

A large, dark silhouette of a tree, possibly a pine or cypress, stands against a light, hazy background. A faint rainbow is visible in the sky behind the tree. The tree's branches are intricate and spread out. The overall mood is serene and natural.

ARROW♦ROCK

Lindenwood University

Spring 2012

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Finally, we'd like to thank our readers. Because of you, the risk of self-expression is all worth it.

We hope you enjoy Issue #3 of Arrow Rock!



ARROW ROCK

|ssue 3

LINDENWOOD
UNIVERSITY

Spring 2012

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Arrow Rock Literary Journal Mission Statement

Arrow Rock is committed to promoting and providing a mature environment for Lindenwood University students to publish quality short fiction, short nonfiction, poetry, essays, 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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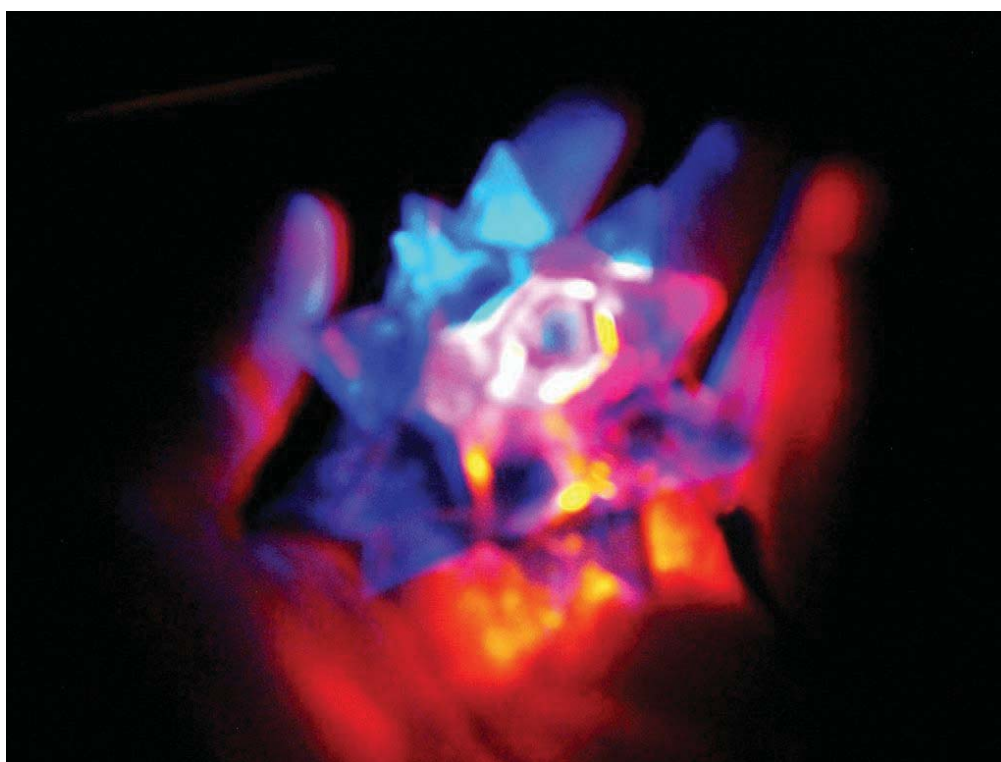
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Poetry



Sarah Crawford, Treasure In Hand

Sarah Allgood

Poetry

I sit in class, listening.
And yet I hear only noise.
The teacher's words make no sense to me,
I'm preoccupied.
My mind is elsewhere, however it's not wandering.
It's at a very specific place, in fact.
Where?
Poetry:
My least favorite form of writing.
It's there because I have to write two poems,
with which I've been struggling for the past two weeks.
I'm writing,
and all I can think of is how bad my poems will be.
But then I remember something:
I'm a writer, this is what I do.
So to the *reader*:
Stop counting my syllables,
Stop counting the lines and the stanzas.
Don't tell me this isn't poetry because it's "not correct."
I don't like to rhyme,
I don't like to match up my words and stanzas.
Poetry is supposed to be art,
It's my feelings put onto paper.
This is my art,
This is what you as a reader get.
It's not meant to offend or displease,
It's meant to tell you how I feel.
This is how I feel.
I feel that my poetry isn't standard, but it does its job.
Exactly how I want it.

Aleta Anderson

Remember

I remember that last night,
As we lay in the moonlight,
Under the black sky,
Watching for a shooting star,
In the misty blue moon bright.
No fire-colored leaves flying by,
Thoughts traveling afar.

The crisp air awakens
Senses of fall; more aware
Of the hope-filled sight,
The flashing stars
Like flickering Christmas lights.
Eyes adjusting to the sight
Took time. Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

I am tired, you said.
Tired of prayer with no answer,
Tired of this fight with no rest,
Tired of this body's imprisonment,
I want to run and dance.

I am tired, you said.
Tired of city hospitals,
Tired of breathing aids,
Tired of arthritic pains,
I want to swim and play.

I remember that last night,
As we lay in the moonlight.
Lying in the hills of home,
You asked me to promise you
To remember your fight.
Here now, I feel lonesome,
But you promised me too.

The rustic air smells,
Hints of cinnamon and nutmeg
Like aged paper of a classic book
Mixing with nature's living scent.
Lying in the hills of home,
Where last energies were to be spent,
Your motivational aura lent.

I need to fight, you said.
Fight no matter what life brings,
Fight for happiness and joy,
Fight for hope and opportunities,
I can run and dance.

I need to fight, you said.
Fight no matter daunting obstacles,
Fight for my heart's desires,
Fight for love and dreams,
I can swim and play.

Remember this last night,
As we lie here in the moonlight.
I will be laughing happily,
Please, don't cry.
I will be shining bright,
No longer suffering, painfully.
Let me go, let me fly.

The cool breeze whispers
A memory of your promise:
I will be your guardian angel,
And see you in never-ending glory.
Watching over from above,
And still walking right beside,
Being with you forever in your life.

Natalie Bridgmon

Certainty

At times, do you wonder if this is all scripted?
What if it is? Would you be afraid if it wasn't?
It certainly scares me.
Is there truly nothing worse than a blank page?
Isn't anticipation worse? Doesn't it kill you?
It certainly kills me.

Light

I met you in the dark
With only a few matches.
You took my hand
And showed me the moon.

You left when I wasn't looking
Taking all my matches too.
Then I had no choice
But to see the stars.

Weather

I've grown a lot since then,
Which is a lot like now,
Outside, at least.

The same chill in the air,
The same look of the trees,
The same sound of the leaves as I walk here and there.

If only I trusted my lungs,
If only I trusted my eyes,
If only I trusted my ears on daily affairs.

Trust is the problem,
Or it was, anyway,
But I've grown a lot since then.

Josh Jones

Cupid's Bullet

He has grown tired of his subtle ways.

 In this new age...

 The bow and arrow don't seem to work anymore

He finds his arsenal much too primitive. Even magic can be outdated

So he toils and slaves

 Even to an immortal, this seems like an eternity

Until

He devised the perfect weapon.

 It was a gun, but not one meant for destruction

 No, this was meant to create

 To create the feeling we taught ourselves to ignore...

 But with this new weapon, we could ignore it no longer

 The most powerful weapon in the world

 And I was its first target

As I saw her, he fired

! B A N G !

Cupid watches as his bullet flies

S W I F T yet graceful.

It was love

Love at first shot

We Came

We came, from the motherland
We came to become slaves
We came into power through ancestry, but were thrown into weakness
From Queens and Kings turned prostitutes and pimps
They took our gold and gave us crack to hold
But we came to grow comfortable in our spiritual prisons
They stole our souls. And we let them go with no repercussions
On the brink of self destruction we contemplate who to blame
Them or ourselves?
We decided to have a prolonged affair with disaster
We flirted with it, we made love to it, we came.
And after the most painful orgasm imaginable, we realized
Something is not right.

Lisa Knoppe

January 5

Little girl
you are 21 today
& it causes my heart pain
because while I raised you
to soar on your own
I long for you to
fly back to me

The Pull

I want to run away from you
or rather know I should
you are the hammer
to my tack
But
something about
your love's magnetism
always pulls me
 b
 a
 c
 k

Snowflake

Lovely and pure
a virgin wearing a
million tiny diamonds
reflecting light &
dancing in the moonlight
covering the grime
of all she touches
with her beauty
until she is corrupted
and becomes filthy
just because
they touch her
and steal her diamonds

20-Sided Die

How fitting a talisman
for a multi-faceted
brilliant young man
So many sides
each one its own
Random happenstance
roll the die
watch it tumble
Who will you be?
The future is so full
of limitless talent
& possibilities using
all 254 shades of gray.

Kelsey Mooney

Friend

A cold heart's what I ran to
When I needed a friend,
Someone to wipe the tears away –
To help a broke heart mend.

Pain is what I found there.
Lying beneath his guise
Was jealousy and hatred –
What led to his demise.

His once warm laugh now mocking,
His open arms now closed.
The smile that used to light my day –
No longer does it show.

The eyes that used to sympathize
Could cut you like a blade.
The voice that once was welcoming,
Now tainted with disdain.

Accusations, false pretense –
Words twisted into lies.
Was nothing left in the context
Of what is really right?

Must feel better to wallow
In self pity and pride,
Than take the time to ask your friend
Why you see the tears she's cried.

Talking's much too easy.
Afraid of what he'll find?
That maybe things, weren't as they
seemed,
That maybe I was right?

I must've never meant that much,
I see it clearly now,
Past the haze – to my eyes – he gave,
And still it stings somehow...

I've learned a lot these last few
months,
Too quick to call him "friend,"
For that's a title one has to earn –
Won't make that mistake again.

I realize now that you can't miss
Someone that isn't there –
A time that never really happened
With someone that you thought cared.

His once warm laugh – still mocking,
His open arms – still closed.
And still he doesn't give a damn,
And that's what kills me most.

The Dilemma

Inside a place with everything,
There's one thing on my mind:
A box that streams a prism
Of assortments, so divine...

Each morsel wrapped so carefully
In silvers, reds, and golds,
The colors chosen thoughtfully
To present what each beholds.

They've dressed their best for me today,
The time of week has come
To do what seems impossible:
Choose, just only, one.

Resulting in a child's game
Of "...meeny, miney, mo,"
I leave it up to fate to name
The one I might want most.

A letter and a number pressed,
I wait so patiently,
As I hear the cranking of the turn
Stop unexpectedly.

I press my face upon the glass,
Both hands, they frame each side,
I shout and shake vigorously –
All dignity aside.

I thrashed about, began to pout,
As if this would suffice,
Perhaps, someone could spare some change,
Or a Milkyway Midnight...

Manjil Pradhan

Prostitute

Beauty and body
Governed under Marxism

For many planets, there is only one sun
Lovers crafted on professionalism

Unsatisfied but with satisfaction
Behind the curtain, hidden forever
Forbidden! May be forgiven
Creationism on Eroticism

Laine Scott

The Cat

Alexander Gubble,
Is in a spot of trouble.
His cat (named Othello)
Who's normally black,
Is now a horrible yellow.

“I do not understand!!” he said,
Quite bereaved, as he scratched his head.
“For yesterday, you were different too!”
In fact, yesterday,
Othello was blue.

“And the day before that,
Oh! my poor little cat,
Your fur was as pink as a rose!”
But Othello uttered no reply.
He just wriggled his bright yellow nose.

Alex Van Walleghen

Immortality

Words, will never dare to describe.
The pain of this loss, eternal.
Time will fade. The body will die.
But memories make us immortal.

//Poem.cpp

```
//Poem.cpp
//Written by: Alex Van Walleghen
//Written on: 01/15/2011
//Copyright (c) 2011, Alex Van Walleghen
//Do not copy, modify, or redistribute without permission
//This is not a program. It is a poem.
#include <iostream>
using namespace std;
bool Think( int );
int Happy();
int Love( int );
int Hurt( int & );
char Heal( int & );
int main()
{
    int i, u, w, o;
    bool love = new bool;           //Our love was new
    u = i = 1;                      //You and I were one
    love = true;                    //Our love was true
```

```

while( Think( i ) ) { u = Happy(); } //While I thought you were happy
while( Think( i ) ) { u = Love( i ); } //While I thought you loved me
int( Think( u ) ) >> i != true; //Inside you thought I was untrue
while( w = o = 0 ) //While others meant nothing to me
{
    u = int( Think( i + w + o ) ); //Inside you thought I was with them
}
do{ Think( u ); i = !Love( u ); } //Did you think I did not love you?
while( true == ( Love( u ) > o ) ); //While in truth I love you more than
anyone
u = !Love( i ); //You didn't love me anymore
i = i - u; //You left me
u = u + o; //You joined them
Think( u ) == ( ( i - u ) > i ); //You thought I was better without you
Think( u ) == ( ( u - i ) > u ); //You thought you were better without
me
u = i + 1; //You were better off
while( i - u ) { i = !Happy(); } //But without you I was unhappy
while( i - u ) { i = !love; } //But without you I was unloved
while( u - i ) { u = Happy(); } //Without me you were happy
while( Hurt( i ) ) //While I was hurt
{
    cout << Heal( u ); //You were healed
}
i = i - u - w - o - i; //You took everything
return 0; //And returned nothing
}
bool Think( int u ) { return false; } //I think inside you were hollow
int Happy() { return 0; } //Inside you were not happy
int Love( int u ) { return 0 * u; } //You didn't even love yourself
int Hurt( int &i ) { return i--; } //So you hurt me and brought me
down
char Heal( int &u ){ return '\n'; } //In hope that my pain would heal you
//End Of Poem.cpp

```

Devinne Walters

New Age Faerie Chick

Tiny androgynous pixie girl
With iridescent shimmery wings poking out from under her superhero shirt

So much love within her slow-beating faerie heart
But she just doesn't know how to show it anymore

But she knows excitement and joy
From comics and superheroes and music and the new video game that's coming out this month

This pixie, like any other, is full of magic and hexes and wonderment
She keeps rose quartz and hematite in a pouch along with her two decks of tarot cards

She knows much too much about the X-Men
Like how Nightcrawler is five-foot-nine and Colossus is seven-foot-something in his armored form

The pixie likes wearing t-shirts and long skirts
Despite her long, athletic, sexy legs that she likes much better than her own face

She listens to loud, clashing, soothing metal
To keep her alive although it will kill her someday

I really need to return this, she thinks to herself
As she looks at the borrowed copy of her best friend's dead father's comic book

Her other best friend is a long-haired, almost-hard-to-describe centaur girl living in a cage of hard plastic
She is miles and moons away from the pixie, but the pixie is planning to go and free her someday soon

People hate and despise the pixie
For her cold demeanor, for her short hair

And she could seriously care less and less about what they say
Because at the end of a day, she will still always be a new age faerie chick

The Fairytale

Someday,
my mother said, I would hear a voice in
My
dreams, that of a
Prince
sticking me with blackberry needles; he
Will
tell me to lick his boots &
Come
away with me

Kyle York

To My Dearest

I am aware
That you, my dear
Me nightly do mistreat.
For like the stag
Who marks his turf
Your love is indiscreet.

You flaunt a fine
And velvet rack
A paramour to please
And widely spread
Curvaceous legs
To lie beneath the trees.

You pant for love
And sate your thirst,
By stooping low to drink
And leave the first
Of many beds
Without a pause to think.

You roam by night
And hide your tracks
So as to cheat surprise
And flee at sight
Of me, a man,
Ere I can catch your eyes.

But know, brave hart
That arrows quick
Will *your* heart one day rend!
Forsooth, one day
You will be trapped,
And I this game will end.

I Must Wait

I must wait until Brazil
Where water runs
In waterfalls,
And I splash like
A cannonball.

I must wait until Brazil
Where black beans, rice
Garlic, and steak,
All taste just like
What momma makes.

Where Carnival
Brings such a high
That timid girls
Are not so shy

Where the people
Samba till dawn.
Bossa nova?
It's always on.

For...

...Now

Meeting new people
Is easy and free,
Most especially
When they're family.

The FIFA World Cup
Arrives, just like me,
Not this June or next,
But Twenty Fourteen.

Yes, I must wait until Brazil,
And since I must, I will.

Creative Nonfiction



Olivia Saldaña, Bike

Natalie Bridgmon

Skinny Love

It was all very surreal, being with Mark as his daughter played in the grass not three feet away while the sound of his family and friends enjoying themselves could be heard coming from the backyard. I kept looking around for *her* though, just waiting for her to come out and stake her claim. But she really wasn't here.

I finally decided to sit down on the front step of his house. I wasn't going to get beat up, so I figured I could sit down. He discarded his cigarette in the trash can nearby and sat next to me. It was the fourth one he had lit, but I had yet to see him finish one. Every time he started to talk to me, he threw it away.

“So,” he began, “how are you doing?”

I should've known how to answer this. I came there with every intention of closing the door on all of *this*; with every intention of finally killing the ambiguity that had loomed over our friendship since we were twelve. But I couldn't answer because I kept thinking about how I was actually sitting on Mark's front step, talking to him.

When I arrived, he had wrapped me up in his arms. His mother, Judy, followed. I took a minute to look him over. Somehow, he managed to look exactly the same and completely different—his black hair was cut the same way it was always cut, short and to the point, and he hadn't gotten any taller, but he had this air about him that I couldn't quite figure out. It could have been pride or it could have been exhaustion. Then I met his daughter, Beth, for the first time. His wife, whom I had yet to formally meet, was oddly not present. I came late because my mother and I had gotten lost. I don't know why we didn't allot time *for* getting lost because, no matter how many times Mark or his mother had given us directions, it still happened. In our defense, the subdivision was organized like a labyrinth on a hill and all of the houses looked the same.

My mom left and I tried so hard to fight the awkward feeling creeping up my spine. This was Mark. We had known each other since sixth grade. He

had been my best friend. There had been a time in my life where I would have done anything to spend an hour with him, let alone an afternoon at one of his family functions. I jammed my hands into my jean pockets and tried not to look as awkward as I felt. Mark seemed to sense this because he immediately tried to get me in on a game of washers going on in the front yard that a few of his old high school friends had started. He smiled at me and I realized, despite how awkward I felt, I missed that smile. So I played washers. I sucked.

Fortunately, the game ended quickly, and Mark led me into his house. His mother grabbed my attention and offered me something to eat. I declined because I realized my nerves had already eaten my stomach. Aunts and uncles cluttered the small suburban home, and Judy proceeded to introduce me to all of them.

“This is Natalie,” she said, “She and Mark have been friends for, gosh, since we moved here. It was like from the moment Mark met her, it had been nothing but Natalie this and Natalie that!”

She seemed so proud to introduce me, as if I were the wife Mark was supposed to have brought home to meet the family for the first time. The various family members simply looked confused because they knew I wasn’t. It didn’t help anything when Judy got a little too excited telling one relative, “Yes, and I think he even spent the night at her house a few times!”

I had to correct that. No, Mark had never spent the night at my house. During freshman year, he and another girl came over to hang out, and they *both* did not want to leave, but they did not get to stay. Of course, regardless of how much I explained, the damage was already done. My status as “Mark’s Old Friend” was now under suspicion. But was I really just an old friend? I thought I was. I told myself I was, *even if* we both recognized that there was potential for something more than that, and even if growing up everyone we knew thought we were going to get married once we got our act together. We were kids, and we made mistakes, and we missed opportunities—it was the past. Besides, Mark had a wife and a child now; everything else was irrelevant. I mean, his *daughter* was right in front of me on the living room floor playing, and his wife—

Admittedly, his wife’s failure to attend her own husband’s “Welcome Home/Congratulations on Finishing Basic Training Party” *was* slightly unexpected. I had spent the previous week preparing myself for that moment when

I would be confronted with Mrs. Mark Evans. I had all these stock responses ready to go if I was forced into idle chitchat. However, for some reason, she did not get on the plane with the rest of the family. In stark contrast, I, who had not spoken to Mark in roughly two years, had found it within myself to let the past be the past and support him. But really, it was simply nice to see him again. So when I finally figured out how to answer as we sat on the front step two hours or so later, I said, “Well, I’m at a party with you, so I’m doing pretty good.”

He laughed, but I knew this wasn’t what he was looking for. He wanted to know about my *life*, school, friends—the whole nine yards. I wasn’t going to give him that because I wasn’t the one disappeared to another state, got married, had a kid and ignored their best friend through everything; that was him. I looked on to watch Beth play, and noticed him watching me watching her out of the corner of my eye. He had been doing that all day, as if he were measuring all of our interactions. I wanted to ask why, but I didn’t. I wanted to ask where his wife was. I wanted to ask how *he* was doing. But I knew that wasn’t allowed. At least, not right now—not with all of these people here. He seemed perfectly content to wait, but I wasn’t. It was Sunday; I had school the next day and a forty-five minute drive to St. Charles ahead of me. He told me not to worry about getting a ride home, that he would drive me, but I knew if I got into a car with him, it would be all over. The whole point of coming here was to close this chapter of my life, to see him happy with his wife and child, and be able to move on. Somehow, I knew that if he got me alone, that wouldn’t happen. He would say something, he would tell me something that I wouldn’t be able to ignore. I didn’t know what it was, but that’s how we worked.

It was getting cold, so we went inside. I continued to make small talk. Judy was sure to give me Mark’s address so I could mail him things to his base in South Carolina, Mark gave me his new cell number, and Beth and I got better acquainted. When the last of his family left, I texted my mom to come pick me up. Mark had left to put Beth to bed for the night in the back bedroom, so it was down to me and Judy. We had kept in contact through Facebook, so conversation came relatively easy. Then my mom texted me that she was had arrived. Mark was still tending to Beth, so I told her to drive around the block a few times to buy time.

“Who are you texting?” Judy asked

“My mom. She’s here, but Mark is busy, so—“

“Well, go to him.”

“Are you sure?”

I didn’t want to disturb Beth’s nighttime routine. My little brother had been really particular, so that if anyone bothered my mother while she was putting him down, it would set them back an hour. I didn’t want mess anything up.

“Go talk to him.”

She was direct and I did not argue. I made my way to the back bedroom. The door was closed, so I opened it as quietly as I could. The lights were off, but a television was on, giving everything a pale blue tint. Mark was sitting on the bed, rubbing Beth’s back as she lay on her side with a pacifier in her mouth. I had seen it all day, but it finally hit me in that moment. The same boy who I met in sixth grade, who taught me how to play AC/DC songs on my guitar on my back porch during so many summers, who talked to me every day on the phone for years, who ran around my house playing with Lightsabers during my birthday parties even though we were supposedly too old for that was a *father* to a little girl. He had married and enlisted to support that little girl. But somehow, he was still just a kid himself; scared out of his mind.

I sat on the edge of the bed and whispered, “Hey.”

He jumped a little and turned to look at me.

“My mom is here so...”

“What? I told you I would give you a ride.”

“I know, but...I have to go.” I reached and took Beth’s hand into my own, rubbing my thumb over it. Her eyes began to droop closed. Mark smiled. “Look at that,” he whispered.

He got up to stand and, after a moment, I did too. For just an instant, he paused to look at me before pulling me into his arms. He held me to him as he said, “I don’t want you to go.”

“I know,” I whispered, wrapping my arms around him.

“I wanted to talk to you.” His voice cracked.

“I know.”

“There is so much I need to tell you.”

“I know.” And my voiced cracked.

This wasn't how the day was supposed to go. I was supposed to end all of this. There was supposed to be a resolution. I was supposed to get in the car and tell my mother how happy he was with his family and his life. Instead, we were both choking back tears as we held each other. He wasn't happy. This wasn't over. Could it ever really be? Did we do something wrong in the beginning? Is this what happens to all best friends who should have been lovers but never were? Do they always go in circles like this, coming in and out of each other's lives, just waiting for something to jar them off the cycle? Does that something ever arrive?

"I'll talk to you soon," I whispered as I broke away from him.

"Yeah," he replied weakly.

I made my way out to the driveway, saying goodbye to Judy as I went. "Don't be a stranger!" she called after me. My mother was waiting in her car, so I quickly got in and shut the passenger door. A few minutes of silence later, she asked, "So how was it?" I took a moment before I answered.

"It's all wrong. He's not happy."

And I cried.

Mandy French

How to Write Your Very Own Mary Sue Character

The vampire genre is once more on the rise in popularity in today's literature. The trend set by novels such as *Twilight* and Anne Rice's *Interview With a Vampire* is now being duplicated all over the shelves of the tweenage romance section. But I've noticed a trend that separates these novels from the so-called "classics": the presence of one, or many, Mary Sue characters. If you want to write a novel, especially a vampire novel that will sell to the many screaming, adoring, 12-16 year-old fangirls, you must include this ever-present Mary Sue character. And now I will teach you how to write one so that you too can see your novels jammed on the shelves with the label "teen vampire romance."

The first step in writing a Mary Sue character is to make that character absolutely perfect. This is easy enough to do with vampires, who are supposed to be naturally beautiful and flawless. However, your character should not be aware of his/her perfection. She/he should be modest and should always wonder why it is that everyone seems to find him/her so alluring. Your Mary Sue character should also have one single flaw. Do not confuse this flaw, however, with the fatal flaw the Greeks were so apt to use in their tragic plays. This flaw should only be noticed by your Mary Sue character, and everyone else in the book should find it either adorable or deserving of pity. For example, your character could be endearingly clumsy or fascinatingly shy or even pitifully self-loathing. And no matter how much the other characters in your book try to point out the perfection of your Mary Sue character, he/she should never believe them.

Now, besides a perfect personality, let's talk about your character's physical appearance. He/she should be beautiful. Period. No one would want to read about an ugly character.

However, as with your character's personality, he/she should not be aware of his/her beauty. Your character should think that his/her appearance is mediocre at best and bashfully brush away any comments or attempts to prove otherwise. Now, don't get too caught up on describing your character's physical appearance for your readers. Try to make your description as vague and

general as possible so that all of your readers can picture themselves in your character's body. Also, it's perfectly alright if your character resembles, or is even an exact replica, of yourself. After all, who would write a novel with the purpose of living a complete stranger's life?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, your Mary Sue character shouldn't be able to die. Again, this is most likely the reason why the vampire genre is so packed with Mary Sues. Vampires live forever as long as they drink blood, they are eternally beautiful, and only things such as sunlight can kill them. However, as the much-loved author Stephenie Meyer must have realized, drinking human blood and bursting into flames in sunlight is just plain icky. No one would ever find that attractive. But instead of freaking out over this apparent contradiction, she simply made her vampires capable of sustaining themselves off of animal blood with no apparent drawbacks except that their eyes turned gold instead of a gruesome blood red when they were hungry, and she made them sparkle in the sun. Now, what about Bella-type characters, you might ask, who aren't yet vampires but keep trying to convince their reluctant boyfriends to turn them into one? Again, your character can't die because that would ruin the story and make all of your adoring fans hate you, but he/she should still come close to death on numerous occasions, in which it appears there is no escape for him/her, and then be saved by another character or some strange miracle of magic you've never brought up before in the story until it suited your needs.

J.K. Rowling was apt to do this at the end of every single one of her *Harry Potter* novels in which Harry always, unsurprisingly, came across some plot to kill him designed by either Voldemort or his followers, and was miraculously saved by the strange, never-quite-explained power of his scar or his mother's sacrifice. If your character is a female, though, as in the case of Bella from *Twilight*, you should make sure that, despite the fact that she claims to be a headstrong woman who can take care of herself, she is always saved by a stronger, masculine character, and becomes absolutely useless in rescuing herself as soon as he arrives. After all, why would any teenage vampire fans want to read about a feminist character that can kick ass all on her own?

Well there you have it, a step-by-step guide on how to write a Mary Sue character all your own. Now you too can publish mediocre vampire romance novels, become temporarily popular, and then fall into anonymity among the millions of other writers until you crank out another novel like the whore author you are. Have fun!

Caitlyn Modde

Sea Monkeys

Last Thursday the unthinkable happened. Our Sea Monkeys died. Unthinkable because seven days earlier I had just told forty-two excited children how our newly hatched Sea Monkeys could live up to two years. I don't know why I was so confident that our Sea Monkeys would provide months of delight, considering I bought them on a whim with no idea of what they really were. What exactly are Sea Monkeys? Looking at the packaging they looked like mini sea horses wearing crowns and holding scepters. A friend told me that Sea Monkeys are brine shrimp. I acted like I knew what she was talking about but I really had no idea. Shrimp? Like the kind you eat with cocktail sauce? Now I had eighty-four eyes looking at me with a million questions. What seemed like a good idea at the time was now coming back to bite me in the butt. In addition to comforting the sad little faces in front of me, I now had a Sea Monkey funeral to plan.

The kids were excited when I brought the Sea Monkeys kit to daycare. The kit came with three steps, a water purifier, Sea Monkey eggs, and Sea Monkey food. We read the instructions and set up the water in the little plastic tank they would live in. We first put in the water purifier and waited a day for the water to drop to room temperature. The anticipation of the Sea Monkey arrival was agonizing to the children, so to kill time they began naming all of our Sea Monkeys. Bob, Smelly, Kitty, Justin Bieber, etc. were all names chosen for our Sea Monkeys. They even named a Sea Monkey after me, Caitlyn.

The day after our water was ready we put the packet of Sea Monkey eggs in. The eggs looked a lot like rock salt and the kids and I all sat around the tank to watch them sink to the bottom. It amazed me how interested kids could be in tiny specks of white floating at the bottom of a plastic tank. Two days later the eggs hatched and we had about twenty-five tiny Sea Monkeys, including Caitlyn. They looked like little specks of dust floating in the tank. The kids would stand on a chair to see the Sea Monkeys sitting on a shelf in the classroom. I purposely put it up high because I knew that some kids would be too tempted to touch. I had to do everything in my power to protect

the Sea Monkeys. The kids were mesmerized. With magnifying glasses in hand we watched, as the little specks would surely develop into some swimming monkey type shape. The anticipation had the children checking the Monkeys constantly. Some of them were concerned with how big they would get. A couple of the three-year-olds from another class were worried the Sea Monkeys would grow legs and take over the daycare. I never did get the idea across to most of the kids that the Sea Monkeys were not actual monkeys.

Five days after the Sea Monkeys were put in the water we got to feed them for the first time. Again, the kids and I all sat around the table and put a tiny spoonful of food in the tank. It was a powdery looking substance that was pea green and smelled funny. The kids were excited and we even set up a food chart for every two days so each of the kids could get a turn to feed them.

The very next day, last Thursday, we came into the class and the Sea Monkeys were sunk at the bottom of the tank. We shook the tank. Nothing. The best reason I can come up with as to why they died is that the room became too cool overnight and the water got too cold for the Sea Monkeys. The weather had been pretty cold lately but I never considered it would do anything. Should I have put them under a night-light? I guess I'll never know. Remembering the story I once heard about chefs that sometimes put lobsters into the freezer because the cold makes them go to sleep and then they kill them, I told the kids that our room had gotten so cold the night before that it put all of the Sea Monkeys to sleep and they just never woke up. I assured them it was a peaceful death. Brine shrimp are similar to lobster, no?

Once the kids found out the Sea Monkeys died they insisted on a funeral. Some of my co-workers looked at me like I was nuts but what could I do? Most of the kids really cared about the Sea Monkeys, including Tristan, a second-grader, who drew a picture for the Sea Monkeys. He drew their tank, some flowers, a tombstone, and himself crying. Once the funeral would be over I decided we would flush the Sea Monkeys down the toilet and send them on their way. I informed the kids of this so they could prepare themselves for the flush. I set up all of our classroom chairs in a semicircle and brought the Sea Monkeys to the front of the room on a table. I imagined the table with the tank as being like a casket and each of the kids could view the Sea Monkeys for one final time. While doing this I noticed the kids had out several rolls of toilet paper. Monique, a fourth-grader, suggested that all of the kids write mes-

sages on a piece of toilet paper. The loving messages could be flushed down the toilet with the Sea Monkeys so they would know how much we cared for them.

We started the funeral with a moment of silence and then we went around the room and each of the kids said something nice about the Sea Monkeys. Mia, a first-grader said that she thought the Sea Monkeys were cute. Lilly, a second-grader said she would miss them and James, a second-grader said he enjoyed the week we had with them and he would never forget it. Who knew Sea Monkeys could make such an impact. We then all huddled into the bathroom and put the pieces of toilet paper and the Sea Monkeys in the toilet. The kids had one final goodbye at the toilet. Respectfully each of them honored our short-lived classroom pets as they passed the solemn toilet. Some with words of love and wisdom and others with a quiet goodbye nod. Then flush. That was the end of our beloved Sea Monkeys. Gone from our classroom, but not from our hearts.

Kelsey Mooney

Untitled

Once again, I sat next to the window in my room. Up on my bed, I looked out the large window next to me, with the long, dark purple drapes that framed each side like hair framing a face. My bed was colder somehow. The quilt that lay at the end of the bed, where I was sitting, was worn and weathered where you used to accompany me. This is the only spot which has never neglected to be the one place I could count on to be as comforting today as it was the day you left. This was our spot. This is where we spent most of our time and have built most of our favorite memories. Today, it is where I noticed it was raining again. I took a deep breath and allowed my imagination to wander. Through my window, I could see lightning light up the dark grey sky as if to silently announce the performance that was about to unveil. Thunder followed shortly after, using its booming instrument to draw attention towards a direction I assumed it had intended my eyes to follow. Next, the wind began to whistle a familiar, happy tune, rattling the glass into a harmonious chorus. Each droplet of water from the rain then danced across the pane in what appeared to be a performance just for me. Though it was beautiful, it wasn't enough to help fade the pain that lingered deep within me.

I often imagined such things, on days like this, in an attempt to distract myself from the memories of you. It's hard not to want to pretend on rainy days, especially like this one. Today it is raining just as hard, and storming just as it was the day you left; there is even a light, eerie fog hovering just about the grass in my front yard. The last time a day like this happened, I became so miserable that I locked myself in my room, and vowed never to eat or drink again until you returned. The pretending seems to have helped with such dark days since then.

To be honest, I don't know why I bother distracting myself when I know I'm waiting at the very spot that reminds me the most of you. There's not a day that goes by that I don't spend the majority of my time by this window, hugging my legs tightly, hoping today is going to be the day that, finally,

you will return. I know mother worries about me. I try to reassure her that I'm fine, but she hates how I glue myself to the window, day after day. "It's not healthy," she reminds me. I can't count the number of times she has urged me to move on – assured me that there will be others. "*Others*," she says – as if you could ever be replaced. I don't care what mother says. I know it's only a matter of time now before I can hold you in my arms again. We've come too far and spent too much time with one another to give up hope now. I know, deep down inside, that you love me. And I know, that you know, that I love you too. Every time I was with you I could see it in your big, dark brown eyes. They are one of the things I have always loved most about you. You could always say more to me with your eyes than you ever could speaking.

These nights have been colder since you left. I can't tell you how much I miss never having to say anything when I was cold. You always knew exactly when I needed you to scoot in just a little bit closer to get me warm again. I remember how you never cared how close you got to me when I was sick, or how silly I looked surrounded by the castle I had built of wadded up tissues and toilet paper rolls. You were always the first one in line, even then, to give me a kiss. So many nights I have cried on your shoulder, and you always took the time to listen to every word I had to say, without judging – a courtesy I have never received from any of my friends. These sorts of memories are the ones that keep me waiting for you – every day. I know you want to come back. Honestly, I don't think you ever meant to leave. You couldn't have intentionally known what you were doing, or you would never have left me here.

Suddenly, I felt something warm and wet drag across my foot. Startled, I jumped up. I must've zoned out because the sun was out now, and the dampness from the rain had been almost completely dried away – that is, everywhere except for my foot. I looked down to find the culprit, who had accidentally been knocked over in my surprise, on his back on the floor. All four legs were up in the air, kicking frantically, and his unusually large tongue was dangling freely out the side of his wide open mouth. His normally floppy ears were laying open, flat against the floor as his body was twisted into a ridiculous "C"-shape. He squirmed left and right at least five times before figuring out how to get up. But once he did, he nearly knocked me completely over. "Buddy!" I squealed, as I buried my face in his coarse, brown and black coat.

As I finally raised my head, I found his fur had been drenched with my tears.

“Who found you?” I asked, as if actually believing he would answer.

My mother interjected, explaining that he had just shown up on the front porch this morning. Buddy escaped from the yard one day, about a week ago, while I was attending my first day of classes at my community college. Someone forgot to lock the gate to the fence. Buddy and I are so close that I think he went looking for me, and finally returned when he couldn't find me. I know it hasn't been long since he left home, but I could tell my parents had already given up hope that he would return. Once my parents had vanished from my doorway, I jumped back up on my bed and inched my way over towards the window, once more. This time, I called Buddy up with me. Buddy curled up next to me, just as he had always done every day before he left. He stared up at me with his big brown eyes, as if to tell me that he has missed me. “I've missed you too, Buddy,” I say, then give him a kiss on the head.

Laine Scott

My Title Means Nothing

A few years ago, when I was in middle school, my dad offered me a job. When he told me what my job would be, my middle-school brain got a little overexcited:

“YEAAAAAAAAAH! Where am I going? What do I have to do? Where is it? IT’S IN YOUR CAR?! Can I see it? Can I wear it for Halloween?”

And the answers to my questions were, respectively: You are going to the Grand Opening for a Sonic Drive-In in Manchester. You have to dress up in a hot dog suit and pass out balloons. Yes you can see it. And no, you can’t wear it for Halloween.

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A few days later I found myself standing in the impressively ungreasy back hallway of a brand new Sonic in Manchester. Despite its newness, the restaurant still managed to smell like a French fried sock (which is what all restaurants smell like, even if they claim they don’t fry food). My mom, who was going to be with me all night, tried to make me stop jumping up and down as she helped me suit up.

First, I had to pull over my head the oddest long-sleeved woolen shirt I’d ever seen. The actual shirt part of my shirt was mesh, and it only went down to about 1/3 the length of a normal shirt. The rest was composed of very ugly, very blue fabric sleeves with elastic stirrups at each end that went between two of my fingers. After I had struggled into that, I immediately pulled it off because, in the middle of summer, it is much much much too hot to wear.

The next step I might as well skip also because it deals with disgusting woolen pants of that same primary color and those same elastic stirrups at the ends.

But now I’ve reached the exciting part! The dog itself was rolling around on the floor behind me like it was possessed, its cartoon eyes laughing at me while I struggled with my shirt! This hot dog suit was very professional.

It had a cylindrical metal frame to give it its distinct shape, and a dashing bright blue baseball cap that seals off the hole at the top. My mom and her work friends then plopped the metal-framed hot dog prison over my head, then I stuck my arms out the armholes and listened to the “awws” and stifled laughter from every free man outside. The first thing I noticed then was that my face automatically got smashed up against the inside of one of the eyeballs (which is a metal mesh I could see through). Then, as if I had an unwelcome epiphany, I noticed exactly how heavy the hot dog suit actually was, and when my mom pushed down on the removable bright blue baseball cap to make sure it was going to stay on, I most certainly whined about it for a few hours. . . .

The next two steps were more awkward than you’d think. There was a pair of white gloves that seemed innocent, but were actually surprise four-finger gloves! Finally, I struggled through “slipping” on a pair of bulbous shoes, 20 sizes too big. Those special shoes were fitted to house my real shoes, and slipping shoes into a pair of shoes is certainly a feeling I’d never experienced before, or even after that day. And even though that might sound like a comfortable alternative to sharing sweaty shoes with past and future hot doggers, it’s actually rather cumbersome to layer shoes. However, forcing my shoes into giant shoes was much easier than learning to walk in them, and I found that waddling like a duck was the only way.

My mom, who was acting as my personal chauffeur, walked around on the parking lot holding my arm as I got used to walking in those ginormous shoes. Whenever we’d find a group of people, I tried my best to hand out the balloons with those awkward puffy gloves, while my mom dished out coupons.

And then I saw her: a tiny blond girl standing next to her large blond mother. I waddled towards them and stuck out my hand full of balloons to the tiny girl, who stared at me wide-eyed. She looked about six or seven, and she didn’t care one bit about those balloons.

“Are you a Hot Dog?!” she asked me.

I gave her a thumbs up.

She beamed and asked, “Will you be my friend Hot Dog?”

I kind of danced around for a “yes,” and the tiny girl smiled even wider, grabbed my free four-fingered hand with an iron grip, and did not let go.

For the rest of the night, I was her favorite person...well, her favorite food in the whole world. "Hot Dog!" the tiny girl would yell, "Come over here! Hot Dog! Go this way! Hot Dog! Do the Macarena dance! Hot Dog! Let's do the wave! Hot Dog! Jump in the air! Higher! Higher! Hot Dog? Why'd you fall over? Get up Hot Dog! Hahaha!"

As demanding as she was, I was actually having a lot of fun. And nobody knew it, but I was smiling and laughing the entire time the tiny girl "Hot Dogged" my head off. But, the ends of fun things come far sooner than they're wanted, and eventually it was time for me to take off the suit.

My mom took me back into that now slightly greasy back hallway, and pulled off the hot dog suit. The whoosh of cold air that hit me as soon as the hot suit was off made me realize that my clothes, arms, and even hair were completely drenched in sweat.

Anxious to go back outside where there was a breeze, I yanked off the shoes and gloves, thanked my dad for the shake he handed me in payment for wearing the suit for hours, and headed for the door.

I trundled outside with the surprising ease that came with wearing normal sized shoes, and saw the tiny girl sitting beside her large mother slurping down a slushy.

"Hi! Remember me? I was the hot dog. My name's Laine!" I waved and smiled at her, expecting a wave and smile back. But what I received was a blank, terrified stare. My name meant nothing to her. I was not the person she'd been running around with for hours. I was just some weird, slightly chubby older kid who looked like she'd just gone swimming in a pool full of sweat. Her mother tried to explain to her that I was "the girl in the hot dog suit," but her efforts were wasted.

Lauren Terbrock

The Five Stages of Grief

Denial

In the beginning, I wouldn't accept it. I kept going about my life as if it weren't true. In fact, I knew it wasn't true—he would fight to live. I would call him in the morning to see if he needed anything.

“Hi, grandpa. How are you feeling today?”

“Oh, honey, I'm doing just fine. I have less pain than I had yesterday. I think I am feeling a little better.” His voice was still chipper with no signs of pain or defeat.

“Well, maybe you'll pull through. Stranger things have happened!” I was wrong. Stranger things didn't happen. Within three weeks of ceasing treatment, he was no longer able to care for himself. His pain was becoming intolerable, and he rarely left his bed. There had to be at least one person at his house at all times to take care of him. Even though I was a full-time student and working forty hours a week, I still volunteered my time. If I wasn't in class or at work, I was sitting in a rocking chair next to his bed attempting to catch up on homework, listening to him talk, or watching a low budget made-for-TV movie about a woman who was trying to escape a murderous ex-husband. This is about the time that the reality set in. He was going to die, and there was nothing either he or I could do about it. Shortly after this realization is when he asked the whole family to start removing things from his house. He wanted us to take the things that we wanted; he wanted to be sure that his things would go to a good home. I searched all over his house for what I might want.

“Grandpa, there's only one thing in this house that I want.”

“Mad Bluebird?”

“Can I have it?”

“Sure. No one else will want that ugly thing.”

Mad Bluebird is the best picture. It was bought by my grandmother twenty years prior at a garage sale. It is a photograph of a bluebird, and there

is really no other way to describe this bluebird except that he looks, well, mad. Both my grandfather and I always thought this photograph was funny. It was a moment captured where a harmless bluebird is pissed. No one else thought it was too funny, so he decided to label it: “Mad Bluebird,” in the handwriting of a seventy year old man on the frame. It was no longer just funny. It was downright hilarious. That night I brought Mad Bluebird into my house, but I refused to hang it up.

Anger

The house—full of fifty-four years of family history—slowly emptied. Some family left with a picture frame, some family left with boxes full of picture frames, or anything else they could stuff in there. Two weeks later, the house was sparsely littered with trinkets and broken furniture that no one wanted. My aunt’s husband (her second, but no less rude than the first) said, “Why don’t you just throw it all in a dumpster? It’s just junk.” After he left, I sat back down in the rocking chair next to my grandfather’s bed.

“I’d like to put him in the dumpster.”

“Now, don’t get angry. That’s just Kevin..... But if you get a chance, please don’t pass it up.”

Bargaining

While we shared a sense of humor that no one else really understood, we differed greatly on terms of religion—Christianity to be exact. In the many moments we shared as his death came nearer, a lot of them were spent talking about religion and God. My grandfather, a faithful Christian, was always interested in converting me. I spent most Sundays at church with him, not because I wanted to be a Christian, but because I wanted to make him happy. He enjoyed seeing me at church while I tried to find some kind of comfort in sermons about things like forgiveness. One evening, I had the most heartbreaking experience of my life thus far. In between cries of pain, my grandfather told me what he really thought of me, someone who has been riddled with doubt her whole life.

“Grandpa, are you scared to die?”

“No, not really. I’m kind of excited. I’ll get to see your grandmother again, and I’ll see your uncle Carl.” My grandmother had passed away seven

years prior to his cancer diagnosis, and my Uncle Carl was killed in an automobile accident at the age of eighteen.

“Who do you want to see first? Grandma or Carl?”

“Now, don’t get me wrong. I loved your grandmother very much. There is not a day that goes by that I don’t think about her. And I’ve said many times that I would give anything to see my son that was taken away from me too soon. But, honestly, I want to see my Savior, Jesus Christ first. Do you think you’ll see your Savior when you die?”

“I’m still not really sure what will happen when I die, Grandpa.”

“I know. I just thought I would ask. Can I tell you something?”

“Sure.”

“I’d be a lot more comfortable dying if I knew that you believed you would see me again someday. I would like to know that you would raise a good, Christian family. I don’t know if I can really be ready to die until I know that. It’s just something to think about.”

It really was something to think about. I was presented with an opportunity. My grandfather’s comfort in dying rested in the hands of my conversion to Christianity. Could it really happen that way? I knew that I couldn’t save him. I knew that I couldn’t keep him from dying. But I could make him more comfortable, and at that point I would have done anything to take away his pain, to make him feel comfortable. However, at the same time, I felt as though I had been somewhat wrong about my relationship with my grandfather. Was it possible that he really believed I couldn’t raise a good family without being Christian? What did he really think about my morals? Did he think I wasn’t a good person?

Shortly after this conversation I told my grandfather that I was sorry—I couldn’t make the decision to believe right then. I could have taken the easier way and lied. But, that wasn’t fair to him or to me. I promised him, though, that I would allow myself to remain open to the possibility of belief. This, at the very least, made him admit that I had a good head on my shoulders.

Depression

So, there we were. We had to accept our differences at the moment and trust that what is supposed to happen will happen. Our time spent together became grim. Our conversations were dark, rarely talking about anything

other than his suffering and his desire to die. His voice became more and more quiet, and I usually had to lean in close to hear his barely whispering words. Our depression grew with each day that passed without him getting out of bed. The medications were increased as his pain amplified, and I began to question his quality of life. I began to question the quality of my own life. My conversations with my fiancé at home became more and more somber. He would say to me, “I’m worried about you. If you’re this depressed now, what will happen when he is actually gone? This isn’t healthy. You go to class, you go to school, and then you sit next to his bed. You need a break.”

“No. I need to be there. He needs me to be there. One day, he’ll be gone, and I’ll be thankful for my time with him.”

Acceptance

After two weeks of spiraling further and further down, I felt the weight of a question that I didn’t want to ask anyone but myself. I couldn’t stand it anymore. I couldn’t watch his body deteriorate. At that point he hadn’t eaten in eight days; he hadn’t gotten out of bed in two weeks. I actually wanted him to go. I wanted his suffering to end. Does that make me a bad person? Should a human want that for another human?

My answer was ultimately yes. I had finally accepted his death, and I let him know it. I went into his bedroom, and I sat down in the rocking chair and grabbed his hand one last time. His body was so skinny and frail that I could see his heart through his shirt, pounding just enough to keep his body alive. He hadn’t woken up in almost two days, but I hoped he could still hear me anyway.

“Grandpa, I want you know that I’ll be okay if you want to die. I will miss you terribly, but I don’t want you to stay here for me or for anyone else. If you want to go, then go.”

Within three hours he was gone. When I got home that night, I didn’t say anything to my fiancé other than, “Can you help me hang up Mad Bluebird?”

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Something I had never realized about caring for someone who is terminally ill is the fact that you actually grieve their death before they are gone.

It is a strange experience—grieving the death of a person who is still living and breathing (even if it's just barely). It is even stranger when the person who is dying is also going through the same five stages of grief at the same time. It becomes a support system that you would never expect. I learned all of this while taking care of my grandfather after he decided to stop his chemotherapy treatments for bone cancer. In the seven weeks between the moment he decided he was too tired to keep going to the moment when he took his last breath, a bond was formed between us that I would have never imagined.



Gary Burkhead, The Cinder Ella

Sarah Crawford

Lolly

“You want me to do *what?!?*” I asked Abby over the phone in disbelief.

“Could you please take care of Lolly this weekend?” Abby asked me again. She was almost begging me now.

“Abby,” I began. “I hate to tell you this, but I’m not in any position to take care of Lolly.”

“Please, Mary?” Abby pleaded.

“Why?” I moaned into the phone.

“I’m going out of town for the weekend,” she replied. “The place where I’ll be staying doesn’t allow dogs.”

“Can’t someone else do it?” I asked desperately.

“No, they can’t,” Abby replied. “I’ve called everyone—my neighbors, my coworkers, my best friend—they just can’t take care of her right now.”

I couldn’t say anything. All I could do was sigh out of exasperation.

“I know this is short notice, Mary,” Abby said. “I wouldn’t have asked you if I knew other people could do it. Could you please take her this weekend?”

I sighed again. “Maybe. How old is she?”

“She’s 16 weeks old.”

“Is she housebroken?”

“Well, um, no.”

“What?!”

“She almost is!” Abby cried in an attempt to rescue her puppy’s reputation. “She goes to the bathroom outside, but you have to take her outside as soon as she starts pawing at the door. She also likes to chew. She still doesn’t know the difference between her toys and whatever objects may be lying around the house.”

“You’re kidding, right?”

“And she has lots of energy. She likes to run,” Abby continued, as if she hadn’t heard my last question. “One of her favorite things to do is run outside and play fetch with a stick. But sometimes when she runs, she crashes

into stuff. Just yesterday she ran head-on into a bush while she was chasing her frisbee.” Abby tried to conceal her laughter. “The poor thing; she was just so excited that she forgot to look where she was going. Anyway, I wouldn’t leave anything breakable in your living room while she’s there.”

I couldn’t imagine what kind of situation I was getting myself into. Me, take care of a dog? It’s laughable!

I’ve never owned a dog, mainly because I’ve never been very fond of them. Besides the fact that I didn’t like dogs, I had just moved into a new loft downtown. It wasn’t very big, but it was very comfortable. The day before my kid sister called, I had just finished the two-month long process of decorating the loft to make it feel like home. All of the walls were painted in pale pastel colors of lavender, blue, and green. Every room had a wallpaper border featuring a floral design. A carpet cleaner came in the week before to deep-clean the white carpet that covered every square inch of floor space except the closets, the kitchen, and the bathroom. In the living room I hung up several framed paintings of nature scenes. I had placed a new brass candelabrum with mauve-colored candles on one of the end tables near the new sofa. The other table held a porcelain vase full of freshly picked lisianthus flowers. I displayed my glass figurine collection on the open-ended bookshelf across the room next to my small aquarium, which was sitting on a low shelf against the far wall near the ottoman footstool.

Abby wanted me to babysit her four-month-old hyperactive puppy in this place?

I sighed again. “Okay, Abby. I’ll take care of Lolly. When do you leave?”

“Tomorrow morning,” Abby replied. “My neighbor is driving me to the airport. Can I drop Lolly off at your place right before I leave?”

“That’s fine,” I said.

“Sweet!” Abby squealed into the phone. “You’ll love Lolly; I just know it.”

At that moment, I heard a faint yet audible crash in the background. “Oh, dear,” Abby sighed.

“What was that?” I asked her.

“Nothing too serious,” she replied after a slight pause. “Lolly just ran into the living room, and she accidentally tripped over the electric cord of my

reading lamp and pulled it off the table. She's fine, though. And it doesn't look like she broke the lamp." Abby began to laugh. "Talk to ya later, Mary. Love you. And thanks again."

Abby hung up. I kept holding my phone, wondering what I was getting myself into this weekend.

I didn't waste any time getting ready for Lolly's arrival. As soon as I came to terms with the fact that my sister's four-legged home wrecker was coming to *my* home, I began to make the necessary accommodations. I packed my glass figurines safely away in a box to keep under my bed. I removed the lisianthus flowers from my porcelain vase and placed them in a tall, plastic glass on the kitchen counter; they would be safer there than on the end table near the sofa.

I had just finished watering my large potted fern in the living room on that Saturday morning when Abby knocked on my door.

"Hey, Mary! It's me," I heard a voice say.

I opened my door to see Abby wearing black sweatpants and a neon, multi-colored tie-dyed T-shirt. She had a large, blue denim tote bag slung over her shoulder, a nylon leash wrapped around her right hand, and a 30-pound (or so) black lab puppy cradled in her arms. The puppy's tail was wagging so rapidly that it looked like it would fly off of her little body at any second.

"Hi, Mary!" Abby beamed as she stepped through the doorway. "I'd like you to meet Lolly." Abby set her on the floor.

I looked down at Lolly. She was already balancing on her two back feet, trying to jump up on me.

"Down, Lolly," Abby commanded gently. To my surprise, Lolly obeyed immediately. She sat down at Abby's feet and panted heavily as Abby dropped the leash onto the floor.

This was the first time I had seen Lolly in person. Upon first glance, I have to admit, she was a beautiful dog. Her pale pink tongue sharply contrasted with her shiny black coat. Her eyes were a little hard to see at first, but I could tell they were brown. They seemed to reveal the wild, energetic side of her that she had to restrain while sitting politely for me. Her tail wagged with eager anticipation of what would happen next.

"She bounces off the walls sometimes," Abby told me. "But she's very obedient. If you tell her to sit, stay, lie down, come, whatever you want, she'll

do it.”

“That’s good,” I said, trying not to sound worried.

“She’s a good girl,” Abby said. She turned her gaze towards her dog and stooped down to pet her. “Aren’t you, Lolly?” Ohhhhh, what a good little girl you are!” she cooed. I thought the pitch of her voice would break the windows.

“This bag has everything Lolly will need this weekend,” Abby said to me as she stood up. “It has her food and water bowls, three days’ supply of dog food, and a brush. She gets fed twice a day, once at breakfast and once at dinner. There’s a line drawn on the dog food scoop that shows how much she needs for each feeding. I already fed her this morning. She has a few toys in her bag: a giant rope, a Frisbee, and a squeaky ball.”

“A giant rope?” I asked her.

“It’s a chew rope,” Abby explained. “She likes to play tug-of-war with it. Let her win.”

“Okay,” I said indifferently.

“She enjoys running,” Abby continued. “I let her run in my back yard every day. It lets her release her pent-up energy that she’s had after being stuck in the house for nine hours while I’m at work. She also likes to play fetch. She’ll chase and retrieve almost anything. And if she needs to go outside to do her business, she’ll let you know. She’ll whine and paw at the door.”

“Okay,” I said again.

“And if she rolls over on her back and stretches one of her front legs toward you, it means she wants you to rub her tummy,” explained Abby. “She doesn’t let everybody do that, so consider yourself privileged if she lets you.”

“Alright,” I responded.

Abby looked at her watch. “I need to go soon,” she said. “Lolly’s kennel is in my neighbor’s car. I don’t know if you’ll need it or not, but you’ll have it anyway. I’ll bring it in here, but after that I need to head to the airport. I’ll be right back.” She left and shut the door behind her.

I looked down at Lolly. She looked up at me and wagged her tail.

“Hi, Lolly,” I meekly said. I timidly stooped down to pet the top of her head, but before I could reach her, she began to lick my hand.

“Ew!” I shrieked as I jerked my hand away and stood up. I couldn’t

remember feeling anything so slobbery in my life.

Lolly stared hard at me and tilted her head to one side. Her tail stopped wagging. I felt tension and awkward silence between the two of us. I thought that this only happened when I met new people and didn't know what to say to them. Apparently, it happened to me when I met dogs, too.

After a few minutes, I heard a loud thud outside my door, followed by a knock. I opened it to find Abby scooting a dog kennel across the floor through my doorway. Lolly immediately sprang to her feet and jumped toward Abby, her tail wagging furiously at the sight of her owner.

"Down, Lolly," commanded Abby. Lolly immediately sat down but continued to wag her tail. "This is Lolly's kennel," she said to me. "I put her in here if I have visitors at my place that aren't used to dogs. She loves people, but people aren't always comfortable with her because she's high-strung sometimes."

"I can see that," I said as I stole another glance at Lolly. Even though she was still sitting down, her whole body was shaking wildly as she continued to wag her tail. She was still panting with her mouth wide open, her pink tongue hanging loosely out of her mouth.

"She had a bath last night, so unless she gets really dirty playing outside or something, you won't need to bathe her," Abby continued. "But there's shampoo in her bag, just in case."

"Any questions?" Abby asked me.

"No, I don't think so," I replied.

"Okay," said Abby. "I've gotta head to the airport now. Thanks again for doing this, Mary." She hugged me. Then she squatted down on the floor again. Lolly lunged for her.

"Down, Lolly," said Abby gently, and Lolly obediently sat down right in front of her.

"Good girl," cooed Abby as she squeezed her puppy good-bye. "Be a good girl for Mary, okay? She's gonna take good care of you while I'm gone."

Abby stood up again.

"Thanks again, Mary. See ya!" Abby said cheerfully. She left and closed the door behind her once again.

I didn't have any questions before Abby left, but a tidal wave of them rushed into my head as soon as she was gone. I didn't know how well I was

going to take care of Lolly. I mean, she wasn't going to starve, and I had no objection to letting her go outside when she needed to, but at that moment I desperately wanted Abby back so she could relieve my mind of its current barrage of questions: How do I play with a puppy? How do I make a homesick puppy go to sleep? How do I make her obey me?

All of a sudden, Lolly leapt from her seated position and jumped on me. I knew that she wasn't strong enough to knock me down, but it still took me by surprise.

"Down, Lolly!" I cried, hoping she would listen to me.

To my surprise, Lolly obeyed my command. She immediately sat back down.

"Good girl," I said. "Let's take your leash off." I had just noticed that it was still attached to her collar. I knelt down, unhooked the leash, and placed it in her bag.

As soon as I had taken the leash off of Lolly, she rolled over on her back and squirmed all over the floor, kicking her legs up in the air. She must have done it for a good minute or so before she got up off the floor, shook, and took off running with her nose to the carpet. As soon as she got up from the floor, I noticed that she left a patch of her black fur on my white carpet. It wasn't a huge mess, but there was so much fur in that little spot that vacuuming it a few times would be the only way to clean it.

I looked up from examining the fur to see that Lolly had finished exploring the various scents in the carpet that only her nose could detect. She had jumped up on my couch and placed her two front paws on one of the end tables. She hoisted the rest of her body onto the table and began to sniff the candelabrum with my new candles in it.

"No, Lolly!" I cried.

It was too late. She had yanked one of the candles out with her mouth, knocking the entire candelabrum on its side with a reverberating clang. Lolly half jumped, half fell down from the table toward the floor and landed on top of the giant potted fern I had just finished watering. She climbed out of the pot and started running across the floor toward the hallway with the candle clenched tightly between her teeth, leaving a trail of muddy paw prints behind her.

This can't be happening, I thought to myself. "Lolly! Come back here!" I yelled as I stood up to follow her. On my first step, I tripped over the

denim tote bag, fell to my knees, and did a face plant in the patch of fur she had just left on the carpet.

“Lolly, SIT!” I yelled as I raised my head up. I hoped she would obey.

To my surprise, Lolly stopped running and sat down in the middle of my bedroom doorway. She began to chew on the candle as I stomped toward her.

The candle obviously wasn’t fit for display anymore. I picked it up and walked toward the kitchen to throw it away, but before I made it there I heard Lolly canter into the living room. She stopped in front of her bag and stuck her head inside. I could hear her sniffing and could see the outline of her head under the bag.

What’s she looking for? I wondered. I was still holding the candle. Even though Lolly looked occupied, I still felt uneasy letting her out of my sight. I set the candle down on the end table and sat on the couch.

Lolly finally emerged from the bag with the squeaky ball in her mouth. She ran toward me and dropped the ball at my feet. It was obvious what she wanted me to do.

I picked up the ball and almost shrieked with disgust. It was drenched in her saliva.

Lolly watched my every move and wagged her tail. She was waiting for me to throw the ball. I knew that throwing the ball inside was a very bad idea, so I just tossed it straight up in the air a few inches, thinking she would catch it.

She didn’t. She reached for it, but the ball bounced off her nose, soared across the room, and landed with a splash in the aquarium.

Lolly didn’t hesitate one second. She sprinted toward the ottoman and jumped onto the empty bookshelf. She stood on the edge of the shelf, batting her paw in the water to try to reach her ball. She shifted her weight forward slightly, swung at the ball again, and lost her balance.

“Lolly! NO!” I cried.

KASPLOOSH!

Lolly had leaned too far forward and fell into the aquarium as she tried to retrieve her ball. Water splashed over the sides as she tried to jump out. I instantly imagined her tipping the aquarium over as she struggled. I dashed to aquarium, lifted Lolly out of the water and set her on the ottoman. She shook

the excess water out of her fur and sprayed it all over me.

I glanced around the living room. From where I was standing, I could see everything Lolly did: the patch of black fur on the carpet, the fallen candelabrum, the chewed candle laying beside it, the small pile of dirt near the potted fern, the muddy paw prints that tracked across the floor from one end to the other, my half-full aquarium, the puddles on the floor, my soaked ottoman.

Raging anger boiled inside me and threatened to explode all over this dog. This terror hadn't been in my home for 10 minutes, and she was already wrecking it.

I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, letting the air hiss between my teeth.

"LOLLY, SIT!" I commanded.

To my amazement, she immediately sat down on the ottoman. She dropped her squeaky ball onto the floor. She didn't wag her tail. She didn't cock her head. She didn't move at all.

She sat perfectly still.

Neither of us did anything for a minute. Lolly continued to sit on the ottoman without moving a muscle. I stood next to her as I wrung aquarium water out of my sleeves.

This is too much, I thought to myself. Can it get any worse?

I sank to the floor, propped myself up against the ottoman, and tried to pull myself together. Lolly didn't move. We just sat there.

After a few minutes, Lolly finally hopped down from the ottoman to the floor. I ignored her until she tried to lick my face.

"Go away, Lolly," I said.

Lolly sat down next to me and nudged my hand with her cold, wet nose. I ignored her again. She slowly walked away with her tail between her legs. She didn't run or skip across the floor like before. She knew she was in trouble.

"I'd better clean up this mess," I said out loud to myself. I walked toward the closet to find the carpet spray but stopped when I heard Lolly whine.

"Now what?!" I moaned.

Lolly was whining and scratching at the door. She needed to go outside.

"Fine," I said. I grabbed a plastic shopping bag from the closet and picked up her leash from the floor. Lolly scratched the door again, scraping

the paint with her toenails.

“Alright! I’m coming!” I said. I hooked the leash to Lolly’s collar to take her outside.

Lolly did her business on a patch of grass near the sidewalk. Thankfully, it was the kind I didn’t have to clean up. She came back to me and tried to jump on me again.

“Down, Lolly,” I said. Lolly stopped jumping and stood next to me, tail wagging.

She obviously had some energy that she needed to burn off. The city park was only a few blocks away. I wasn’t enthusiastic about walking to the park, but the weather was perfect for spending time outside, and I decided that I’d rather have Lolly run outside at the park than inside my living room again.

“Why don’t I take you to the park?” I asked Lolly, knowing perfectly well that she didn’t understand what I had just said to her. We made a quick trip back inside so I could put on my running shoes. We returned to the sidewalk, and I gently tugged on her leash to tell her the direction in which she needed to walk. Lolly ran ahead of me. Surprisingly, she didn’t jerk my arm out of its socket like I thought she would, but I did have to jog to keep up with her. I was surprised by how good the exercise felt, but I was relieved when we finally arrived at the park and slowed down to a walking pace.

A few minutes later, I found a stick on the ground that was about the same size as the candle Lolly had tried to chew earlier. I picked it up and jogged with her again to an open field.

“Lolly, sit,” I said. “Stay.”

She obeyed. I unhooked her leash and raised the stick in the air. Lolly gazed at it the entire time, not even blinking.

“Go get it!” I said as I threw the stick as far as I could. She sprinted away from me to fetch it.

As soon as Lolly took off running, I panicked. Did I make a mistake? Will Lolly come back to me? Can I catch her if I need to chase her down?

To my intense relief, she sprinted back to me with the stick in her mouth and dropped it at my feet.

“Good girl,” I said. I picked up the stick and launched it across the field again. “Go get it!”

Again, Lolly came back to me, stick in mouth, and dropped it at my

feet. This little game continued for the next half hour or so. I kept wondering when Lolly would collapse from exhaustion, but she didn't. She just kept running back and forth between me and the stick.

I was getting hungry. I checked my pockets for some money. I had enough to buy a hotdog from a stand nearby, but I didn't want to leave Lolly unattended, even for those few minutes it would take for me to buy a hotdog.

"Lolly, come here," I called.

She trotted back towards me so I could hook her leash onto her collar. We left the field and walked down a narrow sidewalk past a hedge of forsythia bushes to the hot dog stand.

"Two –fifty," the hotdog vendor said to me. I reached into my pocket for three dollars but only found two.

"Here are two dollars," I said as I handed him the money. "Hang on; I've got another dollar in here somewhere."

I finally found another dollar and pulled it out to give to the vendor. "Here it is," I said. But as I was about to give it to him, a breeze snatched it out of my hand.

"Oh, great!" I moaned. What else could happen today?

With no warning, Lolly's retriever skills kicked in. She took off running to chase the dollar as the wind carried it down the sidewalk. Her leash ran out of slack and I had to follow her about 30 feet from the hotdog stand. At last, she managed to pin the dollar down on the sidewalk with her paw.

I was impressed.

"Good girl, Lolly," I said as I picked up the dollar. We walked back to the hotdog stand together.

After I paid the vendor, we walked a little further down the sidewalk. I sat down on a bench, and Lolly sat at my feet, clearly hoping that a morsel of the hotdog would fall within her reach.

I didn't want to give Lolly part of my hotdog at all. Why should I? After making such a huge mess at home earlier that morning? Did she really deserve to have this kind of treat?

Then again, she did retrieve the dollar that allowed me to pay for the hotdog.

"Oh, here," I said as I tore off a little piece to feed her. I set it in the palm of my hand and lowered it to her nose. Lolly scarfed it down, but she

was very careful to avoid accidentally biting my hand. She rested her chin on my knee and pleaded for another piece with her eyes. I have to admit that it was hard to tell her no.

“That’s enough hotdog for you,” I said. “Abby doesn’t want you to have too much human food.”

I finished the hotdog and brushed the crumbs off my lap. I was about to stand up to leave, but before I could Lolly stood up first and started to wag her tail.

“What is it, girl?” I asked her.

I looked down the sidewalk and saw an older gentleman walking toward us. He stopped when he reached our bench.

“That’s a beautiful dog,” he beamed. “May I pet her?”

“Yes,” I replied. “She would like that.”

He stroked her head for a minute. Lolly’s tail wagged faster.

“What’s your dog’s name?” he asked me.

“Lolly,” I replied. “She’s not my dog, though. She belongs to my sister. I’m just watching her for the weekend.”

“Well, I can tell that this dog adores you,” the gentleman said.

How could this dog adore me? I wondered to myself. After yelling at her this morning? After verbally complaining about giving her what she needed? After almost not taking care of her for only two days?

“Well, to be perfectly honest, I’m still trying to get used to her,” I confessed. “I’ve never owned or taken care of a young puppy before. This is a whole new experience for me.”

Lolly licked my hand. This time, to my surprise, I didn’t pull away or shriek.

“Well, she seems very happy to spend an afternoon in the park with you,” the gentleman said. “Have fun with her this weekend.” He turned and walked away.

Lolly looked at me for a second, rolled over onto her back, and stretched one of her front legs toward me. I reached down to rub her tummy. She closed her eyes and breathed a sigh of contentment.

“I will,” I said to myself.

Mandy French

The Black Lily – Chapter 1

The room was small, made smaller by all of the people that occupied it. Cigar smoke mixed with the smells of liquor, perfume, and sex in the air. Each wall had a couch, and every couch was occupied by lovers coupling, sometimes in groups as large as three and four. Dark, heavy drapes covered the windows, so as not to give a free show to any passersby outside, and low burning candles reflected off of the soft, exposed breasts and thighs of the women. Laughter and music could be heard from inside, so all who passed the building knew what kind of place it was.

Outside a lone figure crouched on the roof of a house across the street from the building. The figure did not move, and none who passed by on the nearly deserted street noticed it, clad as it was from head to toe in dark blue to blend in with the night. It waited for some signal known only to it, and when it saw it, it sprang forward, moving across the slanted the roof like water. Candlelight from a lamppost stretched out its fingers, barely brushing the figure's exposed face, and briefly revealing it to be that of a young woman's before she evaded the light once more and faded into darkness. The buildings here were closely packed and the streets narrow, making it easy for her to leap from one to another, until finally she came to a shop, a few buildings down from the brothel, that reached its eaves far enough over the street for her to leap from it and land on the rooftop on the opposite side of the street. She began to traverse her way back to the brothel, and when she was on top of it, she slid down the steep slant of the roof, stopping just as her feet hit the thick round drainpipe that ran across it. Staying crouched, she grabbed onto the drainpipe and dropped her body lightly to the window below it, her softly slipped feet coming to rest on its ledge.

This window, too, was covered in a thick curtain, and peeking through the sliver where the drawn curtains met, she gazed into the room unnoticed. Her eyes took in the large bed, the centerpiece of the room. There was little furniture otherwise: a small loveseat scattered with pillows and a makeup table for the women to prepare themselves at. At the far end of the room there

was a door that led to the watercloset, where the men and women could refresh themselves afterward.

The bed was covered in tapestries that hung from its four posts as well as a stained comforter that seemed to be of no use besides decoration and soaking up the spilled seed of the men who visited. This man was a regular. From the golden trim of his jacket hung across the couch to the neat lines of the pants which were now becoming quite wrinkled in his furious activity, he was clearly a nobleman of some standing. And as with most noblemen, he had a taste for the more devious, as the whore who lay under him could be no more than fifteen years to the day. She moaned softly for him, fakely, and looked off into the distance, pretending she wasn't there as he pounded into her again and again. He didn't last long before he was spent and collapsed his full weight on top of her, sweating and breathing heavily, before getting up out of the bed.

"Leaving already, m'lord?" she asked, not bothering to move herself. She had been trained to keep the men as long as she could, they charged by the minute, whether she wanted him to copulate again with her or not. She reached out a hand to him, but he shoved it away and walked over to the lavatory. There was the sound of him cleaning himself off and pulling up his pants, then, silence.

He came running back into the room seconds later, fury in his eyes. He held a flower in his tightly-clenched hand, a lily dyed black. "What is the meaning of this?" he roared at the girl, who now looked quite frightened.

"I don't know! I don't know, it was just sent to me today, I thought it was pretty so I put it in the vase!"

"Foolish whore!" he yelled, striking her across the face. The girl began to cry and gathered up her clothes around her naked body, running out of the room with a slam of the door.

He crushed the flower in his hand before throwing it to the ground, stomping on it. It was not the first he had received in the past few days, and it clearly frightened him. He quickly began to gather up his clothes and redress before heading for the same door. But as he reached for the doorknob he heard a whistling, and then a knife slammed into it just above his hand.

The nobleman stared at it in shock, unmoving. The woman hopped down from the window ledge, the curtains fluttering around her small body.

“Leaving already, m’lord?” she mimicked in a high pitched voice, and he turned, staring at her through slanted eyes.

“I’ll scream,” he warned her quickly.

Her light-hearted laughter filled the room. “You’re in a brothel. No one will notice you scream. I’m guessing from your expression and your wild attempt to escape, that you already know who I am and why I’m here.”

He looked her up and down slowly, his mouth forming a grim line and his back straightening, and replied, “I know who you are, though you’re certainly not what I expected. As to why you’re here...I have many enemies, it is only a matter of whom I upset this time to have them send an assassin after me.”

She smiled. “I thank you for the compliment, my lord, and as for the whom, you should look no further than your only surviving descendent.”

“Rebeckah?” he muttered in disbelief.

“Yes, your one and only daughter. Though I can understand her desire for patricide. Any girl would want vengeance on the man who burned her brother and his wife alive in his home.”

“It was my home, actually, and he should have known better than to offend me by running off and marrying a commoner.”

“Yes, terrible thing that, him marrying. Perfectly good reason to kill someone.” She eyed him predatorily. “I tire of our banter. Shall we get on with it then?”

He did not offer a reply, but instead turned towards the door and grabbed the hilt of the knife. After a few tugs he managed to free it and turn towards her, wielding his only weapon. “If they would let my guards in here, you would be dead by now.”

She pouted. “Oh my lord, it saddens me that you think so little of me.” The woman smiled. “You came here to play, so, let us play.”

And without further warning she leapt at him like a cat at its prey. He responded, slashing the knife at her midsection, but she dodged it easily before taking hold of his wrist and disarming him. With his arm bent behind his back and his wrist burning with pain, he found himself nose to the floor, the woman on top of him. “How shall we do it, my lord? If you are nice to me, I’ll make it quick and clean, and you’re wife and child will only have to gaze upon you in your coffin with a broken neck.”

“Damn you to every level of hell! I should see you hanging from the gallows like your friend Robert.”

She glared at him, her lips curling back. Rage filled her eyes, but she reigned it in. “Just for that, I’ll make you suffer.” The woman leaned in to him, her lips at his ear. “Tell me, *my lord*, have you ever heard the old adage, ‘Don’t cut off your nose to spite your face’?”

The cheerful music and laughter of the whores and their customers was interrupted by an ear-piercing shriek. The door to the room burst open and a man stumbled inside, his face and shirt covered in dark red blood that gushed out onto the floor, splattering a few of those who were unfortunate enough to be near him. Through the blood they could see a gaping hole in the center of his face where his nose should be. He seemed to be trying to speak as he grabbed at his face, screaming in pain, but none could make out his words. Moments later, he collapsed to the floor, dead.

They found a curious flower clenched in one of his hands. By the morning, rumors had spread throughout the city. The Black Lily had struck again.

The Duel

The sword flew from its owner’s hand, landing on the stone path with a clatter. Its owner lifted his hands in surrender as the warrior drew his sword upon the fallen man’s neck, a smirk on his face. Returning his weapon to his sheath, he lent a hand to his opponent, lifting him up. “It seems I am unbeatable,” the winner declared arrogantly and gave a little bow to his audience.

The small crowd of women cheered and clapped for the warrior. He was the best swordsman in the entire city, and he made sure everyone knew it. With a name like Victor Hardcastle, he believed it to be his birthright. He had been undefeated for three years now, despite the many men who had dared to challenge him. He was a handsome man as well, with flowing brown hair to the nape of his neck, tall and lean from years of training, and owning a face that had soft features and dazzling green eyes. His appearance made him famous for conquering in the bed as well as the battlefield. Whether his adoring

fans, now swooning in their afternoon gowns and fanning themselves for air, loved him for his looks, his swordsmanship, or his money was unknown to him, but either way, he did not shy from their affection.

“Is no one else man enough to duel with me today?” he goaded the crowd of onlookers with a handsome smirk.

“I am,” came a voice from behind Victor, and he turned in surprise. The newcomer was dressed in black from head to toe, his garment simple and quite cheap looking. He wore long sleeves and breeches all in black, despite the afternoon heat, and had already donned his duelist’s helm, a mesh mask that protected the face and head during sparring. The only part of him left uncovered were his hands, which were quite small and delicate looking. In fact, the entire man was small and delicate, hardly taller than Victor’s shoulder.

Victor found he was oddly unnerved by the newcomer, despite his small stature and shabby appearance. It must have been the man’s voice, the confidence in it. “What is your name, good challenger?” Victor asked.

“I only give my name to those who can defeat me.”

Victor smiled at his adoring fans, who giggled stupidly, as if they had exchanged some private joke. Did he not know that Victor was undefeated? A simple little man like this would be no match for the professional duelist. But he decided to humor the poor boy, and lifted his sword to the challenger’s, so the blades met in an X, and bowed politely.

“Victor!” One of the ladies called to him. “You forgot your helm!”

“Do not worry, darling, I hardly doubt it will be necessary—” He was cut off by the challenger’s sudden attack, and the battle began.

Victor was surprised to discover that this newcomer was quite good. Being small of stature, he moved quickly and fluidly. He dodged or easily blocked all of the warrior’s attacks, springing back with deftly maneuvered counterattacks of his own. He was a natural at sparring, but so was Victor, and the warrior would not let this newcomer win so easily.

The duel quickly became heated and moved outside the designated area. They fell into the crowd, scattering the female onlookers. The spectators followed the men at a distance as they made their way through the garden, crossing the bridge over the small stream to the front of the manor. They ended up on either side of a hedge separating the gardens from the entryway into his manor. The gardener scoffed at Victor as he swept his blade over the

hedge, shearing the top of it but missing his opponent, who ducked down. The newcomer's blade thrust through the hedge, catching one of the buttons on Victor's shirt and ripping it off. The women squealed at his suddenly exposed chest glistening with sweat. But he had no time to strike a pose for them. For he and his opponent were now at the edge of the giant fountain that stood erect in his manor's entryway. The men circled around the fountain's edge, both trying to balance on its thin stone wall and trip the other at the same time. They had gone around it twice when Victor misjudged his step and fell into the water with a huge splash. When he looked up again, the challenger had the tip of his sword at Victor's heart.

"It would seem you are defeated by your own arrogance...and this carefully placed stone." The man tossed a rock in his hand lazily. So that's what Victor had tripped on!

"How clever of you to plant that beneath my feet," he muttered sourly. Victor stood, his clothes soaked to his body. He looked up at his defeater, only to find him walking away. "Will you not at least let me look on the face of the man who defeated me, good sir?!" he exclaimed in offense.

The man paused and turned to him thoughtfully. Then, with a shrug, he pulled off his helm. Victor stared in shock while the bystanders gasped. A long red mane of hair tumbled from the woman's head, strands of it sticking to her face from perspiration. Her angular features and sharp, quick eyes stared down at him with mild boredom, though there was a momentary flash of self-gratification at Victor's reaction. She smiled in impish satisfaction.

"What...what is your name?" he demanded harshly, forgetting his manners in the presence of this rather strange lady.

"I told you, I only give my name to those who can defeat me." And with a smirk, she turned and walked away.

Laine Scott

The Bird and the Human

This story begins with a pie. This pie was baked by a little old man who hated baking pies. He hated to tenderly knead the soft, pillowy dough. He hated stirring and mixing delightful fillings. He hated the smell of pies baking in the oven. He hated the taste of a crunchy-crumby crust that gently cradled delicious, gooey filling.

But, most of all, he *hated* when someone would compliment his masterpieces (for he sold these pies at a bakery).

One morning, as he grumpily huffed to the bakery (which was called “Bernie Baker’s Bakery”) he was stopped in the street by a little bird.

The little blue and grey speckled bird didn’t do much—he just would be where the angry old man would be, no matter where the angry old man went. The old man walked over the bridge that was over the brook—there was the bird. The old man walked down the street that went down to the town—there was the bird. The old man stopped at the stop light that stopped traffic—there was the bird.

The bird never sang a whistle—which infuriated the angry old man.

“Stupid bird!” he yelled at the little bird, “your only purpose is to sing, but you can’t even do that!” The little bird blinked at the angry old man, and followed him no longer.

The next morning, however, the little blue and grey speckled bird was sitting on the old man’s mailbox. But the old man didn’t notice the bird, and went on his not-so-merry way to Bernie Baker’s Bakery. The old man also didn’t notice the little bird at the bridge over the brook, or on the street down to the town, or at the stoplight that stopped traffic.

If, when the old man entered the bakery, he had looked to the sign above the store, he would have noticed a little blue and grey speckled bird sitting ever so quietly upon the great wooden “B” in the word “Bernie.”

But he did not.

And just as the old man slammed shut the bakery door, the little bird began to sing and trill with all its tiny, trilling heart.

Inside the bakery, the little old man stopped for half a moment. He was frozen by the pure simplicity and beauty of the bird's song. He smiled ever so hesitantly, and slipped his pies more gently than normal on the countertop. When Bernie came to the desk with a splotch of white flour across his nose, the little old man motioned him to brush it off, and chuckled when Bernie missed it completely. When Bernie said he was out of fives, and could only pay in ones, the little old man waved it off, took out his wallet and gave Bernie all of his own fives so he could make change later.

Then, for the first time, the little old man looked around the bakery, and realized it was a rather charming place. There wasn't much—but of the little that was, there dwindled a feeling of simplistic beauty. The windows had no curtains—but they were large and elegant. The tables were very small, but they were black as iron and perfectly circular. The walls were a harsh unpainted white, but were filled with striking black-and-white photos.

One photo was of a couple dancing. And another of a crowded street. And another of the Statue of Liberty. And another of fallen leaves. And another of a broken bench. And there was one of a little bird sitting on a fence.

The little old man decided to leave, but first he bought a chocolate chip scone for the walk back. As soon as the old man opened the bakery door, the little blue and grey speckled bird shut his beak and flitted away.

Suddenly, it seemed to the old man, the world had become noticeably lonelier. He threw his scone into the first trashcan he came across, and stomped home in a huff.

The next morning was quite the same as all the other mornings—except the little bird was nowhere to be seen—he wasn't even there to be not seen by the angry old man as he trundled off to sell his pies.

Over the door, a little bell that hadn't been there before jingled when the old man went into Bernie's bakery.

"What's that awful racket!" yelled the angry old man to Bernie, who was in the back.

"HUmffffh?" came the muffled reply, then Bernie ran to the desk. The angry old man slammed his boxes of pies on the countertop.

"Oh," said Bernie collecting up the pies, and smiling "I put that in yesterday. Do you like it? It makes me so happy when I hear it! Such a pretty sound...."

“Humph!” said the angry old man turning to leave.

“Hey,” Bernie called, “Mrs. Hubert wanted me to tell you how wonderful that cherry pie was you baked a few days ago. Bought it for her son’s birthda—“

“Shut up! I don’t care!” huffed the old man, and he left the store with a flurry of jingling.

On his way back to his house, the angry old man was stopped in the street by the blue and grey speckled bird. It was looking intently at him from across the way.

It sang not a tune.

“What a stupid, horrible bird,” mumbled the man to himself, “Even if it sang, no one would want to hear it.”

This story ends with a man. This man was made bitter by avoiding the beauty that thrived around him. He avoided the beauty of baking delightful pies. He avoided the beauty of seeing the over-exuberant Bernie. He avoided the beauty of walking outside in the sunshine. But, most of all, the little old man avoided the beauty of the little bird who trilled and tried, for a moment, to make him pay attention.

Devinne Walters

Addictive Little Words

There's something addictive about the little worlds on those pages, isn't there?

There's something better, she said. Something that's not mine that I hold in my hand. There's something warm and safe and true. They're an escapist's best friend in the whole world, and there's so many worlds to choose from. I could be sitting on my bed, she said, but gliding through the streets of Gotham or taking sides in a Civil War, Marvel Style. She shrugged then, picking up something called Power Girl.

And that? I asked.

And this. In this, who knows? It's brand-spanking-new, she laughed. I don't always know what I'm getting myself into, you know. Sometimes I fall in love with the King of Dreams or swoon over a fuzzy blue elf who fancies himself a swashbuckler –

A what?

Exactly; he's adorable, anyway.

What else can these things do? Tell me more.

They can drown out the sound of screaming that penetrates through a closed and locked door. You're not always safe behind a locked door. They can make you forget about all the gross stuff inside your head, make you not sniffle for a few minutes. At least, no sniffles you're conscious of. When you should be studying, a friend calls your name, a friend who you know will never leave you, so you can at least do them this one favor. I don't know, really, she shrugged.

Are they alive?

Yes. More alive than I think I'll ever be. They have so much more to fulfill, after all.

I thought about this for a moment. The King of Dreams, huh? I asked. Sounds fun.

She only smiled and said, Oh, it is.

Good interview, I told her. But you never answered my question.

I think you can figure that out for yourself.

I step away from the mirror.

Nature Boy

I knew I was lost when I looked in his eyes. They were two North Stars, leading me away from that terrifying concrete forest, and back into his breezy arms. He was the warmth of a fire, the relief of a clean stream.

He was the oxygen in my lungs, a fish that I ate, a tiny friendly spider upon my palm. But all things die; even trees, even love.

The birds stopped singing for us. The sap from the trees a little less sweet. The water in the stream a little less clear. His stars led me back to the skyscrapers, to an angry hot dog vendor on the street.

Even he needs love, nature boy whispered.

I wanted to decorate my apartment with the flowers in his hair. He wouldn't let me.

They will die here, he explained. As I will, too.

How could I not let him go when he lay dying in my arms?

Contributors



Gary Burkhead, Yggdrasil

Sarah Allgood has been writing ever since she can remember. Her comfort zone is Fiction, so when she was asked to write a poem for class, she struggled with it immensely. But the end result was a poem that she actually really enjoyed, as did her friends and family! ^^

Aleta Anderson, from Nebraska, intends to pursue a career in editing upon completing her English Education degree. She dedicates her poem to her cousin, Ariana Miller, who died of congenital heart failure February 20, 2008.

Natalie Bridgmon likes to write. Sometimes she feels like she's pretty good at it. Other times not so much. She also likes to play the guitar, talk about the economy and discuss the flaws of the public school system. She's a senior majoring in Creative Writing and minoring in Literature.

Gary Burkhead makes this stuff in his spare time in the hopes of avoiding a real job later on in life. You can see more of his stuff at finalhazrd.deviantart.com, or by following him home and peeking through his window at night. Please don't do that second thing.

Sarah Crawford graduated from Lindenwood University in 2011 with a Bachelor's degree in dance. She is currently pursuing her Master's degree in education. Sarah works as a graduate assistant in the grounds/maintenance office at the St. Charles campus and is also a pet/house sitter. She is from Belleville, Illinois.

Mandy French is a senior at Lindenwood University and a Creative Writing major. She mostly writes fantasy short stories and novels, and she also dabbles in poetry and graphic design. Currently she is working on five novels, and she hopes to someday have at least one of these published.

Josh Jones is a junior at Lindenwood University majoring in Public Relations. His hobbies include writing, music, reading, and playing video games.

Lisa Knoppe was a student who attended Lindenwood University and graduated in December 2011 with a Bachelor's degree in English. She thanks those who mentored her during that time: Dr. Ana Schnellmann, Alex Balogh, and Pyra Lightword. Her four creative children continually inspire her. She cannot imagine a world without poetry.

Caitlyn Modde is a senior at Lindenwood University pursuing her degree in Middle School Education. She was inspired by all the children at Discovery Kids Preschool to write this personal narrative. Long live the beloved Sea Monkeys!

Kelsey Mooney is a 22-year-old senior who is currently studying Language Arts. She enjoys spending time with her fiancé, Ryan, and their two dogs, Espie and Otis. Her passions include acting, swimming, shooting trap and, of course, writing poetry and short stories.

Manjil Pradhan is from Nepal. His dreams of traveling and gaining experience played a major role in his decision to come to Lindenwood University. He transferred to Lindenwood in the Fall Semester of 2010 and will graduate in May of 2012 with a BA in Economics. He is truly glad that he came to Lindenwood University for his undergraduate education.

Olivia Saldaña will be graduating this May 2012 with a degree in Interactive Media and Web Design and a minor in Graphic Design. She was born and raised in O'Fallon, Missouri. She speaks English and Spanish. Her passions in life are art, design, photography, and traveling.

Laine Scott is a Junior at Lindenwood University. She enjoys reading and writing (and not arithmetic). In the future, she would like to work for a Publishing House.

Lauren Terbrock is a student at Lindenwood University.

Alex Van Walleghen is a Computer Science and Mathematics Major. His goal in life is to become a cryptologist. Poetry just happens to be one of his passions.

Devinne Walters is a fashion designer with writer's block. 'Nuff said!

Kyle York aspires to become an English teacher and creative writer, and he appreciates the power of words and meaningful detail. This issue of Arrow Rock contains two of his poems, one a dramatic monologue ("To My Dearest") and one a celebration of his Brazilian-American heritage ("I Must Wait"). Enjoy!

Arrow Rock is currently accepting submissions for Issue 4. Please email your poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, photography or artwork to ArrowRock@Lindenwood.edu.

To view previous issues of the Arrow Rock literary magazine visit

<http://www.lindenwood.edu/ArrowRock/>

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