

LINDENWOOD

Spring 2016



ARROW ROCK



ARROW♦ROCK

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## Alone Under the Night Sky

*Bret Lundstrom*

A lonely horseman glanced at the last light of sunset  
Beaten by a long day of riding and grinding  
Swayed over a rock cliff side, legs finally off the ground  
Slumped over and beaten from riding and running  
His horse lay broken and gimp from riding  
A constant gallop in fear of a noose  
Had strained his friend  
He had let him loose  
Out over the plains  
In fear of that noose  
Spurring his sides red  
With blood on his heels  
He could hear the posse prey  
But they scream no more  
For want of blood had died  
So here they lay in wait for a bit of sun  
Only the moon to keep them company for the night  
As well as a bit of howling

Stars finally started to pierce sky  
Sunlight finally leaving for the day  
Constellations unknown to the horseman  
Made their way across the horizon  
Slowly taking their turn in the sky  
Hinting at the horseman's eye  
With a slight grin playing at his cheeks  
And a cold empty sense of accomplishment  
His numb legs began to feel again  
His horse whinnying with a shimmer of life  
Rest was slightly safer now  
He was free for the night

Morning would soon come for him  
Along with revenge driven men  
Forcing their way across the plain  
For men they felt were unjustly slain  
Even though he was on his back  
He wasn't in the ground



## Bar Talk

Brandon Evans

The black luxury sedan pulled up to the curb. Its dark tinted windows hiding the two men inside from curious glances. This wasn't the part of town expensive cars drove through. Not at noon on a Tuesday at least. On a Friday or Saturday night you could catch a glimpse of a senator's Cadillac or a business man's Mercedes steering up to a corner for some "company" or "party favors", but this was unusual. Even more unusual was that the bar the men had pulled up to was open and serving.

"You're sure he's in there? Like, he's actually in there?" the man in the passenger seat asked.

"Oh, he's in there. I saw him with my own two eyes, after the bartender called me," the driver responded.

"So, he's been at a bar, in a bad part of town, for the past few days?"

"That is what I'm telling you, and that is why we're here. I have to get him out of there, and unfortunately, I need your help to do it."

"I don't know, man, this all seems stupid. If my parole officer finds out that I'm not in the half way house and down here...at this bar, wearing this again, I'm screwed. It will be throw away the key and buh-bye to my chances of ever seeing my boy again."

"You're doing me a huge favor. You're doing him a huge favor. You know we've got a good influence on the Judges, and the District Attorney is a personal friend. I don't think you need to worry about it," the driver said. "Now, come on; let's go get him."

The driver reached for the door handle and stopped to look back at his passenger.

"You can do this. You were really something back in the day."

"Yeah, that's why I'm in the sorry state I'm in now. I can't believe I'm about to get out and blow up this car just to get his attention," the passenger complained. "I can see the charges now. Property damage in excess of \$100,000, reckless endangerment of civilians, attempted murder of known law protectors, domestic terrorism— I mean, those are just the ones I can think of off the top of my head."

"I already told you, I can take care of all that. Beside, this car is a spare, and I bought this bar a long time ago. I wouldn't press any charges. It's all insured."

"Wait, you own a god damn bar?! The Night Avenger owns a bar in the east side?!"

"Not just me. We all do, it's actually Justice Corps' property."

"This day just keeps getting weirder."

"Weird is relative. Now, let's focus. We need to make this fight look real to get his attention. You go ahead and blow up the car after I get out. Then we trade a few shots, make a big show out of it, and hopefully that will snap him out of whatever funk he is in, and he'll come out. Got it?" Night Avenger asked.

"Fine. Fine. Let's just get this over with. I know how this ends up. I'm going to get my ass kicked again when he comes out. You better have that check cleared and in my account."

"I do, Bill. Besides, you were one of the few who could take it. I wouldn't have asked anyone else. The Suicide Bomber was the only one he ever had to actually try to fight. Now, le—"

"—First," Bill interjected. "I never liked that name. The *Daily Global* newspaper used that name as a headline, and it stuck. I'm not frickin' suicidal. Secondly, it still hurts when he hits me. Hurts like hell man...and finally, you asked lots of people. Nobody else was stupid enough to say 'yes.' Now go ahead and get out. Let's get this over with."

"Actually, you're the only person I called that wasn't on the team," Night Avenger corrected as he opened his door and got out, moving a good distance across the street from his car. His all black form cast a long and imposing shadow over the pavement. Bill sat in the car, watching the leather

caped figure move. This was the first time he had ever seen the man in daylight, but it didn't make him any less intimidating. Lightweight armor covered his body, which led to a cowl that was formed into a perpetual scowl. The red goggles really sealed the deal and made him look like a crimson eyed demon of the night; except for the open mouth which revealed his chin. Bill thought it was odd how nice he actually was compared to how he looked.

Night Avenger made it to the corner that he was going to use for cover, and then gave the go ahead nod. Bill nodded back and opened his car door. He stood letting his 5'10" frame stretch. His bright orange fire suit reflected brightly. It was his old costume from back in the day when he tried to make a name for himself as a costumed criminal. It was so over the top. The suit even had fake flames made of plastic that came off his helmet and over sized gloves. Apparently, it was something that Night Avenger had kept as a trophy, after Bill got his ass kicked and was sent to jail the first time. Bill hadn't put on a costume since then. He couldn't shake the way his ex-wife had mocked it when she brought their son to visit him in prison. His son, who was only two at the time, liked the bright colors.

"I can't believe I let that creepy bastard talk me into wearing this again," he muttered.

He steadied himself in the middle of the street beside the car. He wanted to blow it up and cause only minimal damage to the surrounding buildings. He hunched over and concentrated. He was trying to do something he hadn't done in a very long time, something that he swore, for his son, to never do again. His brow furrowed as the air around him started to dance like it did on hot asphalt in the distance. Somehow he became brighter in his center, and the light spilled outward to his extremities. The Night Avenger ducked lower into cover.

"That's right, Bill, nice and easy, like we talked about," he thought. "Make it like a lightening flash, so we get a nice, loud thundering boom."

Suddenly, the bar door slammed open. Hard enough to leave it firmly indented into the wall.

"STOP," the figure in the doorway demanded.

Bill stopped glowing and stumbled back gazing at the slouched figure in the doorway. He hadn't seen him in person in years. He was used to the tall chiseled figure that you could break stone on, but that wasn't the sight he saw now. Instead, Alpha Citizen was slumped and wobbling in a grungy, stained t-shirt and ripped jeans. His jet-black hair was uncombed, and he had a good couple of days of growth in his beard. He looked like a hilarious shadow of the clean-cut Boy Scout everyone loved. He turned his back to the two costumed men, revealing he was at least still wearing his long blue cape.

"You two better get...get in here and stop making a spec...specta...asses of yourselves," he slurred. He didn't walk so much as he floated in air while moving his feet. He haphazardly levitated from side to side as he went back to his bar stool.

Bill blinked in disbelief until he was startled by the hand that gripped his shoulder.

"It's worse than I thought," Night Avenger said.

"Holy shit...is he...is he drunk? How? I mean, I didn't think that was possible."

"We'd better get in there." Night Avenger walked up to the bar entrance before turning to look back at Bill. "And when you come in, yank this damned door shut behind you."

Bill did as he was instructed and found the two men in capes at the bar. Night Avenger sat on a stool to Alpha Citizen's right, so Bill took the one on his left to even out the trio. The bartender wore a look of worry and mental exhaustion. He had apparently been awake long enough to hear all the woes of a super hero. Alpha Citizen informed the bar keep that they'd each be having a whiskey, straight up.

"I think you might've had enough, sir," the bartender replied.

"Ted, don't be rude. Give our friends some drinks and keep mine coming too."

Ted looked at Night Avenger, and then glanced at Bill, before returning his gaze to the man in



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goggles. Night Avenger nodded, and Ted pulled down a new bottle of whiskey, cracked it open, and poured three equal glasses. He handed them out and then put the bottle in front of Night Avenger.

"I'm going home. You guys take it from here. I've been up all night with him."

"Don't worry, Ted. We'll take good care of him," Avenger replied.

Bill watched as Alpha Citizen pulled an odd looking flask out of his belt. It was a dense, dark metal and had a radioactive decal on the front. He opened it and dropped a few glowing green drops of liquid into his whiskey, before securing the flask away again. As he did so, a bit of sand fell off him and landed on the floor. Alpha Citizen swirled the beverage with his finger and took it down in one drink. His throat pushed the mixture down, and he coughed. Then he stared at the big screen behind the bar.

"You've got a little moon dust on you still," Night Avenger commented.

"Yeah...I hadda...Hadda fly up...and get muh flasssk. I heard ya guys in da car... go head and tell Suici...uh, Bill here what's in it."

"Look, Bill, one time," Avenger began before taking a sip off his glass. "This one time, Dr. Genocide actually devised a way to hurt Citizen here. He found some of the minerals around the portal that brought Alpha to our dimension, and after irradiating them with one of his death beams, he found out that the stones actually could hurt him. He nearly killed Citizen, but the Justice Corps showed up and stopped him. Afterwards, I realized that we should probably keep the stones just in case, because you never know right? Anyway, I told Citizen all about it, and he agreed. So, we hid the stones away in a safe place. But then, this one time, we were at Liberty Eagle's bachelor party, and we had all had a few and felt that Citizen was left out. So we guessed that he could get drunk, too, if we used the minerals in miniscule doses and added some booze. Well, we worked it out, and Citizen got drunk for the first time. That didn't go too well though because his powers got a little out of control, and well, you saw the news the next day. The whole Justice Corps had to pretend an alien invasion happened just to cover it up. It wasn't our finest moment, and we weren't proud of ourselves at all, but after a while, we kinda forgot about the whole thing."

"But I dinnit," Citizen said. "I membered where we hid the stones n' made sum' more of the booze. Then put it in one of these lead flasks, so I could carry it 'round. I didn't think anybody would notice, but Night Avenger did."

"I did. And we got Citizen some help and put it all behind us. I even went and hid all of the stuff on the moon. Apparently, not well enough."

Citizen smirked and brushed a little more moon dust off of his shoulder. Bill was speechless. He looked at the other two men with wide eyes. Then he took a gulp of his own drink and winced as it burned on the way down.

"So, you're telling me that the greatest hero of all time...is an alcoholic?"

"Bingo," Citizen quipped, while pointing a finger in the air.

"Wow. Just wow. All those years of plotting your destruction through outrageous plans and all we had to do was hand you a bottle of cheap scotch and some magic rocks. This is crazy."

Night Avenger poured Bill and himself another glass, which they each gulped down. Then, he put the bottle away. He looked at Citizen and put a hand on his slumped back.

"Go ahead and give me the flask. It's almost empty anyway. Then we can talk about it," he said. Night Avenger reached for the flask and was met with a stiff shrug. The shrug knocked him off the bar stool and onto the floor. Bill scooted back, unsure of what to do.

"I'm not done," Alpha Citizen declared.

"I know you don't think you are, but you need to put the damn thing down, Alpha," Night Avenger said as he struggled to his feet. "Bill, take it from him."

Alpha Citizen kicked the bar stool into Night Avenger and sent him sliding across the floor. Then, he turned to fix his gaze on Bill. His eyes started to shimmer and glow.

"Don't make me hurt you, too," Alpha Citizen warned.

Bill was unsure of what to do. In fact he was downright afraid. He looked over to Night Avenger's body on the ground.

"Did you just kill him?" Bill asked.

"No way, the guy has taken much worse. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've a drink to finish," Alpha Citizen declared. He reached for his flask and filled a new glass with the exotic concoction. Just as he raised the drink to his mouth, Night Avenger reached around from behind him and shoved a glowing rock into his mouth. The reaction was immediate and violent. Alpha citizen bucked forward in a gagging motion that crumpled the bar in front of him.

"Now! Hit him with everything you've got, Bill!" Night Avenger demanded as he sprinted for the door. Bill hunched over without hesitation and channeled everything he could. Night Avenger barely made it out the door before the blast lifted him off his feet and slammed him into the black sedan parked in front of the bar. The entire back of the bar erupted in a giant blast. Somehow the blast was contained to only the bar. None of the surrounding property was damaged, except for a few scorch marks.

Night Avenger slid down against the car. His suit armor had absorbed most of the shock, but he had still felt the impacts. He removed his goggles, just in time to see the glowing rock and metallic flask bounce out from where the door used to be. Inside, Bill had cleared them away from Alpha Citizen.

"Nice work, Bill. Just like we planned," Night Avenger said as he secured the flask and rock in a special container. "You really contained that blast. I think you've been practicing."

Bill walked out from beyond the rubble with Alpha Citizen over his shoulders.

"Planned my ass! You said we would be able to talk him down. I thought he killed you," Bill shouted.

"Well we had to do something. Besides, now you can say you took down Alpha Citizen. Can anybody in your old crew say the same?" Night Avenger asked.

"Don't even try to play my ego. Look at this place. I'm so going back to jail."

Bill set Alpha Citizen on the ground next to Night Avenger, and then he surveyed the scene.

"Oh yeah," he began. "I'm definitely going back. How long until the cops get here? I'd like to at least try and call my son so I can say good-bye."

"You're not going to jail, and the cops aren't coming. Well, not once I make a call to the Corps headquarters and tell them it is under control," Avenger responded. "You did great, Bill. You proved that I can count on you. I won't forget that. Thank you, and I'm sure, when Alpha Citizen wakes up, he will thank you as well."

"Somehow, I sincerely doubt that," Bill said. "This costume business is insane. I'm never putting this damn costume on again."

"Not even for induction into the Justice Corps?" Night Avenger asked.

Bill smiled at that and thought of his son.

"Well, maybe I could be persuaded."





*A Dark and Snowy Knight*  
Stephanie Ricker

## Blatant Plagiarism<sup>1</sup>

*Kristine Wagner*

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.

There was a little girl who had a little curl.

“Impossible!” she said.

“Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

He responded.

“But what about second breakfast?”

“I do not like green eggs and ham, I do not like them Sam-I-Am.”

She took a bite and winced. “Alas, earwax.”

“Curiouser and curiouser. All’s well that ends well.”

“Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.

It’s not much of a tail, but I’m kind of attached to it.”

“If most of us are ashamed of shabby clothes and shoddy furniture

Let us be more ashamed of shabby ideas and shoddy philosophies.”

“To be or not to be.”

“Elementary, my dear Watson. You should be kissed and often,

And by someone who knows how.”

“You are the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed upon to marry.”

“Just because you’ve got the emotional range of a teaspoon doesn’t mean we all have.”

“You killed my father, prepare to die!”

“All happy families are alike, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

God bless us, everyone.”

“I misjudged you, you’re not a moron, you’re only a case of arrested development.”

“Tomorrow is another day!”

It was a dark and stormy night sometime later when

She realized she was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him.

Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night could stay her swift flight to him.

“You have brains in your head and feet in your shoes,” she said to herself,

“But a horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!”

He appeared with one obligingly.

“I can’t carry it, but I can carry you.”

“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.”

“It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done;

It is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.”

“Yes, isn’t it pretty to think so?”

But the sky was bright, and he somehow felt he was headed in the right direction.

<sup>1</sup> I in no way wish to take the credit for quotes from *Winnie the Pooh*, *Gone with the Wind*, Dr. Seuss, Ernest Hemingway, *Stuart Little*, J.R.R. Tolkien, Shakespeare, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, The U.S. Postal Service, Charles Dickens, Tolstoy, *The Princess Bride*, J.K. Rowling, Jane Austen, folk proverbs, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Lewis Carroll, *1984*, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Mark Twain, and especially not *Twilight*. Please don’t expel me.



## Business Meeting

Brandon Evans

Nolan steered his rental into the parking space. The spot gave him a very clear view of the table inside the restaurant he was eventually going to be sitting at. He took a deep breath, held it for a moment, and exhaled. He was trying to clear his mind for the business meeting at hand. It was always nerve wracking to meet a potential client. Nolan had to gauge each new person and see if they were worth the assistance the agency could give. Nolan killed the engine, in no hurry to get out of the car, but instead sipped his coffee. He checked his watch, which he double checked against the agency's home office, before he left for the airport. Nolan was twenty minutes early to the meeting. Being early was a habit that had served Nolan well many times. He found it was useful to be able to watch a potential client arrive. What they drove, who they might be with, and how punctual the client was told Nolan most of what he needed to know before ever speaking to them.

Nolan checked his watch again, and then compared it to the rental car's dash. The clock on the dash was slow by two minutes. He took another deep breath as he straightened his tie. Exhaling, he caught his own gaze in the rearview mirror. The pale blue eyes behind thin lenses broke away as he checked his hair. Not a single dark strand was out of place. Nolan wasn't particularly vain, but he did make sure he was presentable at all times. He wasn't a handsome man, nor was he ugly. His face was forgettable, and in his line of work, that was a benefit. It was never useful to be movie star good-looking or remarkably painful to look at if somebody was later trying to describe you. Having a memorable face never helped if the meetings went sour.

Nolan exhaled another breath and watched it fog the window of the rental. Sometimes things just went sour. He thought of his wife Lisa. After nearly a decade of marriage, he found himself trying to recall why he had loved her so much. This was a game that he often played when he had a moment to waste. Was it her golden locks? Oh yes, those helped. He thought of the way they framed the emerald earrings he bought her for their fifth wedding anniversary. Was it her athletic build? Her body most certainly attracted him, yes. Was it those delicious chocolate eyes that he got lost in when she spoke? Oh, was it her voice? The melodic way she sounded was so intoxicating to him, and he longed for the days when he would call her just to feel his heart sputter as she purred his name.

Partially, it was all of those things, and then the rest was made up of her personality. The way she laughed at things he said and thought were funny, and not just to try and seem interested, but she genuinely laughed. Nolan could tell, because the agency had taught him how to read body language. If somebody was faking a laugh, or a smile, all you had to do was look for wrinkles around their eyes. If you could see them, that meant it was a genuine laugh. Lisa always had smiled with her eyes, because Lisa was always genuine.

Nolan watched as his breath on the window beaded up in condensation, giving it the effect of sweating against the cool fall air. A droplet rolled down the inside, and he thought of Lisa again.

"How can you cut into something that is sweating?" she had asked him. At the time, Nolan was about to cut into a piece of pumpkin pie that had a tiny pool of condensation on the top. The pie had been the only thing he was looking forward to when he drove the two hours to his in-laws' house for Thanksgiving last year. It used to be this type of observational humor of hers that made him laugh, but for some reason, the only effect it had, was to completely ruin the moment. The thought of his pie breathing and sweating on the plate completely turned him off to the dessert. In one short question, Lisa had effectively ruined Thanksgiving for him. She performed this act of ruining things with a dishearteningly increased frequency over the past year. It had gotten so bad that when he left for this trip he hadn't even bothered to say bye. They had become so distant



and had barely held a conversation in the past month. Why would a few hundred miles of actual distance have mattered? It didn't, but that hadn't stopped him from thinking about her now.

Nolan was snapped back to the present by a set of headlights that streaked across his field of vision. The car pulled into the lot and took a spot nearest to the door of the restaurant. Nolan looked at the plates of the vehicle as he flipped open his tablet. He then opened the file that he had read, and reread, countless times during his flight. The plates on the car matched the ones the file told him to expect on the client's vehicle. He then noticed the make and model of the car, followed by the smaller details of color and state of repair the car was in. This particular car was a red BMW 320i sedan. It was last year's model but in pristine condition. The file read that the vehicle was the client's own daily driver, and that it was also leased. Red, flashy, but not purchased. Nolan checked his watch; the client was five minutes late. Nolan was already putting together an idea of how the meeting would go but silently cursed himself for letting his mind wander for so long on his own personal affairs.

The client exited the car and looked around the parking lot quickly, before he hurried to the door of the restaurant. Nolan tracked the man with his eyes through the wide windows that wrapped the restaurant. He wanted to see if the man would follow the directions the agency gave him, to go straight to the table that had been reserved under the name 'John Smith'. The client stopped at the hostess stand and held a brief conversation with the girl. Nolan couldn't help but smirk as the man repeatedly flashed his car keys to the young girl. The girl pointed back to the corner table, but the client went to the bar of the restaurant. The keys flashed again as he held up two fingers. The bar tender poured two tall drinks, straight up. Nolan scoffed as the client slammed one, before taking the other to the table and sitting in the seat that faced the wall.

"Well, at least he got that part right," Nolan whispered to nobody but himself. He then stepped out into the November night. Nolan smoothed his hands down his dark gray suit and took another deep breath, as he tucked his tablet in his jacket pocket. The crisp fall air refreshed his senses. It had been a night like this when Lisa had told him she loved him for the first time. Lisa. Again, she was in his mind, but now it was time for business. He needed to push her out and focus. Nolan took three quick and short inhalations. He blew them all out in one single breath as he tried to focus, and the cool air helped.

Nolan's eyes fixed on the client as he walked into the restaurant. He entered and made eye contact with Darcy, the hostess. She was deceptively young looking but was actually in her late twenties. She played her part as the teenage hostess well, bouncing with a bubbly smile. Her messy blonde ponytail bobbed from side to side, while her barely buttoned, white shirt hung over from her black yoga pants. She was skirting the uniform policy at the restaurant perfectly.

"Hello, welcome to Gambino's. Will you be dining alone tonight, sir?" Darcy gushed.

"Actually, I have a table reserved for a Mr. John Smith."

"The client has arrived," Darcy informed him. "Will you be requiring the briefcase tonight?" She was all business now.

"Unfortunately, that may be necessary. Thank you."

"You two are the only guests of the restaurant this evening," Darcy said while she reached under the podium and removed a small metal briefcase. Nolan accepted the case and smiled at her. She then pushed a button on the underside of the podium. The shades on the windows closed, and the lights dimmed throughout the restaurant. A soothing, classical music flowed from the overhead speakers. Darcy locked the door and turned the sign to say closed while he walked back to join his client. Nolan approached the end of the table and startled the man who was apparently lost in thought.

"Jesus, man" the client bumbled as he spilled some of his drink.

"My apologies, I didn't mean to startle you," Nolan offered.





“No, it’s okay, I’m expecting someone…” the man eyed Nolan carefully.

“May I sit then?”

“Only if you’re the John Smith I was told to wait for,” the client replied as he raised his hand to the empty seat across from him.

“Indeed, I am,” Nolan began as he took his seat. “I believe you are a Mr. Gareth. Is that correct?”

“Yup. That’s me. My friends call me Mike,” the client responded with the drink up to his lips. Unsteady hands shook the glass a little as it rattled back down onto the table.

“Mr. Gareth will be fine,” Nolan replied as he took the time to eye the man up. He was late forties easily, which he obviously tried to conceal. Dyed blonde hair was betrayed by the gray roots of his hair. The wrinkles on his face were deeply set in, an affliction that was only made more severe by a red tinted tan. His obnoxiously large, gold ring clinked on the empty glass. It matched a gaudy watch and a chain that hung on his bare chest. Nolan could see it through the bright pink, open collared polo the man wore. It was at least one size too small, no doubt he attempted to accentuate the fact that he worked out, if only a few times. He finished out the look with a pair of tan cargo shorts and leather flip flops. That was how Mr. Gareth chose to dress to a meeting of this importance. He would never make it as an agency man. Not only did he look ridiculous and scream midlife crisis, but the style choice was completely dysfunctional for the late November weather.

“Have you reviewed my case yet?” Mr. Gareth asked.

“Indeed I have,” Nolan said, pulling out the tablet. “It appears you are at risk of losing most of your assets.”

“Yeah, the bitch is gonna take me to the damned cleaners if she gets her way,” Mr. Gareth spat.

“It certainly looks like she would have an excellent case against you in court.”

“You don’t think I know that? Christ, that’s the reason I came to you guys!” Gareth fumed. As his words flew out, a glob of spit accompanied them and landed on Nolan’s tablet. Nolan instinctively sat up straighter and removed his glasses. He locked eyes with Mr. Gareth.

“Mr. Gareth, I understand that you are upset. I will not, however, tolerate you raising your voice to me. I would advise you to think carefully before you speak, and remember, to keep your voice down. If you would like me to continue considering your case, you will kindly take your napkin and wipe your saliva off of my tablet screen. You will do this slowly, with no sudden movements, but you will do it now,” Nolan instructed.

Mr. Gareth held his gaze for a moment, before slowly reaching for his napkin.

“Thank you, now if we could get back to the matter at hand, you’ll notice that on the tablet which you are holding is the police report for a domestic disturbance at your residence. Accompanying it is the subsequent restraining order that your wife filed against you.”

“I don’t need a review. I was there, man,” Gareth blurted.

“She had some private dick tail me around. He got pictures of me with a hooker. She wasn’t dirty or nuthin’, but one of those classy, expensive ones. You know the type of girl that wouldn’t look twice at us. Couple of my buddies pitched together and bought her for my birthday. Definitely worth it if you ask me. Anyway, the asshole got some photos of it and gave ‘em to my wife. She gave me a set of damn copies. I brought ‘em with. I dunno, thought they might help.”

Gareth put both hands up, and Nolan nodded. Then he reached inside his cargo shorts and produced a thick, dirty envelope that was roughly 6” x 9”. He dropped it on the table between them. Nolan made no movement to pick them up, but instead, reached for the slim metal briefcase that was on the floor next to his feet. He placed the briefcase on the table and ran his hands across its smooth, cool surface. He found the latches and popped them open. Nolan eased the top up but kept the contents out of view of the eager eyes of Mr. Gareth. He then used his own napkin to wrap up the pictures and transfer them into his briefcase. Finally, he closed the briefcase and replaced it

on the floor.

“Don’t you even want to look at ‘em?” Gareth asked.

“Mr. Gareth, I see no benefit to our meeting from me viewing pictures of you engaging in sexual intercourse,” Nolan responded. “I do see benefit in asking you a few questions. Firstly, has your wife contacted a divorce attorney?”

“Yeah, I got served the papers at my job,” Gareth scoffed.

“So your coworkers saw this?”

“Hell, my boss even saw it. Made me the joke of the office,” Mr. Gareth seethed.

“Why the infidelity?” Nolan asked. Secretly, he was surprised that he felt compelled to ask a personal question. His feelings had seeped into his work, and that was simply unacceptable.

“I was horny,” Mike Gareth shrugged. “What? You never slept around on your old lady? You might as well have. I bet she has slept around on you.”

Nolan felt his neck go hot. He would never betray Lisa’s trust like that, and he was certain that she would never… This meeting was going sideways on him, and he needed to regain control. He had allowed the client to upset him, and that was never good for business. Nolan swallowed his emotions.

“Are you able to pay for the services you’re requesting? Up front, right now?” Nolan asked.

“Well, I mean, I thought you guys understood that you’d be taken care of once I get the insurance check. I’m good for it. You’d get your money,” he scrambled. His ring clinked against his empty glass again.

Nolan raised his hand to the bartender, and she promptly came to the table.

“What can I get you sir?” she asked attentively.

“I will have water, but he’ll have a…” Nolan paused.

It took a moment for Mr. Gareth to stop groping the bartender with his gaze.

“Um, yeah, go ahead and get me another tall whiskey, straight up.”

“Right away, sir,” she responded as she headed back to the bar.

Nolan remained quiet while they both watched her. Mr. Gareth had proved incapable of focusing if a female was involved. So, he waited, and while he did, Lisa crept her way back into his mind. She was bartending when they first met, and she could still put this younger bartender to shame. He allowed himself the moment to recall Lisa’s body, both then and now. He was finally interrupted when this bartender returned. She delivered the drinks with a quick smile, explained that they were on the house, and then left the men to their business. Nolan drank his water trying to wash Lisa out of his mind. He put up a finger when Gareth tried to speak. He turned off the tablet and slid it inside his suit jacket trying to maintain an air of professionalism. Then he finished his water.

“Enjoy your drink, Mr. Gareth,” he resumed. “Hopefully, it will take the sting off a bit.”

“What sting?” Gareth asked right before he guzzled the liquid.

“I’ve decided that the agency won’t be able to help you with your case.”

“What the Fu—” Gareth stopped mid word and recomposed himself. “What do you mean you’ve decided that you can’t help?” His red complexion was nearly glowing now. Nolan could tell he was barely keeping his rage under control, which was expected, but not particularly threatening. Beneath his suit Nolan was also very fit. His strength was functional and practiced, unlike the potential client who boiled across from him.

“Why have me drive all the way up here to jerk me around and then tell me that you’re not going to do shit for me?” Gareth growled.

“I see you are foregoing my warning from earlier about your voice. Regardless, the agency does not require me to explain my decision to any potential client. For you, though, I shall make an exception. Your wife has made very public your divorce. You admit yourself that your coworkers are aware of your marital woes, and you already have legal documentation that highlights physical



abuse— by you— against your wife. The incident was significant enough to warrant a judge to grant her a restraining order against you. Those are the obvious factors that led to my decision.”

“So you are saying your ‘agency’ can’t pull it off,” Gareth hissed.

“On the contrary, the agency and I are more than capable of solving the problem that your wife represents for you. However, I have known you for a short period of time, and I can already tell you that you do not follow basic instructions. If you did, you would’ve arrived to this meeting on time, you would have proceeded directly to the table, and you most certainly would not have driven your personal vehicle here. All of these things were plainly instructed to you by the agency when they set up this meeting, and yet, you failed to meet the minimum expectations. Not to mention the fact that you are a terrible planner. You didn’t even think to bring a change of clothes for the weather this evening, and you couldn’t help but drink in excess as soon as you arrived. All things considered, you would be nothing but a liability if the police were to question you about your wife’s disappearance.”

Mr. Gareth sat staring at the empty glass that his hand clenched around.

“Even if we could ignore all of these previous problems,” Nolan continued. “The largest and most pertinent issue is that you simply cannot pay for our services. We are not the Make-a-Wish Foundation, Mr. Gareth. We only solve problems for clients who can afford us.”

Nolan rose from the table, smoothed out his suit after buttoning it, and picked up the briefcase.

“Mr. Gareth, I thank you for your time. I will be leaving you now and wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors. I will escort you to the bar where you may have another drink on the house. You will remain there for fifteen minutes after I have left, and then you may go. This instruction you will follow. Do you understand?”

“Go to Hell,” Gareth snapped.

Nolan accompanied the disgruntled man to the bar.

“If you want my advice, I would suggest that you cut your losses and give her the divorce.”

He then walked towards the door to leave. Darcy was quietly waiting for him with a keen eye. She then shifted her gaze to Gareth at the bar.

“Don’t worry. All bark, barely any bite. You ladies will be able to handle him with ease,” Nolan reassured her as he handed her back the metal case. “Turns out I didn’t need this after all.”

“Much appreciated, Mr. Smith, but you will need to take this back.” Darcy smiled handing him the envelope of pictures. “You aren’t allowed to leave anything a client has given you in the case. You know the rules.”

“Would you mind holding that until I return from the men’s room?” Nolan asked. He hadn’t noticed that the coffee and water had run their course until this moment.

“I’m afraid I must insist you take them, sir.”

Nolan made no protests. He grabbed the envelope and stuffed it quickly in the already occupied jacket pocket. He hurried to the urinal in the men’s room. He had just started to relieve himself when the envelope slipped out of his suit jacket and toppled to the floor. It split open when it bounced off the urinal, and its contents spread across the slick tiles. He glanced at the photos, a kaleidoscope of depravity fanned out underneath him. Again, Lisa came to mind as he recalled how she used to touch him.

Nolan glared at the photos a little closer. The woman looked like...no, that didn’t make sense. He closed his pants as he bent down to the visual stains beneath him. The woman in the pictures, Mike’s prostitute, she looked like Lisa. Nolan snatched one up for a close inspection. This can’t be her. He looked for a picture that showed her left shoulder. If he could find one of the woman’s left shoulder, then he would know for sure. He grabbed at one, and then another one to see the blonde’s face contorted in pangs of ecstasy. Nolan brushed his hand across them all as he slid to the floor. He let the filth soil him. He fought the sobs that threatened to escape his mouth. Just

one...that one! He found the photo and snatched it up to see the truth, and the truth was that it wasn’t Lisa in the sordid photos. It was just a prostitute that slightly resembled her on a mere glance. Upon closer inspection it clearly wasn’t his wife.

Something in him compelled him to reach for his cell phone. He pulled it out and dialed his wife. He pressed the phone to his ear and heard his own breath in the receiver. The phone rang and rang before finally picking up.

“Hello,” Lisa’s familiar voice came over the speaker.

“Hey, Lisa, it’s me. I know things have been kind of weird with us lately. I’m sorry, I should’ve said good bye this morning... Anyway, when I get back from this sales meeting in Detroit, I really want to talk to you. I even want to go with you back to your parent’s house next week for Thanksgiving. You know how much I love your mom’s pumpkin pie. I know you’re probably busy, but I want you to know you’ve been on my mind this whole trip, especially now.” Nolan spilled into the phone.

“Honey, what are you talking about? I’m trying to give the kids a bath before I put them to bed. Can I call you back?” she asked.

“Oh, yeah. Don’t worry about it. I will call you once I get back on the road. Tell the kids I love them. I love you too. Now that I think about it, I need to clean up something myself. I will talk to you soon,” Nolan answered. Then he hung up the phone.

He leaned back against the stall and took another deep breath. He exhaled slowly, and this time, focused on the man in the photos. The disgusting man, Mike, who Nolan had disliked from the beginning, but now hated with a passion he had never known before, was just outside the bathroom. Suddenly, he was on his feet and smoothed out his dark gray suit. He washed his hands in the sink before adjusting his glasses. He had gone into business mode. There was a job at hand, and he intended to do it well. Nolan left the bathroom and reached directly under the hostess stand for the briefcase that he knew would be waiting. He clutched it and began to pop the case open on top of the stand. Darcy stared at him in confusion.

“You can go ahead and leave now. I’ve changed my mind. I will be resolving his case right here, tonight,” he declared while pulling out a knife and a .45 caliber pistol from the foam lined case. He then removed a suppressor and screwed it onto the barrel of the pistol. At the bar, Mike was oblivious.

“Give me another damn shot before I tell everybody about your little operation you’ve got going on here!”

“I’ve got a shot for you,” Nolan announced as he grabbed the back of the stool and whirled Mike around to face him. He put the suppressed end of the gun deep in the crotch of the cargo shorts and squeezed the trigger twice. Mike’s eyes went wide as he shrieked in pain. Nolan hooked his foot under a rung on the barstool and kicked up. The bleeding man tumbled to the floor. Nolan eyed the bartender and motioned with his head towards the door. She calmly folded her towel and laid it on the bar. She then collected her purse and joined Darcy.

“I’ll have them send a cleaning crew in a few hours,” she said before shutting the door behind her.

Nolan had his weight on top of Mike’s chest and pressed the gun hard against his head.

“Upon reviewing your case, I have reconsidered. I am going to take care of your problem. All of your problems, and as a bonus, your wife will get your life insurance policy,” Nolan reassured him as he pressed the gun deeper into Mike’s scalp. Nolan had his knee in Mike’s throat, making it difficult for him to breathe, let alone respond. His head was swelling with the effort, and sweat poured down around the gun. Nolan tilted his head in thought and brought the knife to the bead of sweat.

“This is how you cut into something that is sweating,” Nolan said to nobody but himself.





*Small Foot, Big Leaf*  
Rachel Schuldt

## Confessions of Daisy and Margo

Marrisa Bylo

She's the girl who got a date to every homecoming dance. Well, the first three. The last dance is still up for grabs. Some lucky guy will ask her, and she'll always say yes (even though she said she has to "think about it." She used it all three times. I guess it worked). She picked me last year, but I won't ask again. She's intimidating—somehow. All the guys in our friend group have had crushes on her. Her scope is bigger than our nerd group though. She's shot down an athlete or two and even the band kids. No clique or stereotype can escape those killer blue-grey eyes.

She walks the halls of Living Hope High School very single and very independent. And me? I'm the awkward friend she's known since the 3rd grade. I'm the awkward friend who wishes she liked me back. I took her to homecoming and visited her at work. I didn't have to tell her my feelings though, right? Couldn't she tell by the way I joked around with her? Lyle thinks she believes she's too good for us nerds. I don't know. All I know is the friend zone is a dark, scary place.

Anyway, she's cute and short. That girl is always happy—smiling, laughing, and joking around. I don't think there's a serious bone in her body. Her obsession with cats is hilarious, and she also runs track. It's freaking awesome to see her at practice five days a week and at track meets. And she plays video games. Basically an angel.

Oh, her name is Melissa.

The blaring school bell ended my daydreams of Melissa. I was being pushed along the hallway, a stampede of tardy students shoving me right into my Anatomy class. Here we go again.

"Please, class. Stop your talking, okay? Class has begun. Sit down now. Okay?" requested Mrs. Royal in her quiet, one tone voice. She only sounded different when she talked about her cats. I like cats, but she made me not want to. Her lessons always included her cats. Or her grandson. Yes, we know he has a blood disease, and we feel bad.

"Lucas Garrett," droned Mrs. Royal.

"Here," I mumbled, already feeling my eyes getting droopy.

Mrs. Royal continued calling roll, her monotone already putting our class to sleep. I felt my eyes closing. My mind was getting itself ready for a long, long hour of her chirping about cells and mitochondria (the powerhouse of the cell. I learned something in that class). But I was determined to stay awake, so I looked at the homework board:

Reproduction system crossword

Read pages 69-80 due tomorrow

I rolled my eyes, trying not to laugh. Mrs. Royal teaching the reproduction system? It would probably be the most awkward thing in the world. It was. The rocket sperm animation on the PowerPoint presentation was enough for me. I doodled and glanced back at Melissa, hoping to catch her looking at me. But she wasn't looking at me. Actually, the seat was empty. She wasn't one to skip class, and she was at lunch earlier.

"Make sure to read pages 69-80 and do the crossword. It is due tomorrow, okay—" began Mrs. Royal.

"Bingo," cried a student from the back of the room. Mrs. Royal Bingo. Even Mrs. Royal knew about it. She looked upset while those who were awake laughed.

Before she could say another word, the bell signaled freedom. The rest of the Anatomy students woke up, and everyone shuffled to their next class. But I was on a mission. Melissa would be in the Pre-calc room, but her seat was empty again. I crossed the hall into Bible class instead. Did she go home sick?

Roll call flew by, and Mr. Knight was trying to lecture. The guys in the room were loud and



didn't care about what Mr. Knight said. I didn't really either. I thought about her again. Melissa had been at lunch and seemed fine, laughing and joking and—

"Lucas," called Mr. Knight across the room.

"Uhh, yes?"

"For the second time, what is the answer?"

"Jesus." Jesus was always the answer.

"No. Satan is the answer. Pay attention. Do you even have your book?"

I glanced down at my desk. I forgot it in my quest to find Melissa. "No, Sir."

"Go get it. Now."

I decided to take the hallway that led to the east stairwell. The east stairwell was forbidden because of hormonal teenagers in a private school; even frontal hugs were illegal. I felt rebellious after he called me out in class I guess. The stairwell was surprisingly empty. It ended at a door that opened to a hallway that went either to the boys' locker room, the gym, or the stage. Small private school problems—the theater stage is in the gym.

As I passed the stage, a crying sound stopped me. I wanted to keep going, but I was curious. Who would be crying on the stage? I looked in and the darkness was inhaling, exhaling. I'd been in haunted houses before so it didn't scare me. I got out my phone instead, another rebellious act. The light showed a figure sitting against a door on wheels. The girl's shaking knees were brought to her chest. Her head rested there. Breaths came in harsh, uneven bursts like she was running a race. Her hands held a light-blue hoodie, her fingers moving across the fabric. She glanced up, an animal in head lights, her inky mascara all over her reddish eyes.

It was Melissa.

"Are you okay?" was all I could ask even though I knew she wasn't. She held up a finger. I didn't think she could talk. Her breathing was still so fast.

I don't know how to deal with crying girls. I felt uncomfortable, wondering if I should leave. Maybe that's what she wanted. But she was my friend, and I liked her. So I sat next to her, leaving six inches for Jesus. I turned off my phone so it was just the darkness, a crying Melissa, and the dependable friend. I always imagined being alone with her. Just not on a stage at school.

Her breathing began to slow down. I checked the time. It had been five minutes. How long had she been there?

"I'm sorry," whispered a voice beside me. I didn't recognize it. It was hoarse and husky. I tried to answer, but the words just got lost. Maybe it didn't help that it was still pitch black. And that Melissa was crying and sitting next to me on the school stage.

"I was at the nurse's office for a stomach ache and I just...this happened on the way back."

"..."

"If you're not gonna say anything, I would rather be alone. I feel like a freak."

"No. I just didn't know what to say," I answered lamely.

"I get it. No one wants to be around a sad person." She sniffled as if to get her point across.

"No. I didn't know about, uhh...this."

Why couldn't I say things right? Here my friend was having a panic attack, and I didn't know what to say. I had seen these before today. I guess I was still in shock. Shock that Melissa was having a panic attack. She seemed so happy all the time. But this made her so...normal. Just like every other high schooler. She was like everyone else.

There was an awkward silence. I tried again. "I'm the one who should be sorry. I had no idea that you had these." I still couldn't say the words because it didn't fit her. Panic attacks didn't equal Melissa. "How long has this been going on?" That was a safe way to ask.

"Maybe two years. I only get them sometimes."

"Well, I'm sorry."

"Don't be."

"Why?"

"I haven't told anyone. You're the first to find out."

"I should have known."

Melissa laughed. It sounded weird. There was no humor or joy in it. "No. You shouldn't have known. I'm an actor. I've played happy my entire life. I think I accidentally convinced people that's all I could be. I'm just a darn great actor is all."

Acting. She was in the school plays. I suddenly remembered.

"And I fell for it."

"Sorry, but I wanted you to. No one wants to be around a sad person."

"Is that why you don't have a boyfriend?" Darn it. The words slipped out. I'm glad it was dark because I'm sure my face was super red. But this was my chance to convince her. This was important, even if it was a jump in topics.

Another laugh.

"Well, no one likes me."

"That's a freaking lie!" Because I like you.

"Has any guy—well, besides Eric, but whatever—ever told me that he liked me?"

But I bought you a milkshake! Doesn't that count for...

"I can't read people's intentions. Most everything seems like a friendly gesture is all."

Oh.

"So, I always talk myself out of the idea of someone liking me."

"Are you kidding? Every guy in our friend group—including me"—has had a kind of crush on you."

There was a pause. "Oh," was all she said.

"And you've had a date to every homecoming."

"True. But I wasn't dating any of them. We were friends."

"Friends that liked you."

"Oh."

"Yeah. Oh. Why can't you see that?"

"Because I'm me."

"What does that even mean?"

"You saw a glimpse of that a few minutes ago."

"You were sad? So what?"

"No one wants to be around a sad person."

"Are you always this dramatic?"

"Sorry, but yes."

I had blown it. My chances with Melissa had just crashed and burned. I was her friend, but didn't know she struggled with this. How had I missed the absences? I missed her teary-eyes and the weird anxious tics, like the way she was running her fingers on that hoodie. She could actually be serious, too. It was a strange day.

She broke the silence again. "What do you know about me?"

Random, but I could do this. "You like to act."

"I actually hate speaking in front of people. I have major stage fright. So, you're sort of right. But not really. Try again."

"Well, you run track."

... "Eric got me into it. I started running because he was in track. But I like it now. Keeps me in shape even if I'm bad at it."

"Okay. One more. You're super independent—"



“Because I’m afraid of commitment and vulnerability.”

“Wow.”

“Wow indeed. People know about me, but they don’t know me.”

“Why are you saying all of this?”

“I’m just thinking out loud. Hear me out.”

“Okay.”

“Do we even know each other? People only know me for what I do. Does anyone truly know anyone else? Everyone is so superficial. There are just actors and idolaters. People believe what they want about others. They paint this flowery existence around someone, turning them in to some sort of idol. It’s selfish. Humans are humans, and you can’t treat someone like that just to suit your idea of him or her.”

“Dang. That was deep.” So no one really knows her? That’s what she was saying. I think.

“Sorry. I read a lot. Two of my favorite books discuss this topic. These two characters are practically objectified to suit what another character wants them to be. And sorry. I can go on tangents...” I later learned these two books were called *The Great Gatsby* and *Paper Towns*. I had asked her girl friends about the books she liked. It’s weird that she used characters in books to describe her feelings...

I wasn’t mad. “Stop apologizing.”

“Sorry. I do that a lot.”

“I know that...well, I know that now.” That got a laugh out of her. Score.

“But I do the same thing. I mean, I’ve known you since the 3rd grade, but do I really know you? I don’t even know your favorite color!”

“Favorite color?”

“It’s important.”

“Blue.”

“Got it. Mine’s purple. Anything else I should know?”

“I had a girlfriend freshman year.” I felt a light punch on my shoulder. This was the Melissa I was used to seeing.

“No way! I had no clue!”

“Well, she went to a different school. It’s over now, obviously.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Stop that.”

“You were saying?”

“I had a girlfriend my freshman year and my mom has cancer—“

“Stop. What?”

“My mom has cancer.”

Melissa sniffled. “I had no idea. I feel awful.” At least she was sincere.

“Don’t. I haven’t told anyone. It’s her thyroid. She’s doing alright.”

“I’m sor—“

“Don’t.”

“Okay. One more thing?”

“I’m going to college to study computers. Computer science. It’s the nerd in me.”

“That’s so cool! You can help me with all my technology issues.”

I laughed. “You can’t use me for my knowledge. Anyway, can I ask you a less deep question?” She was being so open...

“Shoot.”

“Did you even enjoy homecoming last year? I heard you saying you don’t remember it.”

“It was the best one yet! I said that since it was such a freaking blur. Time flies when you’re

having fun.”

I thought I had ruined her night somehow. Well, I felt better about that. Maybe I would ask her to this next dance.

She sighed. “I wish people were more open like this. You know, talk about the difficult stuff.”

“Today was a step in the right direction.”

“True.”

“Maybe we can have more talks like this. Keep getting to know each other.” I sounded so lame. She didn’t seem to care.

“I’ll try. Oh, and one more thing.”

“What’s that?” Please tell me you like me. Please tell me you like me. Confess your undying love for me.

“Don’t act like a victim.” And she was back to the dramatic, serious Melissa. Well, I guess she was just being herself. I needed some time to accept it.

“Uhh...what?”

“A victim. The whole friend zone b.s. that I hear all the guys talk about. You can’t force someone to like you and blame them for friend-zoning you. The right person will return the feelings. Don’t act like a victim.”

“Will do, Pal.” I had been caught.

“Thanks, Bud. Now, give me a quick hug and get to class, you rebel.” Just like that, she was back to normal Melissa. Or the normal I thought her to be. This was confusing. But I understood what she had said. No one really knows her.

I expected an awkward side-hug, the usual. Nope. Both her arms were around me. Her head barely reached my chest. A friendly hug, but better than nothing. I hugged her back, wishing it would last longer. But that darn bell rang, and she stopped hugging me. I had missed the rest of class and hugging was considered PDA (a.k.a. sinful). I was becoming a rebel for this girl.

“See you after school. Maybe we all could go to McDonald’s or Sonic for some food. You know, the usual.” She wiped her eyes with her jacket and bounced off to her next class like she hadn’t had a panic attack. The actor thing to do.

I watched her go and wondered if things would be different between us. So much had happened, but nothing happened at all. We just had a conversation. But there was something about that day I wouldn’t forget. I wouldn’t forget sitting with Melissa on the dark stage as we talked about our lives in a way that wasn’t fake. It was rebellious. It was nice.

Things went back to normal after that day—Melissa the actor, I the awkward friend-zoned friend, and the other guys all “idolaters.” I began to like her less. Don’t get me wrong. I still cared about her a lot. Just not in the same way. More like a friend way. The other guys still talked so highly of her, but I knew better. I knew the truth. I bet they didn’t notice her sad eyes that she hid behind smiles and laughs or her nervous ticks. It was like our little secret.

But that’s okay. Maybe one day she will learn to open up and stop acting all the time.

By the way, Melissa went to her senior homecoming that year dressed as the Disney Princess Belle. She also went alone.





*Inner Voice*  
Mai Urai

## Countdown

*Marrisa Bylo*

*3 hours left.* Sunlight welcomed the newest high school graduates as they left their school one last time. They were surrounded by their families and loved ones. Cameras flashed, hugs exchanged. “College won’t get in the way of our friendship,” was the promise of too many hopeful, ignorant teenagers that day. Ignorance is bliss. But at least today they still shared their vibrant friendships. Today they were on top of the world only to start over as freshmen in the fall. It was an interesting transition to fall from the top and work your way back up.

I was at the graduation. My cousin Audrey wrapped her arm around my shoulder. I tried to pull away. I didn’t like pictures. She was stronger and taller than me.

“Come on! Take a picture with me. You know you’re going to miss me this fall,” she laughed as she posed and gave a goofy grin. She bent down so she wouldn’t be too tall next to me. Her graduation gown matched my red hair. The tassel on her hat tickled my nose. I almost sneezed. But I held it back and smiled like she asked. She wanted a picture of me, which was nice. The camera flashed.

Audrey grabbed the camera, looking at the picture. She said, “It’s perfect! This is going up on my wall. You are my favorite cousin, of course.” She ran off to take more pictures with her friends. I could hear her chatting with her classmates. There were a lot of cameras flashing. Mom and Dad took me to the car. I would see Audrey at the BBQ at her house.

I liked the picture though. We were both smiling big. It was the last picture I ever got with Audrey.

*2 hours, 50 minutes.* My family and I went to the BBQ at Audrey’s house. My Aunt Karen and Uncle Robert threw the graduation party. Audrey was their only child. They didn’t cry even though they would miss her. I was going to miss her too. Even with weather reports of an approaching storm, people were everywhere. Thunderstorms were common here in the Midwest. No one paid attention to the clouds in the distance. We were used to them.

There was lots of food. I sat with my parents and my two younger brothers, Riley and baby Charlie. We ate slowly because we had on nice clothes. Mom and Dad smiled as they talked to people who were also our neighbors. I watched all the graduates as they took even more pictures and played in the pool. The boys would push the girls in the pool even though the girls said no. The girls would yell as they hit the cold water. It was funny.

Audrey opened up gifts while saying “I love it” a hundred times and blew out candles on a yummy cake. Aunt Karen took a piece of cake and put Audrey’s face in it. Everyone laughed at the blue icing hanging on Audrey’s nose and forehead. She laughed too. She posed for pictures with her closest friends and then her parents. Audrey with her blue face. She wiped it off, and the cake was passed out. She gave me an extra-large piece, and she handed it to me with a wink.

Her birthday was tomorrow. She would have turned 18.

*1 hour, 45 minutes.* Baby Charlie started crying so we had to leave the party before it was over. I waved good-bye to Audrey as we climbed in our gray minivan, and she got into a car with some friends. Her mom needed more tea, so Audrey left her own party to get it. I don’t know why tea was so important. But hanging out at Walmart was what teenagers did for fun. She was sent to get tea, but she would buy other things: probably candy, an energy drink, and a new sun hat. They would look at dorm stuff, dreaming about what the future should hold. They would forget about the tea, and the party, while they hung out at Walmart.

She shouted through the open window, “BYE, STEVEN!” I waved again as our cars turned away from each other. Our house was only a few blocks away. We visited each other a lot, especially



during the summer. I would swim with Riley while Audrey “worked on her tan.” She always complained about sunburns.

I heard the music booming as they drove away to the Walmart across town. Her brown hair flew around her as Audrey stuck her head out the window. She yelled some lyrics in her bad singing voice. But she didn’t care. She was like a queen. It was the last time I saw her. The Walmart didn’t stand a chance.

*1 hour, 30 minutes.* Mom took a screaming Charlie to his room upstairs. I went to the room I shared with Riley, and we changed out of our nice clothes. I passed by the door, and Mom was rocking Charlie in a rocking chair. She smiled at me.

Riley and I sat on the couch with Dad and watched television. I was tired after sitting through a long graduation. We were watching cartoons when the news came on. It was a weather report. It said there was a big thunderstorm coming our way. The lady on the television talked about high winds and hail. The red warning on the screen scared me. Dad told me that we would be alright. The really bad storms missed us a lot for some reason. I believed him. He was a smart businessman. He lived here a long time, so he knew what he was talking about. This storm was supposed to miss our town.

*50 minutes.* We ate dinner early. We sat around the dinner table, the five of us eating some leftover BBQ from the party. It was still sunny outside, even though the lady on the television said storms were coming. There was a lot more wind, though. It whistled while we ate. Dad talked about watching the storm come in. Mom left the table to help Charlie who had just woken from his nap. We could hear him yelling again. We finished eating and cleared the table. Riley and I cleaned the dishes, and Dad put them away because he was taller. The wind continued to rattle the windows while we cleaned.

*10 Minutes.* Riley and I stood side by side on our house’s small porch. I used to be afraid, but now I could watch the storms. Dad joined us like always. Watching storms had become a tradition at this house. I felt safer with him here. I wished Mom could watch too, but she was with Charlie. He cried a lot. But that was okay. There would be more storms to watch. This one was slow anyway. Nothing was really happening. But the wind made me squint my eyes. It was hot.

*180 seconds.* The sun was shining, but clouds rolled in the distance. They were galloping like a herd of angry gray rhinos towards our little house. Too quickly. I had never seen them take over the sky so fast! I looked up at Dad to see what he thought. His eyes scanned the clouds, a frown wrinkling his forehead. I looked at Riley who wouldn’t stop staring at the wall of clouds. I couldn’t stop staring either. I almost asked for someone to get the camera.

*120 seconds.* Then the sun hid. A cold wind hit us. My heart began running, and I put my hand on Riley’s shoulder. His eyes didn’t move from the sky. It started swirling, looking like a lead ice-cream cone. Sirens yelled at the clouds as a gust blew straight for us. Lots of rain fell, moving sideways and making us wet.

*80 seconds.* Dad turned, his arms forming a castle over us. He pulled us over the doorframe. We went through the door. Hail the size of golf balls beat the roof like a drum. We were in the hall. We weren’t supposed to run in the house. Dad grabbed bicycle helmets from the closet. There was some pressure on my head. The straps hung loose, tickling my wet cheeks. Dad yelled for Mom. Riley cried. She appeared at the top of the stairs with baby Charlie. Charlie was crying, too. A freight train screamed outside. There were no trains here.

*50 seconds.* Windows burst. I think my heart did, too. Everything was too loud. Mom flew down the stairs with Charlie. I fell to my knees. Dad scooped me up. The walls leaned in for a hug. The house danced, twisting and shaking. We skipped down the basement steps onto soft carpet. The bathroom door swung open and shut. Mom got on her knees in the tub with Charlie wrapped in her arms. Riley and I got in, too. Our heads were tucked under. Our hands were on our necks. Dad

crouched nearby.

*Ten seconds.* A rock band crashed their instruments together upstairs.

*Nine.* Shattering glass sang along with the awful song.

*Eight.* The bathroom’s roof danced to the beat.

*Seven.* Water dripped slowly from the ceiling.

*Six.* Drip, drop, drip, drop, drip.

*Five.* Clang, clang! Crash! Tumble.

*Four.* Rip, Twist, repeat.

*Three.* Bang! Bang!

*Two.* Thud.

Silence.



## D'amour pour Paris

Jeffrey Yates

The City of Lights

A city I have never seen;  
A city my heart has broken for.

A senseless act of terror,  
Primal and disgusting at best.

Angels wept that night  
As they gathered up the victims.  
They carried the weary souls  
Among flashing lights.  
Hearts were breaking  
As they completed their task.  
As they comforted the fallen,  
And led them gently by hand.  
But who would comfort the living?  
Who could comfort the "lucky ones"?

"A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle"  
James Keller once admitted;  
But it was never more true than on this night.  
All around the world,  
We saw blue, red, and white.

On the night the City of Lights went dark.

And the whole world was there,  
Grieving for those in Paris.

The whole world was there,  
Grieving with Paris.



*Blues Pop*  
Haruka Kawata





## For the Kids

Brandon Evans

At 5:45 AM, thundering booms jar me awake. I roll over, blinking the fog from my mind as I read the green glow of the clock.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

I realize it's my door being pounded on. I sit up alarmed, as I wonder who would be knocking. My phone rings to life, and I see that it is my brother calling. Instinctively, I answer.

"Hello?" I grumble.

"Wes, wake up. Let me and the kids in. It's freezing out here," my brother, Scott, pleads.

I'm moving for my door before I even think and find myself unbolting the lock. I swing it open and the blast of cold shocks me awake in spite of my budding hangover.

"Uncle Wesley!" squeal my niece and nephew as they spill through the door and wrap themselves around my legs.

"Because of the snow, Dad says we get to play with you all day!"

I look up at my brother with eyes full of betrayal.

"Wes, you know I wouldn't ask you if I didn't absolutely need it. School is closed today, and I need the kids with someone I trust," he explains. "I can't take the day off, and I know you need the money anyway."

He stuffs a few hundred dollars in my hand. I look at my older brother and see the determination in his eyes. His mind was made up before he even got here. I know his job in the service is important, and he knows that I'm in between jobs. I'm not sure who is doing the favor here.

"No problem. I can take care of the munchkins today. I mean, they can be pretty self-sufficient," I assure both my brother and myself.

He gives the kids a hug and, with a wink, tells them to look after me. If I'm ever a father, I hope I'm like him. He leaves quickly, and I'm left staring at Aubrey and Jackson. They size me up, and I realize I'm going to need coffee.

"You two hungry?" I ask as I fill a coffee pot.

Jackson doesn't answer; he is fixed on my Xbox, but he hasn't the courage to ask. Aubrey, on the other hand, is full of energy. She smiles at me with gleeful eyes.

"I will have some coffee."

"I doubt that Aub, how about some cereal?" I counteroffer.

She concedes, and I make the same for Jackson. I set Aubrey's down on the table and Jackson's on the coffee table. His eyes light up as I turn on the video games for him.

"I could use some help on my gamer score, Jackson. Just don't tell dad."

He just snatches up the controller while Aubrey happily eats her breakfast. It occurs to me that it isn't even 6:00 AM, and these two are wide awake and beaming. I pour coffee into my mug and sit next to my eight-year-old niece. I take a long sip of the scalding liquid and use it to chase an aspirin.

"You seem awfully excited. You this happy to be off of school?"

"Daddy is helping Mommy be happy in heaven," Aubrey squeals.

I nearly drop the coffee. "What did you say?"

Jackson looks up and, in the sternest five-year-old voice I've ever heard, tells his sister to hush. She blushes, trying to hold her excitement back. It's like trying to turn a river off with a sink faucet.

"It's okay," I nudge her. "What do you mean?"

Their mother was murdered three-and-a-half years ago. It was a random act of violence that shocked a community. The killer was never caught, and my brother has never let it go. For a brief

time, he had seemed almost happy again, but lately a bitter Scott was leaking through. He had been working a lot lately, and now I finally wanted to know on what.

"Daddy says he found another bad man, and he is going to make it fair again," she explains as she stirs her milk.

Behind me, I hear gunshots as Jackson plays a violent game. I'd pause to rethink that, if I wasn't so rattled about what Aubrey had revealed. I snatch my phone and disappear into the other room. I'm frantically dialing with shaking hands. The phone rings for an eternity until Scott picks up on the other end.

"Are the kids okay?"

"They're fine; except for they think you're going to kill somebody. What are you doing?" I demand.

"They don't know anything and neither should you."

"Scott, killing somebody isn't going to bring her back!"

"What do you know? I see her every time I look at my kids. They deserve to know that whoever took their mom away has paid for it. I'm going to make sure this time. This has to be the right guy."

"What do you mean this time? Scott, stop it. You can't do this," I plead.

"Take care of my kids until I get back. It will be over soon."

The line goes dead.



## Generation 2

### *Lontreal Wiseman-Farmer*

Rachel flinched as the small, rubber, rainbow-colored ball flew past her face and back into the hand of the boy behind her. “Do you mind?” Rachel turned around from the desk she was sitting at to glare at him.

Aden smiled and jumped down from the bed he was sitting on without disturbing a single sheet. “Hey, you are in my dorm room. You can’t be upset with the way I entertain myself in my own room.”

Rachel watched as he slowly paced the room. Aden was wearing his usual dark jeans and long sleeved shirt. The shirt was red with dark blue lines making the familiar plaid pattern. His boots were black leather and looked as clean as the room they were in. Rachel stood up, raised her arms above her head, and arched her back like a cat. Her black blouse raised with her stretching, showing her bellybutton and milky-white stomach. Her red hair ran down past her shoulders.

“I am only here because you need me to check your computer for you. I would rather be in my own room.” Rachel sat back down in the white desk chair she had been occupying for the last hour and a half. “It’s clean by the way. The Division has not hacked your computer. You shouldn’t be so careless when porting into their base. Now can you tell me what happened? Why did you leave your computer in a Division base?”

Aden looked at his phone and turned away from Rachel. “I want to wait until the newbie is here.” As Aden said this there was a soft knock at his door. Aden walked over and opened the door to a short blond girl in sweats and a tank top. “Hello, Elizabeth.” Elizabeth smiled and brushed past Aden.

Turning to Rachel, Elizabeth smiled and said, “Hi, my name is Elizabeth. Nice to meet you!” She held her hand out and Rachel shook it and smiled.

“My name is Rachel. How do you know each other?”

“He found me using my power to get my professor to give me a few days off.”

“So you’re a Pusher.”

“I have no idea what that is,” Elizabeth said.

Aden had been watching this conversation from the door and decided that now was the time to intervene. “How about everyone have a seat, and we can explain the terms to Elizabeth. I will explain the Division stuff as soon as she is caught up.” Elizabeth hopped onto Aden’s bed, and Rachel sat back in the white desk chair. Aden pulled the wooden chair that is provided by the school from the corner it was occupying. “Okay first things first, let me explain what you are.”

Aden leaned back in the chair and said, “A Pusher is telepathic. They have the ability to push memories and thoughts into another person’s mind. You and Rachel are both Pushers. You both also have another ability. Rachel is also a Phaser, meaning she can move through solid objects. It’s super annoying to deal with. You are also a Feeler. Feelers are like Pushers except they only deal in emotions. You are able to manipulate both thoughts and emotions.” Aden stopped talking and looked at Rachel.

“This is a lot of exposition don’t you think?” Rachel smiled and looked back at Elizabeth. “Anyway, Aden is a Mover. Basically, he is telekinetic. He is also a Porter, meaning he can teleport long distance and short.”

“I can also teleport other objects without touching them—watch.” Aden flicked his wrist and sent the rubber ball he was holding flying through the air straight for the wall next to his bed. Just before making contact with the wall, the ball vanished and reappeared on the other side of the room. Aden held his hand up and the ball flew back into his hand. “There are other terms and abilities, but they can be explained later. Right now I need to explain why I was running around a

Division base.”

“What is the Division?” Elizabeth asked.

Rachel sighed. “The Division is a government agency that keeps track of people like us. They also try to recruit others and police us. That would be fine if they weren’t morally bankrupt. They kill any of us who show a strong ability but won’t work for them. We have been doing our best to hide the double power thing from them. It only happens when both parents have an ability, so it’s rare at the moment.”

“Well, now that we have the exposition out of the way, I can finally explain the reason for this meeting.” Aden took another breath and looked out the window. His eyes opened in surprise, and he threw his arms out like he was pushing something away. There was a large crash like a car hitting a wall, then screaming. Rachel jumped up and ran to the window to see what had happened only to get pulled away by Aden. Elizabeth was also pulled off the bed. Both girls made contact with Aden’s hands at the same time and were instantly blinded by the sunlight. Aden ported them outside in the parking lot behind his truck. “Get in and drive. The Division knows about the three of us. They had a spy on campus, someone me and Rachel trusted.” He held out his hand and his laptop appeared. “This has all of the files I was able to steal. Use it to bring down the Division so that we can all sleep better at night.”

Aden turned around and began walking towards the wrecked car. He had managed to push it away right before it had made contact with the window. It crashed into the opposite building on the other side of the parking lot. As he was getting closer, he noticed a man walking towards it as well. They saw each other at the same time and stopped. “Don’t they teach you any subtlety? Throwing a car is a bit much, don’t ya think Brian?”

Brian smiled and started rising into the air. Aden backed away. He had never seen anyone actually levitate himself. He had never tried it because he could teleport.

“Are you gonna say anything? We were friends, man. Was that really just a cover? Do you really not care?”

Brian got to about twenty feet in the air then flew straight for Aden. Aden shot his hand out to the left, and the car next to him was now floating vertically in between Aden and Brian. Brian ran right through the car, his telekinetic shield making a large lens flare color when he made contact with the car. Brian went through like it was paper and rammed into Aden, carrying him into the sky. He began hitting him in the stomach so that Aden would not get enough time to think and teleport himself out. Aden’s teleportation wasn’t reactionary, but his telekinesis was.

Aden used his power to push Brian, and himself, into the ground. Brian flew down but was able to regain control and landed lightly on the ground. Aden focused and levitated himself in the air. He smiled and created his own telekinetic shield. Brian was floating a few inches off the ground and watching Aden with a blank stare. It took only a second for Aden to figure out why he wasn’t attacking.

“I am not porting away from this fight. I am going to kill you and send a message to the Division.”

Brian smiled and flew at Aden while launching cars from all directions. Aden flew at Brian and, just before making contact, he vanished and reappeared underneath him. He also managed to teleport a few cars off the ground and into the air above him. Brian looked down then used his power to push Aden into the ground. He then rotated in the air so that he was facing the cars and sent them racing after Aden. Aden hit the ground hard and scattered the cars before they could land on top of him. Brian crashed into Aden on the ground and began ruthlessly punching through the shield Aden had created. Aden threw him off and began punching back with as much force as he could muster. Their telekinetically powered punches made the familiar lens flare light as they came into contact with the shields that they had placed around themselves. While they were



throwing punches Brian was levitating a large truck over Aden's head. The moment it was in place, Brian allowed Aden to knock him away and dropped the car as he went flying. Aden teleported the car before it made impact, then he teleported on top of Brian and cocked his hand back to punch him. Brian had expected this. He sent a piece of metal shaped like a spear, created from the piles of cars they had destroyed, flying for Aden from behind. The metal went through his arm and blood sprayed out onto Brian and the ground. Brian lifted Aden up and threw him onto his back. He pulled the piece of scrap metal out of Aden's shoulder and raised it above his heart.

"Hey!" Brian turned to see Rachel standing behind him, near one of the wrecked cars. He looked into her eyes and saw them dilate, turning her eyes completely black.

"The metal is a syringe that will save you, but you have to—" Rachel flew through the air and landed on her back next to the truck she arrived in. Elizabeth was inside; she tried to open the door, but Brian warped the metal around the door before she could do anything.

"Nice try, Rachel, you gotta be faster than that to push me." He began walking toward her with the scrap metal held high when he was hit with a train. The train flew at him from the left and embedded itself into the asphalt.

"Does that work on you?" Aden said. Aden was standing up holding his injured shoulder. "The train was probably too much." Aden looked and started walking—

"Lontreal, can you tell me what started World War I?"

Lontreal looked up from the notebook he had been doodling in. "The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand. The squabble was between small countries backed by world powers. They started fighting then basically asked their older siblings for help."

Mr. Prahlow looked unimpressed with Lontreal's answer. "That is correct, Lontreal. Now would you mind looking up from your notebook so that I know you are paying attention please?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Prahlow turned back to his dry-erase board and began writing about the causes of the First World War. Lontreal looked at his stick figure doodles and wondered if maybe he should start actually trying to focus in class. The bell rang and everyone started to grab their bags and head to their next class. Lontreal packed up his notebook and walked out of the classroom. He walked down the hall of lockers and dodged the other high school students. He stopped at the last door on the right and entered the room. He sat down and grabbed his notebook to start doodling again when he noticed that all of the students were looking at their phones, and no one was sitting down. The teacher, Mrs. Rathje, was even looking at her phone, one hand over her mouth and a look of horrified curiosity on her face. Lontreal walked over to the group closest to his table.

"What's going on?" he asked Kevin.

"Dude, look!" Kevin held his phone out for Lontreal to see. There was a YouTube video playing. In it there were what looked like two men on a college campus throwing cars at each other and flying around. The video ended with a train appearing out of nowhere and smashing into one of the men. Lontreal looked at his backpack that contained his doodles and stories. He walked over, opened the backpack, tore out the pages, and threw them into recycling. He walked back to Kevin, who was watching it for the seventh time.

"Dude, let me see that again, it looks so cool."



## Grandfather's Coffee Pot

*Brenden Kleiboeker*

"Alex, where do you want this box?" Janie struggled under the heavy set cardboard as she stepped into the threshold of her new boyfriend's house. They have only been dating for a little over three months, but she was more than excited to help move him out of the busy downtown Chicago area to the suburbs; a perfect place to rope him into a ring and a few kids.

"Just set it down in the kitchen babe, I'll get to it later," he replied from behind the TV set.

Leave it to a man to have his TV set up before everything is unloaded, she thought. She set down the box with a huff, letting the box hit harder than expected, causing the contents inside to rattle. Oh shit. Janie opened the box hoping nothing was broken inside. She had already scratched his car this morning and couldn't bear to have to break the news of two mistakes, especially when he loved that car more than her. Well, for now. Once opening the box she found a tin-rusted coffee pot sitting on top. That actually wouldn't have been too tragic if that broke, She laughed at herself as she felt Alex come up behind her.

"Phew that was a pain in the ass, but hey now we can play Call of Duty later." He placed a soft kiss on her cheek, trying and failing to keep as much of his sweat off of her as possible. "Oh you found the box with my Grandfather's coffee pot." Alex reached over Janie to pull out the rustic machine.

"You mean you meant to pack that?" She ruffled her brow then quickly smoothed out her face, feeling her reaction was too harsh.

"Are you kidding? I love this thing. I can remember sitting on my grandfather's lap every morning during the summer weekends; the smell of the brewing coffee filling the house." A small smile crept across Alex's face. "But we could never sit and wait to hear the loud buzz signaling it was ready because it always brewed more than the pot could hold."

Janie crossed her arms and listened as Alex continued.

"It was like a game to us. Who could sit the longest before going to check if it was overflowing?" A laugh escaped his lips. "My grandfather always won though because he'd had that pot for longer than I had been alive. He'd get me all riled up, making me think I sat too long. Before I knew it I'd be on my feet, racing to the kitchen only to see the pot half full."

"Awe babe," Janie touched his shoulder with a sweet smile. "What a cute story, but I think the pot is outdated and kind of an eye sore." Alex's smile had vanished only to be replaced with an open mouth. "I mean, I don't want you to get rid of it, but you definitely can't use it to brew your coffee. It's a hazard and especially if we are going to bring kids into this house."

"How is it a haz... Did you just say kids?" The subject switched just like that. Janie's face froze in a panic.

"No, no, no, I said cat. I can't have my little Snuffy running around here when we stay over and have hot coffee burn him."

"Well we won't have to worry about that," Alex shot back without even thinking about what he just said.

"And why is that?" Janie stared in confusion.

It was Alex's turn to freeze, except he wasn't as quick on his feet as his obsessive girlfriend and stumbled over his words, at a loss for a response. His head raced, but no matter what came to mind, he couldn't think of a believable excuse to cover up the fact that he accidentally backed over Snuffy earlier that morning.

"Alex, I asked you a question." Another small silence.

"Because babe." He wrapped his arms around her waist, giving her lips a small kiss. "I don't have a litter box or food bowls for him yet. We won't have to worry about that until I am settled in



and bought all the necessities for him.” Her face lit up before she leaned into his chest.

“You’re just the sweetest.” Janie’s hands slipped around his chest. “I can’t wait for what is instore for us in the future babe.”

With love pouring over her heart and filling her body, she moved onto the next box as Alex returned outside to carry the rest in. She kept help but think of how great she had it with this man she would marry, even if he didn’t know it yet. Janie placed the coffee pot on a shelf tucked away, hoping Alex would forget about it.

“Oh My God! Janie what in the hell happened to my car?!”

And with that Janie’s smile was gone, and his Grandfather’s Coffee pot was back on the countertop, set in the perfect view from any part of the kitchen.



*The Antique*  
Mai Urai



## Ground to be Moved

*Bret Lundstrom*

The undertaker is gone today  
Up the hill digging graves  
Someone has died?  
I'm sorry to hear  
As you can see  
We are quite busy  
The horses and hearse  
Have been put to hard use  
Their legs are worn  
Knees sore, backs bent  
Ferrying men to rest  
Work to be done  
Ground to be moved  
How long has he sat?  
A day gone and in this heat  
What the world does to bodies  
Come night time I'm sure  
We will drop on by  
Pick him up and be off  
With the pine box and lantern  
Many friends and family?  
No? A small service then  
I'm sure the reverend  
Would be free for a bit  
Say a few half-hearted words  
And we can settle this  
Man into the ground



## Heavenly Reason

*Nicole Hansell*

“That’s not the best idea, you know.”

Thomas Whelan jumped.

Well, not literally.

If he’d literally jumped, as he’d been considering doing a moment ago, he would have found himself momentarily weightless, falling through a good hundred feet of cold, unfeeling air to the icy water below. But as it was, Thomas did not jump.

Not that way at least. Not yet.

He would.

In a moment, he would. But first he wanted to know what kind of a person would sneak up behind a man who was standing outside the guard rail of a bridge at 2am on a chilly February night.

As it turns out, the sort of person who would was the sort of person who would also have a large overcoat reaching to his knees, an old maroon sweatshirt underneath (Tom knew it was old because one faded cuff was poking out from the sleeve of the coat and looking frayed at the edges, like an old dog lying on the porch with unkempt fur with a couldn’t care less attitude), and a pair of jeans (the cuffs of which joined that of the sleeve its tattered we don’t care either glory) over a pair of bare feet.

Of course, a cursory survey of a man’s clothing says nothing about the person wearing those clothes, but it’s good, Tom thought, to have some image in mind of the person in question before making any sort of judgment on his behavior.

That said, the man was a jerk.

The jerk grinned widely, leaning his elbows on the railing that Tom’s elbows were hooked backwards over. Not the same place, mind you. If the jerk had leaned into Tom’s back, Tom would again be falling right now, weightless, flying, suit jacket fluttering in the breeze as he fell. No, the jerk leaned down next to Tom, his broad shoulders sloping back into a position that must’ve been fairly uncomfortable for a man of his height leaning down so stiffly. The reason for the stiff posture turned out to be a cat lounging like a poorly groomed scarf across the man’s neck, orange and tattered like the dog sleeve, missing one eye and looking like the cat equivalent of a hobo.

The cat blinked at him, stretched its paws out toward him briefly, allowing them to quiver with the satisfying extension of muscle before settling back in for a nap. Tom turned his attention back to the jerk’s grin. He wondered briefly if that comfortable, toothy grin would remain in place if he were to let go right now. The grin faltered. Maybe not.

“You okay, there, bud?” The man’s voice was a lion’s soft rumble. It was the kind of voice one would associate more with someone muscular and gruff; someone who’d fought with his bare hands and could intimidate you with only a few words.

Like Liam Neeson, Tom thought.

Twinkling, hazel eyes met his curiously, and Tom instinctively looked elsewhere, preferring to watch the cat readjust its weight, settling with a sigh against the back of the man’s neck and the fringe of disheveled brown hair. And that hair. It was ridiculous. It looked like the unholy offspring of bed head and hat hair—wild, windblown, and completely unnoticed by its owner whose insufferable grin was back in place, fringed by a brown beard. The beard was white right down the middle from the edge of his smile to the tips of his moustache which blended with the beard as if it didn’t know it was called something else.

Ridiculous. The incongruity of the man’s youthful face and the white streaked beard and crow’s feet crinkling the corners of his eyes was confusing. Was he old or young? It was just unreasonable



not to choose one or the other. Tom himself was old, he thought. In mind, if not in body. He was old, worn out, and sick of life.

That was why, at the age of thirty-three, with newly shined shoes, his best grey work suit, the garish orange tie his mother had got him, and his briefcase waiting for him at the bottom of the river, Tom Whelan was going to jump.

“Still not the best idea, if you ask me.”

“Just shut up,” Tom said.

“Why?” the man asked.

“Because I’ve made up my mind already,” Tom replied.

“Have you?” the man asked.

“Yes,” Tom said, trying to sound irritable enough to make the man leave.

“Oh,” the man nodded agreeably, “Okay.”

A moment of silence passed as the man looked out over the river, and Tom watched the man. The man glanced over at him. Tom looked away quickly, fixing his eyes on his shoes and the dark water swirling below. He couldn’t see it swirling... couldn’t even see his shoes too well except for where the yellow-gold of the streetlamp caught the shiny surface. He’d had them shined just that morning. The hotel did it for free and he’d left his shoes out to have it done without thinking. At least whatever hobo found his body tomorrow would get a nice pair of shoes out of the deal.

Man... that was dark. Tom looked out over the water, just able to see the silhouetted tree branches waving against a backdrop of near black-blue. It was dark. Outside and inside. He tried to picture the water, little eddies making ripples in the surface as the currents pulled this way and that. Like life, pulling helpless people into its endless dance, ripping at you from all sides until you just have nothing left to give it. The water and life were both, dark and depressing, and Tom was going to jump into this water, escaping that life.

The man made a sound. A sort of thinking sound that implied a long drawn out, “Maaaaybe...” and would inevitably be accompanied by a “but.”

“Aren’t we all?” the man said with a wink, moustache and beard meeting as he let out a huffing chuckle through his nose. That painted stache and beard annoyed Tom. It was like a young man, old enough to have a beard, but young enough to want to keep it, had smeared cream on it, or dribbled cream down it, Tom supposed. He imagined the man with an oversize glass of water, gulping it down so eagerly that when he set it back down, the tip of his nose and all the hair beneath it was stained wet and white. Wet and white like the snow that had fallen just a few days ago when Tom’s life had gone to hell. It wasn’t snowing now. That would be magical and maybe even beautiful against the backdrop of starry skies and softly swaying treetops on either side of the river. No, all day it had been grey and lifeless like Tom wished he was. The snow from the night before had become slush, not enough to make snowmen with or play in but too much for comfortable walking. A miserable day to finish off a miserable week.

“You wanna hear about a miserable week? I could tell you stor—Whoa there, Tommy!”

Tom felt the man’s hand grasp his sleeve before he realized he’d been slipping. He was so startled, so stunned, it took the dip of vertigo to draw him back to reality as his foot left the edge of the bridge only to be reunited with it as the stranger pulled him back.

“H-How’d you know what I was—”

“Because you told me, Tom.”

Oh... had he been talking out loud? The man was frowning at him in a concerned sort of way, so Tom guessed he probably had.

The cat yawned as Tom caught the railing with both hands, secure but not quite giving up on his plans for the night. He was going to jump, and it was going to be exhilarating, freeing. It was going to be what he wanted, and he wouldn’t have to worry anymore. He let out a visible breath,

watching the steam of it curl in the cold air.

“Do you worry a lot, Tom?”

“Huh?”

“I said, do you worry a lot about stuff? You know, like money, bills, work, your family, stuff like that. You look like a guy who worries.”

The man’s hand released Tom’s jacket and folded back with its twin as the man resumed his leaning position. Did Tom worry? Hell, Tom was *worry*. Most people (at least, most of the people he’d heard of) committed suicide because of some major event in their lives, something like the death of their soul mate or the utter ruin of their career... but Tom? He had just worried himself to the edge of reason, to the edge of this bridge. And it sounded so stupid when he thought about it. Who kills themselves over a little worry? Everyone worries! But did everyone worry like *this*?

Tom didn’t know why, but he just knew he’d worried all his life. No one knew what it was like to worry that much. He’d been told it came from both sides of his family. His grandmother on his mom’s side had been chronically plagued by anxiety, but in her time they just called it “being a silly woman” and left it at that. His grandfather on his dad’s side had self-medicated through alcohol and nicotine. His parents had been less than understanding, his dad had followed in his own father’s alcoholic, stumbling footsteps, and Tom had never really been that close to his mother.

So, did Tom worry?

Yes, Tom worried.

Tom worried about everything from what he was going to wear that day to when and how he was going to die. He worried that coworkers could tell he’d worn that shirt twice in a row, that they could tell he was confused by Jim’s slideshow or the financial report from Sasha’s team. He worried that he wouldn’t have enough money to pay rent, to buy clothing, to buy food, to pay insurance bills and electric bills and the money he needed to keep a roof over his mother’s head and a breathing tube down his father’s throat. Every time he took the subway, he worried he’d be mugged, raped, killed. He was a thirty-three-year-old man who was afraid of being kidnapped, afraid of developing a terminal illness, afraid of being asked a question he didn’t know the answer to in front of people he hardly knew. Tom worried that he would never meet someone, that he *would* meet someone, that he’d never be a father, that he *would* be a father. Anything under the sun, the sun included, could potentially worry Tom and he was *sick* of it.

It was like a disease, a condition he couldn’t control. He was tired of people telling him to calm down, to relax, and to not worry about it. Wouldn’t he be *doing* that if he knew how? The sheer arrogant stupidity of the advice to “not worry about it” rankled him like nothing else. Gee, thanks William, I’ll just do that why don’t I? By the way, I’m really relaxed and calm about how the nursing home has upped mom’s rent, which, by the way, I pay more than fifty percent of. He’d tried explaining all this to his brother. Tried to tell him that it felt like the feeling you get when your foot slips off the top step. That quick little blast of adrenaline... times a hundred. He tried telling Will that it felt like your heart was screaming, the sound and the terror echoing through every vein.

Will had laughed and told him to stop being dramatic.

But he *wasn’t*. It *felt* like that. It felt sharp and piercing. It made him hot and cold at the same time. It made him feel sick and dizzy, made his heart rate pick up, and his breathing increase. It made him want to run and to hide. It gave him gas and headaches and exhausted him so very thoroughly that he fell into bed every night wishing he’d never wake up.

So...

“Yeah.” Tom said, and the man nodded.

“I get that.”

Great. The hobo jerk with the hobo cat and bare feet on the rain-pooled, slush-strewn sidewalk



understood Tom on a level his family and friends never had. That figured.

“No you don’t,” Tom grumbled, turning around again to face the river. There was a moment of silence as Tom wondered if he wanted to jump just because it would be the one way he could control that feeling, that adrenaline. He edged one foot out, holding it over the black darkness below. He wondered if his shoe would fall first, although it was tied tightly with a precise knot to prevent just that. But still, he could see it, feel it almost, slipping from his heel, hanging on his toes briefly like a man at the edge of a cliff. The wind would sweep in, chill his foot and he’d curl his toes against it, dropping the shoe’s grip and leaving it to tumble, end over end, into the water below. Would he hear the splash? Would anyone hear his over the faint rumble of water and the occasional wet rush of a car passing by? It had started to rain, drizzling weakly, more misting than anything, and again, Tom wondered what the water looked like, if it was beautiful or terrible in the rain, soft and calm or voracious and swollen.

“Feels like tippin’ your chair back too far. ‘Cept it doesn’t stop.”

Tom turned to look at the man who looked back at him, taking a small book from his pocket and tilting it in his hands so Tom could see the cover. It said *Holy Bible* across the front in gold letters, illuminated by the street lamp’s impersonal yellowed light.

“You can sweat blood if you worry too hard, says so in here.”

“Yeah?” Tom asked, not sure what else to say.

“Yeah,” said the man, with a slight smile. Then he spoke softly, as if saying the words too loud would make them too real. “Hurts, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah...” Tom said, feeling his throat constrict with emotion. He fought off the feeling, fixing his eyes again on his shoes, both safely tucked on the ledge beneath him. He glanced over at the stranger’s bare feet and watched for a moment as a bit of drizzling rain water fell from the edge of his coat onto the bare skin. “Aren’t your feet cold?” The man glanced down like he’d only just realized his shoes had gone missing.

“Oh. No. Rocky keeps me warm.” He hooked a thumb back to indicate the cat who gave no indication of having heard its name spoken.

“Rocky?”

“Yup. ‘Cause he’s been through a lot, like a friend of mine.”

“Oh.” Tom began to worry. Was this guy some Bible-thumping loony? What would he do if he found out Tom had hardly set foot in a church since he’d moved out of his mother’s home? Would he be angry? Would he—well, what could he do? Kill him?

The apprehension that had been sneaking up his chest to his throat faded and Tom paused a moment, relishing that feeling and thinking it figured the only thing he’d found that worked that well to relieve his suffering was jumping off a bridge.

“And what’s your name?” Tom asked, for once not stumbling over his words or having his hands shake when he tried to get to know someone. Tom didn’t have many friends. Tom didn’t have *any* friends except Larry, his neighbor in the fifth grade who only really counted as a friend because they were still linked up over social media. They never spoke except in the form of those chain mail type posts people shared. Tom hated those. He didn’t believe in them... but after spending a sleepless night worrying that he’d have ten years bad luck if he didn’t share a picture, he just did what they said and moved on. He hated that. So Tom asked about the guy’s name and felt good about himself for managing it and bad about himself for feeling good about such a stupid, mundane accomplishment.

The man gave him a sidelong glance, a playfully suspicious look, jaw shifting as if he were considering the question.

“How ‘bout this,” he said finally, “I tell you my name... and you come back over that rail?”

Tom hesitated. The man was a good several inches taller than him, looked like he’d win if this

turned into a fight, but Tom was quick, and he could always make a mad leap for the edge if the man turned out to be a cop trying to talk him down. But then... he doubted cops wore cat scarves, carried Bibles, and went around barefoot. He nodded.

The man nodded back.

“Okay. I’m Emmanuel Iams. You can call me Manny.” He held out his hand to shake Tom’s and all but dragged him back onto the sidewalk on the other side of the rail when Tom accepted the warm, rough handshake.

“I-Iams? Like the dog food?” Tom asked, rather stupidly, he thought afterwards, but something in him felt like it had shaken loose and all the shaking was going to his legs, rattling unsteady tremors into his voice. Manny laughed.

“Like the cat food,” he said, catching Tom’s arm as he stumbled, seating him on the waist-high concrete barrier separating sidewalk from road and leaning back against it himself. The water soaked into Tom’s suit pants, but he didn’t care. It didn’t really matter anyway seeing as all of him would be wet in just a little while. He meant to say something more intelligent, to say something like, “I’ll talk to you for a bit, but then I’m going over.” But Manny beat him to it.

“You’re not gonna jump, Tom.”

Tom frowned, the stubborn Irish streak from his mother’s side kicking in.

“Am too,” he mumbled, feeling foolish even as he said it.

“Are not.” The man quirked a lopsided grin at him. “Do you really think I came all this way to watch you do that?” Tom managed a bitter laugh.

“Why the hell not? There’s nothing else good on TV.”

Manny’s smile faded, but Tom continued before he could cut him off, feeling frustration and exhaustion fueling his words into a near shout.

“Why shouldn’t you come see me jump, huh? Why shouldn’t the whole world come by and watch? It’s not like they’re losing anything! I can’t even get through *one day* without embarrassing myself or disappointing somebody or just sitting there and screaming inside because it freaking *hurts* to worry! It freaking *hurts* to be afraid of *everything* and to *know* how stupid that is! Why do you even care? I’ll give you a tip, go down the river a little ways, and you can have my shoes when I catch up with you, how’s that?” Tom scoffed at Manny’s grim expression. “What is my life worth to you anyway?”

A strange look passed through those hazel eyes and before Tom could snap another bitter drained question, Manny’s work-worn fist had caught his collar and tie and jerked him so close to the man’s face that Tom could see the tiny band of scars dotting the man’s brow and hear the unspoken emotion heavy in his low voice.

“I didn’t go through hell to see you jump, Tommy. I didn’t watch good men die right next to me so you could throw your life away, ‘cause if you wanna do that, there are plenty of better causes than jus’ a clear head.” Tom tried not to fidget; the rough, work-worn fist still clutching his collar. He took in a calming breath that didn’t really ever work and tried to keep his tone level despite the knuckles brushing his throat.

“What else am I supposed to do?” he asked, startled by the utter exhaustion in his own voice. Manny stared at him in speechless shock before a soft smile spread across his whiskered face. He shifted then, exchanging the near-chokehold for a supportive hand on Tom’s shoulder.

“Live.”

“Easier said than done,” Tom scoffed.

“Yeah,” agreed Manny, “But I know a lot of good men that had the choice made for ‘em. A lot of ‘em wished it’d gone the other way.”

Silence stretched between them, Tom looking down at the rain glinting in the light of the streetlamp, Manny staring out over the river at the horizon and the distant lights of the city. The



cat, Rocky, twitched in his sleep and Manny glanced back at him with a soft smile. The streetlamp flickered and failed, dropping them both into darkness. Still neither of them spoke. A car swept by, bringing with it a current of damp air that brushed Tom's cheek and ruffled Manny's hair. The companionable silence Tom had never experienced before was broken by the man's gruff voice.

"Would you look at that..." His tone was reverent as he gazed up at the sky, a blissful half-smile on his face as his eyes traced the constellations the streetlamp's tacky urban glow had hidden. Tom looked too, finding the familiar shapes of Orion, the North Star, the Dippers all standing over them with a tremulous light, like diamonds, sewn with care to the silky folds of sky. The dark rush of the water below was nothing compared to the expanse of twinkling pinpricks of light, painted across the skies with a light so pure and clear that it seemed to smile down on the earth. A soft breeze brushed through the swaying trees, leaves rustling like feathers and taking flight across the water, visible only by their darkness against the pale starlight. The moon slipped out from behind a cloud, unfurling her gown of silvery light across the earth. The moonlight caught in the puddles of water, the glint of it a pale shadow of the stars overhead.

"This is what helps me," Manny's voice rumbled softly beside him, somehow grounding him without detracting from the beauty around them. "No matter what I remember 'bout those days an' what we went through over there, no matter how many lives were lost or troubles gained... there are still more stars in the sky than there are reasons to die."

Tom felt the man look over at him and met his gaze, watching as the moonlight rested a motherly beam on his head, catching in his silver beard and sparking in his eyes.

"An' I might be a dirty vagrant who can't keep his nose out've another man's business, but personally, I think even one star like that," he pointed at the sky, indicating the tiny holes in the sky's gossamer fabric, "Little pinpricks of heaven shinin' through, like the sun sneaking out to dance in the rain... I think just one of them is worth living for."

The man sighed, patting Tom on the shoulder and straightening. The movement woke Rocky who voiced his displeasure with a rattling meow. Manny shushed him softly, taking him in his arms and stroking the cat's disheveled fur.

"Jus' promise me you'll think about that, Tommy. Alright?"

Tom nodded and the man gave him one last fond smile before turning and making his way down the sidewalk, bare feet fracturing the starry mirrors in each puddle he crossed. Tom watched, just watched in calm silence as the man's steps became a dance, twirling slowly and swaying in the starlight... like the sun sneaking out to dance in the rain.



*A Fall Day*  
Miranda L. Motes





## In the Valleys

*Devin Mitchell Durbin*

In the valleys, at my lowest lows  
I forget sometimes  
How far I rose.  
In the valleys. I sometimes lose my sight  
Of the King and what is light.

I am heavy and burdened down,  
By the past I've drug around.  
I thought I'd get there  
Someday soon,  
But here I am, in the valley.

In the valleys, in my deepest darks.  
In the valleys, at the bottom of my heart.  
I forget sometimes  
How far I rose.  
In the valleys, I sometimes lose my sight  
Of the King, and what is light.

You never leave me,  
I just lose my way.  
You don't forsake me.  
You call my name,  
From the mountains, You came down  
To walk with me.

In the valleys, I make a step  
From the valleys, You pave the way.  
To the mountains, You take my hand.  
In the valleys  
I lost my sight.  
With the King I see what is light.

## Letter From the Father

*Devin Mitchell Durbin*

"I know you feel so small  
You say, but in my eyes  
I see a giant. I see a man.  
Don't lock yourself away  
There's so much left to see.

Don't let the serpent around your neck.  
You'll hang yourself if he gets too far.  
It's easy to see what's here and now,  
But your emotions are nothing to fear  
I hear it and see it in your eyes, 'How?' How do I love you?  
You took the step, made the jump  
You leapt!  
You said you ran, but you knew one thing  
I'd catch you.

No matter what you did I am here.  
No matter what you said I am here.  
No matter who you think you are.  
No matter cuts, the bruises, self-inflicted shame.  
I see a giant in your soul!  
I see a future you can't see!

All you know is the here and now,  
You see the reaping of the sin you sowed.  
Don't look here, I've made you new.  
Once and for all, the weak will be made giants.  
Don't lock yourself away –  
Someone is watching.  
You are more important than you ever  
Thought you were.  
My son."





*Manar*  
Haruka Kawata

## Malts

*Bret Lundstrom*

I had a malt one time  
Malt liquor another  
The treats we reward ourselves  
The pains we cause ourselves  
From ice to cream  
With ice to dream  
Dreams of summer  
Days of warmth  
Brightly stressing  
Our daily displeasures  
Honestly regretting  
Lying to the past  
Remembering days of malts  
Through the glass bottles  
In the hazy green glass  
Of malt liquor



## My Brother's Keeper

*Lontreal Wiseman-Farmer*

Able studied the room. The walls were made of steel and covered with screens and knobs. He was sitting in a comfortable office chair at a very large, round table. The other chairs were occupied by the heroes he was there to talk to; the table was a very large holographic image of the entire city of St. Louis. The ceiling was very high up, at least 100 feet, and the center of the ceiling was made of a shiny glass he had never seen before. While Able was wondering what made glass shine like that, Lontreal and Jacob were deciding exactly what they were going to do about him.

"How the hell did he find this place?" Jacob whispered furiously. He was pretty sure Able didn't have heightened senses. But, in this line of work, you can never be too sure. Lontreal shook his head and whispered back,

"I have no idea, and he refuses to tell us."

"This is a government facility. Did you threaten him with jail time?" asked Jacob.

"He said he knew who was responsible for Maddie, and that he was here to help."

"Well, why are we all sitting here like a bunch of assholes? If he is going to help then, he should help!" Jacob directed the last part of the statement at Able, who jumped in his seat, startled by the sudden outburst.

"Excuse Jacob. He is just very worried... As we all are," said Kelsey. Kelsey was sitting to the right of Able. She was wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt with jeans. Able liked her the moment he saw her. Her bi-racial background gave her a creamy complexion. She had a very friendly face, with her light brown freckles to match her even lighter brown skin. She had soft brown eyes and short brown hair. "Can you just explain to us how you found us, and how you plan to help Maddie?"

Able stood up and looked around at his audience. His black sweater and black pants seemed to absorb the light around him. "My brother was the one who put your friend in a coma. Me and my brother were born a long time ago in a tiny village. This was long before recorded history. My brother dared me to race him past the village borders. I knew I shouldn't, but he was my older brother and I wanted nothing more than to make him happy. So, I chased him very far out into the desert. As we were running, the sky darkened and something hit the ground in front of us hard. The ground exploded and launched me and Caine into the air. When we hit the ground we were lying next to a glowing white stone. We seemed to be unharmed except for our clothes that were almost completely burned off. Caine grabbed the white stone and we ran back to the village. Lucky for us, the stone falling from the sky distracted everyone, and we were able to change clothes.

"Caine buried the stone outside our hut, and every night we would go out and play catch with it. As we grew the stone's glow lessened. Every year, it seemed to be a little less bright. When I was about 20, I seemed to stop aging. So did Cain. I also became the healer of my tribe, and I seemed to be able to heal any wound. One day, Caine got into an argument with the tribe's elders about Caine only hunting and making food for himself. Caine lost control of his temper and grabbed the elder by his arm. The elder, whose name I can no longer remember, started to die slowly in front of the whole village. Caine seemed to have gained the ability to create diseases and infect as many people as he wanted. Caine fled the village, and I followed. We stayed together for a while, but Caine's violent nature was starting to get the best of him while I was more concerned about healing. Before I left we made a rule—I would not heal anyone he has infected, and he will not infect someone I have healed." Able finished with a weary sigh. "I have always kept track of him, but last month, he disappeared. And I couldn't find any trace of him. Then my contact in the city told me of your friend, Maddie and a man named Jax. I knew Caine was involved when Jax described the condition Maddie was in."

Elijah cleared his throat loudly and raised an eyebrow. He was sitting on the left side and a

lot further away than Kelsey had been. "I don't mean to rush you, but how did you find out about Maddie? Who is your contact? And, considering your pact with your brother, how do you plan to help us?" Elijah asked these questions with the calm tone he knew was needed in order to keep this civil. He could see that Lontreal and Jacob were getting tired of just listening.

Able nodded towards Elijah. "I understand the confusion, I just thought you might want some background." Able looked back towards the skylight. "My contact is a girl by the name of Jessica. She has somehow gained the ability to see events going on in the world, without being there. Her ability only works in real time. She cannot see the future, nor the past. And she can only see a person she has touched before, and she can see a place she has been before. During one of the many assaults on this city she came into contact with Lontreal. Because she touched him she can now see and hear him anytime she wants."

Lontreal flew across the room, lifted Able into the air, and pulled him very close to his face. This happened so fast Able didn't even notice until he was in the air face to face with him. "What the hell do you mean she can see and hear me whenever she wants?"

"Lontreal calm down—" Able raises his hand, and Kelsey halts her protest.

"She told me about Ashley" Able said. "She told me you did everything you could, and that it wasn't your fault."

"I know it wasn't my fault, but that was a moment between me and her. No one else."

"There is nothing I can do about it. I didn't order her to spy on you. She did that of her own free will." Lontreal slowly landed on the ground and released his grip on Able's shirt.

"Will you heal Maddie? Please, we would forever be in your debt" asked Elijah, after everyone had retaken their seats.

"I'm sorry, but if I heal her then the agreement will be broken and Caine will be free to kill all those whom I have healed and are still alive", said Able. "I can heal all of you and add you to my computer and upload you into the database we share so that he cannot kill you all."

"Can you at least tell us where your brother is?" asked Elijah.

"No. I will not help you kill or lock him up. I will however take a look at Maddie and see if there is anything you can do yourself to save her."

Elijah nodded and said, "Kevin, Morgan, would you mind taking him to see Maddie, please?"

Morgan and Kevin stood and walked toward Able, leading him to the medical bay. Morgan was very pale with blonde hair. She wore a white cotton shirt with white cotton pants. Kevin was white as well, but nowhere near as pale as Morgan. He wore a blue shirt with cargo shorts. As they were walking toward Able to the medic center, Lontreal facing away from them said, "You know your brother is a murderer. Instead of putting a stop to him, you made a deal. You allow him to kill innocent people while you make yourself feel better by healing a few. He is your responsibility; you should stop him."

Able stopped mid stride, turned his head to the right and said, "Ashley was just as dangerous. How long until you stopped her? If your hand wasn't forced, would you have?"

Able was led to a black door at the end of the medical hall. "We had to place her in isolation. Because with her telepathy, she sends images directly into your brain of people who have died," said Kevin.

Morgan opened the door and started to walk through when Able touched her shoulder. "It's ok. I can do this alone. Trust me, I won't hurt her." Able walked through the door and was instantly bombarded with images of people dying. Some of them quick, some of them slow. There didn't seem to be any kind of order to it. Just random image after random image. Able raised his hand and a white light shot out and covered Maddie. Able recalled the light and left the room as quickly as he could with his head in his hands.

"Are you ok?" asked Kevin.



Able stumbled forward, and fell to his knees. "I saw people I know. I think she got into his head when he did this to her. She pulled out all of his murders. There are more than I remember." Kevin shook his head and walked away. Morgan helped Able to his feet. "Sorry for the boy's behavior. They hate to lose, and this is the worst form of losing," Morgan said something else but Able wasn't able to hear it over the alarm that started to blare. "Damn, not another one." Said Morgan.

"Another what?" Able asked.

"Another attack. Welcome to St. Louis, Missouri. The Show Me state."



*Lightening*  
Haruka Kawata



## New Rome

### *Lontreal Wiseman-Farmer*

Darius looked up at the podium with disdain. He hated Marcus for forcing him to kill. He was tired of fighting strangers to the death for the amusement of the crowd. The opponent today was from an all-female coliseum in New Themyscira. Her long, black hair and bronzed skin showed her Italian heritage. Of course, he couldn't mention that. Italy didn't exist. She wore the basic gladiatorial attire. He could tell that her armor was crafted for her body. It fit all the contours of her body. It would allow her free movement without giving up defense. He was going to have to be careful with this one. Darius himself didn't use armor. His coliseum was not run by someone as wealthy as the owner of the New Themysciran coliseum. And he hated to have his movement restricted. The only protection Darius used was a bracer that ran the length of his right arm, a galerius for his shoulder, and a helmet that covered his face. She wore no helmet, and her hair was tied into a bun.

"Prepare yourselves for the most entertaining battle in this arena since its construction!" Marcus was giving his opening speech before the match.

*How stupid is he going to feel when I refuse to fight?* Darius thought to himself.

"Begin!" Marcus shouted into the mic.

The crowd started cheering and stomping so loud that the two gladiators could actually feel the ground move beneath their feet. The woman started to walk towards Darius, but stopped in surprise when Darius dropped his twin Gladius on the ground and raised both hands above his head, making a fist. This was the sign that a gladiator made when they refused to fight an enemy. This was considered either an insult to the gladiator's sponsor, or the challenger and their sponsor. It had to be handled by both parties before the fight could end or continue. Marcus and Bellona both rode the floating chariots down to the arena's floor. Darius still found it weird to find advanced technology in such an ancient civilization. They both hovered in the air, out of reach of the gladiators.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Bellona.

"I refuse to fight a woman," Darius said.

Marcus chuckled; he found it very funny that this is where Darius would draw the line and put his foot down. He had foreseen this and already had an answer for him.

"I will handle this, Bellona. Darius does not mean to insult you or your gladiators. He just doesn't want to fight a woman. He knows very well how dangerous his opponent is. He just has some alien belief that he should not lay hands against a woman."

"Well, that is very strange," said Bellona, "and I don't care if he did not mean to insult. He has." Bellona looked over at her gladiator, "Diana, I expect his blood as payment for this insult."

"Yes, my lord," answered Diana in a very unemotional and robotic voice.

*What the hell is up with her?* Darius thought. *She hasn't shown any sign of life sense she got here. She just stares ahead with those soulless grey eyes.*

"Diana, do me a favor, please?" Marcus asked in his most condescending voice he could muster. "Tell him of your life in New Themyscira." He looked at Darius, "and after she is done, remember this: I will send Valerie there if you do not win." Marcus smiled and floated back to the podium, Bellona at his heels.

Diana looked at Darius, and he saw pain in her eyes. The first sign of emotion since he meet her. Darius was starting to dread what she was going to say. "The gladiators of New Themyscira are separated into two classes. New Roman citizens, and non-citizens. This you should already know because we are all separated into these two categories. The New Roman citizens are made famous and rich for every battle they win. They have personal trainers and schools. They are taken care of,

and they have their pick of males. Those, like me, who are not citizens of New Rome, are made into gladiators a different way. We are trained, yes, but we are toughened by abuse rather than training. When we get there, we are tied up outside of the city limits, naked. Men are allowed to do whatever they want with us. If we do not make it in to the city in three days, we are never allowed back in. We are given no weapons and are expected to survive. After that, we are trained and sent in to battle." The pain that was in her eyes at the beginning has disappeared, replaced with anger. "Once a week we are tied up out there and forced to endure it again. Once a week for the rest of our lives!" Diana finished the last part screaming, partly because the crowd was getting restless and partly because of her anger. She took her spear off of her back and waited.

Darius was still in his original position. She would not attack until he had picked up his swords. Darius slowly put his hands down. He was thinking about what Marcus said. He could not allow Valerie to live through that. He crouched down and picked up his swords. The crowd started cheering again. Darius looked hard at Diana. She nodded. There would be no more words spoken until one of them was dead. Darius struck hard and fast. He swung one blade at her stomach, which she blocked with the base of her spear. He used his other sword to strike at her face diagonally. She blocked that with the shaft of her spear. She was now holding her spear diagonally. Darius jumped into the air and kicked out at her with both feet. Diana flew backwards, rolled, and jumped to her feet. She ran at him and vertically swiped at him while he was still on the ground. Darius caught the blade of her spear with his sword. The blade was barbed, so Darius hooked his sword into the blade and, using the momentum of her swipe, brought it down into the ground inches away from his face. He dropped his sword and grabbed the spear so that Diana could not easily pull it out of the ground. He pulled himself up with his left hand, and with his right, he stabbed out with his sword. His blade found its mark in Diana's gut. The entire coliseum went quiet for a few seconds and then erupted into applause and cheer. Darius got up, threw his helmet to the ground, dropped down, and cradled Diana's head in his lap.

"Thank you." Diana whispered. She continued to look into his eyes as the light faded from hers. Tears started to fall from Darius's eyes when she finally sighed her last breath. He looked up at the podium and saw that Bellona was smiling and shaking Marcus's hand.

Marcus stood up and proclaimed to the crowd, "We have only seen the first of many battles to come. New Themyscira will run a gauntlet. Darius is to face all of the non-citizen, top-ranking gladiators they have over the week. 27 women will enter this arena, to either die by his sword or bathe in his blood." The crowd cheered even harder. "And the next match will be inside of a bio dome, courtesy of Bellona!"

The crowd was so loud now that Darius would not be able to hear himself speak. He looked down at the woman whose life he had ended and thought about his soul. He wasn't sure how much of it he had left, but he knew it wasn't enough to survive killing that many women who were being treated like that. Darius decided that the time to escape was now, before he lost his humanity, and with it, Valerie.



## Period

*Kristine Wagner*

She leaves work early because there isn't much to do and she is cramping badly. Stupid Advil isn't working, or if it is, she would hate to see what it would feel like without Advil. Sitting hurts. Lying down hurts. Walking to the car was absolute torture. She is supposed to go to this thing at her friend's later, but she really doesn't want to. Well, it is either that or going back home and having to put up with her mom's constant questions and no private space. Her friend's house it is.

She drives to her friend's, trying to keep her eyes focused on the road. She wonders how much a car crash would hurt. Could the pain be magnified anymore at this point? She figures it might be, so she makes an effort not to crash. A car honks at her for not responding to a green light quickly enough. Little car, she could kill you and all the other little cars if she felt like putting the effort into it. She is a gracious driver—you be thankful, little car.

When she gets to her friend's house, she parks behind the old shed and slips in through the back porch and into the guest bathroom. She doesn't want to see anyone or talk to anyone or answer any questions. "How do you feel?" "Like crap on toast, thanks." It just wouldn't be a good idea. She quick, grabs a blanket from the guest closet, hands shaking. She locks the door to the bathroom and collapses onto the ground. The effort of driving made her sweat profusely, and now chills engulf her body and the sweat stands on her arms in weird, gelatinous droplets. She drinks water from the tiny paper cups they have for guests to use while brushing their teeth, because honestly she doesn't know what else to do beyond curling up in the blanket like a fetal burrito. What was this pain like? Being stabbed in the stomach? No, not quite that sort of sharp pain. Sharp pains are intense, quickly subsiding. Aches are duller, staying constant for long amounts of time. Period cramps are like the foul child of both, having both the intensity and staying power.

As she contemplates her pain and fantasizes about her impending death, she hears voices in the guest room. She hopes no one tries to open the door or see who's in there. She has left all the lights off except the nightlight which is always plugged in next to the light switch, so it shouldn't look like anyone is there. She stays very still and listens.

"Just put your coats on the bed, Kacey should be here in about half an hour." she heard her friend say, and a couple of other familiar voices responded and faded away as the group left and the room returned again to silence. Faye had invited Sarah and Tom over? Faye doesn't even like Sarah, probably because she used to like Tom. "Used to," ha, she would've laughed if it wasn't such a pathetic story and if it didn't feel like tiny dwarves were mining their way out of her uterus using tiny pickaxes. So instead she stays quiet and reads the back of the Advil container.

### **Warnings:**

**Ask your doctor before use** if you are pregnant, under a doctor's care for a serious, condition age 60 or over, taking any other drug or have stomach problems."

Well she definitely wasn't pregnant. Allergic reactions, blah blah blah, oh look, stomach bleeding.

**"Stomach bleeding warning:** This product contains a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) which may cause severe stomach bleeding."

Drat! Probably shouldn't take any more, but really, could sever stomach bleeding hurt any more than this? Would it kill a person? Would it get her to the hospital? Would the doctors knock her out? That wouldn't be too bad. She contemplates this until voices reenter the room.

"Coats on the bed! Kacey should be here in about twenty minutes!" she hears Faye say again.

"Oh my gosh, it's so exciting!" a voice that could only be Tiffany's squeals.

"That is if she says yes, you know." a nasally voice replies. Katherine. That would be Katherine. Ever since Katherine's breakup, Katherine has avoided her. Probably because she told Katherine to grow a pair and move on. It had been 10 months at that point, in her defense, and he was already engaged to someone else. *Oh well*, she thinks, sniffing the disinfectant wipes from under the counter, *that's your loss, Katherine*. She wonders if she can kill enough brain cells by sniffing this stuff to stop the pain. She probably is killing too many already to be considering that as a plausible solution. But hey, the pain must have lessened for her to be thinking this creatively at least!

She also begins wondering why on earth Faye was telling everyone what time she would be arriving. She probably ought to make some effort to go out and join the rest. She stands up wobbly, holding onto the edge of the countertop. She sits on the toilet and checks her tampon. Bled straight through and left a lovely stain on the back of her pants. Fudgesicle frickety-frack. Were there any tampons under the sink? Of course not. And that was the last in her purse. She stuffs her underwear full of toilet paper and gingerly takes off her jeans and rinses them under cold water to get the stain out. That'll take a while to dry. But it is just supposed to be a movie night or something. Maybe Faye's not letting anyone start watching until she got there. That's so sweet, but there's no way she's leaving this bathroom for at least another hour. Sorry punks, y'all can just gossip and postpone starting the movie until that time anyway, because that's what you always do. She reaches over to text Faye that she'll be late, but her phone is dead. Oh well.

"You can just throw your coats on there, and hurry back! She should be getting here anytime." Faye calls.

"Do you think she'll be surprised?" Tony asks.

"Definitely! I can't wait to see the look on her face!" Kelsey replies.

Kelsey? What on earth is Kelsey doing here? Kelsey is her older sister, not one of Faye's friends. And Tony is her brother-in-law, Faye's probably only seen him like, twice.

"Mr. Phillips, we're putting the coats in here. Mrs. Phillips, I think my mom has the appetizers in the basement." Faye calls again. She hears her parents thank Faye and leave the room. She is now thoroughly confused. Her parents are not here for a movie night. Everyone is there for her. But her birthday isn't for another two months, and birthdays aren't that big of a thing. She would be turning twenty-two, not sweet sixteen.

"Sorry Jeremy, it's pretty loud out there, could you repeat that?" She hears Faye shut the door. Must be on the phone. "What do you mean she's not at work? Does anyone know where she is?" Oh sweet tea and biscuits, she was going to be found out. "45 minutes ago? Oh my gosh. No, she didn't tell me anything. Let me see if anyone here knows where she is."

She sits in the bathroom, pantsless and wearing a bloody toilet paper diaper, unsure what to do. If it was just Faye, she'd be fine. But with all those other people here, she can't just march out like she is. Her pants are still soaked, and it still feels like rodents were gnawing away at her uterine lining, although not as bad as before. Maybe small rodents now. She braces herself and makes a decision. The next time Faye or one of her family members comes through that door, she will try to get one of their attentions, and hopefully a new pair of pants.

But alas, it is not Faye that reenters; it is Sarah and Tom who come back in.

"I guess we just wait now. It sucks that she wasn't there for Jeremy." Sarah says.

"Well she didn't know he would be coming." says Tom.

"Well she should've come here then. Now Mr. Phillips is driving back to their house to see if she's there. All this trouble for nothing."

"Getting engaged isn't exactly nothing, Sarah."

"She might not have even said yes! They've only been dating 11 months."

"Some people get engaged after less."

"After *fewer*, dear. It just seems like a bad idea after such a short amount of time."



“Guess that means I have more time, then, eh?”

She can almost hear Sarah glaring at Tom in the silence that followed.

“We’re different.” Sarah says, pointedly. “We’re more mature.”

“Yeah, Jeremy and Kacey definitely have their issues. Jeremy is still working at Macaroni Grill, you know. Not a great way to start a marriage.”

“She’s probably twisting his arm into it. If it weren’t for the fact she wasn’t even there for him to pick her up for the proposal, I would’ve thought she was the one planning it. Kacey is so overbearing. I just feel sorry for Jeremy. I can’t see what he sees in her, she’s not even that pretty.”

“Now Sarah, that’s not nice.”

“It’s true! He’s out of her league. Oh shoot, is my mascara smearing? Why don’t you ever tell me these things?”

“Uh...”

“Never mind. I’m going to clean up.”

“Alright, I’m going back out to see if there’s any news.”

Kacey hears Tom leave and Sarah approach the bathroom. Kacey has the blanket wrapped around her waist, and unlocks the door. Sarah gasps when she opens it, but Kacey puts a finger to her lips and ushers Sarah in and shut the door again.

“Oh my gosh!” Sarah exclaims.

“Shush!”

“Oh my gosh,” Sarah whispers. “Have you been here the whole time?”

“Yes. I need you to get me some pants.”

“Did, did you hear Tom and I?” Sarah looks nervous. Kacey doesn’t even bother raising a judgmental eyebrow at her. She is in pain, tired, angry, and doesn’t have time for this floozle flazzle.

“Yes. I am very disappointed, but we haven’t been close in years, so I guess it makes sense. All that doesn’t matter right now. I need a pair of pants.”

“Kacey! You need to go out there! People are worried! What on earth have you even been doing in here?”

“I’m planning to get out there, as soon as I have pants. Can you get me some pants?”

“You’ll need to ask Faye.” Sarah doesn’t seem to realize the situation. Kacey takes a deep breath.

“I’m having cramps, and have no pants. Can you go ask Faye?”

“Cramps? You’re in here just because of cramps? Couldn’t you just suck it up? That is so selfish!”

“Sarah! You do not understand. Right now my shredded uterus lining is coming out of my vagina and I just missed my proposal apparently, and you were talking smack about me just a minute ago. Do us all a favor, stop being a horrible person, and just find me a pair of pants.”

“You could just put on the wet ones.”

“Yes, and I could also just go tell Tom about Chad.”

Sarah’s eyes widen in horror. “You wouldn’t.”

“That depends on if you can find me a pair of paints.”

“I thought we were friends.”

“Well so did I, but that display I just heard out there proves otherwise,” Kacey hisses, pointing out the bathroom door. “I’m happy to put all of this behind us; just right now I need pants.”

“You won’t tell Tom about Chad?”

“Sarah, however you choose to screw up your life is up to you, unlike some people I don’t go spreading my opinions about like manure on a field. Now, pants.”

“You do, too! You are one of the most headstrong, overbearing people I have ever met!”

“Sarah, PANTS!”

“First you have to promise not to tell Tom about Chad.”

“Who’s Chad?” Tom’s concerned face appears at the door. “You know this thing isn’t soundproof, right?”

“Tom!” Sarah gasps. Both of them begin bickering, and Kacey sinks back into the corner of the bathroom and starts crying quietly. Standing so long had caused a new wave of cramps, and she is angry and miserable. Jeremy rushes into the bathroom, pushing Sarah and Tom out of the way.

“Kacey! Have you been here the whole time?” Jeremy asks, quickly taking in the whole situation; pants in the sink next to a bottle of Advil, small smears of blood on the floor. Kacey nods, sniffing. Jeremy puts his arms around her, drawing her into a little bundle. Instantly her anger fades away and her whole body relaxes into him. “Your period started?” Kacey nodded again. “You know, I’ve always wanted to get you out of your pants, but this is not what I had in mind.” Kacey half-laughs, half cries, and Jeremy smooths her hair. “Guess you heard what this whole shindig was about, huh?”

“Were you really going to propose at my job?” Kacey asks.

“Yeah,” Jeremy chuckles, embarrassed.

“Well that’s a stupid place to propose.” A grin sneaks back onto Kacey’s face. Jeremy throws back his head and laughs.

“You’re right, it’s not the most glamorous, but marriage isn’t exactly the most glamorous either, or life in general. Look at us now.”

“I’m plenty glamorous. Blood-stained jeans, it’s the trend women have been waiting for since they were allowed to wear pants.”

“You are the most glamorous.” Jeremy laughs. “Will you make my life a little more glamorous and marry me?”

“Once I get a pair of pants. Yes, duh Jeremy. Yes, yes!”





## Privy

*Bret Lundstrom*

We join the greats  
Every time we squat  
On the pot  
We are never alone  
On that porcelain throne  
The Einsteins, Carnegies  
The Lincolns and Gandhis  
Took a part  
In that most humane art  
Take brief relief  
As you sit and think  
Wondering who you are  
Unburden yourself  
And know that you are  
Among good friends  
Good men, good women  
Sit with you  
With newspapers and books  
Wondering with you

## *Fiiiiire*

Rachel Schuldt



60



61





## Remember When

*Brandon Evans*

Looking at a version of life  
Through the lens of a cellphone screen  
She envies all the things she is missing  
Without ever seeing anything  
Always busy viewing and judging  
She spends her youth at the price of peace  
A faint blue-tinged light has left her precious face  
With tan lines and age marks for social media's sake  
Where has my little girl gone?  
The one who cared about the simple and the sweet  
She always feels so distant in conversations  
Conversing solely in thumb speech  
There is a loss of interaction  
Even though more connected we've never been  
I miss my little girl so much  
I post a picture to say "Remember When?"

## Snow Poem

*Brandon Evans*

It is weird how different two days can be. I walked outside yesterday to a heavy snowfall. It hid the sun behind a quiet, gray blanket. Big, cotton candy flakes hit the ground in muted puffs. It was nice, and it was peaceful. Even in the city. For a little while, the snow covered up all the nastiness that filled the streets, and everything was pure again. White, clean powder radiated a soothing stillness in the otherwise busy minds of the city folk. It seemed like it was Mother Nature's hint at us to slow down, so we did.

Each one going home to whomever they had. Sharing hugs and kisses under blanket forts as we lined up a movie to watch or show to binge. Just like that, we had stopped the hustle and bustle. We were quiet and content just like the icy smoothness of the fresh snow, and just happy to be still. Happy to be innocent.

Then, the morning came. Jobs demanded attendance, and rush hour roared to life. Now, the snow, no longer a bringer of peace, is a burden and annoyance to our busy lives. We pushed our ways out into it. Clumping the powder into heaps, big trucks cleared a messy path in the once calm roads. We left those we sought comfort with. Leaving them like the dirtied snow that lined the streets. Once white and pure, but now gray and thought of as gross. We left our snow fort comrades as we necessarily sought more green.

Today is sunny and warmer than yesterday. The snow is melting, and I am out alone in this world. It isn't quiet out here, nor is it peaceful. No, all that has been replaced by us and our noisy business. I find it odd, though, that today is nearly twenty degrees warmer, yet it feels much colder than yesterday.





## The Constellations of Conversations

*Bret Lundstrom*

How such curious glances cross  
Passing by without second thoughts  
Casually drifting on  
The cusp of conversation  
Words on the tips of teeth  
Slightly gripping  
Then slipping  
Away from sight  
Constellations of connecting souls  
Scattering the celestial scenery  
Faint connections between stars  
Create lions in the night sky  
We woefully walk wayward  
Onward from somewhere  
To somewhere as we each  
Line the streets of our journeys  
Granting each other a king's nod  
To the many subjects of intent  
As the seeds of casual talks  
Fall amongst the rocks, sand and soil  
Fortuitous rains fall on our heads and hands  
While we reach out both  
But masquerade in prideful faces  
Social as we are  
Sanctions are made every day  
Bits of safety stain the liberty  
Of every relationship that could be

*Fog*

Kristine Wagner



# The Kingdom of Colors

*Brenden Kleiboeker*

I pushed away from the overflowing clutter that consumed my desk. My head spun with all the documents, files, and tax forms that still needed to be completed for my clients. April 15th was right around the corner, so naturally, everyone was looking for a professional to personally handle their taxes. Well, “When taxes are due, Jonathon Marshall is the man for you.” That slogan ran across the bottom of my business card just like it now ran through my head each time I completed filing someone’s taxes. I pinched my forehead in the hopes of seizing the repetitive phrase. It stopped the phrase momentarily, only to have the reminder ring in my ears that I needed to call about having the two bills that had been lost in the mail re-sent to me. As an accountant, I should be more organized, yet during this time of year I lose all control in the chaos. This year had been by far the toughest. It really was the true test of how much I could handle before completely quitting my job, leaving my family behind, and moving back in with my parents for total financial support. My wife had spent the last week on a team-bonding work trip, leaving me with the housecleaning, cooking, maintenance, as well as trying to keep track of our daughter Vanessa... all while trying to balance my clientele who were just as needy as my 4-year-old.

Cursing my wife and the fortunate luck of her work retreat, I made my way towards Vanessa’s room. Mid-step over Bandit, our dog, I stopped to take in the smell that radiated off of his fur. The stench of rotten animal, which I’m sure he thoroughly enjoyed rolling in, traveled from his blood-crusted hair, filling my nose and spiking my headache into a migraine. I mentally added ‘Dog Bath’ to my to-do list.

Songs of innocence traveled down the hall as I approached the cracked bedroom door. The Christmas icicle lights that hung from the ceiling of her room overflowed into the darkness of the hallway. I poked my head in, careful not to disturb her playtime. Her room imitated my office. Yet, toys took over papers, and pretend tea replaced cups of coffee.

“Daddy, just in time! Cinderella is about to go on vacation with Rapunzel. Prince Charming is taking the horses out to the courtyard to play fetch while the castle is getting painted pink!”

I would love to have the leisure time of Charming, even if it was playing fetch with horses. I’d skip out on the pink castle, though.

Actually, no, I wouldn’t. A castle meant a support system. No more dog grooming or bill paying or tax filing. I wonder who she has doing all of that. Wait, what am I saying? She doesn’t think of that stuff. All Vanessa wants is for her horses to have a good time and to have a pink castle. I looked over at my daughter as she threw a small bouncy ball across the room, only to fling the horse right after it.

“Way to go, Bullet! Daddy, Bullet is the fastest horse in all of the Kingdom of Colors!” She made her way across the enchanted forest I called her room. She picked up the horse and brought it back to the castle. “I call it the Kingdom of Colors because all the trees in the forest are a different color and the magic waterfall looks like a rainbow.”

I sat down next to her, picking up the other horse.

“That’s Gimper. He isn’t as fast, but he is the prettiest horse. Cinderella rides him. It’s only fair since she’s the prettiest princess.”

Amazing. I began to imagine her riding around the carpet that built itself into trees and grass. The horse was no longer being moved by hand, but running on its own, dodging socks that had turned into boulders. The blankets tumbling off the side of her bed had changed into the rainbow waterfall that ran just on the far side of the Kingdom of Colors. Cinderella’s hair bounced as Gimper trotted over the Legos that...

“Careful, Daddy! The red ones are from the volcano!” Her hand reached out and stopped

Gimper before he stepped on the Lego Brick.

I snapped back into reality. A flushing of all the real world jobs that needed to be completed filled my head again as Vanessa’s room came back into focus, the Kingdom of Colors that Gimper had just been trotting through fading back into my imagination. I glanced down the hallway, over Bandit, and into the slightly ajar door of my office: home of all my stresses and everything else that comes along with adulthood. I took a deep breath, stood up, walked towards Vanessa’s door, and shut it.

“Well, then let’s get the Kingdom guards to clean up the forest.” I grabbed some of her stuffed animals and brought them to the carpet that again began its transformation back into the magical forest. I returned to my position next to my daughter and re-entered the Kingdom of Colors with Gimper in one hand, Cinderella in the other, and a smile of relief across my once stress-crinkled face.



# The Story of Blue Belle

Jaymie-Rae Martin

*My first memory of life was of their kiss.*

*His calloused-looking fingers curled themselves in her copper hair while she smiled as their lips pressed together. The gesture seemed odd to me, but I stared, enchanted by it and them. Her arms held me close to her breast, and I heard very clearly the fast thumping that thumped within her. It deafened my ears but I could also hear his. My first sound was of their hearts beating. My first scent was of her Jasmine flower perfume and the faint aroma of powdery rose of the workshop room. My first touch was of her warmth from the skin against my little body, and my first sight was of their kiss. It was soft and it didn't last long, but their noses still caressed each other before they opened their eyes to gaze into their souls—his slate gray reunited with her fresh spring grass green.*

*Joy—I knew not what it was in my first moments, but it was the word that came to me as I observed their expressions. Joy and love. A love so strong, pure, and true that it breathed life into me. I knew the man who kissed this woman. He was the one who built me, and their love is what created my soul.*

*“My love,” the woman called him, “did you give her a name?” her voice chirped like the morning sun of spring.*

*Looking down at me with her, he hummed. His voice spoke, deep like the calming, crashing of waves of the sea—soothing and strong. “I made her for you, my dearest. She is yours to name.”*

*The woman studied me further. She looked at my tube-curl, golden hair, my clear brown eyes, my pale cheeks, my painted red lips, my sapphire blue dress and blue bonnet to match on top of my head, and the black, buckled shoes on my tiny feet. She stared at my colors, and an idea sparkled in her eyes.*

*“I shall call her Blue Belle. Our beautiful little Blue Belle.”*

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Once upon a time, in the year 1862, there was a young doll-maker. He was a Frenchman who traveled across Europe in hopes of settling down in a town far from the city, where he could practice his craft of ball-jointed doll making. One day, he fell in love with a woman in a small town with the most beautiful green eyes he had ever seen. He opened shop in her town and she loved the dolls he made, even when ball-jointed dolls were a new craft and weren't immediately fond of by society. This woman was the first to love his creations in her little town.

To propose, the doll-maker crafted a doll of fine beauty and detail—the most stunning doll he had ever created in his career. He was not rich. He was an outsider in her town, and all he knew was how to make dolls. He didn't have much to offer her, but she was more than satisfied with his love alone. She accepted his proposal and loved the doll as if it was her own child. She named it Blue Belle.

Years of happy marriage together passed before the couple could, at last, have a child of their own. However, the baby did not cry when she was born. Although breathing, the doctor predicted that the child would not survive a day after her birth. The doll-maker and his wife were devastated with the news, until they heard their baby crying from the nursery. In her crib, where they left their baby girl, the Blue Belle doll was lying beside the baby as she wailed and cried.

No one knew how the doll got there.

Ysabel, the baby girl, grew up happy and healthy with her parents for many years after her miraculous birth. She was very well behaved—always helping her mother clean after supper, always smiling, always expressing love to her parents, and she shared their love for the dolls her father created. At school, she was considered the most well-mannered student a teacher could ask for.

But she was also the quietest and most reserved child in class. She wouldn't play with the other children, but would rather spend many hours of the day watching her father carve, paint, and dress the dolls he sold, and, if Ysabel promised to be careful, her father would allow her to play with the dolls as well. For a young girl of seven, it wasn't unusual to play with dolls for Ysabel would eventually out grow them, but she never tried to intermingle with the other children or any other adult besides her parents—if necessary.

“Father's dolls are the only friends I need,” Ysabel would reply when she was asked why she never talked to the other children.

How she played with the dolls was similar to how people would interact. She would talk to the dolls and respond as if she were engaged in a back and forth conversation—with their own thoughtful opinions and responses. Her strange behavior did not go unnoticed by the village or her parents. It concerned them, but Ysabel was their precious child. They did their best to understand her, as they knew of the isolation to have an intense fascination no one else could really appreciate.

For every doll that was sold, Ysabel acted as if she were saying goodbye to a dear friend. Since she had no real friends, her father decided to craft for her a doll of her own—much like how he made one for his wife. Equally perfect and equally divine. “Think of him as your angel to take care of you and to watch over you,” the doll-maker told his daughter. “Your guardian when your mother and I are not around to protect you, a companion to guide you and accompany you in life's journey, and a friend to help you smile so you won't ever be lonely. You are the most precious thing to my heart, Ysabel, you and your mother, my beautiful little doll.” She loved the doll he'd given her and played with it always, along with her mother's Blue Belle doll.

Then one night, tragedy struck on Ysabel's house.

At this time, ball-jointed dolls still were not a popular craft in the small, reserved village. The doll-maker had many troubles in the beginning and many more when he managed to capture the heart of the most beautiful woman in town. A drunken group of five bigots, prejudiced against the dolls, with a leader known for his acute distaste against Ysabel's family, raided their home. First, they attacked the shop; the family woke at the sound of the windows smashing and porcelain heads of the dolls shattering. Ysabel was the first to cry, screaming about the dolls being murdered. Quickly, her parents hid her under the floorboards and warned her not to come up or make a sound no matter what sounds she'd hear. Ysabel remained as quiet as she possibly could, gripping the doll her father made for her and the Blue Belle doll in her arms, as she heard the men storm into her home, beat her father, and disgrace her mother.

“Ey! Where'd thad brat of yurs go? Thad creepy liddle bitch! She'd be nice, ain't she boys?”

Beaten nearly to death and raped beyond salvation, Ysabel's parents were at the men's mercy but they would not breathe a word of their daughter's location. With a sudden slam of a heavy boot from the leader, Ysabel squeaked under the floorboards, and she was discovered. The leader tore through the room to find the trapdoor, and he grabbed the little girl by her collar when she had tried to escape. She dropped her doll in the dirt and dust of the underground and screamed for her parents while gripping little Blue Belle in her tiny arms.

When Ysabel's father tried to escape his assailants, they punched and kicked him back down—cracking more ribs and having him gasp for impossible air.

When the Ysabel's mother tried to escape her rapists, they punched her down and slammed her face back on the wood before pinning her body back to submission. A water pitcher had fallen from the counter when the leader searched for her daughter, and the doll-maker's wife reached for a piece of the glass. Grabbing it, she stabbed her assaulter in the neck to get him off. She left the piece in his neck to bleed to death and reached for her daughter next. The leader stopped her, and she scratched his eyes. He dropped Ysabel, and the little girl protected her mother's doll with her elbow.



Ysabel heard her mother scream for her to run. She heard the man call her mother a 'whore'. She heard her mother get pushed and then there was a very loud SNAP. Ysabel turned around and saw her mother on the floor, her head under the legs of a fallen rocking chair. Ysabel's father couldn't call out to his own wife when she laid unmoving.

With two dead bodies in the room, the other two attackers started to panic. This was going too far but it was too late—their leader bellowed. They finished what they had started, and he reached for Ysabel. The little girl had not looked away from her dead mother. With the sorrow of her body and the anger towards these men, Ysabel suddenly screamed, and from the trapdoor, a knife stabbed the leader's arm before he could touch her again.

A stranger crawled out of the trapdoor, holding the hot metal blade that burned the flesh it impaled—allowing not a drop of blood to be spilt from the wound. The doll-maker recognized the stranger the moment he saw him through the blood that clouded his vision, though he could not believe it. Wearing the same clothes he stitched and bearing the same features he designed, this stranger resembled the doll he crafted for his daughter.

With eyes that glowed red, like the devil's wrath, the stranger smirked and hissed, "I'm going to kill you...."

"....all of you," Ysabel finished for the stranger, whose hazel-violet eyes glowed with rage just the same towards the men who murdered her mother.

One by one, the stranger killed the attackers. He sliced off the leader's arm first, before digging the blade under his ribs, and then dragging the blade down the flesh of his thigh, just so he could survive a little longer. The scent of burning flesh sullied the air, and the other men tried to leave. The doll-like stranger did not let them. He trapped them in Ysabel's home, and he reveled in carving their bodies before the shock and pain drove them mad to death. The stranger's knife raped the men of their dignity, the way they violated Ysabel's mother, and he made sure to have them cry in the luscious pain they shared with Ysabel's father. The stranger did everything Ysabel wanted him to do and more—and she loved their screams.

The leader had a gun in his jacket pocket. He pointed it at Ysabel, his hand shaking from lack of strength and his eye sight unclear. A shot boomed into the room, and Ysabel's father heard the stranger call out a name from the hallway before the air finally became silent. The name he heard was Blue Belle. Feeling more concern for his daughter than the unfeasible events that played before him, the doll-maker crawled to Ysabel's side. When he saw her face, she was without an eye. Funny thing was, it wasn't the doll-maker's daughter whom the bullet hit. It was the Blue Belle doll that was also missing an eye.

When Ysabel woke up, the doll her father made for her was beside her on the bed—no longer life-size and moving on its own. The doll-maker also waited by the bedside, with his wounds unskillfully mended. "You're not afraid of me?" she asked her father.

Then he smiled, and he replied to her, "How could I be afraid of the child who saved my life and avenged her mother's murder?" with the utmost sincerity. Ysabel was so relieved by his words that tears drenched the tightly wrapped bandage over her missing eye. Little did she know that her life was never going to return to the truly happy days she once knew.

\*\*\*\*

The doll-maker left town with his daughter. They knew they had to leave and start anew somewhere far away. They buried their wife and mother, giving her the proper burial she deserved, and they burned the bodies of their assaulters in their house. Father and daughter traveled from one town to the next—some were large cities and some were small towns. The doll-maker never let the two of them stay for very long. Only long enough to open shop, sell a few dolls for money, and then they would move on to the next town.

It wasn't because the doll-maker feared their identities to be revealed and the two of them to be

separated. It was so Ysabel's father could find a proper wife and mother for his daughter—someone who shared a love for the ball-jointed dolls and had the same shade of green eyes as she did, which held compassion and acceptance. Once it was confirmed that none of the women in town had her exact shade, then the doll-maker and his daughter would move on.

A mother with a gentle soul and those same beautiful green eyes; yes, that was to be the proper mother for Ysabel. If a woman was false, then there was no need for her.

Years passed this way—the constant moving, Ysabel's new education becoming the craft of doll making, and the relentless searches for a replacement mother. Ysabel herself didn't complain about this new way of living, so long as she had her dolls and her father. She was fine with not making friends or acquaintances with other people, so long as she had her father's dolls for company instead. Then in a smaller, poor village near the ocean, Ysabel met a thirteen-year-old girl, same age as her, named Clarisse.

Clarisse approached Ysabel first and was really friendly with her. She was also very persistent, which was something Ysabel wasn't comfortable with. She was more acquainted with the eerie eyes of rejection and the soft mumbling of rumors that scorned her and her dolls. When Ysabel tried to ignore Clarisse, the sea village girl would continue talking as if she were completely oblivious. She admitted that the village was financially suffering from their poor skill at fishing, which was where most of the income came from, and there weren't a lot of children since families would often leave for a better life—so Clarisse was very happy when Ysabel and her father moved in. No one had ever really said that to Ysabel before and slowly, she listened to Clarisse a little more.

However, because the village was small and low on potential marriageable women, there wasn't a single pair of green eyes possessed by any of them. Ysabel's father was ready to leave, but Ysabel pleaded her father to stay a little longer. It was the first and only time she ever asked him for a request, but he was still adamant on finding a woman to be Ysabel's mother. The doll-maker's daughter had known of her father's grief for losing his wife. She watched it turn into his obsession and eat away the caring father she used to know all these years. She saw the violence he would sometimes display, never to her but to the women he attempted to court and the people who taunted them. Ysabel witnessed his episodes and she never stopped her father or told him different. Only at the little village by the sea did Ysabel finally tell him a secret of what he could do so that they may remain a little longer.

"Make a doll, Father. Craft a doll in Mother's image with the same eyes you love. Think of her as you craft it. Use the love you have for her to create a soul. Give it a purpose, and I'll help give it a physical form like before—when Mother died, and I used the doll you gave me to avenge her. I can do that, Father."

The doll-maker immediately went to work. His new obsession became making the perfect doll, in his wife's image, so that she could come back to their daughter—come back to him. So long as they could stay in the little village by the sea with Clarisse, Ysabel didn't mind her Father's newfound madness.

The two girls became close friends. Ysabel listened more to Clarisse. Clarisse never stopped talking and invited her new friend for dinner and sleepovers. Clarisse's parents were also very nice to Ysabel and had wanted to meet her father as well, since they were the political leaders of the village. "Father is busy working," Ysabel would answer, and that was all she would say about it.

Ysabel still played with her dolls, and Clarisse became the first, and soon the last, person whom she would ever willingly allow to touch them. She shared her views with her new friend that dolls are alive. They have souls, and Ysabel's father has the ability to create souls for every doll he crafted, without even realizing it. It was because of his love for crafting that such tiny, little souls could be born, and only Ysabel could hear them, since she was also a product of his making. The dolls could not move on their own, nor could they talk to their owners. "Is that why you move



around so much,” Clarisse asked her, and Ysabel told her no. It was because she allowed her doll, Wrath, to kill the murderers who took her mother away. Clarisse accepted listening to this and more.

One day, the doll-maker was near completion of the doll-imitation of his deceased wife, and Ysabel was readying herself to meet with Clarisse. The sun was just about to set, letting in the hues of red and orange to reflect off the ocean’s surface through the windows of their home, when there came a knock at the front door. A police officer was at the door, and Clarisse’s voice was heard screaming behind him.

“There’s the freaks!”

Outside Ysabel’s home was a mob of the villagers, with the police officers that held badges from bureaus of larger, more well-known cities—a few the doll-maker and his daughter had lived in and left. They came for the family of criminals, who not only killed the men that killed Ysabel’s mother, but also assaulted and dishonored the women who had the ‘wrong shade’ of green eyes. Since Ysabel had confessed to Clarisse about what happened that night and why they traveled from place to place, their actions could not be pleaded as self-defense, and the people who rejected them would not accept such a plea anyway.

Ysabel knew that the crime of dishonor was a lie against her father.

As the police were dragging the doll-maker and his daughter from their new home to the police carriage, the captain informed Clarisse’s family that they had done a great service to society and would be given a hefty reward that would replenish the poor village for many years. They called Clarisse a hero. When a police officer took Ysabel’s Wrath and Blue Belle doll away, she struggled—screaming and claiming that no one touches her dolls.

“No, just me, right?” Clarisse picked up pieces of coral rocks from the sea shore and threw them at Ysabel. A few other villagers started copying her, throwing rocks at Ysabel and her father. “You’re the spawn of the devil! Go rot in hell where you belong!”

One of the rocks missed Ysabel entirely and instead hit the Blue Belle doll. The already broken porcelain face cracked more, and Ysabel screamed bloody murder. With the police holding her, she couldn’t cover her face and allowed all of the village to watch how the corner of her lip cracked, like the doll’s, into a wide, rigid smile—the same damage that was done to the Blue Belle doll. Seeing this, Clarisse ran to the police officer that held the two dolls and yanked away the Blue Belle one. “Did you forget to share this little secret with me, *my friend*? Any damage done to this filth will be done to you? Then let’s make that ugly face of yours prettier!” She raised the doll up to smash the doll on the reefs. Right before she could, her hands were sliced clean off over her head.

An officer laid on the sand, with his head nearly severed from his shoulders, and Wrath caught the Blue Belle doll before it hit the ground with Clarisse’s dismembered hands.

“Now you’re going to die...” Wrath hissed, and Ysabel finished, “...Clarisse.” Her one visible hazel-violet eye was glowing, like it had all those years ago.

Wrath stabbed Clarisse, multiple times. The last one he stabbed deeper into her chest and turned the blade so that her screams would be nothing but total agony when it echoed throughout the beach. The villagers started to run away, even Clarisse’s parents, fearful of this new stranger who just appeared out of nowhere while the other police officers took out their guns. They shot at Wrath and he allowed the bullets to hit him. He relished in the terror on their faces when they watched his wounds heal instantly, as if they hadn’t happened. He wanted to show them that their weapons would not hurt him or cause him to bleed, even when a bullet went straight through his head.

Then he would play with them, with his coal hot blade like the first time. Wrath killed all of them, sparing Ysabel’s father, who once again could only watch these impossible events. He watched how his daughter walked over to Clarisse’s bleeding body for her last moments of life.

“You were never my friend.” Then her soul drifted away to death.

Ysabel took off the bandages that had covered her missing eye all five years and rolling down her face were tears of blood. The wound left by the betrayal of her friend bled through her missing eye as she screamed and cried in her grief and anguish. The tears and the blood drizzled on the sand, and her shrieks were like listening to a dying animal—it was painful to listen for the doll-maker.

When he tried to approach her, however, Wrath returned and threatened Ysabel’s father not to touch her. If the doll-maker had been a good father and protected his daughter like he was supposed to, instead of sulking over his dead wife, then this wouldn’t have happened. Claiming that finding a suitable mother was for Blue Belle’s sake, Wrath didn’t want the doll-maker to make him laugh.

“Wrath, stop it,” Ysabel demanded her doll not to talk to her father in such a manner, but she dare not say more to defend him, as a part of her agreed with Wrath’s words.

Ysabel’s father did not fear Wrath, even when he should. But seeing how much pain his daughter was in, ignored that instinct. He reached for her again and brought her to his arms to hold. He caressed her, kissed her, and apologized over and over for what he’d done to her.

*BANG*

Clarisse’s father had come back with a gun and a few men who’d also run away at first to get weapons. The one who fell from the bullet was the doll-maker, with his daughter still in his arms. Wrath turned his rage on them and brutally murdered the men—their weapons failing to protect them from him. Ysabel crawled out of her father’s arms and became hysterical over the blood and the wound—pleading with him not to die and leave her. He cupped her right cheek, where she didn’t have the broken crack on her face, and his hazel-grey eyes showed only sweet adoration for his daughter and the death that had crept to claim him.

“My beautiful little doll....p-please f-forgive me.” And then he died.

With his death, Clarisse’s and the town’s betrayal, anything sweet or pure that was left snapped inside Ysabel. Wrath could feel something happening inside her, something darkening and evil. When Ysabel screamed again, birds flew from neighboring trees far from the village, and animals scurried away from their homes to get away from the dark energy released from Ysabel. The windows of Ysabel’s home were broken, and the villagers quivered at the sound of such a monstrous screech while they armed themselves or tried to gather their families to leave.

Leaving was futile for anyone. From the doll-maker’s workshop and through the front doors of his home emerged six dolls with larger physical forms like Wrath—one of them being the masterpiece Ysabel’s father obsessively crafted.

“Kill them....I WANT THEM ALL DEAD!! LET THIS VILLAGE BURN BACK DOWN TO HELL!!”

By Ysabel’s command, Wrath and the new six dolls went on the hunt. Every soul in the village—every man, woman, child, and elderly—were all sent to damnation. Her Wrath that was fueled by the Lust for their blood fed her Gluttonous hunger for the injustice done to her. Her Slothful feelings were Envious of the families that comforted each other when pleading for mercy, making her feel Greedy for a more painful demise on them all. Her seven dolls answered her desires and physically caused the village to burn for the sake of their mistress’s Pride.

No one was safe and everything burned, just like Ysabel wanted. She didn’t watch it burn. She stayed by her father’s body—caressing his head, holding him against her broken heartbeat, and kissing his cool, dead face.

Ysabel only looked up when she heard a familiar voice cry ‘monster’.

Clarisse’s mother became the last survivor of the village. She was being dragged by the hair in Wrath’s grip when he returned with the other six dolls. He had a feeling that Ysabel wanted the honors. He gave her his knife, and she accepted it, holding it to the woman’s throat.



“Silly. I’m not a monster,” Ysabel said, tilting her head to the right so the gaping hole that had once been her left eye was revealed for the horrified woman to see. “Father says I’m beautiful. So tell me, please. Don’t you think I look pretty?”

Ysabel slashed the woman’s throat and as she laid on the ground, drowning in her filthy blood, Ysabel constantly stabbed her—over and over and over again.



*Die in Bloom*  
Haruka Kawata



## The Voice Behind the Words

*Brenden Kleiboeker*

Searching to penetrate the mind  
Words traveling across the crisp  
White paper  
Raped by blue lines

Releasing emotion from the tip  
Of their pen—escaping the pain  
Embodying the soul  
Freedom

The hands and mind are paired  
Creating an art that may not be grasped  
The work of others stolen for their own  
Claiming it in thievery

Molding words to fit the shape of others' minds  
This cares not of the art of their work  
But rather an art so shallow  
So rich no joy comes from this practice

True writing is not categorized by  
Penetration emotion thievery or molds  
But rather  
To write is simply to live



## Tulips Along the Way

*Bret Lundstrom*

Tulips lined that particular train track  
Only on one embankment though  
They couldn't grow across the rails and ties  
With no intentions of embarking  
Trains flow past, usually from the north  
Grinding metal on metal brings slight winds  
Gently bending the stems and playing with petals  
Old flowers sometimes have their stance broken  
To be swept onward down the tracks  
Sometimes lying on the giant wooden ties  
Only to be pushed farther down the tracks  
The unlucky few who fall on the metal  
Are cut in half and turned into blossoms  
Perhaps to be picked up by hand holding lovers  
To end up in a lucky girl's flowing hair  
Carried a bit farther down the tracks  
While that flowerbed on one side of the track  
Blooms forth with vivid life and commotion  
While trains sweep by with winds from the north  
To take love elsewhere for it is already here







*Out of 202*  
Brenden Kleiboeker

## Contributors

**Marrisa Bylo** is a Nonprofit Administration major that happens to love writing as well. She's been writing since the 5th grade when she learned she could take all the thoughts in her head and turn them into stories. Marissa is a self-proclaimed literary nerd, fangirl, and cat lover.

**Devin Mitchell Durbin** is a class of 2016 mass comm student. He has written over a thousand poems in his lifetime. He writes mostly confessional styles poetry but has begun experimenting with blackout and other types. You can follow him on Instagram @devinitelydev or find him on devindurbin.com

**Brandon Evans** by all accounts should have a career already – any career. He decided against it and went back to school for a creative writing degree, because he is an excellent liar. He fully accepts his bright future of unemployment, and self-aggrandizing starving artistry.

**Nicole Hansell** is a homeschooled, Air Force brat and creative writing lover. In addition to being firmly rooted in her Catholic faith, she is the second of seven kids, a Guitar Hero enthusiast, and enjoys sticking puppets out the car window to wave at passersby. So... weird, but good weird.

**Haruka Kawata** is a senior student at Lindenwood University, originally from Osaka, Japan. She is a Studio Art major and a Psychology minor, and has taken a digital photography class in 2014. She enjoys drawing, painting, sculpture, cooking, playing the piano, playing sports, photography, and traveling.

**Brenden Kleiboeker** is still a senior at Lindenwood University, but he is now much closer to the finish line. After graduation he aspires to be a writer in the magazine industry as well as one day have his own novel published. He is still perfect.

**Bret Lundstrom** is a future student at Whittier College, home of the Poets. He's been known to be a wittier poet than most, although he'll be the first to admit that he sometimes forces it, but that's not how the force works; that's not how any of this works.

**Jaymie-Rae Martin:** In order to overcome her fear of the unknown, Jaymie-Rae Martin has embraced the horror and terror the cultured society has to offer her. From years of intensive study on scary movies and bonfire ghost stories, Martin has delivered her version of horror based on mistreated cruelty and the unexplainable.

**Miranda L. Motes** is a current senior and Elementary Education major with hopes of entering into the field of teaching. She grew up in Nixa, Missouri but plans to stay in the St. Louis area.

**Stephanie Ricker** is a current Senior and Psychology major with hopes of entering into the field as a pediatric psychotherapist/clinician. She served four years in the United States Marine Corps as an Information Networks Technician. She grew up in Wilmington, NC and every so often yearns for the beach.



**Rachel Schuldt** has the same bio as every other human on earth. Genes, anatomy, carbon, calcium, phosphorus, skeleton, blood, 37.2 trillion cells, whatever, etc. What makes her special though is that her level of coolness is over 9,000. Whoop whoop!

**Mai Urai** is a junior student studying mathematics and pre-engineering. She works as a photographer at *The Legacy* but she also works on artistic photography. Recently she started to take pictures of people and one of the selected pictures, Inner Voice, is her first portrait artwork.

**Kristine Wagner** is graduating after three years at Lindenwood University with a B.A. in Creative Writing. Inconceivable as it is, she has had career opportunities within her field, so it must not be an entirely useless major after all. She will miss (almost) all of her professors and classmates.

**Lontreal Wiseman-Farmer** is a Creative Writing major at Lindenwood University. He is the second most interesting man in the world; he doesn't drink so was unable to be number one. He is the greatest writer ever according to his mother, and is just so handsome.

**Jeffrey Yates**, the 4th of 8 children, is pursuing an English degree at Lindenwood University. He enjoys reading and writing as well as the outdoors. His biggest goals in life are to obtain a PhD in English and to teach English to students in less fortunate countries at some point.

*Arrow Rock* is currently accepting submissions for Issue IX. Please email your poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, plays, photography or artwork to [ArrowRock@Lindenwood.edu](mailto:ArrowRock@Lindenwood.edu)

To view previous issues of the *Arrow Rock* literary magazine visit [www.lindenwood.edu/ArrowRock](http://www.lindenwood.edu/ArrowRock).



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*Arrow Rock* would also like to express our gratitude to this issue's contributors for their fearlessness and honesty.

Finally, we'd like to thank our readers. *Arrow Rock* now belongs to you.

We hope you've enjoyed issue VIII.

## ***Arrow Rock* Literary Journal Mission Statement**

*Arrow Rock* is committed to promoting and providing a mature environment for Lindenwood University students to publish quality fiction, nonfiction, poetry, essays, plays, and artwork, while showcasing the integrity and the individual talents of each writer or artist.

The staff and contributors of *Arrow Rock* strive to produce a literary journal that interests and inspires.



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