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Literary and Art Journal of Seminole State College
2012 edition

The Muse

Volume 5
2012 edition



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

Faculty Editors:
Rayshell Clapper and Yasminda Choate

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Cover Art by Amber DuBoise “Morning Rise Yei”

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The Miner's Riddle

By Caitlin Maddox

The chill of rock and darkness surround my lonesome soul.
I am here below the earth.
I am here beyond the rivers.
A wandering pile of bones whose home is this black hole.

The days pass over me, unnoticed and never ending.
I am a stranger to the sunlight.
I am a neighbor of the shadows.
Reaping an ancient harvest that needs little tending.

The joy and wonder of youth left me long ago.
I am a victim of my strength.
I am a borrower of my father's profession.
Through these gripping hands let my energy flow.

The earth has left my hands calloused and black.
I do not fear my transformation.
I do not love my aged face.
It is sleep, not bravery, which I lack.
Let death come swiftly if it does at all.
Let me fall,
Oh let me rest.

Under The Influence

by John DiMase

Some influences are positive, while others pretend to be helpful and then suck the life and will to exist right out of your nostrils. Some start out well meaning, and then meander down a path that twists back upon itself into a negative direction. My life followed a road of influence for a while, in the years of my childhood and teen agedness. One day, though, I woke up, saw the road I was on, and took a sharp exit the first chance I had. Religion started as a daily influence, and eventually became a motivation, of how not to live my life. In the end, I would not be who I am without religion, but it's not the end yet, there are still a few details to fill in.

I was raised hardcore north eastern Jehovah's Witness, and I survived somehow, with the appropriate scarring one would expect. At first the influence of religion seemed subtle, but then again it was all I knew. We went to meetings three times a week, and a couple days a week my mother took me door to door to tell people how they were wrong to be who they were, and wrong to be whatever religion they were. That is just how the world worked for me. I was taught to read at 2, so I could be a cute little proselytizer spouting off scriptures before I had a full set of teeth. Soon I had a little brother and sister to teach the things I had learned and live a godly life beside.

Things took a horrible turn when I started school, though. The daily dose of Jesus I had been getting was not a universal condition, and I hadn't been warned of that by my smiling blank eyed zealot parents! Oh the agony of being 4 or 5 years old, suddenly thrust into a cement and crayon scented prison surrounded by heathens who didn't believe as I did. Oh yes, and pee, there was definitely a strong undercurrent of pee smell.

Regardless of the smell, or maybe as a result of that and being crowded on all sides for hours on end by sinners of the vilest sort (especially Catholics), I was understandably incredulous by the time I found myself on a bus en-route to home. I thought, surely, this upstanding adult driving this contraption, put in charge of so many tiny lives, must be of my ilk, and must know what my easily controlled parents just called The Truth. I asked him if he were as excited as I was to be destined to live forever on a paradise earth. Now, there is laughter, and then there is the special laughter of ridicule and no small amount of pity. I got the special kind from the driver. I would say I cried like I had never cried before, but since my parents were fundamentalist I had been beaten so hard for not studying the bible enough even at 5 that I was already a champion crier of great volume and anguish. Can I get a hell yeah from the choir in honor of church sanctioned child abuse? Thank you.

Over the next decade the influence of religion kept me in check mostly. I was a good little Jesus-juice drinking disciple of the one true God Jehovah. I got baptized at 15, and since I was on the fast track to being a full time minister, I was only marginally educated, even though I was told by every school councilor I had an astronomical reading level and ability with English and other subjects. Instead I was sent off to the local Voc. Tech where teenagers went to have their dreams euthanized and self-confidence amputated. I was poised to be a true light of the god, easy to get along with, and quick witted enough to see the flaws in other religions. In fact that's what a lot of my religious training had focused on, dissecting religion. They built a monster, they thought they could control it, but apparently they had never read any comic books or non-religious fiction.

At the not so tender age of 17, an avalanche of events occurred that could not have been foreseen even if you had a magic book written by ancient Hebrews who smoked a lot of opium and said they were too busy being inspired by God to get real jobs. After a long battle with mental illness my mother hung herself. I started to realize I was gay, and my father remarried within 8 months of my mother's death. Don't make the hulk angry, you won't like him when he's angry. Over the next year I used all the training I had undergone to unravel the lies of my religion. I proceeded to extricate the many influences of religion that had been wired into my conscious and being. Pray and your mother will get better. Be a good boy and study the bible every day and your mother will get better. Don't be gay, and your mother will surely not hang herself with a robe she unraveled in a psych ward of a state hospital. Yes she did, and don't call me Shirley.

Times passes and points are reached, so here is the point of what I have written: Seventeen years later, I am no longer under the influence of the Jesus juice, though it is still a major factor in my life, as motivation. Motivation to dispel lies that religion weaves to control people. I have a deep seated need to help those who might not be able to see how they are being influenced right out of their lives. Hi, I am Jay, and I am ex-Jehovah's Witness. I quit, and so can you!

Lost

by Blake Miller

Scared
Hope lost.
Wanders in dark.
Right way is unsure,
But all alone he wanders
Through the trees, further he runs.

Searching for the light, he sees
Faster and faster he flies.
Much closer, so near
He runs toward
Those called
Home.

Almost
He reaches
His loving family.
He foresees the end.
He falls again to darkness
Never seeing the light of day.

Alone, he waits in the darkness:
Waiting for a hopeful rescue,
Tired of being alone.
He wonders why
He cannot
Love.



Morning Rise Yei by *Amber L. DuBoise*

The Forest
by Kasey Stafford

Christian: Age 12

Jeffery: Age 12

Two young boys play in the forest that surrounds their village. A forest so thick, that if a stranger to the woods they'd be lost forever, the smell of fresh earth fills the air as every foot step the boys takes scratches the surface of musk fresh dirt.

(The two boys, full of energy, playing army men in a forest so

Jeffery: (stick in hand) You're not going to win this time.

Christian: I can promise you I will, because I win every time. HA!

Jeffery: That's only because you cheat and hide behind that tree.

Christian: Oh yeah?! Tat, Tat, Tat, Tat.....

Jeffery: NO I'm still alive!

Christian: Well if you're going to cry about it, I got you in the leg. So you have to walk around like this. (hopping around on one leg)

Jeffery: Oh forget it.... Let's do something else.

Jeffery throws his stick to the ground. The boys stand around kicking a rock back and forth, till Christian throws an idea out.

Christian: You want to go to the pond?

Jeffery: Ya..... but it's a little far.... (stopping the rock with his foot)

Christian: It's not far and we'll be back before curfew scaredy cat.

Jeffery: I'm not scared! It's just our parents always tell us those crazy stories.

Christian: It's all just to make us be home before dark. Now let's go!

Jeffery: Ya you're probably right... I'll race you!

Christian: You're on buddy.

Jeffery: 1..... 2..... 3..... GO!

The boys take off through the thick forest leaving nothing but a dust trail.

Christian: OK JEFFERY SLOW DOWN! SLOW DOWN! DAMN IT, STOP!

Jeffery: What's wrong to fast for you?

Christian: I'm not on the track team like you, so of course you win....

Jeffery: Always do!

Christian: ya... ya.....

Jeffery: (Stretching his arms to show how easy the run was) Well we are almost to the pond after that small jog. We'll be back before curfew for sure.

They continue their journey speedily walking, because Jeffery does not want to be late for curfew

Christian: Stop worrying about curfew and those fairytale stories they feed us.

Jeffery: Do they not scare you?

Christian:(shrugging his shoulders) Nah

Jeffery: Lies all lies. You know you hear something at night in these woods.

Christian: I don't hear anything but my parents cracking my door open to see if I'm there. It's like they think I'm going to run away or magically disappear.

Jeffery: And that doesn't strike you as odd, because my parents do the same exact thing. It's like they know something is trying to get us.....

Christian:(Surprise look takes over his face) Really?
Jeffery: Yeah man it's creepy, and sometimes I wake up to weird noises.
Christian: (rolling his eyes) Like what?
Jeffery: Well the other night it sounded like a sharp object clawing at my window, and there are always those weird noises from these woods. (looking around as if he is expecting something to jump out)
Christian: Well my mom said that these stories about a creature that stalks the woods at night for children have been passed on for generations. I think it's a bunch of crazy talk.
Jeffery: I don't know it just seems all too real.
Christian: Well let's prove that there's nothing out here.
Jeffery: UH What? How?!
Christian: We'll ignore the curfew bell and stay out here and when the sun goes down we will calmly walk home
Jeffery: UUUUHHHHHH....
Christian: Such a scaredy cat I swear. This will prove to you there's nothing to be afraid of.
Jeffery: OH hey we finally made it to the pond.
(Stopping at the waters edge)
Christian: Trying to change the subject because you're chicken.
Jeffery: FINE we'll play stupid and be sitting ducks for a creature that we hide from every night. Sounds like a great plan!
Christian: Well sounds like a plan!
Jeffery: Whatever.
Christian: So it's settled! Do you accept the challenge my good friend, or will I be making fun of you for being scared of your shadow for the rest of your life?
Jeffery: If you're so settled on getting yourself killed, why don't you go do something else stupid?
Christian: It's just a late night stroll and we are back in our beds.
Jeffery: Man I'm not going to talk you out of this am I?
Christian: Oh what's that? Is that curfew bell I hear? You wouldn't leave your best friend to die alone would you?
Jeffery: Come on! Let's go home before you think of something else dumber.
Christian: No! I will prove that these stories are nothing but myths.
Jeffery: FINE! I will not walk home without you...
Christian: It is settled we walk back home in thirty minutes when the sun is no longer up.
Jeffery: The sun goes down so quick after curfew rings. It's starting to get cold, we should head back now.
Christian: Not yet I can still see the sun through the trees.
(The forest starts breathing and stretching the boys start to hear strange noises)
Jeffery: Now Christian we must head back now! I hear something.
Christian: Your imagination is letting the dark play games with you!
Jeffery: I swear, I hear something coming closer. I can feel it, please the sun is down let's go home.
Christian: Uhhh... I hear it too. Let's go.
Jeffery: Now you believe me, something is coming for us?
Christian: Jeffery, nothing is coming for us! I just agreed I heard something too.
Jeffery: (pausing to look around) Is that why you are walking so fast? Wait, what was that?

Christian: Nothing, keep walking we don't want to give our mothers heart attacks. Just prove that curfew is a bunch of B.S..

Jeffery: You are starting to get just as scared as me now, admit it.

Christian: Ok, Ok! I am scarred but it's nothing but creepy noises that the forest makes at night.

Jeffery: I don't care whatever the noise is it's getting closer, lets hurry we are more than half way home.

Christian: This was not a great idea!

Jeffery: (throwing hands into the air)YOU THINK?

Christian: Ok, you were right and I was wrong there is something out here. The noise is getting closer and sounds like it's getting faster.

Jeffery: Dude what was that?

(The trees start to rustle above the boys heads.)

Christian: Man, keep walking don't stop, don't look up.

Jeffery: UUUUUHHHHHHHHH what was that..... (wiping something slimy from his shoulder)

Christian: I...I....I don't know... What was that hissing noise?

Jeffery: This is the myth you don't believe in coming after us. Are you happy we are going to die out here!!

Christian: We are not going to die; we can see the lights from the town.

(Loud thump comes from behind the boys.)

Jeffery: OK I know that wasn't you..

Christian: And that wasn't you...

(turning around to see a dark figure with red eyes)

Jeffery: Is this the right time to start running?

Christian: YES!

(Running through little of what's left of the forest before they make it to the town. All they can hear is the pounding of their feet, hearts and the screeching of something following them. They make it to the light of the town; which is the center of the small village. No one is out and all the doors are closed.)

Jeffery: (breathing heavily) Is it still coming after us?

Christian: I don't know, but I'm not sticking around to find out. Let's get to the apartments, Fast!

Jeffery: I have been waiting to hear you say that all night!!!

Christian: (Grabbing Jeffery's arm) Hurry, I still hear something not far behind us.

(The boys make it to the door of their apartment; where they must put a code into the door)

Jeffery: Do you remember the code to get in?

Christian: Ya, it's either 4406 or 5516, hurry try it!

(The dark figure is in view and is coming for them fast. Frantically the boys try the code)

Jeffery: Those aren't the right codes, dude I am not dying on my front door step. Remember the code!!!!

Christian: Uhhhhh, try 1918!

Jeffery: That's not it either! Hurry! It's getting closer!

Christian: Last chance, 1914!

Jeffery: Holy Shit dude it worked!

Christian: (pushing Jeffery through the doors) GO! GO!

Jeffery: SHUT THE DOOR!!!

(Slamming the door the boys get one last glimpse of what they had been running from. A tall, slender, dark figure that moved smoothly like a snake.)

Christian: I say tomorrow we stay in and play video games. Let's stay away from the forest for a good while.

Jeffery: (laughing) It's a deal only I am never going back to that damn forest.

Christian: Let's call it a night!

(The boys start up the stairs and hear the door knob turning and the pounding on the door.

They sprint up the stairs and run into their apartment without another word)

Poetry

by Kimberly LeDuc

A Haiku is written;
how it pops from the page.
Read repeatedly in order to comprehend.

A Ghazal is written;
rich threads of passion.
Pulses race with each droplet in anticipation.

A Pastoral is written;
simplest fair, but depth of perception
is like the wheat waving at the dusty trail end.

A Limerick is written;
wrapped in giggling joy.
Tumbling words capture a child's imagination.

The Wizard's Trade

by Jessie Randall

The Wizard's Trade

"Where am I? Who are you?" Edward stared wildly about. Some feet away from him, a blonde-haired woman in a white dress sat on a rock above a nearby pond, swirling the water with her bare toes. She glanced up at his voice.

"My name is Blanche, Lord Edward," she said calmly, turning her face back to the water. "I'm a Lady of the Waters."

"You mean a mermaid or a siren."

Irritation crossed her pretty features. "So a human would call us. But know this, O mighty wizard, we Fey folk are never so tidily classified and compartmentalized the way you would like. We might take our names from places, our abilities, our tribes and nations, but we are not a mere *species*, to be so degraded."

Edward climbed to his feet and stomped over to her. "Where is my horse?" he demanded.

"Back at your castle, eating the oats from your enchanted fields. And before you ask if you're in a dream or if I bewitched you, no, I didn't. Those are your same riding clothes from this morning. You've been unconscious for a goodly portion of the afternoon, but I assure you, you're in perfect physical health."

"Are you implying I am ill in some other way?" He angrily pushed his dark hair out of his face.

"Of course you are," Blanche replied biting. "You don't appreciate people the way you should."

"What is that supposed to mean?" he yelled.

"I can't believe how I ever put up with people such as you before I left for the Otherworld for the first time," he heard her mutter. Louder, she said, "Do you know a trade?"

"I'm a wizard, aren't I?" Edward prepared to unleash a lightning bolt at the insolent faery. He cocked his arm back and made a throwing motion. Several minutes passed silently.

She smirked. "Do you know another trade?"

"I'm a lord. I don't need to know a trade."

"Of course not."

"What are you going on about?" He shouted in her face.

She sprang to her feet. "Go into the village nearest your castle, my lord," she replied icily. "And learn. A. Trade. Good luck getting an apprenticeship without your magic."

He turned away from her. "I'm going home."

"Not until you learn your lesson." Her voice was so soft he barely heard it.

But when Edward found his way back to the castle, his guards wouldn't let him in. They didn't even seem to recognize him; he concluded that the faery woman had hexed them, or fed them a potion to force them to forget. It seemed the tactics just like one such as she would use. Furiously he headed to the village and began wandering around. If he had to play her little game, then so be it.

"Excuse me, sir?" A teenaged girl approached him. He gritted his teeth.

"What?"

"Can you read this?" She handed him a piece of paper.

His foul mood worsened. "Can't you read it yourself?" he snapped.

“N-No,” she said apologetically. “I can barely understand lettering as it is.”

That gave him pause. Surely the village priest would have taught the children how to read? He asked her about it.

She shook her head in reply. “He’s an ab-absentee. He spends more time in other villages than here. He said—” She colored.

“He said what?” Edward frowned.

“He said that if the lord of the manor can spend time playing with the oc—with the unknown, he can find time to teach his own people the scribal arts.” She said it as if reciting from memory, exchanging one word for another.

Edward pressed his lips together and opened the message. He scanned the words. “It’s a release from service at the castle.”

She burst into tears and sank to the ground. He stared, unable to reconcile the simple fact of dismissal and her apparent desperation. Despite himself, he let curiosity get the better of him.

“Why is this dismissal so hard on you?” he asked.

Hiccuping now, she replied, “Because...my father can barely pay taxes, our farm might be lost, and both my mother and my sister have been ill for three months.”

Her words hit him like a storm breaking trees in half. He remembered, suddenly, that he had ordered a servant girl to be sent away a couple of days ago. The servant had apparently taken one of his books, and left it out where it could be ruined by a dripping potion when she’d been called to clean the stairs. Topping off the incident, the chemicals within said potion had ignited the book, destroying a beloved copy of ancient lore—which he’d gotten from a “Lord in the Mountain”—and nearly setting his entire workroom on fire. Had she been trying to teach herself to read?

“What illness do they have?” he asked her, an odd twinge of guilt gnawing at him.

She responded with something that was treatable, if she’d had the right amount of money and access to a physician. Edward left the girl, wondering what sort of trade that Blanche had expected of him. Over the next few hours, he continued to roam the village, observing the blacksmith, the tanner, the carpenter, a weaver, potter, and basket-maker at their respective jobs. Each one demonstrated a particular care in what they did. The blacksmith wore protective clothing to prevent burns. The heat of the shop quickly drove the wizard back toward cooler air. In the tanner’s shop, the man applied certain minerals to the hides; the acrid smell did the same to Edward as the heat of the forge. The carpenter delicately shaped wood to become a chair, and the potter shaped his clay into a pitcher. Weaver and basket-maker took note of where they went wrong, undid their work, started again, and continued on their respective patterns.

Toward the end of the day, he decided Blanche’s actions had nothing to do with a line of work. This was about the girl. Edward felt a certain kind of anger; why would the Lady choose to humiliate him in this manner? But he knew that if a curse of becoming a normal human had been placed upon him, the only way to break it would be to do as the curser wished. He asked directions to where she lived—Lavender was her name—and followed them to the farm. There he negotiated with the father, to help in the field for food and a place to sleep.

Over the next few months, he did his best to hold up his end of the bargain. It was difficult; he had never planted wheat, harvested, or threshed it. He had never mended tools, or taken them to the blacksmith for that purpose. He had certainly never shod a horse. This

caused Lavender's father to turn a critical and suspicious eye on him. Edward, proud as his nature made him, chafed under abrupt commands, felt miserable when there wasn't enough to eat, felt miserable at the taste of the food, and had his eye blackened when he nearly crippled the horse. Slowly, as he came to understand the hardships of servanthood, he felt his magic come back, confirming his suspicion that the Lady of the Waters had merely put a dampening spell on him.

After accidentally overturning the horse trough and having to refill it, which had alerted him to the return of his magic, Edward decided to right one of Lavender's problems and began making some of the meals himself as an excuse to put in healing herbs which corresponded to treatment of the disease. Practice was needed to make a decent meal.

Then one evening, Lavender's father caught him placing the herbs into their soup. "What's this?" he roared, catching the wizard by the shoulder and spinning him around. "Have you been poisoning us?"

"No," Edward said. He had learned to keep his replies simple and his tone as non-confrontational as possible. But the other man's expression told him it wasn't working.

"I don't believe you. You're a warlock if I ever saw one. Get off our farm!"

Edward headed toward the door. Lavender and her mother stared after him.

He paused before stepping out, and glanced at the girl. "Thank you for the opportunity to serve your family."

He went back to the castle, realizing that the suspicion of intentional sabotage hurt worse than being thrown out. This time, the guards recognized him and let him in. When he made it to his chambers, he found Blanche sitting in one of the chairs. "It looks like you've gotten your revenge."

"Revenge?" she asked, gazing at him with a puzzled look.

"I now know what it feels like to depend on someone to employ me and then to be thrown out."

"That wasn't revenge," she said quietly. "You know what you were like ten months ago. Now, you just see yourself as you were."

Always suspicious, not really trusting others to do as they were entrusted to do. She didn't have to say it.

The next morning, he sent his tax collector with a potion to give to Lavender's relatives, and to inform them that the debt of the farm had been cancelled for the next three years. Added to that, he had his representative inform Lavender that their lord had dismissed her by mistake, and requested that she return for at least one month.

A knock sounded at his study door later that day. "Enter," he called, glancing up.

"Sir?" Lavender stopped short of the desk, eyes wide. "Are you really...?"

"I recently had an object lesson in appreciating those who serve me," Edward said, motioning for her to sit on a nearby chair. She did so, and he turned to face her. "Your father...he isn't like that to everyone, is he?"

She shook her head. "Only to people he thinks are doing something wrong and should be corrected."

"Ah, so I was right about his thoughts on incompetence." He made a face. "Quite similar to me, I should think."

"What changed your mind?" she asked. "I mean, about dismissing me?"

He pursed his lips. "Let's just say you had someone like a fairy godmother hit me in the head while I went for a daily ride."

“And what’s your reason now, my lord?”

He smiled, and gestured, bringing a book from its shelf and setting it carefully in her lap. “Would you like to learn to read?”

The Tales of Sight, Lights, and Loves

by Desarae J. Bryant

Dreamer

I

A blank mind finds space
To characterize and play
With happiness and small
Pictures that are woven
Together as black and white.

II

Thoughts of linen and lace
Come as one never gray.
Her head floating so tall
As spectacles are proven
Worthy to the dawn and night.

The Pale Entourage

Time breaks his nerves
As the pale men prepare
A long musky box.
A prodigy has disobeyed,
And faces a long awaited
Sleep in chocolate earth.

He creeps through the night
Hoping to escape like
The sun at dusk.
A grasp of his coat as
He passes a corner -
Struggle.

Breath leaving his lungs
Briskly, his legs moving fast
Keeping pace with the cracks on
The ground in the darkness.
The pale men fade in his distance
Behind as he reaches a glimpse
Of freedom.

Beauty of the Morn

A crisp love approaches
Bringing the soft smell of dew,
As morning light runs upon
The horizon.
Melodies of sound create
A symphony as the wind
Hums freely.

Sweet lilies give birth
To color and give my
Heart a joyous bloom.
Tingles run through my veins,
As whispers of warmth
Fill my ear.

The smell of honeysuckle
Breaks my senses with
An aroma so pure and sweet
In the subtle light.
I embrace my essence of
My dawn, my love.

To My Soul

Stance can be taken
upon decision.
A choice boldly made
in regards for love.
Life brings many lies
and promises.
Whom which many falter on
and wait for.

You gave me peace
and a heart so divine
without taking a missed step.
Why do you love me so?
Does my heart reign true
in your eyes?
Does it bring you happiness
and serenity?

Our lives will be
Forever entangled
like tightly woven baskets so strong.
Our promises will be enlightened
and may our lies be in the shadows.
For my life
will be solely yours.
The days that follow
will never leave my soul.

Old Friend

Hello old friend. You have been gone all
The seasons and have left a trail of
Footsteps behind. Amongst the rain, bearing
The heat, through the leaves, and in the snow.
Trifling your demons as they face you as
A mirrored reflection. For where have you been?
A legacy follows you for a child to its mother.
As words of victory and salvation are brought
To us, and hope. We triumph and worthy you
As victor over his conquered. Perhaps a change
Is given to us now like leaves on the trees in
Late September. Burning bright orange and falling
To the earth like a soft flake. Do you bring words
Of happiness and prosperity? We want to hear
“We are free.”
Are we free my great and mighty friend? Our passions
Fly so high and sing like angels waiting to play
Their harps. Redeem us from this land so broken
And left to die. Time has given the faces of many
Long gestures as we’ve waited as prisoners in a dim
And dark cage. Have you come to surpass this darkness
And deliver us away from this cold, sheltered
Place from which you have wondered far? Alas, you
Come with enchanting words from within your heart,
And gave us compliments of peace and freedom. We are
Bound to you in blood and sacrifice, we give to you
Our dying privilege of honor and duty, and we are in debt to you
My Old friend.



Impressionistic Canyon de Chelly by *Amber DuBoise*

Untitled
by Callie Kirk

There was nothing else to do so they decided to drive around. She hopped in the Ford Bronco, and set the case of Coors behind the seat. She reached back, grabbed one, and put it between her legs. She was wearing high-waisted denim shorts, and the cold can pressed against her legs. Her legs were tan and smooth all the way down to her socks which were bunched up against her worn out tennis shoes. Her hair was long and light brown, like sand, with bangs that slightly covered her dark eyes. Jacky came running out of the small brick house, that was once her grandmother's. He was wearing his firefighter t-shirt and had a cigarette tucked behind his ear. She loved when he wore that shirt. It showed everyone how her husband was a hero. As a wedding gift, her father had given them the house, the land it sat on, and the pasture where she kept her horses. Three years ago, she was in love with idea of what their life together held as she unpacked boxes and decorated the house, but now it felt constricting and cold, it was not home at all.

"Where we goin' babe?" Jacky asked his wife as he hopped in the Bronco and reached behind the seat to grab a Coors for himself.

"Uhm... let's go see what everyone else is doing." She cranked the window down and let in the spring air. The trees were greening and everything felt new. Smells of dogwood and pear buds filled the musty Bronco.

They began driving down the old dirt roads singing along with the radio. *Mama tried to raise me better but her pleading I denied that leaves only me to blame 'cause Mama tried.* He set his hand on her thigh; it had been so long since she felt his warmth. The kindness he showed was what she fell in love with, but lately he would treat her like she was nothing more than property. The gold band on her hand was more of a title, a deed, she was registered to him.

"We should've gone to church this morning. Mom's gonna be upset with us." She knew her mother would be calling to ask where they had been.

"She'll be all right," he mumbled as he held the cigarette between his lips.

The sun was beaming in through the window and the wind whipped her hair back and forth. It was so nice out, for once. She couldn't help but enjoy it. She grabbed her empty can threw it out the window, and grabbed another from behind the seat.

"Put your hair up. It looks bad," he instructed his wife.

She followed his directions and pulled her hair back while gazing out the window watching the trees roll by. She put her feet up on the dashboard and leaned back as the bronco bounced along the dirt road. Would today be good? She had wanted to talk to him for a while but was nervous. What would he say? Maybe she should just keep her mouth shut. Why ruin a pretty day? No. It couldn't wait any longer... this meant too much.

"Uh Jacky, can we talk about something?" she asked through biting her nails.

"Oh god... What is it?"

"Well... I want to go to back to school."

"Oh god here we go again."

"Well, I do all the work at the office, and they get paid."

"We don't need more money."

"Yeah, but Jacky if I'm doing the work I want the recognition."

She knew it would be a fight but she was tired of letting go of things that might upset him. She was going to stand her ground this time.

“You don’t need no more schooling.”

“I want to.”

“Who’s gonna pay for all this bullshit? I’m not.”

“I’m gonna pay for it! I don’t need your help. I can do it by myself. I knew you wouldn’t understand. How could you! You think moochin’ off everyone else is fine.”

“Damn it! Quit your bitchin’.” His hands gripped the wheel tighter and tighter with each word. The anger in his eyes was becoming obvious to her, but she didn’t care; she pushed it farther and farther as she often did.

She leaned towards him. “No, I want this.”

“Why, so you can be better than all of us?” he shouted in her face.

She darted back at him without hesitation: “You’re so ignorant, you dumb hick!”

He raised his hand up and she winced. His hand formed a fist as he swung downward. It met her knee and buckled her leg against the dash board.

“Jacky!”

Her knee was swelling as a bruise was coming to surface. Her eyes welled up and her face turned red and became hot. Yes, her knee hurt but she was more hurt that he had done it again. He said he wouldn’t. *How could she be so stupid?*

“Take me home Jacky” she said through a shaky voice.

“I’m sorry.” There was silence. “Let’s just keep driving.”

“No! My fucking leg hurts! Take me home!” Sweat beaded on her face emerging through her pores and mixed with her tears.

“Don’t yell at me!”

The Bronco slung gravel as he ripped the steering wheel left. The motor revved and dust filled the air behind them. With both hands on the steering wheel, Jacky stared straight ahead. A sharp tongue had always been her defense, and a fist had been his. As they pulled into the drive way, she held onto her leg which was throbbing with pain. He walked around to her door and slid his arm under her leg and behind her back and carried her into the house. After setting her on the bed, he turned on his heels and quickly left out the front door. Tears began to stream from her eyes as she heard the Bronco engine turn over and rip out of the driveway. Pain was shooting through her leg as she hobbled out of bed and into the kitchen to find ice for her knee. The routine had become just that, routine, she had done it so many times before, reaching in the freezer and wrapping the ice in a wet rag. Just as she knew it would, the phone began to ring.

“Hello?”

“What’s going on? I just saw Jacky drive by like a mad man.”

“It’s nothing mom, we just got into a spat, that’s all.” She waited for her mother’s reply as she twirled the telephone cord.

“You need to go apologize to him and make it all right. You don’t want him goin’ out and finding some woman who appreciates him. I mean you don’t even cook for him. You need to watch that tongue of yours. You think you’re so smart, but you say some stupid things.”

“Ya, I got it Mom, don’t worry, he’ll come home when he’s ready.”

“You’re gonna lose ‘em. You need to get him home and make it up to him!”

“Bye Mom.” She hung up the phone.

As she lay in bed icing her knee, she wondered if her mother was right. At one time Jacky was all she had known, he was all she had ever loved; their life together was all she ever had. She never had true aspirations anything more than being Jacky's wife; she never thought she would be the bread winner, but today she no longer knew if she could stay married to a fireman with a temper. She no longer knew if she could stay married to this town with its lack of hope and growth. Her mother was a good woman and raised a family, but she didn't want to become the beaten down pulp that her mother had. Her father was a great man with a raging temper when he came home drunk and the house wasn't cleaned or dinner had gotten cold. He had never touched her, but she could hear him arguing with her mother followed by the tussling. The next morning, she would see her mother's bruises and how she wore them with shame, but she never left and she always forgave him.

She glanced into the closet trying to figure out what she would wear to work tomorrow. Pants, she needed pants that would cover her leg, and if she limped, well... she had fallen down the front porch steps. She knew they knew; how many times can a woman fall into the same doorknob? She thought about Ron. Tall and slender, Ron had dark hair, light eyes, always in a suit, and words floated with ease from his lips. He was everything Jacky wasn't. She thought about when he would call her into his office. She knew what he would say: He would tell her how smart she was, how excited he was she had been accepted into law school, how she was too good for that little town, how she was too good for Jacky. He would brush her bangs from her eyes forcing her to look up at him. He'd say he knew that her knee wasn't hurt from a fall. He'd tell her how he wanted her to come live in the city with him. She'd ask him what about Susan, reminding him that he too was tied to a vow and a new baby that needed him. He'd tell her the same thing he had told her before: he was going to leave Susan when she left Jacky. She wanted so bad to believe him, but she couldn't afford to gamble her life in the small town on what *might* be in the city, a career that *might* happen, a relationship that *might* work, and a life that she *might* want.

The clock sat on the dresser warning her it was almost ten when she heard the Bronco pull in their gravel drive way. Jacky stumbled in the house as she tried to be quiet; she didn't know what his temperament would be. The bed shook as he sat down on the foot; He was struggling to take off his boots. The smell of cheap women and cigarettes wafted to the head of the bed and stared her in the face like a sharp insult. She knew where he had been and asking would only prompt an argument. He crawled into bed, scooted closer to her pushing his body against hers, and wrapped his arm around her. Hair tickled her cheek, and the smell of alcohol buffeted her nose as he whispered in her ear "I love you."

She replied "I love you too."

Holy Father

By Jonathan Carter

Thank you Lord for all you've given,
Happy Easter for He is risen.
The season's here—your birthday's come.
Through the Father Ghost and Holy Son
We lift you up in glory praise.
Through Jesus Christ you will be saved.
For these words alone can't express your love.
Your holy kindness is from above.
Above the clouds and universe,
Please send me down a Bible verse.
To be my friend but also my Father.
Praise anyone else? Why bother?
I was unclean, but now I'm bathed
Because of You I'm finally saved.

The Mentor
By Kimberly LeDuc

The hallway loomed as a distant moat surrounded by a morning mist that shrouded hidden dangers, obstacles and venomous creatures. I didn't want to take that first step but a force propelled me forward into a cataclysmic rush of mulish drones heading toward some predetermined destination the hallway mapped for them. I was lost but the turbulence pressed in a direction that only confounded my will. I thought I knew where, when and what but uncertainty engulfed my purpose as the mist blinded my view. The drones wisped past me without acknowledging my existence. The cries for help lay trapped in my humiliation as apparent ignorance chastised my being.

A sudden light sparkled ahead then zoomed forward in 3D magnitude as if a homing device had been programmed to detect the weak, unsure and wayward souls that dared to brave enter the hallway. The heat enveloped my body like the rough texture of a wool blanket stimulates the nerves when one is frigid. A desire to curl up in its glow beckoned from within with the awe of admiration. My dazed confusion stared at the light awaiting a revelation. It circled in assessment buzzing with critics only experience could detect. I spun around like a puppy chasing its tail as the momentum of this lure evaluated my potential. Emotions impeded my cogitation as grunts, growls and laughter danced from the light. I wanted to cower, feign defiance and cover my nakedness.

Alas the light accepted my submission as it transformed in juggernaut. The encumbering mist parted as the force established a suitable path based upon the knowledge attained during my appraisal. Wisdom unraveled ancient myth, rumor and assumptions that had tangled my progress. Encouragement imbedded within made me light headed with sudden determination and motivation. The inspiration continued past brambles, hedges and the bulk of deceit. The beacon laid up a treasure trove of ammunition with cautionary scorn that the warning be respected. I dared to glance behind me toward the moat of great abyss only to see that flowers bloomed among the chirping innocence. It was then I reached for the redeemer and felt the overwhelming truth of pure belief.

The light which saw potential graciously emblazon the path so I could see the future in its epitome of me. She smiled with satisfaction as she celebrated success for my journey was just another twist along the travails in life. The cool abandonment of separation elicited a whimper of self-doubt to which she calmly quieted, "A mentor is forever, now you are safe." Ahead shimmered a golden door of accomplishment which brought me delight for I knew there would come a day when again my mentor would shine.

Holy, Holey, Wholly
by Daisha Richmond

A room in these walls, a hole in the wall.

Whole in these walls, I feel holy in these walls.

In a room with these walls,
a place in my mind-
with no windows, no walls.

Nowhere to fall.

Thank God for gravity,
holding me in these walls,
with no holes.
I am holy alone, wholly alone.

Breastfeeding in Public

by Jazmin McElfresh

Many opinions exist on how a person should feed their infant. Some people believe that bottle formula fed is best and some believe breastfeeding is best. For those who choose not to breastfeed their babies, it can be hard to understand the dilemma that surrounds feeding in public. It is looked at as inappropriate and graphic to some for a mother to openly breastfeed her baby in public. It is easy to feed a baby a bottle in public with no judgmental stares or rude comments, but it is quite the opposite in some cases for a breastfeeding mother. Babies have to eat whether it be by the breast or bottle, and in public or in the privacy of one's home. Current laws are in place that make the legality of breastfeeding in public unquestionable but the harsh attitudes of some people toward it make this an issue (Ford). It should be more acceptable for a mother to breastfeed her child in public.

It is widely encouraged that mothers breastfeed their children. Breast milk is more nutritious than formula and it is available instantly wherever and whenever mother and baby need ("Breastfeeding"). If a mother is in public and her baby gets hungry by all common sense and decency, she should feed him or her. A baby should not go hungry if his or her mother is breastfeeding and the public might be uncomfortable with the sight of the baby feeding. Some people say that when a breastfed child gets hungry in public mother and baby should go somewhere private like the bathroom to feed. It is very unsanitary for even adults to eat in the bathroom; why should breastfed babies have to eat in there? It is germey and quite full of odors in a bathroom, which is quite unfit for anybody to eat in. Breastfeeding mothers are equipped to nurse their babies where they need to, which is why it should not be a problem for it to be done in public.

Being in public is part of daily living and is unavoidable at times. When a mother and her baby go out, sometimes the baby needs to nurse before a trip home is possible. While in public nursing or breastfeeding a baby is possible without making a scene. A blanket or a large shirt can be worn over the exposed breast to avoid anybody seeing a baby breastfeed. Not always is covering up with a blanket practical when nursing a baby. In hotter months of the year it can be sweltering to cover up with a blanket when attempting to feed a baby. In these hotter months when covering with a blanket is impractical, some creative hiding or positions on holding a nursing baby can help. Putting a stroller or car seat in a place where it blocks the view of the baby feeding can be a makeshift way of being discreet. For most breastfeeding mothers it is not a problem to be discreet and to hide their naked breasts when attempting to feed in public but for others it is harder depending on circumstances. People should understand that most of these mothers are trying to avoid being exposed and that when they cannot avoid it the public should understand not to be judgmental or rude.

Mothers should have the comfort of breastfeeding in public just as much so as a grown adult has feeding themselves in public. It is a natural act for a baby to breastfeed, though not all natural acts should be done in public but breastfeeding should not be put into that category. Breastfeeding is necessary to be done when and where a need arises, unlike other natural things. It is considered natural, normal and very acceptable for everybody else to eat in public. Breastfeeding is a natural way for a mother to produce milk that is specifically designed for her baby to eat. Where a baby eats should be no less acceptable than a person eating a hamburger at a restaurant. The only difference in a person eating at a restaurant and a baby breastfeeding is the packaging it comes in. The package of breast milk

is obviously a breast which is what breasts are for. Just like people associate everyday food packages such as a potato chip bag and a jar of pickles it should be applied to breasts and breast milk. Breasts are only the package that breast milk comes in. Though it should not be encouraged for everyone to flail around their bosoms openly, it should be only accepted when it bares the purpose of feeding a baby. Breasts are a structure on the female body that is made for feeding a baby. The stigma attached to breasts is that they are sexual organs but in reality people need to educate themselves on what breasts are really for (*Msnbc.com*).

In a perfect world there would be no need to make a fuss over how a baby is fed and where. This is not a perfect world and there are instances when breastfeeding becomes a hot topic. Breastfeeding a baby is something that ideally is done in the privacy of one's own home but in some instances this cannot be done. Mothers often need to be in public frequently and sometimes they do not have the luxury of a private room or place to go to breastfeed. Breastfeeding can be done discreetly but when it cannot, the public should be more forgiving and understanding. Circumstances play a huge role in how, when and where a breastfeeding mother feeds her child. When a baby is hungry, it should be fed with no questions asked, no eyebrows raised, no rude comments, no ridicule and no shame. People need to change the way they feel about breastfeeding. It should be applauded and encouraged for a woman to breastfeed her child when necessary not put down. People need to realize that it takes a lot of courage to breastfeed a baby in public. A mother is just doing her job when she breastfeeds and it is no different if she has to do it in public.

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This Cocaine of Smiles

By Amber L. Duboise

Submerge yourself in the fate of sin that you let go of. May everything be gone inside this shell of rage that you create with every forgetful thought. If you forget please forget this face, of which the face of your dearest. The fire and ashes burn within this soul and soon will forget entirely. Do you hear those melodies she screams into the night? Only smile when you forget that face in the toxic and poison you intake. Take that rage and break her bones and spit the images of this angel into her mind, so she may always remember while you forget that smile. Take this skin and cover your face, so we may never see. But we all know what you take and what you absorb. I hope she will always remember you with her darkest thoughts. She will never be the sun again as you pour the salt into her heart. Will those you call friends love you as this one did. This angel that only helped destroy your sight and as you devour her wings and leave her on the lake of snow. She is frozen forever in her heart. Take that next line and smoke her away into the emptiness and void you call your heart. Smile as the other masks do. She will always remember the sweetness of your touch. Never will she be the same for the cage she is in is killing that angel. Come with me fallen one, and I'll keep you warm inside these crystals. Just take another and forget that face and never see the light that shined so in those eyes. I will control the urges, so you will never see the one who was the saint. Take me in, and you will forget. She will always remember. Take me in, and I will take care of your memories. She will never smile again. Take me in, and forget the kiss she gave you. She will be haunted. Take me in, and I will kill your soul and soothe the aches. She will die because I can take away her soul.

Secret Wars: Rivals

By Cory Tiger

Chapter 1: Best Friend vs. Step-Father; a Heart under Pressure

Looking back as he turns a corner, Blain gasps as he sees the large black beast continue to chase. His body aches as he has been running for about 15 minutes away from that thing. He turns into another alley and wishes he had chosen a different way. In front of him is a large fence with no gate.

Using as much strength as he can gather, Blain is able to jump most of the fence and climbs the rest with some ease. From the top of the fence, he jumps off and lands hard but continues running. Once he is at the other end of the alley, he turns around to see if the large beast will stop chasing him or try climbing the fence itself.

The large beast simply jumps over the whole fence with ease much to his horror. He turns around to run some more, but his feet slip from under him causing Blain to hit his head on the ground. He is dazed giving the beast enough time to catch him. He shakes the cobwebs out of his head and sees the beast's body constrict as it readies to lunge at him. Red eyes stare at Blain for a second before it attacks. For that one second, he gets an actual look at its eyes and notices they are really dark brown with a red glow. The eyes look familiar to him.

In the next second, the beast is coming towards him with frightening speed with its jaws aimed for his throat. At the last second, his instincts kick in and he manages to evade the beast's jaws. The beast's head slams into a dumpster momentarily stunning it; using the distraction, Blain sprints out of the alleyway.

As he is running across the street, a car turns the corner and speeds down the street. Blain jumps out of the way but his leg is caught by the car. The pain in his leg is intense, but he has no time to assess the damage to it; the beast is back on his tail. He turns to run and puts pressure on his injured foot only for it flare up in pain. He stumbles with that step from the pain but manages to shift his weight onto his other leg and takes off in a difficult pace down another alley.

The beast watches the boy hobble away with a sick grin on its lupine face. It trots off after him with a menacing look in its eyes. "You're mine this time, boy!"

This has got to be the longest night of Blain's life. Everything he has tried to lose this monster has failed. He found an old warehouse and quickly hid inside it where he is currently resting. He looks up at the moon through a hole in the ceiling. "Man, this is just one long nightmare. What exactly is that thing anyways? It looks kinda like a..." The hair on the back of Blain's neck stands on end; it's near somewhere.

A large paw bursts through the wall beside his head. He jumps away as the paw rips through the wall where his head once rested. He lands and rolls into a crouch to face the beast and torn wall. Using its strong arms, it rips a large hole into the wall making an entrance for itself. Blain stares wide-eyed at the monster and runs up a flight of rusted stairs. Looking to his right, he spots a management office with what looks like a tough, sturdy metal door. He rushes into the office and slams the door behind him resting against it.

The large beast has a wide, monstrous grin as it watches the boy try to run up the stairs with his damaged leg. It starts to hastily trot up the stairs with an even larger grin for it knows the boy is cornered now. "I got you now, boy. There's no escaping me this time, Blain. With you, I will become complete!"

The Beast crouches onto its hind legs and leans against the door with its right paw. Blain is trying to examine his leg when the beast's left paw bursts through the metal door. As the beast's paw is going through the door, one of its claws manages to slice the side of his neck.

He jumps away from the door and backs into the wall opposite from the door and the beast. The beast uses both of its front paws to rip the door off its hinges. Blain watches the beast rip off the door panting a little as blood runs down his neck. He uses his right hand to try and stop the bleeding with some pressure on the wound, but blood continues to flow through his hand.

With the door out of the way, the beast walks up to Blain with a malicious lupine grin. Standing a few inches away from Blain, pools of saliva pour from the beast's mouth dripping onto his shoes. His eyes and the rest of his body have grown heavy as more blood flows out of his neck. The beast towers over him by a few inches and has an odor similar to wet dog but somehow different. The beast emits a low growl and Blain glares back at it in the eye defiant to his death. He lowers his weak hand from his neck wound as it's obvious that this game of Cat and Mouse is over.

Before he is able to even blink, the beast's large paw is embedded inside Blain's abdomen blood surging from the wound onto the floor. The force of the thrust smashes Blain into the wall. He grinds his teeth as he tries not to scream out, but the beast uses its strong arms to lift him off the ground causing the new flood of pain to escape Blain in the form of an agonizing scream. Blood starts to pour out of his mouth and the beast moves its jaws next to his ear. "I told you I'd win eventually, boy. Now you are finally mine." A purr-like growl leaves its jaws. Blain's head starts to lower as his eyes start to dull.

"Blain, wake up! Wake up right now, you idiot! WAKE UP!" A feminine voice rings out in the air and inside Blain's head, but things slowly fade to black.

Blain jolts up in his bed trying to claw through his shirt to the hole in his chest. A few seconds later, he is able to calm himself down; it was only a nightmare. He looks to his right and finally notices his alarm is going off. He reaches up and turns it off looking at the time as well, 3:01 a.m.

He moves to a sitting position on the side of his bed and is about to head into the kitchen when his phone goes off. Looking at the caller ID, Blain smirks and answers the call. "What's up?" The caller sighs in a high-pitched tone revealing it belongs to a female. "You really had me worried just now. I thought it was too late."

He smirks as he knew the reason for her call the moment her name popped onto the phone's screen. She really is a troublesome woman, but at least he can rely on her. "Yeah, sorry about that, D. I was just about to go take my medicine. I hate having to take that awful medicine; it leaves me feeling like crap the next day."

An irritated grunt is heard on the other side of the phone. "Well, when you get a handle on your condition, then you won't have to take it anymore, but until then you have to take it. I don't need you causing more trouble; I've got enough on my plate as it is. Well, I'll talk to you tomorrow. Take your medicine and go to bed."

Blain chuckles a little before saying yes mom to the late night caller in a mocking tone and hanging up. He rises from his bed and walks into his kitchen and grabs a canister with herbs. He puts a pot on the stove and boils some water adding in a small handful of the herbs in it. *"Making this stuff is more of a pain than anything except having to drink it, of*

course.” After about 2 minutes of boiling, he is able to smell his tea/medicine and makes a frowning face. He grabs a cup from his cabinet and pours the tea into the cup moving to drink it. Blain stops right before it touches his lips and gets hit by the smell. “*Man, this stuff reeks.*”

He quickly chugs it down and starts coughing as some of the leaves had clumped together. He starts choking from the leaves in his airway and hurries to the sink to fill his cup up with water to help wash the leaves down; he stares at the canister containing the herbs and sighs. “*This stuff is going to kill me; I just know it.*” Washing the cup out, he puts it back in its place in the cabinet and heads back to bed to try to get some sleep

He lies in his bed staring at the clock he nailed onto the ceiling. He sighs in frustration as the infernal ringing from hell blares at its loudest setting. He keeps telling himself to buy a new alarm clock, but he never has the time or the memory to go to the store to buy it. “*Stupid alarm, shut up!*” Finally getting tired of the noise, Blain slams his fist onto the snooze button and returns to staring at the clock on the ceiling. After a few moments of this, he achieves what he wants. He starts to drift off to sleep.

A blob of black and purple hair paces outside of Blain’s house. “Where is that dummy? He should have been out here 30 minutes ago ready to go! I bet he’s still sleeping.” Luna grows impatient and pulls her key out. As she enters, she stops to listen for any activity from her best friend. As she had guessed, he is still sleeping. She sneaks into his room and yells into his ear.

He is startled by the unexpected wake-up call and falls out of his bed; she smiles innocently at him as he glares at her through his disheveled hair. “What? I didn’t do anything besides it’s almost time for school. You are not even dressed yet. I swear if it wasn’t for me, you’d have failed the last school term.” Blain sighs at his best friend’s antics. He pushes himself off of the floor and manages to push Luna out of his room so he can change into his school clothes. “Hey, I’m still talking to you, Blain!”

After a few minutes of waiting in his room, He leaves the room to find Luna digging in his refrigerator. “What are you doing in my refrigerator?” She jumps at being caught and quickly hides a piece of birthday cake behind her. He continues to glare at her until she finally hands over his last piece of birthday cake. “Fine, take it. It didn’t look good anyways and it smells funny. Let’s hurry up and get to school so I can actually get some breakfast. My step-dad’s been even more of a douche lately.”

Blain snorts a little. “It’s not like I can’t fix us some breakfast.” He opens his frig and is pulling the eggs out when he catches her last sentence putting the eggs back. “Hold on, is that jerk hitting you again? If he is, tell me, Luna. I’m not going to let my best friend be abused.”

Blain’s deep brown eyes stare into Luna’s jade green eyes. Neither backs down for a few minutes until Luna turns her head away. As she turns her head, he sees a bruise hidden under some make-up on her cheek. Then, he notices the bruise hidden by her jacket collar. The sight of the bruises makes his blood boil and almost pushes him into a fury.

Cooling himself off, he places his hand gently onto Luna’s cheek to get her to look at him. “Luna, we’re heading to your house after school, alright? I’m not going to let you be abused by that guy. He may be your step-father, but that does not give him the right to hit you. Now let’s head to school so we can get you something to eat.” She nods as she heads into the living area. Blain grabs his bag and the two starts walking to school.

As they walk through the suburb area of town, Blain grows increasingly frustrated with the silence as he finds it unnatural. Things are never quiet when Luna is around except when she is sick or upset over something. Blain knows he crossed the line just now, but he knows how her step-father is. The man is cruel and unemotional to a fault. Blain just wants his friend to be safe.

Luna knows Blain is just trying to look out for her. He's always been protective of her and tries being there for her, but he can overdo it sometimes. Luna looks back to when they were in Third Grade and a couple of the Fourth Grade boys were picking on her. Blain came running to her aid, but ended up suspended for fighting. Both of the Fourth Grade boys had bloody noses and black eyes, but Blain had one black eye and a cut on his forehead. Luna went to see him at his house, she started to cry. He had gotten hurt because of her. When she asked him why he had done that, he just simply said, "Cause you're my friend." and smiled a big grin. Luna smiles quietly and glances over at Blain. His expression is blank like he too was caught in memories.

Blain starts laughing at the memory of him fighting the two Fourth Graders. It was after when he had told Luna that he would always protect her from meanies. Blain is so caught up in the memories of Luna and him that he doesn't notice the light pole in his way. He walks smack into it.

Luna doubles over from laughter at his mishap. If anything hasn't changed, it would be Blain. He's always been protective and a big knucklehead. She knows he's always going to be there for her. He even turned down a date from some girl just to take care of her when she was sick. He actually spoon fed her soup his mom had fixed for her.

The sound of her laughter causes Blain to laugh as well. After they are able to breathe again and stop laughing, he looks at her with a big grin. "Race you to the school like when we were little?"

She grows a grin equal to his. She pushes Blain back down and darts off towards the high school. "Hey, get back here, you cheater." He pushes himself off the ground and chases after a laughing Her. An old familiar laughter is heard throughout the town and some the adults are seen chuckling to themselves.

The two best friends run past the blocks of Blain's neighborhood until they reach the high school. Blain is reaching for the handles to the front doors of the school when Luna jumps onto his back causing him to fall to the ground with a grunt and thud; she quickly jumps back up and turns to face her best friend. As she reaches towards her victory, she sticks her tongue out at Blain giggling. "I win!"

He gets up dusting off his jacket before picking Luna up and spinning her for a bit until she is dizzy. "Yeah only cause you cheated. Now, let's get some breakfast." The two friends walk into the cafeteria with Blain looking for a certain streak of green hair. Spotting it, he pulls Luna towards the table with the streak of green hair and they both sit down with their trays of food.

Destiny looks up from her book to see her "friend" and his best friend sitting down at her table. She notices Blain's hair is a slight mess and guessed they were probably chasing each other or something because she knew it wasn't anything romantic or anything like that. Just even a small crack at them being a couple causes both to turn red and stutter like morons. Well, the boy does while his little punk friend gets defensive on the subject. She swears that the moron needs to hurry up and grow a pair so that he can ask "Spunky" out already because she hated having to listen to his depressive whining but then again, the only

reason he even talks to her is because they work together like their fathers do. Sure, she doesn't mind Blain too much but it's again only because they work together and have developed a sort of friendship but calling him a "friend" is a little much or maybe less. Either way, whenever he is around so is she, the punk girl and those two together can be annoying especially since Destiny likes being by herself anyways. She even wanted the title of the "School's Weird Girl" just so people would leave her alone; then he showed up with Spunky behind him.

In the end, she has friends apparently and they are both actually nice to have around, Blain the quiet love struck boy and Luna the hyper punk girl. Destiny pushes her glasses up a little and smiles a small smile with that being her mistake. Blain notices her smile and pokes her cheek teasing her about the need to smile more when with friends. She takes that back about Blain; he's a moron. He continues teasing Destiny for a few more minutes before she slams her grimoire into his head and he hits his head on the table.

Luna is caught in a laughing fit over the two; if Blain ever had a sister, she would be a dark haired Destiny. Those two met when he was eight-years-old and she was almost nine-years-old. He was still living with his father at the time and his mother hadn't left yet. Luna's eyes soften as she remembers Blain's, and practically her, mother. The mother took care of everybody when they needed her, but back to the topic that got Luna to thinking about mom.

Blain's father Adrian and Luna's father had just been assigned as partners on the police and were bringing their families with them to a lunch to meet each other. Apparently, from what Luna was told, Blain had accidentally called Destiny a "dude" and she beat the crap out of him for it. After she had kicked the crap out of him, he had raised his hand and asked, "So are we friends, then?" From what Destiny said, he had a stupid grin on his face when he asked her too. Luna giggles a little from picturing the whole thing.

The two mock siblings continue arguing when they hear a soft giggle. Stopping to look at the source of the giggling, they see Luna caught in a fantasy of the two being actual siblings. The two stare at her until she finally snaps out of it and the two are already getting up to leave. "You have a really weird best friend, Raveheart."

"Yeah, why don't we just go with she's a stray, yeah." Luna yells at the two for leaving her behind and runs after them.

The teacher is writing on the board the new homework assignment as Blain rests his head on the desk, Luna works on a drawing she's been working on for the class period, and Destiny reads from her odd book titled "Fate's Grimoire." Blain smirks when he looks up at the clock. "Heh, three, two...One and I'm out of here."

All of the students quickly rise up from their seats and head to their lockers so they can head home for the day as they are free for the next 16 hours when the whole process starts over again. The trio waits until everybody else has cleared the room before exiting themselves. Blain and Luna's lockers are next to each other while Destiny's is down a few lockers.

As they are putting their books away, Blain does his usual ritual of staring at his mother's picture for a minute before closing his locker door and walks with Luna down to Destiny's locker. "So what are you two doing this afternoon, Raveheart? Surely, you have all people have something planned for a Thursday night."

A serious look crosses Blain's face while Luna looks a little uncomfortable. "Yeah, we're going to Luna's from here. I got a bone to pick with her step-father." Upon him

mentioning this, Destiny notices the bruise on Luna's cheek and neck and finds herself getting mad as well. She knew that Spunky had some home issues but didn't suspect that it was like that. If there was one thing Destiny Bloodmoon is without a doubt against, it is abuse of any kind, well except her abuse of Blain but that's different.

From the look on Luna's face, Destiny guesses that she isn't all that up for Blain talking with her step-father so she decides to ease her stress a little. "Spunky, don't worry about a thing. Raveheart might be an idiot, but he's the kind of idiot that will keep you safe above anything else. Am I right, Raveheart?"

When asking him the question, she gives Blain the "look" telling him not to mess up. Throwing up his thumb, Blain gives Destiny a large grin. "Yeah, I got this." With that, the two best friends head to Luna's house to confront her step-father.

As the two are heading to the house, Luna has her head down as each step brings her closer to having to face her abusive step-father and her own troubles. She not only fears for herself but also for Blain. *"What if dad beats up Blain for trying to stick up for me? I don't want to see Blain all beat up again. The last time was only two fourth graders, but this is my step-father, a full grown man. He might put Blain in the hospital."* Luna doesn't notice that she had brought her hands up to her heart clinched together and is breathing heavily.

Blain notices Luna's heavy breathing and guesses that she is worried about confronting her step-father. *"She doesn't have to be nervous or scared because I'll protect her from the guy. I won't let anything happen to my best friend and that's my promise of a lifetime for her."* Walking beside her, Blain nudges Luna's shoulder with his. When she looks up at him, he gives her a confident grin and places a comforting hand on her shoulder. "Don't worry; we got this." She smiles a little and nods her head. "Yeah, we do."

The two best friends walk up the sidewalk towards Luna's house with Blain eyeing the red truck parked in front. *"Good, he's home. At least we can get this over with quickly and won't have to wait around for him giving us time to rethink this. It's now or never especially for Luna."* Blain has been ready for this for some time now and he's finally going to give that old man a piece of his mind.

Luna, on the other hand, has been getting more nervous the closer they got to her house. Her heart feels like it is made of lead by the time they get to her front door. She already knows a fight will probably break out between Blain and her step-father, a fight between her best friend and her step-father. Either way, somebody she cares about will end up hurt badly. Blain is her closest friend and while her step-father abuses her sometimes, he can also be so kind to her that she doesn't want to see him hurt either. What can she do?

The two find Luna's step-father sitting in his recliner drinking what appears to be a can of beer. He hears the two walk through the door but fails to notice in his drunken state of mind the extra set of footsteps. "Hey, brat, you finally home? What took you so long?" When Luna doesn't answer him, her step-father turns around in his chair to face her only to see Blain standing in front of him scowl planted firmly on his face and Luna hiding behind Blain. "Her name is Selena, old man." Luna's step-father's face is at first in shock and then something dark crosses his face.

To say he is pissed is to say an arrow to the knee tickles. That little bitch of a step-daughter would dare bring her little friend into His house without asking him, unbelievable! Its bad enough he had to just listen about the little shit, but now the little bastard comes into

his house without even asking his permission! Obviously, this little bastard wasn't taught some manners like not entering another man's house without permission.

Luna's step-father gets up from his recliner and stares down at Blain with an irritated look to his face. Blain stands his ground and stares back at George. "Sir, we need to talk about how you been treating Selena. She's my friend so when I saw those bruises on her, I got concerned for her safety." George's facial expression turns to a face of anger as he can't believe what he has just heard.

George walks up to Blain until they are inches apart and noses are almost touching. Both start into a staring contest with neither backing down from the looks of it. Luna is watching as both her best friend and step-father are sizing each other up. If she had to guess, they both were holding themselves back from hitting the other already.

"Old man, step back right now. I have an extreme dislike for people being this close to me." George gives a deep chuckle and then places a sneer on his face. "Why don't you make me, little bastard, or are you all talk and no bite? Yeah, I know what kind of person you are, mutt." Blain's eyes widen in shock, then glares at George with cold eyes trying hard not to punch the man. A smirk grows onto his face after he thinks up a solution to his little "George" problem. "What's wrong, old man? Brave enough to hit a woman but not a man? Some 'man' you are, dude. You're just a pu..."

Blain doesn't get to finish his sentence as George's fist comes crashing into his jaw with tremendous strength. Blain stumbles back as the force of the punch catches him off guard and balance. "What the hell? I didn't think he'd be able to hit me with that kind of strength. It's inhuman!"

George grabs Blain by the shirt and tosses him in the dining room table. He leaps at Blain but Blain brings his legs up catching George in the chest and tosses him back into the wall. Blain kicks up and wipes some blood from his chin off with his hand. "Let's dance, old man."

Blain tosses a kick towards George but he moves his head to the side causing Blain to miss. George grabs Blain's and swings him around the room sending him flying through a door. Blain rests on his elbows looking around; he sees a plain room and guesses it's Luna's parent's room. George stands in the doorway grinning at busting up the young man; he was bleeding from his mouth and on his arm. George turned his attention to his step-daughter to make sure she didn't try to defend her friend but like usual, she only stood there.

Luna could only watch as Blain and her step-father fought. At first, she thought it would simply be a fist fight but then her step-father threw Blain into the table and caused Blain to kick him into the wall. She gasped when she saw her dad throw Blain through her parents' bedroom door. Right now, all she wants is for them to not hurt each other too badly. This fight has to happen sadly, she knows, but doesn't mean she likes it. Luna should have known that Blain would notice the bruises and that her step-father would get mad for being blamed of hitting her. Luna gasps again as Blain comes shooting out of her parents' bedroom slamming into her step-father spearing him through the door to her room.

Blain hates the fact that he has to fight Luna's step-father but the man has to learn not to hit women especially not his best friend. *"That stupid grin of his is making my blood boil. Just because he threw me through a door doesn't mean crap. Let's see how you like going through a door."* Using his hands to push himself off the ground, Blain hits George with a heavy slam and they go through another door across from the first door. Blain lies on top of George with George lying on top of the remains of the door. Blain rolls off of George and

looks around. The room is colored in a hue of pink and purple with stuffed animals placed all over the room and bed; a black cat stares at Blain from the bed. *“This is definitely Luna’s room because there’s Ninja, troublesome cat. What’s that next to him?”* Next to the cat is what looks like a doll of Blain.

George groans as his back hurts from the doorknob in his back. Blain looks back to George. “Hey, old man, you done?” George glares at Blain. “You get the fu** out of my house! You and that worthless girl get out of here, you hear me! Get out!” Blain and Luna are taken aback; then, Luna starts crying realizing that she has just been kicked out of her home. “What the hell, old man! How you going to just kick her out in the streets like that! You know what, screw it! Luna, get your things; you can stay at my place until we get this settled, ok?” Luna sniffles as she tries to hold back more tears and nods. She starts packing all of her things and Blain helps her carry it all out. After an hour of packing, Luna looks around her old room and sees nothing else she can take. Crying one last tear, Luna places her favorite teddy bear on the naked mattress and walks out to the jeep with Blain waiting in it. As the two drive off, George walks into the empty room and spots the lonely bear. He moves to sit down on the mattress and picks up the bear. Staring at the bear for a few seconds, the man breaks down and cries at having lost his daughter. The teddy bear was Selena’s favorite bear as he had gotten it for her on her eighth birthday. He didn’t want to do what he did, but he was no good for his step-daughter. George knew he was alcoholic but he couldn’t get himself to stop with trying to make sure there’s money and food for Selena to eat. Trying to make things better for Selena, he only made it worse and even hit her. With this, she is safe with Blain and he knows it. That boy will protect her until he can’t fight no more. Blain proved that today. “Thank you, boy.”

Triolet: Knowledge

By Tyler Beddo

Pride without mind, I find no answer.
Choice over fate, I can see many.
My path is my own, let it be known.
Pride without mind, I find no answer.
Death upon doubt, I can go without.
Choice over fate, I can see many.
Pride without mind, I find no answer.
Choice over fate, I can see many.

Gaming Night
By Shawwna Elmore

Characters

DM (Dungeon Master)

Nicki

Brad

Debbie

David

The stage is dark. The sharp sounds of clashing steel pierce the heavy growl of a churning storm. The loud roar of a monstrous beast echoes throughout the battlefield.

NICKI: Annasari!! Face me you foul demon! After twenty long years I shall finally avenge my mother and send your blackened soul back from whence it came!! From Hell's heart I stab at thee!!

All sound abruptly stops followed by the sound of dice rolling.

DM: You miss.

NICKI: Noooo!!

The lights slowly go up to reveal a group of adults huddled around a coffee table in the middle of a living room.

BRAD: What did you roll?

NICKI: A five!

DEBBIE: Don't you have any bonuses you could add to that?

DM: What's she gonna add? She leapt off the cliff in a rage!

DAVID: What about her DEX modifier? Like maneuvering while in free fall?

DM: Tell you what, Nicki roll your nimbleness.

NICKI: Kay... *(rolls dice)*... *(gasps and then lets out a very self-satisfied laugh)*

BRAD: No way!

NICKI: Giiirrrlll, you know I got it!

DM: Natural twenty?

NICKI: Na-tu-ral twenty!

DAVID: Nice!

DM: Okay, so everyone sees the Paladin run, jump off the cliff, do some air gymnastics ridiculousness, and then stab the arch demon right between the eyes. *(the audience hears the sounds of what the DM describes)*

NICKI: Ha haaaaa!

DM: Which has really pissed the demon off.

NICKI: Aaaawwwww....

DM: Roll your damage.

BRAD: Am I in bow range yet?

DM: Ummmm....yes.

BRAD: Well, while Nakomis has the demon distracted, I will shoot a called shot and aim for the demon's left eye socket.

DM: Okay-

NICKI: Hey! Boy, if you hit me, I will be VERY unhappy with you!

BRAD: (*self-righteously*) Impossible!

NICKI: I did forty-six points of damage, by the way.

DM: She doesn't even bleed.

DAVID: Ha! Told you the demon was a she!

NICKI: Debbie, we could really use some mass damage right now!

DEBBIE: I'm running as fast as I can! No one told you to jump off a cliff, now you're just going to have to wait for the rest of us sane people to catch up!

DAVID: (*to Brad*) Ooo! There's that impossibility you were talking about!

BRAD: Well....damn....

DM: Really?

NICKI: Nooo...

BRAD: Sorry, girl.

DM: (*rolls dice around in hand*) Ok, Brad, even or odd?

BRAD: Hmm....odd!

DM: (*rolls dice*) What luck! You manage to merely wound the Paladin. Nicki you suddenly notice that there is an arrow in your shoulder. (*arrow sound*)

NICKI: Hmph, I'd know this arrow anywhere. Darius! I-

DM: Annasari throws her head forward sending Nakomis to the ground. By now Rif and Braagi have caught up to Nakomis. Everyone roll initiative.

Everyone picks up their dice. Nicki begins to rustle like she's going to get up.

DAVID: (*weasely*) You about to get up...Nicki?

NICKI: (*scoots back up to the table*) Oh, no! I will not be the "sensuous" victim on this day!

DAVID: You say that, but you have the smallest bladder of us all!

DEBBIE: It's true.

They all shake their heads in agreement.

NICKI: Whatever...ye of little faith!

DM: Well, until Nicki gives into her tiny, pea sized bladder, let us continue.

They all roll dice.

DM: Okay, looks like Braagi, then Nakomis, then Rif, then Annasari, and then Darius. So, David, what will Braagi be doing?

DAVID: Well, now that the element of surprise is no longer an option... (*looks at Nicki*)

NICKI: (*points to David*) Hush it up, you!

DAVID: I'm just going to have to pull off something fancy.

DEBBIE: As long as it's not Brad's version of "fancy".

BRAD: Heeey! That almost never happens!

DM: David?

DAVID: Well, to avoid Annasari's parry I'm going to shadow step and then attack from the left.

DM: Kay, roll your shadow step.

As David rolls, Nicki begins to slightly rock back and forth in her seat.

BRAD: *(notices Nicki)* Niiickiii.... *(makes water rushing sounds)*

NICKI: You know, you've already shot me with an arrow today; do you really want me more upset with you?

BRAD: No. Not really...

NICKI: Then zip it!

DAVID: I rolled a 44.

DM: Do What?!! How?

DAVID: Well, I rolled an 18...

DM: Uh huuhh, and the other 26 points?

DAVID: Well, I get to add 5 points from my DEX modifier, 4 from my Cult of Shadows feat, 2 from my "Sneak"ers, 4 from my Cloak of Concealment, 2 from my Ring of Whisper Walk, 4 from my Amulet of Whisper Walk, and 5 from that scroll of Shadow Bending that I read at the beginning of battle.

DM: My God! I really need to pay more attention when you guys make your characters! That's just gross!

DAVID: Too, late now?

DM: You're lucky. What did you roll for damage on that?

DAVID: 21

DM: Well, since your roll to hit was ridiculous, this is what happened. *(sounds of battle begin)* Braagi essentially disappears into the shadows, flanks Annasari and manages to strike a weak point in her scale armor, which causes her to yell out in pain.

The demon cries out.

BRAD: ♪ Slicey, slice! ♪

DEBBIE: *(to David)* You are kind of ridiculous, Sir!

DAVID: Muahahahaha!

DM: Nicki, it's your go.

NICKI: Let me show you how to do some real damage, Davey!

DM: Now, since Nakomis isn't shadow incarnate, Annasari will attempt to parry your attacks.

As Nicki and the DM roll their attacks, Nicki, very visibly, has to use the restroom.

BRAD: *(makes water drip noises)*

NICKI: Nope.

BRAD: *(continues)*

DEBBIE: *(makes rushing water noises)*

NICKI: Giiirrrrrllll....

David joins in, making water sounds as well.

NICKI: It's not gonna work...

They continue.

NICKI: Y'all better quit...

They continue.

NICKI: I mean it...

They continue.

NICKI: *(grabs her pencil from the table and holds it up like a knife)* So help me!!

Everyone bursts into laughter.

NICKI: *(trying not to laugh)* You think I'm playing?!

DM: Alright, alright. Everyone shut up. What did you roll to hit, Nicki?

NICKI: 27 for the enchanted sword and 12 for the broadsword.

DM: Enchanted sword hits, the broadsword is parried. Roll for damage.

NICKI: 36!

DM: Okay, so... *(battle sounds start back up)* the dual wielding paladin lunges towards the demon swinging wildly! Annasari knocks one of her swords away, but Nakomis finds the soft meat of the demon's forearm with her sword and carves her mark!

Sounds of the battle happen as the DM describes them. The lights slowly dim to a spotlight on the DM.

DM: Annasari lets out yet another scream, her hatred is immense and oppressive! Her black blood pours over her tensed muscles. Her breathing is labored as she quakes with rage. She points her sword towards the group and exclaims, "You!"

Ring, ring.

DM: Uhhh.....

All sounds of battle are replaced with a cellphone ring. The lights snap back to normal as everyone looks to see whose phone is ringing.

DEBBIE: *(reluctantly answers her phone)* Hello?... Heeeyyy, baby! Uhuh...yeah? Hey, Mommy's in the middle of a battle right now, so...aawwww, okay. *(looks back at the group then goes back to her phone)* ♪ Soft kitty, warm kitty, little ball of fur ♪...

The group collectively groans.

BRAD: I guess we're taking a break, then? *(he gets up and begins to walk off)*

DAVID: Brad, "sensuous" up!

BRAD: Nooooo!!!!

NICKI: Oh, thank God!!!! (she gets up and runs off stage right to finally use the restroom)

BRAD: (lets out a very defeated sigh) What does everyone want?

DAVID: Coke, please!

DM: Beer for me.

DEBBIE: (puts her hand over the receiver) Coke for me, too, please!

NICKI: (yelling from offstage) Mountain Dew!!!

Brad walks off stage left frustrated and muttering to himself. After a beat of silence David and the DM pull out their cellphones and begin checking and sending messages causing their phones to chirp with different tones. Then, Nicki enters stage right with her cellphone in hand doing the same as she sits back down at the coffee table.

DEBBIE: (whispering) Oh, okay....I love you! Goodnight. (hangs up)

The DM, David, and Nicki stop and look at Debbie.

DEBBIE: (puts her hands up in contrition) Sorry....

Nods of forgiveness are given as they slowly begin typing away on their phones again until Brad enters stage left attempting to carry very precariously balanced bottles and cans. He walks slowly and carefully.

DAVID: Little bit closer ... little closer. Doing good. Almost there!

BRAD: You ass, come and help me!

David laughs as he hops up to help Brad dispense drinks while everyone else puts their phones away.

DM: Everyone settled now? We good to go?

The group nods.

DM: (clears throat, battle sounds and epic music begin to swell up once again) "You! You who have the audacity to walk in the sun are nothing but meat sacks! You've spat in the face of true regality and must be made to crawl in the dark!" (thunder crashes) Annasari then assumes a menacing stance, opening her mouth wide, inhaling vast amounts of air. (points to Debbie as the music and battle sounds fade) It is now Rif's turn.

BRAD: I do not like the looks of this!

NICKI: She's charging up something, Debbie! You must kill her and you must kill her now!

DAVID: Kill her with what? Any spell that could do enough damage is gonna take two turns to cast and by then it will be too late!

DM: That's not necessarily true. I could roll poorly.

NICKI: (shakes her head) Not with my luck.

DEBBIE: Question.

DM: Answer.

DEBBIE: You said the demon opened her mouth up wide and started inhaling, yes?

DM: Correct.

DEBBIE: So, I am able to see inside of her mouth clearly?

DM: Uhhh...I suppose, yes?

DEBBIE: Excellent, I am going to cast Frostbite.

NICKI: Say wha?

BRAD: Doesn't that just make things cold? It doesn't do any damage!

DEBBIE: Now, now! Before you get in a nerd rage, just hear me out. The spell says, "Frostbite can encapsulate any object up to the size of a small dog and seal any opening up to the size of a sewer grate with a thick layer of ice. Because the ice is magical it is not subject to the elements withstanding even fire. Frostbite last for four hours."

BRAD: Ok, so....

DEBBIE: Ok, so I'd like to cast Frostbite in Annasari's throat, sealing it completely.

There is a moment of silence.

DM: Huh.

DAVID: Well, I'll be damned...

NICKI: That...

BRAD: Wow.

DM: Ummmm...roll to cast.

DEBBIE: *(rolls and then begins to chuckle)* And then there's that.

Everyone jumps up to see what she rolled.

DM: Awww, come on!

BRAD: Natural 20!

DEBBIE: *(to DM)* Sorry!

NICKI: It's a beautiful thing.

DM: Sooooo, give me a second. *(battle sounds and epic music begin to swell up again)* As Annasari's gaping maw ever widens, creating a destructive vortex, the quick-thinking mage conjures "Frostbite" from her book of spells. The sudden closing of Annasari's airways causes her lungs to burst. The ice in her throat continues upwards, tearing through her sinuses, jutting up behind her eyes, encapsulating her brain. Annasari, the Arch Demon General of the Demon Lord's army dies in silence, *(battle sounds and music fade out)* and the entire army sinks back from whence they came. The realm of the living has been made safe once again!

The group erupts with sounds of celebration, giving out hi-fives, and letting out exasperated sighs of relief.

DM: Unfortunately, not much more is known about the group that saved our lives that day...

All celebrations abruptly stop.

NICKI: Wait, what?

DM: Like so many heroes before, they faded into the annals of history.

BRAD: But, wait, what about gold, and experience points, and-

DM: I'm saying I want you to leave my house! It's 3 A.M. and we've been playing for seven hours! I'm soooo tired....

DAVID: Okay, but we can get all that stuff next week, right? We just killed an Arch Demon!

DEBBIE: I don't wanna be lost in the annals of time! Not yet!

DM: Leave!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Everyone collects their things and starts to go.

DM: Don't forget your trash!

Everyone comes back to pick up their drinks and then starts to go as the lights fade out.

THE END.

Home

by Miriam Baker

They say, "Home is where the heart is."
What about when the heart is torn,
When the heart longs for more,
When the heart needs what was before.

The holder of the heart is blameless.
Does this mean the heart is homeless?
Does this mean the home is heartless?
Does this make the main home, less?

They say, "Home is where the heart is."
My heart is with her, the family I have created.
My heart is with him, the family that created me.
I am homeless in a sense I am home here and there.

Escape Artist
by John M. DiMase

The boy closed the door. His eyes darted around his small bedroom of foggy memories, looking for a breath to catch. He saw one where he had left it, next to his pillow. He reached out to grab it, and it popped right as his fingers brushed up against it. Damn it. He saw another breath, hidden in a corner of the ceiling. He tried jumping up to knock it loose, but he was too chemically challenged to gain any air.

On the boy's rickety desk of oak and painful memory, an ancient lamp flickered. That is exactly what would help, if he had an idea he could catch the breath, and move on from this moment. He got on all fours next to the box of springs and cotton someone once referred to as his bed, reaching under, near the head of it, and dislodged a board on the floor of cold and hurt feelings. He sent his hand down the hole of scary, and grabbed his bag of tricks.

Once back on his feet, bag of tricks in hand, he sat down with a creak and a sigh, or a sighing creak, depending on if you considered the viewpoint of the bed. Sometimes he did. Sometimes the fog of drugs *they* pushed into his face drifted lazily to the sides, all four of them, and he could see the viewpoint of an old mattress. The bag of tricks gurgled, snapping him slightly more out of it, or into it. He reached into the bag, and pulled out a bowl of room temperature water. He set that aside, it was an old trick, and he didn't think he could use it to catch a breath.

He reached down further into the bag, and pulled out a lie, it gurgled at him, and squished between his thumb and finger. Lies are dangerous tricks, but his mind was addled, and his powers muted. He threw the lie on the floor. The lie hit the floor with a splash, and sank into the wood. Once the floor became a lie, who could believe it? So, it decided to become a ceiling, and the room flipped.

The boy fell up, for a second, while the room figured out which way was more believable. He landed next to his breath. He grabbed it before he had a chance to lose it completely. The world sighed, and he breathed. His head cleared, and he reached for his bag of tricks in his room of shambles on his floor of multiple personalities. He pulled out his most dangerous trick, one no one ever suspected he knew, one that could change things and never be used up. He bounced his super bouncy ball of truth on the floor of questionable flooriness and up to hit the ceiling of recent aspirations. Both realized the truth, and flipped a flip, and the world giggled at their confusion.

The boy *breathed* a breath of relief and joy, and *exhaled* a breath of power and resilience. The room shuddered under the weight of his power. He was armed with the truth, and had stashed a few extra tricks up his sleeve. He faced the door of infinite possibility, and grinned. The walls started to shake as the drugs that kept him mentally neutered began to wear off.

The boy opened the door.

New Beginnings
by Marcus May

Characters:

JEFFERY HINES

STRANGER

NURSE

DOCTOR

[The front lobby of an emergency room. Three rows of hospital waiting room chairs sit in the center of the room. Each row faces a row directly across from it. A Nurse's desk sits in the back where a young nurse quietly does paperwork and answers the phone. An oil painting of a flower in vase hangs on the back wall. The actual flower and vase sit directly underneath on a pedestal. It is early morning, and the waiting room is empty.]

[JEFFERY HINES enters the room frantically. He is dressed in disarray: button up shirt half-untucked, tie loosened, and carrying a briefcase that is about to lose papers. He is breathing heavily. His face is both angry and mourning. After he enters, he stops, looks around, and then approaches the nurse's desk.]

JEFFERY: *[Shouting.]* Where are they? Where's my family?

NURSE: Sir, please lower your voice. Who are the people you are looking for? What are their names?

JEFFERY: Nancy and Samantha.

NURSE: Last names?

JEFFERY: *[Again shouting.]* Hines! For Christ's sake, Hines!

NURSE: Sir, you're going to have to calm down. Let me check. *[Starts typing on a computer keyboard.]* Okay, they both came in via ambulance about half-an-hour ago. It looks like they are both in surgery at the moment.

JEFFERY: *[Drops his briefcase, places his elbows on the counter and buries his eyes in the palms of his hands.]* Oh, dear God.

NURSE: Sir, I know it may be difficult at the moment, but if you'll take a seat, I will go let the team know you are here so someone can come give you more information as soon as they can.

[NURSE leaves through a door behind the desk. JEFFERY picks his briefcase back up, paces the room for a moment, then finds a seat in the middle of one of the rows of chairs.]

JEFFERY: *[Starting to cry.]* God, you can't do this! Don't you dare let them die. They're all I have!

[Blackout.]

[When the lights come back, JEFFERY is still sitting in the waiting room chair. He has his head down and his face buried in his palms. A STRANGER is now sitting directly across from JEFFERY. The STRANGER is an elderly man, well dressed and reading a magazine.]

STRANGER: Excuse me, son, do you have the time?

JEFFERY: *[Startled.]* Huh? Oh, yes. It's two-thirty in the morning.

STRANGER: [*Sighs.*] I guess it's going to be another all-nighter for me. Thank you.

JEFFERY: Sure.

STRANGER: Say, you're not looking too great, young man. Of course, I guess most people who I see sitting in this waiting room aren't having the best of times; but, you look different from the others. Something is really wrong, isn't it?

JEFFERY: You have no idea.

STRANGER: Perhaps you're right. I'm sorry for being nosey. [*Goes back to reading his magazine.*]

JEFFERY: [*Remorsefully.*] No ... I mean, my wife and daughter were in an accident.

STRANGER: Oh, dear. I'm sorry to hear that, son. Have you heard anything?

JEFFERY: [*Sighs.*] No, not yet. All they'll tell me is that they are both in surgery.

STRANGER: Well, hopefully you will know something more soon. How old is your daughter?

JEFFERY: She will be nine next month.

STRANGER: Well, I'll say a prayer for your family.

JEFFERY: [*Again lowers his head into his hands.*] Sure, thanks.

[*The STRANGER reads his magazine for a few seconds, and then speaks again.*]

STRANGER: You were wrong about me, you know.

JEFFERY: [*Confused.*] Huh?

STRANGER: About what you said before. When you said I have no idea.

JEFFERY: I don't follow.

STRANGER: I know it may be hard to imagine, but I was once a young man myself. I had a wife and daughter; and, like you, I found myself sitting in a room, not too different from the one we sit in now, awaiting to hear the fate of my young family.

JEFFERY: I'm sorry, sir. I ... I didn't mean anything by it. I'm just worried about my family. That's all.

STRANGER: No apologies necessary, son. I know it was not meant maliciously.

JEFFERY: So, what happened to your family?

STRANGER: Oh, they survived the ordeal. My wife recovered fully. My daughter lived, though she spent the rest of her life in a wheelchair. She was eight when the accident happened. The same as your daughter it seems. What is your daughter's name, son?

JEFFERY: Samantha.

STRANGER: And what is Samantha's favorite color?

JEFFERY: [*Thinking.*] I ... I don't know.

STRANGER: Have you ever asked her? [*JEFFERY sits still, thinking. The STRANGER nods.*] It's a shame that we sometimes overlook those things. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in the rat-race of life, that we forget about the little things that make our children who they are.

JEFFERY: How could I have been so careless?

STRANGER: You didn't get careless, son. You just got tunnel vision. I'll assume, by what you're wearing at this hour, that you spend a great deal of time at the office. [*JEFFERY nods.*] You want to give your daughter financial stability; maybe you want to give her what you weren't able to have when you were a child. There isn't anything wrong with that! That is part of being a parent. We just have to remember to slow down from time to time and try to get to know our children. I'm not talking about knowing their birthday, what grade they are in, or what they want from Santa Clause. I'm talking about who their best friend is, what

their favorite breakfast is, what is their fondest memory. These are the things that allow us to really get to know who our children are. These are also the things that tend to get overlooked the most.

JEFFERY: I feel like a horrible father.

STRANGER: As I did when I realized these things. It was about the time of the accident that I realized all of the things that I had been missing out on. No one here is judging you on your fatherhood, son. I don't know you, and you don't know me. But I can tell by our conversation thus far that you love your family.

JEFFERY: Yes! Yes, I do!

STRANGER: Then listen to the advice from an old man. If the good Lord sees fit for your family to stay on this Earth for a while longer, get to know your children. They are the only ones in your life that will love you unconditionally. Don't get me wrong, the relationship between a father and their children can falter, but deep down, the love will always be there.

JEFFERY: But, what if I mess up?

STRANGER: *[Laughing.]* Oh goodness, son! You will! We all do. What you have to remember, through both the rough times and the good, is that we can always do better as fathers as well as husbands. Don't take the little things for granted. It's the little things that your daughter will remember once she's grown. Once we make up our minds that we are doing a great job, we stumble, and when we do, we hit the ground hard. Take it from a man who has made every mistake in the book.

JEFFERY: Thank you, sir. You have no idea what this conversation means to me.

STRANGER: Don't thank me. Just don't forget our little exchange here. Continue to love your family. I think you'll be just fine.

JEFFERY: What about you? Are you here with someone?

STRANGER: *[Chuckles.]* Son, when you get to be my age, half of the people you know are in one hospital or another. Let's just say I'm making my rounds.

JEFFERY: Well, I still thank you. I don't believe I ever caught your name.

STRANGER: All of my friends call me-

[A doctor enters the room from stage right. He is wearing a medical lab coat and is carrying a chart.]

DOCTOR: Mr. Hines?

[JEFFERY stands abruptly and hurries over to the DOCTOR.]

JEFFERY: *[Shouting.]* Are they okay? How bad are they hurt?

DOCTOR: Your wife and daughter were involved in a pretty bad accident, Mr. Hines. They were struck broadside by a vehicle going at a high rate of speed. Your wife has a concussion, and we had to do surgery to repair a laceration on her liver. She is out of surgery and in recovery right now. She is going to be fine.

JEFFERY: What about Samantha?

DOCTOR: Samantha's case is a little more complicated.

JEFFERY: *[Grabs the doctor's shoulder and becomes weak, like he may fall.]* Oh, my God.

DOCTOR: *[Grabs JEFFERY'S arm to help steady him.]* No, no. You don't understand. Her case was more complicated, not more severe.

JEFFERY: I don't understand.

DOCTOR: You see, this is what has taken me so long to get out here and speak to you. Your daughter came into our emergency room unconscious and showing signs of major internal injuries. Both the ultrasound and the MRI showed that she had major internal

bleeding in her abdomen. But, the thing is, once we prepped her for surgery and actually got in there to take a look, we couldn't find anything. It's like she wasn't in an accident. We spent three hours doing exploratory abdominal surgery and couldn't find a thing to repair. I even had another surgeon scrub in and assist, and he couldn't find anything either. To tell you the truth, we are baffled.

JEFFERY: You mean she is okay?

DOCTOR: As far as we can tell, there isn't anything wrong with her. After we closed her up, we reran the ultrasound and MRI and they came back clean. After that, we took her to recovery and stopped the anesthesia. She woke up quickly and began asking for you.

JEFFERY: *[Laughing hysterically.]* She asked for me? I can speak to her? I can see her?

DOCTOR: Sure, you can. I have to tell you Mr. Hines, I've never seen anything like this before in my career. I'll take you to her. She is a little groggy from the anesthesia, but other than that, she is going to be fine. You can speak to your wife afterward if you like.

JEFFERY: My wife! Of course, of course! Just let me ... *[JEFFERY turns to the seat he had been sitting, as if to share the news with his new friend. The STRANGER is gone. JEFFERY looks about the room for a couple of seconds, confused. After he is satisfied that there is no one else in the room, he turns back to the doctor and they exit stage right. Fade to black.]*

[End of scene]



Snowy Woods by Amber L. DuBoise

A Cold Winter

by Callie Kirk

The day was somber as the clouds cast over Mason. The leaves had lost their golden tint and were now all fallen. The trees were bare as they shivered in the cool wind. The grass still had bits of frost left from the morning dew. Winter would shortly roll in staking claim in the town. I pulled my black hose up as it stretched over my leg. I slipped into the black heels I had only bought earlier this week. They were plain with no design and the heels were small. I covered my black dress with a black pea coat as I prepared for the day's service. It's always hard to lose someone, that's what I've heard, but it's harder when they're young. It's harder when they are young, when they are beautiful, when they are full of life, and in an instant... they are gone.

I walked in the First Baptist Church of Mason. It was a sea of black. It was a sea of sobbing. Most of those filling the pews were of the same age as I. They were young, nearly twenty or just so. The casket was in front of the altar. His picture was prominently displayed for everyone to see. It was picture of happiness as he had an enormous smile ? from ear to ear. His eyes were lit with vitality, strength, and youth, but it was no more.

I saw her in the first pew. She wore a simple black dress with sleeves. Her blonde hair just touched her shoulders, and when she turned to glance at those arriving, I saw her face was free of any make up as her eyes were swollen. In fact, they were almost swollen shut. Without the ? of paint her face appeared of an innocent girl who couldn't be more than twelve. It had been a week since... it happened. Most of those around me whispered she was the reason. They had a toxic relationship for years. Both drank in excess and had quite the temper. They would fight at every party and someone would pull her off of him and he would leave her there for someone else to take home. The next day they would be seen together shopping or getting lunch holding hands. She was the last person he had called before he pulled the trigger.

Some say that they had a nice talk. According to that version, he had called to chat, they had been separated for several months, he told her how well he had been doing, he had found a better job, he was looking for a house, and that he had turned things around for himself. She encouraged and congratulated him. At the end of the conversation, he reminded her how much he loved her, and she did the same. She claimed as she hung up the phone she had a restored hope that perhaps they would return to each other. The alternate version claimed quite the opposite and in fact fit the circumstances. He had called her begging for her to take him back; she denied him, insulted him, and told him to never speak to her again. A few hours later, the body was discovered.

I sat quietly as the service played out. A few family members spoke kindly of him. They offered memories and lighthearted anecdotes. Though a few giggled, none of us could forget why we were there. The possibility that one could feel so alone that he would prefer to cease to exist astounded us. It loomed over my head. I was oppressed by the thought that someone could have saved him. I held myself in my seat as I wanted to stand up and shout "You killed him!" We could have saved him. If only I had known, perhaps I could have said something, been there, and stopped it. I can't allow myself to feel responsible for someone else's actions but mine were lacking.

As they lowered the casket into the ground, the finality of the situation hit me. He was gone forever. The trees shivered in the cold harsh wind. Winter was here.

The Beauty of Words

By Tiffany Westfall

The Beauty of Words

Many individuals go through life without realizing that details are all around them. The creation in which these individuals live is an example of details. This world is bursting with details just waiting to be recognized by the human eye. For instance, in nature when a flower blooms in the spring and the petals of this flower are purple with yellow swirls and black dots, the details/design of this flower is what catches one's eye. Details are also present in paintings, in the way a wedding dress is designed and beaded, in the way a cake is decorated, but most of all, details are present within the pages of a story. When details exist within the pages of a story, these details grab the imagination of the reader's mind and take the reader to a place where only the reader and writer can go. Authors who are detailed and descriptive with their words when they write a story allow the reader to feel, see and experience what is happening within the story right along with the authors themselves. Therefore, when authors are very detailed and descriptive with their words, the details that the authors give help shape and mold the thoughts of the reader. If details ceased to exist within a story, then anyone who reads the story would not be able to fully grasp and understand what the authors were trying to paint in the mind of the reader.

One author who fits this description of painting a picture in readers' minds by the use of detail and vivid description is N. Scott Momaday. In his book, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, N. Scott Momaday fits the pieces of words together so perfectly as he is describing the weather in "the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range" (Momaday 5). The following words from Momaday's book take the reader to this place in Oklahoma:

Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil's edge. The grass turns brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. There are green belts along the rivers and creeks, linear groves of hickory and pecan, willow and witch hazel. At a distance in July or August... Green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass, popping up like corn to sting the flesh, and tortoises crawl about on the red earth, going nowhere in the plenty of time. (Momaday 5)

Momaday grabs the attention of the reader by including and describing the weather, trees, grass, grasshoppers and tortoises. By doing so, he creates a vivid image for the individual to relate to. Also, Momaday goes into such depth and detail that anyone who reads the above sentences would feel as though he/she were standing amongst the "...groves of hickory and pecan, willow and witch hazel" (Momaday 5). Therefore, the reader appreciates the story and understands the story so much more because Momaday was able to make the images appear real to the reader.

Momaday is not the only writer who has this gift of storytelling. Another author with this same talent is Johann Wyss. Wyss is the author of the timeless book, *The Swiss Family Robinson*. The following is an excerpt from *The Swiss Family Robinson* book. It describes how the Robinson family finished building their tree house because they became shipwrecked and landed on an island (Wyss 1-328). The excerpt is an example of how Wyss uses detail and description to help the reader envision the situation:

...throwing the sailcloth over the higher branches, we drew it down and firmly nailed it. Our house was thus enclosed on three sides, for behind the

great trunk protected us, while the front was left open to admit the fresh sea breeze which blew directly in. We then hauled up our hammocks and bedding and slung them from the branches we had left...we cleared the floor of leaves and chips, and then descended to fashion a table and a few benches from the remainder of the wood. (Wyss 71)

Because of the way Wyss worded the above sentences, one can imagine being in the tree house with the Robinson family watching as this big tree is transformed into a quaint little home for a stranded family. Also, the reader feels as though he/she is a part of the Robinson family as well and that he/she is experiencing the adventure of building a tree house right along with them.

Another way authors use words is by creating an illusion in the mind of their readers. For instance in the book, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, the father and his two sons, Fritz and Jack discovered a cave of salt by using hammers, chisels and crowbars (Wyss 149). When they went inside, the father described the inside of the cave like it was a palace of diamonds and "...crystal pillars [that] rose from the floor like mighty trees, mingling their branches high above us and drooping in hundreds of stalactites, which sparkled and glittered with all the colors of the rainbow. The floor of this magnificent palace was formed of hard dry sand..."(Wyss 151). By this illusion, the readers think the whole time that the inside of the cave has to be diamonds until the father tastes the crystals and he announces, "This was a cavern of rock salt" (Wyss 152). Not only was Wyss creative and descriptive with his words, but he also created a mystery for the readers to unravel. When I read this book a few years ago, the "cave of salt" was one part of the book I enjoyed reading because Wyss made me feel as though I was right along side Jack and Fritz with a candle in my hand feeling, seeing and tasting the beautiful cave of salt.

On the other hand, can writers be too descriptive and overly detailed with their stories? According to a blog by A J Barnett he says, "Some writers can go overboard with descriptive writing in their stories. Most times, less is more" ("Descriptive Writing"). Barnett goes onto say:

Readers are intelligent. Readers even enjoy filling in the gaps of a book. Leave them some work to do and they'll love you for it...By using their imagination a little, readers will feel they own your story...Overcook it, and they'll toss your precious story to one side. Not enough and they won't be able to picture it. ("Let the Reader Participate")

Basically, Barnett is saying writers have a tough job because they want to "get" the readers into the story, yet they want their readers to use their own imagination to determine what happens in the writers' stories as well. Therefore, writers have to find a balance between using detailed words but not overloading the readers with too many details. If writers were to use too much detail, the story itself could actually suffer because the story would become buried in the elaborate detail.

Even so, people cannot ignore the fact that writers do play a pretty big role in the lives of their readers. Writers' words are what help ignite and guide the minds and imaginations of their readers. These words that were once just words become sentences, and these sentences become stories, and these stories take the readers on journeys that lead to mystical places or to utopia worlds that are not like their own or maybe tell the true story of how the Kiowa people came to settle in Oklahoma (Momaday 5-13). If writers who use vivid words and colorful details ceased to exist, then this world would be missing out on the

opportunity to broaden their imagination. Hundreds, even thousands, of writers all around the world have written or are writing stories, whether fiction or non-fiction, that capture the minds of all who read their books by simply using words and details.

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The Twilight Spirit by *Amber L. DuBoise*

The Muse

Literary and Fine Arts Contest

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

The winners for the 2012 edition of *The Muse* are listed below by category. We thank our judges and all contestants for their hard work. We would also like to thank Lana Reynolds specially for her continued support of *The Muse* Literary and Fine Arts Contest.

Poetry:

1st: Daisha Richmond, “Holy, Holey, Wholly”

HM: Kimberly LeDuc, “Poetry”

HM: Caitlin Maddox, “The Miner’s Riddle”

HM: Blake Miller, “Lost”

Prose:

1st: John M. DiMase, “Escape Artist”

HM: Marcus May, “New Beginnings”

HM: Callie Kirk, “Untitled”

HM: Shawna Elmore, “Gaming Night”

Art:

1st: Amber L. DuBoise, “The Twilight Spirit”

HM: Amber L. DuBoise, “Morning Rise Yei”

HM: Amber L. DuBoise, “Impressionistic Canyon de Chelly”

HM: Amber L. DuBoise, “Snowy Woods”