



THE MUSE

Literary and Art Journal of Seminole State College

2013 edition

The Muse

Volume 6
2013 edition



Sponsored by SSC's Upsilon Alpha Chapter
of Sigma Kappa Delta

Faculty Editors:
Rayshell Clapper and Yasminda Choate

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Cover Art by Russell Kilpatrick “Dock on a Calm Pond”

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The Muse is sponsored by Seminole State College’s Upsilon Alpha Chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta, the National English Honor Society for Two-year Colleges. Faculty Editors: Rayshell Clapper and Yasmina Choate, Seminole State College, 2701 Boren Blvd., Seminole, OK 74868

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Seminole State College’s Upsilon Alpha Chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta, the National English Honor Society for Two-Year Colleges, annually publishes *The Muse* literary and art anthology under the direction of editors Rayshell Clapper and Yasmina Choate. The purpose of the anthology is to not only encourage expression in the literary and fine arts but to also encourage students, faculty, and staff to publish their works.

Upsilon Alpha reserves the right to edit submitted material for spelling and style. The chapter considers all submitted material, but submission does not ensure publication. We do not accept anonymous material. All views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of Seminole State College or Sigma Kappa Delta. *The Muse* is distributed on the SSC campus and the surrounding area.

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The Muse

Literary and Fine Arts Contest

Sigma Kappa Delta, Upsilon Alpha Chapter, sponsors a contest for authors and artists submitting their works to the anthology. We send all submission to a qualified judging committee, and they choose the winners and honorable mentions (HM) in each area (poetry, prose, and art). Cash prizes go to the 1st place winner in each category and honorable mention recipients receive recognition and a certificate. Only students of Seminole State College are eligible for prize money. Should a judge award 1st place to a work by faculty or staff, Sigma Kappa Delta acknowledges their achievement with a certification, and the next ranked student will take the case prize.

The winners for the 2013 edition of *The Muse* are listed below by category. We thank our judges and all contestants for their hard work. We would also like to thank Lana Reynolds specially for her continued support of *The Muse* Literary and Fine Arts Contest.

Poetry:

1st: Courtney Skelly, "Buckets of Rain"
2nd: Shawna Elmore, "My Solar Wind"
HM: Yasminda Choate, "The Things She'll Carry"

Prose:

1st: Brionna Duke, "A Hero Lies in You"
2nd: Chalee Groves, "Becoming Chalee"
HM: Megan Goff, "Pages from Brad's Diary"

Art:

1st: Russell Kilpatrick, "Dock on a Calm Pond"
2nd: Megan Goff, "Face in the Crowd"

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Who Doesn't Love Their Virtual Significant Other?

by John Slover

Imaginary friends are cool, right? Everyone has one growing up. They are that little friend that is all in your head and gives you advice and companionship. What if you could expand that idea? What if it was possible to have a relationship with that imaginary friend? Better yet, this friend will even form its own ideas and thoughts because it is a real person! Wait, a real person as an imaginary girlfriend? What guy would not want that? Well, in today's society it seems that almost no guy, or girl, is opposed to that idea. Social networks make it possible to talk and see anyone in the world at any time without actually being there. Any guy who wants a sweet little Jamaican honey or any girl who wants a nice French playboy can achieve this goal without ever leaving the confines of their prison cell (a.k.a. their bedroom). What sounds like a dream is actually nightmare. The basic human need for face to face contact is eliminated. A person can have as many virtual partners as they want, making infidelity seem like a proper social convention. Then to top it all off, it is sad and pathetic in every sense of the words. Social networks destroy people's love lives and even make it so that the need for a love life is irrelevant.

Every relationship begins with hello. Everybody has that one person that they have a crush on, that one person that they are dying to say hello to but cannot find the courage to do so. That is what makes real relationships great. The gut wrenching uncertainty that weighs down a person's mind until they finally achieve a stuttering hello. That bitter sweet mix of excitement and fear is all but eliminated by the virtual world. A person is not afraid to say hello when they are not actually saying anything but rather typing their greeting. In Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," the prisoner that escapes into the light, in this case the light of a love life, is unused to the light and almost blinded; however, they grow used to the brightness and come to like what they find. Plato was a revolutionary philosopher, but even he could not foresee a completely virtual world. There is no virtual light that a person must become accustomed to so the goal is easier to reach, making the achievement hollow and more shallow than a kiddie pool. So social networks are harmful to the beginning of a relationship, but what about the rest of it? At some point all romantic relationships develop some sort of physicality. Can a person kiss their computer screen? Can a person hold on to their iPhone in a romantic embrace? Yes, actually they can, but such acts are disturbing on many levels. How can a person have a true partner if they have never seen them aside from the occasional Skype chat? The answer is that they cannot. Then there is the dreaded ending of a relationship. Why is it considered harsh to end a relationship, a real one, over text? It is because of the absence of face to face contact. The person ending the relationship has no fear of tears or sobbing; only depressing emoticons and question marks. That is how all partnerships in social networks end. The people involved in these types of romances are nothing more than heartless robots, because the phone and the computer are the ones that are involved, not the people that control them.

Some people have a few e-mail accounts, some people have quite a few social networking accounts, and some people have several virtual partners. Do the math; how many social networking apps are there? There is Facebook, Skype, Kik, MeetMe, Zoosk, and multitudes of others. That is not even counting the thousands of online dating sites. A guy can have as many virtual sugar mammas as he can handle. Is this cheating? That is a blurred line in today's society. Does it count if it is online? If the person committing these infidelities believes in the validity of these virtual romances, then that is exactly what they are: infidelities. All this is assuming that the people in these relationships are not in an actual relationship. According to Time Magazine, 32% of Internet users believed that "online dating keeps people from settling down because they always have options for people to date" (Doctorman). When a person signs up on one of these sites or applications, they are immediately bombarded with messages from potential "partners." A person on one of these networks can virtually flirt with anyone they want. So, if the point of this essay is to disprove the validity of these networks, then why does it matter if the people using them are unfaithful? It is bad because it becomes a habit. These people become accustomed to acting in such a way, that they feel that it is acceptable, in both the real and the virtual world. These people lose the basic human fear of infidelity. They feel as if it is no big deal, that it is just a part of the world. Well the world they are living in is inhabited by software and binary code, not flesh and blood.

Everyone associates the game *Dungeons and Dragons* with pathetic lonely nerds. Why? That is because it is a role playing game. The people who play this game enter a world that is fake, and they believe that it is better than the world that they actually live in. Why is this different than the relationships that go on in social networks? The people involved in these romances are in a world that is fake; they believe that it is better than any relationship they actually have, and they are usually alone in their room at their mom's house while they are doing it; these two examples are synonymous, and so are the people involved in both. At least the people playing *Dungeons and Dragons* get to kill cool monsters. Words like sad and pathetic are open to interpretation. What qualifies as falling into these categories? While they are in the eye of the beholder, the same society that has deemed these relationships acceptable has set standards for words like "pathetic" and "sad" and these relationships fall directly into these standards. It involves people who are scared of actual human contact, which usually cannot find an actual relationship, and are lonely. Pathetic is a harsh word but it is fitting. However, these people are not lost forever in this make believe world. Any person who chooses to do so can get off of their couch, go out their door, find the person in real life that they want to be with, and get rejected like a spoiled Christmas turkey. That is what everyone in one of these virtual relationships needs. It is a shock that lets them know that the real world, real love lives, are terrible, depressing, soul crushing functions of society, but at least they are real.

Social networks destroy people's love lives and even make it so that the need for a love life is irrelevant. Humans crave interaction with other humans because

they are social animals. However, that is similar to saying that tweakers crave meth; they are meth addicts. They crave their drug so much that it overwhelms them, much in the same way the people define themselves by their relationships with other people. The drug they abuse destroys their minds and bodies. These virtual lovers have their minds altered by false hope. The false hope that they will find happiness in their virtual world, when in fact, that world is the reason for their depression. The way to true happiness in a person's love life is to find it in the real world, not the virtual world.

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Ballad of the Undead Boyfriend

By Cynthia Choate

One night when even the stars hid their light,
some evil thing did wrend the darkened cloak.
One rose from that eternal sleep and spewed
dust's foulness with the single word he spoke--

"Jane," the cry came loud, human agony
melting into a raw, unholy hue.
All that was human drained, slipped into earth.
A single thought remained to him, "Jane, with you."

Or was the thought more like this: "Jane, eat you?"
His head cocked slowly, slowly to the side.
Hunger, the only feeling left to him,
an abiding guide, "Must have brains!" he cried.

Clawing his way from his freshly dug grave,
he joined his brothers and sisters of night.
Even with worms for brains these undead know--
if you want to find humans, go to light.

The first house was easy, a door ajar.
But of occupants there were only two.
A simple crunch of bones, and it was done.
The host turned, this size meal just will not do.

Toward the brightest light they slowly stumble.
Inside is a feast, there for the making.
The one pauses, how does he know this place?
Hunger he knows. What is this new aching?

Glutted on flesh, but forever empty,
the pack of putrescence hunts the next kill.
On creaking bones they wander on and then--
There! A packed park, every body a meal.

Those standing in back of the crowd are first.
The band's thumping music covers their screams:
the music's quick end, the stage overturned,
running, howling, the blood on the grass gleams.

The one pauses by a sticky, red bench,
and strokes the wood with what fingers remain.
His body jerks, his mouth lays open with
a woeful moan, echoes across the park-- "Jane."

He turns from the horde and makes his way to
a quiet street far from the noisy throng.
Each sight familiar, each step a welcome.
Yet something inside him screams, "This is wrong."

He steps onto the small, familiar porch.
At the window he is lost with the sight.
He shudders, struggles once more with himself,
but soon as he starts, he loses his fight.

She is there, her eyes wide with the fright of
some unseen message on a box. She stares.
They all seem fixed on the box of bright noise.
Gathered in mourning, they now have other cares.

He fumbles at the knob with rotting hands.
Locked. But that only gives a moment's pause.
He pulls the bright key from beneath that old
statue, the one of the dog with small paws.

The door creaks open; the room empty now.
He searches, soon learns that they had a plan.
When he opens the door to the closet,
he is hit by searing flame from a can.

Screaming he battles the blinding flame. "Stop!"
a voice cries out, the lighter falls from hand.
"Peter?" she asks her voice so soft as she
raises her hand, steps forward there to stand.

With flesh melting like frozen snow in rain,
his eyes grow hungry, one word he says-- "Jane."

The Things She'll Carry

by Yasminda Choate

She loves my necklace with a rock on it,
my glass butterfly,
my shot glass collection.

When I have descended to dust,
will these be the things she treasures?

She loves my Kindle,
my daily planner,
my book with huge glossy photos of elephants.

When I am called to the land beyond,
will she remember the melody of my voice reading aloud?

She loves my lotion,
my bath gels,
my tool box full of nail polishes and face creams.

When I am rotting in the ground,
will she remember the scent of my skin?

She loves snuggles on my lap,
burrowing her face into my armpit,
resting her head on my arm while she sleeps.

When my flesh melts away,
will she remember the gentle touch of my hands?

She loves lipstick,
hair goop,
gazing at herself in the mirror.

When my face becomes the playground of worms,
will she remember that she looks like me?

She loves to be loved,
kind, supportive words,
the security that someone will always care for her.

When I can't care anymore,
will she remember me?

Birth Options in America

by Ashley Crane

Consider, for a moment, a conversation with a medical professional. Imagine that the conversation centers around discussing treatment options for a health issue that must be dealt with. Now, suspend reality a touch farther and reflect on how it would feel if that professional, following that discussion, stated that it was only possible to act on one option, although the conversation ranged over several possibilities. This is the reality that pregnant women face when considering their labor options. Midwives have been a part of culture for centuries, although they have been discredited as views regarding modern medicine became more prevalent. Our society is now arguing about whether pregnant women should have the option for home birth, attended by a midwife, or only be allowed to give birth under hospital conditions. A recent article in the *Calgary Herald* shows the two sides of the debate clearly, citing women who have given birth in both conditions as well as medical professionals on either side of the issue (Nieman). The groups involved in the debate over home or hospital birth can be analyzed using Plato's "Allegory of the Cave", assisting in separating truth from fallacy. This deeper analysis will assist in determining what sort of prejudice is prominent in those groups, allowing the reader to come to his or her own opinion of the truth with a clear understanding of the sources of information. Ultimately, this is a decision that every family will have to make for themselves; with more information, people in general are able to make better choices.

One of the two groups offering certification to American midwives is NARM, the North American Registry of Midwives. This organization acts in the belief that availability of certified midwives is of primary concern, offering certification upon completion of an analysis and written examination ("How"). This is harmful to the home birth community, although initiated with the best of intentions. Certified Professional Midwives do not have any concrete medical training. Although they have to pass a written exam before they are allowed to be affiliated with NARM, they have no practical training in recognizing a medical emergency. This has given rise to a series of horror stories, generally offered by parents who have no idea that there are two types of midwife (Goldberg). Although the people running the certification program genuinely wish to increase the credibility and availability of home birth professionals in America, their tactics fail to effect those changes. According to Plato's "Allegory of the Cave", they would be considered to have thrown off their shackles and emerged into the light, but are as yet dazzled by it (Plato 2). That is, these individuals have seen the truth regarding the need for options during pregnancy, but are still trying to find the path to turn that truth to action. There are still ten states in which it is illegal to have a home birth with an unlicensed midwife. In North Carolina, a midwife is not allowed to practice unless there is a supervising, trained doctor supporting them (Hoban). Regrettably, it appears that CPM's do not generally follow these laws. Tina Bailey, ordered not to practice midwifery by her state Medical Board, chose to ignore that injunction. She has recently been arrested for accidentally killing a child she was helping to deliver, in defiance of the order

(Boone). It is possible that NARM will eventually become a great force within the home birth community. It appears, if that is the goal they have in mind, the organization will need to start following the laws regulating home birth. In Plato's words "He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world" (Plato 2). Plato believes that truth can only be seen with an effort, and that in order to act rationally one must have their eye fixed on that truth (Plato 3). While emotion can play a part in truth, it must not dominate logic and reason. Possibly a required course on ethics and law would be in order, as the midwife profession is being damaged by the failures of CPM's to follow those laws.

It seems feasible that, if information on individual programs may be slanted, one might find a source of unbiased, neutral information from places such as the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Their goal is to inform professionals and laypersons alike about the pros and cons of different procedures in order to have a more educated group making choices about healthcare. This does not appear to be the case. The Committee on Planned Home Birth has produced a report which draws heavily on JR Wax's report of infant mortality rates in home birth. Unfortunately, there are doubts about the accuracy of the data in that report, leading one to believe that the ACOG is rather slanted in the material they consider ("Committee"). The Committee summarizes their report by specifying what they believe must be shared with women considering home birth. Specifically, they state "absolute risk may be low, planned home birth is associated with a twofold to threefold increased risk of neonatal death when compared with planned hospital birth" ("Committee"). However, earlier in the abstract for this report, they specifically point out that there is actually a dearth of concrete data to draw these conclusions from. Plato might say that they are trying to come back into the cave before they have learned to see properly in the world above. The members of this committee appear to have chosen to stay stuck in the cave. These are those who say to others "up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death" (Plato 3). In other words, they don't have the data they need to make an informed decision, but they prefer to err on the side of fear. While people like this may be worth listening to, care must be taken to separate the fear from the facts when considering their arguments and opinions.

If the educational field cannot be trusted to be neutral on this subject, perhaps peer reviewed journals can. The *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology* is intended to be a neutral, data giving source for members of the medical field. Unfortunately, they have also stepped across the line from professional to personal in this debate. In a recent article printed in the aforementioned journal, readers came across a plea to refuse support to planned home birth processes. They go so far as to suggest that those who do not go along with their plan "should be subject to peer review and justifiably incur professional liability and sanction from state medical boards" (Chervenak et al.). This article intentionally ignores studies that do not fit with their personal views, which generally demonstrate that *planned* home births are

statistically on par with hospital births. This article also discounts maternal satisfaction and cost-efficiency of home birth, although it fails to offer evidence that these factors play no role in effective labor. Where results of studies on those subjects do appear, there are liberal discrepancies in the actual data and the data presented in this article. In fact, this article seems primarily concerned with taking pregnant women's autonomy away from them and conferring the power to make decisions on the doctor. The authors' personal perceptions of the choice for home birth as a disease, as well as their contempt for studies that do not fit with that perception, is evident in their choice of language throughout this article (Chervenak et al.). Socrates in "Allegory of the Cave" says: "And must there not be some art which will effect conversion in the easiest and quickest manner; not implanting the faculty of sight, for that exists already, but has been *turned in the wrong direction, and is looking away from the truth*"¹ (Plato 4). This article is a clear case of turning away from the truth in order to bolster the private prejudices of the authors. While the studies they cite may be sound, in whole or in part, their use of the data gathered with those studies is deliberately slanted. This appears to be a case of heavily stacking the deck in favor of the opinion they want to see prevail. It would be the best course to disregard this article, although perhaps an investigation into the sources they used to create it is in order.

Home birth or hospital birth is an important question in the life of a parent. This issue encompasses moral, ethical, and emotional reasoning in addition to necessitating a collection of local legal data. There is good reason to gather data and come to an opinion prior to the situation in which it may be necessary to make this decision. Without the medical and social information surrounding this issue, any decision that is made will be flawed. Full data is necessary to make an informed, accurate, and livable choice regarding the possible consequences of choosing different types of labor care. Even if the situation never occurs for the reader personally, it will be part of our society for many years to come. The traditional medical community and the alternative medical community see very differently on this subject. Without a specific, focused attempt to gather information from both sides of the discussion, it is quite possible to be railroaded into a decision that is, perhaps, not the best for the human beings involved. This is an unfortunate side effect of personal opinion finding its way into the advice offered by practitioners of either community; rather than trying to fit the treatment to the patient's best interest, these opinionated people assume that their preferred treatment is inherently best for that patient, regardless of their wishes or needs. The preference for hospital or home birthing is, finally, about the parents and child in question. However, the debate on the subject is tied into arguments about abortion, women's reproductive rights, and the role of government in health care. This is an issue where wide knowledge is the best currency, and that knowledge must be examined rather than simply accepted as it is presented. Making the choice to have children simply amplifies the need for that knowledge, rather than precipitating it.

¹ Italics added by author for emphasis.

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Dock on a Calm Pond by *Russell Kilpatrick*

Less Than Perfect Produce: A Play in One Act
by Megan Goff

CAST OF CHARACTERS

RITA	Accountant in her late twenties
BREEZE	Art teacher in her late twenties
AMILLIANA	Plastic Surgeon in her late twenties
NONSPEAKING MAN # 1	Unnamed man
NONSPEAKING MAN # 2	Unnamed man
NONSPEAKING MAN # 3	Unnamed man

SCENE

An Upscale Restaurant

TIME

Evening

Act 1

Scene 1

At rise, RITA, BREEZE, and AMILLIANA sit at a table in the restaurant. THEY have food and wine in front of them.

RITA sits looking bored, drumming her fingers against the table.

AMILLIANA is stabbing HER fork at whatever food is left on HER plate

BREEZE bounces HER head back and forth to the beat of the song playing in the background.

RITA

I don't know how I let you guys talk me into getting a babysitter, getting dressed up and coming down here to drink wine with you. We could have done that at my apartment.

AMILLIANA

We came here to be social Rita; to see and be seen.

(A slow jazz song begins to play)

RITA

(sighing) This is the type of place people come on dates. We're not on a date. We can't get dates.

BREEZE

You know yesterday I went to Wal-Mart and bought some bananas and when I got home I found a sticker on them that just made me laugh at loud. It said...

RITA

(interrupting) It's not enough our candy has to be funny. Now are fruit comes with knock-knock jokes?

BREEZE

No, No it didn't have a joke on it, although that would be super cool. It said "less than perfect produce"

AMILIANA

And that made you laugh?

BREEZE

Yeah it did because it reminded me of dating.

(AMILIANA and RITA look dubious)

BREEZE cont.

No, I'm serious. See it's like grocery shopping. By the time you finally get to getting around to dragging your-self to the store all the produce has been picked over and all you're left with is less than perfect produce. And then you realize that that is exactly what everybody else in the store is thinking.

AMILLIANA

(incredulously) You think we are less than perfect produce?

RITA

I know I am. Nobody and I mean nobody wants to date an overweight accountant with a noisy kid.

BREEZE

Yeah and nobody wants to go on a date with someone who is only five feet tall and still looks like they're in the eighth grade.

RITA

And still wears the same clothes she did in eighth grade.

AMILLIANA

What are you talking about? She looks great. (Addressing BREEZE) I love your shoes by the way they kick serious butt.

RITA

I'm talking about that shirt she wore on Saturday when we went to the zoo. It had some of those whatcha call em mons on the front.

BREEZE

You mean my Digimon shirt? I just bought that.

RITA

Where?

BREEZE

(smugly) Amazon. It has the original Japanese logo. I had it shipped all the way from somewhere overseas. When it finally got here I ripped the box open; felt just like Christmas.

RITA

You say stuff like that on dates, don't you?

BREEZE

I say stuff like that all the time. It's just who I am.

AMILLIANA

And we love you for who you are, even if you listen to Japanese pop music in your car and watch cartoons with subtitles for fun.

(RITA, AMILLIANA, and BREEZE all laugh)

BREEZE

(feigning seriousness) Don't knock my passions.

RITA

(looking toward AMILLIANA) So how do you explain AMILLIANA? Why doesn't she get dates?

AMILLIANA

I work too much and I make a lot of money. Some guys have a problem with that.

BREEZE

She's also supernaturally pretty. Guys are totally spooked by gorgeous, powerful women.

(RITA tosses HER hair over HER shoulder)

RITA

Well I'm glad that's not my problem.

AMILLIANA

Rita stop that! You are so pretty and smart and amazing. You've got curves everywhere. You're like old school sexy.

RITA

You're such an optimist, Millie. But I love you.

AMILLIANA

(shyly) I went on a date last night.

BREEZE

How'd it go?

AMILLIANA

Horrible. He invited me to that rooftop restaurant downtown. I was supposed to meet him there. He was nearly an hour late. Then he had the nerve to get mad at me for ordering dinner without him. He sits down, orders dinner, and eats without saying anything to me. Then when the bill comes he insists on going Dutch. Can you believe that?

RITA

Why do we attract such losers?

BREEZE

I just wish that I would get a letter in the mail telling me where to find my soul mate. I would just get in my car and go.

AMILLIANA

What if you didn't like him when you got there?

BREEZE

That's the point, Amiliana, he would be my soul mate; the like would be built in.

RITA

I could definitely see you riding off in your T-Bird toward Comic Con and happily ever after.

BREEZE

I've been to Comic Con, remember? I had so much fun, taking in the sights and listening to the actors. But as far as prospects go... less – than – perfect – produce.

AMILLIANA

What are you guys looking for in man? I don't think we have talked about that since college.

RITA

Yeah, we were too busy talking about what we wanted in a teacher, in a career, in a boss, in an apartment.

BREEZE

I just want a man who's passionate about something. I love my job, I love my students, I love anime. I have passions. I never meet men with passions, with a fire for life.

AMILLIANA

I want somebody tall, dark, handsome, and rich.

RITA

How original.

AMILLIANA

I'm serious. I'm a plastic surgeon. I make good money. I don't need a sugar daddy. I just want someone who won't be jealous; who won't feel inferior because I make more money.

BREEZE

I think that makes since. What about you Rita?

(AMILLIANA and BREEZE turn expectantly toward RITA)

RITA

Well, obviously I need a man who likes kids.

(BREEZE nods)

AMILLIANA

And?

RITA

I want someone who's funny, not the kind of funny that is at someone else's expense, or that comes from dirty jokes or farting noises. I want someone who is authentically and genuinely funny.

BREEZE

See, we don't ask for much: funny, passionate, and rich. We should be able to find guys like that.

RITA

You sound like my mother.

AMILLIANA

You think that's bad? Every time I see my mom she starts in on how she isn't getting any younger, how I'm not getting any younger, how she might like some grandkids before she dies.

RITA

Doesn't your brother have three daughters?

AMILLIANA

Yes, he does, but I guess that isn't good enough for her. She has to have my kids too.

BREEZE

I've got you both beat.

(BREEZE takes a sip of HER wine)

BREEZE cont.

Last week one of my students, Rosie, told me that she knew that I was old and I didn't have a husband. She told me that her uncle was old and didn't have a wife. She thought that we might get married.

RITA

You should look into that. He might be a keeper.

BREEZE

I talked to her mother about what she said.

AMILLIANA

No? You didn't?

BREEZE

I did. Turns out that the reason Rosie's uncle doesn't have wife is because he's nineteen.

RITA

(laughing) I guess Rosie's idea of old is subjective.

BREEZE

Yeah.

AMILLIANA

My mother has been trying to set me up with her podiatrist.

RITA

Why?

BREEZE

She's over the hill and wants grandkids. Don't you pay attention?

(RITA scowls at BREEZE. BREEZE sticks HER tongue out at RITA. RITA rolls HER eyes.)

BREEZE cont.

What I want to know is what's wrong with your mother's podiatrist?

AMILLIANA

Not much. He's polite and rich...and almost seventy years old.

BREEZE

And there it is!

RITA

Your mom couldn't find somebody more age appropriate for a prospective son-in-law?

AMILLIANA

She said that age is nothing but a number and looks shouldn't matter

RITA

They do, though.

AMILLIANA

So true. Like I said rich and handsome.

BREEZE

So what does this handsome guy of your dreams look like?

AMILLIANA

I don't know. I imagine someone tall, like six foot. He likes to wear suits without ties. Has dark brown hair and eyes. Dimples when he smiles.

RITA

Sounds dreamy

AMILLIANA

What about you, Rita?

RITA

I don't really care if he's tall. I kind of like average, five foot six or five foot seven. He's a little rounder in features. Last thing I need is some skinny boy. And, don't laugh, but I like a guy with an accent.

BREEZE

I wouldn't have thought that of you Rita.

AMILLIANA

Don't try and distract us, Breeze. You still haven't told us what your dream guy looks like.

BREEZE

Well I want somebody short. I don't want to have to crane my neck to look at him. He's got red hair and green eyes. He would also have friends just right for mine.

RITA

Cop out, Cop out.

AMILLIANA

Oh come on Rita. She's just being sweet. I would want my guys to have friends for you guys too.

RITA

Yeah, yeah, me too. Do you think these guys we're talking about really exist?

BREEZE

I like to think so.

AMILLIANA

That's why we came out here tonight. Why we continue to get dressed up and go out. We hope that we might just run into them.

RITA

It's kind of stupid isn't it?

BREEZE

No, it isn't and none of us think so, otherwise we would have just stayed at your apartment drinking wine and watching *The Hunger Games*.

AMILLIANA

Life becomes almost sad when you become jealous of the love life of an emotionally stunted teenage girl in a post-apocalyptic world fighting for her life on national television.

(AMILLIANA, BREEZE, and RITA begin laughing. THEY pick up their glasses and bring them together in a toast.)

RITA

Well the night is still young, bring on the single men.

(AMILLIANA, BREEZE, and RITA survey THEIR surroundings.)

BREEZE

(laughing) I don't even think there are any guys in here.

(MAN 1, MAN 2, and MAN 3 enter. MAN 1 is tall, dressed in an expensive-looking suit with no tie and wearing sunglasses. MAN 2 is average in height and plump in weight. HE is wearing grey slacks and a blue button down shirt. MAN 3 is wearing dark wash jeans and a bright yellow shirt depicting Pikachu. HE wears a black suit jacket over HIS shirt.)

AMILLIANA

What about those guys over there?

look)

(BREEZE and RITA turn to

BREEZE

Wow! Are the two of you guys seeing this?

AMILLIANA

I think we should go over there.

RITA

I'm not going.

BREEZE

Come on. We can't do this without you Takeshi.

RITA

Is that some kind of anime reference?

BREEZE

Anime quote.

(RITA closes HER eyes, drops HER head, and shakes it back and forth.)

BREEZE

(defensively) I thought the occasion called for one.

(RITA looks up and glances over at MAN 1, MAN 2, and MAN 3)

RITA

It's gotta be some kind of trap.

BREEZE

Come on Indiana Jones. I'll race you.

(BREEZE, RITA, and AMILLIANA bound up from THEIR chairs and start to walk toward MAN 1, MAN 2, and MAN 3.)

FADE TO BLACK

The End

Love
by Alexis Gentry

Love is sometimes blind
It can be very unique
Everyone finds love

He Walks Among the Mist
by Dawna Hamm

He walks among the mist
Fantasy
Reality
Side by Side

He talks to those I cannot see
Those who linger in the mist
Sanity
Insanity
Side by Side

He stands in the mirror
His reflection I do not Recognize
I search his eyes, just a glimmer
for the man of past
I cannot find

Fantasy Reality
Sanity Insanity
Walk side by side

The disease has taken him
yet he is not gone
just walking among the mist

A Tale of Two Secluded Cities

by Brian Kordsiemon

In the great city of Socrates thrives the repetitive commonness of the city people. They each awaken at the required time of morning, serve three meals a day, work to sustain a home, and, on the day's end, return to the place they call 'home' and rest. These simple routines earn them a payment, which shortly afterwards they spend on necessities and—if the week was good to them—extra commodities. This cycle is then repeated when the dwellers again work just to do as before with what they receive. The economy of Socrates is designed in such a way as to gain both the control and money of its public. Whatever employers give away, they receive right back in another form or fashion.

This cycle was possible for the city of Socrates to endure because, for one of two reasons, their economy was coursed by a different money system than that of other colonies. Thus, whatever they gave away ultimately had to come back to them.

The city of Socrates also made it inevitable for their currency to flow right back into their system because of another, more impressive, reason. This city was built in a foreign part of the world that excluded it from the rest of reality—as intended.

This foreign placement? The maze of caverns deep in the underground seemed to suite their intents well. Therefore, a city was spawned in such depths; accompanied by the designing, inventing, and uses of many devices that allowed survival to be possible.

Granted such information about the city—which few are—the question soon follows of how the city is able to thrive at the productivity of what it is currently when its policies included a constrictive economy and definite placement beneath the dirt? Who would live in such conditions or invest their entire lives on the city? Beginning life there would mean ending life there, for the money earned in Socrates couldn't be exchangeable anywhere else. Yes, one could supposedly leave with their bought commodities, but that would hardly buy them anything out in the other cities of the world. Life was different from the early years of man; nowadays people wanted to give away paper and coins rather than herds of sheep or bulks of wheat to receive provisions. Basically, this era of society reconstructed the way of payment by substituting the value of so much—sheep, cattle, corn—and compacting it to the width of a sum of paper sheets.

So the question still remains of how a city of such odd characteristics could stand among other, better cities? Again, the answer lies in the seclusion of the city. The Socratic leaders learned that in order for their city to thrive, they would have to create a deviant lie: one that would be easily believed because of their current surroundings. Such was done and early settlers—unbeknown of the real reality—served as a test to see if the lie held water. The lie theorized the idea of the singular nation. It harvested the belief that the large cavern around them was solely reality

and that the city of Socrates marked the dawn of humanity. Man had begun intelligent, being in merely a few years able to create everything that had actually taken centuries to do. And many believed it—as the world around them seemed to prove so—but others, primarily visionaries, didn't. They saw the world as more than just the cave, and believed that man didn't just begin great but that they had slowly worked for it. And since these people hindered the existence of the city, their existence for the city ended untimely. It was the rules of the game they played in; to give a life for another, more profitable one. Unfortunately, few knew they were involved in such a game, or that the game even existed. But it did, and has always since man's first inspiration of a capitalist society.

Though subdued quickly, the unexpected resistance caused the leaders of Socrates to gather and contemplate on how to best avoid any future obstruction of this kind, or at least how to manage their tale while other hidden heretics still existed. For indeed, though the mass of the problem was controlled, many loose ends still lingered about in hiding to await the best time of revival.

Shortly after the leaders had gathered, they together conspired a sly solution. They needed to know exactly how the human mind functioned and how best to twist its intelligence. If critical thinking was how humans thought through a situation, then in order to produce a lie that same format of thinking would have to be minimized to the foundation of compromised satisfaction; a fulfillment that would rest on a lazy examination of a situation in order to make the person fill as if they had searched the issue well. Thus, many scientists from the city of Socrates were appointed to such a task, these scientist being told that it was as to increase the understanding of the human brain and how to treat it of many diseases. When asked who their subjects would be, the elect Socrates told it would be of certain agreed participants. The Socratician leaders then sent many of its loyalists out into the real world to steal a generation of people who were most like those of the city. A consensus about the Socratician population was quickly sent out and received back, and then the loyalists left the city to accomplished their duty. At first, they only took those who were of older age—those who would resemble the people the scientists were promised to be agreed participants—but later down the line the Socratician leaders thought that they were not getting enough information from this age group, for they were older and already formed in their ways. With this in mind, the city leaders—in secrecy—rose up a more loyal generation of scientists to perform their work. In this, the Socratician leaders perverted the originally stated investigation, one told to both the early scientists and public, to the one of their real intent. They then recruited a much younger race to test on and began to run the experiment on them for conceptual strength. They did this by spreading a lie across that generation that the world was always dark and unknown, had no real color but that of light, and the human was nothing more than an inactivate being meant to examine. This belief claimed that the solar system worked not by a sun and orbiting planets, but by explosions of galactic gases that created seldom lighting to the city; that the darkness was because nothing besides the universal explosions could fathom such fantastic coloring; and that the voices they heard were nothing more than voices in their head called the

Truth. And in a matter of a few years, everyone held captive in the dark lab believed the lie.

And because these people believed this lie so strongly, there was no need for the area to be maintained, a watchful eye to be cast, or the lie to be told by the scientist any longer—for the lie was muttered by all of the prisoners repetitively.

However, because the Socratic scientists relied so heavily on the power of the lie, the chains holding the prisoners overtime gave way to rust by sweat and age: soon becoming incredibly feeble and barely able to hold. One of the prisoners, in the late of the night, jolted in his sleep and shook the weak chains horribly. Such intensity broke the chains and the prisoner fell face first on the ground. Startled by this, he awoke to a new perspective and figured he was dreaming; though, after an hour, the man began to move his fingers and legs to his amazement. He saw that he could do more than what the Truth had once described. And though it ached, he was coursed by a thrill at his every move. It was like a rare privilege granted, and the man wanted to experience every second of it.

A flash of light occurred moments later and the man was able to see the chains that had formerly bound him overhead. At the sight of this, the man became increasingly curious. Had it been the chains that had actually bound him and not his body's lameness?

Hours later, another flash of light occurred and the lying prisoner was able to see many rows of people hanging by chains that forced them to see in only one direction. They were all asleep at the time, so none of them saw the man on the ground. The light ended shortly thereafter, though before it did, the man saw a crevice formed by a large, bent rock. He used his arms to pull himself over to the crevice and slumped himself against its corner. Ten minutes later, another flash of light happened. The man peered out and saw that the whole world he lived in was exotic, being mixed by a rocky formation and clear barrier. Behind the clear barrier was more of the world that the Truth had kept from him. The man began to contemplate what reality was really like and if the voice deemed as 'Truth' was actually derived from truth.

Guided by his will to see the world further, the man hid in the crevice for months longer. Every night, though he was weak and tired, the man studied what happened about the cave. He learned that behind the clear barrier where *people*—people like him! And that they moved about in such a seemingly unstable fashion. They relied on their *legs* to move around, and assumedly by practice were able to take step after steady step to move in an efficient manner. He noticed that the people behind would mutely work behind the clear barrier, though always giving a hand motion—lifting their thumbs to the sky—before the seldom light would flicker on. These people *controlled* the light! The last thing the man saw was that the people walked from the clear barrier to the carven by an intriguing mechanical device. The people never used their hands to operate this device, as they did with their many other devices,

but chose to merely walked to the mechanical device and it would move out of the way for them. It was as if they had made the device *human*, as to see when someone approached and move aside for them.

Slowly, the man's reality expanded.

However, the view behind the rock was not enough for the man. He wanted to know what was outside of the self-moving device. He wanted to know what the world was really like, as a whole and not by what the Truth had told him. Therefore, the man—every night—practiced himself on how the people learned to move about, each day getting better at it. And in the daytime, slept as to keep his energy reserve at a regenerating level. During his rest, he was never found hiding in the crevice for no one ever surveyed the area looking for missing captives. This was because, even though the man's chains were unoccupied, many of the chains around the cavern were broken and unfilled.

At last, three months after the man's freedom from his chains, he was able to stand and take a proper step forward to the moving device. He tripped and fell multiple times, but always rose up again to continue towards his further freedom.

Finally, the man reached the moving mechanical device and breathlessly stood in front of it awaiting it to open. The device obediently abided. At its opening, the man stumbles into the room of the clear barrier and begins to looks around, each second in there filling his curiosity a bit more. A faint light was left on by the careless scientists, causing the man's eyes to have to readjust slightly before he could explore with an understanding of where he was. In the room, there were many devices which the man did not understand. He looked around until he saw some leftover food, and ate it without complaint: for he had not eaten in at least a month. Beside the meal was a bottle filled with water, and the man consumed this as well. Once finished, he looked around the room for a half hour longer before leaving by another self-moving device. He was not about to go back into the cavern he had come from, not when there was more to see.

The area through the self-moving device was much darker than that of the clear barrier, so the man's eyes had too once again adjust to this light contrast. He, however, did not want to wait until his eyes refocused, and thus stumbled on bravely with his hands against the wall for guidance. He felt the wall take many turns in the dark, all the while trusting that it might lead him to a land once again further than the knowledge of the Truth.

One step later, as if to toil the man's faith, his foot slipped when the path took a quick descent and he began to tumble down a path he knew not. At the hill's end, the man came to a rolling stop. Unconscious.

A little before dawn, the man awakens with a headache and bruises. Worn and sore, he is about to fall back into his former rest but, just before he does, hears the

voices of many behind him. Frightened that the people might take him back to the world of the Truth, the man scrambles to his feet and looks for a place to run. He sees a small light off in the distance, one that he did not see beforehand when he was being guided solely by the wall of the cave. He hurriedly begins to trot towards it, knowing it as the only visible landmark for him to follow. Furthermore, the way he stumbled parted him farther from the voices of the men behind. Slowly, he made his way to the light at the end of the cave: it growing a little bigger by the step he took towards it. The light resembled a richer glow of the substance produced in the cave he came from, an aspect that also drew him all the more closer. For if the light in the lab taught him more about reality, then this light—by his logic—should be no different.

At the end of the tunnel, the man takes his first step out of the cave. When he does this, he is immediately being blinded by a great amount of something from the outer world. He does not know what has blinded him, only that his statue outside is at the moment not much greater than the life in the cave. He continues farther out of the cave with his eyes covered, thinking that whatever has blinded him is only an obstacle to keep him from the light. He falls over and gets back up, and repeats the process multiple times.

Unknown is the time he has spent outside of the cave, and more so the time when his eyes break the tyranny of whatever had blinded him before. With his eyes now able to once again see, he looks to see what is around him. With this look he sees life as it really is, being more detailed than mere shadows on a wall. Outside of the cave there are trees, lushly green grass, mountains, flowers, and other objects of beauty rare in subject to the cave. At the reckoning of the outside's beauty, he acknowledges something essential. He sees that the Truth he had heard once was not really truth, rather knowledge. It told of the world around him and the blindness his eyes felt, but it never told of the world granted by light. He now, and only now, experienced the truth because he stepped out into the light. He then looks to the sun and is immediately blinded as before. He at first is offended by the ball of fire, and then he admires it. His first reaction is resent. How could the substance of truth try to blind its visitors? And then he saw more into the truth. The defense of the sun blinded any whom had no perseverance for the truth. Those who wanted desperately to see the truth of reality would be hindered by their blindness at first, only then to be later welcomed to see what was true.

The prisoner turns around to return from whence he came—wishing to tell all of the true reality—but cannot remember from which entrance he can in. Before him are many pathways to enter in, so the man best guesses and stumbles through one of the choices. He entered the cave with great aspirations, but soon after begins to trip and fall as his eyes are not used to the darkness of the cave. He again resorts to the guidance of the wall to find his way down the pathway, doing so until he sees another faint light ahead. Joyous, the man pushes himself off from the wall of the cave and runs to the light ahead. When he reaches it, he is amazed to see a whole city present. With so much admiration, he cannot help but fall to his knees and look

in awe at the city. Faint light shines to show the city, and he hopes the closer he gets to it the brighter it will become.

Suddenly, behind him he hears the many voices of the people he had heard earlier, this time being frantic and serious. He looked around and saw many people in uniform coming at him and, in that instant, recognizes them to be the scientists who wanted to take him back to the cave. Somehow they had figured out he had escaped.

By instinct, the man darts from them and ventures further into the city. The further he goes, however, the darker his surroundings become and with more blindness he runs. As the man runs on, he stumbles and feels himself hit against many other civilians, knowing this only because they shriek and curse out at him, but continues forward in the quickest manner possible to him. Continuously, he hears the sound of the voices chasing him call out for him to halt as he runs on, the calls getting closer to him by the second.

How could they still be following me undeterred? How could anyone see in such darkness? the man desperately thought.

Then he understood. The light he had seen before required one talent in order to show its beauty. The light that had blinded him earlier was not a test to see if the world it showed was worth it, it was rather a selfish bargain forced to never allow those who see light to ever again see darkness. He understood that the sun had blinded him by more than just light, but also—once the light's power had wielded away—by darkness. He fell several times while he thought this, and at the end of his thought was embraced by a pair of thick arms. The scientists had caught him, and he would never again witness the light that had cheated him from its glory. In desperation, he began to cry out to the city dwellers present about what he had seen and of the world around them as nothing in comparison. Many scoffed, others feared for the man's mentality, and others listened with perked ears. But in the end, the man was taken from the city and nothing more was preached on the subject. Yet, before the man was taken back to the lab, he learned one last essential piece of truth—he now knew that, in order to compare with those of the dark, he had to teach his eyes to follow the dark's custom.

Many years later, word about the man and his theories began to take root and some believe that, at least, the world around them was not just made up of the Socratic city. When word of this reached the ears of the Socratic leaders, they gathered and conspired among each other on how to cease the information that was growing. They couldn't merely exterminate those who preached the news, for the number was now large, widespread, and, worse, mostly anonymous. After days of congregation, the leaders found that all they could do was refer to the promise they had made long ago to the people of Socrates—the idea that they were an early species and that they would continue to grow. They figured, in doing this, that the Socratic people might see the promise of the leaders as the actual truth rather than

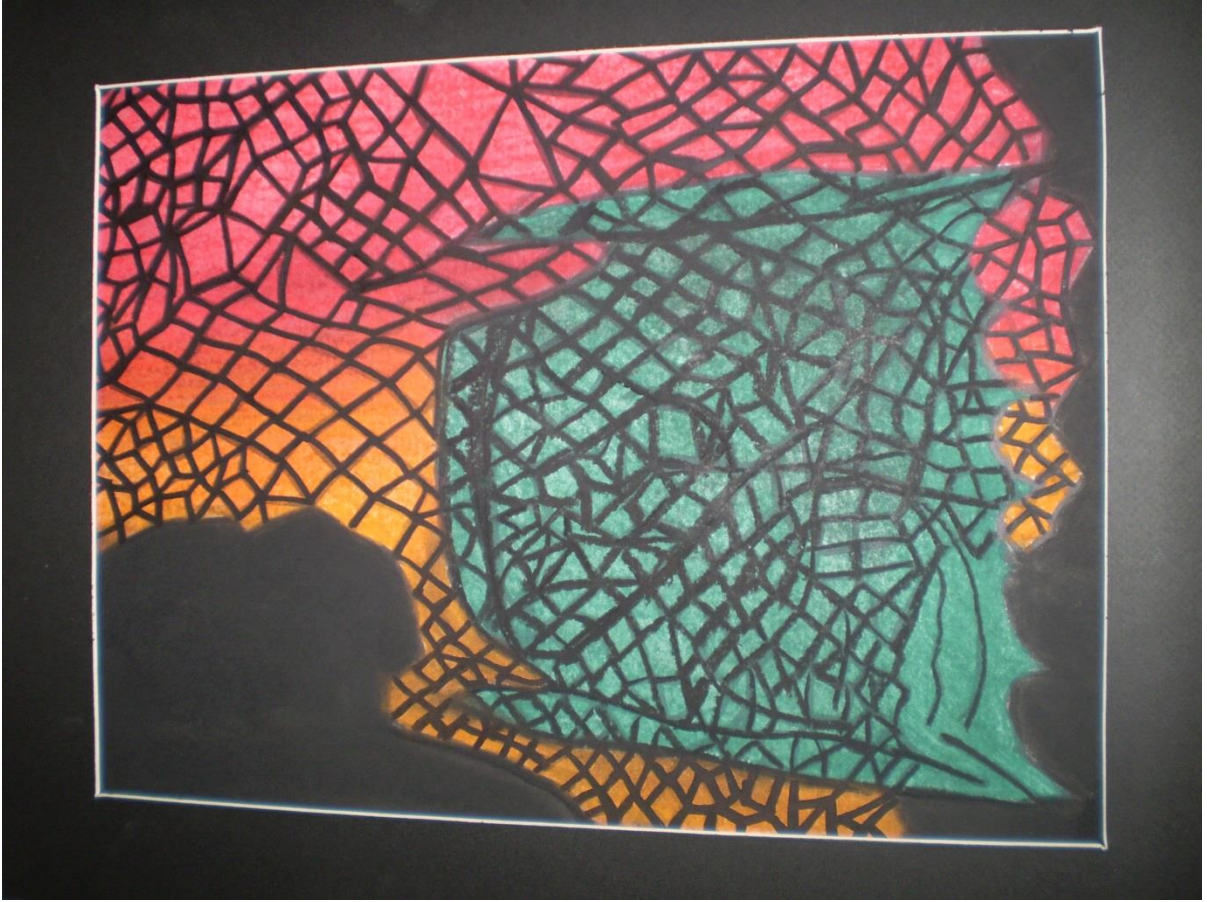
the words of the escapee; since their works have come to pass and the words of the fugitive had yet to be seen. Thus, the Socratic leaders decreed the construction of a new city in order to prove that the time they lived in was indeed the beginning of civilization, and that they were expanding as they had once prophesied; hoping that, by this accomplishment, the public would side with the view of their intent.

In less than two year's reign, the new city was complete and quickly after populated with villagers, traders, and business that had formally found life hard in the Socratic city. The Socratic leaders then deemed the city as Glaucon on its opening day and set it under its wing until it could govern itself properly. Through this period of time, the city of Socrates explained to Glaucon many things, including the mentioning of the rumor about the man who had escaped their lab facility. They told the story how, for the most part, it had actually occurred; though, substituting the information that portrayed their secret experimental studies with faulty facts. They told of how the man had been a *prisoner* to a dungeon located far in the cavern, sentenced because of several serious crimes he had committed. They told of the cavern and its conditions, but as mentioned before never told information that gave away their original plans. They told of his escape, though keeping a clean conscience as they confessed they did not know how, and spoke innocently of his escape from the prison. They assessed the damage and route taken by the fugitive and, by the conditions it took to overcome the obstacles of the cavern, purposefully inferred to the Glaucon leaders that the escapee may have been assisted in his getaway. This bit of information was given to infer the ideology of a conspiracy within the city's security, taking the blame for the slothful-acting scientists to some anonymous traitor. Then the Socratic leaders spoke, in false ignorance, of the man claiming to see some kind of light—a bright one—that shined from the heavens and showed him the truth of the world. Lastly, they told of the man's return and the possible oppression he received during his professions.

Then the Socratic leaders told of their solution for the, seemingly, existing problem: to create a monarchy between the two cities. The king they would elect would be guided by the mind of him who knows what is good for the people and is rich with—rather than silver and gold—virtue and wisdom in order to lead his people justly. The Socratic leaders spoke of a man directed by the philosophic ways, being full of knowledge and its information. And by his philosophy, this new king would lead the two secluded cities into greatness and prosperity.

During the words spoken by the Socratic leaders, the officials of the city Glaucon listened intently, believed the tale of the escapee, and agreed with their notion of the monarchy: as well as who they should elect as their king. The prerequisites for the leader seemed good to Glaucon and its people, for they in harmony thought one filled with knowledge of right and wrong would become the best to lead the people. Therefore, the two cities elected one Philosopher King to lead their people to the future of the cities.

But in this decree, lamentation should have been in order for Glaucon and its people. For—obviously unbeknown to the real intent of the commission—the city never knew that *knowledge* was what had caused so much grief to begin with, and that truth was what the two cities actually needed to begin anew. But this reckoning was not the intent of the Socratic leaders, now was it?



Face in the Crowd *by Megan Goff*

Rape Culture

by Yasminda Choate

Just pour her a drink and give her attention:
Everyone knows her type.
Zip thigh high boots and smear on gloss:
Everyone [but her] knows how the party will end.
Boys without conscience; boys will be boys:
Everyone knows she's asking for it.
Let's give it to her.

The Decedent

by Jay DiMase

Dearest One,

Try to read this with my voice in your heart. It must be hard. If I were in your place, if you were the one gone, I don't know if I would be able to continue. The hurt, the loss...But you must, for me, for the kids, for the idea that we had and the personification of it that we eventually became, together.

It's going to be ok, it doesn't feel like it without me there, but remember that campaign from when we were in college? It gets better, I know, I have been through it once myself. I know some of the process, so I put a few things into motion the moment I had an idea I might not make it back alive.

Upon my death, I have left instructions to drain the blood from my heart as soon as possible. That blood is to be made into a crystal, through means not important, and that crystal hung on a pendant. You will receive this pendant one lunar cycle after my passing, after it absorbs the moon's light for an entire month.

Let this be my heart that you keep with you, something that you can look into when you need strength. Something that you can curse when you blame me for not being there, that you can hold up in the moonlight to shine a path through your darkest hours, hours I should have been there to hold your hand.

Morbid things for morbid people, didn't you say that to me once? Well, let this morbid piece of me be the Always that you need. The other side is a mystery, The Goddess only giving us a glimpse, so if I see you there some-when, bring my heart back to me, and we shall be complete once more.

The Decedent

One Step: A Play in One Act
by Cynthia Choate

Cast of Characters

Janelle A woman in her early 30s

Scene

The bottom floor of a city townhome.

Time

The present.

*(The bottom floor of Janelle's townhome.
Janelle stands facing the audience on the
bottom step of a flight of stairs leading to a
second story in the entryway of her home.)*

Janelle

One step. That is all it is. One step. I really should. The doctor says so. Dr. Wallace. His bright eyes locking on mine, holding me there. No escaping the blue of them, and he says, "This is the week, Janelle. Just one step."

*(Janelle holds her foot in the air, leans
forward as if she would step off the stair,
then places her foot back on the stair)*

But it is not one step at all. One step down the stairs, yes, but then four more to the door. Then you open it, and you are outside and there are any number of steps before you. Not one step but infinite steps! The sidewalk like an escalator taking you anywhere it pleases! Whisking you along so fast you don't know where you are. Or where you are going. Or who you are. Because in the noise out there you are not you at all! You put on your business suit with the tall heels and the tight hair and you are punctual and responsible and full of the right things to say. Or maybe your little black dress takes you on a date and you are charming and attractive. Or you leave with a stroller and you are-no, not that one. Don't think of that. Stop and Breathe. Three deep breaths. That's what Dr. Wallace says. In and out. In and out. In and out. (*She pauses to breathe deeply.*) Find your calm, and then you just do it. In and out and then you just leave out the in part and go out. Outside. Where the people are. Where the fast moving people swirl by. You walk down the street not meeting anyone's eye, just letting them all swirl by you-- colors and sounds and empty heads. You let your eyes slide past them, and you keep it all inside, your frozen smile a padlock. And they don't know, don't ask. Except when you are standing at the bus stop you suddenly get that feeling. That skin crawling, deep down sick feeling and you look up from your book, and the woman holding the baby in the corner is looking at you, running her eyes up and down the length of you. Her eyes dart away, run away from your face as if she hadn't been looking. And then you wait. Here is the test. Your heart catches and beats faster as you bite your lip. Then it comes. She looks again. A glance thrown out the side of her eyes. Testing. Seeing if she can stare again. And you know that she sees you, that she sees through you. She has caught you, examined you, stuck a pin through you, and now you hang labeled, like a shiny-backed beetle. Now your pieces are easily pulled apart and examined at will. "What is it?" she asks herself as she tightens her grip on her child, instinctively knowing you for what you are. Then you look away unwilling to risk a third eye contact. You sit silent and aching while she picks you apart, rips your legs off to see what makes them work. And you know the whole time what she will find. That hot worm that wiggles inside you, the secret at the bottom of your soul, what you let happen to them that night-Don't! Breathe In. Breathe out. In and Out. (*She pauses to breathe deeply.*) Not everyone looks at you like the woman with the baby, thank goodness. Like the boy who brings the food from Mr. Wang's to the door. He knocks and enters without waiting, his black hair shiny, gum popping in his mouth. He brings the food to the top of the stairs, accepts his pay, and never asks a question. Not with his mouth or his eyes. Just stands there smelling of mint gum and eggrolls while you count out the money. He has enough in him. He doesn't need more. Doesn't need to know why the crazy woman in the blue townhouse can't even walk down the stairs and open the door. He doesn't need a reason, doesn't need anything more than his \$8.43 plus tip. Just stands there with his dark hair. (Pause) Hair so like *his* hair. I remember the soft strands of it on his collar as I watched him paint, life flowing from his paintbrush in shiny, wet streaks. I sat behind him, always quiet and behind him, watching him, delighting in him. It was so short. So short of a time and then all over. He was mine and then that night-No! There is nothing there. Breathe. Do the breathing. In! Out! In! Out! (*She pauses to breathe deeply.*) Sydney came to visit this morning. She is the only

one who still comes. She sat making polite conversation about friends who no longer exist. "Darnell is in town this week," she says, "and we are having a party for her. Won't you come?" She gets only silence so she tries again, "They all miss you. They ask about you. Honey, can't you at least try?" But Honey acts like she can't hear her so then Sydney says what everyone says, "There is no reason for you to stay here and punish yourself like this, Janelle." She is right about that, you know. There is no reason to stay here on this step, and yet here you still are. It would be easier if you had a reason why your feet won't move, an Oprah reason. Something to bring a tear to those greedy eyes on the other side of the screen, the ones eager for a train wreck, eager for a reason to feel that their life is not so bad; your mother kept you chained in the backyard and made you eat dog food, your brother raped you, your face is a oozing disfigured mess, but you have nothing. Sorry to disappoint, you tell Oprah, but I had a great childhood. Good parents, wealthy even. The audience frowns. This is not what they came here for. She has nothing they hiss. Nothing. That's all you have. Ever since that day when he, when I-no, not that. There is no reason! None! You have no excuses. You had everything and now nothing. You are nothing. What does it matter if nothing goes outside?

(Janelle turns as if she would walk back up the stairs, but does not take a step. She turns back to face the audience)

Except you did promise Dr. Wallace. Promised him that you would do it this week. Today even. You sat in your last session upstairs, and he leaned in with his eyes, his hand there on your knee and you promised him. Darn his eyes! You have always been a sucker for men with blue eyes. Blue eyes, dark hair. *(Pause)* Dark soul, dark past. His best paintings were always dark. Those were the ones that sold. I asked him if he would paint her, but he never did. He never even seemed to notice her. His eyes would flick to her if I pointed something out to him-her outfit or hair or the set of her little lips-but they never quite landed before he was gone again, his eyes lost in some world of his own. That's why I should have known. I never should have left. If I had been there that night they would both still be-Stop it! Darn you! In and out! In and out! *(She takes three angry breaths, pauses, rearranges her face into a smile and continues.)*

The weather is wonderful today, clear skies, sun, a crisp breeze. I used to take walks around the city on days like this. I would walk with my notebook and pen until I found just the right spot. Then I would watch the strangers walking by. Their faces were careless of me then. I would sit blissfully invisible and write. Except on those too cold days. Then I would bundle up in my coat and scarf and go to my very favorite place, the library. I can make it to there in 15 minutes. The library. That is where I first saw him, sitting in his chair, a book in his hand and a window behind him framing him in soft winter light. He looked at me, smiled at me, and I, not caring to see the carefully laid snare, smiled back. "An artist" he called himself, just looking for inspiration, someone to share his passion with. He was always so full of passion.

Joy, anger, sadness, hate, everything he felt he felt with such great intensity. And I, boring and ignored, what was I next to such fire? If I would pay the bills, support the habits, feed the fire then he would share it with me, all of it. He would light me up and make me glow, my life suddenly brilliant and full of warmth. *(She pauses.)* Except fire is an unpredictable companion. All it takes is a strong wind to turn it into a raging flame. And in the end fire did what it does. It consumed. It devoured everything, the very best part of my life. So little, she was so little-stop it! Don't think about it! In and out. In and out.

(She pauses to breathe deeply. Then tries to rearrange her face into a smile but accomplishes something more like a grimace.)

(Janelle continues, desperately.) It really is lovely weather. Did I say how I like to go for walks? I remember the first time I took her out in her little stroller. I put three layers on her in mid spring, but I still worried that the chill would be too much. She loved it though. She reached her little hands up as if to grab the wind. That part of her was like me. That's right. You are doing well now. Focus on the good. Dr. Wallace says to remember the good. Her blue eyes, her little fingers, her dark hair, her smile that was so like her father's. We had a photographer make a portrait of the three of us. Twice I rescheduled it, the swelling on my face too much to hide. She sits in my lap smiling out of the frame. She was always with me. Until that last night. I saw her asleep in her bed that night, had laid her down smelling of my milk, and then left her with him, my beautiful blue-eyed monster. By then I knew him for what he was. But there had been a phone call. An invitation. A chance for a stolen moment away. I waited, listening in the hall until his breathing was slow and even. I peeked in; saw his face slack, his dark hair spilled across his pillow, one hand thrust out from his body as if beckoning me to him. I paused, hesitated on the brink, and then pulled my coat tight around me and turned away. I slipped down the stairs and out into the chill night. That decision will haunt me forever. Don't think of it! Breathe in and out! In and out--but that is what I did. I went out! Leaving her behind. One step at a time I walked away from them. I could have stopped at any one of those steps. I didn't have to find her little body on the floor. Flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood lying broken by his hands. If only I had not taken that one step out the door! I could still have them! I could still have them!

(Janelle slowly walks backwards up the stairs.)

If only I had not taken that one step, one step, one step.

The light fades away.



On the Range by *Russell Kilpatrick*

My Own Annabelle Lee

by Josh Vandergriff

There was a girl I had.
She was my own Annabelle Lee.
She was one with great beauty
And she was worshipped by me.

She haunts my thoughts and my dreams.
While I still felt the dismay.
I missed her more and more
Within each summer day.

The worst gift I always receive
Is remembering every single memory
Of the laughter and smile
With my own Annabelle Lee.

Love could be like a curse.
You'll never know if you're going to be free.
Your heart could turn into an anchor
Sinking to the bottom of the sea.

She may be the one who's gone
And a once joyful memory.
But my love still holds
For my own Annabelle Lee.

Life

By Kristian Fipps

Broken hearts and shattered dreams
I've seen it before it's been my scene
I walked away but I ran to fast
Something grabbed me and pulled me back
Life's not easy it's just a game
We're the pieces put into play
You can't run or get away
Everyone's watching for your mistakes

The Forbidden Oath

by Jessica Ellis

My heart is still, my wit has gone and fled.
I lay in shambles, your petty laugh;
Night after night it echoes in my bed.
Why your heart so black, so chafe?
What is it about you I can't shake?
You live a lie, life not worth living.
Every time you smile the earth quakes.
If I say it, dare I with no giving—
But alas your tricking surpassed,
You grab my hand, smile flashing bright,
who can't help but smile back? I'm precast,
Who resists, refuses, remains with might?
Love is the word that cannot be spoken
rendering me useless, but unbroken.

My Friend Sam

by Kendric Martin

For as long as I can remember, Sam has been my closest friend. He's been my only lasting friend, and for good reason. I'm the only one who can see him. As I'm sure you can imagine having an invisible friend doesn't make you the most normal kid in school. To everyone around me Sam is imaginary, a figment of my teenage mind. By my age, you're supposed to have been rid of your imaginary friends. But how can I abandon Sam? He is as real to me as anyone else is.

The best times are when Sam and I are alone. He is the only person I can really talk to. He doesn't really talk back though... You see, Sam cannot speak. To communicate we write back and forth in a notebook. I don't mind much though. It's a lot easier to write out my feelings than to speak them. After years of being the "odd" kid, it's sometimes difficult to speak at length to people, so it's nice to have a way I can be completely open. So, we write back and forth. I tell him about my day away from him at school, and he talks to me about my problems. We share all of our ideas and concerns for the future.

The only complaint I have with Sam is his anger. Anytime I have a hard time at school, anytime people call me names, anytime my parents tell me to get out and get some real friends, Sam gets angry. He says terrible, violent things. He tells me of the things he would do if only I would let him.

I'm not sure how my parents found the notebook. They must have searched my room pretty hard, likely trying to find drugs to explain my behavior. They read the notebook, seeing all the horrible things Sam had written and all the things I had written to him. I tried to tell them that I hadn't written the bad parts. I tell them that it was Sam. They don't believe me of course. They tell me it was time I went to a therapist. Even though I knew it would piss Sam off, I agree to go.

The therapist sat across from me in a high backed leather chair. I had gone in expecting a couch to lie on, but there was only another, smaller chair, in front of her. As soon as I walked in she spoke to me in a calm, soothing voice.

"Please sit down Dylan. Is it okay if I call you Dylan, or would you prefer Mr. Grayson?"

I sat down across from her. "Dylan is fine I guess."

The woman speaks again in that calming tone. "My name is Janet Morrison. I would like it if we could talk about this situation. Would that be okay with you?" I nod my head in affirmation, and she begins asking me questions.

"So Dylan. How are you today? are you having any troubles at school?" she looks at me with what could pass as concern, but to someone used to the scrutiny of others I can tell she is studying me like a bug.

"My grades are good. I don't have much trouble from anybody at school. But that's not why I'm here. You want to talk about Sam. My parents are under the impression that I am imagining him. What do you think?"

She seems almost as neutral as she had been before, but I had seen it. I had seen the facade slip for an instant. She was just like the others. She thought I was crazy. I knew that pitying look that had briefly been in her eyes. She looks at me with that Lying face for a moment before speaking. "I think you are lonely Dylan. I think that maybe you have invented Sam to have someone to talk to. I want you to know Dylan...." at this point she leans forward and gives that fake concerned look."... You can always come and speak with me. Don't think of me as your therapist. Think of me as your friend." after that, we talked about everything other than Sam. She didn't push it, but I knew we would be back on the subject next time.

There wasn't a clock in that room, so I don't know how long exactly we were in there. She asked me more about school and my home life. She was just as ignorant as the rest of them. She acted like she wasn't judging, but I can always tell. I told Sam about all that she said. He was unusually calm about it. That should have been the first sign that sometime was going to happen.

The next morning when I awoke, Sam was waiting to speak to me. He tells me that he had gone to Janet's office late last night. She had been working late, and Sam followed her home. Right outside her home he strangled her to death. It took longer than in the movies, he said. After that, he dragged her into the woods behind her house and pushed her body into a river running very near her house. I was upset with Sam. Not because I thought it was wrong. No, she deserved to die for talking about Sam like he didn't exist. I was mad at him for being so careless. He could have gotten us into trouble. About that time, my parents called up to me. Sam signs for me to keep quite. He tells me to play dumb. So I head downstairs to get the news.

"Dylan....." my mother begins. She seems at a loss for word so my dad steps in.

"Dylan, we know you really liked Janet. I don't know how to say this, but she died late last night. The police say she must have slipped into the creek and gotten caught in an undertow. I'm so sorry Dylan."

I wait a moment before I speak. "I... I don't know what to say. I just can't believe she's dead. She was so nice. I really felt we were getting somewhere." I hang my head in mock sadness. They eat it up like I knew they would.

My mom speaks up, having gathered her wits finally. "We've been talking about it, and we don't want to send you back to another therapist. We should have never sent you in the first place. I'm so sorry Dylan." At this she begins crying. I may not be that close with my parents, but I can't stand to see my mother cry. I walk over and hold her until she stops.

"It's okay mom. I know you were trying to help." I smile at her and go back to my room.

My parents didn't send me to another therapist. To avoid future problems, I no longer speak about Sam. He tells me he doesn't mind. He didn't like when people call him imaginary anyway. From then on we took it upon ourselves to hide our new notebook under a loose floorboard. For a while there were not any problems. That is, until I had the pleasure of meeting Viktor West.

Viktor West is the school bully. He messes with everybody that's not big enough to fight back. He had no interest in me until he found out I had been to a therapist. The first time I had a run in with Viktor, I was in between classes heading to Algebra. Suddenly I felt my body get slammed into the lockers. "Well, look at the little loony! The psycho can't even walk straight." I look up to see Viktor standing over me.

"What do you want Viktor? I don't want any trouble." I know I sound weak, but there is nothing else I can do. I've seen him beat other kids. It's not pretty.

Viktor looks at me with that cruel expression unique to bullies. "I hear your psychiatrist died. Did you kill her or did you just drive her to suicide with how nutty you are? I bet you did kill her. How did you do it, nutty?" He pulls back his fist to hit me when another voice rings out.

"Mr. West! Unhand Mr. Grayson at once!" We both look up to see the Superintendent, Mrs. Kramer.

Before releasing me, Victor whispers in my ear "I'll get you, nutty. Don't you worry about that" He then gets taken in to the principal's office. The rest of the day I avoided Viktor. I finally made it home without another run in.

When I got home, Sam can immediately tell something is wrong. I tell him what had happened. Sam did not like it. He told me that he wanted to kill Viktor just like he had killed Janet. I try to tell him it isn't worth it, but he is so furious he does not notice. I make him promise not to do anything. Sam swears to me that he will do nothing. In a way, Sam kept his word.

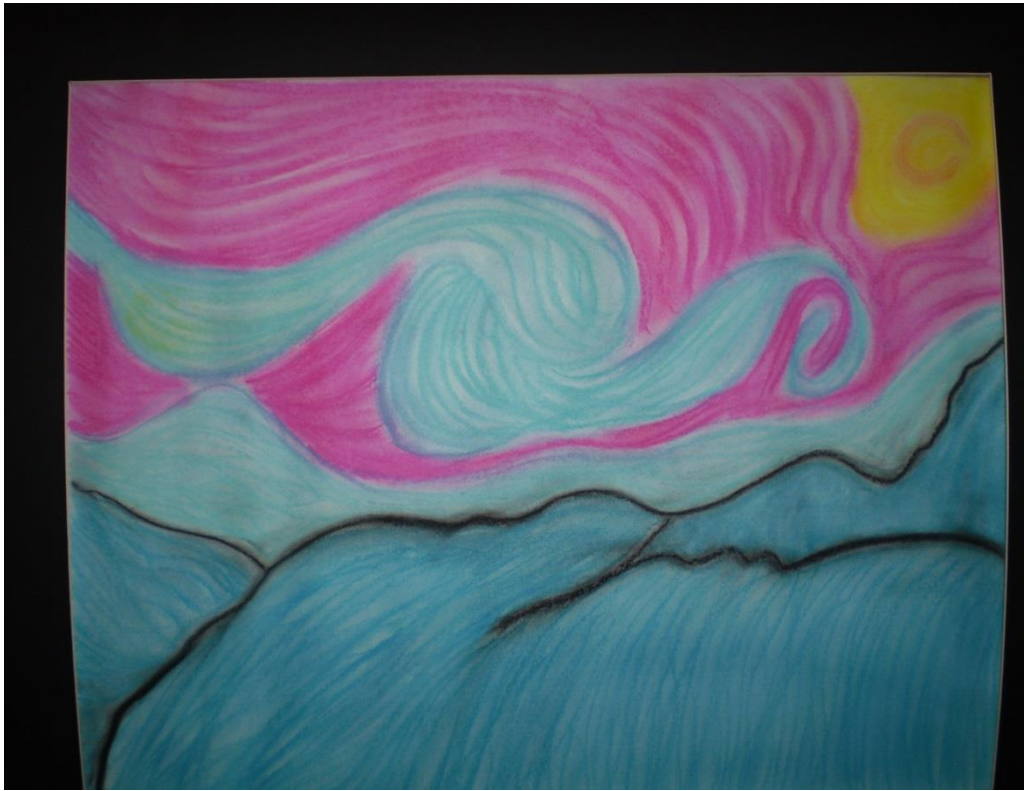
Two days later I awaken from a hellish nightmare. Reaching over to turn on my lamp I see blood on my hands. In my sleep addled state I assume I had a nosebleed in my sleep. I flick the light on. There is too much blood. There is no way

it had come from me. Sam is sitting calmly at my desk. When I ask him what he had done, he told me he had done nothing just as promised. He tells me that he had taken my body like he had many times before. Anytime he had written to me before I learned sign, it was him controlling my hands. Anytime he had moved objects, it had been me under his power. He made me see him doing it all. He didn't want me to know he had that power over me.

Sam tells me that Janet wasn't the first murder "we" had committed. The few close friends I had when I was younger had died in strange accidents. He was very careful not to let suspicion point toward us. He didn't want anyone to come between us. He wanted me all to himself. He tells me that he is all I need. For the first time, I truly fear Sam. I sit on the edge of my bed in a frightened stupor. I know he will kill again. No telling how many times he had already killed. I must be locked up. I can't let him kill more innocent people. I run out of my room, headed for my parent's room. I get to the end of the hall before he catches me. He grabs me by the throat and arm and drags me back into my room. I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror. It's my hands around my throat. I try to stop, but I have no power over myself. Sam throws me onto the bed and pins me. My vision fades as I "see" Sam strangling me.

The next morning, Dylan's parents call for him to come to breakfast. Getting no response, his mother goes up to his room to wake him up. She opens his door and sees he is not in his bed. She sees a stain on the bed and lifts the covers. A large blood stain spans the bed. Panicking, she yells for her husband. He runs up to her and they both follow a trail of blood leading to the closet. When they open the door, Dylan's mother lets out a bloodcurdling scream. She collapses onto the floor in front of the cold body of her son. Dylan's wrists are cut all the way to the crook of his elbows, bone and muscle exposed. His face is lifted up in a joyous smile.

The Dylan's parents hold each other and cry shamelessly. They blamed themselves for not seeing he needed help sooner. Silently sobbing, the father calls the police. They have to tell them about all the Dylan's problems. They tell all about Sam and the Journal. They leave out one part though. Something they never even told their son. When the Dylan's mother was a child, she had a Mute brother that killed himself in the same way. He had slit his wrists all the way to the elbows and he had done it with a smile on his face. Her brother's name was Sam.



Cotton Candy Sunrise by *Megan Goff*

Congress

by Yasmina Choate

When roosters climb up on a soapbox,
they cease to behave like alarm clocks.
They crow all the day long
when right and when wrong.
After all, they're nothing but cocks.

Night: The Ties that Bind and the Ties that Break

by Megan Goff

Elie Weisel's book *Night* recounts Weisel's experiences as a prisoner in the Nazi concentration camps during World War II. During Weisel's time as a prisoner, he witnessed the effects of many different father and son relationships. The father and son relationships were both helpful and harmful.

Weisel's relationship with his own father was at times very helpful. Weisel and his father saved each other's lives a few times. An example of this would be during the time that Weisel and his father, along with other prisoners, were being deported to Buchenwald from Buna, and Weisel's father saved him from being strangled by a fellow prisoner. In addition, Weisel prevented his father from being thrown from the train with the dead. They also provided food and comfort for one another. During their first days in the camps, Weisel's father gave his son his rations of food, and in his father's last days, Weisel gave up food he desperately needed to try and save his dying father. Lastly they provided each other with a reason to endure. Being together, having one another, made them stronger and helped them not to give up on living. "My father's presence was the only thing that stopped me... He was running at my side, out of breath, at the end of his strength, at his wit's end. I had no right to let myself die. What would he do without me? I was his only support" (Weisel 82). All in all, I believe that Weisel's and his father's relationship was helpful and beneficial to both father and son.

Although at times Weisel's and his father's relationship was harmful, Weisel and his father had to watch each other being beaten. This caused them both pain and guilt for not being able to stop the other's pain. They also had the burden of having to care for and look after each other. They gave up desperately needed food to keep the other strong. Weisel risked his own safety to stay by his father's side in the camps and during the forced march to Buchenwald. Even though for the most part Weisel's and his father's relationship was helpful, it at times resulted in hardships.

In addition to the relationship between Weisel and his father, other father and son relationships are shown in *Night*. These relationships seem to be predominantly harmful to the parties involved. The first of the relationships shown is that of a Buna pipel and his father. The pipel was beating his own father because he could not make his bed correctly. As his father cried, the young boy shouted at him and threatened him. The next of the relationships was Rabbi Eliahou and his son. During the forced march, Rabbi Eliahou came around to all of the men to ask if they had seen his son. Weisel told Rabbi Eliahou that he had not seen his son but later remembered seeing Rabbi Elihou's son running out in front of the men, purposefully leaving his old and slow father behind, maybe even to die, to save himself. Another example given is that of a father and son in Weisel's train car during the evacuation of Buchenwald. As they were stopped somewhere, men began to throw bread into the cars to watch the starving men fight to the death for the meager crumbs. The

men in Weisel's car fought for the bread, but one man managed to get a small piece and escape the huddle with it only to be attacked by his own son for it. The father calls to the son telling him this he is hurting him, killing him even, but the son does not listen. He continues to fight for the bread until his father is dead, until he had killed him. He then, in turn, is killed for the meager crumbs of bread that he shed his own father's blood for. These relationships are overwhelmingly harmful to the sanity and survival of both father and son.

The relationships detailed in *Night* are both helpful and harmful, but are for the most part a harmful thing. Fathers and sons abandoned each other, abused each other, and killed each other during this time. The things they saw and the things they experienced were so shattering that they could even sever the ties that bind, the ties of blood and of family, the ties of a father and a son.

Work Cited

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Lake Texoma at Sunset by *Russell Kilpatrick*

My Solar Wind

by Shawwna Elmore

Chichiue, do you hear
Hahaue drifting near?
A place for us to stay;
A place to get away;
A heart clotted with scars;
A void dotted with stars;
This is where I keep my solar wind.

A flash of heat under skin;
Abandoned memories flooding in.
The pain and suffering eats away
My still life painting of that day.
With sharpened point cut hole of cold.
Time and mass begin to fold.
This is where I keep my solar wind.

And at the thought, a tear boils hot,
Evaporates, and then forgot.
A sickening, gut-wrenching little tune;
The hypnotic discord of the moon.
But, knowing that the path is clear,
And knowing that you both are near,
This is where I keep my solar wind.

And though the day ravages my soul,
And though the years have taken their toll,
I'll not runaway anymore,
But gladly except what's in store.
For these broken parts were meant to mend.
So I shall live until the end.
This is where I keep my solar wind.

Becoming Chalee

by Chalee Groves

At the young age of thirteen, I was in seventh grade. I was getting my feet wet in the transition from a little girl to a young woman. I was painfully shy, but my group of friends definitely weren't, so that helped. I had made two wonderful discoveries – one was a little thing called mascara, and the other was jeans that hugged my quickly changing body. I was in the good ol' days, though I was unaware of it then. I griped about the fact that earning my allowance meant keeping straight A's and making sure my chores were done. I didn't even realize how easy I had it. I had not a care in the world, and I was certainly oblivious to the fact that the smallest of decisions could and soon would affect my life so drastically.

The school I attended from Kindergarten to graduation day was in the small town of Okemah, Oklahoma. We were all born and raised there, and our young minds were naïve to life outside of ours – that is, life outside of our "Okie" ways. Needless to say, when a couple of new kids moved to our school from California, it was like two shiny, new toys on Christmas morning. We were all amazed. I built a friendship with the new girl pretty quickly. We talked about our similarities and our differences. We both liked Fall Out Boy, but "y'all" and "pop" to me was "you guys" and "soda" to her. Getting to know Drea had completely taken my mind off of her older brother who had been roaming the same hallways for several months now. I don't know when it happened, but he had noticed me, and was about to turn my world upside down.

I walked down the stairs outside the cafeteria, closely following my new friend. She grabbed my wrist and pulled me to the corner of the building. She looked around to make sure no one else was around and then said, "Do you like my brother?" That shyness I mentioned earlier was getting the best of me because I can remember blushing when she went on to say, "Because he thinks you're hot."

The split seconds after she asked me was one of pure decision making. I could've easily blown it off and went on about my day, but did I? No. In seventh grade, the new boy thinking I was hot was a big deal. Naturally, this consumed my mind for the rest of the day, and I was looking for him every time the bell rang.

It wasn't long after when I saw him face to face. He was walking up the stairs to go to lunch and I met eyes with him as I was walking down. Of course, I didn't say anything to him – He thought I was hot, so talking to him was out of the question due to my unnecessary nervousness. Anxiety aside, I looked at him for several seconds longer as we passed each other. I couldn't help but notice all of the smallest details about him that were just drawing me to him. He had big, brown eyes that were framed with long, thick eyelashes. Being mostly Mexican gave him the most beautiful tan-year-round complexion. As he walked on by, I couldn't help but notice that he smelled so good. As if I needed a little more evidence to prove that he was

perfect, he got my number from Drea that night, and it had begun. He sure had a way with words, and I was hooked in no time at all – I had met Rob.

Our little crush turned into puppy love before I knew it. I was still pretty nervous around him, but after we both made it to high school that faded away. I was all about him. I was young and naïve, so I believed in fairy tale love back then. Every little girl does, I think. I was sure that I'd met my prince charming. His sister and I were the best of friends, and Rob and I were in love, this had to be my fairy tale, right? As most good things do, this “happy all the time” feeling came to an end. We'd fight and break up, then kiss and make up over and over again. He would be so sweet for a while, and then one day it was like a completely different person. A person that was very mean and hateful, and enjoyed putting me down. I'd forgive him, of course. I was caught up in believing that he was my first love, so he had to be my last love. He sure knew how to push my buttons, but at the end of the day, he was the only one I wanted to make it all better again. The problem was – he knew that.

Stop, Chalee! I wish I could go back as a 20-year-old woman and scream at my former 15-year-old self. What I didn't realize was the chain reaction, roller-coaster love that I was getting myself into. My very first decision to get back together with Rob was an easy one. I loved him so much, and getting back with him was a thousand times easier than mending my broken heart on my own, but the easy way and the right way are usually two very different paths.

By this time in our lives, I was a sophomore, Rob was a junior. Getting driver's licenses meant first date night by ourselves. We used his parents' truck, and went to the movies and out to eat. We took a dozen cheesy, kiss-me-on-the-cheek, first date pictures, and he gave me his Powerlifting State ring to wear. I know, gag. We were back together for what seemed like the millionth time, but it was as if we never skipped a beat. We stayed together this time for just shy of two years.

The end of junior year brought me to a huge bump in the road. My “meant to be” and I were fighting more than ever because he was a senior, about to go out into the world, and I was left behind. He wanted to go out and party until all hours of the morning with his friends, like seniors do, and I didn't get to go. I was always pissed when he'd ditch me for a party, and it only made him more of a jerk. He'd go out and his phone would coincidentally “die” and I wouldn't hear from him until the next day. Which is why I was at home in bed when he met a cute girl at a party. There were pictures of them together on Facebook the next morning, which is how I found out about her. I was livid, he said it was nothing – blah, blah, blah. Long story short, he ended up dating her for a while, and I didn't see or speak to him for a whole year. I was DONE. I gained back all the friends that have been absent through the story. Absent, because they didn't exist. Rob consumed my life for so long that I'd lost contact with everyone, including his sister. Now, I was on top of the world. I was the big senior and he was long gone, or so I thought.

Chalee, don't look back. I should've slapped his face when he spoke to me for the first time after all that time, but did I? Of course not. I was at a critical point in my life, but it is a little too late for realizing that now. I made many decisions to push other guys out of my life, simply because they were getting too close. At least, that sounded like a good excuse to cover up the real reason – they weren't Rob. I found myself playing games with them, as if I wanted to do it back to someone because it had been done to me. But I was never satisfied. They didn't owe me anything – Rob was the one who was supposed to have been there for me. Rob was also the one who wasn't. If I would've made the decision to let go, it would've saved me from coming up with countless excuses for why I couldn't hang out with the guys that were interested. More importantly, if I had let one of those nice guys mend my wounds, it may have eliminated the train-wreck I was headed for.

As I said before, all good things usually come to an end. It wasn't long before Rob's newfound "good thing" wasn't near as good as he thought. I was vulnerable, and quite frankly an idiot, which explains why my heart skipped a beat when his attention was back on me. No, I didn't dive right in head first, but I sure didn't say what I should've said to him – things I won't mention here. I found myself giving into his charm, little by little. Soon enough, after going against everyone who tried to keep me away from it, including my parents, we were together once again. A couple months passed, and we were happy as ever. We had been away from each other for a year, so it had become a matter of falling in love all over again. I put up with the fact that my parents were only "putting up" with him because they really wanted to rip his head off. Which is so not what I wanted from the relationship between my boyfriend and my family. House hunting came into the picture, and talk of engagement rings was a frequent conversation between us. We found a little house in Okemah on a Thursday evening, called the landlord, met with her, and by Friday morning we were approved. All we had to do was sign the lease.

Chalee, use your head. Although it was only a year ago, I was unimaginably insane to think this was a good idea. Once again, the split second of signing that dotted line sent me directly into a whole new level of decision making. I made the decision of moving out of my parent's house, where food, water, gas, and electric were just part of the territory. I made the decision to put not only my heart, but my whole life in the hands of a man who had hurt me countless times. I made the decision to jump. My "jumping" was equivalent to jumping off a cliff into shark infested waters. At least – it hurt just as bad, and it was equally stupid. Things in our new house were great – for the first month. I was having fun playing house girlfriend while my man went to work. He loved coming home to me just as much as I loved being there for him to come home to. Apparently, I was right when I thought things couldn't get more perfect because they soon went downhill. He'd come home and sit down, no hug or kiss for me, even though I'd waited all day to see him. I'd clean the house, do both of our laundry, take care of the dogs, and cook dinner. Modern day June Cleaver, basically. And what'd I get when he walked in? Nothing. I knew he was tired, and he reassured me of it when I'd ask him what was wrong. Little things like that began to turn into big things within those next few months. His distant

behavior began to turn into that mean, hateful Rob I remembered vividly. We rarely stayed at the house, and it was becoming apparent that he didn't care about spending any time with me. We would sit at his mom's all night long but we never saw my parents, hardly ever. He soon got a new job as a floor hand on a drilling rig, which put him working out of town for two weeks, and then two weeks at home with me. At least, I was hoping some of it would be spent with me. When he'd come home I'd run outside to meet him, beside myself with excitement to get a, "hey babe." I'd get all dressed up so we could go out, only to find out that he'd invited his friend along. When it came time to go, I was always expected to sit in the back seat. I had become the third wheel in my own relationship, and it was getting old – fast. The downhill spiral was not over yet. The smallest of conflicts turned into huge screaming matches that always ended with me crying myself to sleep later that night. He didn't care who was around, or how humiliating it was for me to get spoken to like a dog. Engagement rings were the farthest thing from our minds at this point. It was hard to swallow, and it slapped me in the face really quick – we were nothing but roommates anymore.

Come on, leave him, Chalee. I woke up every day in a horrible mood, even though I was waking up next to the man who I thought I would spend forever with. I woke up angry to my very core, every day. I was mad inside, and that's never good. I loved him, but I hated him even more. Every day was a decision to stay or go. I knew staying would only make me happy if Rob decided to magically be a loving boyfriend again, and I knew that wasn't going to happen. After all, how many times had I been through one of his little hot-then-cold spells? More than enough. I also knew that leaving meant rebuilding my life from the ground up – once again.

The last day I lived with Rob started like any other day. I woke up, got dressed, and continued my internal conflict – should I stay or go? I had no idea that it was actually the first day of the rest of my life. A huge argument between the two of us, in front of his family I might add, ended with him saying, "We're taking a break, Chalee." I knew he's been waiting so long to say those words – it was written all over his face. I went to our house, packed a bag, and spent the next two days living out of it at my friend's house. I didn't want to tell my parents about what had happened because I knew it wouldn't be good. I was still hanging on to that little thread of hope that things would change. On the third day since our big fight, Rob finally decided to contact me. I got a text that said, "We can talk later, and I'll give you some money." This was my sign. I had ran around practically homeless for two days, and he acted as if he was giving me the privilege of talking to him, which finally gave me the strength to stand up for myself. I told him everything that I had held in for so long. I called my momma and told her I was coming home – for good. A few of my friends, his sister included, helped me move all of my stuff out of his house and back home. My momma held me while I sobbed, and I remember making up my mind right then and there – I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and let it go.

For the first time, I was aware of the huge decision I was making, but this time I knew that it was the right one. Of course, it was quite an adjustment moving back

home, and once again it was a ground-shaking, life-changing decision. Like any other breakup, it was hurtful and confusing. I didn't understand why my previous decisions had felt so right when they couldn't have been more wrong. Why had I spent hours asking God to send me what was meant to be, and all along he was trying – I was the one who kept chasing the wrong one. At the same time, I was hurting, but my heart felt lighter than ever. I wasn't leaving Rob in hopes that he'd change his mind about being so mean to me, and I wasn't waiting for him to come crawling back – apologizing for the thousandth time. I was leaving because I was done being Chalee-and-Rob, or Chalee-without-Rob. I was Chalee. Just Chalee – for the first time, I had found myself.

Nearly five months later, here I am. I wake up happy – everyday. I go on dates, and talk to other guys, but I have a newfound attitude towards my love life. My twenties are about accomplishing my dreams, and goals – both personal and educational. I figured out that getting better is much better than getting bitter. I've let go of the anger inside of me. I've made the decision to forgive Rob for everything that's happened because I know that happiness cannot be achieved while hanging onto grudges, and we are actually on good terms now. As I said previously, I've made the decision to jump. However, this time I'm not jumping into some crazy decision that practically screams "NO" at me – I'm jumping into my own skin. Through all of this, I've learned that life is a compilation of tiny decisions that serve as a tour guide, directing us on our individual paths. I'm very happy to say that my decision to let go hasn't led me to a new path, but caused me to fall in love with the one I'm on. It may be rough and mangled in places, but it's just that which makes it beautiful.



Going Somewhere by *Megan Goff*

The Scarlet Trials

by Tiffany Kelley

Her name was Scarlet, as well as her cheeks and lips
Amazon tall, sapphire eyes, blonde hair hugging her hips

Being desired was her worst flaw, throwing away men like trash
One by one they came to her door, pronouncing their love so brash

Although her middle name was Marie, some might say it was Vain
With men chasing her like dogs would rabbits; she was never to be obtained

_____ would be the death of her, his admiration too strong
No one considered this a crime, no one thought of it as wrong

When the officers found her Crucified, they just turned their head
Even the owners of polished badges, endeavored hers truly to their bed

In this town a funeral was considered tragedy, but with Scarlet it was farce
Angry mobs of wives, daughters and mothers celebrating, now that her presence
was sparse

Her name was Scarlet, as well as her cheeks, lips and blood
Amazon tall, sapphire eyes, blonde hair drenched in Scarlet after the flood

Pages from Brad's Diary

by Megan Goff

Dear Diary:

Diary if the guys on the football team ever found out that I keep you they would bury me. My therapist said this was what I had to do to get over my social anxiety disorder. Isn't it enough I joined the football team? He also mentioned dating. Now Diary, I don't believe you have ever been on a first date. So let me tell you what's what. First dates suck. They really do. But Kevin, you know Kevin, my therapist. He said I should just try going on a date, so I did.

First, I asked out this smokin' hot blonde from Chemistry. She told me her college boyfriend would beat me up in a dark alley if I even looked at her again. I decided that it was best not to. Then, I asked out this brainy brunette from Algebra. She said she doesn't date jocks – too dumb. Can you believe that? I'm not that dumb. I'm not even a real jock. Real jocks don't ride the bench. So, I went to the library. I know I'm not supposed to go there anymore, but I just wanted to read. While I was sitting there minding my own business some red-head sits down next to me. She asked me if I played for the football team. I have to admit Diary I was flattered. I told her yes and introduced myself. You'll never guess what happened next. She asked me if I would like to go and get sushi with her. Now, I was not exactly sure what sushi was at the time, but all Kevin said was to get a date. She was offering so I accepted. I picked her up today at the library like she asked. I know. I know, it's weird, but I guess she didn't want me to know where she lived. I pulled up to the curb where she was standing. She was wearing capris. What's up with that? All the star players get mini skirt wearing cheerleaders. I guess if you warm the bench all you get are paranoid, red-heads who wear capris and flip-flops.

Next we went to the restaurant. Diary did you know that sushi is raw fish? Well I certainly didn't. Let's just say it was disgusting. The date wasn't a total bust though. The faces I made while gagging must have been funny because she couldn't stop laughing. I had a good time. When I dropped her off back at the library she said she'd like to go out again soon. I told her I'd like that too. There is only one problem. I have no idea what her name is or where she lives. Oh well. I guess I'm back to sitting alone in the library, which is how I got stuck writing to you in the first place.

--Brad out.

Haiku

by Yasmina Choate

Easy Math

Memorize one plus
one is two. Unless fleas breed...
Then it's a billion.

Hunting Deer

Sky's bruised: pink, grey, blue.
Wind stopped. Birds chirp. Still I wait.
Deer are elusive.

Birth Defect

Mother's gaze adores.
The infant opens her eyes.
The screaming begins.



Sunset Highway by *Russell Kilpatrick*

The Anonymous Mask
by Brionna Duke

Cast of Characters

Eris (means goddess of discord and destruction) female

Kali (means goddess of destruction) female

Carey (means dark) male

Hadrian (means dark one) male

Lilith (means spirit of the night) female

Manson (murderer) male

Act I

Scene I

High school cafeteria on the first day back from summer break.

ERIS, KALI, CAREY, and HADRIAN pass LILITH and MANSON on their way to their usual lunch table.

ERIS

Well, well, look who we have here. I figured you two would have crawled back into the hole you came from after the hell we gave you last year.

Kali

Maybe we didn't make it clear enough for them, ERIS. (SHE glares at LILITH.) This school isn't for people like *you*. Haven't you noticed? No one cares who you are, no one appreciates your presence, and no one would miss you if they never saw you again. You're *nothing*. A waste of space.

(By now most of the student body is watching with amusement. LILITH and MANSON remain silent; nervously averting their eyes and shifting uncomfortably)

ERIS

If the two of you thought last year was bad, just wait. We're taking your return as a challenge. We'll have you begging for mercy by the end of the first semester. Trust me. Have a great first day now.

(She gives them a wink and smirks as the group saunters off to their table while several students standing by give them a small applause for their performance.)

(MANSON and LILITH sit quietly with their heads downcast until everyone goes back to their lunch and conversations.)

LILITH

I hate them. I hate them so much. Why can't they just leave us alone? We did nothing to them. We've minded our own business since our very first day and they still single us out. I can't take another day of this, MANSON, much less another school year. You know I almost didn't make it last year. You barely stopped me from making that noose and just ending it all...

MANSON

Nothing good comes from taking the coward way out, sister. That just means they won. ERIS is just threatened by you. You're smart, beautiful, and have 10 times the personality. She thinks just because she comes from money, she can run everyone's lives. She has this whole school under her thumb and no one will stand up to her or KALI because of their boyfriends CAREY and HADRIAN. Remember that guy they put in the hospital last year for flipping KALI off?

LILITH

Yeah, how could I forget? No one even did anything about it. All the teachers turned their heads and ERIS'S dad got them off of any charges. We have to do something. Someone has to put them in their place; show them that the whole world doesn't revolve around them.

MANSON

Do you remember last year when they went to ERIS'S cabin at the lake for their "end of summer" bash, and all they talked about in class was how hard they partied and did whatever they wanted?

LILITH

Um, yes, but-

MANSON

(HE quickly cuts her off to get to his point.) I heard they're going again this weekend. I remember them saying they could have gotten away with murder out there; in the middle of nowhere.

LILITH

What does this have to do with anything?

MANSON

They said they could have gotten away with *murder*, LILITH. Think about it... It would be so easy. Four teenagers stranded out by a lake with no one around to help them. Sounds like a perfect time for pay back to me.

(LILITH freezes and stares wide eyed as she realizes what HE means. It takes her several beats to find her voice.)

LILITH

(HER voice is barely above a whisper, but there is excitement in it.) Brother, are you insane? We could never get away with such a thing, and even if we could, how in the world would we pull it off? There are only two of us, and four of them.

MANSON

We'll use fear. People like them tend to be weak when they're afraid. This will take some planning, but we have until next weekend for sure. We'll hear them talk about going up there and we'll follow them and wait for night to fall. Then we have all night to give back what they've been giving us. Are you in?

LILITH

Of course I'm in. At this point, it's either us or them because I can't stand the humiliation anymore. Besides, I want those bitches begging for my mercy.

Act I

Scene II

ERIS's cabin at the lake.

ERIS, KALI, CAREY, and HADRIAN *arrived late afternoon and are lounging around the*

living room after a day on the lake. The sun has just sunk behind the horizon.

ERIS

Can you guys believe we're seniors this year? I have my best friends and boyfriend, I'm making perfect grades, I have everything I could ever want. My life is so perfect. Well, almost perfect. The only thing that brings me down is LILITH and her stupid brother. I don't understand why they won't just fall off the face of the earth. I can't stand the sight of them.

KALI

I can't stand them either. The couple of losers. But hey, at least you've been able to make an example out of them. We totally run that school. Everyone at that place is so pathetic!

(They all burst out laughing in agreement.)

CAREY

(After HE catches his breath.) Hey, do you guys remember their first week of school when I invited MANSION to play basketball in the gym, and I got everyone to beat up on him for fouling me and he walked off almost crying? That was priceless.

HADRIAN

Yeah, we showed that little punk. Serves him right. I've never liked the way he looks at us, like he's better than us or something.

ERIS

(Gives a little chuckle) Babe, calm down. He's not even close to your level. He's trash. They both are, and that's all they'll ever be.

KALI

Yeah, she's right, and-

(SHE is interrupted by something hitting the window behind them. They all whip around and stare at it)

ERIS

Um, what the hell was that?

CAREY

It's probably just-

(Something hits the window again and cuts him off. Everyone is staring wide eyed and anxious.)

HADRIAN

(Gets up to go take a look out the window, CAREY follows him.) You guys, quit freaking out it's probably an animal or something.

CAREY

Yeah, there's nothing out there girls.

(They walk back to sit down and again hear a thump on the window, this time much louder. The girls let out a scream and are close to tears. CAREY and HADRIAN go to the window to look out once more.)

HADRIAN

ERIS, go look out that window that's closer to the kitchen. Hurry!

ERIS

(She makes her way to the window and stands with the curtain drawn back, looking out.) HADRIAN... there's something, or someone, out there...

(KALI makes a small whimpering noise. HADRIAN and CAREY rush to ERIS and look out the window and find a dark figure standing near the tree line.)

CAREY

What the hell is that?

HADRIAN

It looks like a person standing out there with a mask on. Is someone playing a joke on us?

CAREY

Does anyone even know where this place is?

ERIS

If this is a joke, it sure isn't funny. Nobody should know where we're at except my parents. I've been sure to keep it that way so shit like this doesn't happen- Jeez! Why is it just standing there, looking in here? What is up with that mask? I've never seen anything like that... it looks like a cross between a doll and a clown.

KALI

(Panicked.) I'm about to call your parents, ERIS. Where's my phone? *(Frantically begins to search for her cell phone.)*

ERIS

KALI, go in mine and HADRIAN's room; my phone is on its charger by the bed.

(KALI runs to the other room, only to return empty handed shortly after.)

KALI

It's not there! The charger is plugged in, but no phone. Are you sure that's where you put it?

HARDRIAN

For Pete's sake, everyone calm down. This is obviously someone trying to be funny, so, CAREY and I are going to go tell him what a kick we're all getting out of this. We need to go to the lake and get our phones out of the boat anyway.

ERIS

(Runs her hand through her hair, exasperated and scared.) Please don't go out there. That's the stupidest mistake everyone makes in a horror movie!

HADRIAN

(Gives a little laugh.) Babe, calm down. This isn't a horror movie. It's some prick trying to scare us. Besides, we need our phones since the two of you have went and

lost yours. Your dad keeps a gun out here for emergencies, right? I'll take the gun with me; just in case. We'll be fine. Keep the doors locked, we'll be right ba-

KALI

It's gone! Whatever was standing out there is gone! You guys please don't go out there. I don't want us to be in here by ourselves. What if it hits the window again?

CAREY

You girls just calm down; we'll take care of it and be back before you know it.

(The girls give pleading looks as Hadrian finds the gun and the two boys walk out the back door and head toward the lake.)

KALI

This is so scary. What kind of freak does this? I hope CAREY and HADRIAN teach whoever it is a-

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!!!

(ERIS and KALI freeze and stare at each other.)

KALI

Did that come from the front door?

ERIS

Yes, I think it did. Let's go look.

(They creep quietly to the front door. Just as they reach it another loud bang hits the window in the living room, then another loud bang on the side of the house. The girls scream and start to run as the power goes out.)

KALI

ERIS! What do we do? I can't see anything!

ERIS

We have battery-operated lights in the closet in the living room. They won't put off much light, but it won't be pitch dark at least. We can light some candles too.

(They make their way back to the other side of the room and start turning on the little lights and lighting candles. Suddenly, HADRIAN bursts through the back door, breathing heavily.)

ERIS

Oh my god! HADRIAN! What happened out there? Where's CAREY?!

HADRIAN

I don't know. I lost him when we were running back. Someone is after us. Our phones were gone, the boat motor was wrecked, and then as we headed back we heard someone coming after us. We took off running, but I think they caught CAREY; I never heard him yell. I didn't realize he was missing until I was almost to the door.

(KALI is covering her mouth and crying silently, when she suddenly stops and stares at the coffee table.)

ERIS

KALI, what is it? What are you look-?

Oh. Oh my god... is that your phone, snapped in half? That means... that means that *thing* has been in here.

HADRIAN

Okay, we have to get out of here. I want the two of you to take this gun and go hide in that closet. Don't come out until I come back. I'm going to go see if the car is working.

(HE gives ERIS a swift kiss before heading out the door. The girls hide in the closet, and soon can hear heavy, slow, footsteps across the hardwood floors accompanied with slow, deliberate breathing. The intruder has a large kitchen knife and is coming toward the closet door. ERIS get her gun ready, but the masked figure turns and goes the other way.)

KALI

(Quietly) Do you think he's gone?

(Suddenly, a person is coming swiftly toward the closet and just as the door flings open, ERIS fires the gun and the figure drops to the ground.)

ERIS

(Slowly comes out of the closet and looks at the body. Recognition sweeps over her and she lets out a bloody scream.) NO! HADRIAN!!! I killed him! I shot him!
(Continues weeping and wailing.)

KALI

(In shock, she quietly mutters.) ERIS, look. That thing. It's looking at us... and there's another one. There's two, ERIS. There's two of them.

ERIS

WHAT DO YOU WANT!!! WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM US!

ANONYMOUS I

(The masked figure speaks after an eerie pause.) We wanted to kill you. All of you. However, it looks like you've already done half the work for us... Murderer.

ERIS

(With a trembling voice.) What do you want from us? We did nothing to you!

ANONYMOUS II

(Chuckles underneath the mask.) Oh, dear ERIS, KALI. You did everything to us. You're the reason I almost took my own life. You're the reason I can barely show my face at school. You're the reason my brother and I barely make it through each day.

(As realization dawns on the girls, the figures take their masks off to reveal their faces.)

ERIS

(With a shaky voice, chokes back her tears.) I'm sor-

LILITH

SHUT UP, ERIS! We're running this show. It's not an apology that I'm after. Your time ran out to make things right a long time ago. I don't care if I rot in a prison cell. I want to hear you beg for mercy. I want you to feel all of my pain. Our pain.

(They start walking toward the girls.)

KALI

Please don't do-

(Their pleas are cut off by the siblings reaching them and begin letting their fury out on them.)

Act I

Scene III

As the morning sun rises, and the living room is lit up, blood paints the walls and floors of the cabin. Three lifeless bodies lie on the floor. The siblings are standing in the wake of what they have accomplished.

MANSON

What had to be done, is done. They got exactly what they deserved. They'll never bother us again.

LILITH

I can't get their screams out of my head.

MANSON

Don't have any regrets. It'll get easier, as time goes on.

LILLITH

Regrets? Brother, you misunderstood. I can't get their screams out of my head. I'm going to sleep so peacefully, knowing they're not in this world anymore.

(MANSON smiles a slow, agreeing smile. They pick up their masks, and walk out of the blood stained room.)

The Muse

by Gregory Don Votaw

All people great and small,
Become blocked by that great wall.
Lack of creativity, lack of amenity,
Oh the need to seek the serenity,
To know and behold that one creation,
That One - That Only - Inspiration.
It will come to one you see,
The one who finds themselves to be,
Their own - their one - identity.
For everyone has that one desire,
That hunt - that spark - to dare inspire,
For it may not appear, but to amuse,
Your one - your only - Given MUSE.
That is what we dare to seek,
The very hour we seem so bleak.
Our thoughts - our joys - our blessed calls -
Oh they greet us in our abandoned halls.
She drives - She pushed -She motivates -
Our every whim, She doth dictates.
When She's through, oh don't delay,
Because that's the hour - your lighted way.
Thanks be to Her, your saving grace,
Or be it ever to Him in your Heavenly place.
Muse, oh Muse, you came at last,
May this moment not forever be cast.

The Shadow of Sin

by Andrew Yoakum

The alarm clock sounded half past seven like it did every morning. Mr. Collins began his day normally enough. He would take a shower and brush his teeth as was routine, then eat breakfast. He'd go outside to fetch the morning paper where he would meet the paper boy. Paper boy: "how are you doing today Mr. Collins?!" Mr. Collins: "Oh very well my lad. Thank you for asking!" Paper boy: "You're welcome sir, and tell Mrs. Collins I said hello as well!" Mr. Collins: "I will my boy!" Mr. Collins smiled and headed back into the house to catch up on the latest events.

Why is this conversation relevant you might ask? Well Mrs. Collins has been dead for 9 years now and you're never going to guess who killed her. It was our very own Mr. Collins. See He kind of had a problem. He loved to kill, and he was very good at it, never leaves a trace of blood or any evidence. Too bad Mrs. Collins could see through this false front He would put up every day or she would still grace this fine world we live in.

Mr. Collins finished reading the morning paper and headed back into the spare room. He tapped a certain place on the wall and opened up a hidden cabinet. In this cabinet set 32 vials of blood neatly individually placed alphabetically. All of these represented each person he had killed including his dear wife. While this would floor us with the mere thought of so much death by one man. It brought happiness to Mr. Collins, these were his trophies. But all good things have to come to an end and he has decided to retire from his days of crime. Just relax and travel the world. He had pushed his luck far enough.

At that moment there was a knock at the door. He didn't get many visitors these days. He walked to the door and looked through the peep hole. It was Mrs. Harris. Hmm this is weird, (he thought to himself) what could she possibly want? He opened the door, Mr. Collins: "Hello Mrs. Harris, this is quite a surprise. What brings you out here on a lovely day like today?" Mrs. Harris: "Well I thought it would be nice to bring Mrs. Collins some flowers, since she's been so sick and all." Mr. Collins: "Well isn't that nice of you! Yes. Yes of course come on in."

Was it time for one more? Yes, it had to be. Don't want anyone knowing my secret. Mr. Collins: "Why don't you just take a seat and I'll let my wife know you're here." How should I do this? He thought to himself. He thought quickly and came to the conclusion. Tea.

Mr. Collins: "Hey Mrs. Harris would you like some tea while you're waiting on my wife? It shouldn't be too long." Mrs. Harris: "Yes, that sounds lovely."

Mr. Collins went to the kitchen and started the tea and grabbed the Rohypnol. Once the tea was done he grabbed a couple of pills and put them into the tea.

Mr. Collins: "here's your tea Mrs. Harris." Mrs. Harris: "Oh thank you my dear." She started to drink. Mr. Collins: "Goodnight Mrs. Harris. You will be joining my wife soon enough."

Mrs. Harris fell from the chair, landing on the floor. Mr. Harris grabbed her and dragged her to the spare room. He began setting up the usual for such an event. Plastic. Lots and lots of plastic. Then he began. It didn't take him long to take apart Mrs. Harris. She was a small lady and before retiring He was a very good butcher. After he was done he grabbed a vial and filled it with the blood of his latest victim. He then put the body parts into individual bags and took them out to the trunk of his car. As he was walking in he was thinking to himself, Now I am truly done. He opened the door and walked into the spare room which was clean like nothing ever happened, opened the door to the cabinet...a cold chill came over him. They were gone. All of them were gone! Where had they went?! Am I going mad?! Unknown Voice: "Shawn why do u look so scared?" Mr. Collins turned around and saw something that took every bit of color from him...It was his wife, and everybody he had ever killed.

Mr. Collins: "No you aren't real, how could you be?!" Mrs. Collins: "why do you look so surprised?" Mrs. Collins smiled...

That was the last time anyone saw Mr. Collins alive.

A few weeks later some neighbors called the cops to check on him because his newspapers were piling up. The cops broke into the house after many attempts of yelling in vain. They found our dear Mr. Collins face down in his spare room obviously he'd been dead for many days now. They flipped him over and guess what they found? 33 small vials stabbed into the cold corpse

Which is worse? Being caught or living the rest of your life in the shadows of your own sin?

For the Stranger I Love
by Megan Goff

You said we were friends, and I conceded,
Yet every bone within my soul desperately pleaded:
Don't let him go.

I didn't fight you. I couldn't.
Don't know you well enough to know how.
You made your request of me
and beneath your will I did bow.

I cannot bring myself to anger.
We were barely more than strangers.
But I desired you more than words can tell;
And with that same devotion I desire you still.

Your appearance leaves me shaking.
The sound of your voice leaves desires awaking.
My heart is still yours for the taking.

My broken, battered heart beats true;
Its pieces, forever, long for you.
True, I know you not well.
You gave my love ice's chance in Hell.
God, you must wield an ancient tempter's spell.

You said we were friends, and I conceded,
Yet every bone within my soul desperately pleaded:
Don't let him go.

A Hero Lies in You

by Brionna Duke

I remember very clearly the warm June day when my life changed forever. I was sitting in my bedroom watching TV like on any other normal day. When the telephone rang, I saw the caller ID had my doctor clinic's name. I thought to myself, "here it is." Sure enough, I watched my mom out of my bedroom window breakdown and start calling parents to come and get their kids from her daycare. I just continued laying on my bed, waiting as my grandma, dad, and step-dad showed up and stood outside with my mom for hours. How was this possible?

Several months prior, I had begun track practice in the latter half of my freshman year. I had ran track two years before, so it was nothing new to me. Like always, the first day was the hardest, and I was very sore for the next couple of days. One problem that did persist after the rest of my body returned to normal was a weird feeling in my right arm. It felt almost as if I had strained a muscle. I didn't think too much into it; after all, it had happened all the time. Over the next month or two the strained feeling turned into a constant ache. I noticed that when I would throw a football or quickly raise my arm, it would cause a great deal of pain. The ache began keeping me up at night, and when I talked to my coaches, they said I had most likely hurt my rotator cuff. I accepted that and thought it would eventually heal on its own.

By May, I remember several of my guy friends trying to horse around with me by pushing me or lightly punching me in the arm. Whenever any pressure was applied to my shoulder, it would cause very intense pain and it felt like something was being squished. Once I noticed this, I told another coach about it and he took a look. He bent my arm backwards and began flexing the muscles, which made me cry out in pain.

"When you get home, put an ice pack on it for about half an hour." He instructed me. I did as I was told and the next day I found him and said "Dunlap, the ice made my arm hurt worse than ever. I don't know what else to do." He gave me a very strange look and replied "I want to go see a doctor as soon as possible. Don't waste any more time, understand?" I didn't want to add a doctor appointment to my busy schedule, but I complied and went to see a regular physician. He told me to take pain medicine, and that he would go ahead and have me do an x-ray to be safe.

A few days later I was in the middle of my EOI test, and my dad came and picked me up from school. He told me the doctor called and was sending me to a bone specialist to look more closely at my x-ray results. By this point, I was getting nervous. I was thinking I would have to have surgery on my shoulder, or it might be permanently damaged. As I walked into the exam room, I studied my x-ray. I knew from watching different shows that usually any white was not good. Well, I had a lot of white on my shoulder. The doctor walked in, an older gray-haired man. He was

very nice and had me tell him my symptoms while he listened patiently. After I was finished he explained to me that he was not sure what the problem was, so he wanted a second opinion. He referred me to Dr. Smith, an orthopedic oncologist, located in Oklahoma City. She is the only one in the state and considered to be one of the best of her kind. I only needed to have an MRI before I met with her. I didn't know what her specialty meant, but after being referred once again, I had a feeling it must be serious.

Within a couple of days, I found myself at a hospital in Shawnee, getting ready to be put in some huge, alien-like machine. The lady strapped me down and told me I had to be very still for at least 45 minutes so that they could get a good picture of my arm. I wasn't even worried about that it was the IV I was going to have to have that was scaring me to death. Thankfully, she was very skillful at inserting the needle, and it was over before I knew it.

Now, through all of this, I still had no clue cancer was a possibility. So, imagine my shock when one day at lunch a classmate came up to me in the lunch line and said "Brionna, I'm so sorry about your arm."

I smiled and said "Thank you, but what do you mean?" He said "Your dad works with mine and he told him that you may have bone cancer."

I just stared at him. What does a person say to that? My whole world stopped right in the middle of the loud, bustling cafeteria.

I somehow made it to my seat, across from my best friend, and she immediately knew something was wrong by the look on my face. I slowly explained to her what had happened, feeling like I was in a movie. It didn't seem real at all. Our boyfriends had a seat by us and caught on to our mood, and they teased us about being cranky until I explained once again, in a voice that wasn't my own, what happened. We all sat in a stony silence through the rest of the lunch period, not joining in on the laughter of our other friends surrounding us.

A couple of days later, I had my appointment with Dr. Smith. Several members of my family went with me. We sat in the waiting room in a very tense and awkward silence, and none of us knew what to think. This was a place for the elderly with bone disease, not a 15-year-old girl. After what seemed like forever, a very polite male nurse called us back to the exam room. Soon we were visited by Dr. Smith herself, and I told her my symptoms as I studied the MRI and x-ray results hanging up in front of me. When I was finished, she nodded her head and said "See all that white in those results? That's not good. I'm thinking it's either a bone infection, or a tumor, but most likely a tumor."

She went on to explain more, but I froze on the word "tumor." What kind of tumor? Do teenagers even get tumors? Does that mean cancer? Are all tumors cancerous? All of these thoughts were racing through my head, and I don't recall

any more of that appointment. All I know is I was later told I would have to have a biopsy after the last day of school, which was just a few days away.

It took three weeks for the results of the biopsy to come back, but when they did, they were our worst fear. As my dad told me to come into the kitchen and have a seat, I looked at the faces of my grandma, mom, and step-dad and saw they were trying to hide their fear. My little brother had been sent to his room, another sign the news was bad.

Once I took my seat, my dad looked at me and said “Brionna, you have cancer.” I didn’t cry. I just sat there and listened as he explained what little he knew.

I barely remember the rest of the evening. I know I called my best friend and told her. She was a trooper, and not once did she ever cry in front of me or while we were on the phone. Within a couple hours, the whole town knew, and I was getting texts and phone calls by the dozens. Family members came over to show their support, although I can’t recall their kind words. After our world settled down a little and everyone had went to bed, I decided to have some thinking time in the shower. As soon as I shut that bathroom door behind me, I fell to my knees and started weeping. I was so scared. I cried and prayed for hours, constantly asking God what was going to happen to me and how I was going to get through. Suddenly, I had a strong feeling of peace come down over me. In that moment God told me that I was going to be okay. I instantly stopped crying, for the burden of fear and worry was lifted. I couldn’t cry anymore and I knew that I was going to come out of it stronger than ever. For whatever reason, it was just something I had to do.

Over the next couple of weeks I met with my oncologist at OU Children’s Hospital, had multiple scans, and had a port put in. The port was so that I wouldn’t have to have an IV in my arm because chemo can burn through the veins. It connects to the main artery in the heart so that the medicine is pumped through the blood stream at a fast, but safe pace. Plus, the nurse doesn’t have to try to stick a vein every time she needs blood, to give medicine, or fluids. By June 15, 2009, I had my first chemo treatment. It ran for 52 hours straight, and I was in the hospital for three days. I had never been so sick in my life. The sterile smell of the 10th floor mixed with my nausea had me puking every 30 minutes almost from the time the chemo started. I tried many different nausea medicines, but none worked.

After that torture was over, I was free to go home for two weeks. I lost 20lbs during that time. I went from 100lbs to 80lbs. I couldn’t eat anything; I had absolutely no appetite. I had spells where I would almost pass out, and I started losing my hair. I never actually got mouth sores, but I got what they called “ribbon tongue” and my tongue and cheeks would hurt so bad that even when I did have an appetite, I couldn’t bear the pain enough to eat. Then, the nose bleeds started from lack of red blood cells. I thought it couldn’t get any worse until I had my major surgery in August of 2009. Dr. Smith removed my entire humerus bone and shoulder joint and replaced them with a metal rod. I no longer had use of my shoulder, and my way of

life was changed drastically. No more wrestling, riding horses, reaching, pulling, lifting, falling, or anything that might harm my arm. Riding horses was the love of my life. I couldn't imagine myself never being able to ride down an old dirt road with my grandma until the sun went down. I didn't know how to play with my brother without slapping him around a little. I could no longer reach across the table to grab my drink and had to depend on other people to help me with the littlest tasks. I don't want to say I felt useless, but I no longer knew my place. What was going to be the point of my life when everything it was centered on was now nothing but memories?

After the surgery, I began to lose myself. My community had been great, but eventually people move on with their lives. I didn't hear from many of my friends, my boyfriend had pretty much deserted me, and I was all alone in my battle. No one understood what I was going through. The only thing I could do to make it from one day to the next was remember that night in the shower.

It got particularly bad one night after a shorter, but very horrible treatment. I was very ill and weak. I was tired of fighting and tired of puking my guts up. All I wanted was to sleep, and I was getting up every 30 minutes, like every other time. I remember being in that cramped bathroom leaning over the toilet and looking up and thinking, "I can't do this 10 more times. I have 10 more treatments to go, and I can't do it." I saw no light at the end of the tunnel.

Not long after that night I was laying in my little hospital bed trying to choke down some food, when a nurse came in and told me she wanted me to meet someone. She brought in a frail, bald headed girl my age, and we found that we had the same cancer only hers was in her leg. That was the beginning of a very special friendship, and got us both through our last treatments together. Just when I had hit rock bottom, once again God gave me hope. Only this time, it was in the form of a heaven-sent girl named Stevy.

Finally, after being able to talk to someone who understood, I was able to finish with my fist held high. On my last chemo treatment the staff threw me a "No Mo Chemo" party, and it was so awesome. We had cake and pizza. Although I didn't eat any of it, the nurses sure enjoyed it. After that, I had some final scans and tests, then I was able to ring the cancer-free bell on March 9, 2010. What a day that was. I had finally made it to the finish I had envisioned for nine months. My family, and a few favorites of the hospital staff, standing in front of me smiling through tears of joy. I was as about as frail as the human body could withstand, but I felt more empowered than I had ever felt in my life. That day was the beginning of building a whole new me.

Throughout this battle, I found out how strong I really was. It is amazing how strong one can be when being strong is the only choice they have. I not only got through my battle, but I also fought it with a grace that I received continuous praise for. I always had a smile on my face, and I was never bitter nor indulged in a pity party. I knew deep down that it was going to be okay, and it was just a stepping

stone to the differences I was going to make in the lives of others. I have heard countless stories of how my testimony has helped people, and to me, it makes it all worth it. I am stronger in my faith, I believe in myself, and I am making a difference. I wouldn't change what I went through, and I am honored to say I am a cancer survivor.



Mona Lisa Recreation by *Russell Kilpatrick*

Buckets of Rain: A Collection
by Courtney Skelly

Ode to Wandering Spirits

Here's to everything in us:
Broken, lonely, and old.
Here's to all the time wasted
Doing what we're told.
Here's to the selfish people who sucked us of our time.
Here's to every revolving door
And the days we spent in sorrow.
Here's to the money we earned that keeps us poor.
Here's to the tears and the blood and the emptiness.
Here's to the nights spent alone.
Here's to the Suffering and pain.
Here's to all the times our lives were a mess.
Here's to all who hung in there and saw what we had to gain.

Gas Station Breakfast

It's rainy out.
Cold out.
My soul is so tapped out.
All that I've got is this gas station breakfast.
Holding me to the ground.

My car is creaking.
It's pounding and it's knocking.
Bag of Bolts.
My bag of bolts.
Why do I feel so alone?
When did my soul grow so old?
The clouds are hanging low to the ground.

I stare right through you.
And you stare through me.
Now your touch hurts me so.
Why do I have to let you go?
Why can't I breathe?
Just leave me alone.
I'll find my way on my own.
You were never mine from the start.

Dead Grandmas

Waking up in the middle of the night.
No one around.
No one in sight.
Curl up a little closer to the wall,
Try to escape the dread.
But there's nowhere to crawl.
Let a single tear roll down my face.
Wipe it away quickly,
Until there is no trace.

Your tombstone is cold.
I laid my face across it
Before I grew old.
I'm so far gone.
Memories skip across my brain
Of everything I've done wrong.

I heard you smile.
I heard you mumble.
Things I haven't heard in a while.
Remember when we spoke?
Remember when we walked?
Our little talks never missed a note.
I remember mumbling on and on,
About our friends and dead grandmas,
Mumbling about what was gone.

Bucket of Rain

Walking down the street.
My heart skips a beat.
Clinging to a bucket of rain.
I feel myself going insane.
Falling down the steps.
I scream all the secrets I've kept.
Drugs coursing through my veins.
Holding onto my bucket of rain.
Bloody, broken, dead, soul.
I have nothing to show.
Meet me at the river.
Help me kill my liver.
Find me floating in a bottle of cheap wine.
Being fucking lost is my only crime.

The Sorcerer's Sacrifice: Chapter 1

by Rayshell Clapper

CHAPTER ONE

“All right, Ranac, you ready?” Lilina whispered to her dwarf eagle. They had been stalking a large pheasant for hours, waiting for the perfect opportunity to hit it. Ranac had spotted the large bird first earlier that morning. Lilina saw the sign that he spotted something and immediately used her mind's eye to see through his eyes. She rocked her head back and forth with eyes closed until she gained contact with Ranac. And then she saw the bird, hidden deep in a bush. She called Ranac back to her, and they made their way to their pray. Now their target lay nestled in that same brown bush lining the trunk of an orange-shaded leaf tree. The trees of Adirona blossomed leaves that were more than just one color. From the bottom to top, the leaves ranged in shades of a single color, starting with the lightest shade at the top and ending with the darkest shade at bottom. The one that Lilina and her bird lay waiting under cast an angelic golden hue on them as the sun shone through the large leaves. Lilina easily hid behind one of the leaves. From top to bottom these human-sized canopied leaves drooped, helping keep the two hunters hidden from their next meal.

To an untrained eye, the beige pheasant hiding ahead of them would become cloaked by the bush, but Lilina and Ranac had been hunting in this forest for years and no camouflage fooled them. The bushes were the only neutral colored plants in their forest, thus being the only domicile for the neutral colored pheasants to live safely. Every other plant and flower displayed bright colors in shades of reds, blues, and yellows and every combination therein. The two suns lowered in the sky by the second, and she knew they had to make their move soon or go home with nothing. Lilina grasped her bow so tightly her knuckles turned white. Normally this hurt, but the excitement from the hunt superseded her pain.

Ranac perched almost weightless on her shoulder anxious for her cue to send him off. He had been the runt of his brood and so grown no larger than a foot at maturation, but his wing span was twice that. When he laid them on his back, his body doubled in length. His rounded head was covered with large feathers that fanned up when he sat at attention. The feathers of his body and wings were chameleon like. One minute he would be the brightest pink and the next camouflaged to match the forest surrounding him. More often than not, he was a golden color to match the Adirona sky. His ability to blend was a necessary protection of the dwarf eagles, as was his beak. His little beak was no bigger than the size of Lilina's palm, but was strong. He could rip apart anything from tree branches to fingers, though he rarely did the latter, except when protecting Lilina, his mistress and best friend. He had large talon-like claws, but he also had the ability to weigh nothing and leave no marks on his stands, human or not. This feat too was part of what made Ranac's breed special. Rarely did he ever put any pressure on his mistress; rarely did he ever harm her. But he could if necessary. The magic of dwarf

eagles worked as a means of defense as well as a show of love and friendship. He glanced back and forth between Lilina and the pheasant. His claws clenched her shoulder without harming her in the least, as he crouched ready to round the pheasant closer so Lilina could shoot it with her arrow.

“On the count of three,” Lilina paused, bringing her bow up for aiming. “One.” She closed her right eye, aiming with her dominant left eye. “Two.” She focused in on her prey, getting the bird in her sights. “Three.” Taking a deep breath she waited.

Ranac darted off, wrangling in the female pheasant. As he got closer, he locked eyes with her, using his mental magical powers to shepherd her in the direction he wanted her to go. At first the pheasant struggled to break the eye contact, but soon Ranac was too close for her to dart away. He rounded above the prey, bringing her into his mistress’s sights.

Lilina followed every motion. She waited until the pheasant sat at perfect aiming distance. SNAP!!! With an easy exhalation, she released her arrow and watched as it elegantly sliced through the air and floated towards their prey. Silently, the arrow pierced through the pheasant’s heart killing it instantly. Ranac flew to the larger pheasant, trying with quiet desperation to lift it. Though his claws and beak could slice through anything, he did not have the leg muscle to carry a large pheasant. Strength blessed him, but not muscles.

Lilina turned as she heard quiet applause. She knew it could only be her father, King Brenizab, waiting quietly in the brush for them to finish hunting. He stepped slowly towards her smiling wider with each foot landing, though his eyes were filled with a sadness only she recognized.

“Daddy, what’s wrong?” Lilina pushed the light orange leaf aside, making her way to her father. “You look so sad.”

“Quite the contrary, Sweetheart. I have some good news.”

Ranac flew to the king’s side, landing with light grace on his upraised arm to walk up towards the king’s shoulder. He started pecking at his tucked wings, arranging them for comfort.

“Master Sorcerer Harsmin contacted me.”

“And?” Her eyes grew anxious.

“He wants you to arrive in two days.”

Lilina felt her heart leap. She was finally going to become a sorcerer’s apprentice. For as long as she could remember, she not only felt drawn to magic, but could use it more than was natural for common Adironians. All of her people had

magic ability, but hers was stronger, more refined and precise. She could do more telekinetic and telepathic magic than any of the other royal children, and she knew it. Now she was going to learn to perfect her raw talent. The princess threw her arms around her father's neck, almost knocking Ranac to the grass beneath them. She hugged her father and her eagle almost as tightly as she had hugged her bow only moments earlier. Her father's hug caught her breath. His squeeze was one of fear, not elation.

"You are unhappy," she sighed as he loosened his grip.

"Not at all. After all your practice, it is about time you learned more than just a disappearing spell. There is no better sorcerer than Harsmin." She blushed as he spoke. "Besides, I am tired of commissioning more spoons," he said with a wink.

"I just learned a repellent spell too, you know?" Her sarcastic but loving tone warmed his heart.

He forced a smile at this. He didn't want his daughter to know that he feared for her life outside of the castle. As long as she was by his side and within the parameters of the castle and surrounding forest, she was protected. Once outside of her home, he didn't know if she would be as safe.

"I know, Punkina. I have been watching you in the courtyard. You really did a number on the flora." He wrapped his arms around her once more and hugged her as if it was his last hug to her ever. "Shall we go get you packed?"

"After we eat. I'll get dinner." She skipped over to the pheasant as a young girl would to a wandering stray animal. As she lifted it from its spot, she glanced down satisfied that there was not a spot of blood. She hated cruelty, even when hunting for food. She believed that people should hunt and should eat, but not if the prey suffered more than was necessary. No food was worth the sacrifice of unnecessary pain. Running to her father's side, they made their way back to the castle that had been her only refuge for fifteen years. From the forest she could always see its shadow. It was large and could fit the entire castle village population inside for protection. Usually, it was shrouded in sunlight, but recently a silver-like shadow loomed overhead, especially at dusk. She grabbed her father's arm tighter and found him shaking; she thought he shook because he would miss her. He kissed her head. Their pace quickened as they made their way to her last night in her home.

Lilina heard a soft knock on her door. She turned to Ranac, and he tilted his head. Curiosity was always his favorite vice. After dinner, the two had rushed to Lilina's room to begin packing for her trip the next day. It would take almost both days to get to the Master Sorcerer's tower, her father had said. They had been up in her room rummaging through her clothes and deciding on the necessities for hours.

The princess laid her treasured spell book in the trunk, which was near full of her clothing, and turned towards the door.

As Lilina walked to her door, she said, "Wonder who's calling so late?" She pulled the door back to reveal her father. His face was fixed with a slight smile. "Daddy, why aren't you in bed?"

"I just thought I would help my daughter pack." *I have so much to tell you*, he finished in his head. For years he had practiced the speech he was about to give to her. He knew that she would be shocked, but he also knew that he had to prepare her before sending her off in the world. He stepped into her room and looked at her trunk. "Looks like I am too late, though."

"You're never too late." She wrapped her arm around his, squeezing it lightly. "I can't decide how to fit Ranac in there."

Her innocent comment slapped the king. "Oh, Lilina, I am sorry. I meant to tell you earlier, but there just will not be enough room."

She glanced at her open faced trunk and tears started to well up. "Well, then I'll just carry his cage in the carriage with me."

Her father slowly shook his head. "Punkina, you will have to leave him here for the time being."

Ranac looked from master to mistress, then flew to Lilina's shoulder. He nuzzled his head against hers. Lilina didn't want to leave him, didn't know that was part of the deal. She sat on her bed and rubbed his back.

Brenizab stared at his daughter. *That's enough heartache for now. I can't tell her everything.* "I will leave you to finish. Be sure to be up and dressed by dawn. I love you, Sweetheart."

"Love you too," Lilina said as she tried to smile.

Brenizab closed the door and rested his back against it. He closed his eyes as he pictured his precious daughter crying. He couldn't believe he had forgotten to mention to her that she could not take her beloved companion. Tears welled up in his own eyes as he heard a snuffle. *Oh, my precious Punkina. You have so much growing up to do. I can't bare to see you do it alone.* Brenizab stepped away from the door as an idea crossed his mind. *And I won't have to.* With a confident stride, Brenizab made his way to his own bedroom to begin the plans.