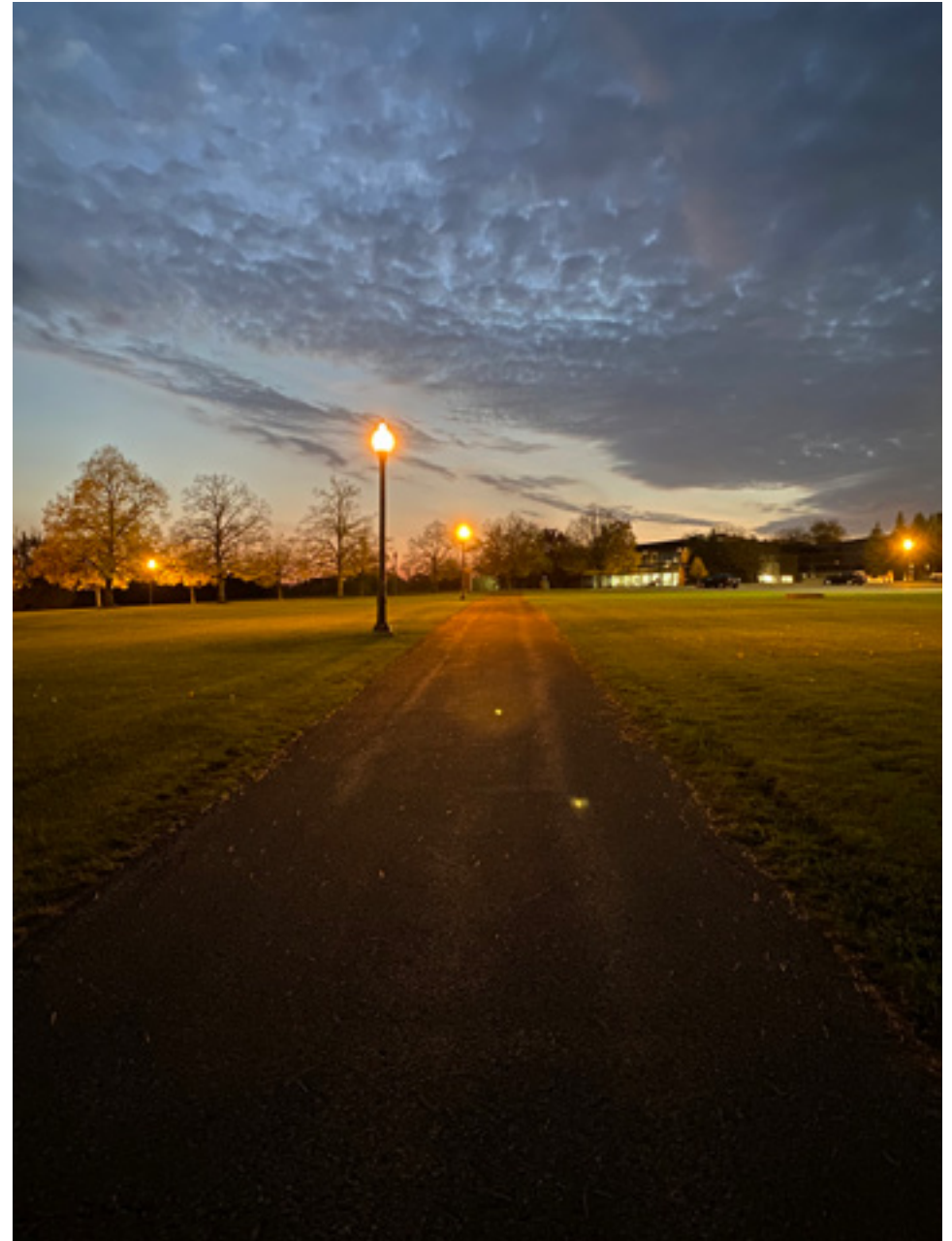


A black Fender Phatton 150W guitar amplifier is shown against a plain white background. The amplifier is oriented vertically. On the top surface, four small, greyish-brown birds are perched. On the bottom surface, three similar birds are perched. The Fender logo is visible on both the top and bottom panels. A microphone is plugged into the top panel, and a cable is plugged into the bottom panel. A green horizontal bar with the word "PHATHON" in white capital letters is superimposed across the middle of the image.

PHATHON



Path to Success by Kaitlyn Jenks

cover photo by Xueli Wang



Ethan Babowicz

About Phaethon

The myth of Phaethon is simple. He seeks to know his father. So he asks his mother Clymene, and she tells him his father is none other than Apollo, the god of the sun. Phaethon goes to Apollo and asks for some proof of their relationship, and Apollo says he will grant him one wish. Phaethon wishes to drive Apollo's chariot that pulls the sun across the sky. The only being that can do this successfully is Apollo himself. Not even Zeus can pull the sun across the sky. Knowing this, Apollo tries to dissuade Phaethon from this task. This does not work, and Phaethon is placed in charge of the chariot and its horses that breathe fire. Doomed from the start, Phaethon loses control of the chariot and nearly burns up the Earth. The Earth cries out to Zeus for help, and Zeus strikes Phaethon dead with a thunderbolt. Phaethon, now a falling star, plunged into the river Eridanos still ablaze. His epitaph reads:

*Here Phaethon lies who in the sun-god's chariot fared.
And though he greatly failed, more greatly he dared.*

In the spirit of this figure, we at the Phaethon value bold, confident, daring, courageous, and risky fiction, poetry, and art. Phaethon is not a tragic figure. His actions, that of a mere mortal, for a brief moment of time are equal to an immortal. He did something no other mortal, or immortal for that matter, could ever do. His confidence, courage, and daring are an inspiration to all of us. We too, if we risk our very lives, can be gods.

So we want pieces that challenge, inspire, stump, and move us. We crave new expression. New ideas. New connections. We do not value art that tests the boundaries of expression. We value art that obliterates them.

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The World's a Little Off by Kaitlyn Jenks

Time

Benjamin Griffin

Time is a ticking clock,
an impatient deadline, hovering over you.

Time is each moment, and everything which led up to it. It's an insult

It is brief, yet relentless.

It is infinite but limited.

Why must we experience time?

Time is a commodity, yet it is inevitable.

A moment may be stretched

And a lifetime may flash by.

Time is relative to our experience of it.

We are but momentary specs in this world

Time will prevail.

It is eternal.

If only we had more time,

If only.

The Ivory Cabinet

Carynn Bohley

When it came to finding square roots or understanding scientific formulas, Belle was clueless. If one were to ask her the capital of Minnesota, or how molecular bonds form, she wouldn't be able to answer. She could play no musical instruments, no sports were to her liking, and she didn't have a creative bone in her body.

But of one thing, Belle was completely certain: She was absolutely, undeniably beautiful.

Perhaps it was the precise symmetry of her heart-shaped face, or the way her dark, doe-eyes were just as delicate as they were fierce. She carried herself with a vulnerability that demanded protection and compassion, but still managed to hold an air of intense confidence. Her warm complexion sparked envy in her peers and admiration in strangers. Her charm had no match. To all who beheld her, she was perfect.

Though she tried to remain humble and keep her focus away from her looks, she couldn't help feeling strong because of it. She felt that it gave her an advantage, like she was a step ahead of those around her. Yet, somehow, this mental barrier which she had constructed became a source of isolation.

Perhaps this was why she was so fascinated when she first entered the figurine store. It was a new establishment, but there was something very ancient about it. This wasn't a surprise, what with the tacky, floral wallpaper, and the floorboards, which had accumulated a layer of dust too stubborn to be swept.

As someone who was so organized and immaculate, Belle's first instinct should have been to make a run for it. Her friends did just this; they wrinkled their noses in disgust and left the building without a second glance.

But Belle was frozen in place, her eyes transfixed on the surface of a pure white cabinet that sat on the far end of the room. It was here that an array of figures stood, stuck in time and space, angelic little people that gleamed under the dim light that hung overhead. Belle had no remembrance of approaching them, but soon she found herself standing just inches away. She leaned down to get a closer look, and only then did

she understand the full extent of their beauty.

There were four of them. They weren't like the little statues that lined the other shelves in the shop, made of rough wood, or fresh out of a plastic mold. These ones were crafted from the same material as the cabinet on which they sat; they were carved from a gleaming white stone. Their features were impossibly perfect, and bore ornate details too small for the eye to fully comprehend.

Belle, who spent her life being praised for her looks, had finally discovered something as beautiful as she was. And she wanted them. She wanted them more than she'd ever wanted anything.

"Ivory," a faint voice murmured, and Belle whipped around to face the speaker. An elderly woman stood at the entrance of the back room, her aged lips curled up into a smile. The lines of age drew a maze across her face, which danced and grew deeper as she spoke. "They're a beauty, aren't they?"

Belle nodded, but she couldn't will herself to speak. She couldn't remove her gaze from the woman's eyes, which were white and cloudy. Her blindness was clear, but still she managed to look straight at Belle with an intensity that made her stomach squeeze in discomfort.

"There are so few upon this earth who carry such charm and grace," she went on, her unseeing eyes trained on Belle's. "It's a gift, child. Don't waste it."

As she began to grow anxious from the peculiarity of the situation, Belle forced herself to respond. "Um... Thanks. I'd better be going, now."

She turned and hurried from the room before the woman could continue the conversation.

When Belle closed the shop door behind her and stepped out onto the sidewalk, her friends were waiting.

"What were you doing in there?" Olivia asked, a laugh in her tone.

"Yeah, don't you have OCD or something?" Jessica added. "I'm surprised you weren't the first one out the door."

Belle shrugged and started walking to prove a point. "There were some cool things in there. The woman was creepy, though."

The two of them caught up. "I didn't see anyone," Olivia remarked. "And unless you're into cheap little trinkets that are totally overpriced, let's add that place to our No-Go list. Kay?"

Belle laughed, but somehow Olivia's words felt like an attack. It didn't make sense; it wasn't anything personal. Still, Belle found her thoughts creeping back to the perfect figures that stood upon the ivory cabinet.

After dinner, Belle paced her room. It wasn't often that she felt anxious like this. Sure, she was Type A, and despised when her plans went astray... but this was different. A longing like no other had engulfed her, and she was drowning in it. When she thought of the little ivory people, so beguiling and flawless, she felt a sense of belonging that she'd never come close to before. Each one was the quintessential human- the most perfect version of themselves, unsurpassable in every aspect of their beings- and to Belle, this idea was infatuating.

She didn't want them. No, she was far past wanting. She needed them.

And she would have them, even if it killed her.

After a fitful sleep fraught with intense fragments of nightmarish thoughts and dreams, Belle was relieved to see the sun peak over the horizon. The shop wouldn't be open for another two hours, at least... but perhaps the old woman could be reasoned with. Something that Belle had learned during the past few years was that money could buy anything, if you had enough of it. It could even buy time.

"And she would have them, even if it killed her."

The shop was only a few blocks away, so Belle decided to walk. The town was still sleeping, and few cars inhabited the streets. The sky remained an inky blue despite the sun's arrival, and the moon was still suspended above.

When she arrived, Belle found that the shop door was slightly ajar. A forceful thrill of panic and eagerness exploded through her chest, and she stepped inside. The faint smell of mothballs and old wood flooded into her nose, but she took no notice as her eyes locked on the cabinet in the darkness.

Again she stood just before the figures and couldn't remember the walk in between. Even with the deep shadows that brushed their faces and pooled around their feet, the ivory people were more beautiful than Belle had remembered.

She reached toward the closest one with trembling fingers, but she was afraid to touch it. Though they were strong and sturdy, the little people were also fragile and delicate. If Belle were to take one, she knew that she would have to handle it as she would a butterfly.

After a moment of hesitance, she drew her hand away. She turned to the empty desk, wondering when the woman would return. What excuse could she give about being here before the shop officially opened? Would the woman even care, considering the fact that Belle was going to make a purchase?

A sound too quiet to make out touched the silence, and Belle scanned the darkness vigilantly.

Everything was still.

When the noise came again, Belle turned to face the door that led to the shop's back room. She crept closer to it, her ears strained, and that's when she realized that it was a faint voice that had caught her attention.

Belle pushed the door carefully open and stepped inside. Shelves of boxes lined the walls and thick gray cobwebs clung to the ceiling. An antique desk stood a yard or so away from the room's entrance, and it was here that the old woman sat. She was hunched over something, her neck

craned down and her shoulders drawn up to her ears. In her fingers she grasped the handle of an ivory mirror, which she stared down at intently.

"Gone... it's... it doesn't stay long, you know, not unless.... But such a price to pay..." She rambled under her breath, and Belle almost turned around and went home.

Then the woman looked up. Her white eyes found Belle, and her laugh was like the croak of a bullfrog. "I knew you'd come back."

Belle's hand found the doorknob. "I'm sorry... the front door was open."

"Don't be sorry. I hoped to see you again."

Belle's gaze returned to the mirror, and she couldn't help her curiosity. "That mirror... it's beautiful. It's made of ivory, right?"

"I've found that the finest things are." The woman stroked the handle fondly, her eyes cast down to her reflection once more.

"I can't help asking..." Belle ventured, her grip on the knob tightening. "How did you know who I am? Aren't you.... You know..."

"I may not see with my eyes, child, but that doesn't mean that I do not see," the woman told her. "I've always had a special appreciation for beauty. I can sense it. It's the reason why I can see this mirror, but not my reflection."

Belle's lips moved but no words passed through them.

"I was beautiful, once, if you can believe it. But like the sunlight fades at the end of the day, so did I. And now, I can do nothing more than seek the beauty of others."

Belle swallowed. "The mirror isn't for sale, is it?"

"Not this one," the woman said solemnly. "But it has a brother, which lives in the cabinet."

The ivory cabinet, Belle thought, her heart pounding with exhilaration.

"I want it. I don't care how much it is."

When she returned to the cabinet, it was another minute before the old woman caught up. She hobbled out of the back room and stopped a few feet away, her eyes trained on Belle. "It's in that drawer," she said, gesturing.

Belle turned and looked down at it, admiring the pearly white handle and glossy surface. Her eagerness consumed her all at once, and she pulled it open to reveal the matching mirror. It laid face-down, and Belle felt a thrill as she took hold of the handle.

She lifted it up before turning it in her hands, aching to see how she looked framed by ivory.

As she caught sight of her eyes, deep brown with golden accents, they filled with a stark white light. It flooded across her skin, taking root in her hair and rushing down her face. She barely had a chance to gasp as she felt her body go rigid; the ivory swept down her torso and legs, enveloping her completely. The mirror dropped from her hand, and she began to rapidly shrink under the weight of the old woman's empty gaze.

As the light of early morning filtered into the room, the woman leaned down and carefully lifted the figure from the floor. With a small smile, she placed it beside the others who stood on the ivory cabinet.



Dark Horse by Amy Marie Kosina



Chase Halstead

Half a Hundred

Daniel Sargent

Drunk with lack of disaster
 And not burdened by wisdom,
 In my youth I believed I belonged
 And was connected with
 Trees and seasons, cities and men,
 Wind and the ways of water, and
 Everything.
 Now with half a hundred gone
 It all stands ever further off,
 And I resent the distance,
 My constant and growing failure
 To be close to the world,
 My inability to be
 Anything.
 Words fade on the darkened page,
 But some things stand out clearer now:
 Vultures spiraling in the spring
 Over fields just free of snow,
 And how we all, like flipping coins,
 Resolve ourselves in
 Nothing.

digital
photography
fall 2020



Kendra McGovern



Kendra McGovern



Aleksandra Korol



Chase Halstead



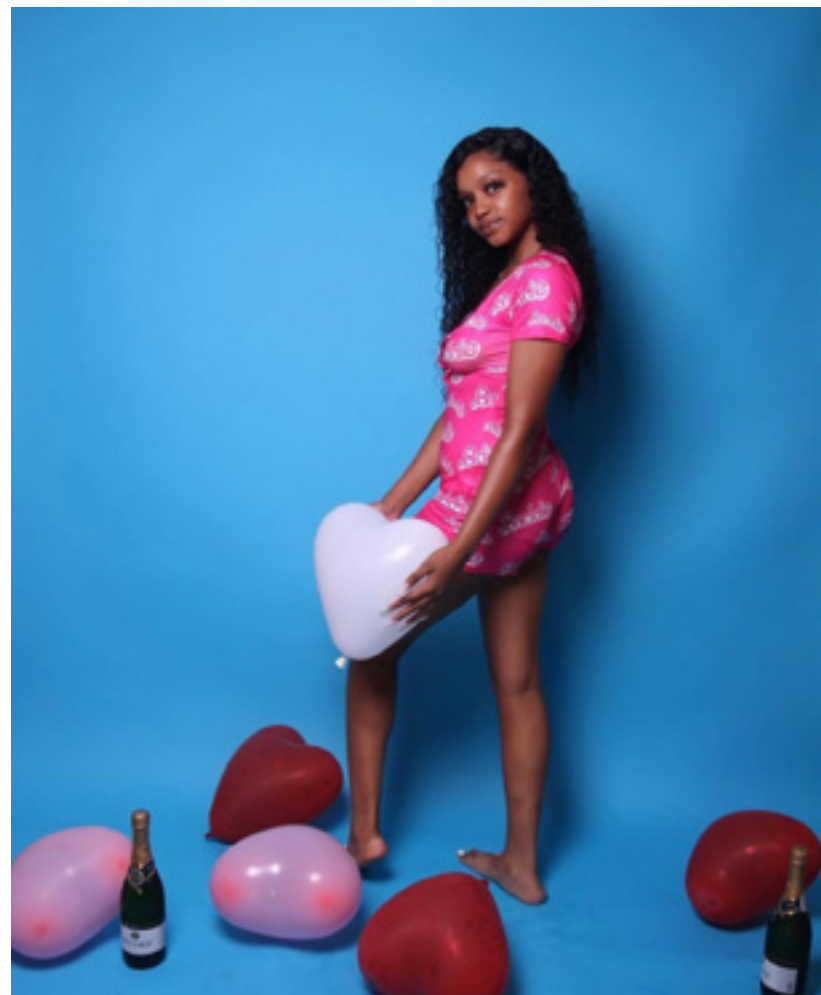
Michael Ford



Michael Ford



Michael Ford



Sky Ciriaco



Kendra McGovern



Timothy Cloonan



Kendra McGovern



Aleksandra Korol



Aleksandra Korol



Aleksandra Korol



Sky Ciriaco



Aleksandra Korol



Anti-Lock Brakes

Aubrey Ketcham

I'd always liked the sound of cars driving by late at night, water splashing under the tires as the sound grew loud and then silent within an instant. I soon realized that they sounded better through my bedroom window. I'd stayed in three different motels before running out of money and sleeping in my car; anything beat living with my drunken father and hypocritical mother, though.

It took me about a month to find an income; landing a job at a record store would do for a while. The job kind of fell into my lap, really. I had met a man about six inches taller than me with a face aged by tobacco, booze, and a hard life. He was playing a beat-up guitar and singing in a raspy voice on the side of the road. I could play a little bit too, but I was only good enough to know how shitty I was. He was different though—Jimmy Page with Slash's aura. I was on my way to scavenge some food with the few coins I had in my pocket when he caught me staring. I quickly looked away and tried not to make eye-contact again, but he initiated a conversation anyway.

"A little bit goes a long way," he motioned toward the open guitar case sitting at his feet with a nod of his head; it probably held a total of fifteen dollars. I pulled out the change in my pocket.

"Food money."

"That's all you got? Hell, I make more than that being a bum on the side of the road within an hour."

"Not all of us are so fortunate." He picked up on my sarcasm. He looked me up and down, I'm sure taking note of my unwashed clothes and the little facial hair that grew around my jaw.

"Well, when I ditched my parents, I made sure I was self-sufficient, kid."

I was ashamed of my appearance—even though I grew up broke, my parents always made sure I looked presentable. I blew off his nasty tone and retorted back.

"Oh yeah? What do you do for a living? I'm sure your gig here doesn't pay the bills."

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” He looked as if he was lecturing me. “I own a record shop. Could use some help though, I spend most of my day there. You need a job?” I put aside my pride and nodded my head. “I figured as much. Here’s the address,” he said, handing me a thick business card. “Your shift starts at nine a.m. tomorrow. I’ll be there to help open up and show you the ropes.” He handed me the money in his guitar case. “Go get some food now, I can see your collar bones through your shirt.”

Within a few weeks, I grew close with the guitar man; within months, he became more of a father to me than my old man. He took better care of me than my parents. He let me stay in his apartment- which was small, but at least he owned it- and like he’d mentioned to me before, we spent most every day at the record shop. Nine ‘o’clock came around and we were about to close the shop when he finally asked about my parents.

“Why’d you leave home, anyway? I figure since I let you stay at my place, you could at least tell me why you’re on the road.”

“My parents are getting a divorce and don’t know it yet,” I replied in a still tone. I didn’t let it bother me anymore – at least that’s what I told myself.

“I see. I wanna show you something,” he grabbed the keys to his rusty pick-up and saw my look of confusion. “Don’t ask any questions, just follow me. Lock the door on your way out.”

Aside from the tires on the slick road, all that could be heard was the slight buzz of the old radio and a song playing in the background. A bright light shone from the dashboard, illuminating his face in a dim yellow tone.

“Your brakes are out?” I broke the silence.

“Just the anti-lock system,” he paused a moment before speaking again. “If God says it’s my time to go, I don’t need no man-made invention keeping me here on this damned planet.”

“A bit morbid, Ed. I’ve been in this truck more times than I can count...” I trailed off, thinking about every ran stop sign and surpassed speed limit

he’d brought upon us. He just scoffed.

“We’re here.”

I looked around, finding nothing that particularly stood out. “What’s here?” I sounded a bit annoyed. He opened his door and hopped out, motioning for me to follow. As we walked a few paces I saw that we’d been moving toward a house that looked as if it’d been empty for at least ten years. “Whose house is this?”

“This is where I grew up. My parents divorced when I was young, and I had to raise myself here. It’s my father’s old place,” his stare was held on the old wooden door.

“Why’d you bring me here?”

“I’ve been where you are, kid. I was you twenty years ago – on my own. You’re not alone.”

I didn’t know what to say. I thought I’d led him to believing I didn’t miss my family, but I guess he knew the feeling all too well. “When my mom would move out, my dad would sit at home and get drunk, blaming their whole situation on me; I guess that’s typical.”

He nodded his head.

“My mom would cry to me over the phone for hours, and I’d try to comfort her, but they made up so often it seemed pointless after a while. I wanted to be a good son,” I looked at my worn shoes. “They’d ask me for money all the time – I was paying a damn monthly mortgage on a house that didn’t even belong to me. The worst of it was that they didn’t even appreciate it. They threatened to kick me out five times a week, sometimes twice in a day.”

As much as I tried to fight it, my eyes swelled with tears. I couldn’t look at Ed, but I could feel his stare burning through me. “I don’t care anymore,” I sniffled, and wiped my eyes with the back of my hand. He patted my shoulder and gave an empathetic half-smile; that was the closest gesture of love I’d receive from him.

“Quit playing that disco shit in here, kid. You’re running away my

"As much as I tried to fight it, my eyes swelled with tears. I couldn't look at Ed, but I could feel his stare burning through me."

business."

"Alice in Chains isn't disco, Ed. No one likes Grateful Dead anymore." Fighting over music choice was one of our hobbies. It was usually a lighthearted conversation, but I'd woken up that morning in a particularly bad mood – being at work didn't help.

"I've sold more Grateful Dead than you've sold – what do you call it – 'grunge' combined."

"It's gonna take off, you watch. It's already all over MTV," I said, not looking up from wiping the counter.

"You been saying that for a month now. Stop being so damn optimistic all the time, kid. This world will chew you up and spit you out. Seen it first-hand too many times to let that shit happen to you." I rolled my eyes, but he was right. He was always right and it pissed me off to no extent. I looked up from what I was doing to speak.

"You act so wise Ed, but you're just bitter because you really could have made something of yourself and you blew it. You sit in your shop all day pretending to love what you do, then you sit on the side of the road thinking people are listening to your music when they're just throwing pity money at you." There was a silence. I didn't mean what I'd said, but that didn't matter. His stone face didn't change expressions, but I knew he was hurt. Drawing in a long breath after what seemed like an eternity, he finally spoke.

"I thought I had you fooled." And with that he left.

I hadn't seen Ed for three days since our last encounter. I felt really shitty about where we had left off. There was so much I wanted to tell him – I wanted him to know how grateful I was for everything he'd done for me. I'd always been bad at letting people know how I felt about them.

He showed up one night for work after I'd just closed the shop. His eyes were glazed over and the smell of whiskey coming from his breath confirmed my suspicions of him being drunk.

"Ed, what the hell are you doing here – are you drunk?"

"It's my damn shop," he slurred his words. "I been thinking about what you said the other day and –" I tried to cut him off, but he didn't allow it. "Let me finish. I don't need no apology. I just don't want you to end up like me, kid. I see myself in you. You turn out any better than me, that's an apology in my book." He looked like he wanted to forgive me, and I think maybe he did, but I'm not so sure he forgave himself; for what I still ponder to this day.

"I'm going for a drive."

"You're drunk."

"I'm fine," he said, starting toward the door.

"Sober up first," I said before he turned to face me. "Please."

We sat in the record shop for a few hours listening to music and playing cards until he seemed good to drive. I genuinely enjoyed that man's company. We had a few good laughs, though bittersweet, before he grabbed his keys.

"You sure you wanna come?"

I hesitated before nodding my head; he seemed wary.

I was sitting shotgun while we listened to the barely-audible radio. He had his cruise control set at 76 miles per hour on the thruway. He ignored placing his seatbelt over his lap, but that was nothing unusual. It was almost midnight and he was in a hurry to get us nowhere. Both windows were rolled down and his messy hair flew about the top of his head, reflecting the dim yellow light and blocking his vision here and there. Drawing in a deep breath, he placed a pair of sunglasses over his closed eyes, leaned his seat back, and let go of the wheel to light a

cigarette.

“Ed, what are you doing?” Panic arose deep in my gut as the car started to swerve from the left lane to the right, then over the rumble strip.

“Be good, Tony. Be better than me,” he said without opening his eyes. Adrenaline pumped through my veins as he slammed on the breaks; it didn’t matter. I watched his car sideswipe the guard rail, and with that, Ed wrapped us around a tree.

He died on the sight. I barely survived, but after a few surgeries and casts I was back to work at the record shop. Not a day goes by that I don’t wonder what that man could have contributed to this life. I wish I hadn’t been right about him.



Cotton Shine by Kaitlyn Jenks



Utopia by Kaitlyn Jenks



Storm Clouds by Vicki L. Brown



Chimney Bluffs by Vicki L. Brown

Unforgettable You

Benjamin Griffin

She terrifies me.

She is a storm brewing in Bermuda.

She is a disease plaguing a nation.

She's a fist-sized dent in the fridge.

She is the love of my life.

If only she knew.

If only she knew how her laugh made me nervous.

Or how her eyes ripped through my conscious,

and exposed my soul.

Suddenly, only her and I exist in this world.

She's ripped my heart out,

But I don't want it back.

Please, don't give it back.

A Brother's Love

Caitlyn Loucks

The sun was rising over the hill, and Brian could feel the crisp autumn breeze as the leaves danced along the sidewalk. Well, he remembered what it had felt like. Exhausted, Brian packed up his journal and stepped away from the oak tree that had become his home. He walked down the road ahead and turned left toward his childhood home.

The street was quiet at this time of day. As he walked, Brian could only remember the sound his footsteps had made to help break the silence. Brian did this often; he would make the walk back to his mother's house just to check on her. Occasionally, he would catch the end of a phone call with his brother, or a passing glimpse of his sister when she would stop by.

Brian arrived at the dark house; everyone was still sleeping. He slipped inside and walked through the rooms as he always had, vivid memories flashing before his eyes. He could see his dad leaving, and the hopeful look in his own eyes that it was finally over. He saw himself and his siblings playing the PlayStation 2 that the Easter Bunny so generously left that year; as he paced the rooms, he continued to watch time pass.

Today was not an ordinary visit for Brian. He had overheard his mom on the phone the day before. His baby sister was a new foster mom, and she was going to bring her daughter by. Brian so desperately wanted to know his new niece, to know his sister as a mother.

Brian reminisced about when she was born, his baby sister. They were poor at the time...really poor. There wasn't extra money for little girls' toys, and Brian was determined his

sister would not have to go without. The night Mom went to this hospital, Brian approached his grandmother, whom he affectionately called Nanny, for some help. "Nanny..." He said with a few mismatched socks in his hands. "...would you help me make my new baby sister a doll with these?"

Nanny was elated; she put her tea down and with a smile said, "Of course."

They had done it. Brian had made his baby sister a doll. She had buttons for eyes and the most perfect pink yarn for hair. He couldn't wait for her

to come home.

As Brian played through this over and over again in his head, he began to hear a stir in the house. It was his mom; she was awake. He watched as she made her coffee and sat on the couch just as she always had. He sat next to her, wishing with everything he had that she could feel him there.

As the day grew later, Brian began to feel the anxiety creeping up in his throat. He knew she would be there soon. Quietly, he walked up the stairs to his baby sister's bedroom, the most painful room in the house, filled with haunting memories. Brian carefully stepped inside, hanging on to the way his sister clung to him as they grew up. Brian was 8 years Catarina's senior, and she had hung on every word he said. She adored her big brother and would've done anything for him, and she always had.

As Brian sat on Catarina's bed, anticipating the painful memories to come, he heard a car door... They were here. He slunk back down the stairs contemplating what was worse, reliving himself as an addict stealing from his little sister, waking her up in the early hours because she knew where mom kept her money, or waiting for her to walk in the door as a mother, with his niece, and having no way to let her know what he was feeling.

"Grammy!!" A little voice came from the kitchen, "Grammy!! Mommy said you have puzzles!" It was Ivory. She was just under three and perfect in every way. He watched as she ran into the office, which was once their playroom.

Catarina followed behind with a soft giggle. "Sorry Mom, she was REALLY excited." Brian sat on the couch as he had before, but this time next to his baby sister. He reached out to touch her arm, to let her know he was there. She didn't notice.

"Ivory, would you like to see your mommy's very first baby doll?" His mom swept the little girl off her feet and began to head up the stairs, Catarina close behind.

When they reached Brian's old bedroom, he felt his heart drop. His Mom, niece and sister crossed the room to where his picture was displayed

on the wall, along with his published books, guitar and Catarina's doll sitting in a shadow box. He was surprised that "Molly", as she was named when Catarina could talk, was still around.

He had to look away. He peered into Catarina's room. This memory was not so great. Brian was 16, and he had run out of cigarettes and money for beer. It was late- or, well... early. Catarina was sleep in her bed. He continued to watch, insisting this was less painful than what was happening in front of him. He watched as a person he tried so hard to forget woke his baby sister up. "Cat, come on... get up. I need to borrow some money." Catarina was only 8. All she had left of her birthday money was in her jewelry box. She was saving it for a new doll.

As she stirred awake, she wiped the sleep from her eyes. "Brian? I only have a few dollars. Hang on." She went to her jewelry box, determined to only give him some of her money this time; she knew she wasn't getting in back. Cat handed the money to Brian, 15 dollars.

Fire grew inside of him, but he didn't snap- he laughed "Thanks baby sister, I love you." "I love you too, B," she muttered as she dozed back off.

Brian quickly made his way to the jewelry box, taking what was left.

Brian turned back to his family. That memory hurt so much more now than ever before. He watched as his mom, with tear filled eyes, shared his things with Ivory. More than ever he watched Catarina. She held no grudges; their harried past meant nothing to her. She stepped closer, taking her daughter into her arms, and spoke so softly. "Take a look at this, Ivory. This was Mommy's very first doll. When Mommy was a baby, Grammy didn't have a lot of money. So, Mommy's Brother, your Uncle Brian, loved her so much he made her this, so that I could have my very first dolly, just like all the other little girls." Tears began to roll down Catarina's cheek.

He watched love pour from his sister as she spoke about him, love he only wished he could reciprocate. He wanted so badly to wrap her in his arms, to say "I love you baby sister" just one more time.

A little voice broke the silence. "Don't be sad, Mommy, Uncle Brian is

the best angel. He's here right now!" Brian stopped dead as the little girl pointed right at him.

Catarina laughed under her tears, "Of course baby, Brian is always with us." Brian's heart shattered. He thought maybe, just maybe, for a second, his sister could feel him near.

Brian remembered the last time he saw his sister. It was Christmas, and she was getting ready to leave for Florida to take her dream job. He remembered how proud he was of her, how tightly she hugged him, the "see you later" they shared as she left the next day. Neither one of them knew that this would be the last time they saw each other alive. Brian passed away unexpectedly in February and had been trying to reconnect with his family ever since.

As his mom descended the stairs with Ivory in her arms, he heard Catarina. "I just need a minute, I'll be down." He watched as she gently pulled her doll from the box, clutching it as she

sat on the bed and sobbed. Catarina was strong; she never let anyone see her like this. Brian rushed to his baby sisters' side. He wrapped his arms around her, pushed the hair from her face, kissed her gently on the forehead, nothing worked. He needed her to know he was there; he was frantic to connect with her again. "I love you Catarina. I am SO sorry, I am so proud of you," he said over and over again as she wept.

After composing herself, Catarina stood, ready to head downstairs. This was his last chance, and Brian knew it. The door creaked as he gently shut it. Catarina jumped. "Mom? ...Ivory?" There was no reply. Brian walked over to his guitar; he strummed the first few chords to "Columbus Day", a song he had written that they played at his funeral.

She sat, and Brian couldn't tell if she was afraid or just listening. This time Brian sat next to her, and she spoke. "Maybe she is right... Maybe you are here. I guess if you're here there are some things I should say. I think about you often, I love you to the ends of the Earth and I forgive you. I forgive you for the things you couldn't control, I forgive you for leaving early. I forgive you for not being here, and most importantly I promise you she will know who you are."

"Don't be sad, Mommy, Uncle Brian is the best angel. He's here right now!" Brian stopped dead as the little girl pointed right at him.

Brian felt a lump in his throat. Maybe she couldn't feel him or hear him... but Catarina had kept him close all on her own. She would never let him leave her. As tears fell from both of their eyes, he hugged her, harder than he ever had, with every fiber his spirit had to offer. She gasped, "You are here." She could feel the warmth of her brother's hug. Though Brian knew his sister well; she would rationalize the feeling as being emotional and getting warm. That didn't matter, because in that moment, they were back together. His baby sister was grown up, and he was so proud.

He walked back to his oak tree that night, humming songs he hadn't felt like singing in ages. As he crept closer to the place where he spent the evenings, it was like the world got a

whole lot lighter for Brian. In his heart, he knew the painful memories could no longer haunt him. He was determined to continue to watch his family grow and change with so much love and light that they would always know he was there, even if they couldn't hear him.

Before he knew it, he was singing "Someday, I'm gonna run away, to a place where it's always Columbus day or night I'll be feelin' alright always." And he did; Brian finally felt alright as he settled in under that same old oak tree.



Xueli Wang

The Life of Death

Benjamin Griffin

What is this terror, this grief?

They told me that all things must die.

That all things must come to rest.

They didn't mention the suffering. The poisonous empathy, the burden.

Instead, they told me that I'm a part of life,

A second step in a relentless journey.

I beg, Why must I be the one to reap such sorrow?

They always say the same things.

"I'm not ready to die." Or "Why me? Why now?"

I wish I knew.

I see the fear in their eyes.

It begs the question, what is more terrifying than the unknown?

It's ironic, you know.

I guide the dead beyond the veil, and yet I live forever.

Death is no judgement call.

Life is the real punishment.

Silent Words

Anna Grace McDonald

I rang my bell to get Mary, although it might as well have been silent. A young maid entered through the door to my room with a notebook and pencil. Mary was a small maid. She had a long auburn braid going down her back and blue eyes. She wore a green dress with a white apron. She flipped through the brown notebook until she found the page she wanted. On the page she wrote:

You rang for me, Your Highness.

I reached for my own notebook.

Can you help me get ready? The Prince will be here this afternoon. I wrote.

She gave me an excited smile and flipped to a new page.

Of course.

After being bathed and dried, Mary found me a sea-foam green dress. The sleeves were wide and flowy, reaching all the way down to my fingertips. The skirt ended at my ankles. Embroidered flowers and other intercut lines lined my sleeves and skirt. Mary then brushed my hair till it felt like a silk cape going down my back. She carefully weaved my hair into a braid, making a crown around my head. She powdered my face to at least add some color to my pale face, and she painted rose lip balm on my small lips. As for jewelry, she placed a tiara on my head. My earrings were diamond studs. My necklace was silver with a raindrop-shaped ruby. My two rings were both silver that weaved liked vines.

When I saw myself in the mirror, I couldn't help but blush. I never really got to dress up like this before. Mother and Father never really liked me going out to balls or events. I would be a disgrace in their eyes. They are the image of perfection. I'm just a chip in a porcelain figure, as they would tell me.

You look very pretty.

I smiled.

I felt Mary pinch my arm suddenly. I twirled around to face my Mother, the Empress of Rasha. She didn't take any interest in me, however.

Her total attention was directed toward Mary. Now, Mother was a very impressive woman. She easily towered most men. Her skin was a pale white. Her hair was blond and done tight and neat in the back. She wore an extravagant navy-blue dress that trailed on the back, and she wore just about every type of jewelry you could think of.

Mother mouthed some words at Mary, clearly upset, and waved her hands about. She was talking so quickly that I couldn't read her lips. Mary only bowed and mouthed something like "I understand." Mother then turned to me. She motioned her finger at me. She wanted to examine me, I could only guess. I stood straight up as still as I could, trying my best not to look at her fierce blue eyes.

Mother only said one more thing to Mary before she left. I thought Mother was satisfied. However, the look on Mary's face said otherwise. I leaped for my notebook.

What's wrong? I wrote. What did she say?

Her Imperial Majesty says that you can't bring your notebook with you when you meet the Prince this afternoon. My heart sank.

I quickly jotted down, But Mary, how am I supposed to talk to the Prince, then?

You can't. Her Imperial Highness doesn't wish to reveal your disability to the Prince Elijah of Ingreed. They may take back their marriage proposal for your hand. Her Imperial Highness said you were only allowed to nod or shake your head.

He doesn't know. Mother and Father have been planning this marriage for years, and they haven't told him yet. If he finds that I'm trying to lie to him, he could take back his offer, or worse: He could take offence and cause a political war. I can't do this! What am I going to do? I wrote.

She stared long and hard at what I wrote. Finally, she wrote back.

Anyah, meet with the Prince first. If things go wrong, I promise you I will do everything I can to help you.

I leaped right into Mary's arms.

"Thank you." I whispered in her ear. Mary stood back in shock, tears swelling in her eyes.

"You're welcome" She mouthed. She wiped away her tears with her handkerchief and wrote:

Your Highness, it's time for you to go.

I then left my precious notebook in my room.

The garden at the palace was the most impressive garden in the Empire. It was only fitting that the Emperor had the best and most beautiful garden. Various flowers from all over the world grew here. The pond always sparkled with waterlilies. The statues of angels and demons seemed as though they were frozen in time. There were very few trees in the garden. The great white willow tree was my favorite spot. It sat right next to the pond at the edge of the garden. It blocked just enough sun, but there wasn't too much shade.

All I could do now was wait, but my heart was beating harder every minute. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a hand peeping right over the wall. Following the hand was an arm and the head of a disheveled young man with charcoal hair. He managed to lift himself up onto the wall and stood up and reached for one of the branches of the willow tree. At least, that is what he was trying to do until he spotted me. Losing his footing, the young man tried to grab a branch but fell right into the flowers below.

I rushed to his side only to find him laughing. Now that I could see him, I was astounded. He was well-dressed in a gray suit. However, that suit was now torn and muddy in several places. He mouthed some words, but I just couldn't make them out. He tried to say something else, but I just couldn't read his lips because he was talking too fast. Damn what Mother said!

"I can't hear," I mouthed, pointing to my ear. Something clicked behind those deep purple eyes. He dug his hand into his pocket, pulled out a small notebook, and jotted something down.

You're deaf?

I nodded.

I heard that you might be deaf, but I didn't really believe it, he wrote.

Grabbing the book from him, I wrote, And who are you?

I am the Crown Prince Elijah Walkman of Ingreed, Your Highness.

I suddenly felt sick to my stomach. Mother's going to kill me! How could I be so stupid? I just told him I'm deaf.

What's wrong? He wrote.

You're going to take back your marriage proposal. I'm sorry. I'm sorry! I didn't mean to lie to you! I wrote in a panic. At this point I broke. Tears started to well up in my eyes. I really screwed up.

He dug in his torn coat pocket and pulled out a handkerchief, gently wiping away my tears. Lie. What lie? What's wrong?

I'm deaf. Who in the world would want me as their wife? I looked at the words I just wrote. That's right, no one would, I thought to myself, trying to wipe more tears with my sleeve.

My butler is deaf, and he's my best friend. I would never do something so shallow. This was never something you had to hide, he wrote.

I actually have a lot of respect for you, he continued. Being deaf isn't easy. It's a battle you have to go through every day. I would be proud to have someone like you as my wife. I would at least like to know you better, if you'll let me.

You really mean that? I smiled, and relief and warmth flooded over me.

Of course, and I would really like to talk more, but I think the both of us really should get cleaned up first. Until now, I didn't realize how messy my dress had become. Mud and grass were clinging to my skirt. Elijah wasn't in the best shape either, but then a thought occurred to me.

Why were you climbing the wall in the first place? I wrote.

His face turned beat red.

I had to climb the wall to get away from a dog. One of the palace's guard dogs got out, and, well, he didn't like me.

Elijah suddenly looked past me and waved someone over. I turned around to see who it was he was waving to when I saw Mary and a crowd of servants and guards rushing toward us. Mary took one look at me and was horrified. I suddenly realized just how messy my dress had become. Some servants tried to aid me, asking what I think was "are you alright?" They were swarming like bees, making it rather uncomfortable. I wasn't used to large groups. Mary is the only one that attends me. She mouthed a couple words to them, and they quickly backed off nervously and obviously red with embarrassment. What she said I wasn't sure, nor did I really have time to ask before she quickly ushered me back inside.

Once Mary and I made it back to my room, I raced for my notebook, but Mary was faster.

What happened! Are you alright? Mary looked at me quite anxiously for my answer, but I was filled with excitement.

Mary, he likes me! He actually likes me! I beamed with delight, but she just gave me a puzzled look.

You're a mess. What happened? I heard something about a dog getting loose. You aren't hurt, are you? She wrote.

No, I'm not hurt, but it's wonderful, Mary! Elijah doesn't mind that I'm deaf.

I told her everything as she cleaned me up. I repeated the scenes in my head over and over. It was almost like the plays I would read. I couldn't wait to see Elijah again.

Mother entered the room, tearing me away from my daydreams, however. She was furious. Her eyes gleamed like flames. Every inch of me said "run." At that moment Mother rushed at me, grabbing my wrist. She shouted and screamed at me. Her saliva splattered on my face. My heart was beating faster and faster. I tried to pull away, but she had a

firm grip and shook me instead. I clenched my eyes shut. She then threw me across the room. Managing a glance, I was able to catch three words she mouthed to me, "You stupid child," before she turned to Mary.

Mary stood frozen in fear. Mother shouted something at her, but I didn't need to guess what was being said. She then raised her hand and struck Mary across the face. She fell to the ground, helpless, kneeling before my Mother. I had had enough. DAMN MOTHER!!!!

I dragged myself off the floor and raced to put myself between Mother and Mary. Mother may hurt me, but she will not hurt Mary. Although she seemed slightly shocked by my sudden defiance, it was only for a moment before she shouted something else at me. This time, however, I held my ground. I didn't look away from those fiery eyes.

Even though I couldn't hear it, I said in the most confident voice I could muster, "Mother, that's enough!"

For once, Mother kept her mouth shut. This was probably the first time she had even heard my voice. She just stood speechless. I looked down at my throbbing wrist. It was already turning black and blue. I grabbed my notebook and wrote, If you want to talk to me, you will use this notebook. You talk too fast for me to read your lips. Now what on God's green earth are you so angry about? I handed Mother my notebook, but she refused to take it, so I continued.

I know Elijah didn't take back the proposal. I didn't take my notebook, because you told me not to. He actually likes me, despite my being deaf. So, what did I do that was so wrong? Mother didn't answer me. She raised her hand as though she was going to strike me next, but she lowered it again. It was trembling. She remained silent, and just turned and left.

My legs finally gave out and I collapsed to the floor, gasping for breath. I'd never seen Mother this angry. I could feel Mary put her arms around me, but I could feel her shaking. Night came quickly as the pink hues turned to purple. The day was ending.

Mary could have been killed with one word from my Mother. I may have protected Mary now, but Mother could still punish her. I put her

in danger, but I had to know what I was dealing with. I pulled out my notebook.

Mary, are you alright? Mary nodded, but her cheek was still bright red and now slightly swollen. Why was Mother so upset?

Her Imperial Highness thought you were the reason that Prince Elijah was in such a messy state. She thought you had also let the guard dog out to chase him away. Now he knows that you're deaf as well. She thought you did all of this so you didn't have to marry him.

This is what she was angry about. This made her angry enough to shake me and throw me across a room and slap my maid. Mother had crossed a line today.

It's not like I could have kept it a secret all my life, Mary. She had to know that. I wrote.

I know that, and her Imperial Highness knows it too. You aren't a child anymore. It was simple to hide at the beginning and as you were growing up, but I think their Imperial highnesses have grown a little too comfortable with that. You're an adult now, and they aren't sure what to do with you. Like today, Anyah, you stood up to her Imperial Highness. If I didn't know any better, I would say she was almost afraid of you. Mary wrote.

If she was that afraid, she wouldn't have thrown me or slapped you, I wrote. Mother has always been stern, but she had never been violent before. However, my comment only made Mary smile.

You've never stood up to her Imperial Highness either, and that's what scares her. When I saw Your Highness and the Prince covered in mud and in such a wreck at first, I wasn't sure whether I should laugh or be horrified. Nor have I seen you so excited about anyone. I really hope he is the one for you. Once Mary finished writing the last sentence, something must have caught her attention, because she jumped back in alarm.

I turned to find Elijah tapping on the glass while desperately grasping the window. My heart skipped a beat as both Mary and I opened the

window and Mary practically dragged him in. Then both of them stopped to help a red-headed young man climb in as well. Both Elijah and the young man wore black cloaks that seemed to blend in with the shadows of my room.

Elijah anxiously pulled out his pocket notebook.

What happened! Are you all right? I could hear the Empress shouting. I tried to see you, but guards kept blocking me from entering your wing of the castle.

Guards! I thought to myself. Mother sent guards now.

My notebook laid on the floor from when I was talking with Mary. I bent down to pick it up. My mind raced. What should I say? I really shouldn't get him involved as well. This was something I had to do on my own.

"Even though I couldn't hear it, I said in the most confident voice I could muster, "Mother, that's enough!"

My Mother was just upset about the incident this afternoon. Everything is alright really. Who's your friend? I wrote. I put on my best smile and gestured to the young redhead man. Elijah frowned at me as though he was disappointed with my answer.

This is Rowan. He's the butler I was telling you about, he wrote. He showed it to me, then to Rowan. I could see Rowan a little bit now that he was in the light. He was lanky, and with the setting sun his red hair shined like fire against his pale face. He bowed to me but stopped midway, grabbing my injured wrist. I winced in pain and yanked my arm away. However, Mary grabbed my wrist, pulling back my sleeve to reveal my swollen black and blue wrist. She mouthed something to Elijah, and even pointed to her own cheek. Elijah immediately glanced down at me, but I turned away, ashamed. I lied to him, and he now knew it.

Why didn't you tell me that your Mother did this?

Mary got hurt because of me. I didn't want you to get involved, I wrote. Elijah gave out a sigh.

I know we just met today, but I will be your husband soon. Have a little more faith in me. This isn't okay, and this is not something you need to go through on your own. Don't leave your room until I get back. He wrote something down and showed it to Rowan. Rowan nodded and took Elijah's heavy cloak. What are you going to do? I wrote.

Help you. That was all he wrote before he left through the door of my room. Didn't he say there were guards? What was he thinking! I was about to follow him when Rowan put his hand on my shoulder and shook his head. He grabbed out his own little notebook.

His Highness will be alright. He asked me to look after the both of you until he gets back from speaking with His Imperial Highness the Emperor. We will also need to pack up some of your things. We will most likely be leaving tomorrow, Rowan wrote with a soft smile on his face.

Leave? Leave where? I wrote. Even as I wrote that down, Mary got straight to packing.

With us, Your Highness. Elijah is a good man. He'll look after you. I've been with His Highness for a very long time. I can tell that he really likes you.

It felt like forever waiting. As each minute passed, my heart pounded harder and harder.

Finally, the door slowly opened to reveal Elijah holding out his notebook.

WE ALL LEAVE TOMORROW MORNING!

I couldn't believe it. I just couldn't believe it. I jumped into Elijah's arm and he spun me around in the air like a little kid. Filled with complete joy, I kissed his cheek. Before I realized what I just did, he returned the kiss on my cheek.

I was too excited to sleep that night. Mary dressed me early that morning. It wasn't long before we were all ready to go. Elijah was about to help me into the carriage, when I looked back at home one last time. Mother stood

near the entrance.

Wait one moment please, Elijah.

I walked up to Mother. She wasn't angry, and she wasn't stern, either. I'm not sure how to describe it. She showed no emotion whatsoever.

"Goodbye, Mother." I said. She remained silent.

Just before I was about to leave, Mother mouthed two words, and I couldn't help but smile at what she said. I walked back to Elijah, and he helped me into the carriage.

Are you ready, Anyah? Elijah wrote.

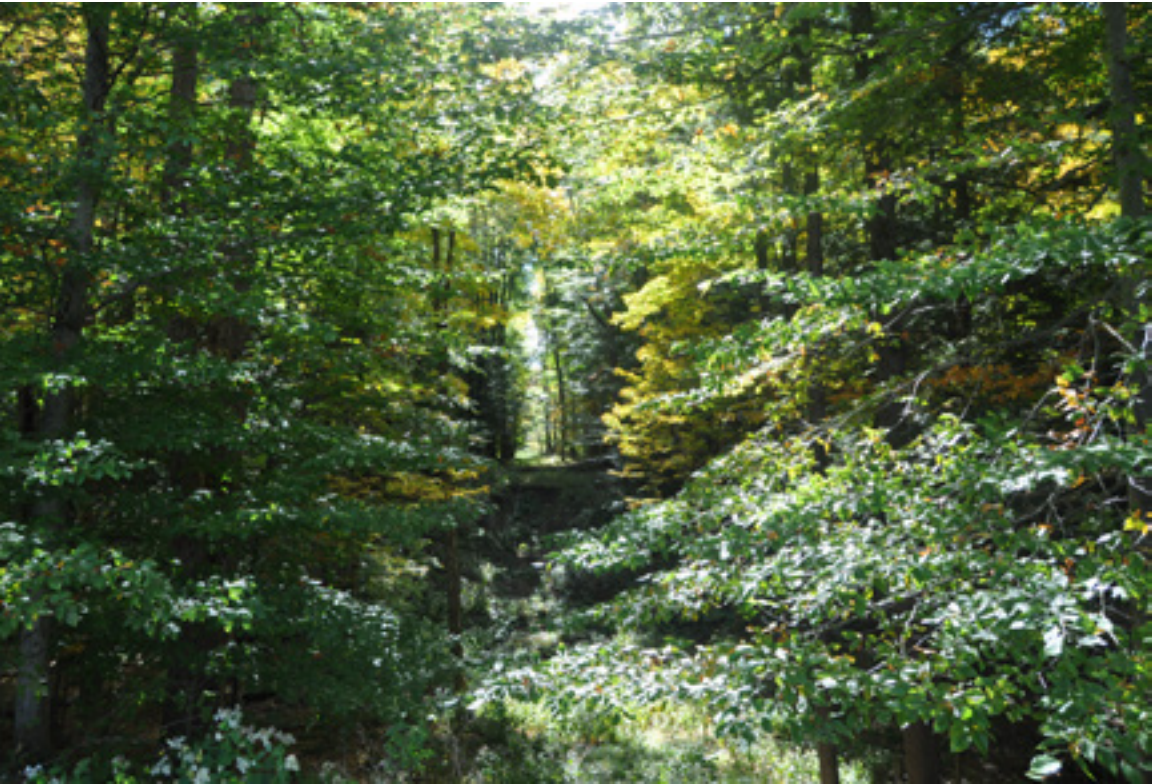
Yes, I am, I wrote..



She Moves Mountains by Kaitlyn Jenks



Baileigh by Kaitlyn Jenks



Timothy Cloonan

Her Kindred Soul

Benjamin Griffin

I didn't mean to do that.
 It wasn't on purpose.
 I hope you realize that you could never be worthless
 Oh, incomparable you.
 Forgive me for my incompetence,
 My pessimistic fall.
 Because standing next you,
 I meant nothing at all.
 You never understood.
 You wouldn't believe.
 You are the wood that makes up this tree,
 Of Life.
 Your supernatural aura,
 It beckoned to me.
 And then you asked,
 How would you feel if I chopped down this tree?
 I'll use the branches to kindle,
 And chop up the trunk for warmth.
 For this way, your soul will live.
 For, by this fire,
 you are reborn.

XUELI WANG



photographs





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Xueli Wang



Xueli Wang



A

Race

Against Youth and Time

Mike Cook

The year was 1985, and the United States has been dealing with a constant threat from the Russians concerning nuclear warfare. However, this would become the least of their problems as a new threat has emerged from the deep... We now go to tonight's newscast from Bill Barron to learn more about the threat.

"Good evening everyone, I'm Bill Barron, and we have breaking news tonight. A monstrous creature dubbed 'The Abyss' has come walking out of the Atlantic Ocean and is reeking havoc in New York State. The Super Monster is 56 feet tall and will ruin anything in sight. Eyewitnesses say that they saw a man shape-shift into the creature! Officials tell us the monster is going to destroy the entire state within 24 hours, and no one knows how it can or will be stopped!"

Before we jump right in, let's rewind to this morning where we meet the unlikely hero of this story, Jamie Nirvana. At age 15, Jamie is a high school senior because of his tremendous sophistication. Residing in Upstate New York, Jamie lives with his parents as an only child where we find him getting ready for school... Jamie wakes up with his red pajamas on and his brown hair in a mess. He walks down the stairs to see his parents eating breakfast.

Jamie's mom has her hair in a bun with red lipstick with her work clothes on. She walks towards the stairs and says "Good Morning, Jamie! You want me to make you some pancakes?" Jamie walks away, visibly upset, and gets ready for school instead. Ten minutes later, the bus pulls up to the house. "Jamie, why so upset? Is it those three bullies again?" asks Jamie's mom.

Jamie doesn't respond. "If they mess around with you again, you let your dad and I know!" She kisses Jamie's head as he leaves for school.

Jamie arrives at school and is on his way to class when the three bullies that are jealous of him show up. Their names are Drake, Travis, and Juice, and are much stronger than Jamie. They're about six feet tall and have fists the size of a small soccer ball.

"Hey, what's going on, loser? Did you think that you were going to have a good day today?" says Juice in a deep voice, clutching his fist.

Jamie replies, "Get out of my way! I need to get to class." Jamie tries barrelling into them, but it's like he rammed into a brick wall. The three bullies grab Jamie and bring him to the gymnasium where no one was around. Drake comes up with a cruel and sinister idea as they decide to stuff Jamie inside of the basketball hoop because he is small enough to fit through. They toss Jamie up there like a rag doll and pull him into the hoop, using a ladder to reach. The three bullies start to hear people coming, so they make a mad dash out of the gym. Jamie is found by the gym teacher, who grabs the ladder and helps him out of the hoop. Jamie, with his baggy hair all messed up, is so upset that he just walks away from the gym teacher without saying a word. Jamie knows that if these kids are going to play dirty, he is going to have to do the same.

Jamie, as smart as he is, comes up with a plan to get back at the bullies. Jamie meets up with his friend, Darren, who helps him set up the devious plan. It is now lunch time, and Jamie uses his smartwatch to talk to Darren from the other side of the cafeteria. The three bullies go and sit down next to the new girl, named Danielle. She has bright purple hair and light blue eyes. The three bullies try to engage a conversation with her, but she doesn't speak.

Danielle gets up and motions the guys to follow her out of the cafeteria. They follow her over to the janitor's closet. When they arrive, she opens the door and gives them a gesture to go

in. One by one, Drake, Travis, and Juice go in, when suddenly the door slams shut, and tons of glue pours on their heads. The glue is followed by tons of Peruvian bird feathers, which are known for causing people to sneeze. Jamie connects cameras to the school's wifi and live streams the whole incident right to social media. The three bullies are stuck to the floor sneezing all over the place. Danielle makes sure the coast is clear as she makes a dash to the restroom.

Jamie speaks to Darren on his smartwatch, saying, "Are the bullies in the germ and glue box?"

Danielle replies, "Yes, everything is all set" as she shapeshifts back into

Darren.

Jamie says, "I wish you told me that you could shape-shift sooner, that was the greatest revenge plan of all time!"

"I know!" Darren says.

Jamie is curious and asks, "So how did you actually get those powers?" Darren is a bit uneasy, and he ends the call with Jamie on his smartwatch. The rest of the school day goes on, and everyone heads back home safe and sound, or at least they thought...

Now that you're all caught up, let's see how our unexpected hero saved the world. After hearing the news report from Bill Barron, Jamie's family starts panicking, as most of the state is. Jamie rushes over to Darren's house to come up with a plan.

Jamie says, "Dude, did you just see the news?! The Abyss is going to destroy the entire state!" Darren just stood there with his eyes wide open as he realized what was going on. "Dude, what are we going to do?!" Jamie yelled.

Darren replied, "Look, I have an idea. It's going to be insane, but I think it might work! Think about it. If we destroy this thing, we will be recognized as the greatest heroes of all time!"

"Look, I have an idea. It's going to be insane, but I think it might work! Think about it. If we destroy this thing, we will be recognized as the greatest heroes of all time!"

“Well, what do we have to do?” asked Jamie.

“Look, this “Abyss” thing must’ve got his powers the same way I did. I got mine from these corrupt scientists disguised as doctors when I was a baby. They used me as their lab rat, and their experiments worked. We have to go to the hospital downtown where the lab is located. I guarantee those evil scientists are behind this. They must be!” Darren said.

With time not on their side, the two boys go over to the hospital downtown as the Super Monster continues to destroy New York. Darren, with his shape-shifting powers, enters the facility disguised as one of the scientists. The two speak on their smartwatches as Darren searches the facility for clues...

“Have you found anything yet?” asks Jamie.

“Not yet- oh, wait!” says Darren. “I found this syringe with a bright purple substance.”

“Wait, is that why you have such bright purple hair? That must be what gave you the powers! Take it with you, and I’ll inspect it.”

Darren leaves the facility in a flash as they go back to Jamie’s house to inspect the substance. Jamie’s parents are still trying to come up with a plan, as there is now a stay-at-home order in place. Jamie and Darren quickly rush upstairs with the glowing purple material. Jamie looks at the fine details of the substance using his microscope and finds that this must have been a compound made from synthetic elements that are not typically found here on Earth. Jamie then goes on the internet to do some research, and all of a sudden they hear a growl in the distance. They know it must be the monster!

Darren exclaims “We gotta get out of here now!” as he turns into a horse. Jamie hops on Darren and books on out of the house with the substance. Jamie and Darren are so worried about getting out of there that they forget about their families, but by then it is too late. Jamie and Darren looks over as the monster grabs Jamie’s parents.

Jamie’s mom screams, “No please don’t eat me! I have a son!” Jamie’s father, with his muscular figure, tries fighting the monster back to no

avail. The Abyss squeezes them so tight that they explode in his fists. Their guts and blood go flying into the sky and splatter all over the surrounding buildings.

“NOOO!” screams Jamie, traumatized by what he just saw. Jamie knows they have to leave, so Darren goes as fast as he can, fleeing the area. Jamie is now in tears and screams, “That’s it!!! We must destroy this thing NOW!”

“Jamie, how are we going to do it?” asks Darren.

Jamie then pulls out the syringe with the bright purple substance and injects himself with it. Jamie screams in pain and is shifting into many different things from pigs, to plants, and even a guitar. He finally gains control of the shapeshifting as his hair turns a bright purple color, and his eyes become light blue.

Jamie says, “Darren, I know what we must do... turn around, let’s take this thing head on!” Darren turns around, and they discuss the plan. They are now in close proximity to the monster and are ready to carry out their plan. Jamie has noticed that there is a sack of water on the monster that is impenetrable, but it has to be the only way it is able to survive. So Jamie, as smart as he is, turns into glue to keep the monster down, and Darren turns into a Peruvian bird. Darren flies around the monster as he is sneezing the water out, and makes it seem like it is raining in the town.

Jamie, in his glue form, says, “Dude, this is going to take all day, and I can’t hold on to him much longer. We need a giant sneeze so he gets rid of all the water!”

Darren knows what to do. He flies inside the monster’s nose and causes him to do a large sneeze, which almost floods the place! Jamie goes out of the glue form, and the monster falls down, causing an earthquake effect.

Jamie yells, “Yes Darren, we did it!” He doesn’t hear Darren or see him. He yells, “Darren! Darren where are you?” Jamie realizes that Darren sacrificed himself in order to save the rest of the country. Jamie sits on top of the now-dead monster, crying, realizing that he is a hero, but he

also lost his family and his best friend.

Jamie goes on to get tons of attention and is called “Kid Morph”. He uses his powers for good, in honor of his best friend Darren.

We now take you one week later, where we meet Bill Barron for another newscast...

“Good evening, everyone. I’m Bill Barron. The state of New York is still recovering after the brutal attacks from ‘The Abyss’, and I don’t have good news. Coming out of the state of California this morning is a giant bird made of fire, which people are calling ‘Wildfire’. With this being the second monster to appear this month, officials are still unsure about how this one came about. What we do know is that we need a hero to save us. Kid Morph, we need your help!”



Sky Ciriaco



Alexis Garrison



Twisty by Kaitlyn Jenks

Absolute Zero

Daniel Sargent

Dust on a drop,
The thin skin living;
Rust on the crop,
The taking in giving;
The warmth and the swell
Of sun-seeded fruit;
The swarm in the cell
And the blight in the root;
Silence in answer
To everyone's call,
And Absolute Zero
The womb of it all.

A Punt of A Dream

Mike Cook

Today is the day, the NFL draft. I have waited all my life for this opportunity to finally come. I worked so hard in high school and college to get to where I am today. Even though I'm a great football player, I'm only a punter. People don't give me much respect because they believe all I do is boot a ball deep down the field. The truth is, I never wanted to be a punter; I always wanted to be a quarterback. Think about it, the quarterback is always the one who gets the fame, no matter what. I could make a great play on special teams, but I was never in a post-game interview, because people just don't care. I hope this year I will be able to change the way the world looks at punters.

This was my mindset when I woke up the day of the draft- oh, I'm sorry, I probably should've introduced myself. I'm Riley Dream, and if you couldn't tell already, I'm a punter. I've been playing football all my life. Back in high school, I used to play quarterback for a small-town school in Washington, but one day that all changed. It was just another game against our rivals, Kings High. It was third down, and I was ready to make the throw that would potentially change my career. The play was perfect, and I was going to pass it to my teammate, Carl Giambrone, for a touchdown. Nothing could have gone wrong.

The ball was snapped, and I was ready to throw the deepest pass I've ever thrown in my career. Suddenly the strong safety, Frederick Palumbo, hit me on my right side. He hit me so hard that he broke my right arm. All I could do was just lay there and cry because I knew my arm

would never be the same again. I was rushed to the hospital afterwards, in so much pain. I can still remember the rain dripping down my snapped arm, just like it was yesterday.

When my arm finally healed, I wasn't able to throw like I used to. During that offseason, I started to work on my legs in order to become a punter. I figured that if I couldn't throw, maybe I could kick. The next year was my senior year of high school, and I was the best punter in the area. I worked so hard all season, and I knew that I was going to be able to go to college and punt. I was always able to get the ball within the ten-yard line, which was phenomenal. Even though I wasn't able to throw to him

anymore, Carl and I always kept in touch, and we became good friends.

After we split ways, I went to Washington State to play for the Cougars. I was still one of the best punters by far. I don't mean to brag, but there was no one near my skill. That was because of how hard I worked after my arm broke. We never won any championships, but we all loved each other as athletes. Even though my high school and college years were important to me, I was ready to look ahead and see who would pick me up in this year's draft.

I went downstairs, and my whole family was there, ready to cheer with me wherever I got selected to go. I smelled the extreme spiciness of my mom's homemade chicken wings, and I heard the loud noise of the TV as other players got drafted before me. I knew a punter would go late in the draft, but it just makes me nervous when I hear that dingy sound because you never know when it will be you. I walked into the living room, and my family was so excited to see me. They have been with me my entire football career and supported every decision I have made. I was just so confident and nervous at the same time, because I didn't know when it would happen. It was late in the fifth round, and my phone started ringing. Everyone in my house was jumping and freaking out including me. I told everyone to quiet down and answered the phone.

"Hello!?" I said like an excited child on Christmas morning.

"Yes, is this Riley?"

"Yes, it is," I replied. "Who is this?"

"This is John Schnider of the Seattle Seahawks, we're going to be taking you here. We really like you and your drive for success. I think you'll be a great addition to the team." I was speechless. I was going to be playing in my state, where my family could cheer me on at Lumen Field.

"Wow, thank you so much," I replied. "This is truly the best team I could've been drafted to. I won't let you down."

"I know you won't. We'll contact you with more details."

After I hung up the phone, my family was there screaming, "Who was it?!"

Where did you get drafted to?!"

"The Seahawks!" I screamed, and everyone in the room was so excited. My whole family lifted me up as if I was being carried by a crowd at a rock concert. I will never forget that day as long as I live. That day, I never thought that I, a punter, would win Super Bowl MVP. John called me again and told me to meet him and the head coach Pete Carroll at the team facility the next morning. I woke up the next day and drove there. It just felt strange because this was the moment I was waiting for. I walked inside the huge training facility and saw some of the rookies standing there. I heard someone shout from behind me "Hey Dream, I haven't seen you in forever!" I looked behind me, and it was my high school teammate, Carl Giambrone. So I said in reply, "Yo Carl, what's going on? I can't believe we both got drafted here!"

"I know, man, this is so surreal. Just waiting for Coach Pete to see what we gotta do." At that moment, Coach Pete walked in. Everyone always said that he had such a strong presence that you could just feel it even before he walked into the room.

"Hey, everyone. As you all know, I'm Coach Carroll. Follow me outside to the field; we wanna see what you're all made of." We all followed Pete outside, and the field was beautiful. Just thinking about being on an NFL practice field felt great. I was out there booting the ball so far that I could tell all the coaches were very happy with picking me up in the draft. Coach Carroll went up to me and said "Hey Dream, I've seen your highlights, and let me tell you: They are just fantastic, some of the best special teams stuff I've ever seen."

I just stood there, very humbled. I replied, "Thanks Coach, I always work hard, there are no days off for me. The way I see it is if I take a day off, then that's a day of training I won't get back."

"That's a great mindset. Now, I wanna introduce you to someone special, so follow me."

I went and followed Pete to the indoor practice field. There, all the Seahawks were training, from Bobby Wagner to DK Metcalf. I was looking around and didn't see the quarterback, Russell Wilson. Pete said,

“Over here, Dream, meet your team captain.” I followed Pete and saw the legend himself, Russell Wilson.

Wilson said to me, “Dream, how’s it going? I’m telling you, your punting is unreal. Even though I’d like to go for it on fourth down, you will be a valuable asset to the team.”

“Thanks, Russ,” I replied. “That means a lot coming from you, it really does.”

“Hey, I heard you used to be a quarterback. I know about your whole story, and I’m really sorry, man. Hey, someday who knows, maybe you can throw the ball one more time.”

“Thank you. I’m happy where I am right now, but maybe it can happen someday,” I said. After that, Russ and I threw some passes to each other, and my arm wasn’t as bad as before. However, with Russ being way better than me, he would always have the starting job. My rookie season of the NFL was fantastic. I really bonded with everyone and made some of the best punts of my career. Our team was so good that we went 14-2, and even made it to the Super Bowl.

Now, this is where things get interesting. Let’s just say it was the drive that changed my life forever.

It was the Super Bowl, and we were facing the Kansas City Chiefs, who were dangerously good. The whole game felt like a back-and-forth battle. I had to punt the ball a good amount of times, but both offenses did very well. With Patrick Mahomes being the quarterback of the Chiefs, he threw touchdown after touchdown. Russ was able to answer back though with touchdowns of his own. There were 30 seconds left in the fourth quarter, and we were backed up to our own twenty-yard line. The score was 21-27, and Russell knew he was going to have to make some plays. With his determination, Russ was able to get the ball to midfield using some magician-like plays.

The next play was going to be huge. The ball was snapped, and the offensive line just broke down. The rookie strong safety came down and made a monstrous sack on Russell. I took a look at who sacked him, and it was Frederick Palumbo, the man who broke my arm in high school!

Russ was not getting back up, and everyone raced to him because he was the only QB on their roster. The backup had a freak accident during pregame warmups and couldn’t play. An injury timeout was called, and Russ couldn’t get up. He knew he wasn’t going to be able to finish the game. Coach Carroll raced over to me and said “Riley, we have no one to backup for Russ. I know it has been a long time, but you’re our only hope. We need you to play quarterback!” I was so nervous, and I had no choice but to play. Palumbo was out on that field, and that nightmare of him breaking my arm just kept playing in my head. So as Russell was carted off, he looked at me and mouthed the words “I believe!” The mindset of our whole team was if we believed we could do it, then we could.

So I went out there, and the whole team was on my side, especially Carl. This felt like high school all over again, except this time, it was on the biggest stage of them all, the Super

Bowl. There were only 15 seconds left in the game, and Coach Carroll knew what we had to do. He wanted me to throw a Hail Mary pass to Carl. This is the same play we called in high school, the same one where Fred broke my arm. Fred just stared me down, because he was a monster on the field and knew that he could break my arm again if he wanted to.

We called a timeout, and I was just so nervous. I knew if I completed the pass, we would win the game, and if I didn’t, then I would let the team down. It was time; the final play. The crowd was flipping out, but I tuned them out and focused. The ball was snapped, and Fredrick knew exactly what play we were dialing up. He immediately rushed me the same way he did on that nightmare of a play in high school. By doing this though he left Carl wide open, so I launched it and he caught it in the endzone. The play that broke my arm finally worked in the Super Bowl. We were all jumping in so much excitement. I went up to Carl, picked him up, and hugged him. We won the Super Bowl, and I was practically in tears as the confetti was falling down. This time I wasn’t in tears because I thought my career was over, but I was in tears because my dreams came true. They named me Super Bowl MVP as I held the Lombardi Trophy high for everyone to see. We believed that we could do it, and that’s exactly what we did. Well, that’s my story. I guess you could call it “a punt of a dream.”

First Home

Jamie Muir

We live in habitats, buildings, and places. Existing, carrying on. This is not a home. Home is where the soul rests. Come with me to mine.

Driving down the road. Trees reaching for you, or to the sky, dense, breathing. Moss-covered boulder just beckoning you to take a rest. Quick flash of movement among the trees as wildlife scampers. Occasional breaks for new cabins. Sun spears through. Houses sporadically placed as you round the bend. Trees thicken again as you cross the creek. A bear drinks out in the woods.

On the left, old homes- almost identical- appear. Turn into the drive by a bright red school bus stop, tucked under the shade of a cedar. Pull up to the old, small white barn, now a garage. You catch a vision of the miners covered in grime, their families hanging laundry, children playing. Smoke billowing out of the chimney. Carrying scents of meals past. The family that converts the double home to one. The hunter's families coming to the lodge for holidays, weddings. Your family pulling up, taking a breath, and the look on your father's face as he looks around. Ghosts of the past flashing by. This happens in a breath.

Walk up to the door. Flashes of the past welcome you. The woods appear silent. Birds call. Entering, inhale deep the smells of home. A motley crew of cats rub against your legs. A pair of aging hounds wag tails. For a moment, looking around, the warmth and feelings of contentment overwhelm you. Running up, talking a mile a minute, is your pride. "Mama, I missed you!"

Telling you about her day, asking for hugs. Not even out of your shoes. Smiling, you are in the moment. Heading around the corner. Starting coffee, you look around, taking in the structure that has stood for over 100 years. A home. Now it is yours. Warmth spreads. Pride. Rich wood tones, every room, except the bright sunny yellow kitchen. As you go about daily chores, you can't help but feel connected to all those who walked before you.

Every room a memory. Dad's booming laugh. Brothers' projects. Deep discussions. Laughter. Birthdays. Death. Emergence. All have taken place here. Not just a building. A real home.

If you wandered down, you would find a dank, dark, cavern-like room with a dirt floor and stone walls. Broken only by a work bench and shelves. Placed in a corner with a sad-looking cement

This first home
of choice. This is
paradise.

pad to support them. Wander up. Here are doors. Behind each one a private life. Brothers, sister-in-law, niece, daughter, and your own. Some open, welcoming. Some closed, but you know if you knocked, welcome awaits. Halls lined with shelves of books and knickknacks. Wander up again.

Narrow, time-worn stairs. Creaks and groans of the past under foot. Here treasures await. Eaves of wooden beams, cut and placed long before, enter the alcoves. Dust swirls, lurking shadows. Chests from long past. Opening, you find treasures of the past. Some your own, some from the families that came before.

Turn to the east. Here is the room you helped build. Originally a bedroom. No longer needed. Now a gym. Here it is bright. Distractions of home locked out. You can choose to work out, meditate, or just stretch.

Down to your room. Step in, breathe deep. Scents of ceremonies past. Rich tones, tomes of stories, wolves and dragons greet the eye. Deep green carpet. The wild meets rest. Here you can sit and rest. Study, connect with the Gods, or travel to far off times and lands. A small portion of the knowledge collection resides here. On shelves, desk, nightstand, even piles on floor.

If you wanted to expand your mind you only needed to look around. Every room has at least one shelf filled with knowledge, adventure, laughter, horror, and tears.

Step outside, breathe in the pines. Small garden, hidden gnomes, fairies, frog people, and raccoons greet your wanders. Head down the back. Into the trees and undergrowth. A fallen tree acts as a bridge. Over a small gully that floods in the spring. Crackling leaves from past seasons under your feet. Climbing the small ridge to the trail. Glance up through the

canopy. Watch the red squirrels scamper. You now have a choice. Turn either direction to walk the ridge and look for bear and deer scat. Turn around and see your home from their eyes. Or, continue over the ridge. If you choose to keep going, you will find the creek. A small pool forms to the north end. Thick underbrush lines the floor. A sharp rise back up the gully faces you.

If you're lucky, you can watch the deer come down to drink, or pass by. Maybe, a mama bear and cub trying to catch the tiny fish. In the evening or night, coyotes, owls, raccoons, and bobcats roam. Birds, ravens, crows, a few hawks. These you hear all around you. Peace steals into your soul.

Breathe in deep. Close your eyes. Hear the call of nature. Children laughing in the distance. Fairies, ghosts, ancestors, whisper secrets to you. Evening approaches and you head home at peace.

Spring 2020

Jamie Muir

They say spring is a time of rebirth. This year, it is a time of fright, death, and change. This year a pandemic struck: COVID-19. Now we are all trying to adjust to new routines, and get our children to understand the dangers without scarring them for life. People panic, buy too much toilet paper, and realize that they don't keep any real food at home. Rushing into stores in hoards, pushing to stock up at first. Then as the numbers climb, as it becomes apparent that the tests aren't catching the virus in every case, a divide happens. Some are happy to wear their face masks and gloves, some grumble. Some find ways to limit their travels, others ramble about like nothing is happening.

Parents trying to balance school, work, households, bills, and now homeschooling. Many have never seen common core, or tried to teach science or social studies. Children at first think it is great, 'till they realize they won't be seeing their friends. Movies, ice cream stands and playgrounds are out of bounds. If they take walks, they must stay 6 feet away from neighbors and friends, holding up facial coverings if closer. The weather is unpredictable- rain, snow, high winds, the occasional sunny day- making going outside to play difficult even in the country.

This is the reality of 2020. But if you look closely, you will see the rebirth under the fear. Child and parent learning new balance. Nature growing, warming, animals sneaking out to start their mating rituals. Geese have flown home for the summer. Trees starting to form leaf buds. Flowers bursting from the soil. Neighbors calling to check in, or just to talk. Students tackling new hurdles and growing in skills. People discovering new strengths, hobbies, and themselves.

Industries turning themselves on ear. People waking up to the importance of what were once thought menial jobs. Households having actual conversations, finishing projects. What was once thought essential has been shown to be unnecessary, the benign important.

"This is the reality of 2020. But if you look closely, you will see the rebirth under the fear."

In the country, even though we lack the ability for high-speed internet or cable, I feel that we are doing better than those in the city. Wide open spaces mean we are used to keeping a distance. Neighbors cough and we don't know. Fresh air surrounds us. No worries that someone will come too close while getting mail. That they have the virus. Playing or sitting in our own yards without masks because our neighbors will not be breathing the same air. Strangers are rare and noted, and if it wasn't for the changes in jobs or school, the stress would be almost nil. Long walks can be taken with almost zero chance of exposure. Neighbors call when they are heading into town to see if you need anything to help limit exposure, checking on each other, making sure they are okay.

Sometimes you can forget the troubles of the world, until you turn on the news or head into town. There it looks like a scene from Watchmen. Everyone in masks. If they don't recognize you, suspicious looks. Bank doors closed. People walking and shopping in single file down store aisles, almost bare. No children laughing, saying hi. The seniors who used to sit in the park to talk and wave are now spread out, faces covered. The waves halfhearted, the joy dimmed. Library dark, park swings empty, swaying in the wind. Remnants of last year's leaves blowing across the basketball court. What used to be busy, friendly streets, teeming with families laughing, are now deserted and closed-up tight. Parts of town are now ghosts. Forlorn in appearance, quiet as a tomb.

What starts as a trip for groceries ends as a disheartening rush home to the light and normal.

This is Spring 2020. When will it end? Who will we be?



Jacobite Train by Cindy Brewer



Eilean Donan Castle by Cindy Brewer

At The Park

Matt Powers

SETTING: The public park is empty. The lights along the stone paths offer a pleasant golden glow, the night sky is clear, the air is cool but not damp. Truly, it is an idyllic evening.

AT RISE: There is a park bench for two. BOB and ASHLEY enter holding hands. They meander for a bit enjoying the night and each other's company. Eventually they sit.

ASHLEY

I miss you.

BOB

What a perfect night.

ASHLEY

Pasquale's was good. The wine was good. Your steak was to die for. We haven't done anything romantic in ages. It's nice to...reconnect. Who says chivalry isn't dead? The only thing that would make this night perfect would be some ice cream.

BOB

Did you see all the heads turn your way tonight?

ASHLEY

Stop.

BOB

Most guys would get possessive over that, turn angry - that whole "don't you look at my

woman thing."

ASHLEY

But not you.

BOB

I felt, supremacy.

(ASHLEY kisses BOB.)

BOB

We need to stop this Ashley.

ASHLEY

No, we don't.

BOB

Yes, we do.

ASHLEY

I disagree Bob. We're in too deep. Too much has been said. Too much has happened.

BOB

Look, this has been a lot of fun, but it's time to move on. It's not you, it's me. I don't feel the same anymore.

ASHLEY

Fun? That's all you can call what we've shared?

BOB

It's getting late. I need to get home.

ASHLEY

How is Jeanette anyway? Haven't seen her around lately.

BOB

How do you...

ASHLEY

Know her name? I know many things Bob. I think we should get some ice cream? What do you say?

BOB

I'm not taking another step.

ASHLEY

You will Bob. You have too. You see, I could easily tell Jeanette about us - we share a monthly book club after all.

BOB

You wouldn't. You're not a homewrecker.

ASHLEY

I never did like that term. It places all the blame on the woman, as if the man had absolutely nothing to do with wrecking his home.

BOB

What do you want?

ASHLEY

I mean he obviously has a major part in all of this.

BOB

Ashley, there's no need to dance around extortion. What do you want?

ASHLEY

You Bob.

BOB

Well you can't have me. I'm off the table.

ASHLEY

You weren't earlier this evening.

BOB

Don't be glib. Your flirtations aren't attractive right now.

ASHLEY

Lighten up Bob, this is the start of something beautiful.

BOB

Beautiful? This isn't beautiful? This has become something twisted, like our lust-soiled, silk, bed sheets.

ASHLEY

Those were silk? I suppose they were weren't they? I'm not surprised really. You did spend quite a bit on those rooms. This must have been worth something to you at one point.

BOB

Never.

ASHLEY

You can lie to yourself all you want Bobbie, but don't lie to me.

BOB

What do you want me to say then? That I was head over heels for you?

ASHLEY

Honesty would be nice. I don't know why I expect it from you. You've kept me a secret from Jeanette for years, but if this is ending what have you to lose?

BOB

Is that all you want?

ASHLEY

Let's say it's the first step in this negotiation. If you're honest, the rest will go smoothly. If you're not honest, this will be difficult.

BOB

This isn't a negotiation this is...

ASHLEY

Oh words, words Bob. Less philosophy, more action.

BOB

I don't like your threats. May I have my jacket back?

ASHLEY

Who's threatening? I'm giving you consequences. And no, I like it.

BOB

And you think this will get you truth? Just give me the jacket.

ASHLEY

(Rolls her eyes as she takes off the jacket and gives it to him.) Well I can't torture you, you're liable to say anything. I can't interrogate you without questions, because I don't

have any, so I'm left with negotiate.

BOB

In return for my honesty, I want you to leave me and my family alone.

ASHLEY

I'll entertain that if you pay my rent for life.

BOB

How about leave us alone and I'll pay half.

ASHLEY

Isn't it nice to leave lawyers out of this? The whole process is much quicker.

BOB

So that's a yes?

ASHLEY

Of course not Bob! Just because you make a promise here doesn't mean you'll keep it. Honesty first. Blackmail later.

BOB

Fine. Fine fine fine. Honesty. Honestly, I don't really know what to say. Yes, this did mean something to me once, but I wouldn't say it was love. I don't think I'm alone on this, but I think it's safe to say that we were both unsatisfied with our marriages, with our lives. Seriously Ashley, admit it. We've spent more time connecting than having sex. Think about all the dinners, the wine; I know more about your kids than I do my own. I never dreamed I'd end up marketing apps for smart phones, but I'm good at it; never thought I'd marry Jeanette, but I thought I knew what I wanted...needed. Did this start as just sex? Sure, but it's changed Ashley, and we're different. How exactly I'm not sure. But I feel it. So if you want the truth, there it is. Well?

ASHLEY

I'm sorry. I didn't expect that.

BOB

You're sorry? Sorry I couldn't feel something besides lust?

ASHLEY

No. That's not it.

BOB

You having a bit of fun with me? Was this some elaborate torture scheme?

ASHLEY

Not exactly.

(ASHLEY undoes a button and removes a long black wire

tipped with a small microphone from her blouse. She

reaches around behind her and removes a compact black

box. She shows both to him.)

BOB

What the hell is that!?

ASHLEY

A wire.

BOB

Give it to me.

(She hands him the wire.)

ASHLEY

You can destroy it if you like. She heard everything.

BOB

What? Who? Jeanette? How? Why?

ASHLEY

It was easy enough. Your daughter is very chatty after a couple of drinks. She gave me phone numbers.

BOB

Who? Who heard all that?

ASHLEY

Why Jeanette silly.

BOB

What?

ASHLEY

You're not the only one with guilt Bob. I contacted Jeanette, told her about us, and she didn't believe me. Part of her must have though, because she agreed to this.

BOB

I don't believe you.

ASHLEY

Ask her yourself. Go on. Give her a call. No?

BOB

I can't believe you'd do this...

ASHLEY

Are you really surprised? We've both been dishonest with our spouses, but I haven't lied to you.

BOB

I haven't...

ASHLEY

One year and one month ago you promised me you'd leave your wife, quit your job, and marry me. You swore up and down that, and I quote, "Ashley by this time next year we will have started a new life." You have not left your wife Bob, so I'm getting her to leave you. You lied to me Bob, you lied to me.

BOB

You're not marriage material.

ASHLEY

Oh this is going to cost you...

BOB

Nothing. It's going to cost me nothing.

ASHLEY

I don't think so Bob...

BOB

I think there'd be several papers who'd be interested in your other indiscretions, not to mention the police.

ASHLEY

I've done noth...

BOB

To date you've embezzled several hundreds of thousands of dollars. It's taken you a few years, which was smart, but you didn't cover all of your tracks.

ASHLEY

H-How?

BOB

Your husband.

ASHLEY

This wire, it wasn't really on.

BOB

I don't believe

(F

ASHLEY

What do we do now?

BOB

Let's get some ice cream.

(BLACKOUT.)

Ms. November

Anthony Graham

She possessed a feeling of November. A sort of cool refreshing feel that could make the angriest man smile. I didn't know why though. The way her hair reflected the light made her look like a goddess. This woman became my wife and I am here to tell you how.

The year was 2018 and the sun's blaze burned hard. In the summer you would often see high school kids rushing into the Stanley in the center of town. The Stanley is a local theater in Utica, New York and this was the 2nd consecutive year that I participated in the Stanley's summer theater program. Two buddies of mine and I walk into the rehearsal room and there she was sitting next to the director. Steel butterflies tear my insides up as I get closer. Finding a way to my seat was a journey. When I finally found a seat, I couldn't take my eyes off of her and I think my friends noticed me noticing her. Me and the guys spoke at lunch and all that came out of my mouth was about her. We all sat back down around the director's piano to recommence rehearsal. What happened next was a little disorienting. Something that made the room go silent. Something that turned heads. Something that wiggled my eardrums melodically. It was so smooth you could cut it with a dull butter knife, yet stronger than 10 oxen. A voice. With a sound as beautiful as the face it was coming from. The soul of Aretha Franklin and technical poise this girl silenced the room, yet I couldn't keep my mouth shut. "Oh my god!" I replied. She snickered as we both smiled and locked eye contact. This was the beginning of the most exciting months of my life. After that moment, a friendship sprouted and then a "flirtation-ship" they call it. The issue with that was this girl was in a relationship with another man. A small obstacle but an obstacle nonetheless.

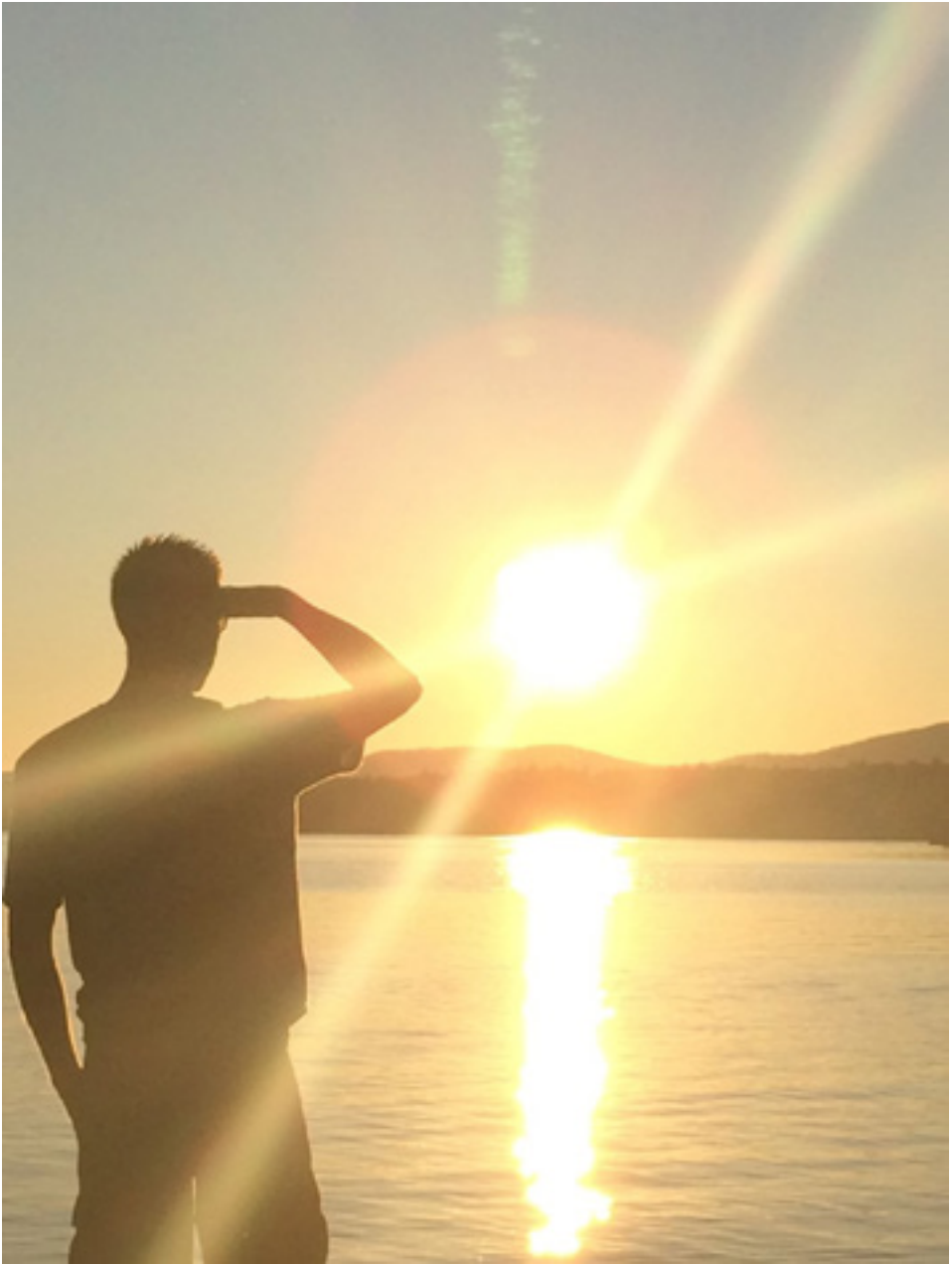
I began to plant a seed in her head waking her up to the ugly reality she's been living with. The man she has allowed in her bed will leave vacancy there soon, for I will take his place. She did like me after all, I can sense it. The way she listens to me, the way she embraces me, and the subtle way she pulls her hair from her face and behind her ear just to see if I'm looking at her, which I am all the time. Having a crush is cute, but having a burning passion to just be next to someone is a monster within another. Months go by and the strength needed to part ways with that goblin of a boyfriend finally is gifted to her. I stayed by her side the whole time. Not long after her break up, I go to her house to express

my feelings. Her mother invited me in and informed me she was asleep upstairs. The old stairs make the walk antagonizing but I was determined and refused to be deterred by some stupid stairs. As I turned the corner her room door greeted me. It was pink with lavender lilacs she painted herself at the foot of it. Her room ajar accompanied by a soft light that spilled gently through the crack. I attempt to open it quietly so I don't wake her, and what I see in front of me belittled my own creativity. Her living space was meant for nothing less than royalty. Warm pinks, cool blues and popping purples everywhere, with no shortage of floral patterns. And in the center, a queen-size bed decorated with white and pink it seems as if she was sleeping on clouds made of cotton candy. A bed rest canopy with four different stands littered with fluorescent lighting. Everything seems so magical, so I couldn't resist to write my feelings down. So I pull out my phone and go straight to the notes app. A single poem that went like this:

“As he sits, he watches the delicate princess sleep,
 As he sits, he ponders why he loves her so,
 As he sits, he notices that the princess is a flower,
 As he sits, he sees its beauty and smiles,
 As he sits, he thinks of life without the flower,
 As he sits, he feels....he feels a rush of feelings,
 As he sits, he knows the flower is special to him,
 As he sits, he becomes aware that he must protect this flower with his life,
 As he sits, he becomes angry at the potential dangers barreling towards the flower,
 As he sits, he marvels at the flower
 As he sits, he dare not wake the sleeping flower as her beauty aspires him to be a better he than he is already,
 As he sits, he waits, he waits for the flower, no, princess to wake and join him,

As he sits, he grows old,
 As he sits, he dies, protecting and loving the sleepy princess forever,
 As he dies, the princess awakens and sees a flower where he sat.....and smiles.”

I finish the second she opens her eyes. I got up from the foot of her bed, panicked and waved to her nervously. Confused but not startled at all she waves back and asks “What are you doing here?” I say nothing. “Mom let you in huh?” Again the silence from my mouth isn't broken. The heart no longer in my chest, it beats in the lower half of my body. I quickly come up with something to say to smoothly avoid tension. “I came over to say hi and tell you some stuff” I said. She replied with “Ok, hi now what?” She giggles after and I'm left with a decision, either pussy out or go all in. My choice then granted me with the ring on my finger. I showed her the poem on my phone, and tears fell like the leaves. She possessed a feeling of November, because I fell for her the second I saw her.



Looking Ahead by Vicki L. Brown