LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

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Poem Section

I am a feminist - by Trinity Plott

“Shut up!” he said.
“Nobody cares,” he said.
“You’re just a girl,” he said.
“Which boy next?” he said.
“Smile,” he said.
“You’re hot,'' he said.
“Just send,” he said.
“You were ugly anyway,” he said.
“I’m sorry,” I said.

Yet I sit here in silence scared to expose my feminism
like a kid scared to ride a bike for the first time.
Scared of being laughed at,
the boys mocking me
like I scraped my knees if I fell off my bike,
and I did.
I’m scared.
I’m scared when my parents tell me I can’t go to concerts,
I have to come home early,
I have to wear what is appropriate,
I can’t wear too much makeup
because I’m asking for it,
I have to watch my mouth,
I have to smile,
I have to sit still,
I have to be polite,
I have to accept when boys break me down.
Cause’ he’s just a boy right?

Well, I’m a girl,
that means I’m going to have to walk home late from a friend’s house
or dinner at night alone to my car

scared that someone is behind me
if I accidentally drop my keys on the ground.
And what do you think happens next?

As a girl living in today's society we are called objects
and they simply just laugh.
As a girl in today's society, we are called property
and they just laugh.
They believe men are better
just because they have testosterone
and can play sports that are popular other than women's sports,
that actually should be.
This is because men are better, right?
They're funny, right?
They're tougher, right?
They're more qualified, right?
This is the normal though, right?

So this? This is me not being scared anymore.
This is me getting back on my bike
to learn how to ride faster and better than any boy,
to show them that they might feel like they're on top of the world
but we are standing right next to them,
not below them.
We are two genders who are supposed to be equal
not one of us superior
but if women were superior
our world's crisis would be eliminated
instead of pushing it aside.
Once a boy accused me of practicing misandry.
"You think you can take over the world?"
No, I just want to see it,
to know it's out there for someone like me.
So yes, I believe in feminism.

Winter - Riley Kuever

Rosy faces pricked with ice
The crunch of the packing snow under my boots
Heated breath clouding the frozen air.

A snow morning - by Mrs. Hagness

A snowy winter morning,
A deer steps closer
Hope ushers in.

Over the Hill, I Bike - Ciro Falanga

One foot after another
Pedal over pedal
Climbing slowly up the hill.

Sweat beads form on your brow
A streak of lightning races by
And as you turn to see
A deep growl breaks the sky.

You look all around the valley
For the source of these devious twins
And spot a storm
Growing strong
Churning with fierce winds

You turn away from this site
To continue on your path
Albeit a bit faster than before

Although you pedal harder now
The storm still pulls so close
You race to clear your final lap
A BOOM rocks your skull
But you finally made it to the top
The hill has been tough but beat

You catch your breath

A Boom again
You push to start the fall
Down the hill down the road
To the sea far below
Turning quickly on the bends
Faster you go
Down, Down, Down

A car zooms out
You swerve
Catch your breath
Control
Down, Down, Down

The sky is alight
BOOM
Spider webbed lines shoot past
You push faster
Racing the storm

The town comes into view
Glowing bright through a haze
The sea breeze rushes up to meet you
Moisture stains your face

BOOM CRACK
Reminds you of the storm behind
Racing now almost there
BOOM CRACK
One more turn
Under the bridge

And you're safe
In the confines of the town
You roll to a stop
Hop off your bike
And grab a bite to eat.

Pottery - by Jayhara Lopez

Molding her curves and smooth edges, creating a figure that most desire but yet she feels insecure.

Color brown that reflects her caramel eyes, yet people look down on her. Pottery made from a different country and no one sees her beauty. A beautiful piece of pottery, put back together by her own strength.

A critical world judges her by her colors and cracks while missing the beauty of how she was made in a radiant small city.

A child of mud hiding her past for critical people to not see. She doesn't understand that where she is from is what makes her beautiful, but the people around her are what makes her fall apart.

Her face wet from the animosity of this unknown land.

She dreams to be put in a glass box so people can see that she is also art, that she can also be worth the amount of those skinny and tall vases. She dreams of a better future with people gathering around to see her beauty in the beaming sun.

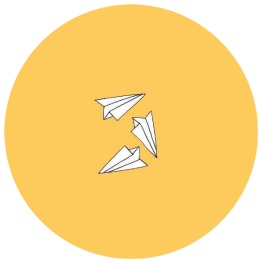
Paper Planes - Noelle F. Main

Paper planes circle the sky
Of the yellow edges behind my eyes
In the yellow background of my mind
Ivory gulls that dive and fly

Ivory gulls in the warmth of sun
The star of summer glowing gold
A wax honeycomb amber sweet
Paper planes a light as one

Paper planes alive with bumblebee wind
Ivory gulls thrive where sapphire shoals swim
Blue wind washing in waves
Washes away paper planes

In opal water paper planes drenched
Feathers of light sailing waves
Over yellow sand and moonstone veins
A yellow mind behind my eyes, dimmed



Robotic
N.F. Main

I hate the way my thoughts are organized into writing
Programmed to lay out nicely to your liking
The careless conversation engineered to be mindless
You, always knowing, ignorance is a blindness
Theoretically learning to think is education
You, always taught, by heritage is indoctrination
I am you and we are them
Separated by different wires stuck in our heads
My social battery runs low, zero energy
You, on another circuit, different electricity
Voltage burning up my core
Burning and still you ignore

Institution- N.F. Main

I spend my days in a social isolation
A self inflicted quarantine that I am chained in
I feel the phantom eyes of those with heads held high
As if they own the world, a lie that I want desperately to be mine
Shroud myself in darkness because I don't have a face
Because I can't feel even when I try so hard to embrace
The hopeless thought that I could change my ways
I cannot see, I cannot breathe, my world never sways
From a self inflicted quarantine that I am chained in
I spend my days in a social isolation

Mental frustration is my sole occupation

Sea Shanty -NFM

A western port of navy blue and gray
A silent fog watches the dark teal bay
Of a city of a girl who dresses in carnival red
Wisps of smoke circle round her head
In her eyes lonely sailors find the sea

Brandy with her silver throat like the moon
The city darkens its lights, maroon
She serves amber in crystal in the harbor bar
Searching souls for the sailor girl with a crescent scar
Hoping for her return from the waves dark ink

The echoes of her sailor girl haunt the silent town
Still she loves the storm eyed girl who's not around

She wishes to hear her story and call her name
As the waves crest and fall, see the ocean untamed
She dreams of her girl and a home by the lady Sea

A delightful break from the stress of school
By: Riley Kuever

A delightful break from the stress of school with the sun departing in an array of magical colors. Teams battling it out on the bright field behind. The cheers of teens and parents are forgotten in the background. Jokes being said in small conversations only those who are huddled around could hear. A beautiful night, full of laughter and fun. The sun setting off to bed as the night sky blankets the crowd in a warm embrace. Kids take pictures and laugh together. Sneaking off to the playground before anyone could see. Taking pictures as if they were family. Not a care in the world about anything else. Just a group of friends together with the stars and themselves.

Being Black in AmeriKKKa - Anonymous

Being Black is something so beautiful
Yet
Why is it so scary
We have so much to say
Yet
Everyday our voices are suppressed
We're humans too
Yet
We were used to clean a white man's shoe
Our color stands out compared to most
And because of that
The whipping post was our second home
I have to live in fear
Because my color stands out
I can get shot
Because my color stands out

I could be associated with a gang
Because my color stands out
Bang Bang was the last thing that I heard
Because my color stands out
These accusations I face are so absurd
Because my color stands out
People are afraid of me
Because my color stands out

I could die-for being a witness
I could die-from the blue badges and bats
I could die-for standing on the wrong person's door mat
Because my color stands out
Yet
Being black is something so beautiful

Traveler - Noelle Main

The bright white trees of autumn almost seemed on fire. Little flames on matches struck by the changing seasons. Sparks snapping to burn out on the ground, a bed of dying embers. A path of parchment is laid out before dark cloaked Time. The forest thinned, giving way to a grove of pine trees and wisps of Aspen rising like morning mist. The sentinel pines were decked in their white robes while snow drifted down like ash through the fresh air. Underneath the evergreen wound the path, almost unscarred by winter's touch.

Walking through the darkening wood was like walking through a great hall of ice and oak. High smoky ceilings supported by obsidian pillars, crusted in sugar and cold. Ancient trees lifted the sky. A bridge dusted in frost led to the dappled gray and roan blue stone of the kingdom's forest throne. The falling snow was like the petals of a white magnolia in spring, raining down with every breeze.

There was a regal presence in the dominion of the Storm King. His thundering dragons with wings of wind escorted a traveler, worn and weary, to the boundaries of the moonlit realm. They walked among broken glass swords and iron thorns, up the slumbering hill until they could cast their gaze down. Ebony tracks left behind marked their presence in time. Shadows bled black ink and shifted through the trees. A traveler returned home to a hearth of fire and hearts glow. Behind a dark veil, Night observed all rest, with silence.

A Place for Lost Souls by Riley Kuever

A place for lost souls,
For the ones longing for answers,
Or just need a place they can control.

The stars above made me feel small, alone, forgotten.
The crisp air pricking my uncovered nose,
Bringing a sense of tranquility to the unknown.

No one in sight,
The moon lighting the earth around,
Trees swaying through the darkness of the night.

Neighbors living their own life next door,
Kids scrolling through social media bored,
People lost in their heads staring at the floor.

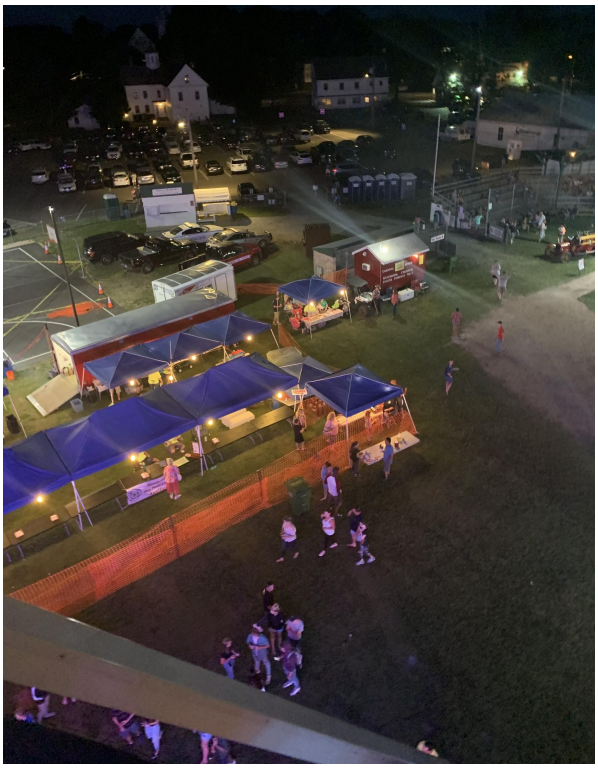
The wind wiping the scenarios from the minds of overthinkers,
Erasing the unsettling thoughts in the back of their heads,
Thinking about the day trying not to linger.

Their wandering minds are awoken,
Clearing the dark thoughts spiraling,
Replacing them with a clear, calm, slate.

The soft sounds of howling wind,
The chirping of crickets far away in the distant ground,
The soft glow of fireflies illuminating the darkness.

Longing for the sense of tranquillity only the night sky could bring,
Wishing they never had to leave the serenity,
Their phones trying to bring them back to reality with a ding.

Alone, dark and cold,
At the end of the day,
Comforted in the place for lost souls.



The Carnival - Aslin Wolfe

I smell the savory scent of buttered popcorn,
People everywhere playing games, winning inflated unicorns
My ears constantly hear the siren of the dunk tank,
Overhead is an ominous cloud bank,
I hear creaks and scratches as I am sitting on this ferris wheel,
And put all my trust in this steel.

Big Top

Winner, winner, here
Flashing Colors everywhere
I am in the clouds

Thriller

I hear screams coming from people all around
But there is a pleasure that comes from the sounds
With it there is laughter in the air

Lost and Found - by Josh Kokai

A rusted screw,
Abandoned by all she knew
Left to rust
never to fulfill her purpose

Lost.

A discarded key,
Struggling to find himself in a world that tells him "You are nothing without your match."

Worthless.

A shard of glass,

Only a fragment of her former beauty
Shattered, never to be whole again

Broken.

A rusted screw,
Once left to fade away
Finds a new purpose
Bringing beauty to her surroundings

Found.

A key,

Becoming a beloved pendant
Finding worth and beauty by himself

Enough.

A shard of glass,
Joined with those hurt like her
Glittering together in the sun

Beautiful.

A Life Just Starting - Leora Gibbs

Only darkness I see
Only pain I feel.
Will the suffering ever end?
Years are frozen
Never to be melted.
A sore heart suffers
Amidst the cherry blossoms.
For me the fires of love
Only freeze me.

I fight amongst the trees
Loss is all I see now.
An army here
Sees my pain.
Nothing they can do
I can't be saved now.

All that care
Will fail in rescue.
Let me go
Life is unlivable.
Now I leave here
To become falling snow.
How could I not see it?

It was right there
Right in front of me.
My mind was stuck
But my heart was right.
How could it be?
It was all an illusion
And she broke through it.

She saved me.

She fought
And won.
She never gave up
And she saved me.
No more darkness

No more pain.

I see the truth
Not all was lost.
Lost warmth returns
As my heart now races.
But I still embrace
The pure white snow

MYTH MONOLOGUES

A Tragic Wave
by Tadan Baker

I hear of a young maiden who spends day after day worshiping a wonderful goddess, and although this does fill her days with joy, it seems to be the only thing that does so. She stands alone with a nurse too old, in a tower too tall to interact with the world. As she grows older though, her beauty increases and is soon told to citizens all throughout Sestus, her hometown, and even across the Hellespont sea to Abydus - my hometown where I hear about the well-known priestess. I soon meet her at a festival held by a young goddess, where we greet each other briefly. Besides her beautiful appearance, I didn't quite think much of her at first. I do notice though, the goddess' odd investment in our greeting. She soon sends Cupid over and I feel quite frightened until a sudden spark. I see Cupid nearby and I think to myself, what if it might be an act of Cupid? Isn't it? Could it be? It doesn't matter though. All that matters is that I am in love with her. How it happened or what happened does not matter. It was sudden, yet true. The only question left to answer is, "Does she feel the same?"

"Might we sit and talk a bit," I ask her.

"Absolutely," she responds.

We speak for hours, and I learn that her name is Hero. Unfortunately, however, she tells me the unforgiving truth as her parents look her way.

"I'm afraid you must go, Leander. My parents don't like me talking to strangers," she says with sad eyes.

"I will if I must, but before I go, might I ask your address? Your parents shall never know as I will cross the Hellespont sea each night so that we may meet in secret."

"I lie simply in a tower across the Hellespont sea, and for your sake, I will light a torch as a sign of my consent for you to embark on your nightly journey."

And so she does. Each night I see her torch lit, and although it is a hard and painful journey, it is one well worth it; for each night, I get to see the love of my life. One night though, I pace back and forth eagerly waiting for Hero to light her torch, like a child impatiently waiting for their birthday. The night preceding this one, Hero

begged me not to go on in the nightly tradition of coming to see her the following night, as a storm was making its way towards our general vicinity. I laughed and brushed it off. I mean, how hard could it be? I have dealt with giant waves before. Now though, as I look up at the towering waves before me, I have my doubts. I contemplate the idea of not going, but I soon see her light her torch. There was no going back now. I mustn't disappoint her. I put one foot in front of the other, getting myself used to the frigid winter waters. I swim with the usual motivation and passion, but this time it seems as if it isn't enough. The waves climb higher and higher until the torch that was meant to guide me is no longer in sight. I try to stay above the monstrous waters, but they soon fill my lungs with the sea, and my eyes close until my life is dark. I only wished I had known that I would soon meet my love again in the realms of Hades all because of her crushing despair of my death. I never would have traveled overseas if I had known that this tragic wave would not only end my life, but the life of my dearest love as well. At least, in all that had happened, we pleased the goddess through our dying passion and commitment for each other.

Better Than the Goddess Herself
by Sara Stack

I think that I am the best needlewoman in my village. I've asked almost everyone their opinion on my needlework. Everyone always says that it is the best they have ever seen. I've spent years perfecting my craftsmanship so now, every stitch is perfect. I think that Minerva wouldn't stand a chance against me in a weaving contest.

"I'm definitely better than Minerva," I boasted to everyone, "I've gone against everyone in the village and won. I need better competition and show that what I'm saying is true; I'm better than her."

I think that I can go against the goddess and win. That would give me fame and maybe become the new goddess of needlework.

A few months went by and I heard a knock on my door. It was an older woman dressed in tattered clothes. She held a large twisted branch that she used as her cane.

"Hello, Ms. Is there a problem?" I asked.

"Will you please help me?" she begged, " I don't know where I am going and I have run out of food."

"Of course please, Come in. Would you like some tea while I prepare some food for you?" I said.

The woman nodded her head and then pointed to one of my pieces of artwork on the wall.

"Did you make this yourself? It's beautiful," she asked.

"Yes, I did. I've done all of the artwork around my home," I said.

"Would you care to show me some?" she asked.

I walked her around my house showing her all of the different pieces of artwork ranging from small sceneries to large family portraits and designs.

"I think that these are better than anything Minerva could do," I scoffed.

"If you keep saying things like that you will face the wrath of the gods for your actions," she warned. "They are not fans of people who think they are better than them."

"I don't care if the gods don't like me. I just wish Minerva would stop being scared of me and face me," I grumbled.

As I was about to walk her back to the kitchen, the old woman dropped her large cane and transformed into a tall, muscular woman dressed in full armor with a spear and shield on her back.

"As you wish," she said, "I, Minerva, will challenge you to a weaving contest and you shall face your defeat," she warned.

I set up two large looms next to each other for the challenge. It was finally happening and I was more than ready. I used all of the best weaving yarn I had and put all of my efforts into my work. I decided to weave the scene of Jupiter kidnapping Europa. The scene was composed of the young maiden on top of the bull half-laughing and half-scared while the waves of the ocean crashed onto the bull's chest. Hours went by and as I finished, I glanced at Minerva's work as she had been done minutes before me. She created a moving piece that had the assembled gods, the horse, and an olive tree. I realized that I had lost to such an amazing piece that I could not compete with. I couldn't live my life with the embarrassment of saying I was better than Minerva all the time and actually not being as talented and skilled and loose. I decided the only option was to hang myself out of embarrassment instead of facing her and everyone else. As I was hanging I could see Minerva standing in front of me looking at me in horror. I remember feeling myself morph into something large and being able to breathe again. Now, I have become a large 8 legged spider that is bound to weave and spin strings. This punishment leaves me weaving all day without any end. Minerva won but I think I still did better.

The Tragedies of Oxen Life
by Riley Kuever

Every morning my owner, who people call Apollo, brings my brothers, sisters, and me to a nice pasture. We eat some grass, relax in the sun, and sleep beneath the trees. The rest of the herd and I are tall, large, and frighten most of the other predators away from us. Our horns are great and big and intimidate the small critters who dare come near. Most of us aren't mean, but my buddy Pedro is a beast. He tries to charge at any person or animal that dares to come near. Well, anyone except Apollo. He has always been very generous to us and brings us to the greenest pastures with the most luscious grass. Apollo gently wakes us all up when he passes over us with his carriage with bright lights streaming behind him. He will come down and tell us about his carriage and tell us that he is the god of the sun and that he uses a sun carriage to wake up the world. After every morning, he comes down to us and tells us about his trip. At night he plays his lyre peacefully and waits for us to fall asleep. We are all very fascinated with what he does and how he treats us so well. Apollo is with us almost every day whenever he can spare from his godly tasks. We haven't really met any of the other gods. Only occasionally will Apollo bring his girl of the week to meet us. Today, however, Apollo just left to attend to his godly duties, and Pedro spotted a small child-like figure in the distance roaming around the empty meadow.

"Hey, Bernard," Pedro asked for me.

"Yeah, Bud?"

"Do you see that small child? He's up to something."

"Give him a break. I bet he's just lost," I answered calmly. We were all curious and watched him wander till he spotted us, and a mischievous smirk appeared on his small chubby face. Even Pedro cowered away from this devilish child. He found a new purpose in his step and

strutted over to the herd after examining us. Scared but unsure of what to do, we all turned away, trying to go back to eating the delicious grass. However, the small child had other plans. He took a big group of us, including me, Pedro, and my girlfriend, Bernice, off. Before taking us too far, he let us stop and eat!

"See, he was only bringing us to a new eating place! Apollo must have sent him when he saw we were low!" I proclaimed, grateful for this small child. The old meadow was good, but there were only little patches of grass after everyone had been gnawing on it for the past couple of hours and there was a lot of poop, too much to actually enjoy the grass.

"You're right," Pedro fessed up. The child was being quite rude and was interrupting us by tying leaves on our hooves. It is very annoying, I must say. We are all just trying to eat in peace! That mischievous smile never left his lips. A small pit in my stomach wasn't going away. I was starting to think it wasn't because I was hungry. After all of us had these leaf branch things tied to our hooves, we continued to a small meadow behind trees.

"Bernard, do you think Apollo knows where we are?" my girlfriend Bernice asked me, worried. (To other people, it may just sound like random moo sounds, but we are actually conversing, so they better watch what they say.)

"I bet. He is a god, remember? He knows everything that's going on. He probably sent this child to move us." I tried to settle her nerves. She tends to overreact. But right as I say that I see the child grab one ox, my friend Dave, kill him and start eating him! I am mortified! How could Apollo let him do this! Then, when I thought things couldn't get worse, he grabs Pedro! I run to try and stop him, but the damage is already done. We all stood there, shocked. No one tries to attack the kid because we saw what he did. He was strong enough to kill them all by himself, with his bare hands. That's when it clicks in my head, he must be a god. No wonder he was so smart and strong. Luckily he left, and no one else was injured. Now we are all alone in the middle of nowhere. I wonder if Apollo knows where we are. The sky starts to darken, and I spot Apollo running towards us, furious and upset. He sees the carcass, and a tear escapes his eyes. He immediately starts apologizing and pleading for forgiveness. I'm not sure why. Is it because he brought us to a new meadow? When did that happen? Huh. I don't know why he would be crying. New grass is always nice. I noticed two oxen dead. Poor buddies. I wonder what happened to them. Well, Apollo brought us somewhere new! There are a lot of other oxen too! I love meeting new friends.

Red Current
by Noelle F. Main

The field we chose was a somewhat barren and rather dull expanse. It wouldn't matter much since the choice was not based on extravagance, but on the level ground which was so perfect for our enjoyable game. I met my friend on earth once I regained the freedom to enjoy the refreshing company of mortals. His people were very hospitable, and he made for good company. A quick friendship and bond grew almost immediately. We would discuss various topics of athletics and the arts. On a particularly restless evening we happened upon the field in which I stand once again, wondering what I could have done to prevent the tragedy. I should never have suggested the evening stroll. I should never have guessed such a simple, innocent game could end in such despair. Alas I cannot change the past even with all my will, and live in the shadows of what could have been. These darkest of nightmares now haunt me and I wish to be drowned in dreams of tranquility once again.

The last thing I remember was his smile and how it crumbled once the device of his demise struck his temple. I fell to my knees in shock, as what seemed such an unassuming gale took the last

of my breath in it's violent airy hands and spirited it away. I felt the earth tremble as I finally stood and ran only to realize it was me who was unstable. The sands of time slowed and I ran for ages, already reliving the nightmare even though it was not at its end. I gathered him up gently and cradled his head in my arms. The silence was crueler than the blood that stole the warmth of his body as it pooled out and soaked into the earth. His slowing heart beat like distant thunder after a passing storm. He tried to speak but barely a whisper escaped him.

"Remember me-" was the last thing I could hear.

I could not stop his light brown curls from being tainted dark and scarlett. I could not stop the wave of distress washing over me. His eyelids fluttered like the flame of a candle barraged by a draft until it diminished and his eyes closed. I could not stop the fire in his heart from fading.

Yet the world remained silent. As I raged and grieved the world remained oblivious. I felt the airy presence of Zephyrus return and stir up the dirt beneath us. It ruffled the hair of my once vibrant and lively companion. It whispered with sorrow that it had loved him as well and did not mean for such tribulation to ensue. Our friendship was the source of the South Wind's jealousy and had cost so much. If only, if only, if only kept running through my mind. If only we had more time. I tried to ease the grief and distress that plagued me. How could I hope to cure this sorrow in such a ghastly and gray domain? How could I hope to honor my friend's memory? It dawned on me slowly. Fate had brought us here, a vibrant youth to a desolate field, a god to a purpose. I summoned the strength I had in me, the raw emotion borne of this discord and focused it. From ruby rivers and pools bloomed tiny flowers of a most radiant hue. A once miserable land turned lively and young again with the promise of growth.

The breeze picked up and carried itself gracefully through the masses and speckles of flowers, caressing the petals with gentle affection and carrying with him the name of our deceased companion. I could almost hear the breath of life from this revived place. I could hear his laughter among the larks and sparrows and honey bees that now dove and swarmed among the flowers. Time flowed more quickly. I felt warmth return to me, replacing the chilling presence of death. Now, I stand here once again, remembering. I remember wherever I see those precious flowers growing where the warm wind has carried them, thriving among the landscape, lifting their leaves up to the sun in joyous greeting. Here I stand once again. A sweet current gliding past, and his name on my lips.

Hyacinthus.

My Husband Beside Me
by Mia DiGiandomenico

I had never experienced a greater sadness in my life than the one that I experienced when my husband had to travel to consult the oracle. That morning I cried and cried as I watched his ship sail off into the treacherous waters. As his ship escaped from my view I ran to the palace to pray to the gods, begging them that he return safely. I hoped that no storm would attack his boat during his journey because my life was nothing without him. Every day I would walk down to the seashore, staring out over the crashing waves. The sand would have felt nice on my feet if I wasn't pacing back and forth, assuring myself he was fine. Was I even fine, I kept asking myself? Could I even go on without him? I had to stop torturing myself with those awful thoughts. I looked back to my attendants, hoping that they could give me some sort of comfort. They just stood there, the waves crashing at their feet. Oh to be them. Oh, how I wish that I could be like them, never having loved in their life and only trying to imagine what I am going through. They have no idea. They have no idea what it is like to love someone so badly that it is agony when they are not there.

Every day that I went down to those crashing waves I would think to myself, is this all in vain. Every day I get up and hope I will see his sails soaring high above the water, but if he is gone all of this hope just makes me feel worse. Every day I wake up and run to the sea and when night falls I wait for it to be day again. The last day that I went to sleep, I was certain that tomorrow

would be the day. It would be the day that we meet again, and my worries would be gone, and I would think about how silly I was to think he wasn't coming home. But as I slowly started to drift into my slumber, I saw him next to my bed.

He said, “I am very sorry to tell you this, my love, but I am gone. In fact, as we speak my body is being washed onto the shore. I love you more than anything and I hope that now you can have closure.”

I awoke with such terror and grief that it startled all of the people in the palace.

All of my attendants came running to me, tripping over things in the dark.

I brushed past all of them and ran down to the seashore, making sure that the dream I had just experienced was just a terrible nightmare and that I had nothing to worry about. I hurried down the stairs, almost falling because of my speed. My attendants curiously followed me wondering what was so important that I was looking for. I hoped it was nothing. I stood on the shore, my feet making tiny footprints in the shell ridden sand. The waves softly crashed at my feet, tickling them with every small crash. I looked out into the darkness and felt almost calm. I closed my eyes and listened to the waves crashing and to the stillness of the kingdom. I could smell that salty saltwater smell. I looked down at my toes and admired the clarity of the water surrounding my feet. I sighed a breath of relief when I realized that it had only been a nightmare, and my husband was completely fine. As I started to walk away I had a strange feeling. I looked back at the water one more time, and there he was. My husband's body was lying against the sand. It looked so peaceful, yet so alarming. I ran to him and screamed. I screamed the scream of a wife, the scream of a lover, the scream of a friend, and the scream of a queen. My world had collapsed, my life was over. My love for him was unlike any other, my need for him beside me was greater than any other, and our friendship was like no other. Our life together flashed before my eyes. All of our amazing memories, shared together, and now there was no way to make new ones. My attendants tried to comfort me, but I knew that in a world without him I would never feel happy again. The thought of living without him was unbearable. So that was it, I would just not live without him. What would be my quality of life without him beside me? I would wake up every morning and look out at the sunrise and feel awful that he wouldn't be next to me admiring it too. The first time we admired the sunset together we had a brief conversation. Even though it was short it plays in my head over and over again everyday. It was the first morning we spent in the castle together as husband and wife. I was very sad to have a political marriage at the time because I dreamed of having a marriage full of love. Little did I know that this morning was the morning I would realize I loved him.

“Wake up,” He said.

“I am sleeping, what is wrong?”

“Nothing, I want to show you something.”

When I awoke I saw the most beautiful sunrise. It was peaking out above the light blue waves. All of the colors were splashed across the sky like paint on a canvas. I had never seen something more beautiful than this. I walked over to him. He was staring out over the balcony. He ruffled his curly brown hair and I had to admit he did look quite handsome. He put his arm around me and said,

“I know you think the sky is beautiful, but it is nothing compared to how beautiful you are.”

I blushed. I felt my heart fill up with butterflies and looked at him in a way I had never looked at someone before. That was the day our strong, powerful love began.

After all of this thinking, I realized what I must do. I ran as fast as I could and plunged into the ocean. I didn't even try to escape the icy waters. I made no attempt to paddle to safety. I just let the salty liquid fill up my body. As I slowly drifted from consciousness, I felt a moment of peace. Even though I was in so much pain I knew that soon I would soon be relieved of it. The gods were so touched by my love for my husband that they turned our bodies into birds. Halcyon birds to be exact. They warn seamen about storms. I have never known peace like this or even come close to experiencing this level of serenity. I am finally free of all of my fears and worries. Now I can rest with my husband beside me.

The Grand Goose

by Mason Mester

It was a day like all the others. The grass was green, the sky was blue, the white masses still stood in the sky, and I could see it all. In fact what was there to be sad or unhappy about. In my case there was nothing to be sad about. I was the son of a god, the most powerful of them all, and I was given a huge role as messenger of the gods. People would dream of having the ability to say something like that. I was traveling around earth with my father, something he often did when he suddenly spoke. “Look, son, down there at that small farm,” he boomed.

“Oh, yes,” I replied, “I do see it father. Why concern yourself with that farm, when there are plenty of other farms across the land?”

It was not a very large farm and it did not have a very large amount of crops. There weren't even any cattle, geese, or chickens. Why should I, the son of a god, grace that land with my presence if there weren't even any animals? Father, then laughed. “My son, you are naive,” he explained, “it matters not the size of the farm, what matters is what lies inside.”

He then floated down towards the surface and started to move towards the farm's door. I, still confused, settled down on the ground alongside my father. We were often disguised when we traveled out across the land, so when an older couple opened the door they did not see us, they saw only travelers. Surprisingly, the couple allowed us into their small home. The inside of the house appeared to be in an even worse shape than the outside of it. The windows were shattered, the ground dirty and cold. Now I felt even more insulted. This house is filthy! Disgusting! Nasty! “Why are we here?!?” I quietly asked my father with fury.

My father then silenced me with a look of anger and frustration. “What is your name,” his voice thundered.

The older woman came closer, and with the voice of a mouse, she squeaked,” I am Baucis, and this is my husband Philemon.”

She then walked outside, and came back with a large fluffy goose. She raised it towards the god and said, ”For you, Sir.”

I no longer felt pity for the old couple, and instead felt such gratitude towards them. She was willing to give up her last goose to us. We were complete strangers to this woman. The goose then flew out of the woman's hands and hid between father’s legs. A warm smile appeared on the gods’ face. In an instant we both transformed into our normal, godly appearances. “Philemon, Baucis, I am flattered and grateful for your immense hospitality and kindness towards me and my son,” he stated, “In return, I swear on the river Styx, that I will grant you any wish that you want.”

Philemon and Baucis said nothing, nor did anything, but stare. They did not fully process at that moment yet, but there was not just one, but two gods in their presence. They did not move for quite a bit of time. Finally, Philemon came next to his wife, and they both said, “We only wish to serve you until our last days.”

They then bowed before us. I could almost feel a tear come to my eye. With that, Father granted their wishes and transformed their small little farmhouse into an immense and beautiful temple. “Your wish is granted,” he finished.

For decades Philemon and Baucis served under my father. Whenever I would arrive at Mount Olympus, I would see them working for him. I would also talk with them about how their lives were now that they were serving him. They always had nothing but nice things to say about father. They would always say, “He gives us food, he gives us clothes, he gives us a home, we would never show anything but gratitude towards him.”

I could also never say anything bad towards them either. How could I? My mind often traveled back to that day on their old home on Earth. How dirty and old it was. It made me sick, knowing that those people lived there. But in that moment they had a home that was worthy of them. But eventually, age would catch up to the old couple. Me and my father were both devastated when we discovered that Philemon and Baucis had passed away. In return and to make sure that faith and love were never forgotten, they were transformed into oaks. They and their story were often discussed by me and my father, but more importantly, we remembered their good nature, their hospitality, and most importantly, their willingness to give up everything to complete strangers. It still makes my heart warm to this day.

The Contrary Outcome
by Julia White

Who would have thought I was responsible for traveling to earth to complete such a task of killing the prettiest girl in the kingdom. All I keep asking myself is how I’m supposed to complete my task to make my mother happy. It is known that my mother gets very jealous when anyone compares her beauty to any other person. So when word of a gorgeous girl by the name of Psyche was getting more praise than my mother spread around, the ending was inevitable.

“My dear son, a young princess is being worshiped because of her beauty. As you know mortals are not supposed to be praised more than gods, ever. Your task is to go to the kingdom and shoot her with an arrow. You will shoot her with a deadly poison and end this commotion,” my mother demanded.

I keep repeating these instructions to myself so I don’t ruin my reputation. At nightfall I reached the kingdom and had the task of sneaking past the guards. To my surprise the guards have fallen asleep. I crept noiselessly past the sound asleep guards just to make it to the girls room. Everything has fallen right into place. All I have to do is shoot the poison arrow into the girl and the task will be complete for my mother. I slowly approached the couchy, about to give her the deadly arrow when a sudden beam of light shined over her face showing her dazzlingly beautiful looks. As I backed away admiring her good looks I felt a sharp pain in my foot. It felt like fire erupting from my lower appendage. My eyesight starts to get foggy as I start to pass out from pain. The last thing I see is the young girl whose picture was being imprinted into my heart.

As I awoke with my first sight being Psyche I forgot everything I was told. How could anyone hurt such a wonderful girl like her? I knew my mother would see I had failed my task and would have backup plans. I listen in on her plans to kill my love and start thinking of ways to save Psyche from the wrath of Venus. I heard her plan was to only let a monster fall in love with her. This was so her parents would ditch her because of the curse.

The goddess of love received what she wanted. After the beautiful girl had no one that was falling for her, Psyche's parents were told to leave her on a mountain. Psyche was left there for days knowing something bad would happen.

Then she jumps. As I watch Psyche leap off of the cliff my heart drops. I beg that she will be saved. Midway through the fall Zephyrus (the South Wind) faithfully catches the girl out of the air and flys her into the distance.

When nightfell I frantically went to where Psyche was placed to look for her. I instantly realized I could not show my face or share my name to the girl because I am a god. As soon as I found her I started talking.

"I love you Psyche, very much," I confessed.

"Who are you, and where are we?" she asked, confused.

"I can not tell you who I am or why I am here with you," I said frantically. "All I can tell you is I love you and I want you to feel the same."

After our discussion, Psyche agreed to love me even through the circumstances. Every night when it got dark I visited Psyche. This routine worked for a while until she told me she was getting very lonely because I was only there at night. I agreed to let her sisters come to see her to avoid any problem. When her sisters came I heard them trying to convince her something. I could not pick up what this something was. I ignored my thoughts and started to fall asleep. My beautiful girl would never do anything to me, I thought as I fell asleep.

I wake up suddenly to a burning sensation on my arm. When I look up I see my love gazing over me with a lamp and a knife. She stands astonished over me when I become aware that she sees my face. I fly out of my room ferociously. I look back at her and yell,

"You will never see me again."

When I return home with my mother I try to recover from my burn. Days wash by as I grieve what my so-called-love did to me. I realized I was still in love with her and nothing was going to change that. One day as I am recovering my mother informs me that Psyche went to her to ask for forgiveness. My mother told me that Psyche had many tasks such as organizing all the different kinds of grain, collecting golden fleece from every sheep in a herd that sits by a river, and to travel down to the underworld and bring a little bit of beauty back in a box. My mother told me that Psyche completed all of her tasks and is now allowed to marry me. Psyche was then brought up to Mt. Olympus to be made immortal. We will now live happily together.

The Horrors and Hopes of Curiosity by Julia Kelly

The gods created me on Mount Olympus. Shortly after, I was offered to a brother, but he declined and told his younger brother to be careful. However, the younger brother decided to accept me. The first few days were blissful with the cool forest and beautiful blooming flowers. One gorgeous evening while dancing we saw Juptiers attendant, Mercury. He came bearing a box, but his walk seemed strained and the weight of the box moderated his movement. As he dropped the box I immediately discontinued dancing and waltzed over to him. My curiosity bubbled up over me. I begged my husband to have Mercury tell us what was in the box. As he was asking, Mercury intervened. He ignored the question entirely and instead was wondering if he could leave the box in our safe keeping because he didn't have enough strength to get it to the destination required, but he promised he would come back shortly for it. We allowed it to be left with us and Mercury placed the box in the corner. As he left I communicated my strong impulse to peek in the box to see what's inside.

"You shouldn't be acting this way. It is unacceptable and inappropriate. Stop frowning and pouting," my husband scolded. "Come outside and get some fresh air."

"No," I refused.

He left discouraged and I became more and more fascinated with the mysterious box. I tried to be as sneaky as possible and came upon it. I inspected the box and there was a glittering gold cord that caught my attention immediately. The beautiful intricate knot

captivated me. It was absolutely enchanting. I figured that if I just untied the knot it wouldn't be bad, like opening the lid, but I knew I couldn't. I tried doing things to occupy myself to refrain from thinking about the box. However, my curiosity got the best of me and I grabbed the box and put it to my ear. I fancied the voices. I reached the point where I was about to give up and open it, just in that moment, the cord dropped. *Thud* It hits the ground. Now I am intrigued even more. The voices got louder and louder and my desire to open it grew and grew.

The box spoke, "Open me, open me. We know you want to see what's inside. Free us now."

I was so interested. You could hear my heart thump from a mile away. I felt the need to open it so badly, but I could hear my husband outside and the guilt came upon me immediately. I knew he would get upset with me if he saw so I lifted the lid for a peek just a second before he would come in. Then the unexpected happened. The horror of all sickness, illness, and these brown winged creatures came out and stung me unmercifully. As my husband walked in they veered towards him, stringing both of us. We suffered unimaginable pain. They flew out an opened window and made all signs of happiness turn to anguish. We had never experienced this kind of pain before.

"I told you not to," he spoke bitterly, "I am so frustrated you brought this pain on me."

The box continued to speak to me, "Free us. Open me again."

My husband and I looked at each other trying to figure out what had just happened. We listened to the box yearning for answers. I had already done so much harm he thought what else could I do wrong. Hesitantly, I opened the box and the best thing that could have happened, happened. The gods must have had an impulse of compassion because a kind creature Hope healed the wounds from the horrid creatures. It relieved the pain and I was forever grateful.

A Mother's Lament by Jill Demaio

I trusted the nymphs to watch her, but I have to forgive them. They never would be powerful enough to even chase after her. Still, it's hard to forget. One day she's out picking flowers and the next, well, I had no clues to find her except the mocking repetition of Echo as I called out her name. My thoughts were clouded by not knowing where my only daughter had gone. Stolen, but by who? I continued along the path calling her name, although I knew it was no use. I'd checked nearly every city along the way. Except for the one that was ahead on the road.

"A chance to move on," I whispered to myself.

Then I caught what I had said and began to resent the thought. I stopped on the side of the road before the city to settle for a while. My eyes filled with tears. I could not go on nor could I stop to rest like this.

"I'm sorry, Persephone," I said through tears, "I'm sorry I couldn't find you."

Later a few women approached me to ask about why I was sobbing. They told me they were the daughters of the king of the country. I told them about how I had lost my daughter and they offered to take me to the palace to take care of their young brother who was only an infant.

It was clear that they were trying to help and were truly kind at heart, so I accepted, seeing that I could at least help for a time before returning to my search.

When I arrived the boy was very sick. I believe the daughters must have been desperate to save him from an untimely death and the grasp of Mors to have asked a stranger to help. I looked at the faint, pale child and instinctively kissed him on the forehead. This healed him instantly, and at first, I thought I would have to leave due to word getting out about a goddess in town. The royal family saw this act as a miracle and asked me to stay. Though still wary of how much time I would be spending here, I knew that the family would try to gather information to help me search while I was occupied with caring for their youngest member.

As time passed there seemed to be fewer and fewer details as to where my daughter had gone. Each night I continued to pace about the room worrying. I longed to continue my search, but I couldn't just leave the child on his own nor could I leave without thanking the royal family for their efforts to help. He was too young to learn about agriculture and harvest and I knew I would love to return to teach him one day, but he was so prone to illness and vulnerable in the world he'd been placed in. I simply could not leave him in the conditions he was in, but I could neither afford to take him with me. I had no choice but to trek back to Olympus to retrieve nectar in order to immortalize him. It was the best way I could help.

The process to anoint a mortal is simply too alarming to do in front of others, so I decided that it was best I waited for night to fall before I began my work. I prepared a bed of hot coals, the warm and fierce red glow emitting from them reminded me of my aspiration to find my daughter. I scarcely thought to check the corridors before I began, figuring that no one had come before and no one would come today. However, the Queen had decided that today she would actually make an effort to care for her own son. I hadn't known at the time and was in the midst of anointing the boy and reciting the most powerful charm I knew. As I carried him over to the coals I saw the same childlike wonder and awe my daughter once had when she was still a baby. I placed him gently onto the coals and shortly after footsteps came down the hall. There wouldn't be enough time to fully rid him of his perishable, mortal elements to finish the process, but there was no use in taking him off now. I decided I must not turn around and maintain focus for as long as I could. The Queen turned into the room and let out a piercing scream. I turned around to see her fear and felt as though a dagger had been stabbed in my heart. I saw the same true and genuine fear in her eyes that my tears knew the sting of as well. She believed her son was going to die at my hands.

"I never should have trusted a stranger with my son. Do you even know how important-" she begins to scold me, but I interrupt.

"There's no use in explaining," I told her, speaking softly despite the distressing empathy I felt, "you wouldn't believe me so I will have to show you."

She didn't respond, still in shock. Few mortals can survive the shock of seeing a god, but it was the only way. I had to give her some comfort to know her son was in no harm; I had to let her know it wasn't her fault.

"I am no old crone from the wayside," I started to explain, "I am and always was a goddess."

I saw her turn to ask something, but I was already far from the room and racing down the corridor. She could've only caught a glimpse of me before I began to run. Seeing her authentic fear and overwhelm of emotions at that moment reignited something in me, and I ran, flowing with the wind and in synchronization with the grass and the flowers. I followed the Alpheus river back to Sicily until I reached a whispering fountain. Her whisper was silvery and ethereal, drawing me to listen. I didn't know it then, but she knew what I did not. She knew where my daughter was.

How the Party Animal Came to Be
by Jake Jones

My life began like no other. I am one of the many children of Zeus' affairs. He and my mother, Semele, were in a secret relationship that Hera, my father's political wife, didn't know about. Overtime, Hera started to become suspicious of my father because he was out all the time. Hera needed to make sure that her suspicions were correct so she took the place of my mother's old nurse, Beroë. She started a conversation with my mother and carefully started to trick my mother into confessing everything, unsuspiciously.

"Hello Semele. How are you feeling today? Is everything good with the child?"

My mother answered, unknowing that it wasn't truly Beroë, "Yes Beroë, everything is fine with the child. I myself have a small headache."

Hera, knowing she needed to get information before Zeus came back, responded with, "Ok, I will grab some herbs and make you some tea. Is your boyfriend coming back soon?"

"Oh, why thank you, and yes, he should be coming home soon," answered my mother.

Hera, wanting to gather information, asked, "Well, why don't you tell me a little bit about your relationship with him?"

After painstakingly having asked her question, Hera had carefully extracted every little detail about what had been going on between her husband and my mother. Hera, being the jealous type, asked my mother if Zeus had ever shown himself in his godlike form.

My mother replied no and Hera strategically answered with, "He must be a vile impostor, or else he doesn't love you as dearly as he loved Juno, in whose presence he seldom appeared except in godlike arrays." My mother was baffled but convinced by Hera, or as my mother saw her Beroë, to put on her best attire and convince him to swear the solemn oath and grant her one request she chose to make.

"Hello darling, how was your day?" asked my eager mother.

"It was good honey, how's the baby?"

"He is good. You would know if you were here more, but that's alright," she exclaimed.

Zeus had nothing to say except, "You know that the more I am away from Olympus, the more Hera will suspect I am with another woman, no less a mortal." (Hera, furious that she had caught Zeus, wanted to jump out of her disguise and strangle him, but she knew if her plan worked it would be so much better).

My mother, upset with his answer, asked, "Why can't you just leave her for me? Who do you love more?"

"I obviously love you more, Semele, but I would not be respected amongst the gods anymore. If they found out, they might try to overthrow me and I can't have that happen."

My mother ordered him to go to Olympus and return as his god-figure in his majestic attire. My father pleaded for anything else but my mother was convinced this was the only way to show that he loved her more than Hera.

“Semele please anything but that, you won't be able to survive me in all my glory, no one ever does,” explained my father.

My mother, desperate to know if he loved her, said, “How do I know that you really are a god? What if you are just a fake? How do I know that you truly love me?” My father felt he had no choice but to do as she wished. So he went to Olympus and returned to Semele as his godlike form with his thunderbolts and all. He dimmed his appearance as much as possible but it was all in vain. He knew that no matter what he did no mortal could ever survive the power of all his greatness.

My father was right. Once he returned and my mother laid her eyes on him, she dropped to the ground. My father, not thinking, dropped to her side but the lightning that surrounded his head burnt the whole house to ashes.

I wish I could have met my mother but that stupid Hera had to worry about everyone else. Why did she have to be so jealous? Didn’t she know her marriage was only political? I guess it is not worth getting upset over because it happened so long ago.

Who is the Best
by Glenda Zhiminaicela

I have godly twins, a beautiful daughter, and a handsome son. Some may say that I am bragging or boasting about my children, but all I am doing is letting the world know how lucky a mother I am with such beautiful, intelligent, and powerful children. It's not my fault they are amazing, in every way compared to others. The other day Niobe had the nerve to laugh at my comment. She even dared to tell me that she is the mother of fourteen children far superior to my two children. She believes that her seven sons are better than my one son. Do I have to remind her of my godly sons' multiple realms of power such as medicine and all fine arts? My daughters' beauty surpasses the beauty of all seven of Niobes' daughters. Not only that, but my daughter is also a skilled huntress.

“She claims her two children are amazing, but they are nothing compared to my fourteen children,” Niobe said, “My multiple children are far superior to her pair of twins.” I was about to allow her false statement to slide without punishment for her hubris, but she crossed the line when she forbade her people to worship my son and daughter. I decided her action must come with a consequence that she will never forget. I guess I have no choice but to show her just how powerful and mighty my children are, compared to hers. I summoned my godly children, gave them each a set of sharp quivers, a bow, and sent them off to slay their competition and punish the mother that dared to look down on them. First, my son killed her seven sons in the forest while they were out hunting deer.

“Come on brothers, I think we finally found the deer’s hiding place, and I can’t wait to eat that deer for dinner,” said one of Niobe’s sons before getting shot dead by one of my sons’ deadly arrows. I was able to hear the commotion, the screams, and cries for mercy. For a moment there, I thought they were a threat. That is sure to teach her a lesson to not mess with my children or me. I couldn't wait to witness Niobe's reaction to her punishment, and I wasn't disappointed when she arrived at the scene. Niobe ran to her sons' soulless bodies and mourned their death. She thought the suffering was over only to find out my daughter started her hunt. Niobe ran as fast as she could to try to protect her daughters, but it was all in vain. One by one, her daughters fell to the ground, exhaling their last breath. Equipped with several arrows, they finished off Niobe’s children with only seven each, not missing a single shot. In the end, fourteen bodies were lying on the ground, with arrows impaling them. Her tears didn't stop, and in pity for her loss, the gods transformed her into stone, but even then, her tears continued to flow down her cheeks. Hopefully, everyone now knows not to mess with the goddess of dark nights, mother of the god of the sun, and goddess of the moon.

A Guilty Conscience
by Corrinne Meyer

Who would have thought I would be bid to slay my husband the same night we are wedded? Especially when it is my father, Danaus, who is the one giving me the dagger. The man who raised me and all forty-nine of my sisters is now the one who is burdening me with the task of killing the man I love to save him. I now have my conscience guilting me into such a conflict, choosing between my love and the man who has raised me. How am I supposed to decide a man's fate of life or death? That is a job for the gods, not a maiden like me. If I choose to save my soon to be husband, then my father will perish at the hands of his son in law. If I choose my father, then I will also lose someone I love. My sisters seem to have made their choice of the less conflicting option of obeying our father and seem to have no remorse even though this is an act of murder. They seem to have less of a guilty conscience and have deep faith in our father, and I get that, but I simply cannot kill an innocent man. I wonder if any of my sisters felt the same way when our father first told us of the prophecy, but I could not flat out ask them. It is not that simple. Even though I do not know their inner thoughts, they seem to be fairly unconcerned that they have to murder 49 men who think they will be wed and spend the rest of their lives in matrimony. Some could be wearing a mask of familial loyalty and secretly be feeling the same as I am, but only time will tell.

Upon the arrival of my wedding day, it all seemed to go perfectly, full of love, laughter, and revelry up until nightfall, when I was left alone with my thoughts. I sit here next to my husband, staring into the darkness, awaiting sunrise.

"What a mess," I mumble to myself.

I had gone with my heart and chose the life of the man I love, which is obvious, seeing that he is still in a deep slumber at night next to me. The light sound of his snores does not help ease the anxious feeling of what will come when all is known and all choices have been made. I hope my father will forgive me. Could he blame me for not wanting to bring death to someone? Well, I guess he could, seeing that this will lead to the prophecy coming true and his life coming to an end. However, I pity my love, Lyceus, who had to wake to the death of all of his siblings, I couldn't even imagine. When morning comes, I find out that everyone has gone through with this plan of the massacre, besides me, of course. All forty-nine men were found lifeless at the hands of my sisters. By the time the news spread, I knew the prophecy from the oracle would soon become a reality. The anticipated word of my father's death finally reached me, the deaths of my sisters came unexpectedly along with it too. Seeing what they had done I can assume where they will end up, and the stern, bearded man they will come to face

How I got my Wings
by Chloe Jackson

I rolled out of bed as I was beginning to feel the warmth of Apollo's sun beams tickling my skin. Mom made me oatmeal, Ceres had brought over some wheat the day before. It would be good fuel for the mischievous day ahead. Something about today felt good, almost too good. I knew I had to stir up my fellow Olympic brothers and sisters a bit. I spent most of the day cutting the attendants' pony tails, and trying to scare my uncles. I even had Mars help me set up a trap for Dad, but he just walked right through it. After dinner I played my lyre bit, but I was still quite hungry, a growing god needs his fuel. Diana had already pulled the night across the sky, and nothing in the pantry looked appetizing. The night seemed to whisk away as I walked through the land of the mortals. They were all fast asleep. I always wondered what it would be like to be a mortal. The wind started to get colder as I turned the corner, but then I saw one of the women dad had brought to the house last week. He said she was helping him with something, maybe she could help me find a snack. I couldn't remember her name though. Ida? Imma?

"Excuse me Miss, I think we've met before," I said. I've never really talked to a mortal before, hopefully I didn't say anything she couldn't understand.

"Have we?... oh you're Zeus' son aren't you," her voice trembled a bit. Maybe it was just the cold, or maybe I really made her that nervous.

"I need a good burger, do you know any good places around here?"

"Oh Sweetie, nothing around here is open this late," she replied, and my stomach started to growl more noticeably. I said farewell to Io and continued onto the pastures behind the town she lived in. I remembered Orpheus told me that his dad had gotten a whole pasture of cattle last weekend, so surely he wouldn't miss a few dozen. The only issue was Orpheus had neglected to tell me where the pasture was, he's always leaving out the details. He really should stick to poetry, over storytelling. I took the path along the river, and eventually came to a large pasture of grass, flooded with cattle. I figured Apollo wouldn't miss fifty or so of them. I moved them to the other side of the valley, and just as I went to harvest the ribs of my third, I noticed it was almost time for Apollo to make his way across the sky, and I ran home.

I woke up to Apollo shaking my cradle, and Mom and Dad yelling.

“Where did my cattle go? 50 of them went missing last night while I was off duty,” Apollo said. I could tell he was very upset, so I lied.

“How would I know? I've been here all night, ” I uttered, trying to sound somewhat groggy, but I realized I would have to give Apollo something to distract him, unless I wanted to have to deal with his temper. He was easily distracted by pretty things, especially his own reflection. My lyre had a small reflective piece on the top, so I told him he could have it. His eyes lit up, and I knew I wouldn’t have to deal with him for a while. He began to play it, awkwardly at first, but eventually melodically.

A few days later he came back to our house after his morning duties. He told me he loved the way the lyre sounded, and that the women of Olympus thought it showed his soft side, which they liked. He sat me down, and said that I could borrow the cattle anytime I needed to. Then he reached into his chariot and pulled out a brand new pair of brown leather sandals. I thought they were cool at first, until I realized they had little wings, and that I could fly once they were on my feet. I thanked Apollo and just as he was about to leave he gave me a cap with the same wings as the sandals. He told me he was awarding me the messenger god and that I would be the main source of communication in Olympus. He said the ladies would like that. Ever since then I’ve done just as he said, and become the communication network for all of Olympus.

The Forbidden Love by Aslin Wolfe

I always wanted to be with my dearest loved one. Sadly a great wall separated us. I hated this wall with all my passion. Pyramus and I had quarreling parents who had forbidden us to be with each other. My heart was so tender and heavy, I often let out long sighs to release the tension. We would pray to our beloved goddess. However, the time would drag on longer and longer. Days felt like weeks. Weeks turned into months and months felt like years. My most cherished memory was when we had found a crack between the wall. Our prayers and wishes were answered. We would exchange conversations without our parents knowing. This felt like a blessing after not being able to talk for so long.

“I love you,” said Pyramus.

“I love you too,” I replied. Even though we had the opportunity to talk, I still longed for more. I had wanted an actual conversation where we were not forced to always look behind and worry about our parents discovering our relationship. We made plans to meet with each other under the mulberry tree at exactly the same time. This place was right outside of the city gates. The location was the best so our parents would not have been able to find us. Once the time came, I was the first to arrive. I paced for what felt like an eternity, wondering what could have caused my love to be late.

“He could have hurt himself on the journey,” I pondered. I was in a meditative state from thinking when suddenly I heard a strange noise coming from the bushes. I went over to it to see if Pyramus was the one making the noise. Coming close to calling his name, suspecting it was him, I stopped with hesitation. Instead, a large beast slowly crept out and licked his bloody jaws. His menacing gaze locked with mine. My mouth let out a loud cry and I ran. I remember

how my heart was pounding in my throat. Sadly I lost my veil to the lion. It slipped off my head and landed into his razor-sharp teeth. I ran as fast as I could on my nimble feet to get away. The farther away was better. I ran and ran until I couldn't see the lion anymore. I eventually came to a safe distance. I waited paralyzed in fear while wondering what had happened to my forbidden love.

"There was no excuse why he should be late," I thought to myself. I had headed back after contemplating my choices.

"Does he actually love me anymore?" I thought. Fearfully, I walked looking at the ground for any indication that the beast had turned around and where it had gone. As I walked back I eventually saw the lion's footprints and where it had turned. Along with those, I saw my own and a larger human-like foot. I became excited hoping Pyramus had slain the beast and would be crowned my hero. I started to run to the site of the white mulberry tree where we had promised to meet each other. There I spotted a motionless body sprawled out on the ground. I approached and the closer I came to it, it started to look familiar. As I walked closer and closer the thought of my dearest being dead overwhelmed me. I saw that the corpse had my veil pressed up against his lips. I flew to his side and it was Pyramus. Lifeless with a dagger in his chest. I shrieked in agony. I was overcome with emotion and felt heartbroken. I tried my very best to revive him with what little hope I had left. Despite my efforts, he was dead underneath the mulberry tree.

"I cannot be without him," I exclaimed. After many moments of despair, I knew what I had to do. I ripped the dagger out of his chest and plunged it into mine. I fell lifeless next to him. Finally, I can be with him alone. Ever since then, the white mulberry fruit turned a blood-red color. It was dyed by the blood of our bodies.

SCARY STORIES

The Frozen Soul - by Noah Pullman

It was midwinter in a rather rural area when three recently college-graduated friends, Akira, Rei, and Nate, were going to a local house, which was rather old, to see if they wanted to live there, as well as get a tour of the house from their realtor, Mr. McJones.

McJones had placed an ad online, and although Rei thought that he seemed to be kind of eccentric, Nate and Akira were optimistic about it, and wanted to go. Rei didn't want to tag along in the beginning, but later decided to simply because they did not have anything else to do.

"Alright," said Akira. "We are almost there, guys. I think we just have a couple minutes left."

In the passenger seat next to him, Nate excitedly said "Man oh man! This is gonna be fun! The house did look a bit old in the picture, but the cost is really low. This is a bargain if I've ever seen one!"

Rei seemed more skeptical, and replied: “I don't know, it seems rather off putting. It looks like they never even switched the material from wood, and it seems very old too, so I think fires could spread easily.”

Rei then thought about it a little more and added slightly more optimistically but albeit passive-aggressively, “Well, maybe it looks better on the inside. And it’s not like I have anything better to do anyways.”

Nate was visibly less excited than before, and sat there quietly. After a few minutes of semi-awkward silence, they arrived at the house. Soon afterwards, they were greeted by Mr. McJones on the porch.

He asked “Ah, are you the people looking to buy this house?” the other three simply nodded back to him.

“Well, come in,” said Mr. Mcjones. Rei decided to go on their own, and the others took a tour of the first floor of the house. Nate, after looking around, decided to start up a conversation.

“Hey, Mr. McJones,” said Nate. “How long has this house been around?”

Mr. McJones simply replied, “Since about 1890 or so. That’s why the wiring is bad, as it is only just getting installed. But don’t worry, the electricity will be fixed by the time you move into the house if you choose to buy it.”

“Alright, but I have a question,” said Nate. “There are a lot of noises coming from upstairs. Are you rooming with somebody by chance?”

“No, I’m pretty sure the four of us are the only ones around at the moment,” replied Mr. McJones in a calm manner.

“Hey,” said Akira. “It’s almost as if this place is haunted or something.” To Akira's surprise, even though he had just been making a joke, Mr. McJones had not even acknowledged that he had asked a question.

Nate was confused as well and asked Mr. McJones, “Did you hear what he said?”

Mr. McJones looked a little confused and said “Oh, no, I didn’t. Sorry. I kind of zone out sometimes.” Akira and Nate both found this a little odd, but decided to ignore it.

Rei, who had been exploring the rest of the first floor, walked back in and said “This place seems pretty nice. I don’t know if I would want to live here, but it seems like a good vacationing area at least.”

Mr. McJones looked a little insulted, but changed back to his regular demeanor quickly and stated “Trust me. By the time this tour is over, you would want to buy this house even if I doubled the price!” Mr. McJones began quietly laughing at his own joke, and the other three became slightly more uncomfortable.

“Hey,” said Nate, “would you mind if me and the others discuss if we want to buy the house in private?”

Mr. Mcjones replied placidly, “Sure thing.”

When they arrived on the porch, Nate instantly began talking, “This house is actually really creepy,” he said. “I keep hearing these weird noises and I want to leave.”

“Yeah, plus when I was on my own I discovered multiple issues with the house, and it's kind of shabby,” noted Rei.

“Well, I have some issues with the house as well, so let's go tell him that we don’t want to buy the house,” said Akira.

“Alright,” replied Rei, “And I will get some flashlights too because it is really dark in there even with the lights on.” As they walked back in, they noticed Mr. McJones staring into a corner.

“Uhhh, Mr. McJones we have made our desici-” Rei was cut off when Mr. McJones turned around with a glare in his eyes and ran straight towards Nate. Akira shined his flashlight into Mr. McJones' eyes to blind him, and rather oddly, Mr. McJones seemed to revert to a perfectly normal state.

“Oh, hi guys, have you made your decision on the house?”

Nate replied in a shaky voice, “This is too weird. I’m getting out of here!” He ran out of the exit and towards the car.

Akira and Rei went to follow him and calm him down, only to notice that he was gone and that his tracks in the snow had stopped halfway to the car. As they stood there confused, they noticed someone watching them from the side of the house. When they ran to the side of the house, he was gone as well.

“What the heck?” asked Akira. “Where did he go?”

“Calm down,”' replied Rei. “We’ll find him.” As they ran back into the house, Akira noticed a very faint light on the second floor window, and instantly ran up there the second they entered the house.

“Wait!” shouted Rei, but to no avail.

“What are you people doing?” asked Mr. McJones.

"Nate went missing,'" replied Rei. "And we think some sort of intruder kidnapped him."

"Oh dear," replied Mr. Mcjones,

Meanwhile, Akira had made it up to the stairs and had entered the room, only to see what looked like a phantom holding a gun,

"Why are you doing this?!" shouted Akira while brandishing his fists, preparing to fight.

The Phantom aimed its gun at him, and he froze. It seemed able to speak, and spoke in an otherworldly voice, "Listen. I am the thing that possessed that realtor. I will explain to you some of my motivation, simply because no one listens to me, and I finally have the opportunity."

The Phantom continued on. Akira decided to oblige and listen to the story so he wouldn't get shot.

"All of my life in this town, my family has lived here. We had owned the house for years, and my parents died of a disease when I was young, and I lived here alone with no education. It was as if the world had forgotten me. As an adult, I tried to make myself known, but it never worked. I never had any friends. I was so sick of everything, until one day I fell from the roof and gained this power. I watched as that wretched Mr. McJones found my abandoned house and decided to sell it. I decided I would use these new powers to get revenge, and maybe, just maybe, I will finally make myself known."

"Now," said the Phantom. "Bring me McJones, and I will spare you and your other friend. Fail to do so and you all die." Akira nodded his head and ran back down.

Meanwhile, Rei was studying what they knew about the ghost. Soon, it dawned on them. When they had flashed light onto the ghost as well as a minor source of heat when it was possessing McJones, it had instantly fled. That was just a minor source of heat, and a fire could possibly defeat it. Akira ran in at about the time Rei figured it out.

"Oh, so you are still alive,"' said McJones in an oddly joking manner.

"No time to explain," shouted Akira. "We need to bring McJones up there or we will all die."

"Wait," replied Rei, "I think we can kill him with fire."

"We can't take chances, man," Akira interjected¨

"But wait," replied Rei quickly, "think about it. That flashlight drove him from a human body. Fire is much hotter than a flashlight."

Akira groaned and replied, "Alright, alright, just give me a torch or something." Rei took out a stick they collected from outside and lit it.

"Here," they said quietly as they handed it to Akira. Akira then automatically ran back upstairs and ran back into the room. Before the Phantom could say anything, Akira threw the torch at it. It dodged, but the torch hit the ground and a fire began.

"You messed up," said the ghost as it aimed its gun at Akira and fired. Akira ran out of the room as the fire quickly spread. The Phantom fired some bullets, but they missed.

Akira ran back to the first floor and shouted "Guys, we have to get out, a fire started!" Mr. McJones and Rei quickly understood and fled the building. As it burned down. Mr. McJones grimaced.

"Hey guys, I know this is a lot to ask, but I don't have insurance and I do not have much money. Could you just buy the house? I'll even half the price."

Akira looked at him like he was insane, and Rei politely declined. After some searching, they never found Nate or saw the Phantom. They decided to go their separate ways after calling the police to investigate

A few days later, after everyone had left and Nate had still not been found, something crawled out of the snow.

There stood Nate, but with rather pale skin and ghostly eyes.

The Doll by Mackenzie Noreikis

About ten years ago there was this little 6-year-old girl that died in the Old Stone Church in a fire. Her name was Agnes O'Neil. Everyone in the small foggy town where the sun never shined always wondered how the fire started in the first place and why the little girl was there.

Next to the Old Stone Church, there was this toy store. One day after church on Sunday this little family of three Payton, Maddie, and their father went to the toy store. As soon as they walked into the store the floor creaked and the store owner, Mr. Jacks, appeared out of nowhere and startled the family and greeted them. Mr. Jacks was about in his 50s, he was alone, no kids, no wife, and his life revolved around his store. Payton walked past the antiques, action figures, stuffed animals, and saw this doll in a glass case. She was very drawn to it as if it was calling her name. Payton begged her dad If she could get the doll and finally her father gave in. Mr. Jacks unlocked the case and told Payton this was a very special doll. Payton completely ignored him in admiration of the doll and they left the store with the doll in her hand. As the family got home Payton saw a card on the doll. She opened it and Payton found out the doll's name was Agnes.

Payton spent every waking moment with Agnes. Payton brought her to school, the store, played house, had tea parties, and everything a doll could imagine doing with her owner. Slowly Payton started to stop playing with Agnes. Payton would leave her in the corner of her room in the rocking chair. Somedays Payton would leave her there all day and night. Agnes began to feel betrayed; all she wanted was to be loved by someone and to have their attention. Agnes sat in the rocking chair day after day, Agnes eventually had enough and began to get furious.

When Payton and Maddie went to school and their father went to work, Agnes got off the rocking chair and walked out of the room as the chair swayed. She walked down the stairs with a

creak at every stair. The house was still and silent. Agnes took the Vase of the girl's mother's ashes and brought it back to Peyton's room, she threw the vase across the room as it smashed into a million pieces. Then Agnes took Payton's red lush lipstick and wrote on the mirror in all caps "YOUR TURN."

Maddie and Payton walked off the bus laughing and sharing about each other's days. As they walked through the front door they took off their shoes and hung up their bags, they ran to the fridge to get a snack and went to their rooms. Payton walked into her room and screamed bloody murder at the top of her lungs. She fell to the ground crying, picking up the pieces of glass from the vase and screaming Maddie's name. Maddie rushed into the room in a panic not knowing what had happened. Maddie saw writing on the mirror and saw Agnes in the corner of her eye smirking in the rocking chair. They wondered who could have done this and what they had done to deserve this. The girls had no idea what they were gonna tell dad. But the thought of what was written on the mirror stuck in their head. They were frightened and worried.

Later that night, Payton couldn't fall asleep. She took Agnes from the chair and tucked her into bed while next to her. 'Did it work?' Agnes thought. Could she have Payton to herself again?

In the morning Payton woke up from the sound of her alarm and put Agnes back in the rocking chair to get ready for school. But Agnes didn't want to be in the chair so while Payton was in the shower she went in there and took the clothes and towel from the bathroom and hid them and went to sit back in the rocking chair. Payton turned off the shower as the steam came off her skin and she stepped out onto the Purple mat. She went to grab her towel and realized the towel wasn't there. Payton swore she brought a towel and her clothes with her. She grabbed another towel from the closet and wrapped herself up. She went to see if Maddie was messing with her, she told Maddie what happened and Maddie said she didn't take her stuff. Payton ran back to her room and began to worry because so much weird unexplainable stuff was happening. Payton couldn't find her clothes so she picked out new ones and got changed for school.

Payton sat down at her vanity and did her hair and face for the day but all of a sudden in the corner of the mirror she saw Agnes move. She quickly turned around and looked at Agnes, Agnes wasn't moving. She was sitting still on the chair as a doll would. Payton rubbed her eyes and continued to get ready but then again she saw Agnes move. Payton knew it wasn't just her mind playing tricks on her and when she turned around Agnes was in a completely different position than before on the chair.

" Maddie, MADDIE! Agnes is alive," said Payton.

"How can a doll be alive, Payton?" Maddie asked nervously, and seemed concerned as well.

" I don't know. Just watch…. SEE! look Maddie it just moved. Agnes is the one doing all those awful things, it is not me please believe me."

" Oh my god, how is that even possible? How.. how did it just move, Payton this better not be another prank."

"It's not, it's not-"

"Hello girls," said Agnes.

"AAAHHHHH!!!" screamed the sisters as they left the room in a panic.

Payton and Maddie ran down the stairs and didn't know what they were going to do. It all made sense to them now Agnes broke the vase and she stole Payton's clothes. Maddie and Payton had to find a way to get rid of Agnes. All of a sudden the girls heard footsteps coming from upstairs and doors opening, it was Agnes looking for them.

“Payton…. Maddie….., come out wherever you are I just want to play,” said Agnes.

Payton took a pillow from her dad's room and took off the pillowcase and Maddie answered Agnes and told her they were downstairs setting up a tea party. The girls hid off to the side of the staircase and waited for Agnes to come down. Agnes began to come down the stairs step by step with a creak at every step. When Agnes reached the final step Payton put her inside the pillowcase and they went outside with Agnes over Payton’s shoulder. Payton and Maddie threw Agnes inside the dumpster across the street and as they walked away they heard the sound of Agnes’s glass shatter. The girls were so happy they got rid of Agnes for good and they could live peacefully again.

During dinner, the girls told their dad about Agnes. Their dad didn’t pay much attention after his wife died. He tended to be in a different world as if he's not there at all. Later that night the girls got ready for bed and went to sleep soundly.

Agnes wasn’t finished with Payton or Maddie. She wanted revenge for what they did to her. She climbed out of the dumpster and cleaned herself off. She walked to the house and quietly opened the door. She made sure no one was awake and she then went up to Payton’s room. She put her hands on Payton’s head, closed her eyes, and chanted. Agnes chanted the same chant Mr. Jacks did to her when he put her soul in the doll. Agnes now had possession of Payton’s body and Payton was stuck inside the doll. Agnes took Payton and put her in the same place the girls put her and she went back to bed as if nothing happened.

The next morning Maddie didn’t know what happened that night. She thought everything was normal. Agnes was the happiest person in the world. She had a body again and she was alive. Agnes wasn’t very careful about pretending to be Payton. Maddie noticed a few things off with her little sister and she was concerned. Agnes wouldn’t talk to Maddie and Payton and Maddie were always very close. Agnes didn’t talk to Maddie for a couple of days and that's when Maddie knew there was something wrong. When Agnes went to Peyton's room one day, Maddie went back to the dumpster to find Agnes. She finally found her and Payton told Maddie what happened and how she was trapped in the doll and the dumpster for a week. Maddie felt awful but she needed to find a way to get Agnes to the store without being suspicious so Agnes wouldn’t find out she knew. Maddie told Agnes she wanted to go shopping and that she wanted to go back to the little toy store to get the antique she saw last time that reminded her of mom. Agnes thought nothing of it and went with her. The day before she called Mr. Jacks and told him he said he would help Maddie and he had a plan.

Agnes and Maddie walked through the doors and Mr. Jacks snuck up behind them and grabbed Agnes, he brought her to the back room and tied her up. Maddie ran back to the little wagon they brought with them and grabbed Payton from the little compartment. Mr. Jacks switched them back and told Maddie he would take care of Agnes and no questions were asked. The girls went back home and never thought of the toy store or Agnes again. As for Mr. Jacks, he never let Agnes’s spirit free. He cleaned her up, good as new, and put her back in her glass case waiting for the next person to take her.

Olivia by Sydney Robison

In the town of Cumberland, Maine, little goes on that everyone doesn't know about. With a population of a little over 8,000, three of them being the Jones family, everyone knows one another. On Maplewood Way lives the Jones family; Josh and Mia, kids of Jen, have lived in this town their whole lives. Josh played little league baseball every chance he got, and Mia made an effort to go to most, if not every Girl Scout meeting. Not a day went by where they were not busy. This was because of

their mom's biggest rule; always participate in volunteering. She believed this to be a great thing to take part in because she believed her kids needed to discover that their life was amazing, but other kids were not as fortunate. Josh goes along with it because while helping kids that are in need at the orphanage is great, it is also appreciable on resumes for baseball scholarships. As for Mia, she goes to Girl Scouts to make friends. Mia would talk to anyone that crossed paths with her. Age and gender didn't matter, or even if they looked like complete and utter pedophile, she still took her chances to make a new companion.

This week was like any other week. Josh and his best friend went to their volunteering gig at the orphanage. This time, though, they brought Mia with them because her Girl Scouts meeting was canceled. The boys and Mia walked through the big wooden doors that laid in the front of the church, welcoming all to walk through them. There was a section of the church reserved just for the orphans, which was located on the second floor. The church contained rooms filled with bunk beds, showers, bathroom stalls, and loads of shiny new toys donated by citizens of Cumberland. Josh and Cole were regulars there; they knew their way around and would pass by all the people with whom they were formerly acquainted with. They had Mia go and play with one of the girls her age, while they would help out the facilitators. But when making the rounds around the room to greet all of the bright-faced kids first, they both spotted a young woman. She was about 5'2, with the build of a 7-year-old. She had brown, pin-straight hair that laid upon her narrow pale shoulders. She wore a grey tank top with tan-brown shorts that screamed cheap. A black thread of string rested on her protruding collar bone. Standing out to Cole, he stared at the strand settled, now, on the thin girl's neck until a small doll-like hand flew up snatching the string, tearing it off her shirt in one swift motion. Startled by her sudden movement, Cole jumped back creating a vile smile that pierced the lips of the woman.

"What the hell," Cole whispered to Josh, sweaty palms shaking at the attempt to hide the sight of his lips. Josh shrugged off Cole's exclamation and kept on walking with his head arched towards the floor and feet dragging behind him. When the two teens reached the bathroom, Josh shut the door firmly behind them.

"What just happened"? Josh voiced quietly, "I have never seen that creep before and I know for a fact that you haven't either." Cole just stood there, eyes glazed over in fear with goosebumps topping his tanned skin. He didn't dare speak a word, his actions vocalizing his emotions for him. Josh approached the sink and turned the rusty tap. Ice cold water flushed out of the metal spout and into his shaky hands. Josh splashed the cool water over his sweaty face, trying to regain a sense of calmness while Cole stood in the middle of the room staring off into oblivion. Both of the boys' minds ran, trying to fully comprehend what happened and why it frightened them to this extent. It wasn't the actions the women did, but the way she did them. What made them the most frightened was the creeping smile on her face when she tore the thread off in aggression; the type you don't normally see people display.

"Let's head back out before the kids think we left," Josh announced in a way to break the eerie silence. Cole nodded to him--the only movement he could get out. They shuffled out of the bathroom, trying to make it seem that what just occurred didn't almost make them pee themselves. Large smiles plastered on their faces and clothes smoothed out, the only thing they craved was getting through this day while keeping their sanity.

The four hours they remained at the church, the spine-chilling movements the woman executed replayed in their heads like a broken projector at a movie theater. They attempted to focus on the kids and forget about the prior events. Finally, their shift was over, and they both headed back to Josh's house to play video games and hang out. When they arrived, Mia went to her room and Josh immediately told his mom Jen about the chilling events that transpired.

"Are you sure you are not just overreacting? The young lady probably meant no harm," Jen remarked as she scrubbed dishes coated in leftover lasagna. "I'm sure she was nervous. You said you guys have never seen her before. It was most likely the first day jitters," Jen exclaimed with not a single drop of uncertainty.

"Mom, you weren't there! You don't understand!" Josh yelled emotionally. He fiddled with his fingers before rushing out of the kitchen in a fit of rage with Cole behind on Josh's heels and running

into the basement. The door to the basement slammed shut, almost coming off its hinges. Following the loud noise, Mia skipped into the kitchen.

"Why are Joshy and Cole so sad? What happened Mommy?"Mia questioned with concern. Her mom just brushed off her daughter's comment, not worried by the story the boys told. Since her mom wasn't worried about it, Mia wasn't either, so she began to wander into the basement to find Josh and Cole, but not before she begged her mom to take her to the park.

"Mama please. I have been a good girl, I just really wanna go to the park! Pretty pretty please Mama?"

"I'm sorry baby. Mama has a lot of work to do for her job. I also need to make dinner and do laundry. I'm sorry I just don't have any spare time." Jen said, noticing Mia began to plaster her puppy-dog eyes and make her bottom lip pop out with a quiver. After about ten seconds she gave in.

"Fine, go ask your brother and Cole to bring you," Jen groaned.

"YAY thanks, Mama!!" Mia shouted and wrapped her tiny arms around her mom's waist and squeezed.

"Okay okay now please go, I need to focus on my work," Jen started leaving a quick kiss on the top of her daughter's head. Mia wasted no time and went to harass the boys.

"Mom says you have to bring me to the park," Mia howled.

"Mia..." Josh groaned, " Cole and I are trying to play video games. But it's kinda hard when you whine in our ears the whole time." Cole nodded in agreement with Josh.

"Yeah, we can bring you when we finish this level," Cole stated sympathetically.

"Fine," Mia huffed, crossing her arms across her chest, "you better be fast or I'll tell Mom."

"Yeah yeah, we will. Now go!"Josh clamored, resulting in Mia stomping off. After a half-hour, Josh and Cole had completed three more levels, and they headed upstairs to grab Mia and go to the park. They both dreaded going to the park on cold autumn afternoons, just like today, but if Josh said no he would never hear the end of Mia's crying.

They walk down the street and get to the park quickly, because of Mia's running of course. When they arrive, Josh zips up his black jacket on Mia because she lost her bright pink one yesterday at her ballet lesson, and she was on her way to the sandbox. Cole and Josh are paying no attention to her and more focus on their basketball game, like any other time they take her to the park. As Mia is playing with her favorite stuffed animal, Fuzzy, a young thin woman walks up and crouches near the border of the germ-filled sandbox. She asks if she can play with Mia, and with excitement Mia nods, this being the first person who asked to play with her. The young adult introduces herself as Ivy and asks for Mia's name in return. With no hesitation, she gives it, yearning for a new friend.

"I have this cute puppy, Mia, but right before I met you, she ran away," a single tear dripping down her pale cheek "Would you be able to help me find her?" Ivy asks with a smile slightly creeping on her lips. Mia jumps up, eager to see this dog Ivy speaks of, but then her eyes began to slowly drop down at her feet as she recalled her mom telling her, 'Mia please remember, only go with people you know, like Josh and Cole, or one of mommy's friends.' But her mind quickly snaps back,"You are my friend, right Ivy?" Mia questions, hoping for a positive reaction.

"Mia, I'm sad you would even ask that, of course, I'm your friend. We just played with Fuzzy together, right? If I wasn't your friend, I wouldn't play with you."Ivy remarked. But her statement about Fuzzy shot up some red flags for Mia. She didn't remember telling Ivy that her stuffed bear had the name Fuzzy, but she shook that thought away remembering Ivy's dog was astray.

"Okay Ivy," Mia looked up, "Let's go find your puppy!"

After looking for what felt like hours to Mia, but was actually thirty minutes, the dog was located.

"Ivy! Ivy! She's here, come over here I think I found her!"Mia squealed. Ivy put on a fake smile and made her eyes twinkle.

"Thank you for helping me find her, Mia. I'm so glad to have a friend like you." Ivy reaches out to Mia for her hand, and Mia intertwines her fingers into Ivy's hand. She takes Mia's hand with a firm grip, pulling her towards her dark grey minivan. Mia's heart races, body tense, until she glances at the van, recognizing it to be immensely similar to her mother's. With that, her frail body relaxes and a sense of relief washes over her. Sadly though, it wasn't her mother's car, it was similar if not the same. But when Ivy picks her up and shoves her in the van aggressively, she knows she's anywhere but out of

harm's way. Ivy places Mia into a car seat, which seems as if it was brand new, and buckled her seat belt tightly. She squirms around in the seat, the belt leaving a red mark on her tiny neck.

"Mia... STOP!" The once calm and sweet Ivy was now screaming at Mia. She plunges her hand into her sweatshirt pocket and pulls out a tiny vial of clear liquid. Forcing Mia's mouth open, she throws the liquid back into her mouth, taking her cold hands, Ivy then puts one on Mia's head and one under her chin, pushing them together, to get her to swallow the unknown liquid. Mia writhes in pain, as Ivy pushes down hard on her head. Her wiggles turned into twitches and twitches turned into small movements until she finally grew unconscious.

Josh and Coles' pick up basketball game ended in a win, and they sauntered tiredly towards the sandbox Mia always played in.

"Where is she? You were keeping an eye on her, right?" Josh asked Cole, who Mia saw as an older brother.

"Um no, you told me you were gonna watch her, I was playing basketball dude."

"Bro, I was playing basketball too, and I was on your team," Josh exclaimed, rolling his eyes as Cole.

"So, where do you presume she went, Josh," Cole remarked, beginning to get nervous.

"Dude, it's fine. She probably just wandered off somewhere." Josh assumes with full confidence that his inference was correct. Cole just shrugs Josh off and his thoughts begin to race. His anxiety takes over and he contemplates what could be happening to her at this moment. Of course, he does not believe what Josh said-- deep down he knew something was wrong.

After a thirty-minute drive, half of which was Ivy just driving in circles while Mia was clutching on to Fuzzy for dear life, Ivy pulls her minivan into a dirt driveway that pulls up to an abandoned house. Vines enveloped the beige siding and trailed to the point where shingles were laid onto the roof. Mia, dried tears coated to the skin on her cheek, is frightened for her life. She already thought of all the things she did today that were careless. She thought of how her trust was immediately set in this woman, who she was only introduced to today, and knew nothing about her besides her name and that she had a dog, who wasn't even that cute.

"Okay, Olivia, time to help Mommy make lunch," Ivy said to Mia lovingly.

"Um, Ivy, you know my name isn't Olivia. It's Mia, now please bring me home to my real mommy!" Mia cried, which then turned into a sob. Ivy began to walk to Mia, aggressively, causing the young girl to slowly move away from the crazed woman. Ivy's walk turned into a run straight for mia. She takes hold of Mia's small wrist and pulls her into a side room.

"OLIVIA!" Ivy shrieks, " You know very well, your name is Olivia, I am your real mommy, and this is your real home!" Ivy begins pacing from wall to wall, back and forth, reciting something to herself. Mia, though not religious, began to pray the only prayer she knew. She learned it from one of her friends, though it was probably not the correct prayer for this situation, she knew if she wasn't getting help from anyone, she should just rely on something that a lot of other people do.

Josh and Cole begin to search for Mia, looking under benches, in slides, and asking surrounding kids and parents. When searching, Josh finds the orphanage group playing together on the playscape. He went to one of the facilitators named Maggie.

"Hey Maggie, have you seen Mia? We can't seem to find where she went." Josh questioned while gesturing towards himself and Cole.

"Oh yeah. You were at the church earlier today, right?"

"Yes Cole, Mia, and I were all there"

"So you met the new volunteer Ivy! She's such a kind young lady. I actually just saw Ivy and Mia walking towards Ivy's car." Josh and Cole looked at one another with their mouths hanging open.

"Ivy was a pale and thin girl with brown hair, right?" Josh asked Maggie, "The one who creeped us the hell out?!" Josh stated, directing his comment to Cole. Astonished by the way Josh was behaving, Maggie just responded with a fast nod up and down.

"Maggie, Mia doesn't know Ivy, she isn't friendly with her, and should not have been going in her car with her! You need to tell us where she lives. For all we know Mia could be lying dead in a ditch! Please I know you aren't allowed to give that information to us, but we need to find her. I need to find her, she's my little sister." Josh declared as he started to tear up, Cole next to him doing the same.

“Okay! This is a scenario where I would say it is okay to give personal information out of a volunteer. But after I tell you, don't go, please call the police. I can't be responsible if something bad happens to you two.” Maggie said with worry. The boys just nodded yes and wrote the address in their phones.

“Thanks, Maggie, bye!” Both boys said while sprinting back to Josh’s house. They entered the house, with Jen in her office and oblivious to their arrival, the boys began making a plan. Josh decided only he would go to the house to save Mia and not Cole. Instead, Cole would try to distract Jen from finding out that Mia was missing. They entered the address to find the house was only fifteen minutes away, so Josh could drive his mom’s car there while attempting to not get pulled over for driving with only his permit. It was around five o’clock when Josh decided it was time to initiate the plan.

It only took around ten minutes for Josh to drive his mom’s minivan to the scary abandoned house because of his speedy driving and lack of traffic on the back roads. He parked the van on the side of the road, four houses to the right of the house Ivy had Mia in. Josh, trying to be as stealthy as possible, wore all black and ran quickly to hide in overgrown bushes next to the house porch. When he tried to open the door, he found it unlocked and realized maybe Ivy isn't as smart as he believed. His eyes scanned through every room through an open window before sneaking through the old wooden door. Josh heard Ivy right away talking to someone named Olivia. He thought to himself, is someone else here with them? Is Mia okay?

When Ivy heard footsteps come through the door, she grabbed Mia’s arm and started to tie her down to a chair. The chair was old and wooden and the rope was itchy and tied tightly around her arms. After completing that task, Ivy went to investigate the noises. All of a sudden, the once closed door flew open, and Josh ran in quietly.

“Joshy! You came! You found me!” Mia whispered and began to cry.

“Shhh Mia, we can talk later. We need to get out of here first.” Mia bobbed her head up and down and motioned for help with the rope. Josh untied her from the chair quickly, looking back at the door every now and then making sure Ivy was nowhere to be found. He finished untying and picked Mia up and began to run.

“Wait! Joshy my Fuzzy is in there!” Mia exclaimed. Josh rolled his eyes, darted back into the room, and came back with the beat-up stuffed bear. Mia looked up at him and Josh relaxed. It was worth it.

Josh ran down the stairs with Mia clutching to his shoulders. They bolted out the front door and didn't look back. They both heard Ivy yelling “NO that's my daughter! Anabelle please, come back to mommy!”Ignoring them, Josh put Mia in the front seat next to him, not caring about the law at this moment, and turned the ignition. With a rickety start, they speeded out of the driveway leaving dust behind them.

When they pulled into the driveway, their mom was waiting on the porch for them, Cole next to her looking guilty.

“Where were you two’? Jen questioned.

“Oh, I just took her out for ice cream, right mia?” Josh lied. Mia just responded with a nod and a fake smile. They headed into the house. From that day forward, Josh and Cole made sure they always kept a close eye on Mia.

As for other kids, since the incident, three more kids around Mia's age were captured. All of them were rescued after a couple of weeks but claimed their name was Olivia and their mommy named Ivy. It didn't get that far for Mia, and for that the Jones family, and Cole, were thankful.But something that did not please them was lack of discovery of the perpetrator.

All was well until Cole took his younger brother, Evan, to the park. Cole looked over to his brother and saw his worst nightmare. Ivy, hair cut short and dyed blonde, with one hand hosting Evan over her shoulder and the other clasped over his mouth.

The Ship by Nick Abbott

It happened so fast, like the sound of lightning that comes shortly after a thunderbolt. The ship started sinking and we couldn't find him within the short period we had before we needed to jump off the ship, into the blue abyss. He was the only one out of us that didn't make it back. The chilly, brisk breeze that came over me reminded me where I was. Ethan's parents were standing at the microphone, speaking about the good times they had with him in a shaky voice. I'd never been much of an emotional person but I couldn't help but tear up.

Once the ceremony was over, people gathered at the food tables to have lunch. I walked over to my friends Elijah and Noah, and we tried to brighten the atmosphere with each other, but not knowing what to talk about was making it hard. Elijah and Noah were on the ship with me when the tragedy happened.

I live in a city called Charlotte in North Carolina. I'm at a funeral for one of my best friends, Ethan, who had just died in a tragic accident. No one knows for sure if he's dead, but the accident happened in the middle of the ocean, and Ethan didn't know how to swim.

"Soooo... How are you guys liking the food?" Noah asked, to break the tension. Just then, we heard a gunshot. It was louder than a firework, louder than the sound of 10 fireworks all at once. At that moment, a big thud happened right behind me. I felt a slight breeze and couldn't move, not even an inch, frozen in shock.

Ever since I was a child, I've had 3 biggest fears. One of them is spiders, a second is gunshots, and third, worse of all is clowns. Ever since I was a child, I've suffered through multiple forms of trauma that led to each of those fears. When I was 6 years old, I had been bullied by some of the kids at my school and they dumped a box of spiders on me and locked me in a storage room with the lights off. Soon after that, when I was 8 years old, my dad was robbed and shot which led to his death. I was there when my dad died, and the man who killed him was fully dressed in a terrifying clown costume.

"GUNSHOT!" I heard someone yell in the background. Everyone dropped to the floor. After what seemed like an eternity, I fell to my knees and dropped my head down. When I looked back up, I was staring at a man from a distance. He was half-hidden, standing at a corner. I was shaking, my whole body trembling. The man whom I was staring at, was dressed in a clown costume, almost the same as when my dad died.

I closed my eyes, and when they opened again the man disappeared, nowhere to be seen. Everyone had started to stand up, hoping the tragedy was over. I saw Elijah and Noah walking over to me slowly.

"Did you see that?" Elijah asked, "The man standing at the corner, dressed in the clown costume."

"So you guys saw him too?" I asked, reassured that I wasn't hallucinating. Something wasn't adding up, two of my worst fears coincidently occurring at the same time. There has to be a bigger picture behind this. "Does something seem out of place to you guys as well? Something just isn't adding up, this can't just be a big coincidence."

"Yeah that's what we were thinking too," said Noah, "I think something is going on. The fact that these things are happening while we're at Ethan's funeral. It's almost like we're being haunted, especially you Lucas." His words hit me like a punch to the gut. What if we are being haunted, this stuff is very unlikely to happen, right? But then again, we're just 16-year-old kids, this could just be our imagination going wild.

I started looking around. So much had happened while I wasn't paying attention. There were ambulances and cops everywhere, a person, I couldn't make out if it was a man or a woman, on a stretcher being placed into an ambulance. Everyone was freaking out, talking fast, not knowing what to do.

I saw my mom from across the field that everyone was on for the funeral. I started to walk over to her when I glanced at something black on the grass near my foot. No way. It was a tiny black widow spider that had been injured, not killed, stepped on maybe. It was squirming a little, its eight legs were twitching one by one. My heart started beating very fast, even faster than before. At this point there's no ignoring it, someone is messing with me.

I started to walk back towards Elijah and Noah who were talking to each other. I couldn't feel my legs at this point, they were moving on their own. I started walking faster and faster until I was at the point where I was jogging. I came to a sudden stop when I reached them and they both glanced at me suddenly. Fear was written all over my face. So many memories were going through my mind all at the same time.

"Is something wrong?" Elijah and Noah asked simultaneously.

"Yeah. When I was walking over towards my parents, I saw a spider. And what's worse is, it was a black widow." I said.

"But that doesn't mean anything right? There are spiders everywh..." Noah started saying, stopping in realization, "Wait, black widows are the same type of spiders that were involved with your incident years back."

"Exactly, which is why I think I need to tell my mom about what's going on. I think we have enough evidence that someone is toying with me and I think she'll understand"

"Are you sure getting adults involved in something like this is the best course of action? They're adults so I don't think they'll believe a couple of 16-year-old kids," Elijah said, "but I guess it's worth a shot." Noah and I nodded in agreement and I turned around to start walking back towards where my mom was again.

As I started to arrive at where my mom had been but I couldn't find her through the rough crowd. After searching for a long 5 minutes I found her talking to a police officer. I waited until she stepped over towards me to talk.

"Hi Mom, I have something urgent to tell you," I said.

"Proceed," She replied.

"Well, you might think I'm crazy, but some weird stuff has been happening today and I think something is wrong. First, someone dies from a gunshot, then I see a man in a clown costume, and finally, I find a black widow in the grass. I think someone is playing games with me and I don't know who or why."

"Honey, I know you've suffered through some adversity throughout the years, but you're only 16, I think you just have a wild imagination." She said. Of course, she wouldn't believe me, the disadvantages of being a kid. This means I only have myself and my friends to rely on.

My girlfriend, Nora, was also at the funeral somewhere so I wanted to check to see if she's ok first. As I was approaching her, I thought back to Ethan for a minute. I've always known Ethan sort of had a thing for Nora and I think she must have known for a while too. Ethan used to get all quiet when she came around and got red every time she touched him.

"Hey Nora, thank god you're alright, I was worried about you," I said, very relieved.

“Hi Lucas, yeah I’m fine. I’m glad you’re ok too, I heard that the man who was shot was standing right by you.”

“Yeah, it was scary. I gotta go talk to Elijah and Noah now though so I’ll see you later!”

“Ok bye!” she said. I started running in a full sprint weaving through people towards Elijah and Noah. THUD! I ran into someone, knocked on the floor. I tried standing up, my vision, blurry as fog.

Once I got up, I was looking and staring at someone through the crowd. It looked like another man, about 100 meters away across the street. Colors. Red, blue, yellow, white. They were all I could see as my vision started to come back. I realized the colors were part of another clown costume. The man I was looking at was dressed in a clown costume, not the same one I had seen the first time. This man was much shorter than the first one, almost as if he were a kid. One distinct thing popped out at me from this man though. He had a dab of yellow on the right side of the white cloth that covered his body, a mustard stain.

A Frisby was thrown in my direction, so I ducked down and closed my eyes. Once I had opened them again, I looked back to where I saw the man. Nowhere to be found once again. I was shaking, my whole body vibrating as if I were naked standing outside in the middle of winter. I needed to get to Elijah and Noah, fast.

I could only find Noah so I quickly told him what happened and asked where Elijah went. He told me that Elijah went to the bathroom a few minutes ago. Just then, Elijah emerged from the crowd and asked me what’s up. After finishing telling them what I saw and that my mom thinks I’m crazy, we decided to head to my house to think it over and devise any sort of plan we could come up with.

Upon arriving at my house, there was a man dressed in a black hoodie, facing my house. I got out of the car and started walking over slowly. The man started to turn around until he was parallel with me, looking into my eyes. It wasn’t a man at all, it was Ethan. He was wearing a white bodysuit under the hoodie, with some white smudges on his face, holding an afro dyed with multiple colors. I stopped dead in my tracks.

“Ethan?” I asked with a quick sharp tone. Elijah and Noah were standing behind me with their jaws dropped to the floor.

“Hi, Lucas! How’ve you been buddy!” Ethan said

“Ethan, how are you alive? We thought you were dead.” My voice was shaking.

“Well, surprise! I’m alive. But you won’t be once I’m done with you.” He said

“Why... How are you here Ethan? You drowned over a month ago.”

“No, I didn’t drown,” Ethan said in a deep voice, “I was drifting in the middle of the ocean for a whole day when some people found me and saved me.”

“So why are you here, doing this to me, what did I do to you? You were one of my best friends, I don’t understand.” My voice was still trembling, I started to tear up.

“You hadn’t realized it, but you took my life away. I went straight to your house when I got back in town, trying to come back with a smile on my face, but when I went to knock on your door, I saw you and Nora through the window making out.” The answer was finally there. The whole reason he did this was out of jealousy. “You knew I was in love with Nora, you didn’t take a second to consider my emotions.” He said, his voice sounding even darker than before. He pulled a pistol out and pointed it at my head.

"Ethan, you were gone. We all thought you were dead, we can talk about this" I said while quickly taking my phone from my pocket and hiding it behind my back. I started to blindly text Nora for help.

"There's nothing to talk about," Ethan said sharply, "nothing I say at this point will make you change your mind about me."

"Ethan you're wrong, we can just... talk about this, please." Ethan shut his eyes closed and started crying. Just then Nora came from behind him and whacked him in the head with a wooden baseball bat. Ethan dropped to the floor.

"NORA!" I shouted, "thank god you're here, you saved us." Noah and Elijah were both dropped to the floor on their knees with tears running down their faces.

"Ethan, are you guys alright?" She said.

"Now we are, thanks to you." Mumbled Noah. We called my mom and told her what happened, and she called the cops. Police had arrived at my house and locked Ethan up and forced him into the back of the cruiser. Ethan was convicted and placed in juvenile court with a 5-year sentence.

It's been months since that day and I'm glad it's all over. At least, I thought it was. I was chilling at Elijah's house when I asked him if he had anything good to drink. He told me that there was some beer in the top drawer of his dresser. I went to open it and accidentally opened the bottom drawer. Inside was a clown costume, with a yellow stain on the left side. A mustard stain. My heart dropped.

Patches' Playhouse - Matt Schmardel

"When are the others going to arrive? It's been twenty minutes since they were supposed to arrive!" Barry was growing impatient with his friends, anxiously waiting for them to arrive.

"Give them a few more minutes, they said they would show up," replied Timothy, "It's only 6:20, we have time."

"Yeah we have time, but they shouldn't be *this* late."

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. Tim rose from his chair and walked to the door. He opened it to see Emily and Abigail standing there in the rain. He motioned towards the inside of the house and the two came inside as Tim shut the door behind them.

"Hey, Tim! Sorry we were late, I had to call Abigail to drive me because my parents couldn't give me a ride." Emily said as she walked in,

The rain pattered against the window as the four stood in a circle in the middle of the room.

"What's the plan?" asked Abigail

"Well, as you know, we're going to go explore the old abandoned house a few streets down. It's not a long walk, so that's how we're gonna get there. Barry brought a flashlight in case we needed it, but other than that we honestly don't need anything else. We'll leave in about ten minutes and we just have to be back by 10:00, so we have plenty of time to explore." Tim responded.

"Oh yeah," Barry pitched in, "and I'll be leading the way throughout the house."

None of them chose to argue with Barry on that one, they all knew they wouldn't win that argument.

“You guys do know,” said Emily, “This house is haunted right? It’s the home of the former town clown, Patches. It could be dangerous.”

Barry rolled his eyes at her.

“I’m just saying we need to be cautious. We don’t know what could happen, and I mean, what really is the point of doing this?”

“Don’t worry about it, we’ll be fine. What’s the point you ask? There’s lots of reasons we should do this. We could find things that are worth lots of money in there, you know. It’s an old house that no one has been in for years. Plus, it’s just gonna be a cool experience. As you said, it could be *haunted*. That’s really cool,``answered Tim.

“I mean, yeah, sure. I’m just a bit worried… but don’t mind that, I think we’ll be alright-” Emily said as she was cut off.

“It’ll be fine, now let’s get going,” interrupted Barry.

Barry got up and opened the front door. The others followed behind him as he walked out.

“You know where to go?” Tim asked

“Yeah,” Barry replied, “I’ve seen the house before. It’s got broken windows that are boarded up, and the lawn is all overgrown. It’s what you’d expect an abandoned house to look like.”

The group walked to the end of the street and took a right turn, following Barry’s lead. The raindrops plopped into puddles around them as they made their way down the road, their feet splashing in the water. The rain didn’t bother any of them much, it wasn’t too heavy of a downpour and they all seemed fine with it.

“One more left turn onto Sunshine Street and the house is about halfway down, on the left side. You can’t really miss it,” Barry informed the group.

It started to get darker outside, as the sun fell down and faded onto the horizon as the moon rose from the other side. Around a minute later Barry stopped and pointed at the abandoned house, informing his friends that this was it. The house looked like a run-down shack that you’d find in the middle of a desolate forest. Vines grew up the sides, shattered windows were covered from the inside by wooden boards, the grass had grown so tall that the pathway to the front door wasn’t visible, and the roof was missing panels. It was quite the unsightly home. Nobody would want to live there.

“Wow,” Abigail said “Now *that* is an abandoned house. I’m surprised the town hasn’t torn it down. They probably just don’t care about it though.”

“Or…” Emily added, “It could be haunted and too dangerous to go near…”

“Could you stop worrying? It’s getting annoying, we’ll be fine,” Barry said

“Sorry.”

“Hey,” Said Tim “Let’s not talk like that Barry, and Emily, it’ll be alright. We’ll be safe, it’s just meant to be a fun trip. Just think about what we could find! And if anything happens, I’ll be here for you, yeah?”

“Yeah… Well, let’s just go. No need to waste time out here in the rain.” Replied Emily.

Barry once again led the way as they walked towards the front door. Once they got there, he twisted the doorknob, but it didn’t budge. He started aggressively pulling on it until you could hear it banging against the doorframe.

“Woah, no need to be so aggressive with it, let’s just find another way in,” Abigail said.

They walked around the house until they found a side door that opened with no effort at all. Behind the door revealed a kitchen. It was empty of any dishes or silverware, but there were

plants growing along the sides of the windows. There was nothing but an old table in the center of the room with a chair at each end. The table had been chipped and was covered in dust, and the chairs were falling apart. The ceiling was covered in cobwebs and the room overall just looked empty and somewhat sad. It was clear it hadn't been touched in years.

They passed through the kitchen and moved into a long hallway that seemed to circle around the entire base level of the house. The four agreed to split up into groups of two. Abigail and Barry, and Timothy and Emily. They went separate ways down the hallway and began exploring the house.

Timothy and Emily took a right and first entered a library. The library was somewhat small, with all the walls lined with shelves of books covered in dust and cobwebs. There were seats and a table in the center of the room, and on the table was a journal titled *The Life of Patches*.

"Look!" exclaimed Emily, "That's Patches' own journal! We could truly learn who he was!"

"That's exciting," replied Timothy, "I'm glad we found something here that actually, you know, has to do with the house and the rumors around it. This journal could be something big. We could learn the biggest mystery of this town! The life of Patches… and his mysterious disappearance."

"We could also see if the rumors are true. Personally, I've studied this story quite a bit, using whatever I can to connect the dots and figure out what happened. I mean, it just doesn't make sense. How does he just die from a circus accident, but then nothing else is said about it? No funeral, no obituary written for him, and he doesn't even have a grave."

"I don't think about it much, but you're definitely right," said Tim.

Emily opened up the journal and flipped through the pages to see how much was written. She then flipped back to the beginning and skimmed through a few pages.

"There's not much in here, honestly." Emily told Tim, "It's kind of disappointing, he really just talks about his days at the circus. Something that does stand out though, is the dates written. The latest entry dates back to three years ago in 2010, which doesn't make sense because the accident was in 2008. I don't understand what he's talking about in that entry though."

"That's definitely interesting, but it's possible someone messed with it, or that it's a fake. If he wrote in his journal then, that would mean he survived the accident, which is possible, but why would we hear nothing about it? On top of that, look at this house, it seems obvious no one has lived here for years, and all of his belongings seem to still be here." said Tim.

"Well, maybe we can still find something that will solve the puzzle for us. Although I'm not sure how much more I want to explore. It's a lot more frightening knowing he could still be alive." Emily said to her friend.

"We'll be fine, I promise," Tim replied, "Why don't we go meet back up with the others if you're afraid?"

Emily nodded her head. The two left the room and walked down the hallway looking for the rest of the group. They eventually reached a room that seemed like it had been some sort of living room. There was a couch with tears and rips in it, and a vintage table set in front of it. Against the wall on another table was a big bulky box TV. Its screen had been smashed in and shards of glass were still on the floor in front of it. The floor was made of hardwood and covered in dust. This room was where Tim and Emily met up with Barry and Abigail.

"Why would you do that?! You're so careless!" Abigail was yelling at Barry, "Oh, hey Tim and Emily, glad you could find us."

Barry was flipping over end tables and pushing chairs across the room, obviously looking for something.

“Come on, all those rooms and there’s been nothing valuable here. Can you believe it, Tim? Isn’t that partially why we came here? So disappointing, this house is lame.” Barry said.

“Really?” Tim replied, “Nothing? I mean, me and Emily found a journal that Patches might have written in, but it was nothing special. This house hasn’t really been scary either, and definitely not haunted. I guess we’ve got a bit more to explore though, like what’s back there?”

Timothy pointed to the back corner of the room, where the room seemed to have an area that extended inwards, like a big closet without a door. The other three turned their attention to the area Tim was pointing at.

“I can’t really see what’s back there,” Barry said, “but we should check it out.”

The four of them walked towards the area in the back. The group came across a partially opened door, with pieces of wood chipped off and small holes that looked like something had been stabbed into the door. Barry peeked around the door to see a long set of stairs that faded into darkness, hiding its end and the room it led to.

“Now this looks scary, we *need* to go see what’s at the bottom of those steps.” Said Barry.

“I don’t think it’s the best idea to go down there,” Emily said.

“Why not?” said Barry, “The house is abandoned anyways, so there wouldn’t be anything that could hurt us down there.”

“Possibly,” Emily responded, “but it’s extremely dark, and there’s no way of knowing if there’s traps or anything like that.”

“Come on, we’ve made it this far,” Timothy pitched in, “and there’s been really nothing dangerous in the rest of the house. Besides, we’ll all be together, so if anything happens we can protect each other.”

“I guess you’re right...” Emily responded,

“Don’t worry too much about it. I mean, we might find some cool stuff down there, maybe even finally something valuable. At the very least it should be an interesting exploration, and Emily, weren’t you interested in finding out who this clown was and what happened to him? You had gone on about how this was the biggest mystery of this town, and that something about the story wasn’t right. Isn’t it possible that down in that basement is where we’ll learn about what truly happened?”

“Well, there’s no guarantee, but you do have a point, and it would definitely be worth the trip if we did find out the real story. What are the odds of that happening though? I just don’t trust it.”

Barry interrupted, “Can we just go already? It doesn’t matter what we find, I just want to see it. This could be the part of the house that’s actually haunted.”

There was no more discussion, as Barry turned on his flashlight and pointed it towards the stairs. Not much was visible because the flashlight was dim, but they carried on anyway. They could at least see what was in front of them.

Partway down the stairs, the group heard a large bang coming from the basement at the bottom of the steps. Each one of them froze in place, startled by what they just heard. Abigail was the first to speak.

“Maybe this isn’t the best idea…”

“We should turn back around,” Emily added.

“I’m not giving up,” Barry replied, “Something probably just fell, gravity exists you know. You guys are such cowards sometimes. You’re still coming with, right Tim?”

"Um, yeah, sure," Tim answered.

Tim and Barry led the way down the stairs, while Abigail and Emily followed despite their fear. They finally made it to the bottom, where they began to hear creaking and shuffling as if someone was moving around.

"Who's there?" Barry yelled, "Show us who you are, I'll take you, one on one!"

Barry shined his flashlight around the room, but he couldn't see anything except the basement's cement walls, riddled with old circus posters and a dartboard that was hung near the stairs. Suddenly, a scream echoed throughout the room. Barry, as well as the others, turned around as the light from the flashlight revealed a deranged clown holding Emily while pressing a knife against her throat. None of them could manage to say a word.

"You've made a fatal mistake…" said the clown, "Not only have you entered *my* house, *my* basement, but you have challenged me to a fight! You're just pathetic kids, and now you've put your friend in danger."

The clown kept talking, but Tim noticed something by his foot. It was a dart, laying there on the ground, and it wasn't dull either. He quickly formulated a plan as he nudged Barry. He had to inform Barry of the dart without the clown realizing what was going on.

"So what should I do, hmm…" the clown continued on, "Just her life? All of you? The choice is all up to me! And none of you can do anything about it!"

The clown laughed maniacally like a villain who had taken the upper hand against his opponent. Meanwhile, Tim motioned towards the ground once he had grabbed Barry's attention. Barry knew what Tim wanted him to do. In what seemed like a split second, Tim kicked the dart to Barry's feet. Barry quickly picked up the dart and whipped it with perfect accuracy into the clown's right eye. The clown screamed in pain and Emily was able to break loose after the clown went to cover his eye in an attempt to address the pain, just like what anyone else would do. Timothy grabbed Emily by the arm and they ran towards the stairs, with Barry and Abigail coming along with. They sprinted as fast as they could, but Patches was faster. Partway up the stairs, a scream echoed throughout the basement again, as the clown grabbed Abigail and dragged her back down the stairs.

"We're coming!" Barry yelled down the stairs.

"Oh no…" Tim murmured, "Emily was right, this was a bad idea, and now we're in serious danger. I'm sorry, you were right Em, we should have been more careful, and listened to you…"

Emily began to speak, "Tim it's not-"

"Now is not the time for this! Let's go help her, and take down that clown!" Barry said to his friends. They rushed back down the stairs to see Abigail running their way.

"Run!" She screamed as Patches was chasing behind with an ax.

Tim and Abigail went back up the stairs but Barry did not run. He ran towards Patches as the clown missed a swing with his ax. Barry ripped the ax out of Patches' hand with all his strength and swung it back at him, knocking out Patches with the butt of the ax.

Barry ran back up the stairs while he could, and caught up with the others. The three reached the top of the stairs as Emily stood at the door and told them all to follow her. Emily led the group to a window in the hallway that she opened to create an escape. The window went out the side of the house. They all climbed through and ran down the street, getting far from the house and not saying a word to each other. They finally reach a stop sign at the end of the street and pause there. Tim whipped out his phone and called the police, informing them about his encounter with an insane clown and telling them that there is a killer inside the house.

A few minutes later police arrived, sirens blaring and cars pulling up quickly in front of the house. Police busted down the doors and quickly infiltrated the building. An officer walked towards the kids, a notebook and a pen in his hands.

"You kids alright?" asked the officer, "Anyone hurt?"

The four just nodded no, because none of them suffered any real injuries, although the encounter with the clown definitely hurt.

"A clown, huh." The officer says, "As weird as it sounds, there have definitely been stranger things that have happened. At least you're all okay. We've got officers in the building right now, they'll take care of him."

Another few minutes later the kids and the officer looked back to see police walking out of the abandoned house, with Patches in handcuffs.

"Thank God," Emily said.

"Well, you weren't kidding!" the officer said to the kids. "There really was a clown. That must have scared you four to death. I'm sorry that happened."

"It's our fault," Tim told the officer, "We shouldn't have gone in there, especially not the most creepy looking part of it. I also somewhat organized this, so don't punish my friends. It's on me."

"Don't worry about it. You're all teenagers I assume? That's the type of stuff teenagers do. I probably would have done this at your age if there was a haunted house in my town." The officer paused, "So, I'll tell you what. You four can go back home to your parents, and it'll be over with. Tell them if you want, but you don't have to. We have this under control and there's no reason to punish you guys and add more stress to your lives after what happened with that clown."

"Thank you," Tim replied.

The group walked away, towards their homes, all going in separate directions. Tim asked Emily if they could walk home together because Tim wanted to talk to her. She agreed.

"So, um…" Tim began, "Sorry I didn't listen to you. I was being selfish and just going for my own experience and trying to get whatever I could out of it. I barely considered the fact that you were probably truly afraid to go to that house. I'm a bad friend, I know. I'm truly sorry, and I'll do whatever you want to make up for it."

"Honestly," Emily replied, "It's alright. You're still and always will be my best friend. We all make mistakes, right? Besides, I kind of enjoyed the trip too, although it was horrifying, I liked spending time with friends, and it'll definitely be a memorable experience. You don't have to feel sorry or even apologize. I mean, I had the chance to opt-out, but I didn't take it. Stuff happens, you know. It's okay, I promise."

"Yeah…" said Tim.

"And hey," Emily said, "Let's hang out again sometime, and do something just as fun, just not dangerous. I'd prefer to not go to Patches' Playhouse again."

"Definitely!" Tim exclaimed.

Happy Ending? by Lily Theriault

The room was silent, save the soft humming emanating from the old woman's raspy throat. It would've been pitch black if it weren't for the lit candle in the center of the table. It burned a light orange and sent a soft flickering throughout the room. Her hands lay across the

hands of 17 year old Blake Anderson. With him were his two friends Zach and Sam who stood awaiting the psychic's conclusion.

"This is stupid," Sam whispered. "This stuff never *actually* works."

"Shh," Zach scolded, "maybe this stuff *would* work if *somebody* would stop talking,"
The woman's humming abruptly stopped as her eyes shot open, "A MINUS," she exclaimed.

"YES!" Blake shouted as he stood from his chair and threw his fist up.

"Typical," Zach sighed, " You asked her what you're getting on your next test didn't you?" Zach stood with his arms crossed over his chest and his expression stitched into an accusatory glare.

"Yes," Blake claimed, "Yes I did, and guess who's getting an A minus on their chemistry exam,"

"Yea right, the day you get an A minus in chemistry is the day I invent time travel," Sam scoffs as she brushes the hair from her eyes.
The old woman's arm stretched out, finger pointed at Sam, "Your turn next, miss,"

"I'm okay, thanks, I don't really believe in all of-," Sam gestured to the room surrounding her with a judgmental face, "this."

"So be it," the old woman croaked. Her arm moved to point at Zach, "it must be your turn then, young man."

"I guess it is,"

Zach walked slowly to the table and sat in the creaky chair. He wasn't afraid of her but he was afraid of what she would tell him. Zach doesn't have many fears, all of them being quite miniscule. Although, he has always been afraid of one thing, that being a lonely death.

The psychic looked at him in his eyes and waited for his question. Zach wasn't as skeptical as Sam but he also knew to a degree that these kinds of things weren't always realistic or truthful. He still wanted to know the answer, if it was true. Zach, knowing he had to be very specific to avoid any misunderstandings, asked her in a small, shaky voice, "How old will I be when I die?"
The psychic's eyes widened slightly and her lips stretched into a small smile. Zach was almost scared of her response but all that came out of her mouth was, "how fun," She grabbed his hands and placed them palm up, then she placed her hands on top and closed her eyes.

Zach sat there scared of, and half joking about his results. His hands were cold but still kind of clammy. He looked over to his friends who weren't really paying attention. They were bickering quietly in the corner of the small room but Zach couldn't make out what they were saying. 'Probably something about Blake's chemistry grade, he thought. He looked back over to the psychic who now had her head tilted back and her eyes open. It might've just been the dimness of the room but he could swear only the whites of her eyes were visible despite them being wide open. Zach was starting to get freaked out so he slowly began pulling his hands free from hers. Before he succeeded in doing so she grabbed his wrists with incredible force and while her head stopped tilting back her eyes were the same, white and soulless looking. At that point Blake and Sam started paying attention again and Zach was just about ready to make a run for it. Right before he attempted his great escape the green of the psychic's eyes became visible again and she began mumbling words Zach didn't recognise as English. Suddenly her eyes snapped shut and her hands drew back from Zach's. She opened her eyes again, revealing to her all three teenagers eyes wide, mouths open, and looking equally shocked and confused. Zach stood up and asked, "Okay, question one: what just happened? Question two: are you okay? And question three: *what* did you see?"

The psychic looked at Zach and smiled a small smile, it looked almost like pity, “Don’t worry about it. You’ve got until age 82.” All three of them keep staring, not really believing her. “It’s nothing spectacular, really, your heart just simply gives out. Now if you wouldn’t mind I’d like to have a few minutes before my next appointment.”

“That’s it?” Zach looks at her in disbelief, “after all of that…. Just a heart attack at 82, huh. Sure.”

The psychic sighs and says, “what reason would I have to lie to a teenager.”

Zach figures she’s right and realizes she was probably just putting on some dumb show to get a reaction of of him. ‘Maybe Sam was right’ he thinks, ‘it’s probably just nonsense’. All three of the teenagers exit the room after thanking her and wishing her a good rest of her night. Their surroundings consisted of an extensive collection of *supernatural* trinkets which the two psychic’s who worked there claimed to have collected over the past few years. Of course they only knew that because they asked what they all were when they first entered the psychic’s dark ‘reading room’. Zach sighed, “Guys, we’ve only got three more days before halloween, we have to find a better way to spend our last October as highschool students. So far it’s only been pumpkin patches and ghost tours.”

“You’re right, Zach, and I’ve got the best, worst idea ever,” Blake exclaimed.

Sam looked at Blake skeptically then turned to look at Zach, who appeared to be all for the idea, and shrugged her shoulders, “well, what’s the plan then?”

“Okay, so, halloween night we’ll tell our parents we’re going trick or treating and then sleeping over my house, I’ll just tell my parents I’m sleeping over Zach’s house. Instead, what we’ll be doing is camping out in Mortem Forest. The cops stopped patrolling the grounds about two years after that kid got lost. I’ve only been once but it was during the day and I think sleeping over will be really creepy, no?” Zach and Sam both looked pretty interested but Sam raised a brow,

“Hold up, didn’t they end up finding the kid?”

Blake sighed and his head dropped back,”Well yeah, but I was trying to make it sound like it was haunted or something. I mean, if a place called ‘mortem forest’ exists it’s gotta have some creepy ghost stories right?” Both Zach and Sam looked a little amused at his attempt toward scaring them. “Anyways, if you guys really want to increase the horror factor of my plan then we could always just buy one of these things,” Blake gestured to the room around them. He walked up to the back wall where a bunch of small stone figures stood. The section was labeled ‘Mayan Artifacts (WARNING DANGEROUS)’ under that was some stuff about making sure they don’t get broken or else something bad will happen but Blake wasn’t paying much attention to that. “Let’s just grab one of these ones, they say dangerous so they might do something spooky.”

“Sure, come on let’s go I’ve gotta be home soon.”

Blake grabbed the first one he saw and walked up to the front desk. “How much for the Mayan trinket?”

The second psychic, not even looking up from her phone, said monotonously, “twenty-five dollars.”

Blake paid and walked outside where the other two were waiting. “Alright guys, I guess I’ll see you on Monday, make sure you tell your parents about the-” Blake made quotation marks with his fingers, “sleepover at my house.” The three of them parted ways to their houses, Zach going left on the sidewalk, Sam going across the street, and Blake going opposite of Zach. They all had a lot of work to do over the weekend so they wouldn’t see each other until Monday morning at school, Halloween Day.

Zach woke up to the soul crushing sound of the alarm on his phone Monday morning. Of course, seeing how he's a teenage boy, he has four more set to go off at five minute intervals for the next 20 minutes. He slept until his last alarm went off and then lazily got up with his eyes not even half way open. After somehow managing to get ready he packed his backpack and made a few pieces of toast before walking a steady pace to school.

Once he got there he waited in the hallway near Blake and Sam's lockers which were halfway across the school from his own. Sam was already there and looked genuinely excited. Zach walked over to her and asked, "What's up with you?"

Sam looked over at Zach and claimed, "Nothing special," I just can't wait to camp out on Halloween telling ghost stories."

This just confused him even more. "I thought you didn't believe in the *supernatural*." Zach made a weird gesture with his hands when he said 'supernatural'.

"I don't," Sam said confidently, "but the *stories* are still cool."

Just as Sam said that Blake came rushing over, his dracula cape flowing in the wind, carrying a few things in his hands. He looked like a puppy with a new toy. When he arrived next to Zach and Sam he smiled and held out two objects, one being a headband with devil horns on it and the other a giant pin with the word 'spooky' written across it in huge black and purple letters. "Each of you, choose one". Both of them just looked at the objects and then at him with confused faces. Blake sighed and bounced on the balls of his feet, "Come on you guys, I'm not having you go without at least partial costumes this year".
Sam looked back at the objects and then at Zach, "Fine but I'm taking the spooky pin,"

"Great, I guess that means I get stuck with the devil horns," Zach looked less than enthused with the idea of himself walking around with that on his head all day. Of course he did it anyway to make Blake happy after refusing a costume all together last year.

The rest of the day was a blur of *fun* in-class activities and zoning out during lectures. After classes had ended for the day, Zach met up with Sam and Blake by his locker this time and they all agreed to meet outside Blake's house at six o'clock. Then Zach would drive them to Mortem Forest. Zach of course knew how to drive and had his license, he just didn't like driving for some reason. He was only driving them because they had no one else to do it for them.

Zach spent the whole time between him getting home and leaving for Blake's house getting all of his camping stuff ready and making sure his phone was charged. He assumed Sam and Blake were doing the same. Zach was in charge of bringing the tent so he had to find a way to sneak it out of the basement and into his car. They all agreed on bringing their own food so Zach just grabbed a bag of halloween candy he asked his mother to pick up at the store for himself and the other two teens, that and a bag of chips. After he grabbed those he packed a sleeping bag, pillow, flashlight, water, etc. He drove to Blake's house where Sam was already waiting on the front step and Blake was stepping out the front door. They both jumped in Zach's car after throwing their bags in the trunk. Blake accidentally threw his bag a little too hard, unknowingly breaking the small Mayan figure he packed in the water bottle pocket.

None of them noticed a thing despite the starving little Mayan god who whisped his way out of the crack in the stone figure. It had been a few millennia since his last meal and he was looking forward to any food source he could get. He was expecting to live off of small animals until he could manage to lure a child into the woods. What he didn't expect was for three whole children to be handed to him. He slipped over the back seat and resisted drooling at the sight of his precious prey. He couldn't help but get excited at the possibilities, for there were so many ways to kill someone. Although his favorite way by far was using their worst fears against them.

He especially loved the look in their eyes as they screamed for their life, what a thrill it was. He decided he'd go with that idea so one by one he assessed each brain for the slightest trauma or insecurity. He scavenged all three minds for their deepest darkest secrets without hinting in the slightest at his own presence. Two of them who sat in the back had pretty normal fears of drowning and burning, 'nomatter' he thought, 'I can be creative'. When he searched the last of the three brains though, he found quite the interesting surprise and immediately knew what he'd do.

Upon their arrival at the edge of the woods, Blake practically jumped out of the car to grab his bag from the trunk. Zach and Sam were almost just as excited. They walked a mile into the woods with the little god invisibly whirling around them. When they found a good spot they divided up the tasks and began setting up their camp. Zach was on tent duty, Sam was setting up their camp area, and Blake was collecting firewood. After all that was finished, Zach taking a little longer than he'd liked to with the tent, they all sat around the fire Blake had made on big logs which Sam had gathered. Blake started the conversation with some light banter about Zach's tent setting up skills and then the conversation went from there.

Around 9 o'clock at night the god became too impatient to wait any longer so he began the early stage of his process.

The sky began to turn dark and a light sprinkle fell on the teens. They decided to move inside the tent to continue their story telling. The rain didn't bother them much, in fact, they just thought it added to the fun of camping out in the woods on Halloween. Although it became less fun when they heard a high pitched scream. "Okay it's not just my brain messing with me right? You heard that too?"

"Yes, but I definitely don't feel like getting murdered tonight so if you'd like to check it out you have my consent." Zach snickered at Sam's comment and Blake rolled his eyes and sighed.

"Fine but if I die it's your fault" Blake stepped outside the tent and began walking towards where the scream came from. He couldn't feel any water droplets anymore but he knew it was still raining because of the soft pattering he heard on the leaves of the trees above him. At that point the sky was dark because of the time and not so much the weather. He was using his phone flashlight to lead the way but it wasn't doing much to show what was in front of him. He heard the screaming again but this time a word followed. A sharp, high pitched, "HELP!" rang out through the woods. The sheer desperation in that one word sent a shiver down Blake's spine. He put down his phone and just looked around to see if he could find anything. He caught a glimmer of something maybe 50 feet in front of him. He turned off his flashlight and strained his eyes in the light's direction. The figure seemed to be reaching out towards him with fire lit limbs. Blake walked quickly at first but then as he neared the small, illuminated, *thing,* he realized it was just a small child, a little girl so he slowed his pace. He was less than 10 feet away from her and absolutely terrified. She was crouched down with her head in her hands and shoulders shaking from what Blake assumed to be vicious tears, but when she uncovered her face, there were no tears, only small giggles that slowly turned into full blown laughter. Blake was absolutely paralized with fear from the fiery blaze that covered every inch of her body. Her skin seemed unbothered but her hair was charred black from the intense heat and still her body language showed she was in no pain. Blake stood there trembling, not able to call out to his friends, as she stood from her singed spot on the forest floor.

The god was so excited to have his first meal in 3,000 years that he sat on the edge of his seat, tree branch rather, watching intently. Of course he was controlling the little dead girl and

knew what would happen next, but after being trapped in a small piece of stone for so long everything is so thrilling.

The little girl held intense eye contact with Blake while taking small steps toward him. Blake's breathing became more rapid as he made equally small steps backwards. The girl's pace picked up as her smile grew wider, each footstep sizzling on the damp leaves beneath her. It was at this exact moment where Blake's fight or flight response kicked in and he made a run for it. The little girl, of course, was hot on his tail. Her giggling grew louder the farther they ran. Blake's lungs burned and his legs were tired, there was no way he could keep this up forever. He began looping around and zig zagging through the trees hoping he'd lose her but every time he looked back she was right there happily giggling as he ran for his life. He ran for another minute like that until he looked back and found that he had lost her, he stopped running and hid behind a tree. His breath was quick but heavy and he closed his eyes to try and steady his breathing. He crouched down and held his head in his hands still breathing heavily. He slowly lifted his head and opened his eyes just to find the little girl standing two inches from his face. Her eyes were pitch black and her expression was completely blank. Blake, back to his hyperventilated state, just stared open-eyed at her, unable to move once again. He attempted to stand but the girl grabbed his throat with one hand and threw him back against the tree. Blake wasn't sure whether it was the heat of her white hot, porcelain hands or her supernatural amount of strength concentrated around his windpipe that was worse. He scratched at her unmoving fingers which only made his situation worse by setting fire to his long sleeved shirt. The fire covering her soon spread to envelope every inch of him, still her face didn't change. Blake tried to scream but her hand prevented any vocalization of his fear. She let go of him just as he was about to pass out. The skin on his neck was bubbling and touching it only made it worse. He fell to the ground and writhed in pain, still unable to speak, as the fire crawling all over his skin seemed to get hotter with every second. The extreme heat caused his skin to crack and split open exposing his muscles and fat, making the process more excruciating. The flames only grew as the hungry god got more impatient, sharp nails grasping against the tree he hid behind and a smile splitting his face.

Slowly, the feeling in Blake's limbs left him as his nerve endings died. Despite the girl taking her hand off his throat he still continued suffocating. He stopped writhing on the ground but the sound of choking was still evident. At that point Blake couldn't suck in any more air. He made several gasping sounds before he passed out and stopped moving all together. He was dead.

End of Chapter One.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE by Kevin Ellis

"I can't do this anymore. It's every night now," James cried. "Those eyes go right through my soul every time I look through that window." He adjusted his phone on his shoulder as he moved to shut his blinds, the tears streaming down his cheeks.

"Listen, we can meet about this at school and figure out what's been happening," Dylan stated. "I'll ask Aiden to help too, this can't keep happening."

"Alright, Dylan, night."

"Night, James."

James felt the pain as soon as the phone hung up, he had almost nobody to lean on, just his friend and mother. He had just witnessed a traumatizing divorce between his parents full of lies, deceit, and violence. Afterwards, his mom took custody of her only son, and moved to the other side of town, on the same street as his friends Dylan and Aiden. He had gone through

enough already, but the asylum put everything over the edge. James was dealing with a haunting and now he knew it for sure. Every night an old man or woman would watch him sleep from the second-story window of the asylum. They would always have yellow eyes that gleamed like those of an owl. James knew he had to find a way of ending the madness but all he needed to do was form a coalition, and he intended to get the job done.

The next afternoon, James arrived home from school, tired from the three tests he took, and his lack of sleep the previous night. He had met with Dylan and James at lunch to discuss what they needed to do to stop the apparitions and haunting. The next part of his plan was to alert his mother on the recent hauntings. He approached her while she was washing her hands and tapped her on the shoulder.

"Mom."

"Oh, you scared me," she chuckled. "How was school?"

"Splendid, there's just something we need to talk about."

"Curricular, or extracurricular?" She asked.

"Extracurricular, but it affects both when I can't sleep. I don't get why you had to pick the house across from the abandoned mental asylum, I mean ser-"

"Oh, so you're the home connoisseur now," she rebutted with a passive-aggressive tone. "You're blessed we moved away from Jason Voorhees, and you live right next to your friends now."

"Mom, long story short, I've been watched through my window by ghosts across the street, and I requested assistance from my friends to figure out the cause." She immediately burst out with laughter.

"Where's your Ghostbusters application?" She chuckled. "Please tell me you're not serious about going in there."

"Mom, I need to do this," James stated. "I won't let this wretched old building terrorize us any-"

"James! There is no need to compromise your health and well-being because of some ghosts on the other side of the street. If you go over there, you could get arrested, and then we'll have to deal w-"

"Mom, please, listen to me. Every night when I look out at that asylum," he lowered his voice. "Someone is looking right back, directly into my soul. I can't sleep at night knowing somebody is right across the street staring at me. Last night, I watched a man jump off that roof, I turned away, and when I looked back, there was nothing there. I'm not the only one on this street seeing this, you can ask-"

"Look," his mother turned to the window. "There is absolutely nothing to-" She turned toward the asylum, and what she saw shook her to her core. There he sat, an old man on the front porch of the asylum, rocking back and forth in his rocking chair, with a Cuban cigar in his mouth. The man peeked right, left, then stared directly at the two. James' mom dashed for her iPhone to call 911, but once she came back to the kitchen

to look through the bay window, the man was gone.

"Alright y'all, are you ready to do this thing?" Dylan asked. The three boys stood on the sidewalk in front of the asylum, with only a dim streetlight about 30 feet down the road. The time was 2 A.M., and all three boys had snuck out since they knew their parents didn't want them anywhere close to the entrance of the deteriorating, weathered, wooden asylum. None of the boys were ready for what was about to come, and they knew it.

"Why hello there young men." All three of the boys turned to their right to see a tiny old lady approaching them. The lady took a look at the asylum, then back at the boys, "This building has quite a bit of history to it. Slave trades, torture, you name it. I would highly advise you, boys, not to enter the building, but you can suit yourselves. You can explore this building, but there's a price to pay, and it's an eye for an eye." Both James and Aiden had some second thoughts and felt frightened, but Dylan saw her as a mere aggravation to their journey.

“Isn’t it a little past your bedtime grandma? Go put on your dentures and read a book.” Dylan exclaimed. SMASH! Some sort of pot inside of the asylum hit the ground.

“You boys better make the right move, or it’ll be the last move you make.” The woman walked off into the cool night air, and the boys turned back to the asylum. Dylan made the first approach, followed by James, then Aiden. As Dylan took his first step onto the creaky boards of the front porch, Aiden looked back down the sidewalk in the direction the woman walked off to, but to no avail. The boys took their first steps inside, and Dylan lit up his flashlight in the cold and gloomy lobby. ‘There’s nothing here after all.’ James thought to himself as the boys made their way up the rickety stairs. The staircase in the asylum was a spiral, and at each full turn, there was a new level. The boys made it up one flight and headed straight down the first hallway. Once they made it about halfway down, Dylan noticed a small teddy bear sitting on the floor in the hallway.

“Yo, Aiden, check this out,” Dylan said. “I didn't know there were kids here.” The teddy bear was brown with plastic eyes and soft fur. Dylan looked behind his shoulder, but Aiden was nowhere to be seen. Dylan took a few steps back the way the boys came from and noticed an odd red splotch in a doorway on his right. James noticed he couldn’t hear Dylan’s annoying talking or steps anymore so he flipped his flashlight back and walked backward. Dylan crept up to the red splotch, crouched down, and put his finger on it, it was still wet. He dipped his finger in and tasted it on the tip of his tongue, blood. Dylan immediately became alarmed and flipped his head up. James approached Dylan.

“Dude what’s wrong, why’d you head back?” James asked. “Hold on, where’s Aid-”

“Give me the damn flashlight,” Dylan demanded. “I think Aiden is over here.” James passed the flashlight to Dylan. Dylan quickly pointed the light up into the doorway, and what the boys saw shook them to their core. Aiden was lying on the ground while his soul was coming out of his body into the cloak of a black phantom. The phantom floated in the air, and its cloak was approximately 7 feet in height, its eyes were brighter than the blood Dylan encountered on the floor. The phantom finished collecting Aiden’s soul, and turned to the boys, letting out a deep demonic laugh. The two boys sprinted out of the hall and down the stairs as fast as humanly possible until they reached the front porch.

“James, I have no choice,” Dylan said, “This thing is going down.” Dylan took the conveniently placed stack of plywood under the asylum and lit it up with his lighter. Within 5 minutes the entire building was ablaze, and in another 5 paramedics arrived at the scene. Two patrol cars, an ambulance, and two fire engines all arrived in front of the asylum. The firetrucks had no choice but to put out the remains, the building was completely wrecked and all that was left was ash and debris.

“Are you boys alright? What the hell happened here?” An officer questioned the boys. Dylan was lying on the sidewalk exhausted, and James felt like he suffered a heart attack.

“Officer, you’re not going to believe th-” Suddenly there was a change in the atmosphere, James’ ears began ringing, and everyone seemed to freeze in time. James felt a soft, yet cool tap on his shoulder, which sent chills down his spine, and made the hair on the back of his neck stand. James turned around slowly to see the phantom floating behind him. At first, James heard the old lady speaking.

“I told you to make the right move.” then the voice went deep and demonic, “You took my home, so I took your compadre.” The phantom pulled out Aiden’s head from under his dark cloak, holding it by his hair. The phantom then sank below the pavement along with Aiden’s head. “An eye for an eye.”

Sight of Smiles - Jake Mastriano

“DAD, DAD WHERE IS DIABLO’S LEASH?” yelled Olivia at the top of the stairs.

Olivia's dad, Jimmy said, “Okay, Olivia I will see you soon.” The year was 1990 something in a small town, west of Montana on a hot summer day. Olivia and her family lived on one of the couple roads in Nomansland. They lived at 66 Deadwood Lane to be exact. They lived in a 3-story house that was a stunning baby blue.

Olivia walked her dog into the park while she was on her phone when she felt a tug on the leash from Diablo. Diablo is a 6-year-old German Shepherd that is mostly brown and black. Olivia looked up and noticed there was a squirrel, then she noticed that the squirrel was no ordinary squirrel. The squirrel was a blackish color with white on it. When she stopped staring at the squirrel, Diablo got loose from the leash. He quickly vanished out of sight in a matter of seconds.

“Diablo, come here Diablo. I got a cookie.” Olivia loved Diablo because he was her only friend. Olivia then noticed that there was a dreadful odor that smelled like skunk and bleach combined. Olivia searched and searched until the crack of dusk before she headed back in a panic. At this moment, Olivia realized that she lost her only friend.

Olivia had a thirty-minute walk back to her house to tell her dad the news. Seconds after entering the house, Olivia ran to her father, “Dad, I have to tell you something, and you are not going to be happy, so do not yell at me, please. I was walking Diablo, and he got off the leash. DAD HE IS GONE!”

After her dad heard the news, he was furious. Olivia's father started to question her, “Were you on your phone? Was anyone in the park, like that eerie guy we always see with a shopping cart walking down the street? How could that have happened?”

“Diablo got freed from the leash. I do not know how, but then he ran into the park.”

“Olivia, that is unacceptable, you are grounded, and you are losing your phone. Losing Diablo will teach you a lesson that you need to stay off that phone and pay attention to your family.”

“Dad, I swear I was not on my phone. He saw a squirrel, and he got his head out of the leash. The collar was so tight you could not fit a string through it and I do not know how he escaped.”

“You and I are going to put posters up around the town before we hunt him down.”

“I am sorry and I will do whatever it takes to get him back.”

Olivia and her dad placed posters all across the town. Posters in Walmarts to posters on telephone poles, down alleyways to the main street. After weeks on end, searching for the dog Olivia and her family gave up the active search.

While they were on the hunt for weeks, Diablo was alive but not doing so well. Diablo was taken hostage in a house that was supposed to be abandoned and lifeless. The house they went to was a 3-story Victorian house with windows broken like an insane asylum 20 years after it closed. Diablo, taken in from a possessed guy who fed Diablo one rat a day that smelled like moldy cheese. He also made Diablo take pills that were as hard as a rock. Instead of drinking water, the possessed guy made him drink this 100-year-old orangish blood.

The insane guy was in the woods waiting for his next prey. He had his traps out using a fake squirrel as bait, on a tree stump with a little wire that he would pull when the dog got too close. He also had netting to pick the dog up off the ground after he went for the bait. He saw a girl walking a dog and got ready to snatch it. He baited the dog with the squirrel and then grabbed the German shepherd. He got away from the girl and took her to his laboratory.

The possessed guy is nocturnal and only comes out at night to feed Diablo. This guy is part of a group that snatches dogs and breaks the dog. He does this so the dog has to go to the vet and get fixed up by the veterinarian. While the possessed guy is sleeping, Diablo has a crank on his mouth to readjust his lips to make him smile cheek to cheek. The living quarters for both of them were about one-fourth the size of an average bedroom.

(Fast forward almost a year)

Olivia’s younger sister Lucy said quietly, “Dada, when will puppy come back home, I miss him.”

Jimmy said, “Lucy, Diablo is most likely not alive anymore, it’s almost been a year since we lost him. It’s been exactly 11 months and 26 days ago since we lost him.”

“Dada I want him to find him right now.”

“Lucy I will go out one more time, but there is less than 1 percent chance that he is still alive.”

“Fffwwwwwwhhhhhhhheeeeeeeeueeeeeaaaauuuuuueeeeeeehhhhhhhhhhh. Come here Diablo. I have Cookies.” Jimmy patiently waited in the woods for Diablo to come back until he heard a light crunch of leaves and a brush against some plants. Jimmy quickly turned around, and he saw Diablo, but he looked different. Jimmy was so excited and approached Diablo, but out of nowhere Diablo pounced on Jimmy and bit his arm, ripping off a chunk of skin. Jimmy was in shock, but Jimmy still wanted to bring him home to show his family.

(Terry is cooking dinner)

“I am home and you will never guess what I found.”

“Olivia and Lucy come downstairs and see what I found,” yelled Jimmy at the top of his lungs.

Olivia said shockingly, “Dad, where did you find him? Why does he look like that?”

“I found him on the fringe of the park woods. He must be hungry and thirsty. I will get him food, and Lucy would you mind filling his bowl with water?”

Olivia said, “Dad, he does not look like he has a tongue anymore. How is he supposed to drink, and why is his face creeping me out so much? His lips are supposed to be going down, not up.”

“Olivia, he may have rabies for being in the woods so long.”

“So what are we going to do about it?”

Lucy yelped, “DADDDD, he is trying to bite me.”

“Dad, he is also trying to bite me. HELP, HELP, HELP.”

“I think that I am going to have to put him down. Girls go to your room.”

(Jimmy grabbing his shotgun)

Chic, chic, pew! The shots went off at 7:30 at night. Jimmy turned around to see his daughters behind him. Jimmy pushed the girls inside away from the dog. Jimmy headed back to the yard and started to cover up Diablo when he heard a scream come from the house. Jimmy ran into the house and saw that blood had dripped down the wall.

Olivia’s mother, Terry frantically said to Jimmy, “There is blood on the wall, but no one is bleeding.”

“I do not know, but who would it be from then?”

“I will clean it up, but I am going to search other rooms and keep an eye open tonight when I head to bed.”

“Okay honey, I love you! Stay safe, I have the cops’ number in hand when needed.”

(5 minutes later)

Terry frantically screamed, “Honey is Lucy in our bedroom? Because she is not in her bed!”

“No, I do not have her. I put her to sleep after I cleaned it up.” Jimmy jumps out of his bed and has a search around the house for Lucy, but no luck. Jimmy calls the cops for them to search the house and says, “It is an emergency our daughter is lost, and we cannot find her.”

(The cops show up)

The cops pulled into the driveway and said, “Excuse me, sir, do you remember the last time that you saw your daughter, and what is her age? We will search the house, but if we find no trace of her, we have to file a missing kid and it may take time to find her.”

“Okay, my wife is inside the house right now, looking for Lucy. She is two-years-old, which means she could not have gone far.”

“Thank you for your cooperation, but we are going to work on finding her and will keep you updated. The cops go into the house and start the search for Lucy. They came upon the door to the basement that was worn down. The police officer grabbed the rusty door that cut up his hands in an

instant. It felt like he just ran his hand up a wooden bench full of splinters. As the officer walked through the door frame, he heard something shut behind him, but no one was there. The officer continued down the stairs that smelled like a bunch of dead rats. He continued down the stairs and kicked something, but he did not see what it was. What he did not notice was he just walked under two people and a bloody piece of wood.

The police officer drew out his flashlight and looked down. He discovered two bodies crawling with insects and innocent little women on the cold ground. The officer sprinted upstairs and told Jimmy and Olivia, "I have bad news. There are two bodies in the basement, and this is now an investigation. You guys will be escorted out of the house and escorted to a room under max security, so you guys are not next."

(One week later)

A police officer said to Olivia and Jimmy, "You guys are good to go."

"Thank you officer for all the help. We are going to sell the house because it has to be haunted after killing our dog."

"Do you hear this guy? He thought his house was haunted by a dead dog. Little did he know that there were knife marks and rope marks. We have the suspect in custody and he is getting life in jail. The nickname we have for the guy is Smiles because of what he did to animals."

"It was a person? My daughter and I are getting as far away as we can from this place because it will bring back terrifying memories anyways."

(3 weeks later)

"Olivia, what do you think of the house? Do you like New Hampshire better than home? ?"

"I love the house and how rustic it is. I love the kitchen the most because all the appliances are a snow white color."

"Olivia, you do not have to tell anyone at your new school the reason why we moved out of the house. Say we wanted to have more than 3 seasons in a year. Olivia, did you know we are 5 minutes from Keene State University? We can visit the college on the weekend."

"Dad I do not know what I want to be when I grow up though."

"It is okay. I was asking to see if you liked the campus. When you go to school today, I am going to go hunting and explore the new land."

"Bye, dad. I love you."

Jimmy was on his way to go hunting when he saw this in the corner of his eye. It was a dog without a leash. It was a boxer, so Jimmy grabbed the dog and brought him home.

Headlights - Izzy Hunt

"*And today is another beautiful day in West Virginia with 75 degrees and rainy skies, stay safe out there and remember, DON'T LOOK AT THE ROAD!"* the radio boomed. Of course the first thing I hear about is the weather, that's all anybody ever talks about. The car hit a bump as a gasp escaped through my lips, then I took a breath in. Surprisingly, I was the only one on the road at present. Everyone else was probably at work since my sister caused a ruckus and made me late. *I swear she needs to stop yelling at me about a computer,* I thought. I hit another bump in the road but it left me unfazed this time. My car had an alarm system telling me if something furry with a heart rate was approaching, and there was. The alarm started going off, emitting an angry buzz accompanied by the chorus of beeping. A quick galloping silhouette almost passed me before turning itself into a statue by standing still in front of the vehicle. I immediately hit the brakes to stop and I did just in time. I opened my door to see what in the hell it was, but was met with a deer. I knew I had made a mistake, a

dire one at that. The creature stared me down with its two eyes, the antlers on its head branching off like a tree in winter. I started screaming at it.

"GET OUT OF HERE!" I screeched, it stepped back and ran the way it came. I held my chest, my heart beating itself the hardest it could go, winning the race of who could pump blood faster. "Crap.." I muttered to myself. I got back in the car, looking to my left to make sure my briefcase was still in good condition, after all it did hold the blueprints for a new model of these headlights. "How ironic… my new model made for deer, and it fails.." I thought about this fact for a moment, it was said that in the old world deer would stop at a bright light, mesmerized by its shining beauty. I shook my head, my blonde hair getting into my mouth. "Bleh, great… Now I'm gonna become like a camperier." *Yeah, a camperier. Somebody who practically LIVES their life in the woods*. *How did anybody in the old world live with that?* As I drove to work in the rain, the tapping of each drop on the glass mocking me about my mistake, I came to an epiphany. *If you tell them, you will never be remembered, and NEVER save anyone from this fate. If I DON'T tell anyone though, somebody will find out for themselves, then I'll be killed on the spot like my cousin Alan. I assume the moment he encountered that raccoon on the road he decided it would be best if he didn't tell anybody, save his good reputation, that little trash panda not only ruined his good streak in life, but took it. Damn it Alan, you always were good, but an idiot.* The grizzly thought sent shivers down me, I scratched my head, feeling two bumps. *Probably from this morning, Arianna did hit me hard.* I thought to myself. I pulled up to the company driveway, my ***Reserved for Carina Moss*** sign digging into my retinas. It's like god knew I was already having a bad day, and wanted to rub it in with the reminder that my identity and rank at my job will be snatched from me if anybody finds out. "Today really is gonna be that day huh? Well I'm not telling anybody. I'm sure it's just a way to reduce the population.." I said, muttering to myself.

"What's a way to reduce the population?" came a questioning voice. I cringed, I *really* should've kept that to myself.

"Nothing.." I said. I turned my head to be met by Ava. She moved her ginger hair to the side, then tapped her ears.

"I can hear EVERYTHING you know?" she said, nudging my elbow and opening the door. I chuckled at her remark, I counted the freckles on her face.

"Yeah well. Let's just hope Mr. Sir doesn't pick anybody today," I said snickering to myself. Mr. Sir is our boss, tall man, mullet, and a damn mustache. There are jokes around the office saying he's never seen an animal because he has one on his face. Only one person got in trouble because of that joke. Poor Clarence, never could keep his mouth shut. Everyone sat down at their designated desks, putting their hands up in a salute. "MR. SIR!". Everybody said in unison. Mr. Sir straightened himself up, then his tie.

"Good Morning, I hope you are all aware of the new plans Miss Moss has brought in today for the new prototype of the *Headlight Strikers* brand." he said like an army general, gesturing to me. I gulped nervously and stood up, opening the briefcase with the blueprint plans. "This will help to ward off not just any animal, but deer." Those last words made me shudder. The irony almost killed me as I stood there, I was sweating bullets at this point. When I went to wipe them off, no moisture was secreted and transferred to my hand. *That's weird...* Ava clapped and whooped, before clearing her throat and shrinking in her seat. He snatched the plans and waved me off like a peasant. *Ok Karen..* I thought. I returned to my desk, pretending to fill out work while darting my eyes back and forth between the work and Ava, hoping she'd take the hint. Of course, being hardworking and mostly serious, she noticed but continued working. The groan broke out of my mouth as I finished with this act. I stood up and grabbed her arm.

"WHAT THE HELL?" she almost yelled.

"Just come with me for a second." Mr. Sir raised an eyebrow as his mustache almost leapt off his face.

"GIRL PROBLEMS!" I screamed at him, his eyes became the size of dinner plates as he looked away with shame, a few employees snickering at his reaction. At this point Ava had a huge question mark above her head. I darted through the door to the bathroom before letting her go with a sigh. "I saw a deer today on the road," I said in one breath, a wave of relief swept through my body. Ava just stood there, staring at my forehead. "Do I have a wrinkle?" I asked, putting a hand on my forehead to feel for one.

"No, but you do have to tell somebody, thank god you told ME. I'll tell Mr. Sir that you have it and we'll schedule an appointment with the mayor immediately." she said, approaching the door again. I felt like I just sucked all that anxiety I had back in as I grabbed her forearm.

"NO, you can't tell HIM," I said, a mix of salt and worry lacing my voice. She turned around and faced me, a hand still on the door.

"Why not? It's the LAW." she said, snatching her arm back and putting it on her hip. I bit my lip.

"You can't because we need somebody who trusts me more, like uh…" I took a moment to think, my mind racing through my contacts list. "My sister!" I blurted out, I felt like I just spit boiling coffee because of how much it hurt to say that. Ava raised an eyebrow.

"Your SISTER? I thought she hated you." she said, beginning to push the door. I stammered for a moment before regaining my composure.

"She does, but who trusts me more, Mr. Sir or my Sister?" I asked, giving a little bit of venom in my voice. She sighed, then rolled her eyes at me in annoyance.

"Fair point, fine. I'll tell him you have come down with a major fever, possibly caused by working so late or something.." she muttered, opening the door. I clapped my hands together.

"Thank you so much, I'll just get going and-" I was about to step out before she grabbed my hand, her fingers constricting mine with a serious grasp.

"Ah-ah-ah, I'm escorting you home. I don't want you backing out like your boyfriend backed out." She said that last bit as a joke, but it didn't sound like one. I gave her the 'haha so funny' act.

"Yeah yeah…" I mumble. She pushed the door and approached Mr. Sir, whispering something into his ear. His eyes dash towards me and fixate on my face. He scans my body for a moment before giving a stern look like a father who just received a report card with two C's.

"Miss Moss, you may be excused and go home. You better come up with an upgrade for this in the meantime." He said sharply. I quickly nod my head as Ava smiles at me, but something didn't feel right. It was way too bright, even brighter than our current model of headlights, and that's saying a lot. She pointed me towards the stairs and pushed me gently towards them. As we descended down towards the lobby she spoke.

"You don't trust me do you?" she said, it almost sounded more like a statement the way she said it.

"What?"

"You don't trust me." she said flatly. I lift my hand and open my mouth to protest, but pull back with my head down.

"You're right. I don't trust you. I do trust you to know what's right though." I said, looking up at her finally. She had a face of fury, scrunched up as if somebody threw salt at her eyes. "Fine, you get home yourself. Don't be surprised if somebody comes knocking on your door." she said, storming back into the office. *I think I just lost my friend, what a* nightmare*.*

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I got out of my car, I felt as if I just lost a part of my sanity when Ava walked away. Her red hair and freckles were still in my mind but the memory was smudged, like a letter that had just fallen into a puddle. I opened the door slowly. *At least Arianna isn't home* I thought. I took off my heavy coat and hung it on a nearby doorknob, then headed
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up the winding and endless stairs to reach the bathroom and wash up. The door was cracked open slightly, singing a song to come inside as it creaked with a push. I turned on the light, the switch cold against my fingers as it went up. The light turned on with a slight flicker, the house bill was always so expensive the only thing I could afford to eat was Ramen cups. I took two steps and was in front of the mirror, when I looked up at my reflection I was met with a ghastly sight. The bumps I felt on my head had sprouted into antlers, similar to the ones I saw on the deer earlier. My skin had become pale, and the white freckles on my face had multiplied and grown.

"Wh-What?" I started touching my face to try and peel off the spots, hoping they were just specks of paint. They weren't coming off, and I started to panic. My brain started branching itself off into different outcomes for my current situation. *Am I gonna DIE? What's going on, am I BECOMING a deer??* I kept thinking. My brain was in shambles, too deep in thought to even notice the small ache in my hands. After several minutes the pain had become noticeable. It felt like staples were being put into my nails, the reaction sending a shock through my veins.

"OW!" I shouted, my head darting to my hands. They were turning black, like when you get frostbite on a cold winter day. Instead of my fingers fusing like I thought they would, they were elongated, my nails were now the black of the deer's pupil, and they were long and sharp. My eyes blinked and it held a pain. I kept blinking a few times, I probably got some smoke into my eye earlier. When I finally opened them to focus and check to see if I did have something in them, the white of my eyes had become a dark shade of brown. My iris and pupils were a faded grey, almost white. I let out another yelp as my back cracked and I hunched over. The sound left my ears ringing slightly, the echoing of the crack burned in my mind. I heard ripping like paper, and the pain was gone. I turned my back to the mirror and found that my spinal cord was sticking out slightly, sending chills through me. I tripped over a towel on the floor, then grasped the door frame, causing it to leave scratch marks from my newfound talons. A gasp escaped my mouth, followed by a choke, and my nose and chin turned to a small snout, similar to a wolf like the ones Ava used to show me in books. My teeth elongated into ferocious fangs, so when I gave a smile out of relief it looked like I was baring my teeth like a wild animal.

"I'm back!" came a holler from downstairs. *Crap, Arianna's home.* I panicked. I scrambled to readjust my posture into a more human form. It failed and only made a loud thud, I switched gears using all fours, my long hair swaying as I ran.

"Carrie? Are you home early? Did you get fired?" Steam was coming out of my ears. Arianna always spat that kind of talk at me for my job. I opened my muzzle to respond, but only an animal cry came. It sounded like a bear crying in pain instead of a witty comeback. I didn't get a response, but what I did get was a dash up the stairs from her, as she stood looking at me in horror. There was nothing I could do. I was going to be outcast, stripped of my identity and being given the skin of a Wendigo. I was a deer in headlights.

Inspiration: *Unwind*, *The Giver*, *Werewolves*, The Wendigo myth

Bloody Paint - Gregg Prevost

November 16th, 1931, Clearwater, Ohio

"You finished?" A young Iris said, "Because I am!"

"Of course, but you know I'm a better painter than you," Lily retorted. The two were having a competition of who could paint the best painting.

"Maybe I can finally beat you for once."

“You wish,” Lily was calm, then suddenly exclaimed, “Oh no! It’s ruined!”

“What's wrong, what happened?”

“I dropped my painting!”

“Well, I guess I will win then!” Iris said, very excited. She had never beat Lily in anything before, Iris and Lily always mess around, knowing Lily is going to go somewhere with her life, as Iris doesn’t feel like doing anything. Lily holds up her painting of a Lilac bush, now all smudged. It looks as if it was hit by a car, or went through a tornado. Iris holds up her painting, of a stick figure portrait of the two girls, laying in a field of flowers. It looks almost as if a 5-year-old had tried to draw for the first time.

A now bawling Lily says, “The paint... it got on my shirt! You know this is my favorite right!” Lily, clearly very distressed, stands up and tries to wipe off the paint.
“It's okay, it's okay, just go clean it.” The red paint was all over her right sleeve, even more smudged after her attempts to wipe it off.

At this point, Lily started converting her sadness into anger. She approached her window and threw her painting out into the dark, rainy abyss. It was the first storm they had had in months, which would be good for her garden. Most of the plants started to look dry and dead. Sudden gusts of wind blew through the window.

But something caught Lily’s eye. She noticed a figure on the edge of the woods, holding something. The object it was holding, it almost looked like a doll. She screamed and got caught by a gust of wind pulling her out of the window. As she was falling the figure was already there, and those were the last, terrifying seconds of her life.

Iris heard the screams and turned to see her only friend fall right out the 3rd story window. She ran to the window, just to see Lily laying there, face-up, lifeless, in the middle of her garden. Iris could already tell she was dead. Her eyes, staring at the sky. Her skin was pale, and her face was calm as if she had not just fallen out from a 30-foot drop.

She ran downstairs, got her mom and they both ran outside to the garden under Lily’s window, to find there was nothing there, not even her body. Lily’s mother was confused but Iris started screaming. All that was left was a doll, and the imprint of her body in the flowers, and where she hit the Lilac bush on her way down. The worst part about it all is that Iris had lost her only friend, the person she was always close with. She had no one to talk to, no one to comfort her. She grabbed the doll, not knowing the severity of what was to come.

Away in the woods, a dark figure disappeared, not seen by either Iris and Lily’s mother, carrying a lifeless Lily away. Lily was never to be seen again, and the ongoing investigation of her death ceased, as the only evidence is what Iris saw that dark, sad night.

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November 11th, 2018, Clearwater, Ohio.

Lilac never liked cleaning the attic. It was always so dark and freaked her out. Her mother had been harassing her to sort through all the boxes since they moved in last year, but she kept procrastinating it. She could faintly hear the news in the background from downstairs, her grandmother listening to it all day. She didn't have a job and just slept all day. Lilac was close to her Grandmother and was always intrigued by her stories.

She first sorted through her own box of belongings, making sure anything she needed was ready to be taken back down to her room. Next, she went through her sister's things. She found a couple things here and there, and just threw them down the ladder. She didn’t have to sort her mother's things, as she was never a hoarder like Grandma Iris. They are like polar opposites.

Lilac walked up to her grandmother’s box. She dug through all her things, just imagining the stories behind them. She stumbled upon a raggedy doll. It was buried at the bottom of the box, clearly not wanted to be seen. Next to the box was a painting of two stick figures in a field. Her grandmother must have painted when she was young. She puts the doll aside and replaces the painting. She finishes up organizing and heads downstairs.

“Hey Grandma, why was this doll in your box in the attic?” Lilac asked. Her grandmother makes a face of surprise, clearly shocked by the doll.

“I haven’t seen that doll…” Grandma Iris said, “in a very, very long time.”

“Was it one of yours when you were a kid?”

“No, no, it has a much more important story.”

“Well, what's this story you are talking about then,” Lilac questioned, unaware of what she was about to learn. “I love your stories!”

“You are too young for this story, you are not mature enough yet,” Iris told her, “It is very sad, and had a big impact on my life. It's not like my other stories.”

“Okay, but is it really that big of a deal that you can’t tell me yet?”

“Yes, it is a story that should never be told, it never should have happened. Especially for a 14-year-old me to have to endure. That doll used to be owned by my best friend, Lily. We made it together when we decided to make a bunch of crafts together. But she spilled paint on her shirt. It may sound like nothing, but it led to something really bad.”

“What happened next?” Lilac asked, “Also how does this relate to a doll?” She looks over to where she placed it. It was gone, it must have fallen. The dog probably got it, she has a love for toys, until she destroys them. Lilac was tired after a long day of cleaning so she headed to bed after knowing her grandmother would not budge.

The next morning, she wakes up to find the doll next to her bed. She gets freaked out and thinks her grandmother was just trying to scare her, after all, Halloween was just a few weeks ago. Downstairs, she can smell the delicious smell of breakfast, something not too common in her house. Then she realized it was her mother's birthday. She had a nice long day until it happened.

It was about 10:00 pm, and Lilac and her best friend Julia were hanging out. They were messing around and painting. It was somewhat stormy out, but mostly just wind. Lilac had decided to paint the Lilac bush that her grandmother had planted outside her window, and knew she was going to win. Apparently the Lilac bush was about 100 years old, her grandmother once told her. The bush used to belong to her best friend before she died.

“What did you paint?” Lilac asked.

“You know I'm not artistic…” Julia explained, “All I have to say is it is a stick figure.”

“Surprise surprise, but maybe it looks better than my beautiful painting of my grandma’s Lilac bush!” Lilac shows Julia her painting, and Julia’s jaw drops. She knew it was amazing. A sudden gust flew into the window and the window slammed open and smashed on the glass on the wall. The girls screamed, and a panicked Lilac’s mother ran through the door, thinking someone had been hurt.

“Is everyone okay?” Lilac’s mother asked, “Who is hurt?”

“It's okay mom, it was just the window, a gust of wind blew it open and it hit the wall,” Lilac explained. The shards of glass were spread all over the floor, looking impossible to clean. The off white doll was sitting on the ground, must have been knocked off the desk by the window. They don’t finish cleaning up the glass for about an hour, and Lilac’s mother leaves to go to bed.

“You guys should be going to bed too, it’s a school night you know.” Her mother said.

“Okay, okay we will soon,” Lilac told her, “Goodnight mom, happy birthday.”

“Goodnight Lilac, thank you. You two have fun for a couple more minutes now before you have to go to bed.”

The two girls talked for a bit, but they eventually both got tired. They turned off the lights and went to bed. Lilac started overthinking about what happened with the doll earlier that day and decided to tell Julia.

“Hey Julia, want to hear what happened today, I forgot to tell you.”

“Sure, what happened?” Julia asked, confused that Lilac decided to bring it up now.

“Hold on, let me get the doll real quick.” Lilac gets up and turns on the lights to a scary sight. The doll is not by the desk, but rather on Julia's bed. But the scary part was the fact that there was a kitchen knife, shiny and sharp, lying next to the doll. The doll’s facial expression had changed and looked angry. Lilac screamed.

“HELP! HELP!,” She exclaimed, “Julia, come here quick.” Julia jumps out of the bed and looks and sees the doll staring at her, and the knife lying next to her. Lilac’s mother runs into the room with her phone in her hand and sees the doll.

“Guys, you are kidding me right?” Lilac’s mother said, “All of this for a prank?”

“No mom, I swear it wasn’t us! It is trying to kill Julia!” Lilac cried.

Her mother left the room mad that the kids had kept them up. Lilac and Julia sat on the other side of the room, shaking and crying. Julia finally got up and walked over to the doll.

“Julia what the hell are you thinking!” Lilac tried to stop her, “It's going to kill you!”

Julia picks up the doll and brings it over to the still open window, but the doll slips out of her hand. The doll lands itself on its feet and runs. It wobbles, making a clicking sound. Running at the speed of light, the doll runs over to a whiteboard and grabs a marker. At this point, the girls are screaming and crying, scared for their lives.

The doll draws the name *Lily* on the whiteboard. Lilac then remembers the paintings in the attic, of the beautiful but smudged Lilac painting, and the messy stick figure one.

She realizes her grandmother wasn’t lying, and that this doll once belonged to her best friend. The doll turns and starts moving toward Lilac. Julia grabs the doll off of the ground but gets cut by its long dangly hair, clearly sharp and deadly. The doll grows, turning human-sized, taking the energy from the house, and converting it into life power for her. She darts for the window and falls out.

A dark figure exits the woods and greets the doll. The figure takes off its hood. It is an old lady, about the age of Lilac’s grandmother. The girls, sitting there astonished by what they are watching, feel a gust of wind through the window. Lilac starts to fall and eventually does. She seems to fall forever, even though her third-floor window is not that high. She sees her grandmother's garden, packed full of roses, lilies, daffodils, and in the center, a big lilac bush.

Lilac crashes through the bush, tearing all of the flowers off, and lands on a patch of daffodils. The figure walks up to her, the doll in her hand. Julia, still sitting at the window, runs inside. While she is getting Lilac's mother, the Lady talks to Lilac.

She puts the doll next to her, and says, “Hello, Lilac,” The lady says in a very old raspy voice, “I have always wanted to meet you.

Lilac tries to yell at her, wanting to say, “Who are you?” but the words won't come out. She realizes she has no pain. She is dead. There is no way she could have survived that fall. The lady picks her up and walks her to the treeline, but there is a crack in the silence.

BAM.

It breaks the silence and could’ve been heard for miles. The lady drops to her knees, and standing behind her is a troubled Julia, holding a revolver. The rest of the family runs over, but Lilac is lifeless. The old lady was shot and fell to the ground. Julia goes up to Lilac and cries. Lilac tries to say something, but cannot. Lilac can see everything happening, but she is dead. She sees through her body's eyes but is dead to everyone else. She wonders if this is what it is like when you die, but suddenly everything goes black.

She wakes up what seems like a couple seconds later, but it was about 100 years later. She is in an attic, and a little girl is holding her. She realizes what is happening and thinks to herself that she will never be the same.

The Possession of Georgie - Dan Pizzimenti

It's the start of a dreary afternoon in 1997. On a Tuesday during an eerie October, the blades of grass and leaves on the trees are soaked. The sound of thunder is emphasized in the dark gray sky. A large family of 15 lives in an old mansion a couple of blocks down "Haunted Hills." The mansion is secluded into a forest full of dying, eroding trees. However, this family is temporarily cut down to three people excluding the two maids. The first of this trio is Bryan. Bryan is 15 years old, the youngest boy in the family. He had recently been contemplating whether his doll, Georgie, is possessed. Currently, he remains on Georgie's side.

Bryan had just finished his last day of school. While on the bus on his way home, he overhears kids talking about his family's mansion. He listens closer and hears one of the kids suppress the hype by bringing up Georgie. He shuts them up and tells them there is nothing wrong with the doll. Getting off the bus, he recalls that his big sister, Jesse, is at college right now. This means he will have to spend the afternoon with the maids. As soon as Bryan walks inside, he settles in and rests himself in their living room. His rest is cut short, however, when his mom approaches him and accuses him of a mess in the kitchen.

"Bryan, what is that mess over there? There are utensils everywhere! I also told you not to move the landline phone but you can't listen to that as well!" his mom complained.

"Mom, I didn't do anything! I just got home from school. It had to have been the ca…" Bryan came to a stop.

"We don't have a cat, Bryan. Go clean up that mess right now!" his mom ordered.

"This is ridiculous! I promise I didn't do anything!" Bryan claimed.

His mom already went upstairs to get ready to leave for work. This left Bryan with cleaning up. He walks over to the kitchen with frustration and confusion. He thinks the only people that could've made this mess were the maids. However, he soon realizes they would never do such a thing. While Bryan is putting everything back to their designated spot, he begins to hear creaking noises down the hall. He comes to a halt. His heart begins racing. He gulps huge balls of saliva down his throat. He thought he was the only one down there. After a minute of standing still, Bryan rushes upstairs to his mom.

"Mom, I need to tell you something and I need to tell you it right now," Bryan yelled while at the top of the stairs.

"What's wrong?" his mom replied.

"Th-That doll we have. Jesse has been trying to convince me for years that it is haunted. I never believed her but it has recently been throwing off weird and eerie vibes. I just don't want it here anymore," Bryan exclaimed.

His mom says, "You want me to throw it away? I thought you loved that th-."

"Well not anymore! Look, I'm sorry for shouting. I just seriously despise that... that thing now," Bryan stated.

"It's okay Bryan, I understand. I certainly don't have time right now to completely dispose of it. I can put it in the repository for the time being though," his mom says in hope that she would reassure him.

"Then can I at least come with you to work?" Bryan asked.

"I'm sorry honey, but you know I can't bring you with me. The maids are here though, so you won't be completely alone," his mom replied.

Bryan ends up staying home alone. He locks himself in his room and waits for Jesse to come home. He continues to hear noises that he isn't familiar with and ends up hiding in his closet. He hears the thunder amping up outside. The rain gets thrown around by the wind, reaching his windows. The food cart rolling down the hall outside. His heart is racing and his

breathing is faint to prevent noise. This state of paranoia comes to a halt, however, when he hears footsteps coming towards his door; he knows it's Jesse's. Jesse calls out his name, "Bryan?" in hope of a response.

"Yeah I'm right here, give me a second," he replies. Bryan gets up out of the closet and brushes the dust from himself.

"Hey you're finally back!" he exclaims.

"Yeah...I am...why are you so sweaty? It looks like you just ran from something," she assumes. Bryan doesn't say anything. The presence of Georgie immediately enters his mind after she says that. "Bryan, are you alright?" she asks.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Sorry, I'm just stressed about school," he replies.

"Stressed about school? Bryan, you don't have school anymore for a couple of months. Seriously, what is wrong with you?" she asks in an urge for an answer.

"Remember you told me that you thought that doll was possessed. Well, now I'm starting to think the same thing too. I know you know that many odd things have been happening recently here and we are practically the only ones here other than the maids," Bryan replies in a fast manner.

"Woah, let's calm down. Yeah, I do remember telling you that. I've been trying to tell you for ye-," Jesse says until she gets cut off.

"Look I don't have time for you to point out the obvious. Quite frankly, I'd rather act on the matter than talk. Who knows if it is watching us. Or if it is lis-. Listen, can we please just get rid of it now?" Bryan urges.

"Bryan, I'm just as afraid of that thing as you are. We will figure something out soon. Let's just rest for the night and see what we will do tomo-," Jesse replies. They heard a loud bang downstairs. They locked the door and scattered in his room in fear.

"This is exactly what I mean. I can't deal with this anymore," Bryan whispers.

"Let's just spend the night together here, okay? We'll wait for mom to get back and everything will be fine," Jesse reassured. The two end up staying in that bedroom for hours upon hours. No food, no water, just them and their voices, the sound of the lightning and rain, and the constant noises outside the room. Bryan and Jesse are very tired. It is 9:00 PM and their mom still isn't back yet.

"I think I might fall asleep," Bryan claimed.

"Me too honestly. I'll fall asleep in these jeans for all I care," Jesse stated. "Crap," Jesse quickly said.

"What?" Bryan responded.

"No no no, I forgot about the maids," Jesse anxiously replied.

"Yeah, what about them?" Bryan asked.

"You know how mom always tells us to tell the maids to not clean the dining room…" she replied

"No Jesse. There's gotta be another way!" Bryan yelled.

"Shhhh. I have to. If I don't we will get into more trouble and I don't need that right now. You stay here, ok?" Jesse walks over to the door and takes a deep breath before leaving. She assumes they are in the kitchen but can't find them there. She continues to search for them around the mansion. She feels alone and isolated. Her heart begins racing even after holding it together. There is practically no illumination in the halls and she can hear faint noises that seem to be behind her. She picks up the pace yet can't find them still. Eventually, she gives up and

decides to head back to the room. It gets even darker, and she begins to jog. Then, she sprints. She sprints as if she is being chased; the wind hits her face but that doesn't stop her.

When she gets to the hall where the room is located, she notices a small figure in the distance. It appears to be holding a knife and staring right into Jesse's eyes. Its eyes fill with malice and its grin implies nothing but a threat. Without thinking twice, Jesse quickly finds the closest room to her and runs into it; she ends up running into the storage room. Its corners are filled with cobwebs. The paint on the walls is ripping off. Plastic bags that haven't been touched in decades are decomposing. The lights are flickering. Regardless, Jesse fights through this and builds up the courage to yell out to Bryan, "BRYAN, LOCK YOUR DOOR AND CALL THE COPS!" Immediately, Bryan begins to shake and cry; he assumes Georgie has awoken.

Eventually, he ends up reaching for the landline phone and calls the cops to tell them about what's happening, "We ne...need as many co...cops as you ca...can bring. There is a do...doll trying to ki...kill us." He doesn't manage to hold things together for too long, however; he continues to shake indefinitely. Just to make things worse, Georgie begins to slash the door. He's still holding the same grin that he held towards Jesse.

"JESSE I CAN'T LE...LEAVE! HE'S TRY...TRYING TO GET IN!" he cries and shouts. Jesse continues to push through the fear and formulates a plan to save Bryan; she will exit the room to get Georgie's attention and then run back in once Georgie makes way to her.

"HOLD ON, YOU ARE GOING TO BE OKAY!" she yells out. When Bryan screams at Georgie to stop, Jesse quickly makes a run out the door and gets Georgie's attention. "Come here you little shit!" Jesse emphasizes. Sure enough, Georgie suppresses his attempt to kill Bryan and runs towards Jesse. His hair is flying back and his knife is continuously slashing the air. With his attention on Jesse, Bryan notices Georgie is gone. He looks through the hole Georgie made in his door and sees him running towards Jesse. He immediately opens the door and makes a run for it.

In the meantime, Jesse successfully makes it back into the room. With tears running down his cheeks, Bryan runs as far away as he can from the scene. Halfway through his escape, he decides to make way back to where Jesse came from. Throughout this new route, he spots the dead bodies of the maids. He also notices that they almost finished making dinner for himself and Jesse. The thought of how good the food would've tasted doesn't even pass through his mind. The only thing he can taste is his tears right now.

Eventually, Bryan makes it back to where Jesse came from. He ensures his steps are faint and his exposure is at a minimum. He realizes that Georgie is trying to barge into the storage room. This time, he notices the grin on Georgie's face is gone and sees tears instead. Bryan fills up with sympathy and remorse for him and he wants to cry even harder; Georgie used to be his best friend and Bryan's family just abandoned him. Bryan breaks through this phase though and quickly creates a viable distraction to save Jesse; he throws one of his dilapidated slippers down the hall near the room he previously escaped from. Once again, Georgie ends up falling for it and makes his way towards the sound. This time, his walk is slower and his head is down. Additionally, his panting is evident. "What have I done," Georgie says in regret.

Once Georgie reaches the distraction, Bryan makes a run for the storage room and yells out to Jesse, "JESSE OPEN THE DOOR. JESSE!" With her quick reflexes, Jesse kicks the door open and Bryan makes it just in time before Georgie reaches him. The two hug each other and cry in each other's arms. Afterward, their hug session is cut off by the cries of Georgie. He seems so regretful and his cries only increase in volume.

"I'm sorry. Please, forgive me. I'm lost. I'm hopeless. YOU DID THIS TO MEEE! YOU DID!" Georgie screams. His melodrama comes to a stop once footsteps arise down the hall.

Jesse and Bryan assume it is their mom and yell out for her, “MOM, RUN!” Georgie begins running towards their mom. This time, he runs as if he is the one getting chased.

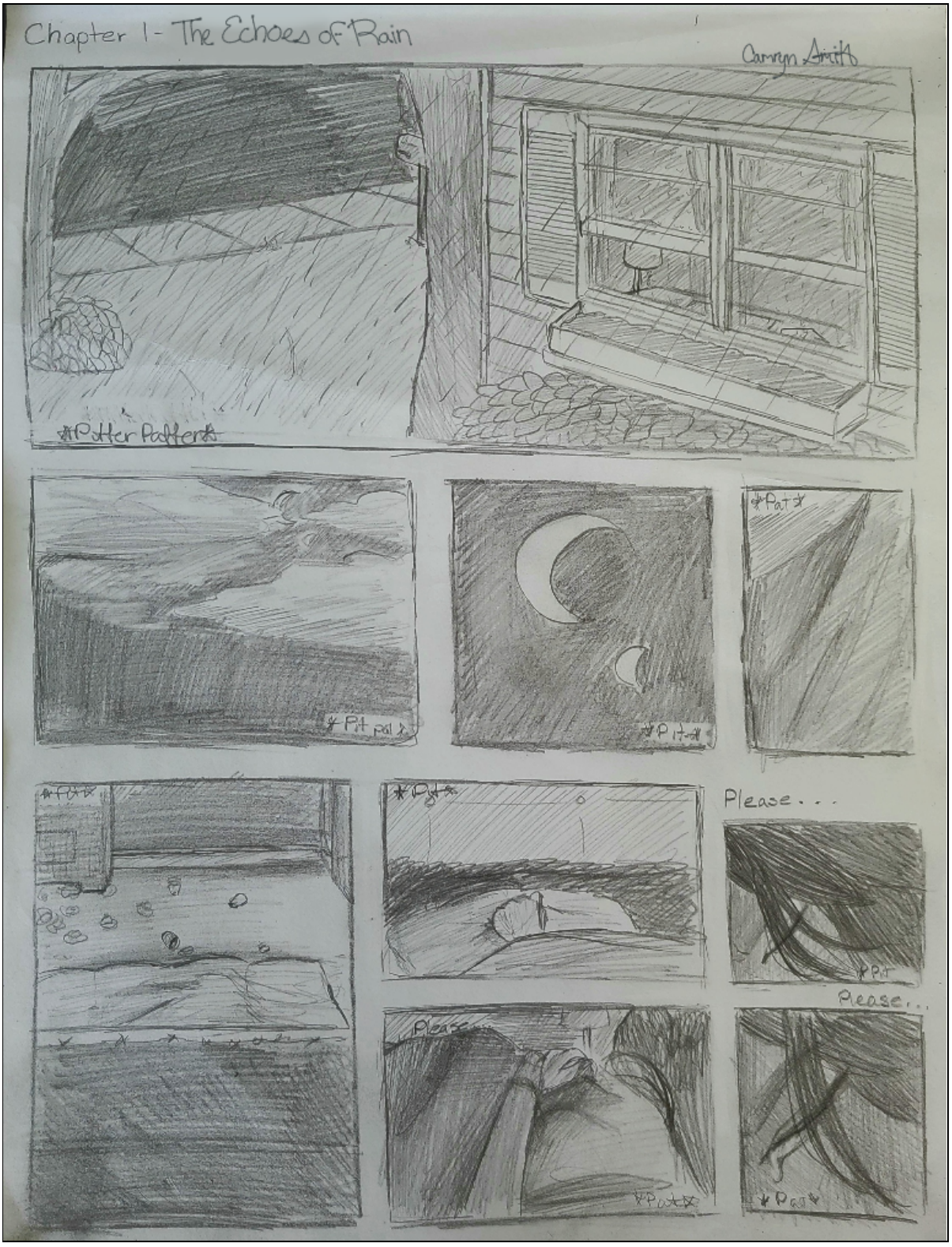
“Don’t worry kids, everything is going to be just fine,” their mom calmly says. Right as Georgie is about to slash their mom, a gunshot goes off. Their mom opens her eyes after she is about to accept her death and sees a group of cops down the hall. She is filled with relief but with confusion and fear as well. She bursts out in tears as Bryan and Jesse run into her arms. The warmth of their hug controls her emotions. Afterward, the cops ensure their safety and any possible injuries.

After the family gets cleared, the cops take them outside. It is still thundering and the sky is now pitch black. They get into their car and follow the cops out. They don’t say anything to each other. The only present sounds are the windshield wipers, thunder, and rain. The three of them are filled with nothing but chilling images in their head. They aren’t sure where to go, but keep driving.

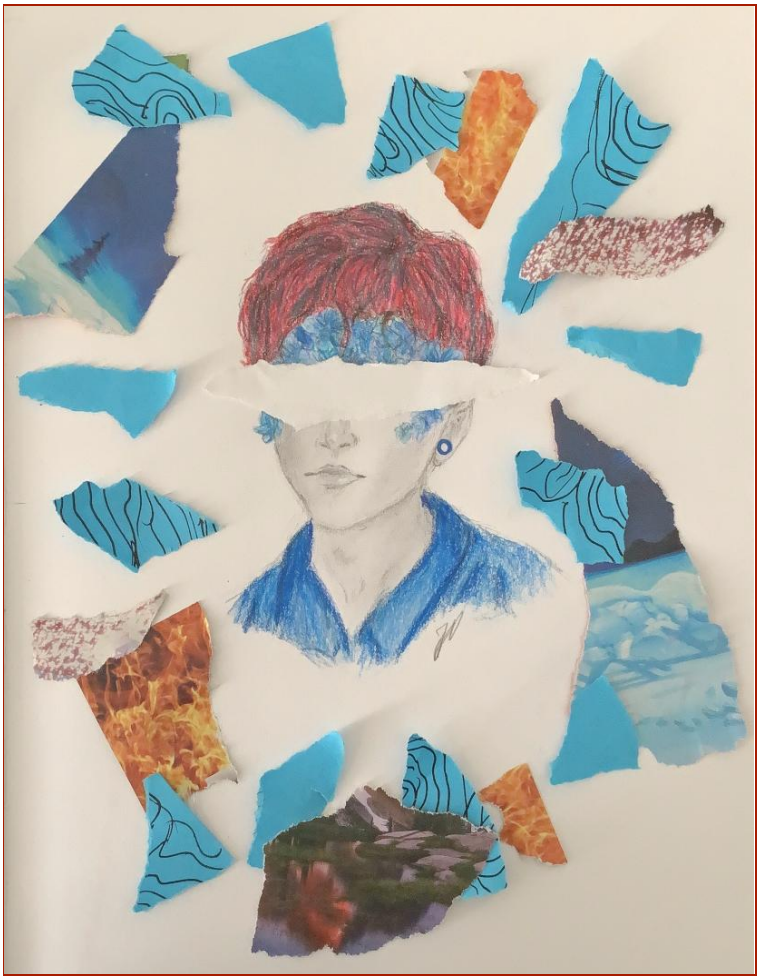
ART BELOW

ART

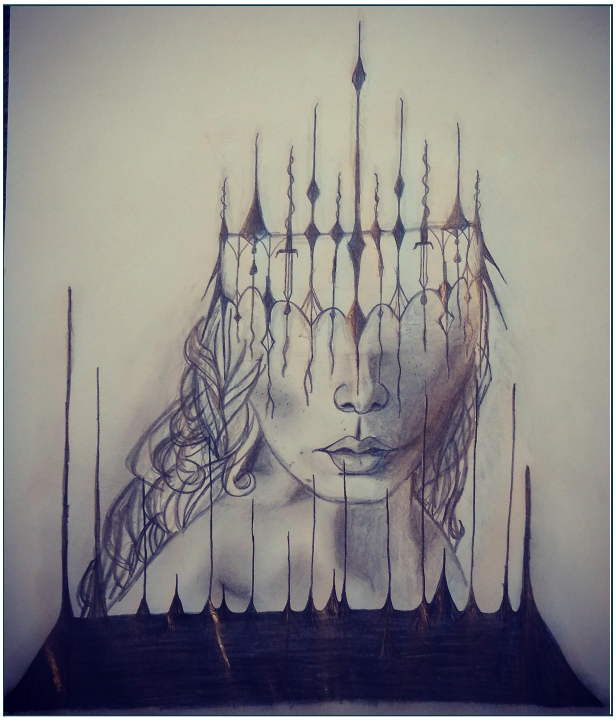
Untitled- Camryn Smith



The Echoes of Rain - Camryn Smith



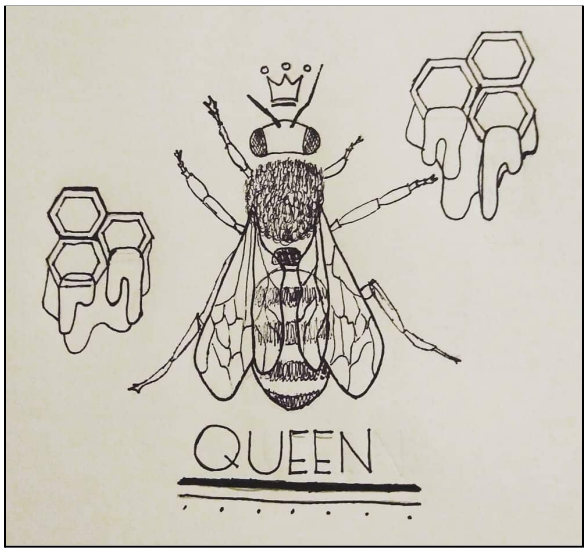
Untitled- Jill DeMaio



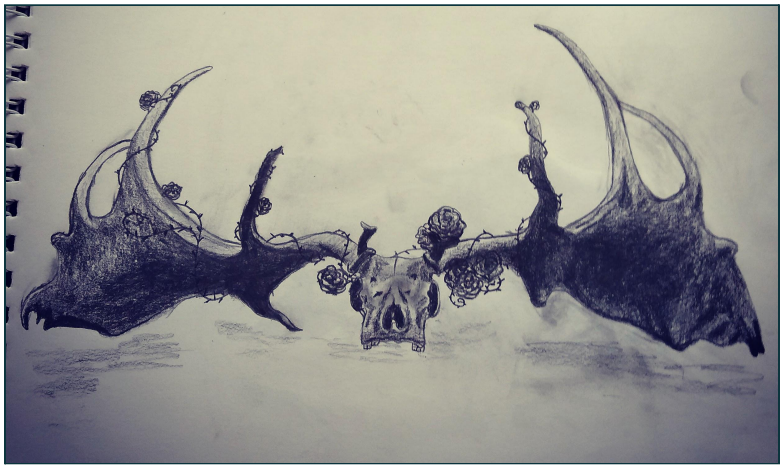
(Above from left to right is: Caged- Noelle F. Main and *Untitled Collage*- Isabella McDavid

Sakura- N.F. Main

Rain- N.F. Main

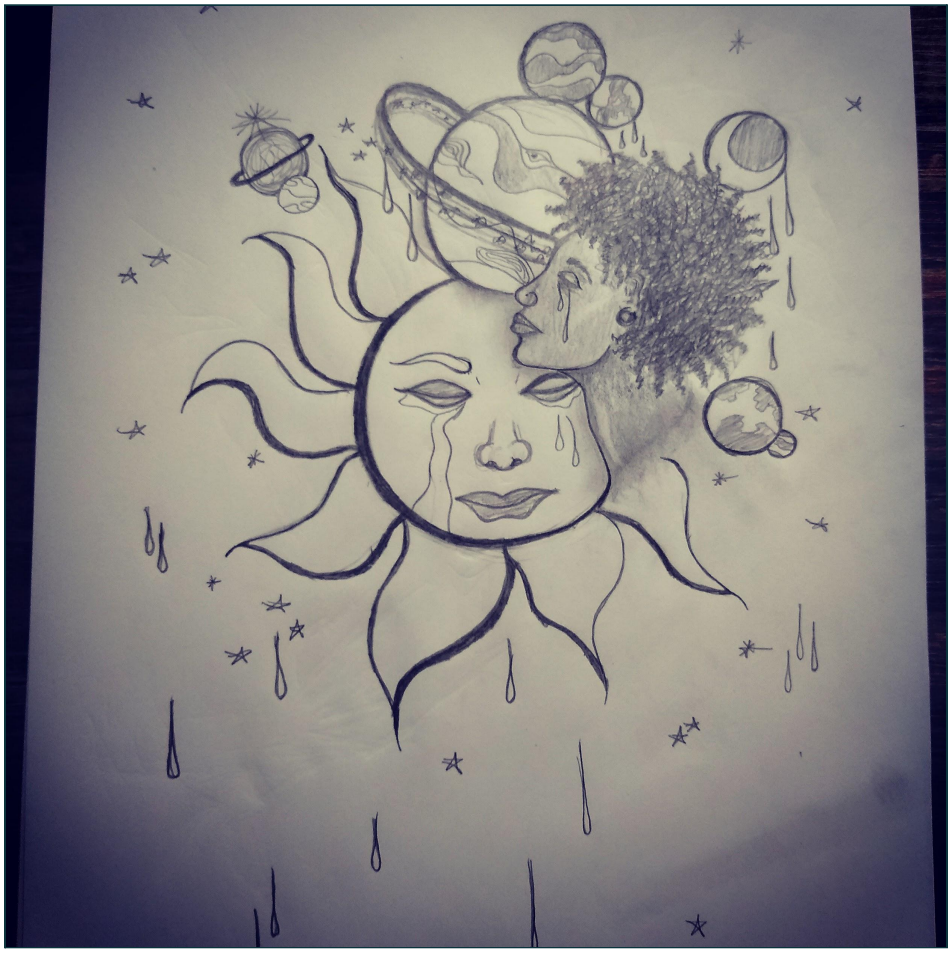


Royal- N.F. Main



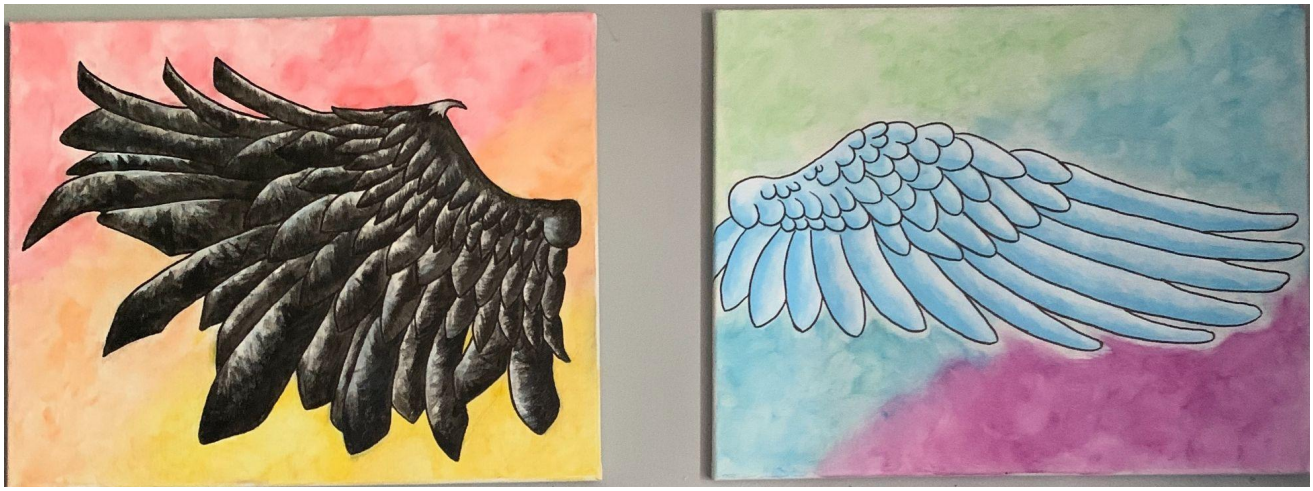
Elch-N.F. Main

Untitled-Isabella McDavid



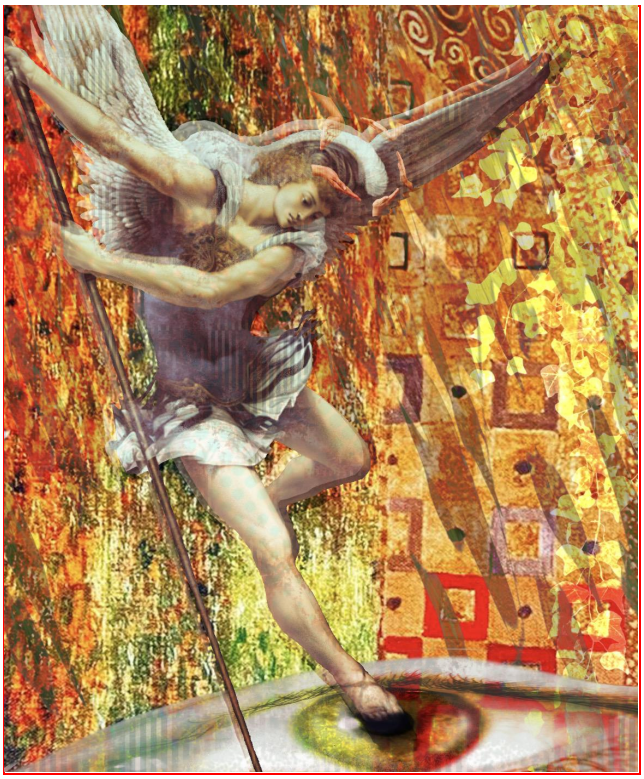
Tears of Saturn- Noelle F. Main

NB- N.F.M.



Untitled- L. Theriault

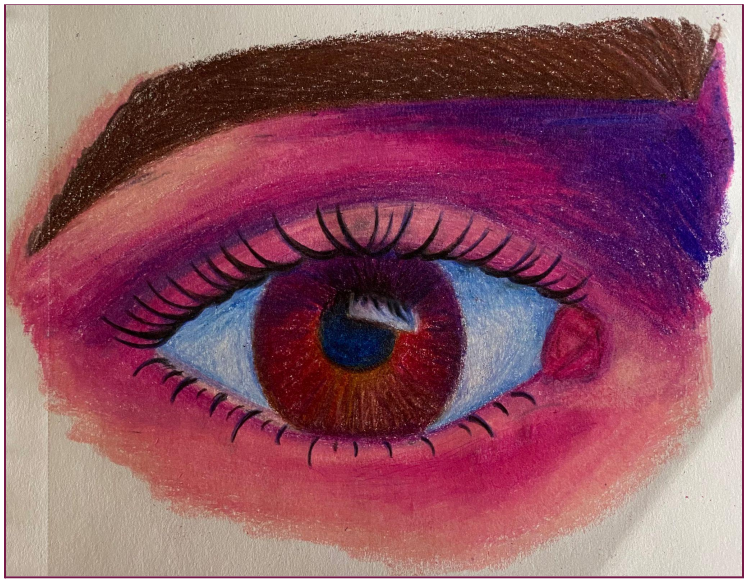
Untitled- Lily Theriault



Untitled Collage- Isabella M.

Untitled- L. Theriault

3 Untitled- L. Theriault (below)



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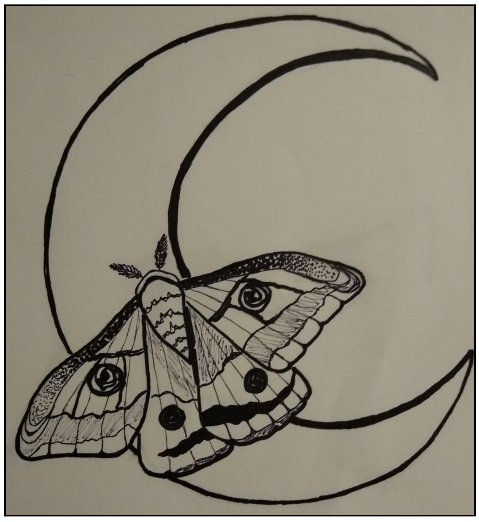
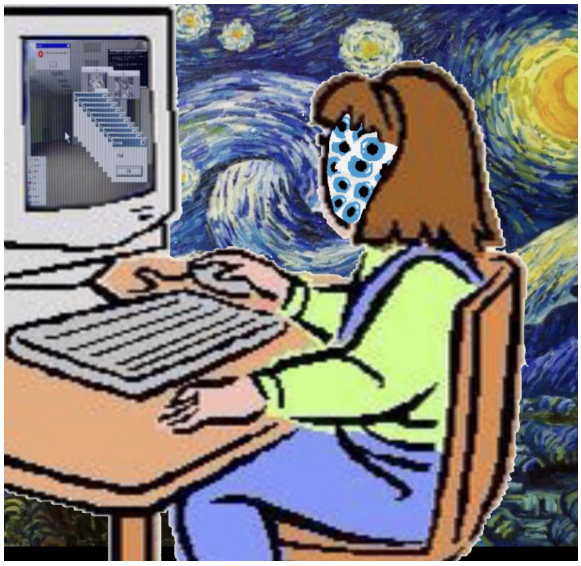
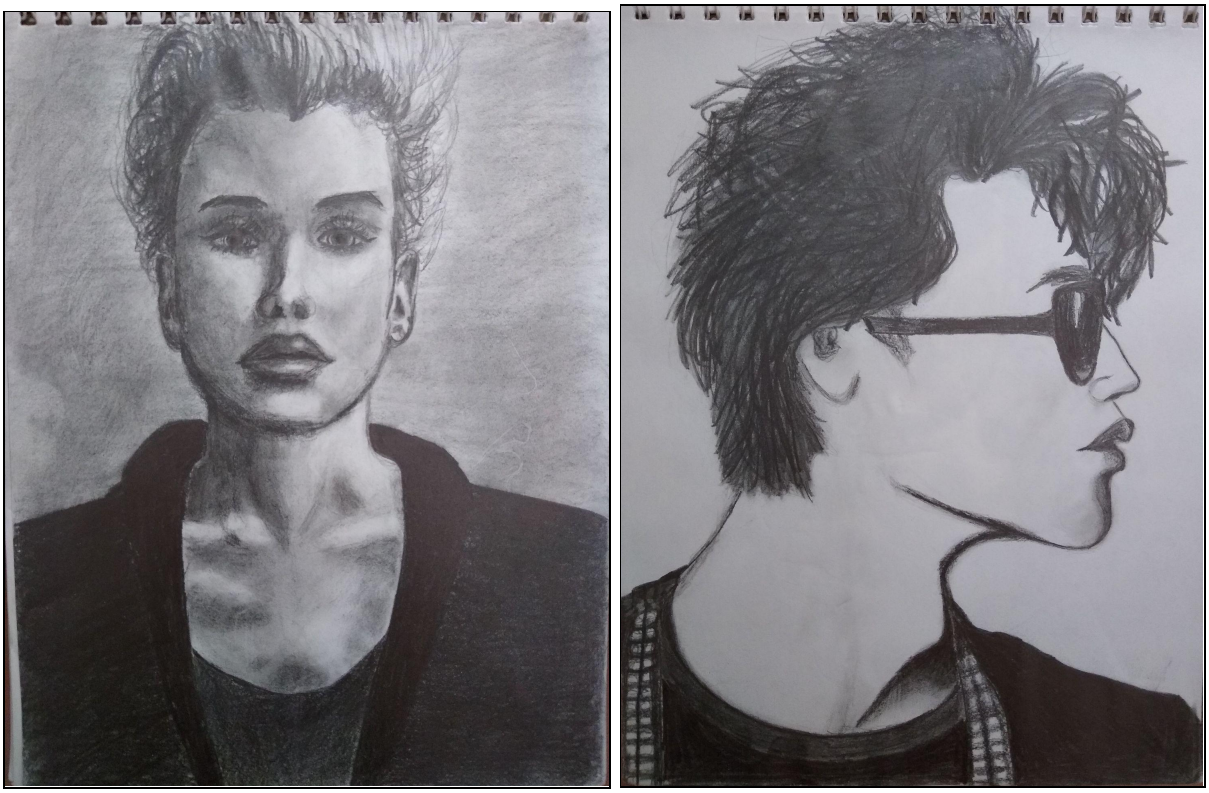


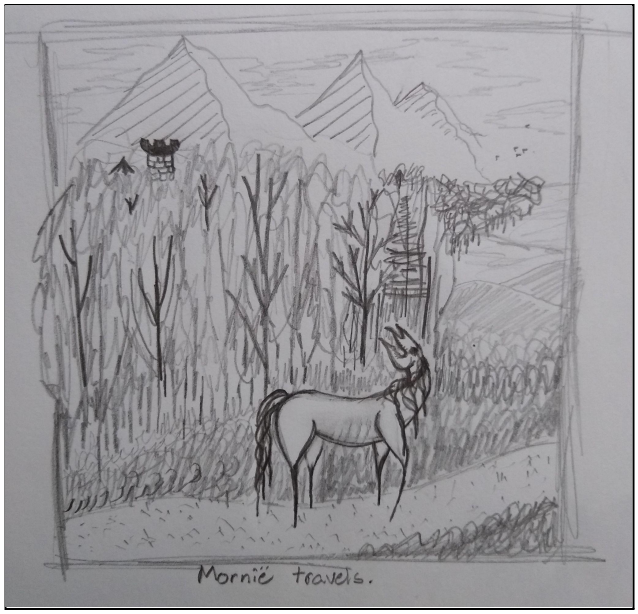


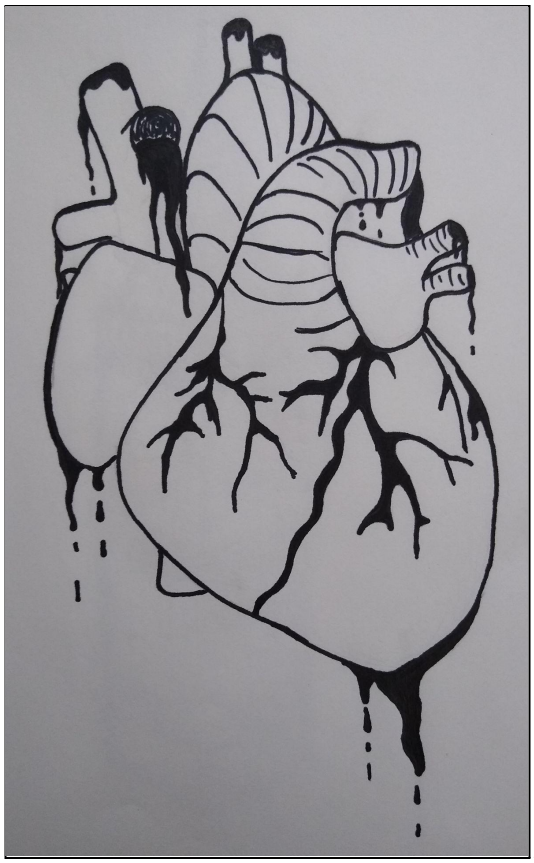


Studies- N.F.M.

The Forest- N.F.M.

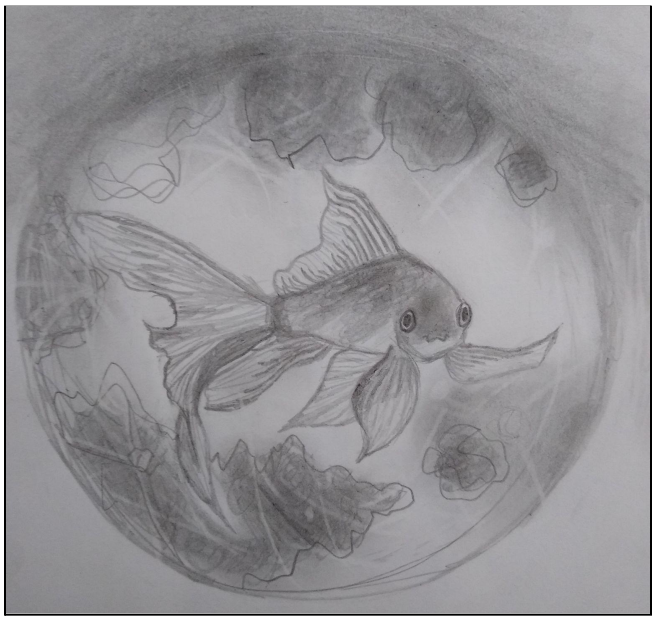
The Ritual- N.F.M.

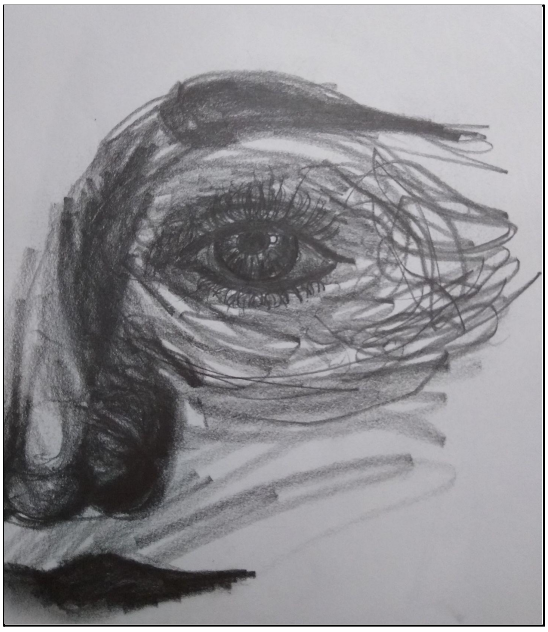




Heart

N.F.M.





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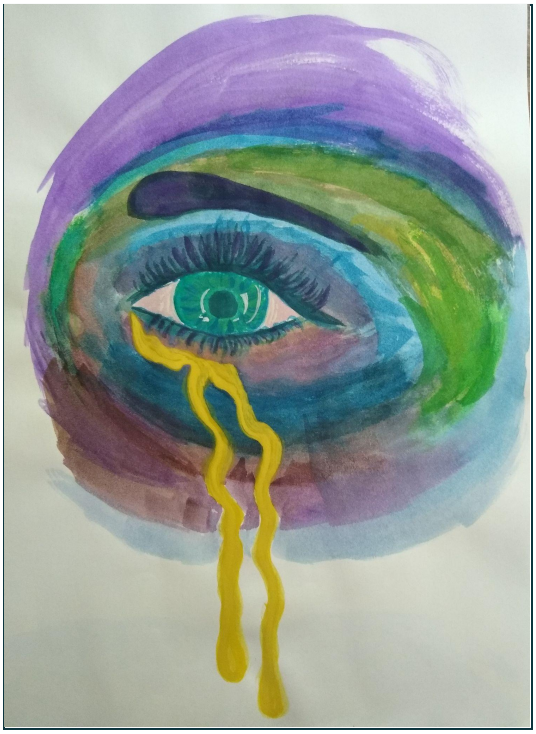
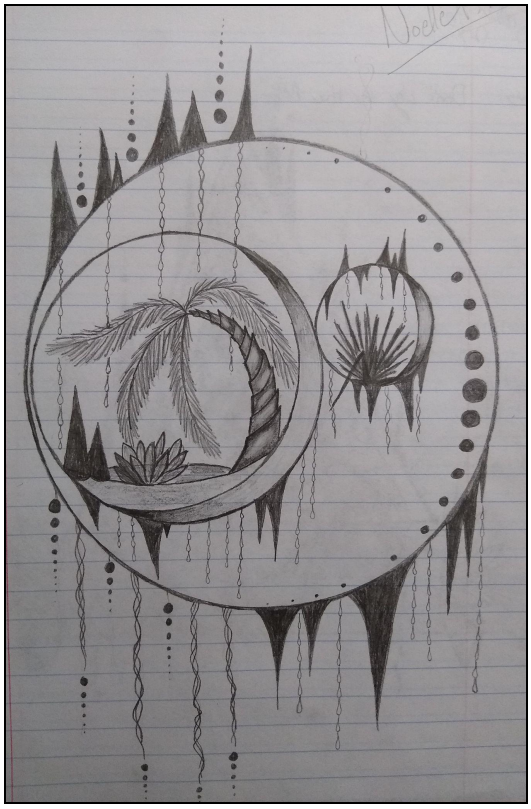
N.F.M.



- N.F.M



Sublime-N.F.M.

Flora- N.F.M.

A Gift for the Darkness -Charlotte Monty