



Et Cetera

*Literary
Magazine*

*Huntington
High School
2016-2017*

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Huntington High School's
Literary Magazine

2016-2017

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Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up this year's *Et Cetera* literary magazine and deciding to read this letter. Although it seems like a regular magazine, what you see in front of you is a collection of stories that were written by amazing people that I've known for a long time. The people that I sit next to every Thursday are people who are very passionate about writing, and they're the type of people that I admire. To have a passion for something, regardless of what it may be, is important because it shows people that you have a goal in life and you're not going to give up until you reach it. That's what I see every Thursday after school, and I'm happy that I was able to meet such incredible people within these four years.

Not only is *Et Cetera* filled with passionate people, but it is also filled with people who are supportive, caring, kind, and so much more. Whenever we're not talking about writing, we always seem to have a fantastic time with each other! We're like a family because we joke around about mostly anything and have a good laugh together! *Et Cetera* is an amazing club, and it's going to be one of the things I miss the most when I leave the high school.

Now if I didn't stay in this club for four years, I don't think I would've received this amazing opportunity from one of my former teachers. According to them, there was an event going on at an art gallery and they needed a poet from Huntington High School to present there with another poet from Harborfields. Someone I knew told me about it, and I got excited due to the fact that I never had the chance to do something like that before. I soon accepted the offer and I looked through my pile of poems so I could present the one that best represented who I am as a person ("What My Heart Desires").

On the day of the event, there were a lot of people and I started to become really nervous; my hands and legs were shaking a little, and it didn't stop until it was my turn to go up there and present to the crowd. After I was finished, I looked up and I saw so many faces filled with happiness; their reactions were simply overwhelming and I honestly didn't believe what I was seeing. Once I stepped back into the crowd, I tried to look at the other paintings but so many people started coming up to me and they started these random conversations. They were telling me that I did a great job, everything I said was heartfelt, it was very touching, and so much more. The Executive Director even handed me his card so he can get a copy of the poem! I felt like a mini celebrity after I presented, and I was so happy to hear what people were saying to me. So out of everything I just said, you can say that I did an amazing job at the event.

The reason why I brought this up is because if it weren't for *Et Cetera* and Ms. Molenko, there's no way I would've done that well at the art gallery. She helped me so much with my writing over these four years, and I'm really thankful that I met someone like her. I would never have reached this level if it wasn't for her, so I just have to say thank you. And if I could reach this level, just imagine what you can achieve if you join this club. It may seem impossible, but you can reach it as well if you put in the effort. That's all I have to say as this year's Senior Editor and Treasurer, so please enjoy the rest of this magazine!

-Jesse Stickell

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Bradley Landberg

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Lauren Feldman

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Petch Asanatham



-Aniyah Toro

Art Credit

1) Aniyah Toro	page 3
2) Hannah Bailin...	page 6
3) Erica Vazquez..	page 7
4) Erica Vazquez...	page 8
5) Ben Connor...	page 9
6) Melissa Torres...	page 15
7) Rudi Fasolino..	page 17
8) Alex Arloff...	page 22
9) Joey Ramos....	page 30
10)Quinn Blackburn...	page 34
11)Tateanna Khokhar...	page 35
12)Tateanna Khokhar...	page 42
13)Tateanna Khokhar...	page 45
14)Thomas Edgar-McNerney...	page 53
15)Friends of Eli...	page 54
16) Thomas Edgar-McNerney	page 57
17)Thomas Goldsmith	page 59
18) Bradley Landberg	page 61
19) Maggie Giles...	page 63
20)Steve Yeh...	page 64

Table of Contents

<u>A Pessimistic View of Optimism</u> - Ryan Buxton... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 6</i>
<u>Disgust, Discomfort, and Everything In-between</u> - Alexandra Muller... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 6</i>
<u>Samotherium</u> - Rory Bocelli... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 7</i>
<u>Should the Stars Abound</u> - Bradley Landberg... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 7</i>
<u>Come to Terms</u> - Rory Bocelli... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 8</i>
<u>The Climbing Tree</u> - Katy Dara... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 9</i>
<u>Dead</u> - LJ Kindall... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 9</i>
<u>The Crypt</u> - Julia Collins... <i>short story</i>	<i>pages10-12</i>
<u>The Coated Girl</u> - Bradley Landberg... <i>short story</i>	<i>pages 13-14</i>
<u>Whoa Meta(phor)</u> - LJ Kindall... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 14</i>
<u>Dreams</u> - Maddy Kye... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 15</i>

Table of Contents Continued...

<u>Letter to Camille</u> - Julia Collins... <i>short story</i>	<i>page 16</i>
<u>Thy Beauty, My Ecstasy</u> - Petch Asanatham... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 17</i>
<u>OH Dear: Part 1</u> - LJ Kindall... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 17</i>
<u>Transcript of The February AYU Assembly</u> - Rory Bocelli... <i>short story</i>	<i>pages 18-22</i>
<u>Note to you, then</u> - Bradley Landberg... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 22</i>
<u>The Night at the Asylum</u> - Jesse Stickell... <i>short story</i>	<i>pages 23-28</i>
<u>Whispers Without Silence</u> - Jessica Pulizotto... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 29</i>
<u>Feathers of Solace</u> - Bradley Landberg... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 29</i>
<u>OH Dear: Part Two - This Time It's Personal</u> - LJ Kindall... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 29</i>
<u>Planting Human</u> - Alexandra Muller... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 30</i>
<u>Zeke's Masterpiece</u> - Zeke Moreno... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 30</i>
<u>The Flame</u> - Petch Asanatham... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 30</i>
<u>Elves</u> - Maddy Kye... <i>short story</i>	<i>page 31</i>
<u>The Sad Reality of a Great Marriage</u> - Jesse Stickell... <i>short story</i>	<i>pages 32-33</i>
<u>Betrayal</u> - Julia Collins... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 33</i>
<u>The Now Written Rules Of Socialization</u> - Jessica Pulizotto... <i>narrative</i>	<i>page 34</i>
<u>A Sail and, I Weep for Us</u> - Bradley Landberg... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 35</i>
<u>Nothing Left Inside My Chest</u> - Katy Dara... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 36</i>
<u>The Encounter of a Magical Man</u> - Jesse Stickell... <i>short story</i>	<i>pages 37-42</i>
<u>A World In Depth</u> - Bradley Landberg... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 42</i>
<u>The Weaver</u> - Bradley Landberg... <i>short story</i>	<i>pages 43-52</i>
<u>How Fireflies Got Their Light</u> - Julia Collins... <i>short story</i>	<i>pages 52-53</i>
<u>Her</u> - Dariana Cruz... <i>narrative</i>	<i>page 54</i>
<u>Untitled</u> - Zubair Ali... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 55</i>
<u>Swayed Friendship</u> - Petch Asanatham... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 55</i>
<u>The Lonely Girl</u> - Jesse Stickell, Justin Larice, Julia Moskowitz... <i>short story</i>	<i>pages 56-57</i>
<u>Sinister Paradise</u> - Nicholas Haupt... <i>gothic narrative</i>	<i>pages 58-60</i>
<u>A Halloween Tale</u> - Anonymous... <i>short story</i>	<i>pages 60-61</i>
<u>Sun</u> - Bradley Landberg... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 61</i>
<u>Roots</u> - Nicholas Haupt... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 61</i>
<u>My Life in Four Shelves</u> - Katy Dara... <i>essay</i>	<i>pages 62-63</i>
<u>Library</u> - Jesse Stickell and Ms. Molenko... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 63</i>
<u>Bread is a Dream</u> - Bradley Landberg and LJ Kindall... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 64</i>
<u>Katharina</u> - Mikayla Gaspar... <i>acrostic poem</i>	<i>page 64</i>
<u>Macbeth</u> - Julia Collins... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 65</i>
<u>Ocean View</u> - Jonah Salese... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 65</i>
<u>Forbade the Hope Chasers</u> - Rory Bocelli... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 66</i>
<u>The Cloud</u> - Bradley Landberg... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 66</i>
<u>Presence</u> - Tateanna Khokhar... <i>short story</i>	<i>page 66</i>
<u>OH Dear part three: In the eye of the storm</u> - LJ Kindall... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 66</i>
<u>I wish I could care, but I don't</u> - Alexandra Muller... <i>poem</i>	<i>page 67</i>
<u>Falling</u> - Ms. Molenko, Et Cetera advisor... <i>found poem</i>	<i>page 67</i>

A Pessimistic View of Optimism

What is hope but a tree without leaves? empty.
Forever reaching, forever chasing the heavens; looking for something, anything more
Cognizant that nothing will be found
Still reaching, reaching, reaching, for something. anything.
Still stretching with branches like open arms craned to the sky hopelessly,
twigs like fingers clawing at destiny endlessly till it rots, and dies.

-Ryan Buxton



-Hannah Bailin

Disgust, Discomfort, and Everything In-between.

“I love you...”
Unconditional?
You are a condition
An ultimatum
A collection of threats
And accusations
Love?
Do you know the meaning of
The word?
Feeling?
The Sensation?
“Unconditionally.”

-Alexandra Muller



-Erica Vazquez

Samotherium

Skygrazer
Unfazed and loving.
An amazer
No animal towering.

Till the apes of wrath,
Pathological monsters,
Controllers of embers,
Took the oxygen makers for a laugh.

The expanding blanket of green,
From in which we use to feast
Ruined in one short scene
From the no tailed fire beast.

Now, the small, pathetic
Shrubs eaten by the empathetic
Must be taken in by my long necked
Family which has been wrecked.

Many passed, fell down when they tried
And after sometime, nature denied
Them permission to eat so far down.
Biodiversity does not let giraffes eat off the ground.

-Rory Bocelli

Should the Stars Abound

Should the stars abound the sky,
Would you let my mind wander idly by?
Dreaming of worlds unreal to you
Yet as real to me as they are untrue

Should the fervent light of Sun descend
Would you let me go and remember then?
Of adventurous tales unknown to time
Since they've only existed far inside

Should ivory moonbeams breach the night
Would you let me view a different sight?
A land impossible for this world to mold
Expanding before me, beauteous and bold

And should that fervent light arrive again
May I maybe go and grab my pen?
Paint a world once unreal to you
Now far more real than it is untrue

-Bradley Landberg

Come to Terms

So tell me:
Was you true intention
Just to reach third base?
So tell me:
Was that little question
About marriage all a fake?
'Cause I know, you hate it when I lie
But you do it so compulsively
And think that defines "you" sly

So tell me:
Did'ya wanna be my therapist,
Or me be your charity case?
So tell me
Why, you damn philanthropist,
You were so mad when I didn't change
'Cause I know, you didn't ever cry.
Just your methods didn't work on me,
And it eats you up inside.

And so,
Goodbye, goodbye, Marcello.
I admit it was a spin,
But I've seen love's horrid path before
And this time I have to win.
Goodbye, goodbye, Marcello.
You can make it on you own,
Because my true emotions you abhor
With veracity-bearing tones.

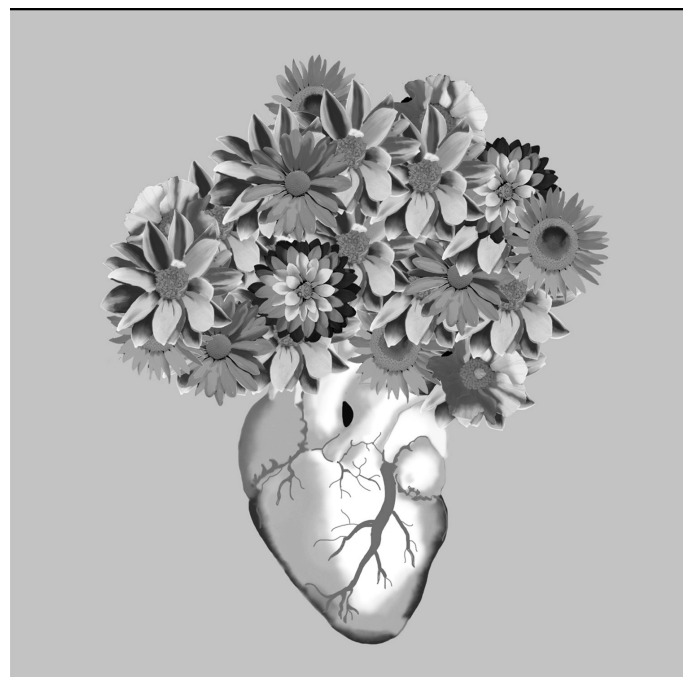
So tell me:
Did'ya threaten to break up with me
Just to see the look of my face?
I'll tell you:
I've developed an adversity
To the "me" you wanna chase.
'Cause I know, you get on. As a flirt you're fine.
They all think that you're a beauty,
But the world's gone full color blind.

I just think it's funny,
You say you'll welcome my feelings.
But when I open up on those spots

I just think it's funny,
You say my build turns you on.
But when I open up on those habits
By 24 I'm be gone.
I just think it's funny,
You say you'll welcome my feelings.
But when I open up on those spots
That made you stressed and go reeling.
You know, I hate to be rude,
But the strings were all pulled.
I hate you I do;
You're impossible.

And so,
Goodbye, goodbye, Marcello.
Please grow up, how about that.
I am happier than you expect
I have no time to chat.
Goodbye, goodbye, Marcello.
To you I am repulsed,
And my life I am not one to wreck
With the abuse that would take course.

-Rory Bocelli



-Erica Vazquez



-Ben Connor

The Climbing Tree

When I was younger
I loved climbing trees.
I wanted to see the world from up high
Without being seen by anyone else.
I would scrape my hands
And slip on occasion,
But remain determined to reach the top.
The branch gave way, once
I hit the ground with a *thud*
And began to cry.
I didn't try to climb again.

Now I look up at the tree.
It has been so long since I tried to climb it.
Now I wonder
How it would feel
To climb up high
And let go.

-Kata Dara

Dead

Sleep
I hope at last, within this slumber,
you find peace
I think perhaps, beneath the covers,
you watched me,
you couldn't call out.

This is not the pain I had in mind:
Nor wanted.

Sleep
and from beneath my hand I almost
feel a beat
it's just a whisper of what I
know will never be
It's just my pulse
as I touch the sheets.

This is not the pain I had in mind

Sleep
and I know that heaven sent me an
angel
And I know to heaven you'll return
alone for now, but not for long
"together" is the right that I have
earned

Sleep
I'm lying next to you
I'll soon be fast asleep
of all my promises
this one I swear I'll keep,
and at the Pearly Gates I'm sure
we'll finally meet.

-LJ Kindall

The Crypt

The sound of horse's hooves clapping against the ground, and the churning of a carriages wheels were the only sounds that could be heard in the isolated forest in Bavaria, Germany. Two men, Alfred and Henri, were looking for the Castle of Amberg, near the town with the same name, to find the crypt of a queen who ruled over the area a long time ago. The two men worked as grave robbers, for it was their only source of income. They had heard from one of their customers that the queen had been buried alongside her massive collection of gold, jewelry, and precious gems. The two men decided to seek out the grave and steal the entire fortune, and return to Berlin where they could sell the collection. They had left the city of Berlin the morning before, and they arrived near their destination in the afternoon. Henri suggested they find a place to keep their horses before they surveyed the castle grounds. The two found a small stable to keep their horses in, and left the carriage outside. Alfred suggested they try to find the grave before night fell, and then stay at the hotel in the town nearby. The men then went to work searching for the grave of a long forgotten queen.

Finding the grave proved to be very difficult. The grounds of the castle were overgrown with weeds, and the stone paths were cracked and difficult to walk on. "If I were a deceased queen, where would I be buried...?", Henri asked rhetorically. "Nowhere that a couple of grave robbers could find," Alfred said back, slightly irritated. Henri sighed, then asked his companion, "Do you want to call it a day? It's gonna get dark soon, maybe we should go back to town and spend the night at the hotel?" Alfred thought for a moment, then said "That's probably a good idea, let's get going." The two men started walking to the stable, when suddenly, they both felt a tugging sensation in their abdomens. It was persistent, and wouldn't go away no matter how far off the men walked. Alfred abruptly stopped, and grabbed Henri by his jacket. "We should go back to the castle. Maybe her grave is inside." He spoke, almost as if he were reading off of a paper. Henri tried to protest, but felt the need to agree with Alfred. "...Okay, let's go back. I just want to go feed the horses. Did you pack any lanterns and gas?" Alfred almost panicked, he didn't think that they would need the lanterns and kerosene, so he hadn't thought to pack any. Still, he shouldered off his backpack and opened it up, only to find a bottle of kerosene and two lanterns sitting on top of all of his supplies. He stared at his find for a few moments, then said, "Yeah, go feed the horses, I'll be waiting outside the main entrance." Henri nodded, then ran all the way to the stable, while Alfred walked to the castle, still thinking about what had transpired between the time they decided to leave and now. He couldn't explain why he had acted that way, and he couldn't explain why Henri did protest his ridiculous request. Henri was usually more sensible than him, and trusted his gut more than Alfred did. Henri had saved both of their tails dozens of times throughout their career together. It made Alfred wonder...

Alfred stopped in front of the main doorway to the castle. What seemed odd to Alfred was how the castle looked as if it was still in use by the royals that once lived inside it, not like it has been abandoned for hundreds of years. The impressive stone walls stood tall, and the stained glass windows gleamed in the fading light of the sun. 'Truly peculiar,' Alfred thought, 'that a castle this old and that hasn't been in use for so long yet it still looks so beautiful...' With footsteps echoing in the courtyard behind him, Alfred heard his approaching friend. He turned and greeted Henri, who insisted they explore the castle. Alfred would have chuckled at his antics if not for the strange situation they were both in. Henri

lit both of their lanterns, and they both stepped into the Castle of Amberg.

The exterior of the castle proved to be a facade hiding the disorder that laid inside. The Great Hall was teeming with dust, dancing in the waning light of the day. Tapestries hung torn on the walls, and once beautiful paintings were torn and thrown on the floor. The pair walked into the castle side by side, observing their surroundings. "So...What should we do first?" Henri asked after a prolonged silence. "It would've been great if we came up with a plan before stepping into this castle." Alfred snapped back. "It was your idea to come here in the first place, but I'm thinking that we just look around the entire castle and see if we can find anything." Henri responded, not wanting to start an argument with Alfred. "And if we don't find anything?" "Then maybe there wasn't anything to find in the first place. Now let's get going."

They found nothing of any significance and after hours of searching, they were both exhausted, Alfred being particularly peeved. "Ugh, wasted a whole day just to find nothing..." He cursed underneath his breath. "Maybe you're right, we should check into the hotel, then leave for Berlin in the morning." Henri yawned. He reached down into his pack to retrieve his wallet, only to find it missing. "That's weird, I could've sworn I brought it with me..." Henri said to himself. "What was that?" Alfred piped up, curious about what Henri was talking about. "Uh, did you bring any money with you? I can't find my wallet." Alfred rolled his eyes, and said while reaching into his own pack, "What did I say about always being prepared?", only to find that he didn't pack his wallet either. "...What the hell is going on?" Alfred demanded, visibly panicked. Henri attempted to calm him down, saying "Don't overthink it, we both made a simple mistake. Now let's just..." He stopped, knowing that he didn't believe his words himself. He felt the tugging sensation in his gut again. It told him that they should stay at the castle for the night. "Let's sleep here for the night!" Henri cried out. Alfred looked at him like he was crazy, although Henri thought he was at this point. "Are you out of your goddamn mind?!" Alfred shouted at him, but he soon had a change of face. He bowed his head down, then said, "Fine, let's hope there are decent beds here." He briskly walked past Henri, leaving him to wonder why he submitted to his plans so quickly after protesting them.

Alfred did end up finding a room with two beds inside, the pillows and sheets in better condition than they expected. They laid their stuff out on the floor, blew out the lanterns, and wished each other good night.

That night, Henri had the strangest dream he'd had in his life. He was all the way in the back of the castle, an area that he and Alfred had explored earlier. In the dream, he takes down an old, flaking painting off the wall, and revealed a hidden passageway. He proceeds to walk down the corridor for an indefinite amount of time, hearing strange sounds that he tried to ignore, but couldn't help to notice. He finally reached a gated door, which would not open, as Henri suspected. It takes some time before he finally breaks the door down, and shone his lantern into the room. Before he gets a good look inside the room, he hears a woman's voice whisper inaudibly inside the space. Henri steps inside the room, and...

He opens his eyes to find Alfred standing above him. Henri stares up at him, confused, before Alfred says "Let's go. I think I know where this woman is buried." Henri steps out of bed, and asks "Where? How do you know?" Alfred paused for a second, before saying "It's near the back of the castle, and I... just have a feeling, now let's go." Henri had a feel-

ing Alfred was lying to him, but couldn't find it in him to call him out for it. He did ask questions like why they were going so late at night, to which Alfred claimed he was afraid to forget the location by morning. After walking through the castle once again, they approached the same area Henri was in his dream. Alfred walked over to the same painting on the wall, and took it down, uncovering a corridor within the wall, one that looked identical to the one that Henri walked down in his dream. Henri was extremely confused about how he had dreamt about the secret passageway when he wasn't aware of its existence, and why Alfred knew of it as well. The pair walked side by side until they reached the same doorway Henri approached. Alfred did the honors of breaking down the door, and shone a light inside the room. They were both greeted with the sight of a vast amount of jewelry, gold, and other luxuries.

They both cried out with relief, and ran into the room without thinking. They both went around to inspect which pieces to bring back to Berlin, when they heard a woman's voice say "What are you doing here?."

The two whip around, flashing light into all corners of the room. Henri can hear his heart beating in his ears as he faces a woman, glaring at the both of them. He had never seen Alfred so terrified in his life. "Well?" The woman asks them. Neither man has the bravery to answer her. Henri was trying to figure out how she appeared in the crypt with them. 'Unless she's...' His worst thoughts were confirmed when she spoke again. "I've ruled over this land long ago, and have been left alone for quite some time. Until you two came along." Alfred began hyperventilating, and Henri was on the verge of tears. "Leave now, or you just may regret it." The old, dead queen said. Alfred bolted out of the room, and back down the corridor they came from. Henri looked at the woman, almost as if he was trying to ask a question he couldn't verbalize. He stood for what felt like hours, before finally blurting out "What were your true intentions for us?!" The queen gave him a confused look, but didn't answer. Henri didn't want to risk asking another question, for fear of his safety, and ran out after his friend.

Henri walked through the castle slowly, for he was too tired, physically and emotionally, to rush out the doors just yet. He noticed that the sun was rising when he neared the front doors. He wondered where the time went while he and Alfred were in the crypt. He finally stepped outside again, seeing Alfred pace back and forth anxiously. When Alfred saw him, he ran and tackled him in a hug, shouting "I thought that thing killed you, Henri! I'm so glad you're here." Henri pushed him off, saying as he was dusting off his clothes, "I'm fine, I'm fine, Alfred. Now let's get out of here already."

The two set up their carriage and were off back to Berlin by mid morning. The two men were exhausted, not saying anything to each other for a while. Henri turned back to look at the castle one more time before leaving it forever, only to see it was gone. He turned back around, and for the rest of the trip, and for some time after the event, Henri couldn't help but wonder what really happened to the castle with the hidden crypt.

- Julia Collins

The Coated Girl

The little girl found herself in the alleyways of the decaying city. The scent of garbage and broken dreams crept into her nostrils, causing her to recoil a bit. Clinging on ever tightly to her olive coat, she panted. This summer day proved the most scorching of the whole year, and she started to sweat uncontrollably. Patches of sog found their way through the coat, but she didn't care, she didn't care at all, and she made her way through the alleyway.

It had been five days since she lost her parents, the same parents that had claimed to love her little visage to all they met, even when she complained of the numerous bruises and lashes she received at home. But she seemed unknowing of their passing, and she searched. She searched for the ones she needed with the vigor of one who could only be described as dedicated to a cause; it was a hopeless cause, but she wouldn't know that, and she clung on to her olive coat as she began to see another lonely form lurking in the doldrums of the alley. A ratty scoundrel, sitting aloof. He began to mumble as she made her way into his sight. He mumbled to himself of questions that asked if she was worth his time, or whether he should bother, but an evil grin crept to his face. The man approached after a deliberation. She froze, not exactly out of fear, grabbing her coat even harder, wrinkling the old seams.

"Hey, kid." The grungy figure stood before her, towering over her frail body and coat. "What's a lil' bugger like you doing in these parts?"

"Dirty man." Her flat and boring response ticked him off slightly, but he managed to find another sly smile.

"Asked you a question, little 'missy.'"

"I'm looking for mommy and daddy."

"Ha, I can help ya." His smile grew larger as he viewed what could be, to him, a perfect scenario.

"Really?" Her grip on the coat loosened.

"Really! I know right where they are. Just lemme lead the way, and I'll get you your parents." They both beamed a smile, for horribly different reasons. As naive elation filled her face, the girl finally let go of the coat, letting it sink to the ground. It was oversized, and wrinkled with ages and ages. The man noticed, and paused. "What's with the coat little 'missy? It's summer. You'll burn. Wouldn't want that now, would we?" He licked his chops.

"This coat makes me feel safe." She looked down at it, as did the man. "It protects me from the scary monsters of the world."

"Scary monsters," he looked at her strangely, "like the cold?" He cracked a laugh, echoing through the narrow walls of the alleyway, and she pouted.

"Don't make fun of Coaty!" She clutched at the coat for a moment, before the man chuckled even harder. He managed to stop himself before she became too angry.

"You named it?" He cleared his throat as he tried to find the fakely amicable tone he produced before. "That's nice. I didn' mean no harm, though. I swear. So, no bad blood between us?" She cringed at his statement and recalled something, but quickly went back to a smile, and nodded. "Good! We should get going soon, before the real bad guys come on through and try to kill ya." He smiled and smiled and smiled knowingly, excitedly, and mumbled silently to himself before reaching his hand out to the little girl. She looked at the dirty appendage for a second before reaching her hand out and connecting their hands.

The coat made a noise. A furious, shrieking noise.

In an instant, it stretched and writhed vigorously. It growled, bouncing its inhuman bellows between the alley walls, and morphed into a disgustingly large pair of olive teeth conjoined by an impossibly large jaw. Cotton drool dripped from the roof of the 'mouth' and fell to the ground, melting the concrete and debris. The man, taken aback, screamed. He fell down, got up and attempted to make a getaway, but the coat's cloth extended like a creeping tentacle full of malice, grabbing his ankle and pulling him back to the abyssal chasm that had taken over the sweet little girl that once stood there. He squirmed and thrashed in a panicked attempt to escape the grip of the fabricated creature, but it was to no avail. The coat dragged the man across the rocky ground and dangled him in front of its salivating, yearning pit. It grumbled deeply.

The man died from a combination of shock and the severe damage to his spine. With a satisfied grunt, the coat energetically threw the limp body into its jaw, and snapped down. A crunch railed through the vicinity as organs were flung onto the walls, cracking the buildings with the force they'd acclaimed. The coat, pacified, returned to its normal state, and relinquished itself to the girl once more.

The girl, awoken from the incapacitation of the coat's transformation, rubbed her eyes. The scent of death made its way in the wind, and she gazed upon the horrid scene in front of her, somewhat sorrowful, somewhat knowing.

"I guess he was a bad man, just like old mommy and daddy." The coat nodded in an inanimate sort of way, and throbbed with a bloodlusting satisfaction only rivaled by the time it had consumed her creators. "I guess we'll have to find new ones on our own." The girl again began on her journey to find new caretakers, better caretakers. She carefully maneuvered around the little chunks that had been left behind of the man, and carelessly soaked her feet in the life fluids and juices.

The coat grunted as they left the crimson canvas, one of many that they had painted along the city, and they made their way along, merrily sweating in the sweltering summer sun.

-Bradley Landberg

Whoa Meta(phor)

It's a metaphor see?
You put words on a page,
But you don't give them the power
To mean anything.

-LJ Kindall

Dreams

When you dream in the day,
It can become reality.
But when you dream at night...
Meet terror induced fright:

You're being tortured, frozen by your past
Unable to change the words that you cast.

You try to drown them all out
Your screams and pout.
But your cries can't tell you what to do,
When the evil is a part of you too.

The dreams will return
But you will never learn
To ignore the visions,
Or how to mend your old decisions

So each night you will carry the stars
From the moon to Mars.
A journey of agony,
Bitter bruises and scars.

Cower under your covers...
No one can save you from what your
mind rediscovers.

-Maddy Kye



-Melissa Torres

Letter To Camille

Dear Camille,

I'm sorry about the fight we had last night. I really didn't mean to lash out at you like that, I don't know what came over me. But ever since I've stormed out of your apartment, I've been burdened with guilt. I can't even remember what we were fighting about, to be perfectly honest. It was probably something stupid. Definitely not something to scream at each other about, and not something to cry about. So, I write this letter to say I'm sorry. I'm sorry for starting a fight with you, I'm sorry for screaming at you unprovoked, and I'm sorry I made you cry, and I'm sorry I left without a goodbye.

I also write this letter to finally tell you why I fell in love with you. I never told you this before, because I know I can only express my emotions properly through writing. I've never been able to outwardly express my feelings.

I can still remember the day I laid my eyes on you. It was orientation week of our freshman year of college. I was walking back to my dorm, when I saw you laughing at something with your friends. You looked absolutely beautiful. Your hair was shining in the setting sun, but the light dimmed in comparison to your smile. I couldn't make out what you were saying, but I knew your voice sounded like that of an angels. And I know this sounds like something from a cheesy romance film, but I truly believe it was love at first sight, whether or not I knew it at the time. I stood there awestruck for what seemed like hours, until someone bumped into me. I couldn't get you out of my mind for the rest of that week, I wanted to get to know you so badly.

And it seemed luck was on my side, because you just so happened to be in three of the four classes I was taking the first semester. I'll never forget the feelings I had when I saw you walking up to me after class on the first day. I awkwardly said "hi" and you introduced yourself, which prompted my own stuttered introduction. You giggled and told me you would see me around. And we did, because it turned out we lived the same dorm, just down the hall from each other. Whenever you needed help with homework, you walked to my room, and I always let you in, even when it was nearly 2am on a weekday. We spent the greater part of our first semester talking over lunch and dinner in the dining hall, usually about our day, how we were adjusting to college, our classes, and our families. As our relationship progressed, you would sometimes come watch my tennis matches. I could tell you had absolutely no idea what was going on most of the time, but I greatly appreciated your enthusiasm and support for me. I also joined your painting class. You created masterpieces, and I could never paint to your level of ability. But you always praised my works I created, and even framed and hung one on your dorm wall. I couldn't understand why, it was terrible. You would think that a thing like that would make me realize that I was falling in love with you, but it didn't.

On the night of our first kiss, we were actually at the frat house party. I only came because I was the designated driver, I wasn't interested in what was going on, until I saw you, of course. I didn't want to leave my friends to their own devices, so I stayed with them for the whole time. I did look your way every once in awhile, I couldn't help it. You looked like you were having the time of your life, dancing away without a care in the world. I then knew I wanted to be the reason for your smile.

I don't know if you ever saw me there, if you did you never approached me. Maybe you were admiring me from afar, like I was to you. Eventually, I had to take my friends back to their dorms before they did something they would regret in the morning. I stood outside, underneath a street light, making sure they all got to their rooms safely. I heard you call my name out, and when I turned around, you reached up and kissed me. You pulled back and said you would see me after break, although I was in too much of a shock to process your words at the time.

Anyways, it's getting late and I need to go to bed. I've experienced a flurry of emotions while writing this, although they were all based on my undying love for you, so I really don't mind it. You've really changed my life for the better, and I honestly can't tell you where I would be now if I never met you. I love you so much, don't ever forget that.

Love, Scarlett

-Julia Collins

Thy Beauty, My Ecstasy

Thy eyes are so beautiful
They slowly seduce me
I tried but fail to resist them
I wonder what can they be

Thy beauty is so attractive
It gives reason for the Sun to shine
The moon stopped shining
Because thou have made it shy

When I feel sorrow in my mind
Thou have made it forgotten
When my world is filled with darkness
Thou art brought the light to make my
world brighten

Where thou'st came from?
Did thou fall from heaven?
Thy beauty is so attractive
It makes darkness be frightened

Whatever thou art think
But please hear me
That all my heart is for thee
Know that I love thee

Thy beauty
My Ecstasy
Such as my love
Befits thee not
Of Course.

-Petch Asanatham



-Rudi Fasolino

OH Dear: Part 1

Donald Trump
Gives bad commands
All while pointing
Tiny hands

-LJ Kindall

Transcript of The February AYU Assembly

To Whom It May Concern,

A transcript of the speech delivered to your seniors last week has been attached per your request. This includes any before and after intermissions from school personnel. We are glad to have not caused controversy and would promptly work with you again under similar circumstance.

Connoly, Marcus

The beginning excerpt is an introduction conducted by your school's administrator, Marie Carannante.

Good morning Seniors. I hope wish you all have had a fine week thus far. As usual, it is expected of you to be on your best behavior during an assembly, and I know what you are thinking. You may think you have been taught all of this before, and most of this information will seem like common courtesy to some of you.

That's actually great, we encourage the latter strongly as part of our school. However, all of us know harassment is not nonexistent in our environment, and the message of this assembly will go farther into your college and adult lives as well. Also, if there is one thing I know, I have never seen a better audience than you all here today.

(Carannante proceeds to possibly compliment the students, it is completely obscured by cheering)

With that out of the way, I would like to introduce this morning's guest. Our speaker is a young man named Lannister Redd. He's also a senior in high school so you all should get along well unlike those creepy old foundation sponsors or what not that usually run the assemblies here. Redd is well on the road to graduate as his school's valedictorian, and he has done quite a large amount of community work, so you may recognize him from charity drives and what not. In fact, I believe he's supposed to come back later in the year to advertise one of our school's fundraisers as well.

This assembly is partially to promote the mission he has started called the AYU that promotes security and care for teenagers and young adults faced against excessive harassment and cruelty. This assembly has shown to be rather touching to most and I expect you all to receive him well. So, without further delay, I welcome mister Lannister Redd.

The following is the actual speech. The account is not word for word, but all that is omitted is the occasional added words and filler speech. Nothing else has been changed as per your request. A few audience reactions have been recorded as well.

Thank you, Mrs. Carannante. Hello, it is a pleasure to meet you all. As previously stated, my name is Lannister. If you can't pronounce that, it's ok; none of my friends want to try. (Redd pauses followed by general laughter over the comment) I normally get called Lane or Laney anyways, so simplicity for all! I don't suppose that you have many people of the same age coming and talking to you a lot now?

(The general consensus is no)

That's normally the case I've found. One question I normally get asked by people our age is how much money I get by going to schools and doing this. My response usually is, well, "No, I won't give you a loan." I kid, I kid, bad joke I know. In truth, I do make some profit off of this, but I want to establish this here - my stance on my work is that the outcome is more important than the income.

I cannot see myself giving three speeches a week for the next twenty years, in all honesty. That's one of the big reasons I don't care for the money, and I place more of my time into the message. As I tell you more about myself, you will see I am an incredibly anxious person. No, I don't hate standing up here, but after two or three weeks, I begin to overthink things.

I have been doing this for three and a half months. It is terrifying for me to walk into- (Redd pauses for a notable amount of time) - certain schools at times. Despite this, I am making an impact. My words are making an impact, and that is why I am here with you all today.

AYU, or The Anonymous Youth's Union, is a volunteer based service to provide people from ages 12 to around 25 with an access to anonymous and affordable therapy from those who partake in it. The reason it is anonymous is because sometimes having a connection to the person you are speaking to, even if they are a paid professional, causes more problems. If someone is enlisting in help from the program, they can say whatever they need to with no repercussions. Period. That is the wonderful part.

Before I can continue on why I chose a method like this to create our mission, I have to explain some things about my own personal life. Bare with me, somehow this is the part that plays everyone's heart strings like a harpsichord. I try to promote being nice to people and I make audiences cry every assembly; Way to go, Laney.

(The crowd laughs for another extended period)

Transitioning, I hadn't a single friend when I was growing up. That is such an obscure concept, compared to this active social lifestyle we come to know. Imagine walking into school and not a single person had anything kind to say to you, not even hello. That is what I went through until the beginning of my high school career.

While I will get into that in a minute, this was all included onto the added concept of how I was frequently mistreated. Mistreated by - people I do not know anymore. Certainly, could not and would not know anymore. Some people who had such a strong effect on my life, and I never have to see them anymore.

I was also ignored by my parents, and when I was noticed, they were not always the nicest to me either. They pressured me so much that I have developed what is known as a perfectionist complex. That means while I think everyone can make and grow from mistakes, I should never make mistakes, and if I do, I will never live them down. Yes, I was the type of kid who cried over getting below an 80. (Redd begins to jokingly yell) It's called *trauma*, Nancy!

With that out of the way, these types of things are what ties into the anonymous service. A normal therapist would inform someone of excessive bullying, or perhaps speak to the parent about how they treat their child. This can put said child in danger. Involvement from parents or the school to end feuds between students can possibly lead to greater mistreatment of the victim over time. As for parents, if they are informed they are not treating the child in an acceptable way they could very easily cut off therapy and extend the abuse.

The major reason though involves personal experience. In my freshman year of high-school, I experienced something awful. It was brought on from the peers I saw everyday, and it still has an effect on my life.

(Redd lowers his head while pacing for the next paragraph, taking into consideration that his connotation was far more broken up at this point, this is as close to exact as we could produce.)

It goes back to - to those people I said were void from my life - back to those who cannot speak of me anymore. That's but a simple comment I tend to make to calm myself. Yes, oh yes this speech is difficult and emotional to listen to. Even on this end.

(At this point Redd tries to repeat his sentence a few times and goes silent for several seconds)

It is impossible for me to lie about something I pray most of you already know. If you were not to know that means what I lived through haunts me alone, and there is no comfort in that. In my freshman year of high school, I went to attendance here. Which means you all were the aforementioned peers who put me in such a poor place.

(Redd stops to breathe for another elongated moment)

This is the most quiet I have ever heard high school children become. Let me be clear that I feel no adversity to the crowd I am speaking to currently. Some of you may remember me, some may not know what I am about to talk about. A good few of you are probably looking up here and putting together that - well that, you see.

(Redd finds himself restarting the statements on repeat)

That, perhaps you were not always the most accepting of people.

Due to me knowing all of you, I struggled to figure out how I wanted to enact this specific presentation. When I saw this school's name on the list I was provided, I just looked at my wonderful teacher advisor, Mister Lederman - he is over there, (Redd begins to yell comically again) he is an incredible person! But yes, I found I was supposed to see this school and acted to him as if it had no significance to me. Two days later I couldn't sleep due to me going through a mental relapse, letting my anxiety take me over. I cried for about two hours and induced myself to vomit three times, succeeding twice.

So the next day I sat down with Lederman and one of our student interns, Jerome Tanner. He is also one of my best friends and is sitting over there as well; (Yelling) I love you! I expressed my concerns in a very paranoid manner, and after being talked down, they both agreed that I could try to pull out of this if I wanted too. So I thought about it, and thought about it, and with enough - well thinking about it - I came to a revelation.

I want to speak to this crowd, very much so in fact. If I could deliver my message to anyone, I insist that it is this group. Some of you will take nothing from this, I understand. Some will derive nothing but guilt, while not my intent, I pray that you will learn anything.

Now if you will pardon my derailment. In my freshmen year, I had a single friend out of the group of you all. If they are here right now is beyond my knowledge, but without giving names, please know that I thank you. I say that every time I give this speech by the way, not singling this school out. Everyone else I went to school with either ignored my existence, or actively harassed me.

This harassment got so severe to the point where I was likely suffering from clinical depression; that is likely amongst the worst. Besides this fact however, I, on one occasion, tried to stand up to my oppressors. All that got me was a cult following against my head, and a metal bat directly into the back of my neck and spine! I told no one

about this incident until my sophomore year, and I wouldn't have ever said anything if it weren't for a doctor finding complications in my spinal column. Once again, no hatred in your direction, hold maybe slight grumpiness when I cannot sleep at 3 am because my pillows don't soothe the pain.

(The audience has no response)

God, I live a traumatic life with all of you and now none of you think my jokes are funny.

(General laughter)

Thank you kindly! So, people began to attack me for, well, anything and everything. Back then, I was normally mocked for having severe anxiety, most people back then just saw it as social awkwardness though. If I ever tried to explain to these people - I know I should be saying you people but I truly hate applying so much pressure onto individuals - where my mental state actually lies, most of them thought of me as intellectually inept.

There was also the more obvious qualms with me, where if any of you were the type to ignore my existence back then, even you could point it out. First off I was overweight. Funny that I say this because I'm still 5'6 at around 170 pounds, but we'll come back to that. A lot of people assumed at some point I was gay, and while that is actually currently up to debate for me in my personal life, the use of it to degrade me is not sound.

My life was hellish. I wish I could sit here and ask you all if you could tell by looking at me back then, but I feel as though I don't deserve that solace. At some point, I had reached my limit and was in need of severe help but I had no one to turn to besides my one dear friend. I said nothing to them because I was scared one last instance of venting would make them hate me for good. So I was left in a situation where I thought the world would oppose my every choice, and I had no place to head for salvation.

As many of you will already know, on December 14th of my Freshman year, I snuck onto the roof of the school. I remember staring down at all the unsuspecting students leaving for their buses or to walk home, and thinking on and on about how no one knew I was missing. It was a weirdly comforting thought at the time, it gave me validation for what I wanted to do. In the next instant, I found myself sprawled out on the ground in severe pain, only being saved because my body barely brushed against a tree cutting off any inertia for just long enough.

With that, everything came out, all of the harassment was taken seriously and I was moved to a different school. It was all so terrifying to me, I thought at any moment someone would bend over me in my wheelchair and scream me down for thinking this was a smart idea.

No one ever did. Everyone was kind and helpful with my recovery, and when I could finally stand again, even the people at my current school made me feel human. My anxiety and other developing mental problems were actual problems to people not and not me being overzealous. Strangers were not basing me on appearance anymore, though unfortunately that didn't stop the bout of bulimic tendencies for the first six months there. I was allowed to breathe, and actually try to be happier for once. People wanted to be my friend, and it came to me that while I can never stop being traumatized, I can take control of my life.

Most of my pain could have been at least nullified if I had an outlet that I thought wouldn't end up with me getting hurt. That is what I am trying to provide, because while I ended up alright, there was a long time where I was afraid that I wouldn't. As we all know, that was almost the case, and not every child will get another chance to choose to attempt such a thing as I.

I want people to be able to say there is a problem in their life. I want to be able to keep someone safe while comforting them over where their life is going wrong. No one deserves to suffer like me. I wouldn't wish it on my harass-

(Redd forces himself to stop and winces)

I wouldn't wish it on any of you.

I thank you all for listening, for tolerating me for this short amount of time. I don't see myself as better than anyone, and all of my companions insist I am far too hard on myself. Standing up here today and talking to all of you, I'm shaking uncontrollably. You have surely heard my voice falter and I am no actor, this is true terror that I am experiencing right now.

Due to this, I want to ask you all to remain here but I would kindly request that I may briefly excuse myself before I take questions. I do not want to damper the experience on any of you due to my emotional turmoil, and I would hate to make this a negative, guilt deriving speech. On my return, you may ask whatever you like, and I will honestly answer what I can. Thank you again for allowing me to come here and hopefully say something of worth to you all.

(Redd quickly leaves before anyone can speak to him, not even school personnel)

-Rory Bocelli

Note to you, then

Can you still not see it yet?
Twenty thousand dewdrops hence
The Sun – Her light – it shines so bright
Sweeping gently tired nights

Can you still not feel its warmth?
Washing out the brazen storm
By fiery embrace it soothes
More than the swashing swell of Moon

O mirror passed – found reborn
Dare not drown yourself in scorn
Soon enough this night shall end
And Her light will – always – make amends

-Bradley Landberg



-Alex Arloff

The Night at the Asylum

It was a Friday night when all of my fears became a reality. I'll never forget it- the cries for help, the blood on the walls, my friend's dead body on the floor, and of course, the little pale girl who had the eyes of a demon. I picked up a gun from one of the dead police officers and aimed it at the monster who stood there with an evil grin on their face. How did I survive, you may ask? I don't know, but I'll tell you one thing- it was a miracle. Let's begin the story, shall we?

It was a Friday night and I just finished all of my homework from college. I was somehow able to finish everything quickly, and after I put everything away, I grabbed the headphones that were in my school bag and listened to my favorite EDM song. I enjoyed singing along for about ten minutes, and then one of the worst things happened- a friend decided to call me when the song was about to get to the best part! Although I was a little bit pissed off, I kept my cool and answered to see what they wanted from me.

"Dean..."

"Hey Jessica, what's up? Do you need something from me?"

"Yeah," she says, "I actually need a favor from you. Remember when you said you'd take me out so we can go get food together? Well, my parents aren't home and I'm *really looking to get something to eat. Can you come get me from my house and take me somewhere to eat please?*"

"Okay, I'll be there in like a half an hour. I'll call you when I'm in front of your house, so keep your phone with you until then. See you soon." I hung up the phone and I grabbed my things. Once I got everything I needed, I got in the driver's seat and texted my parents so they would know the reason why I left; and the moment I got a response back from them, I turned on my car and headed straight to Jessica's place.

When I finally reached my destination, I pulled over to the side of the road and called Jess. Two minutes later, she walked out of her house and began walking towards me. As she approached my car, I got out of the driver's seat and gave her a big hug.

"Thanks for coming over Dean, I really appreciate it. You're the best!"

"No problem," I said, "and besides, I *did say I was going to take you out at some point. Now then, where do you want to go eat?*"

"Hm," she said, "how about we go to Rosa's for the night? You know, the one in the village?"

"Okay, then let's get going. Hop in." We got in the car and I made a U-turn so it'd be easier to get to the village; I honestly didn't feel like going the long way around, so I did what was best for the two of us. As I drove around, Jess and I talked about everything that came to mind; whether it was about the memes we saw on iFunny or the funny videos we saw on Instagram, we would always find ourselves laughing our asses off. That's how things normally went between us, and whenever I came back home, I would always find myself thinking about the time we spent together. Spending time with her was always something to look forward to, and I wouldn't trade it for anything else in the world.

We made it to the village and I found a parking spot near the restaurant. Once we walked into Rosa's, we sat down at a table, put down our stuff, and got on line to order our meals. After we did all of that, we went back to our table and talked about random things once more. We talked and talked until we finished eating, and then something strange happened.

"Hey Dean, there's something I want to tell you..." She looked at me with a serious face.

“What’s up? Why are you looking at me like that?” I began to worry about her. I never saw her so serious before, so I knew there was something on her mind.

“So you know how in our college there’s been a lot rumors about that asylum in Kings Park? I don’t know why, but the stories I’ve heard made me really curious about that place; and now, I want to go there to see if everything I heard is true.” Her words shocked me.

“Jess, you do understand that not everything is true right? I mean, people make things up all the time just to make things interesting when nothing exciting is happening. I bet you right now that ninety percent of what you’ve heard is nothing but lies. I can’t believe you actually fell for those rumors.”

“I know rumors are not always true, but when I searched it up, this one *was in fact real*. You know the story about the girl named Ana Wesker, right?”

“You’re talking about that little girl who ‘apparently’ walks the halls of the asylum during the night time, right?” She nodded her head and proceeded to show me a screenshot.

“Look Dean, everything that we heard about in school is right. According to this article published in 2007, there was a little girl named Ana Wesker and she was no ordinary patient. She was considered a psychopath and because of that, she had to be watched at all times by this huge security group. On August 8th, 2010, Ana was supposed to be placed into a straight jacket so she could no longer hurt anyone else, but by the time they held her down, the power went out and no one in the control room was able to see what happened during that period of time. When the lights came back on, all that was left to see was a circle of dead bodies and Ana being in the middle of it. She was later shot dead on sight after that incident, and now people say she walks the halls at night looking to get revenge on the one who killed her.”

I began to get a bit angry with her about her logic on this topic. “Okay, let’s say that this article is completely true and Ana did exist at some point. If we go in there and see Ana with our own eyes, then what’s the next step in your plan? Take a selfie with her and upload it to Snapchat before you die? If she’s really as dangerous as you say she is, then we’re *literally walking into our own graves if we enter that asylum*.”

“It’s not like we’re staying there for the entire night!” she said angrily. “Okay, what about this? How about we go there and stay for thirty minutes? If what you said about the rumors is true, then I’ll make it up to you by buying you something you’ve always wanted. And if I’m right about this, then you can repay me by helping me fight Ana off and getting me a gift the very next day. Deal?”

I didn’t want to accept her offer, but I knew I had to give in to her. If I didn’t, she would’ve been on my ass about this for weeks, and that’s not something I needed to hear every single day. Once you got her interested about something, she’d do anything necessary to confirm whether it was true or not. That’s just the type of person she is. I waved my white flag at her, and we got up from our table to leave the restaurant. Once we got back in my car, I set the GPS to the location and began to drive there immediately. I couldn’t wait to get this stupid thing over with; as much as I love Jess as a person, this was probably the stupidest thing she’d ever made me do. I couldn’t wait to prove her wrong and just take her back home. But sadly, what I wanted did not turn out the way the night actually went. The memories of this night will forever haunt me until I am in the ground, lying next to the people who died before me; but until then, I will forever be tormented by this monster we call a memory...

We made our way to the Kings Park and I found a parking spot that was somewhat close to the asylum. Once we got out of the car, we both took a good look at the place to see if any police officers were guarding the perimeter. The moment we knew that the coast was clear, I opened up my trunk and pulled out the materials we would need in order to survive the night.

“Okay, so here’s the plan: we’re going to enter the building by that side entrance on the left. Once we get in there, we’re going to use our night-vision goggles and search the area to see if Ana is in fact real. *But, if she is real and we see that she’s close by, do not approach her under any circumstances. We’re not here to start a fight with a psychopath, so please take this seriously. Here, take this gun I bought for you; this is only for your safety, so don’t be an idiot and waste the ammo you have.*”

She took the materials from me and we both suited up for one of the worst things you could imagine. After we got everything we needed, we walked quietly onto the perimeter and looked again to see if anyone was around. The moment we made it to the side entrance, Jess squatted down to lockpick the door.

“Watch my back as I get the door, okay?” Even though I was scared of being arrested for trespassing, I nodded my head and looked around to make sure no one saw us. I did this for about a minute, and then I heard the door unlock. “Dean,” she whispered, “we’re in.”

“Cool,” I said. “Now let’s get going.” I slowly opened the door and immediately felt the cold air on my body. It was so cold that I could see the carbon dioxide coming out of my mouth. “Jeez, I didn’t think this place would be so damn cold. I should’ve brought a jacket or something.”

“Well, it’s too late now and we’re already in here; so suck it up and let’s get started.” I nodded in agreement and turned on my night-vision goggles to see my surroundings. It seemed to me that we were in a really big hallway, and there were no signs of Ana anywhere. *You could not believe how relieved I was in that moment. What type of person, other than Jess of course, would want to find a fucking psychopath waiting for them in some random hallway? But regardless of how relieved I was, I still had to consider that anything could happen within a half an hour and that the worst scenario could happen to the both of us.*

Jess and I began to walk through the hallway, and as we did that, we found a map that could help guide us through this maze of darkness. Once we analyzed it, we discovered that we had two options we could take: the stairs that would lead us to the rooms of where the patients lived, or a door on the right that would lead us down to the really big kitchen. Since we couldn’t make a decision, Jess did a coin toss and led us to the door on the right. We went through the door and kept walking until we heard two guards talking to each other on walkie-talkies.

“Hey Jimmy,” one of them said, “did you find anyone snooping around yet?”

“Nah man, I got nothing here. What about you Marco, did you see anyone?”

“Sadly no, and that’s what’s boring about patrolling this area. It’s been like this for years, and not one thing has changed. I think the people at town hall should seriously consider tearing down this place man, it gives me the creeps.”

“We can talk to them later once our shift is done and we make a report about it. We still have about an hour left, so you’re gonna have to deal with it. You remember what we have to do if we do catch anyone here, right?”

“Yeah yeah, arrest them on sight for trespassing and call for back up so they

could take them to jail. Does that sound right to you, Jim?” Jimmy nodded in agreement.

“Good job, you didn’t forget your duty as a guard. Now get up and continue searching the area; I can’t be doing this alone, you know.” Marco sighed and did what he was told. As their conversation was happening, Jess and I snuck past the two guards and made our way into the kitchen. We did our best to be quiet, and thanks to our efforts, we made it to the stairs that were behind the kitchen exit. Once we were done going up there, we realized that the coin toss we did earlier didn’t matter anymore. Why, you might ask? It’s because we found out that we were on the opposite side of those stairs on the first floor. Although we were really disappointed, we continued searching for Ana on the second floor and began to look through all of the patients’ rooms.

“Hey Jess,” I whispered, “did you find any clues of Ana?”

“No,” she whispered, “I got nothing in this room. I’m starting to think what I read in that article was nothing but bullshit. Sorry for not believing you earlier Dean.”

“It’s okay Jess, don’t worry about it. We still have fifteen minutes left, so we still have time to decide whether or not this rumor is true. Let’s keep looking around, okay?”

Jess nodded in agreement. We looked through the rooms and found no signs of her. All of them looked normal, and it seemed like the one Ana had didn’t even exist. The moment we were about to check the next room, however, we were stopped by one of the guards who had a bright light and booming voice.

“FREEZE! DON’T MOVE! GET ON THE GROUND AND PUT YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR!” We did what we were told and didn’t move a muscle. “MARCO, GET YOUR ASS UP HERE! I GOT TWO TRESPASSERS RIGHT HERE WAITING FOR YOU!”

Marco sprinted as fast as he could to the second floor with a bag of cookies in his hand. “Wow, you weren’t kidding Jim; you *actually found somebody*. *Would you like a cookie?*” Jim looked at him with an angry face.

“No, I don’t want a fucking cookie! Jesus man, take this seriously! These two just did something illegal, and you sprint up here just to ask me if I want a damn cookie.”

“Okay okay,” Marco said, “you don’t have to be a bitch about it.” Marco sighed and then looked back at him. “Well? Aren’t you supposed to arrest them by now?”

“Why do you think I called you up here? You do it.”

“Alright alright, I’ll do it. Stop bossing me around man.” As he was about to take out his hand-cuffs, all of us heard a loud noise coming from within one of the rooms. “The hell was that? Don’t tell me there’s three of you guys...”

“No,” I said, “it was only the two of us who entered the building. I swear no one else was with us when we lock picked the side entrance.” Jim and Marco looked at each other with confusion.

“Jim, go check out that noise over there. I’ll keep a close eye on these two, I promise.” Jim nodded and left to see what made that weird noise while Marco checked to see what was on our person. But before he could even check us, Jim screamed in agony and fear. “Jim, are you okay?” Marco repeated the question over and over, until he saw a shadow emerging from the darkness. He turned on his flashlight and pointed his gun at the shadow; what emerged was a little pale girl whose eyes were pitch black, carrying the head of Jimmy with one hand. And that’s when we knew that the rumor of Ana Wesker was real.

Ana walked closer and closer to our position with an evil grin on her face. Jess and I knew that her only priority was to kill anyone that was in the asylum. No one, *and I mean no one, was going to escape from her wrath. Even though Jess and I were afraid for our lives, we stood up next to Marco and aimed our guns at Ana. Marco looked at us with complete shock.*

"So not only did you guys trespass, but you also had a weapon on you?" The two of us nodded at him. "Alright, I guess that's fine. Let's take her down, shall we?" Each of us shot her with three bullets, but somehow she didn't go down. Instead of going down and bleeding like a regular person, all of the bullets stopped when they touched her body and then fell to the ground. She was somehow immune to bullets. The second we realized that, we sprinted back to the stairs hoping that she wouldn't be able to catch up. As I ran I remembered I had three grenades on me, and so I removed the pin of one and threw it at a tank of gasoline.

The tank blew up and Ana was caught in its flames. Although I didn't understand how that stopped her, I looked at my team and gave them an order. "That should slow her down, NOW GO!" As they ran back down the stairs, I stayed behind to make sure Ana was done for; I didn't know what I could have done to stop her, but I felt like I had to protect those two no matter what. I looked at the huge fire in the hallway, and I was shocked that she was already back on her feet. I ran down the stairs and I soon met up with my team once more.

"Dean," Jess said, "did it work? Did we finally kill her?" She looked at me with fear.

"No," I said, "she got right back up. It's as if the fire had no effect on her."

"Damn it!" Marco said angrily. "If that didn't work, then what will!?"

"I don't know, but we have to get out of here while we still can." Marco looked at me with anger.

"You idiot, we can't just leave this building! What if she somehow manages to leave and terrorizes the people who live close by!? Then what!?"

"What options do we have Marco!? I've got nothing!" Before I could say another word, Ana appeared behind us and let out an awful screech. Right before she was about to stab Marco in the heart with her arm, Jess shot Ana in the arm and knee to slow her down. Jess then ran up to Ana and drop kicked her in the face. The force of the kick seemed to have worked due to the fact that Ana showed signs of pain and that there was a loud bang on the wall. "Wow, you did that like it was nothing. Good job Jess!" She looked at me with anger.

"You can praise me later, NOW GET MOVING!" The three of us ran as fast as we could to escape the building, but Ana's persistence made it difficult. She got up again a minute later and still had the energy to chase after us. Luckily for us, we managed to lose sight of her and then proceeded to hide in a room that was near the side entrance.

"Okay you two," Marco said while gasping for air, "is there any way we could beat her? Our weapons don't seem to work, and it seems like the only damage she took was from that drop kick." He turned his attention to Jess. "Nicely done by the way, that was a top quality kick."

"Thank you," Jess said, "I appreciate it. Now then, back to Ana. I don't think any of our weapons could harm her. Dean, do you have any ideas in mind? You were the one who came up with a plan before we entered this place."

"Usually I would, but I have no idea on how to kill a fucking demon. The only

idea I have is to literally take her down with hand-to-hand combat; but other than that guys, I've got nothing."

"There's has to be something, right? Marco's right, we can't just leave the asylum and have her kill innocent people. We have to end this here and now, otherwise many people won't live to see another day." Marco and I nodded in agreement. We all looked around the room in order to think of ways of ending this nightmare. We did this for about three minutes, and then my worst fear came to life. As I turned back around, I saw my best friend get stabbed in heart by the pale little girl.

"JESS!" I yelled out her name as I shot Ana multiple times in the head.

"Oh no, she found us! Dean, we have to get moving!"

"But..."

"WE HAVE TO GO DEAN, NOW!" We ran out of the room and made our way towards the side entrance. Before I could get close to the exit, I looked over to Marco only to discover that he was cut in half by Ana. As I glanced back up in fear, I found Ana looking at me with that same evil smile on her face.

"STAY-STAY BACK, YOU FREAK!" I took the gun from Marco's dead body and aimed it at her.

"Shoot me as much as you like Dean, you know that won't do anything to me." I slowly backed away from her. "I admire your effort to take me down, but understand this: no matter who it is or how hard they try to get away from me, all of that effort will die in vain as I slaughter *each and every single person in this asylum. And now, this will be the moment where you take your final breath.*"

As an act of courage, I threw all of my grenades at her, hoping it would be enough to finish her off, but that didn't work. I also shot her with the remaining bullets I had, but that didn't work either. The only option I had was to go hand-to-hand, but that option ended up being useless as well; as I kept knocking her to down the floor, she kept standing up with that evil look on her face. Although I knew nothing would work on her, I still did everything I could to hold her down. The thought of her killing innocent people was not alright with me, and I was the only one who could keep her away from the outside world. We fought for approximately ten minutes, and the second I became exhausted, she kicked me so hard that when I hit the wall two of my ribs shattered to pieces. She was right. All of my effort was now going to be in vain.

Ana approached me and lifted me by the neck. Before she could say anything to me like how they do in the movies, a light suddenly appeared at the other end of the hallway. I looked to see the source, and then it hit me. All of the victims she mercilessly killed were standing together, staring down Ana. She let go of me and walked towards the light. "No," she said, "that's not possible. HOW CAN YOU STILL BE ALIVE!?" The next thing I knew, all of the victims flew into Ana, making her crumble to dust within seconds. After all of that happened, I knew that the nightmare was now over.

-Jesse Stickell

Whispers Without Silence

I have a secret,
Can you keep it?
It's a nice one to save.

It's a tale of those who fail,
With troubles they can't escape.

The words they say
Will stain like ink.
Yet where or where will they be,
Then they're lives
are crushed in a blink.

You laugh
Until they cry
So I will keep on listening.

It would be a shame
If someone saw you sneaking
Finding a place for peeking.

You point at them and laugh
Yet the corners of your mouth
are slowly sinking.

Looks like all's well
But I will keep on listening.
Why should I keep your secret?

I have a secret,
No need to keep it!
Spread it like the plague.

Oh there's no need to spare,
All the details,
make those words sting.

It's all just to be fair,
I'm just too aware.
I'll be gone without a trace.

-Jessica Pulizottto

Feathers of Solace

There doth the bird take off in flight
With iv'ry sheen and coat of white
With gaunt and grace it glides on air
Its joyous figure mends despair

A lighted silhouette of hope
For now past sadness I can cope
Due to this avian advance;
Those lost in tears need take one glance

What sorcery provides this vim?
Matters now not, just take this whim:
I prayeth thus, I prayeth whole,
Yond dove-bird illumines mine soul

-Bradley Landberg

OH Dear: Part Two - This Time It's Personal

Faces melt
Condition worsens
When place exceeds
The 50 persons

-LJ Kindall

Planting Human.

There's probably a reason
Why every plant I've ever cared for
Ends up dead in a week

Overwater, underwater, absentmindedness

Display the same neglect others have shown me
Leave them to dry, or drown,
As I try to make up for lost time

Lost. Time.

Maybe that makes me just as bad
Or worse

Because I have a voice
Can beg and scream and fight against...
But. They have nothing

And I have nothing more to give

-Alexandra Muller



-Joey Ramos

Zeke's Masterpiece

Rub dub dub,
Rub in the bub bub bub,
Jippity bub in a cup.

The End...

-Zeke Moreno

The Flame

Thou'st came from solitary
With no one to guide thee
Lost in oblivion
Thy shadow blends in with darkness

With such fortune
Thou found light
Light from a flame
Guide thee to a new world

Thus, a new life
"Land of Freedom"
With liberty and justice
And opportunities for better life

But everything fades
So shall't the flame
That nourish thee
That soon will be extinguished

Thus, back to where thou'st came
Whether the abyss
Or oblivion
Till thou art find new ember

O unkindled one
Link the fire
Or extinguish the flame
What thou'st truly want?

-Petch Asanatham

Elves

"Tell me the story!"

"It was a gorgeous day. The sky was streaked with white from the clouds, the sun was shining bright. Your grandma and I, we had just bought this very house. We were preparing to paint the basement walls, but as we made our way down the stairs, there was an awful crash! Oh Annie, that crash was so awful that your grandma dropped the paint she was carrying!"

Annie's eyes widen. "What was the noise?"

"I guess you'll see," I say, and continue to tell my story. "We sprinted up the stairs. We had to clean up the paint as fast as possible! Yet when we returned to the staircase with our cleaning supplies, the paint was no longer on the stairs. There was a fresh coat of paint on the walls, smooth and glossy."

"Who painted it?" Annie wonders aloud.

I pause to think for a moment. Should I tell her the truth, or should I lie? She's too young to be told the history her family, with monsters and creatures of the night. I can't tell her about the demons... But I *can make a modification. I'll simply end the story after Evan.*

"It was an elf called Evan! You see, elves have inhabited this house long before your grandmother and I. Evan was one of those elves."

"Can I meet him?" Annie asks, eyes sparkling.

"No, he's on vacation." *The demons got him last year.*

"Is grandma on vacation too?" *No. People come back from vacations. They don't come back from the lairs of demons.*

"Yes," I say, forcing a smile, "Anyways, your grandmother and I befriended Evan and many of his friends. But they all went away. So next time you're afraid, just remember that Evan, his friends, and I will always protect you."

Because I couldn't protect Christine.

-Maddy Kye

The Sad Reality of a Great Marriage

So here's the situation: A man and a woman who have been married for fifteen years meet on the sidewalk in their front yard as she is coming home from work and he is on his way out. The woman was supposed to be home all day, while the man wasn't even supposed to be there at all. *Both of them* have done something awful to each other, but *only one* will admit their actions to their partner. This is the sad reality of a "great marriage".

Ben walks out of the house, and he acts like everything's normal until he looks up to see that his wife is getting out of her car. When the two notice each other, their hearts begin to skip a beat due to the fact that they were both extremely nervous. Although they're afraid to see one another, they manage to be brave and speak like everything's all right. "Laura," Ben asks, "what-why are you coming home? I thought you didn't have work today."

"One of my colleagues called in sick, and they needed someone to take their place. Instead of being bored all day in our house, I decided to get up from bed and go to work." Even though she replied to his question with a reasonable explanation, she wasn't admitting the truth of why she really left the house. There was more than meets the eye, and it was waiting to come out of hiding. Laura is someone who can adapt quickly when she's in trouble, especially when she has done something terrible to another individual. With enough practice over the years, she has learned how to make herself look innocent even though she's a monster underneath her skin. It's as if she's a dangerous snake inside of an innocent-looking basket, if an analogy makes you understand better what her personality is like. Fortunately for her, she's been able to escape most situations life threw at her and has become confident in her abilities. But like how people say these days, if you underestimate someone you'll leave yourself wide open and they'll witness who you really are. With confidence in her voice, she asks him the same question when she knows he's not supposed to come home until midnight.

"Th-there was an emergency at the construction site, and my boss made everyone go home for the day." He begins to stutter as his anxiety increases.

"What kind of emergency was it, dear?" She asks him that question even though she's able to see right through his lies. While being married to Ben for fifteen years, she managed to learn every little piece about him; she could read him like a children's book, so it didn't take much to figure it all out. Believe it or not, Ben was the exact opposite of his wife Laura. He's an honest man and whenever he got in trouble, he would admit the truth and accept responsibility for his actions. Many people adored him for his honesty, even with a person like his wife. The only explanation for why he's not doing that now is because if he were to admit the truth, it would cost him everything; not only his wife, but his house, the money in his bank account, and so much more. Even though the stakes are high for him, he's not able to lie very well and decides to accept the consequences. But before he does that, he notices a red mark on his wife's chest and proceeded to ask her what it is.

"Hey honey, what's that on your chest?" She glances down and realizes she forgot to cover up that spot on her body.

"Oh, you mean that? That's just a pimple I've been scratching lately, so don't be worried about it. It's nothing too serious, so you don't have to worry about me dear. I swear to God it's not that important." She starts to make a fake smile as she

covers up the spot with her shirt, hoping her husband wouldn't take a closer look at it.

"I think it'd be best if I check it out so I won't have to be worried about my lovely wife. It'll only take a sec, I promise." As he opens up that area again, it became clear to him what it really was; it was a big hickey, and he knew it didn't come from him since it's been awhile since they had an intense make out session. This triggered a red flag in Ben's mind as he looked back at her in shock. "What in the hell is this Laura!? Who the hell gave you this mark on your chest!? You better have answers, or else I'm filing a divorce on our marriage!"

Laura's confidence began to diminish quickly as her husband kept asking her to answer his questions. "Dear, I told you already that it's nothing too serious! I already told you that it's a pimple I've been scratching, so don't look at it the wrong way!" She becomes afraid as she realizes her luck is starting to fade. Her days of lying may finally be over with the discovery of a hickey.

"I know what I see, and I can tell you're lying to me. So cut the crap and tell me where that came from! Hurry up before I throw you and the unknown guy out of a window!" Laura starts to tear in front of him and she gives into his demand.

"Okay okay, I'll say it! There's this guy that I've met at a bar when I was alone and he sparked interest in me when we spoke to each other! We started seeing each other in private so none of our friends know about the affair! We soon began to take it even farther where I would go to his house just to make out with him on the couch! I'M SO SORRY BEN!" Ben's anger overwhelms him and he punches his wife in the face. Laura was bleeding out of her mouth, and she began to cry right after she fell to the ground. Soon after that moment, he got in his car and drove to his attorney's office where he could file the divorce. The relationship he had with her was now over.

Two months had passed since the divorce and Ben was alone in his new house. He was glad that he didn't have to deal with her lies anymore and he could live his life without a cheating partner. While procrastinating on his Samsung, his house phone goes off and he realizes it's his neighbor from next door. "Hey sweetie pie, you ready to come over now? I'm really lonely in my place, and I would like it if we could spend time together."

Ben smiles and says, "Yeah, I guess I'll come over. I got nothing to do right now, so I might as well hang out at your place. I'm so glad that we starting dating while I was married to *that woman*, I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have you by my side."

"Aw, you're so sweet darling! I'm happy that we're together too! I promise I'll be better than your ex, okay? So how 'bout we get off the phone and you come over now?"

"You got it baby," he says. "I'll see you in about five minutes." They hang up the phone and Ben goes to his closet to put on his jacket. As he turns off the lights as he's heading out, he says to himself, "We're going to have some fun tonight, I promise." He shuts the door behind him and leaves everything in darkness.

-Jesse Stickell

Betrayal

At first glance
anyone can appear like an angel
and act like a saint
but it's an act for some
a picture they paint

-Julia Collins

The Now Written Rules Of Socialization

Dear human,

We are sorry to inform you that our terms of service have changed. This is due to certain humans questioning our authority, so we are here to assure you we are still in charge. We would say that we're sorry for the inconvenience, but we're not.

1. Do not interact with people in an elevator. Stand there and stare at the door like everyone else. You're not special and the elevator isn't a place to make friends.

2. When you're in an empty bathroom, do not take the stall next to the only other occupied stall and loudly sing Adele songs. We've been informed that this does not help any bathroom processes and it makes getting out of the stall horribly awkward.

3. When standing in the middle of a busy hallway, do not form a clot so severe that if you were a vein you'd end up killing yourself. You can always assemble with your companions, but, much like the elevator, this isn't how you make friends.

4. Every teenager is a delinquent. Be suspicious, even when they're doing nothing.

5. Phone use is not permitted when in the presence of another human. It's considered rude and the devolution of your species. Instead, strike up an awkward/meaningless conversation, ignore one another, or even cough to make things even more uncomfortable.

6. No humans are allowed to sneeze more than twice in a quiet room - this goes for coughing as well. Any humans doing so will be shunned until the end of time.

7. Humans disinterested in their meaningless banter cannot express their boredom, nor state that they do not wish to continue it. Smile and nod until you have reason to leave.

8. If you do not understand another human after asking them to repeat themselves three times, say "yes" with much certainty. We have found this to be effective in most situations.

9. The actions of the one will affect those of the many, such as losing privileges for everyone rather than punishing the only one who deserves it. This is very effective in most school settings and establishes authority over your inferiors.

-Jessica Pulizzotto



-Quinn Blackburn

A sail and, I weep for us

A mile off the coast
I look to him
While he's piloting
Our small sailboat
On a voyage
To El Dorado
Or Atlantis

There's a stop
A sudden stop
He's lowered the sail
Dumped down the anchor
And we've stopped
Off the coast

I look to him and ask,
"Why've we ceased?
What has happened?"
He doesn't look at me
His head is focused sternly
At the sky
Something in the sky
I follow his gaze
And spot an object
A creature
A bird

He stares at it
A single Seagull swimming in the sky
I start crying
But my tears flow straight to the ocean
They mix and meld
With the water
They are seen
And missed
By no one

I look to him
And again ask
"Why?"
But we both know the answer
I know the answer

A salty sweep of sluggish winds
Drifts idly by
And with it
His body,
In the form
Of a million specks of sand,
Floats out to sea

I do not know
How to pull the anchor back up

-Bradley Landberg



-Tateana Khokhar

Nothing Left Inside Of My Chest

An old firehouse.
A scaffold against the wall.
That painting he never finished.
A red Schwinn bike.
Everything is exactly the same.
He remembers.

The air is still.
The silence is deafening.
The setting sun had slipped behind a cloud,
Casting deep, eerie shadows through the empty house
What happened to the life and warmth that used to fill these halls?
When did this house cease to be a home?

The piano.
Covered in a dusty drop cloth, like everything else.
The piano, where they had first kissed.
Before everything had fallen apart.

No, what is he doing here?
As if possessed, he sits at the piano.
His stiff fingers recall the instrument still.
They dance across the ebony and ivory keys.
Mozart. Zeppelin. McCartney. Sondheim. Coldplay. Pearl Jam. Chopin.
Hey Jude escapes – why are the keys wet?
When did he start crying?
Something had broken.
Shattered.
Why can't he stop?

Now he's falling to the floor, crying.
Sobs echo through the empty place that was once his home – *their* home.
Through his burning eyes, he realizes – he's still completely, painfully, unequivocally in love.

Why should it matter?

Now he's falling to the floor, crying.
As he's lying there, he sees the place where the wall meets the floor and realizes -
He didn't paint it very well.

-Katy Dara

The Encounter of a Magical Man

“Okay class, we have five minutes before 9th period ends; does anyone have any questions before we have our test tomorrow?” The class raised their hands as they were in desperate need of assistance. As that happened, I sat in the back doodling on my review packet. I was always the first one to be done when it comes to class work, and I consistently found myself in the utter torment of boredom. School isn’t ever entertaining for me, and because of that I am always looking for something that could liven up my boring life. Luckily, before I fell asleep on the desk, the classroom bell rang and I packed up my belongings to finally leave for the day. “Have a great day Matteo, and make sure you get home safe and sound! It’s pretty dangerous out there, so please be careful!”

“You too, see you tomorrow.” I waved goodbye at my teacher as I walked out and hurried down the stairs on my way to the bus. As I entered the vehicle, I sat in my regular seat and pulled out my headphones so I could chill on the bus ride home. The bus soon left the school, and ten minutes later the unexpected occurred right before my eyes. The bus ran out of gas which sucked since I was literally not that far from my house. “Oh great,” I said to myself, “is there anything else that can make this day worse for me?” As I sighed quietly, the bus driver got up from his seat and made an announcement with a booming voice.

“EVERYBODY LISTEN UP! ESCUCHAN POR UN MOMENTO! WE SOMEHOW RAN OUT OF GAS, AND WITHOUT THAT I CAN’T GET YOU WHERE YOU GOTTA GO. SO BEAR WITH ME AS I MAKE A PHONE CALL TO THE SCHOOL, AND JUST REMAIN IN YOUR SEATS UNTIL ANOTHER BUS ARRIVES. THANK YOU!” As he got back into his seat, my best friend turned to me with a disappointed look on his face.

“Well this sucks dude, what are we supposed to do now? I doubt the bus driver is going to let us get off the bus. Have any ideas, Matteo?” I looked down to my seat trying to think of something useful, and one idea came to my mind. Even though I did think of something, it would be beneficial to me and me alone.

“Hate to break it to you man, but I can’t help you here. I refuse to sit in this bus when I can just walk to my house. I’m going to tell the bus driver that I’m walking home, and whether he likes it or not, that’s the plan I’m sticking with.” I got up from my seat and approached the front of the bus to escape this hellhole I’m currently in. As I got to the main exit, the bus driver put his phone down and looked at me with deep confusion.

“What the hell are you doing? Did you not hear me make an announcement two minutes ago!? For the love of God, please don’t make me repeat what I just said to everyone. The new bus will arrive in ten minutes, and I’m pretty sure you can wait until then. Please return to your-”

I stopped him midway and said, “Look, if I get off right now I’ll be able to get home in less than five minutes. Do I really have to wait double the time when I can just head out right now?” The bus driver thought to himself for a minute, and then looked back at me.

“Fine, I’ll let you go, but if anything happens to you, I want you to remember that you decided this yourself. Are we clear on that?” I nodded, and he opened the exit for me. Walking down the stairs, I started heading in the direction of where I live. I

turned my music back on looked down to the sidewalk since I knew no cars were coming onto my street. Distracted by the song blasting in my ears, I accidentally bumped into a man and my English folder fell out my backpack. As soon as I realized my backpack was still open, I squatted down and started to pick up the papers that were on the ground. While I was trying to recover them, the stranger picked up a short story from the pile and stopped to read the title.

“‘The Sad Reality of a Great Marriage’, written by Jesse Stickell. Well then, let’s see what this is all about.”

I had just met this guy, and I was already feeling uncomfortable around him. Why, you might ask? It’s because he literally sniffed all the pages and looked into the sky with a face of pleasure. You might as well consider this guy a drug addict because he did it as if he were snorting cocaine up his nose! Even though I said this in my head, I decided to keep quiet and remain polite.

“Now that was a pretty good story, don’t you think? I like how they both did something bad to each other, but only the woman named Laura was caught. There’s a lot of lies in here, but it’s good overall.”

“Yeah it’s alright, but I don’t like how the ending went. To be honest, the two main characters make me want to torture them slowly. They’re both terrible people, and they deserve to be punished for what they did.”

The man looked at me with interest and questioned me about my actions. “So if you were the author, would you change the story and do what you just said to me?”

I nodded my head and explained why. Surprisingly enough, this drug addict seemed comfortable with what I was saying and continued to look like a mellow-kind of guy. His next question puzzled me a tiny bit.

“What if I told you that you can do that without going to this guy named Jesse, and actually change how this story goes?”

“B-But they’re just fictional characters, right? How can they be real when Jesse is the one who made them up? That’s not even possible! Who are you!?” The man looked at me with a smirk on his face.

“The name’s Persky, and I’m a magician. It may not seem like it, but I can do things regular people wouldn’t be able to comprehend; like for example, I can place you into this story so you can fulfill what you desire. Any sort of weapon that you can imagine will be at your disposal. If you can just trust me here, I will definitely let you be able to do whatever you want. However, I can’t do anything unless I have your full cooperation during the process. Due to the fact that you’re possibly a new customer, the first one will be on me. So, what do you think about that? Care to give this a try, my friend?” I looked at him nervously while thinking about the offer.

“How do I know it’s not a drug you’re offering me? For all I know, I could be imagining that I’m torturing them while in reality I’m just having a seizure on the ground. How can I really trust you if this is the first time I’m meeting you?”

Persky sighed, “Oh come on man, don’t be like that! Look, I meant it when I told you your dreams can come true; with the skills I have, I can make anyone’s dream a reality, but I can’t grant your wish unless you’re with me one hundred percent. Give me a chance and I’ll prove it to you.”

“Alright fine,” I said. “I guess I’ll give you one chance. But if I find out that you did really give me a drug, don’t be surprised when I drop kick your ass off of a building. Lead the way.” Persky smiled and led me into a strange warehouse one block away from my house. My god it was creepy as fuck; there was police tape everywhere, and all of the walls had huge holes in them. Most of the lights had ran out of energy, and the one light bulb that still worked was flickering on and off. As my suspicions started to rise again, Persky stopped walking and introduced me to this weird box in the middle of the room. I started chuckling and said, “What’s this man, your stash of drugs?”

“You know, you can really offend someone if you keep making jokes like that. Anyway, this is where I make people’s wishes come true. All I need you to do is to drop your backpack on the ground, take the short story with you, and sit in the box. I’ll do the rest while you sit tight, okay?”

“Fine by me,” I said. “I just hope I’ll be comfortable in there.” I did what he said and sat in the crisscross-applesauce position, you know, like how they teach you in preschool. As I got comfortable, I signaled Persky and he closed the box so he could do his thing. While he checked the surroundings, he asked me if I was doing okay.

“I’m alright Persky, no need to worry about me man. I’m just waiting for you to finish so I can do what I came here for. You done it yet, or do I need to wait a bit longer?”

“Nope, we’re all good here. Alright, I’m going to need you to close your eyes right now since this might look disorienting on your end. Got it?” I nodded my head yes and closed my eyes as he asked. With three loud taps on the box, I opened up my eyes again and was suddenly in someone’s backyard.

“Holy shit, where the fuck am I!? Where are you Persky!?” I started to panic when suddenly I heard his voice out of nowhere.

“Take a deep breath Matteo, I’m still here. You may not be able to see me, but I’m talking to you from the warehouse. Listen to me closely and you’ll get the answers you want, okay? You are in Ben and Laura’s backyard, and I placed you here so you wouldn’t be seen by anyone. Since the events of that short story happen pretty quickly, I put you ten minutes before the event so you don’t miss your chance. Laura hasn’t arrived home yet, so that leaves Ben all alone in the house. You have one chance Matteo, so if you mess up you will have to pay a fee to try again. Do I make myself clear?” Thanks to his explanation, I caught my breath.

“Yeah, I got it man. Looks like you weren’t a drug dealer after all.” I laughed again.

“My god, are you always like this? You know what - never mind about that and just get on with it! And remember, any sort of weapon you can imagine-”

“Will be at my disposal, yeah I got it already. I’ll let you know when I’m done here.” Persky ended the conversation, and I felt alone again. While looking around, I noticed that the back door was opened so I decided to enter the house slowly without making a sound. I hid behind the kitchen counter and looked around to make sure Ben wasn’t near. I closed my eyes and imagined a cool looking katana in my mind, and like how Persky said, the katana was at my disposal and it was ready to do its job. While I was astonished by this fact, I heard someone’s phone go off in the background and decided to hide in the shadows until I had the perfect time to strike. One minute later, Ben came down the stairs and picked up the phone.

“Hey cutie, how’s it going? I was waiting to hear that beautiful voice of yours. What did you say? You want me to come over right now? Well, I guess I can do that if you want; I don’t know where the hell Laura is, so it looks like I can go to your place without her noticing. See you in two hours babe. I-I love you too, g-goodbye.” Before he went upstairs again, I imagined an EMP grenade and used it to set off all of the lights in the house. With the time that I gave myself, I pulled my katana out of its sheath and moved closer and closer until I was in stabbing range. While I was approaching him slowly, Ben began to shake as he saw my shadow coming closer in proximity.

“L-Laura dear, is that you? Were you here the entire time, or did you just arrive? W-Were you listening to that phone call just now? W-Wait, you can’t be her! I didn’t hear her car pull up outside! W-Who the hell are you!?”

Without hesitation, I plunged the blade into his stomach and said, “Me? I’m someone who’s going to torture the living fuck out of you.” The lights turned back on as blood poured out of his wound and mouth. He wasn’t able to move a single muscle, so I took advantage of it and impaled him into the wall. “I didn’t think I would get this chance, but I’m glad I did. I won’t waste a single second while I’m here. I’m going to enjoy hearing you scream while I slowly carve out every organ in your body.”

“W-Why are you doing this to me? What have I ever done to you? I didn’t do-” I plunged the blade even deeper so he would shut his mouth.

“Bullshit, I know what did to your ‘lovely wife’ Laura; you’ve been cheating on her with some girl that lives far away from here, and it disgusts me how you just decided to go to her place when Laura isn’t around! People adore you for being an honest man, but you’ve kept this horrible relationship as a secret and I won’t allow this to go any further. I will torture you slowly, and by the time I’m done with you, I’ll do the same to your wife; hell, I’ll make you watch as she goes through the same thing you did.”

“No, please don’t do that to her! I-I’m sorry, okay!? I promise I won’t see the girl again, so please let us go! Don’t hurt her!” A flood of tears came out of his eyes as his voice began to break, but I refused to let him go.

“Do you honestly think I’ll let any of you go if you begged for mercy? I came here to make all of you pay, so that’s what I’m going to do. Besides, why do you even care about Laura? You were already cheating on her, so why does she even matter to you? Whatever, it’s not important anymore; I’m going to make you pay, so stop being a little bitch and take what you deserve!”

I began to tear out his inner organs, and with each strike I made, the pain and suffering Ben was going through became more evident. Most of his body parts were on the ground and he was beginning to lose strength within himself. The second I realized how much weaker he was becoming, I imagined an even greater sword and stabbed him in one of his legs. “Come on Ben,” I said angrily, “this isn’t fun for me unless I hear you scream!” After he yelled from the aching pain, I heard a car pull up onto the sidewalk. “Looks like your ‘lovely wife’ has arrived. I’ll let you two speak as I prepare for my next victim. Have fun little Benjamin...”

A minute after I left the living room, Laura walked into the house and gasped as she saw the large puddle of blood on the floor. “BEN! WHERE ARE YOU DEAR!? HONEY, WHERE ARE YOU!?” The moment she saw her husband, she stood there

silently as Ben slowly looked up at her.

“L-Laura... you have to get out of here... before he... gets you too. R-Run...” He looked back down as he was too weak to keep his head up.

“No, I’m going to pull these weapons out of you right now! I won’t let you die here, I promise!” In the corner of my eye, I noticed tears beginning to drip down her face as she tried to pull them out.

“Hello there Laura, it’s so nice to finally meet you. Your husband and I were having a friendly little chat. Would you like to join in on the fun?” She turned around and stepped away.

“You monster! How can you do this to a human being!? Don’t you have any sense of morality!?”

“Morality huh? A monster? I’ll admit that I have flaws, but that doesn’t mean you’re a better person than me. Even though you two were married for fifteen years, the two of you disregarded your partner’s feelings and secretly dated other people for your own selfish pleasure. A marriage is a promise that people make to each other, it’s a tradition that says ‘I will stay with you until the end of time. Even if our bodies crumble into dust, my spirit will still be with you on the other side.’ Although I might be a shitty human being, I know well enough that a marriage is a promise of love, loyalty, and respect. So tell me, who’s really the monster here?”

“When you’ve been married for a long time, you have to realize that relationships might not last as you want it to! That’s why there are attorneys who can help file a divorce! You’re like what, 15 years old!? What do you know about marriage!?”

I grew angry with her response and said, “You know, there is another solution and it’s actually pretty simple: instead of going out to see other people, how ‘bout you sit down with him and actually try to work it out!? It’s not that fucking hard to do! Literally, if you stopped being such a whore, you would realize how easy it is!”

Assuming all of my weapons were in Ben’s body, she came at me with a fist full of anger. With the quick reaction time I have, I stopped the attack with one arm and used the other to shoot her in the heart with a pistol. Her blood splattered on Ben’s face, and as he looked up, I was able to see the tears in his eyes. It seemed like he finally learned his lesson as he witnessed the death of his wife.

“L-Laura... no... H-How could you... Y-You shot her right... in front of me...”

“Don’t worry,” I said while pointing my gun at him, “soon I’ll send you to the same place she’s heading. Any last words, little Benjy?”

“F-Fuck you... you son of a bitch...” He looked back down to the floor and accepted his fate.

“Not bad for someone’s last words, I’ll take it. Farewell...” Ben’s blood was splattered on the wall as I went for the headshot. After that was over, I dropped the gun and returned to the backyard to call Persky. “Hey Persky, you there man? I’m done with everything now. Wanna send me back to the warehouse, or what?”

“Yeah, I was waiting for you to finish in there. You were in there for almost half-an-hour! Alright, close your eyes again and I’ll bring you back to the real world. I don’t want you to be disoriented or anything like that, so please do what I ask of you.”

“Yeah I got it already, so just make it quick.” I closed my eyes until I heard the three taps on the box. When I opened my eyes, I was back in the crisscross-applesauce position and I got out of the box to stretch. “Well, that was actually pretty fun, so thanks for doing that for me man! Is there any chance I could do that with

other stories I don't like?"

"Sorry kid, I don't think that'll be possible. Apparently there's this man named Kugelmass who is looking to cheat on his wife with a lovely lady, and I think I have the skills to give him what he wants. I have to make a phone call to his house, so I'll see you later!"

I was disappointed with his response. I grabbed my things and left the warehouse with a sad look on my face. I really liked Persky, and he was the only one who gave me entertainment. Now I'll be forever bored in my life with no opportunities of excitement. Hm, I guess that's what happens when you have an encounter with a magical man.

-Jesse Stickell

A World In Depth

What a most grievous upheavall!
What a most grievous shame!
I thought this world to be a lamb
But my! it's proved untamed

A second passed in ecstasy
Leads to an hour in doubt,
For screaming are the pauper folk
And reticent the clout!

All the wonder, it seems to be,
Is locked up tight in woods,
And yet there now cry many trunks,
"The blades misunderstood."

A roll of dice determines fates
While people's hearts burn bright,
And so their flames will peter out
When they are born with blight.

So then it seems a paradox,
This world in its beauty;
People clamor for a sampling
Of mediocrity!

-Bradley Landberg



-Tateana Khokhar

The Weaver

The sun's rays pounded down upon Meryne's slimy, bluish skin, and his eyes squinted in the harsh light. It was a humid day, the heat unrelenting. Meryne's barren, worm-like head secreted a small bit of sweat, and he was beginning to tire from his farm work, but he continued. Though humanoid in stature and form, his feet sank into the soil, making him appear smaller.

He harvested some crops from his land and placed them in a nearby barrel with the fruits. The past week produced little for him; the town-wide underground irrigation system of Selgerst was shut down when the Weaver arrived in his village. Many townspeople had abandoned their traditional ways of farming in favor of the more luxurious lifestyle that the Weaver's services offered them.

A couple of Irrothians, denizens of this planet Irroth, passed by his home and chuckled. Compared to the rest of the village, his little, green sod home was but a forgotten garbage dump. The town's advances had led most residents' houses to replace their mud with more concrete materials, and they now at least held a semblance to the building standards of other planets. Meryne scowled at the passersby. Despite their shared town and heritage, he hated the large majority of them, the simple Irrothians, the simple beings that dared to hold the same form as him. They were worms to him.

From the direction they were walking and the jangling of pieces sounding from their coat pockets, Meryne figured that they were headed towards the Weaver's place. Presumably to get some petty jewels, or maybe a morsel to devour. Meryne frowned at the thought. It was pathetic. Most of the townspeople of Selgerst had either become wholly reliant on her weaving or on the inventions that others brought back from her cavern. She would materialize anything for them, and for just a few bronze pieces or silver pieces. She was a seamstress of the material form, reality's webspinner. And the Irrothians had her services to themselves.

But still, some stuck to their ways, such Irrothians as Meryne, and continued on their little self-sufficient existences. Some rejected her as a rebellion of the strange, alien changes she wrought, but Meryne did it with a grimace and discouraged eyes. One of the few scholars and philosophers to exist before the Weaver came, he desired not the material things his brethren wished for; he desired no shiny jewels or new technologies. The only thing he desired was a child. 'Twas most unfortunate for him, though, when he had learned a few months prior that he was an infertile, unable to have an heir to his vast knowledge. Unable to have a successor who would be the sole Irrothian (besides Meryne) to dare dabble in the more complex mindsets of the universe. He was trapped by his own body, a prisoner to the irony of life, and he often wept nights away at his fervent wish to be a parent wasted in his faulty vessel. For in the end, the only hope he had, the only dreams he dreamt of, and the only purpose he held to his life was to raise the perfect child. A child to call his own.

A child...?

The thought crept over him like a twilit summer breeze, looming and slithering through his mind. He hadn't yet pondered at the possibility. Could the Weaver...? No, he thought. No one could create or put a price to the soul. The soul was something precious, something beyond reality and too divine in nature to ever recreate.

But still, the thought lingered in him through the rest of that day. As the ever more extravagantly dressed Irrothians walked by and jeered at him, he kept thinking

of the thought. As the solar beams assaulted him with sickening heat, he kept thinking of the thought. By the time the moon had arrived and brought the silver stars and inky sky, his mind had become entranced. He was unable to sleep, the moonbeams egging on his mind, and illuminating his psyche with thoughts of damnable creation. He pondered, and slept for but a mere hour in the morning.

When he awoke from his slumber, he got out of bed in a haste, put on his coat, and rushed out the door. He had made up his mind, and set his path to the Weaver's lair. The Weaver had set up her shop in a cavern on the outskirts of the town, and as he entered the heart of town, his eyes widened. In the past week, the Irrothians had invented streetcars from the advances in sciences and the mechanical parts intertwined by the Weaver for them. The previously modest and small homes of the primitive creatures had now transformed into large steel husks with glass panes and iron frames. Farms were replaced with research labs, and vehicles now conquered and roamed the streets.

And still, the Irrothians were simple creatures, living more simply complicated lives, in a less simple town.

Meryne walked through the village like a dead, swaying branch, unsure of its fate, and yet hanging on to false life. As he approached the cavern entrance, he could not help but shiver.

The opening led to a passageway, carved with small steps, and many narrow-ings. Dim lanterns were the only source of light at first, providing a slight orange tint to the large cave. With each step he took, pebbles rattled about. As he traversed his way to the back, he pondered of the Weaver.

Most Irrothians imagined her as a beautiful maiden of immense sophistication, waving her hands to the spacious sky, swishing the sultry air with a grace and elegance that left the universe no other option but to conjure what she willed. Of course, this was merely town-talk, and she never revealed her visage nor her methods to any being. Especially not to the 'brainless' Irrothians. Meryne had only interacted with her once for a brief meeting, mostly to subdue his suspicions, but instead introducing numerous more.

His thoughts were interrupted as he finally reached the end of the lair, and he found himself at a large, black wall.

"Weaver?" Meryne said. At first, the cavern produced no response. The emptiness remained stagnant. There was but silence.

From the nothingness, a bell chimed, and the cavern came to life. The large black wall lit up with red numbers, blinding in their luminosity, ending the murkiness. A small, rocky round table boasting a shining torch erupted before Meryne in a crumbling rise. The cavern trembled, but soon settled.

"You've come for business?" a female voice echoed through the whole cavern. Meryne recognized it as the Weaver, and readied himself.

"Yes," he said. "Seamstress, I'll get straight to the point." He gulped, and got on his knees. "I ask that you craft for me a child."

"A child?" she asked. The screen flashed a few numbers before going back to darkness.

"A child for me to raise and bear as my own." Meryne turned his head towards the ground as he awaited a response.

"Twelve gold pieces."

"Twelve gold pieces?" Meryne said. He looked up to the screen. The number twelve was printed all over. He had gotten confirmation, the confirmation that he could indeed have his child, but also the crushing confirmation of the price. "I do not have that amount."



-Tateanna Khokhar

"Then I will not grant you a child."

"But, you do realize, there are only five gold pieces on all of Irroth." His voice had gone quiet. He so wanted his dreams to be real, as they were so close to him, and now it was as if a boulder had fallen in front of him right as he'd reached the peak of the mountain.

"Such is business," she said. "The true cost of life is high, you know. To put a price on the soul itself? Seven gold pieces, perhaps...?" Her voice trailed off, and a revolting hatred grew within Meryne's core. "Five for the body and materials. But for you, I'll cut a deal. One whole Irrothian child: five gold pieces, and one bronze piece." Meryne's eyes widened. He was both disgusted and enamored. She had put a price on the soul, but she also had offered him a chance to his only dream. An almost impossible chance, but one nonetheless.

He reached into his coat pocket, and pulled out the one gold piece that he had. His most prized treasure, a reminder of his adventures through the world. He would need to gather the other four if he wanted his dreams fulfilled. Looking emptily towards the piece, and back towards the screen, he pondered. The number five was printed endlessly in a crimson font.

"I want a weapon," Meryne said. He pulled out two silver pieces from his pocket and laid them on the small, round, bargaining table. A heartless chuckle from the Weaver echoed through the cavern.

"What kind?"

The forest of Kerlui was much deeper than initially perceived. Orange fern-like plantforms and magenta towering trees littered the shadowy woods. It was rumored that a gold piece was somewhere in the place, but no Irrothian dared enter for fear of the beasts that plagued and lurked amongst the bushes. Often, bodies of Irrothians who went into the depths long ago were found, mangled and bloodied, in local towns, perhaps as a reminder of the forest's dominance.

Meryne didn't care for these omens, however. He felt not fear, but purpose, longing in the outline of the forest. He had already decided that nothing was to stop him, and with a firm grip he held in his hand the glistening, crimson longsword that the Weaver had made him. It crackled and sparked, emitting massive amounts of heat, enough to melt any substance in the known universe. He stood before the ominous forest, and entered.

Immediately, the fern-like forms began to reach towards him with their leafy arms. They attempted to grasp him, and hold him, and keep him, but in return, he

slashed straight through them, vaporizing them upon contact. Swings and swipes ripped through the plants and trees which obstructed his path. The sword cut through the forest like the soft flesh of worms, and with the efficiency of sinful grace.

Eventually, after cutting down near thousands of plants, he reached a clearing in the trees. A bit of light shone down through the canopy and revealed a small stone pedestal sitting in the middle. Atop the platform was a gold piece, glistening in the light. Meryne eyed it carefully, aware of the very real possibility of a trap being set upon it. Hesitantly, he stepped towards it. No response. Another step. No response. Another, another, and another, until he was but arm's reach from the piece. He again waited for something to happen, but nothing moved, so he reached towards it.

A rustling from a bush to his left grabbed his attention, and in an instant, an ivory feline head attached to a mammoth body erupted from the shadows. Its lengthy, drooping fur trailed behind it, and its fangs, much too large for its mouth to contain, shone with an orange elegance and ferocity. Its towering figure, matching the size of a medium building, landed right besides Meryne, and it swiped towards him with its monstrous paw, its shadowy eyes voraciously focused on him. He dodged quickly, the creature's razor-sharp claws bending the breeze. He drew his sword and attempted to hit the beast, but it quickly jumped to the sky, avoiding his swipe. It covered the sun with its grand body and began to descend, directly overhead of him. He quickly spotted his opportunity, and stuck his sword's edge above him. The beast's eyes broadened, and in a panic, it flailed its appendages, but to no avail, as it was stuck in its decline.

In a scarlet flash, the creature landed on the sword, soft belly exposed. Crimson fluids splashed all over Meryne and the ground. The dark color faded from the beast's eyes, and its life force dulled. The beast's arms and legs slumped down, proving its death. Meryne, almost unfazed from its passing, pointed his sword to the ground, allowing the forest creature to slide gently to the floor.

He turned his attention back to the gold piece, and snatched it before anything else got an idea to take his head. His bloodied hand stained the piece a bit, and the fluid left on the sword quickly evaporated from the immense heat. He put the coin in his pocket, and sheathed the weapon. Sickeningly delighted from his success, he turned around and made his way out of the forest through the path of dying and decapitated plants he had cut earlier.

Meryne approached Rorchah castle with a bit of hesitance. He had visited this grand building many times on his adventures through Irroth. It was a checkpoint, a safe place for him, for he knew he could always rely on its owner, his friend, Wry, to provide him a grand time. Wry would give to him many gifts, and bestow upon him many festivities. They were often simple pleasures, simple-minded luxuries, but he tended to enjoy them. Though, he mostly found joy in Wry's insane manner of speech. It was the only non-simple thing about him.

He pounded on the door that towered over him; it was at least 20 feet tall. He took a moment to gaze at the castle. It had undergone renovations since his last visit, and was now crowned with dazzling gemstones and a gold coat of paint to hide the olden, tired rocks that had been stuck there, aging for years, molded in a plain existence as the cornerstones of a simple man's abode.

His thoughts were interrupted by the opening of the doors and the greetings of an armored guardsman.

"Hello, Meryne," the guard said. His armor clanked and banged upon itself. It was a bit too small for his large stature. "You may enter." Meryne nodded and made his way inside the manor. The interior proved even more luxurious now than the outside. Gilded china lay stacked in a silver chest, a glimmering chandelier bearing pyrite candles swung gently on the ceiling, and a needlessly large velvet staircase leading to the second, third, and fourth floors lay centered in the main lobby, imposing and inviting.

"Guardsman, please summon Wry for me," Meryne said.

"Of course," the guard replied. He quickly ran off to a side room and grabbed a small device. He clicked some buttons and spun a few dials, before putting back it down and rushing back to Meryne's side. "He will be here momentarily."

"My thanks," Meryne said. The guard soon left to perform his other duties, and Meryne was left to himself. He looked about the room, gazing emptily at the shining, fake, gold materials scattered throughout. It was a simple elegance, a simple extravagance, he thought. So, so, simple.

Wry, a chubby Irrothian wearing an undersized purple coat covered in magnificent rocks and vibrant colors, soon appeared at the top of stairs. He looked down to the lobby and found his old friend.

"Meryne!" he called loudly. A large smile found itself on his face, and his eyes filled with elation. He rushed down the stairs, almost falling, and ran to Meryne's side. "Meryne!" he said through huffs and pants. "It's of the goodest time, seeing you here, friend."

"As it is to see you," Meryne replied and chuckled a little.

"What is bringing you here? Out tripping on another world adventure? Searching for the, uh, enli..." He stumbled on his words as he tried to recall something.

"Enlightenment?" said Meryne.

"Indeed! That is the it!... Is that the it you are in the searching for? Is that what you are in the needing of?"

"I haven't needed that in a long time. I'm looking for something else right now." He put on a smirk which soon turned to a frown. "Actually, I was wondering if I could talk to you outside for a second."

"Is there something of the worrying to you?" Wry looked concerned and put his hand on Meryne's shoulder, but Meryne promptly shrugged it off.

"I just need to talk to you. It will take only a second." Wry looked hesitant, but eventually nodded his head in agreement. The two made their way out the door into the harsh sunlight, and Meryne led Wry to the shadowed side of the palace exterior.

"So," Wry said, "what is it that you need the talking to about?"

"Do you know where the other gold pieces of Irroth are?" Meryne asked. Wry looked a bit puzzled, but shuffled his eyes a bit as he tried to remember.

"I am not in the knowing of why you are in the need of them, but I am in the knowing of the location of the one you're not in the awareness of."

"Where?"

"I spent of mine one of the pieces to a man of a shadowy figure. The building of the palace, I got from the spending of it. He never made me in the knowing of his name, but a month after, we were to be meeting again. It was by the chance, and I was in the asking of him what he did with the piece of gold. He said he had done the bury-

ing of it, burying it in the dirt of the Selgerst town.” Meryne’s eyes widened. It was underneath his hometown? He smiled a bit, relieved it was in such a simple place.

“Thank you.” There was a hint of sorrow in his voice.

“I mean, you are of the welcome, but do you not think we should be going back to the inside, be quitting of these serious talkings, and start having some of the fun-” Wry was interrupted by Meryne’s sword sinking into his soft, wormy flesh. The speed of the strike was imperceptible; he had unsheathed the weapon, struck, and discarded any morals in a matter of a second.

“Meryne...” Wry sputtered through weak, bloody breaths. “What...?” His face contorted to pain, and then confusion, and then back to pain, immense pain. Meryne did not grace him with a response, instead choosing to look him dead in the eyes. Wry looked back, solemnly, angrily, but mostly with pain, and his eyes slowly lost any of their soul as the heat of the blade began to disintegrate his internal organs.

Meryne plucked from his friend’s pompous coat two gold pieces, the ones he couldn’t bear to not carry around. Perhaps they were a treasure to Wry, or a sign of status, or a bragging item. What a simple being, Meryne thought. I never liked him. Never. He repeated the thought to himself a countless amount of times as Wry’s body boiled to a round bag of skin only held firm by its skeleton. He repeated the thought, and repeated it, trying to convince himself that it was indeed true. Even still, a tear formed in the corner of his eye, but it was quickly evaporated by the heat of the sword, as well as all of the blood on his hands.

All of the blood on his hands.

By the time he’d made it back, three weeks passed, and Selgerst was no longer recognizable. Levitating cars zipped up and down the pitch-black streets. Pedestrians sported skin-tight ivory clothes littered with names of what could only be presumed as companies and sponsors. All of the townsfolks’ homes, besides his small shelter, had been morphed into massive skyscrapers. Breaching the clouds, they loomed over Meryne, haunting and commanding. A few Irrothians in business suits and ties gazed at him through the many glass panes of the buildings. Compared to them, he was a rat, a worm; dirtied and tiny. And still, they went back to their work quick enough, performing their simple tasks on their computing machines and bringing papers littered with data charts to their simple bosses.

His hut stood out severely, even more than before, and his crops had long since perished in his absence. The farmlands were a pale grey, decaying from the lack of water. His house too, had started dying in his absence. The verdant sod frame had now faded to a lifeless brown. Mold and moss had now commandeered parts of the building, and the house’s stability now was unsure, its body slightly shifted. When he entered, he immediately went to work. He kneeled down and started digging through his dirt floor. Somehow, he was convinced that the gold piece was buried under his house, and not anywhere else. Where the thought came from, he was uncertain, be he thought it true, and began scooping out dirt chunks hand by hand in great haste. He was like a mole, or a worm, practically making a tunnel in his house, until a glimmering presence revealed itself in the dirt.

It was the final gold piece. He quickly grabbed it from the hole he made and brought it close to his face, examining it, admiring it. His thoughts raced, and his dreams went wild as he began to get on his feet. Shoving the piece into his pocket

with the other four, he hurried out of the house and began to make his way to the Weaver's cavern. He ran with an insane speed, his legs fueled on paltry dreams and hopefulness alone. As he traversed the new sidewalks of Selgerst, some Irrothians turned him passing glances of confusion or curiosity, but these soon faded as they went back to their simple lives.

He made his way to the end of dimly lit cavern in a haste, his footsteps rumbling through the cave and disturbing the occasional pebble. Dust fell and cobwebs caught his head as he walked by. It seemed the cave had not been navigated in a long while. The Irrothians had no more need for a miracle worker as they began to make their own. He went to the end of the cavern, and stood before the large black screen.

"Weaver," he said to the darkness. There was a wait, just like the first time. Longer, quieter, and more tense than before. But eventually the screen lit up again with haphazard crimson numbers and the small rocky table rose into the room.

"You've come for business?" the Weaver asked. Her pitch was lower than before, more tired sounding and choppy. But Meryne didn't seem to notice, and he yanked all of the pieces out of his pocket and slammed them onto the table. Three blood-covered gold pieces, one gold piece coated in dirt, and a singled untouched gold piece now lay on the rocky slab.

"I have gathered the pieces. Now, make for me my child." His voice no longer trembled. He could feel his dream approach him with a warming pleasance, so near, radiating him with careless brilliance. The table, with the pieces upon it, descended into the cavern's floor. Within a few seconds, the sounds of an engine began. Mechanical creaks and clangs whirled through the cave as Meryne waited for something to happen. The screen in front of him displayed a series of red 1's and 0's.

"I have finished," the Weaver said after a minute. "Thank you for your business." The table arose once more, but with an object on it. It was hard to see in the darkness, but the screen lit up with new red numbers and revealed to Meryne a small being. A small, Irrothian child. Meryne's eyes widened, and hesitantly he approached it, unable to tell if he was dreaming. The child's beady eyes wandered about the room, wondering, dreaming. Meryne picked it up in his hands, and the child peered at him. Meryne gazed at it, at first emptily, then elated as he realized that he was truly holding a child in his hands. A large smile crept across his face, and the baby, upon noticing this, copied his grin.

"My own... child." A tear formed in the corner of his eye as he looked at the child with a love and devotion that was almost excessive for how little time they'd spent together. "You need a name." He pondered. He wanted the perfect name for his perfect child, for his dream child. "I shall name you... Mery." The child's earholes quivered, and it produced a large smile. Meryne couldn't help but copy this smile, and with a delusional bliss, he walked himself and the child out of the cavern and back to his house.

By the time they'd returned, the duo were still beaming at each other. Meryne was still in a joyous disbelief, and the child copied his little expression of elation. Gripped with excitement, he grabbed some rotting crops from a nearby shelf, and shoved it into Mery's mouth. Mery chewed the harvest with a vigor, unaware of how truly unclean it was. Meryne stared as it ate and accepted the 'food' he had grown himself. He felt a pride well within him, sparking more joy in his face and mind, and Mery copied this joy as it chew.

Meryne tossed the baby lightly and playfully in the air. Mery giggled a bit and looked at him with curious eyes, and Meryne threw it again into the air, and again, until it was a little game for them. Meryne would toss it gently into the caress of the humid air, and Mery

would giggle and keep a smile on its face.

That simple moment of exuberance between father and child was truly was the most joyous time of his life, but it was a short time.

They played this little game for a while longer. Meryne was entranced with the child, with the game, with the ideas of parenthood creeping into his head like lurking maggots crawling beneath the dirt, beneath the soft layer of susceptible flesh. He kept throwing Mery up and down. Up and down. Gently caressing it after each fall. He was careful to make sure he wouldn't miss, his arms outstretched perfectly beneath Mery, providing a soft cushion to land upon. Until it happened.

Mery's smile began to fade after an hour. It didn't make a noise, it merely stopped smiling and closed its eyes. Meryne took this as the child being hungry, or sleepy, so he grabbed a sickly green fruit from the shelf, same spot as the rotted crops, and stuffed it into Mery's mouth. Strangely forceful, he waited for the baby to chew its decaying nutrition, but it happened. Mery did not move its mouth, nor did it wince its nose at the smell, nor did it open its eyes to see Meryne gazing at it. Instead it lay still, deathly still.

And then Mery began to melt.

Right in his hands. Mery's soft, azure skin churned into a crimson goop, cascading through Meryne's fingers and onto the floor. Its beady black eyes ran down its liquid head and mixed into a sickening, dark puddle on the floor, oozing and still. Its organs, too, ran down in a scarlet stream through Meryne's fingers, softly, coldly. Brain matter in chunks liquidized and sank to his hands, and Mery's miniscule heart fell to the floor, beating no more, now a crimson core, never more.

Meryne, as this happened, attempted to put the gooey liquids that were once 'his child' back together. He frantically scooped up falling drops of blood and pieces of tissue and organs, and attempted to stuff them back into the little husk of bones and red that now sat still in his hand. But of course, it was to no avail. It was simply impossible. The little pool of Mery that smeared the base of his house was now merely a dead thing. It was a stain on his floor.

A simple stain.

Meryne, face imbrued in tears and red, rushed out of his house and over to the lair of the Weaver. As his steps pounded through the new sidewalks and disturbed passersby, some Irrothians turned their gaze to him in confusion and horror, but soon returned their heads to the problems of their simple lives.

He stormed through the narrow passageway of the cavern, causing rocks to jump and dust to fall from the ceiling. The lanterns no longer shone for him, and passage was engulfed in complete darkness. His footing was unsteady from his mental state, and he was finding himself using walls for support, painting the whole tunnel red.

He reached the end, and his eyes darted around the main room. The large black screen plastered at the back displayed some crimson words.

"OUT OF BUSINESS." He looked at it a few times, having trouble reading it through misty vision. When he made it out, he merely grinned. A grin of insanity incarnate, and he cried again, burying his face in his blood-soaked hands. Perhaps he would've given up then, but he had come so far, hadn't he? After wallowing in pity, he unsheathed his sword and called to the silent veil shrouding the room.

"Weaver!" he called. His hatred, sadness, and fanaticism filled the empty air, but the cavern produced no response, besides a low buzz and faint whispers of a

mechanical noise echoing in the back. "Weaver! Come on out. I'm here to do business with you. Don't you see?" The sword heated up, partially singing his hand. Again, no response. His impatience took over. "Fine, witch. That's right. You're no weaver. You're a witch. A greed-driven monster of sin and apostasy. You gave me a false child. You ended my dreams and filled them with blood. Now, I will return the favor." His face contorted to that of insane glee, with a hint of sorrow around the eyes. He charged towards the black screen and slashed through the pane, the barrier, and crimson words and numbers that dared torment him.

Past the screen, he was not met with a hag, nor a witch, nor a maiden of immense beauty crafting all manner of things. Instead he was met with a room. A small, grey room with a little black box poised in the center of the room and an empty bag placed besides it. Meryne sat there stunned until his earholes trembled from the low noise. A faint noise, a whisper, emanating from the box. It almost sounded like speech, and apathetically, Meryne walked over. He placed step after step, half expecting a creature to come from the walls and tear him to shreds right then and there, half not caring at all. He kneeled besides the box and placed his ear on it. A mechanical voice blipping in and out of existence spoke slightly more clearly.

"The... true... price of the soul..." It paused, weakly. Meryne's eyes began to widen with hatred, but he continued to listen. "...One bronze piece." Meryne froze, and the box began to repeat the quote again. And then again, and then again as it taunted him with the reality of his sin, and the dreams he'd once dreamed rushed back to him, crushed and weeping with him. He sat there for a while, listening to it drone on, thinking of the bronze piece he forgot to pay, of the soul his child never had, torturing himself. Eventually, he took a step back and examined the box again. On the front, in sloppy crimson paint, were the words, "WEAVER: VERSION 1.5".

Meryne could not contain himself anymore. He ran out of the room, through the tunnel, and out of the cavern, screaming like hell's tormented and flailing his arms in a psychotic stupor. He ran through Selgerst, eyes filled with nothing, and everything. None of the Irrothians even turned their heads. His legs carried him to a nearby forest, and in a flash, he disappeared in the leafy haze of the woods, shrieking in terror, sorrow, and decay, never to return to anything.

The few denizens of Selgerst that actually remembered Meryne, as well as a few historians, often questioned his fate. Some suggest he was merely eaten by the forest's beasts, as he had not taken his sword with him, and in his state there was no way to fight off the planet's beings. Some claim that they had seen him in other towns and corners of Irroth, walking aimlessly, crying of something 'merry'. Others simply say that he ended his existence after continuing to go insane from his endless hatred of the simplicity of his species and the loss of his 'child'. But all of this was simple towntalk, gossip to entertain their minds.

In time, the rumors quelled, and Meryne was all but forgot in the passing winds of change and dreams stretching onwards to infinity. The Irrothians in Selgerst continued on, growing their city to cover the planet, farming their virtual crops and converting them to physical matter, hunting the bugs and inconsistencies in their code allowing them to create the most advanced A.I.'s in the galaxy. They continued on these mundane tasks for the rest of their existence, becoming more advanced, thinking themselves more complex. They had become conquerors, ruling the other species of nearby planets and deforesting all the unnecessary woods which had once ruled them with a terror. They were advanced, dreaming, joyous, successful, throwing away their boring past and weaving together a new tomorrow.

But in reality, despite the fact that they denied it with a passion, they were still

simple, redundant, creatures, set off by a catalyst they would soon reverse engineer, and they lived their lives and performed their tasks dutifully in the same way they did ages ago. Eventually, they dominated the nearby solar systems and galaxies. Eons later, they came to control all of the universe. And still, they were simple.

Simple, and beaming.

-Bradley Landberg

How Fireflies Got Their Light

A long time ago, when Hestia was still an Olympian goddess, one of her favorite things to do was to watch the mortals down on Earth from the heavens. She found humans to be very interesting, as they act so much like gods. Humans married; have families, party, all the things gods do. But they have such short lifetimes, unlike gods, who are immortal.

One day, while tending to her hearth as always, a particular mortal caught Hestia's eye. She was no older than seven years old, and she came from a regular commoner family in a small village. She was very bright and cheerful, loved exploring the forests surrounding the village with her older brothers. She obeyed her parents and seemed like the perfect daughter. Hestia later learned her name was Elena. Hestia watched over Elena throughout her childhood, watching her blossom from a little girl to a young woman. Hestia thought she was beautiful, and hoped that she would have a very happy and safe future in front of her.

One day however, Hestia witnessed what appeared to be a quarrel between Elena and her parents. Hestia paid no mind to it, assuming that it was just a regular fight between the parents and their teenager. Hestia focused her attention on something else. But when she looked back at the human world later that night, Hestia was shocked at the sight of Elena sneaking out the back window of her home with a sack in her hand, clearly trying to run away from home. Hestia was concerned for Elena, even though she was practically grown, she could get hurt. But Hestia just watched as Elena ran onto the woods she used to explore with her brothers all those years ago.

Elena thought that running through the woods would be easy because she knew them so well, but it turned out more difficult than she expected. It was dark; she could barely see anything in the faint moonlight shining through the leaves of the trees. She kept tripping over the tree roots that snaked over the ground. Her knees were bleeding, but she kept going. Elena heard the sound of twigs snapping somewhere behind her; she quickened her pace, trying her hardest to stay on her feet. But when she heard the ominous howl of a wolf, she sped off in a panicked frenzy, not even looking where she was going. She was falling over herself, but she managed to still be able to move along. After a while, Elena managed to slow down, and trekked down a forest path, only to realize she had absolutely no idea where she was. She desperately tried to look around for anything she could use as a landmark to where exactly she was in the labyrinth of the forest. But alas, the light from the moon and stars above her was too weak to make out any distinguishable features of the woods. Feeling hopeless, Elena sunk to the ground against a tree, sobbing. She prayed to any god listening to her pleas that they would somehow help

her.

Hestia finally had seen enough, and decided that she wanted to do something. She thought it over for a while, and then got an idea when she saw a beetle flying around the Olympian throne room. She took the beetle into one palm, and a handful of sparks from her hearth in the other. She pressed both hands together tightly, and when Hestia opened her hands, out came a firefly! Its abdomen lit up like a beacon. Hestia quickly made more fireflies to send out to help Elena.

Elena was still crying when she heard a voice call out “Elena...Look up, my dear!” Elena’s head shot up, and she shouted out “Who said that? Is anyone here?” Suddenly, Elena saw a flash of light out of the corner of her eye. She looked in the direction of the light, and to her surprise, there were a dozen tiny lights flying through the air. Elena started laughing at the sight, the lights looked beautiful! She reached out to touch one, and shrieked when she saw it was an insect. Elena has never seen a bug that lights up before, so she was pleasantly surprised. She heard the voice from before again. “Elena...You can’t run away from your problems. It isn’t safe out in the woods at night. Follow the lights home.” Going home wasn’t exactly what Elena wanted to do, especially since her parents would be worried about her, and would be angry upon hearing she was planning on running away from home. After hearing the howling of the wolf again, she decided she couldn’t do anything else, so she followed the bugs all the way out of the forest to her home in the village.

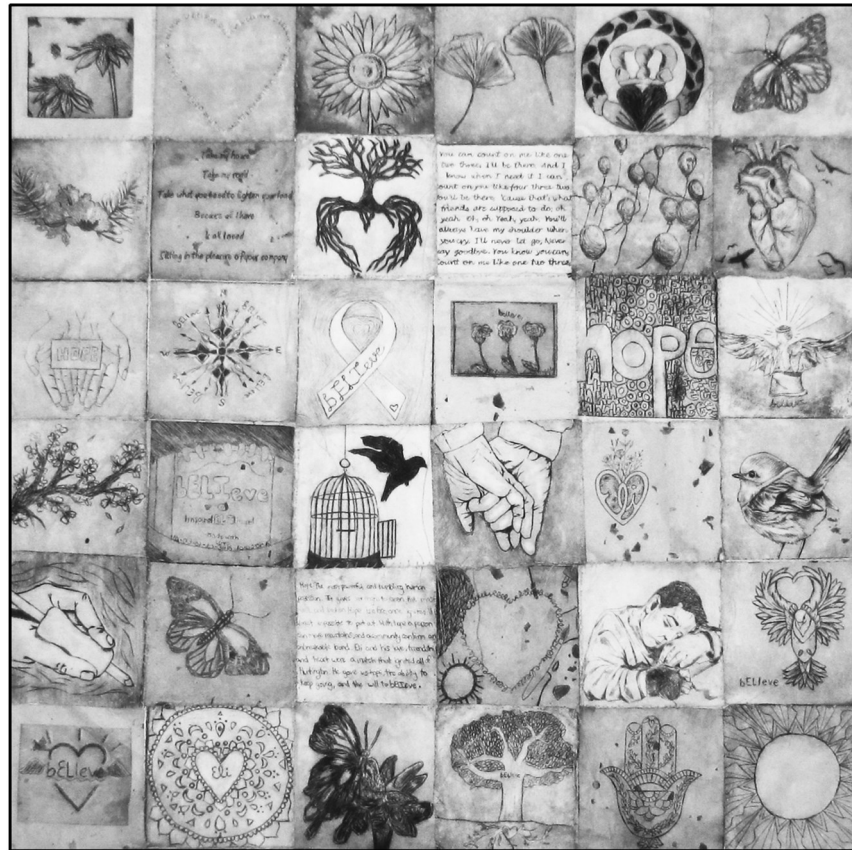
She was met by her parents and brothers, who were all worried sick when they discovered her missing. After explaining to her parents that she ran away, they were very upset, but were glad that she decided to come back. They talked for a long time and resolved all their issues: Elena finally felt at peace with her parents. She then told her brothers about the fireflies she had encountered, and when they didn’t believe what she was saying, she took them outside to see for themselves, the fireflies flying all around. “You’ve made the right choice Elena...I hope you never make any rash decision like that again. I’m glad you’re safe. Goodnight Elena.” Elena looked up at the heavens smiling, knowing that her prayers had been answered when she most needed it.

As for the fireflies, Hestia granted them the eternal duty of flying around the yards of children. Hestia thought that the children at home should be chasing the fireflies around and not running away from home. And if a child were to run away, the fireflies would guide them back to their home.

-Julia Collins



-Thomas Edgar-McNerney



-Friends of Eli

Her

Once there was a girl, who was known and loved by all. I watched her from afar as she lived her life. She had sparkling brown eyes with a head of endless curls. She didn't know my true feelings because I had held them hidden. But still I watched her grow and mature. I watched her fall in love, which broke me to pieces. As much as it hurt, I knew I had to let her go. I knew she would never, and had never, felt the same way I did, the way I will always feel. What I felt was a burning passion and a desire to be present in the moment, making her feel secure by my presence always. She claimed she cared, but I knew better. I knew the truth. What she felt was pity, never care. She felt remorse, never love. As I let her go, I knew that it would be the last time I saw her. Years came and went, but I never forgot her. The girl with sparkling brown eyes and a head of endless curls. Her smile was divine and the one thing that would always be on my mind. I knew she was happy out there living in the world. I knew she was better off. But still I kept my watch from afar and witnessed her, a girl I once loved wholeheartedly, fall in love. She no longer saw me; to her, I was a ghost from her past. As I lay in bed now with my final thoughts, I think of only her. I wish to see her one last time, hopefully in another life. My time in this world has ended. I hope to say goodbye to her one last time. To rest in peace at last, for my eyes will never see the light again. I will see darkness for the rest of my existence until I am brought to life, to live with my one true love.

-Dariana Cruz

Untitled

Lovers, O Lovers beware!
For love is a cruel thing
Which will make you want to rip your hair

I too once was in love
My heart fluttering
Like a dove.

I pined and pined
Gazing at them
Became all I dined

Eventually I confessed to my love
About the feelings I had
Which is when love turned bad

My heart broke, shard after shard
And life became so hard.

My love soon began to ignore me
As if I were some unimportant bee
I asked for friendship
But instead I sailed alone.

Darkness spread throughout my body
Like a plague
While I searched and yearned for
An impossible antibody

So lovers, know sadness often springs
From love's many tender rings.

And to my love, do not ignore my voice
For every one of your waves, smiles
And words make me rejoice.

-Zubair Ali

Swayed Friendship

What made our friendship sway?
What makes our memories decay?
Why thou'st strayed from our sodality?
Why do I sense not our amicability?

Sweet times we have had
Those valuable memories I cherish
Thou have isolated them
And let them all perish

Was it me who weakened our friendship?
Was it me who shattered our memories?
Thou'st gave no glance to me
Thou leave me with thy apathy

Can thee alloweth me knoweth
What sin has't I done?
I beg thee to heareth
That I wilt swear to the beyond

That I am ready to make amendments
That I will make thee atonements
I will give thee all of my commitment
To make our friendship be unbroken

Shall I bleed to restore our friendship
I do care not
Must I feel pain to restore it
I will be ready

No matter what it takes
To restore our swayed friendship
Whatever I have to make
To unbreak our shattered memories

I will do whatever thou want me to
But prithee, do not walk away from me
I do want thy hatred not
I want to keepeth our friendship with thee

-Petch Asanatham

The Lonely Girl

There was once a little girl named Ellie, and she had a very kind heart. She was a person who would do anything to make people smile. Although she was sweet, there was something that just didn't make sense to her. Whenever it was time for recess, she would always find herself all alone and with no one to play with while everyone else had a partner. She felt sad inside. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't get rid of the emptiness that was inside of her heart. One day, once recess was over, Ellie walked into the classroom with a sad look to her face. Her teacher, Ms. Browne, asked, "Did something happen on the playground?" Ellie nodded her head.

"I'm always alone. Nobody wants to play with me. I feel like no one likes me!" A tear rushed down her pale face as Ms. Browne gently laid her hand on Ellie's shoulder.

"Honey, I'm sure those kids like you. I think you're just a bit shy, that's all. Try going back outside and say hi to someone."

"Okay." Ellie quietly took Ms. Browne's advice and went back outside. She noticed there were kids on the swings, so she tried her luck and did her best to say hello. But when she did so, one of the kids named Steven gave her an angry look.

"Why are you here, you freak? Don't you see we're busy playing on the swings? Get lost!" Steven's response made Ellie want to cry.

"I-I'm a freak?"

"You are a freak! The things you're into is just weird, and it creeps all of us out! We don't like being around you, so why not take my advice and leave already?"

The moment Ellie heard that, her heart dropped. She believed the other kids were right, especially Steven since he was a popular kid in the school. He was the type of kid who could get along with anyone, but it seemed like Ellie was the only exception.

"I guess people don't like me because I'm not like Steven; I'm not able to get along with people like he can," she thought to herself.

Once Ellie heard it all, she ran away so she could be alone and cry. She didn't want anyone to see her upset. There was a flood of tears rolling down her face, and there was no way for her to stop it.

The recess bell rang and everyone went inside except for Ellie. She was so upset that she didn't care about recess being over. Soon after, someone called her name and she looked up to see who it was. Who could it be, you may ask? Why it was none other than her teacher Ms. Browne! She walked over to Ellie and asked, "What's wrong Ellie?" Ellie looked back down with no reply. "Ellie?"

She glanced back up at Ms. Browne and said, "Steven hurt my feelings." Once Ms. Browne heard this, she sat down next to Ellie to comfort her. But sadly, it wasn't enough to stop her flow of tears.

"You know, an old man once said to me, 'Keep your face always toward the sunshine- and shadows will fall behind you.'" Ellie stared at Ms. Browne with confusion.

"Ellie, what I'm trying to say is don't listen to what other people think of you. You are special in your own way, so don't let anyone put you down. Plus, I think you're an amazing little girl who just wants to make the world a better place; so don't listen to those jerks, and do what you want to do in life."

Ellie took the teacher's advice and smiled. "I'm so glad that you wanted to be

there for me! You're so kind and caring for me and you helped me realize that it's not hard to make friends after all! I just have to step out of my shell and think the best of everyone and myself."

On the next day of school, Ellie walked into her class with a bright smile on her face. Her heart that was broken is not whole again, but it is filled with more comfort, love, and hope for future friendships. Ellie was now more positive and accepting of herself, and even though she'd meet rude people down the road, she'd be more forgiving of others who were not fair to her.

-Jesse Stickell, Justin Larice, and Julia Moskowitz

Halfway House

An unfamiliar building enters my sight
As they all assure me that this is 'alright'
Pieces and pieces, part by part
This is where my life will start

And end, for now I am reborn
In the house where I should now be scorned
For my parents true have fallen away
To arguments; they let the tree sway

To the halfway home, my newest abode
My newest battleground, my newest episode
The abusers of old have gone to wind
And the pain of the new quickly settles in

Faces abandoned, faces in remorse
Arms bruised, battered, weathered through storms
We are blood brothers, by the blood of our scrapes
For our true blood has faltered, and we must escape

-Bradley Landberg



-Thomas Edgar-McNerney

Sinister Paradise

The phone rang, why did the phone have to ring? I had to pick up my suit, go get coffee, go to my job interview; I didn't have time for a damn phone call. "Hello?"

"Hey Johnathan, it's Dara." She had that peppy voice that always annoyed me, ever since we grew up.

"Dara I have a lot to do, can you please make it quick? You know how much this interview means to me."

"I'll just tell you later Johnathan, make your sister proud!"

The parking lot, of course, was packed. It was a Monday, but how many people on God's earth had to pick up their suits from the drycleaners? Finally, a red SUV truck got out of a spot and I took it quickly as I could. I opened up my door and got out but tripped over myself, hitting the back of my head, causing my vision to become blurry. I tried to get to my feet, but felt a tug on my leg. My feet were lifted into the air, my face dragged across the asphalt, tearing into my skin. I was thrown onto what felt like a carpet platform, heard a door shut, and felt as if I was moving.

Red and purple blotches filled my vision in the darkness, moving, creating a dance before me. The pain started to subside, allowing me to gradually think sanely again. "I'm in an ambulance aren't I?" I thought to myself. "Why would they have the lights out? Why aren't there any doctors?"

"Doctor please help, please!", I yelled at the top of my lungs. As I yelled, I heard no echo, making me realize I was in a tight space. I touched the surrounding walls, and now knew that I could barely move. I'd been kidnapped.

The trunk opened, letting a burning beam of light straight into my eyes, painning me and preventing me once again from seeing who was there. I felt a slight tug on my leg, making me instinctively kick back. As I did, the man lifted me up, almost as if he was carrying his newlywed wife to bed. My head sunk into his breast, protecting me from the sunlight. He carried me down a flight a steps, where no sunlight could enter. I looked up, getting my first glance of my possessor. He was covered in scars, looking as if he had took a drill to his face. His eyes were the epitome of the night, capturing your own light even when you only tried to contemplate their mere existence. Though I only could observe him for a brief moment, the portrait of his murky face was burned into my memory.

At the end of the staircase, he opened a door, carrying me through. As I observed from his clutch, I was led to a corridor, only lit by candles. The candles gave off an array of alluring colors, intriguing my soul into a world of color and light. Once my eyes adjusted to the light, I looked at the corridor in avid disgust. About twenty steps from where we were, started two aisles along the wall of showcases. The showcases were the most magnificent structures I had ever seen from my town. They were traced with gold, not a smudge on the glass, and even a handle made from jewels to open the case. But inside was a much different type of beauty, deceased bodies. Each case displayed one body, hung from a hook through their skull, bare to the skin allowing spectators to see the lacerations throughout their body. As we approached the first set of cases, I noticed one person, a man who I assumed to have been in their seventies, seize my compassion. The lower body looked as if it had been burned, the skin charcoal black and frail, while the upper body was mutilated; only one eyeball left, leaving the other socket an empty hole, cuts penetrating through his chest, and no teeth left to smile. After I observed this morbid scene, I read a sign displayed in the case, "Dominic Miles 1959-1979."

He carried me through the corridor, observing all of the filled cases, some of which I can not even morally describe. At the end of the corridor, there were two empty cases, waiting to be filled. A door stood there upon what I would soon realize to be my worst nightmare, or what I thought it was. He opened the door and carried me through. It was a dim small room, only lit by a small light dangling from the ceiling by its last thread. A chair was the centerpiece of the room, one like you would see in a dentist's office, except it was made of steel, and torment. Alongside the chair was a furnace and an assortment of tools. I was placed into the chair, strapped down with metal cuffs, and clobbered with an aluminum pole. I yelped out in pain as I heard the snap produced from my ribs when the pole struck the right side of chest. I felt as if I couldn't breathe but I somehow managed to. I looked down to see the damage and was unsettled to see that my lower ribs were sticking out of my body. The man came over and put a tight cloth over it, presumably to prevent me from bleeding out so soon. But through all of this, no word was said, no emotion was given from his face, only the look of an impassive being.



-Thomas Goldsmith

I felt a thumping in my chest as my heart began to pound. I looked around the room, looking for some way to ease the mental agony. The drill on one of the trays gave me a warm feeling inside; maybe I could escape with it. Escape into a beautiful lightened world, away from this dungeon. Oh what would I do with this drill? The drill would go straight into his skull, straight through, as the blood gushing would save me from his clutch. Oh what a beautiful dream. As I dreamt, the man began to uncuff me, thinking I was too weakened by my wound to move. He uncuffed me, he uncuffed me! The drill, get the drill, drive it into his head! I quickly grabbed the drill, turned it on, and went after him. I held his head down without much of a fight and began to drill. Oh, oh what a beautiful sight. The blood poured from his head as the drill dug into his skull, splitting apart his brain. Yes, yes! A euphoric feeling came over me, plunging me deep into my soul.

I hung the man in one of the empty cases, displaying my work of art. Ah what a lovely scene it was. A man, with his head drilled through, displayed before me as my pride. I walked down the rest of the corridor admiring the rest of the dead. Oh how beautiful! How charming it must have been to have done this to them. I couldn't wait to fill the next box, I couldn't wait!

The door leading to the outside world opened. "Jonathan, Jonathan! It's Dara, I tracked your cell phone and found you here. Jonathan?" Dara, oh she would be a dazzling display. Those cute eyes and that funny smile, oh my. I couldn't wait to have her hanging as my pride. Dara came into the corridor and ran towards me. "Jonathan! Are you ok? Oh I haven't seen you in person for ages!" She began to hug me, but then noticed my chest. "What happened?!" she exclaimed.

"I'll show you, follow me Dara," I said, realizing this was a perfect chance to achieve my desire. I led her into the back room. Oh how beautiful, oh how beautiful. But

I must say, she did look a lot bigger than the last time. Ugh, she was going to be a pain to hang. As we entered the room, I rushed for the drill as before, and tackled her down. I drill into her head, and felt that same feeling as before, heaven.

I immediately stripped and hung her, admiring her elegance. Oh, what a satisfying feeling it was. Finally the last case was full. My pride and joy! As I stared at her, I looked down at her charming body, seeing only one thing; a kicking from her stomach.

-Nicholas Haupt

A Halloween Tale

Behind the monastery on Littleneck Road, there lies a forest. A dark, gloomy forest. You may know of this place, or you may not, but one thing you need to know about it is that you must never, ever enter it. Why not? Well, here is but one of the tales of those who enter that awful place...

On the night of a cold and shadow-filled Halloween, Tommy had been dared by his friends to go to the center of the forest. Tommy knew this was an awful idea, as the forest behind the monastery was known to be one of the most mysterious and creepiest places in the area. He had heard stories of young kids walking through the forest, and then never coming out, with only a scream being heard from the woods to show they had ever left at all. But Tommy knew that these were just tall tales, and it was just a regular old forest. Plus, he couldn't back out on a dare, he'd never hear the end of it from his friends. *It couldn't be that bad*, he thought. *What's the worst a bunch of trees could do?* He made his way into forest, with as brave of a mindset as he could have.

As he went deeper and deeper into the dark, tree covered woods, he began to think that there was nothing in it, besides the trees of course. He hadn't heard a single sound. Yellow leaves were scattered all across the ground, and the only startling thing he saw so far was a bright red leaf that almost made him jump. He continued walking on, still cautious however.

He eventually found himself in the center of the forest, and breathed a sigh of relief, as now he could finally walk back to his friends and gloat about his victory. However, before he decided to go back, he saw an odd thing in the center of forest. There was a little stone pedestal that was built into the dirt of the forest. It was angled weirdly and was clearly aged as shown by its many cracks and rust marks. Tommy, now struck with curiosity, examined the little pedestal and found a little red stone sitting on top of it. *That's weird*, Tommy thought. *What's with this creepy rock?* It was glowing strangely and seemed as though it was drawing him in, ever closer, until he couldn't resist himself, and he grabbed the little red stone off the pedestal.

Wow, he thought. *This looks so cool!* He brought the stone closer to his face, and slowly walked backwards to get a better look, when suddenly he tripped and fell. He had fallen over a large, old root. *Ow! That's weird; I don't remember that root being there before.* Tommy started thinking about how strange it was, and in his confusion, he tripped again, except this time, he hadn't tripped over a root. A root had tripped him!

"What's going on!?" he exclaimed to the forest, but received no response. A tree's root had wrapped itself around his ankle, and the branch of another tree had grabbed

his arm, and then another grabbed his other arm, and this repeated until all his limbs had been grabbed by the dark, shadowy trees. Tommy panicked; flailing was no use, for he couldn't break free the mighty grip on the olden trees. He glanced up, sweating like crazy and fearful for his life, and saw the most horrific sight he'd ever seen: on the trunks of all the trees in the forest, he saw the faces of all the past children who had entered the woods before, screaming in frozen horror. He too shrieked in terror, and that shriek was heard throughout the entire village.

-Anonymous

Roots

The rain came down on your face today
watching the clouds pass by
As the sun peaks through your eyes
Wanting me there more and more
Just to feel the wind carry you away
To see the water marks imprinted on your face
To feel the fierce burn of your heart
Until you crawl down
Become one with the earth
And grow again

-Nicholas Haupt



-Bradley Landberg

My Life in Four Shelves

My bedroom is typical of many teenagers. Every surface is plastered with evidence of the girl who lives there. Photographs of my friends and family are haphazardly taped to the bright blue walls, from posed pictures of European travels to candid polaroids taken on a hazy summer evenings. Posters referencing my favorite television shows and celebrities line the room, mixed with my own artwork ranging from kindergarten crayon drawings to more recent compositions accompanied by awards of excellence. However, nothing in my bedroom identifies the inhabitant more than my most treasured possession; the bookshelf against the wall.

The four shelves are crammed with books, so many that a pile of extras are gathering on the floor in front of it (much to my mother's annoyance). Reading has always been a passion and pastime of mine. Books have that ability to whisk me away to distant, magical lands, to tell me fantastical love stories, and to take me on thrilling adventures. As the bookshelf has filled over the years, it has become a window into my mind and heart. Every book, from fantasy-filled paperbacks to massive encyclopedias, is a jewel in my collection. Each shelf holds pieces of me from different points in my life.

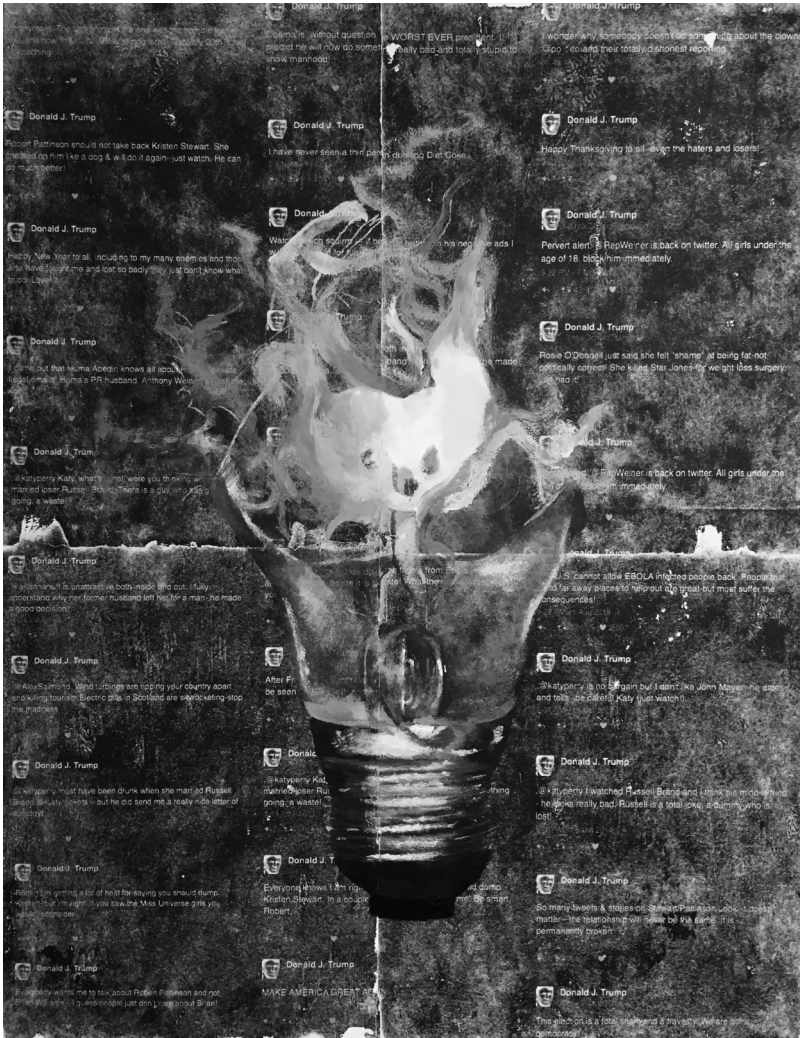
The bottom shelf doesn't have any books at all. Instead, two large shoeboxes stacked atop one another hold my most precious memories. Photographs, ticket stubs, playbills, and various souvenirs are held within the boxes, which I sometimes open in order to immerse myself in nostalgia. On either side of these memory boxes are baskets filled with old toys and games I haven't used in years. They are the playthings of my childhood that are simply too precious to let go of, for they hold the fondest memories. Every now and then, they are put to good use by a visiting younger cousin, but they mostly remain on that bottom shelf, the shelf of reminiscences.

Shelf Two gives the greatest reflection of the person I am today. Young adult series and novels line the shelf, going back two layers. These are the books I've read and loved in my most recent years, telling stories of dystopian futures, assassins from magical lands, and shy girls who find love in unexpected places. The shelf also contains evidence of my geeky side, with written companions to *Doctor Who* and the complete leather-bound set of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. In addition, CD's reflecting my eclectic music taste are stuffed above the books. Broadway and film soundtracks, alternative bands, indie singers, and pop albums make up the soundtrack of my life, alongside the stories that enhance it.

Shelf Three contains the stories of my past. Some have been left in my past for a reason; the ones that seem to be hardly touched are remnants of various school assignments and test preparation. Many of them are books I read once and I am happy to never read again. On the other hand, the books in the worst condition tend to be the most loved. The favorites of my childhood, such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Roald Dahl's *Matilda* are yellowed, bent, and held together mainly by tape and faith after years of use. Enid Blyton's tales of adventure gifted to me from visiting Irish relatives mingle amongst the other old favorites. The most worn book on the shelf is definitely *The Lightning Thief*, the first book in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series. That particular copy has been read approximately five times from my sixth grade year to now, which is evident from the creased binding, dog-eared pages, and yellowed paper. I find myself revisiting the shelf again and again, to relive the magic within the most beloved amongst my treasures.

The top of my bookshelf is not simply a reflection of myself; it is me. The shelf contains notebooks, scrapbooks, and sketchbooks filled with my own creations. Fiction, essays, poems, and countless other original works and writings are stuffed in the nooks of the shelves. Journals filled with my thoughts and imaginings cap my bookshelf. The stories written by me, inspired by the ones that have filled my life for as long as I can remember. These are remnants of my need to create after immersing myself in the fantastic creations of others. There are few things in life that give me more pleasure than reading stories, with the exception of telling them myself. Stories have made me the person I am today. From demi-gods who save the world to the misadventures of awkward high-schoolers, each character and their experiences are tucked away in their own spot on my shelf, just as the lessons they have taught me are kept in a special part of my mind and heart.

-Katy Dara



-Maggie Giles

“Library”

“Please sign in”
No response.

“Please sign in”
No response.

Louder now.
“PLEASE sign in”
No response

“Please SIGN in...”
No response.

“Please sign IN”
No response.
How come no one listens to me?

-Jesse Stickell and Ms. Molenko

Bread Is a Dream

Bread is a dream
A wheat-based scheme
Full of steamy yeast
LEST CAPITALISM PERSIST at least

Grains of grains ingrained
In my brain
Ingrained, memory stained
Loaves of life pained

Good with cheese
Yes please
Give it an extra squeeze
Oh jeez

The byproducts of production flutter
gently through the air
Where
There
In the air

Crumbs of the rebellion spark
As they take a nice stroll in the park
In the dark
Colloquial conversation is stark

-Bradley Landberg and LJ Kindall



-Steve Yeh

Katharina

they call her **K**ate the **C**urst,
a wild **c**At, making her
kill with the **T**ongue of the devil.
You'd think **H**ell was her birthplace
She is **A**damant in her independence,
And has **R**hetoric with such wit,
She'll make a wordsmith **I**nto a fool
Will **N**o one tame this wild cat?
Perhaps only one with **A** mind and temper as sharp as hers

-Mikayla Gaspar

Macbeth

There was once a man who took Scotland by force
He killed the gracious Duncan with much remorse.
But it did not matter, for now he was king,
And to keep his title, he'd do anything.
He murdered his friend, the great Banquo
For he was considered a serious foe.
But he was not content, as he still feared,
That his ascension to the throne would not be revered.
He sought out the Weird Sisters, who told him their prophecy,
And asked what to do to keep his royal sovereignty.
"Beware of Macduff" he was told to do
"No one born of a woman could ever challenge you!"
With this in mind, he grew confident in his claim to the throne,
If only he knew his lords planned for him to be overthrown.
He should have listened, for the forest came to Dunsinane,
All his efforts made to protect himself ended in vain.
In the end, all he got was his death,
And that is the tragic tale of Macbeth.

-Julia Collins

Ocean View

In the year 1914 the acts of war frightened the lives of many
and tortured the lives of others

Was it better or worse for the lives of the mothers that had to stay home and
comfort the brothers that weren't affected by the war?

The alliances held by the Troops of both fronts didn't endure, but helped de-
stroy the lesser of two evils
All was well for both sides and few survived;
When the whistle blew you knew you were either dead or alive
For the Few that survived they were honored for their pride.

Imperialism struck with a beating fist of strength, yet
Nationalism to me was clear to see, the only true way to victory.

Those who died, they should've lied
For the best
For their sane mind.

Conflict wasn't provoked, except for those who sought the light and strived to
fight for both sides
For the Duke he stood high and died for all to see
even when the sun shined bright over the cool blue sea.

- Jonah Salese

Forbade the Hope Chasers.

One post.
out in the sea.
past the coast.
Go boy, leap.
One foot lands
5 feet from man,
and who understands
the lost boys plan?

Second post
out in the gale.
still docks are close
still far from whales.
Run away, to where we came
elevated over the bay.
Before your mind went dull and lame;
before god took your happiness way.

Thrice the posts-
Oceans crash
-They force far the ghosts
of a suffocating past.
Don't wobble, up straight,
faster, post haste!
Nostalgia awaits,
as he recalls youth's face.

Damn the fourth post,
nearly a miss!
As he prayed for the most;
As he in quiet wished.
One more, don't falter
for the light you are after,
the light that's your altar
a feigned love and laughter.

To little, fifth post.
Yet a loser does lose,
let the sea be his host
let this new world mask his blues.
Why don't you listen? Breathe!
The scolding is too late,
it's impossible to heave:

With the sea, he suffocates.

-Rory Bocelli

The Cloud

When I was still lost in the spiral of reality
Wondering and hurting, at an age of thirteen,
I saw a cloud in the sky, just one.
A lonely cloud, drifting about in a mindless stupor.
No purpose, no thoughts
Just riding the will of the wind, hoping maybe
That tomorrow's skies would be bluer.

I'd like to think we became friends;
Me and the cloud.
I sang it a melody, it listened.
I danced on the grassy field, it observed.
At that time, I knew no one else who would care to
look to me
But the cloud did
And I enjoyed its company.

I had to leave eventually;
Such is all of this world.
I wave a hand goodbye
It observed
And we were not to meet again

Time passed
And so did the sky.
Things changed
And so did the sky.
And now I'd like to think that the sky seems bluer
Than on that dreamy day
Four years ago

On this day, there's a chunk of clouds
Patrolling the azure canvas
Grouped and bunched in a patch of ivory cotton.
Some people might think them annoying,
Or ugly,
Or meaningless,
Or omens of an awful rain to come,

But I think they're quite nice.

-Bradley Landberg

Presence

There's a presence in your room.

It's a tangible weight, an existing thing like anti-matter; hard to put your finger on it, hard to contain, hard to create definition for it and yet it still draws reality around itself, like a cloak at first, and then eats at the same fabric like a moth. It draws tangible things into itself only to continue creating a feeling that something's off, something's not right, but never able to put it into sound mathematical terms.

It's there. Its existence may not be, but it is there.

And it's been devouring the reality in my room; moments flicker into hours and gray light breaks down into bright blackness. Logic has been drawn away as well. One corner of the back of my mind reminds you that it's not after you. Another corner of the back of my mind warns you that it desperately wants you. You're pretty sure both sides are right. But in the haze of exhaustion, you can't tell where the two ideas merge. The only clear thing in your conscience is the unclear interloper, as comprehensible as fog, as heavy as mist.

While it's not a common occurrence, it is not an uncommon one; the presence tends to appear roughly two, or three times a year and it's a neutral creature that stays off in the corner of your room. It only ever stays for a short time and then moves on, leaving behind the aftertaste of something sacredly empty. But this time this presence, well,

it has been here for three days.

It has decided to be stubbornly persistent in occupying the far right corner of your room, diagonal from your bed. It seems to you that this is where the presence tends to stay; at the blurriest area the night has claimed and painted it black. It has moved around, in the past, to different areas but it's never gotten very close, and it's never been in front of the door, cutting you off from the rest of the house. It's already cut you off from realistic expectations like being not afraid to get out of bed or getting a solid six hours of sleep.

You twist in bed and make the firm decision to stay still, facing the wall, forcing your half lidded eyes to fully shut. You don't need to look at the darkened shades of white created by the outside light, partially filtered through the blinders. It's not a comfort to you.

You can't tell how much time has passed, mere minutes or stretching hours? You do know the night is no longer 12:24am. One corner of your mind tells you you're being illogical, this is all been created by the other corner of your mind. The other corner tells you that this is no longer your mind, it has been devoured by the presence a long time ago.

You tell both corners to pipe down. You're trying to sleep.

It's long time before it comes

-Tateana Khokhar

**OH Dear part 3: In
the eye of the storm**

All my in-laws
Turned to sand,
I smile within
This nuclear land

-LJ Kindall

I wish I could care, but I don't

You'll always love me most
When you hadn't the brain
To keep from doing so

-Alexandra Muller

Falling

*Here comes the sun,
Oh what a night!*

I wish I had never kissed her
'Cause I just can't resist her,
You hit me like a hurricane.

*You're such a beautiful drug
I can't get enough,
I'll keep you my dirty little secret.*

It might seem crazy to keep loving you this way
But I'll never bring myself to say goodbye, girl
I know you're taken, but I say you're taking too long to tell him that it's over
Love isn't always on time.

*I cannot sleep, I cannot dream tonight:
You make me want to leave the one I'm with and start a new relationship with you.
I can't stay away from you;
I'm so sick of that same old love.*

I want to spend the rest of my life, with you by my side
Forever and ever

*I just think of you and everything you do,
You're my one, my from now on;
I can't help failing
falling in love with you*

-Dianna Molenko, Et Cetera advisor