

by Clara Engstrom

### Charm

By Sabrina Steffenhagen

Beautiful charm in my hand  
 Magic yet mysterious  
 Ancient yet with life  
 The charm tells many things  
 The inner beauty and outer beauty  
 So majestic, so timeless  
 A diamond stone that forever shines  
 Rain comes by but never wipes the sparkle  
 The charm never loses its sparkle  
 The charm is rare and unique  
 Nothing like anyone has ever seen  
 The beautiful, translucent emerald colored stone  
 Will it ever age?  
 Will it ever lose its youth?  
 The charm will be a forever mystery  
 A mystery we will never know

### Isolation By Devin Godfrey

I was never one to get involved  
 Never the person to step up  
 I wasn't invited to parties  
 I wasn't included in groups  
 I was always alone  
 But there's something special about solitude  
 About being alone with your thoughts  
 Getting to know yourself better than anyone  
 ever would  
 Some people find that dreary  
 Depressing, upsetting, boring  
 But I find comfort in myself  
 In the thought that I can always depend on me

### Killing Me

By Eliana Patwary

Loving you,  
 Even after you left--  
 Was the most beautiful and ugliest thing  
 I've ever done.  
 I take no part in it anymore,  
 It was too painful to carry a love so deep  
 Yet so hard to let go of  
 Even though it was killing me.

## Don't Ignore the Little Things

By Chloe Simmons

I was on my way to grab my morning coffee in my beat-up sneakers, but today seemed different. As I entered the café, I noticed there was a new barista. As I placed my order, the barista seemed to be lost in his mind. He couldn't focus for more than a few seconds at a time. It took him 5 minutes to comprehend my order. I made my way out the door and began walking to the craft store to look at some new fabrics for my clothing design store. I need to keep things new and exciting in my shop. As I browsed the aisles, I came across this fabric covered in embroidered flowers. I knew I needed it the moment I saw it. I tossed the fabric into my cart and continued my shopping and grabbed some more essentials such as pencils, needles, and thread. I made my way to check out and ran into a friend who informed me about a man who had robbed a few shops in the area and said I should be extra cautious. Of course, I had it in my mind that it wouldn't affect me because stuff like that would never happen to me, so I didn't make a mountain out of a molehill and thanked her for informing me and went on with my day as normal. Today the shop is going to be closing early because the insulation needs replacing. I had hired a local family business to do it during the evening so it would not interrupt my business or their day jobs.

At the end of the workday, I waited for the family to arrive. They pulled up in a van and had very few supplies, but I was hoping to inspire people to use more local businesses, so I put trust in them to get the job done. As they approached, I noticed that one of the men looked familiar: It was my barista from this morning and - just like this morning - he was having a very difficult time staying engaged in conversation. I handed a shop key to the eldest man who I assumed was the father and asked if he would mind fixing a windowpane that had been broken earlier in the day. I noticed on the side of the van it said they could replace windows as well. He assured me that the

window and insulation would be done by the time I arrived in the morning. I headed home, cooked dinner, and went to bed.

I woke up extra early to get my coffee because I was in a rush to see how the shop was looking this morning. I noticed that the new barista was not there, but I just wrote it off as he had the day off and went on my way to the shop. When I arrived, I was shocked at I saw. Not only was the window not fixed but, there were additional damages such as holes in the wall and the door was now missing. The shop has been cleared of all products and the money in the register was gone. I wrecked my brain trying to find the contact number for the family I hired to do my insulation because in my mind that was the only reasonable suspect. Once I got in contact with the father, he told me that he had completed the work and was gone by 10 pm last night. So, I contacted the police, and they began to investigate the other family members to see if any of them could be in connection with the previous robberies. The mother and father checked out because the neighbors confirmed that they saw them entering their home at 10:30. The only person left to investigate was the barista son. He was out late last night and was the only other person who knew his father had a key to the shop and knew where it was kept.

They found him wondering the street a few hours later and he was taken into custody. They asked him where he had stashed all the items and he told them he had hid them in the van, which he took while his parents were sleeping. I took him to court, and he tried to justify his actions by saying he took me giving them a key as an invitation to have free for all in my store. I don't know how me giving a key to someone I trusted to help me would inspire him to rob me. He had this loveless look in his eyes and though he wasn't prosecuted in connection with the other crimes I felt some sort of just had been served for me and I saved others from this man.



By Judy Lam

**Three Haikus**

**By PJ Elias**

Fog shrouds eternally  
 Quiet gust hovers above  
 Water flows lively

Leaf drifts from the sky  
 Crescent moon brings joy once more  
 Blessings of winter

Path runs to the sky  
 Spring blossom stands with courage  
 Mountains reach cheerful

**Three Haikus**

**By Aiden Vanasco**

“Waterfall”  
 Through the mountaintops  
 A river twists and turns – calm  
 And then it falls down

“Nightmare”  
 A new day begins  
 The sun rises in the east  
 Down again...darkness

“New Beginning”  
 The forest blazes  
 Like torches and gasoline  
 And then it grows back

**a lover's dream**  
**by Victoria Filson**

12:34 in the morning. your voice leaves the air that surrounded me, but it still lingers in my ears. I can't fall asleep yet, so I write about you. I write about the way you touch me, the way you speak to me, the way you love me. I write about how you heal me. how I notice your thumb trailing over my scars, how emotional you get when I say I'm anything less than a goddess. You hold my head up.

2:00, my eyes get heavy, and I am bombarded with mental images of you the second I close them. the way your lips move as you speak to me, the way your pupils dilate when our eyes interlock, the way your heartbeats when I put my ear against your chest. I'm asleep. it's you but I can't see your body. I hear your voice, your whispers, your laugh. red, royal blue, grey, soft pink, black. I know it's you. I sense you; I feel you. but still I am not satisfied with just your colors or feeling. I need to see you. I walk forward into the forest of color in search of you. your scent stains my nostrils, I'm closer to you. just as soon as I believe I've found you the color all mutes, like a switch was flipped. black surrounded me. you call out my name, I call out yours. we search for each other in the pitch black. our hands touch, the color is restored. Your eyes sparkled; your smile is beaming. "I love you" you speak to me in the calmest voice. "I love you too"

6:30 in the morning, my eyes open. I miss you. I suppose I'll have to wait to see you in my dreams.

**Porcelain**  
**By Sky Krampitz**

She's so beautiful, the fragile little girl. They don't realize the pressure they put on her porcelain. She creates this mask that she uses to hide her face. The media broke her, but everyone thinks she's happy. These happy little girls who do not realize how broken they are. Their porcelain is compared to shiny plastic of new dolls. They strain their porcelain; they measure their waists. Everything about them that makes them unique begins to sink.

Little girls grow smaller and smaller bones protruding, faces sunken in. We build their fractures with our beauty standards. We tell them they mean everything to us, but we tell them that they are not good enough. Are we lying to our girls? Or are our mothers brainwashed by the plastic models?

We admire the porcelain girl on the shelf, but we take hammers to her legs. We shatter them, we immobilize her. Those closest to her, turn her to dust.

They tell her they love her, but they break her.

They tell her they care, but they run water over her dust and wash it away.

They tell her she's perfect, but they abandon her.

They leave her thinking it was her fault, that she had done something. She screamed "If only I were made of plastic their words would have meaning!"

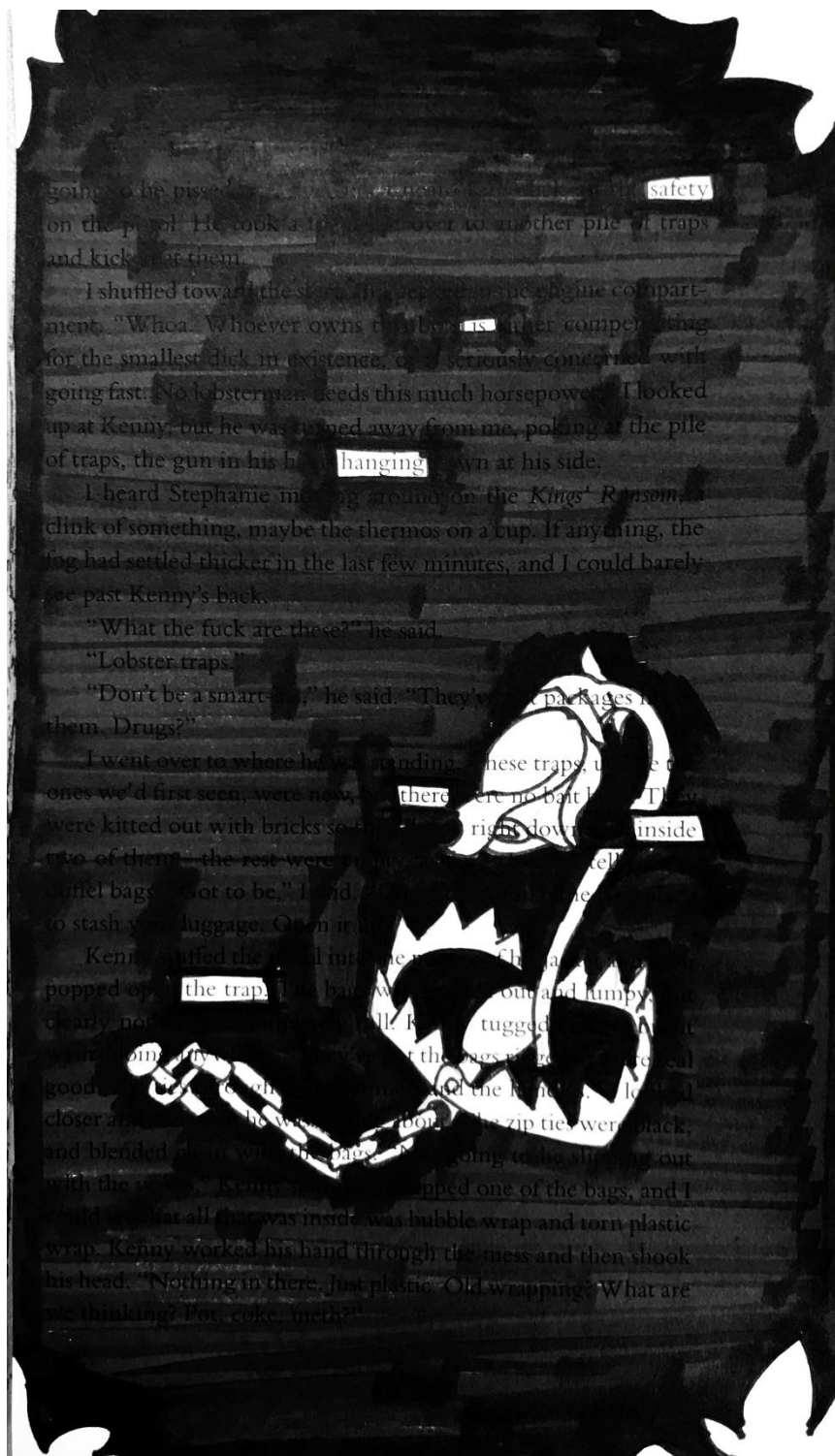
She lays in the street and never gets up. She died, we killed porcelain girl.

Please stop hurting our girls.



**The Man In the Mirror**  
**By Devin Godfrey**

The man in the mirror  
 Stuck in his own world  
 How did he get here?  
 Not even he knows  
 He walks along the  
 chrome planet  
 Wondering what his purpose is  
 But every time he tries to move,  
 It's like he's bound by a string  
 He takes notice to the  
 little things  
 How he can never think  
 for himself  
 Like he's walking in someone  
 else's footsteps  
 And he just can't get away  
 His friends: does he really like  
 them?  
 His food: is it really good?  
 These questions keep him up  
 at night  
 As well as his dreams that don't  
 bring him happiness  
 But then he's driven to a mirror  
 A square slab of reflection  
 The thing he is shocked to find  
 Is himself staring right back  
 The same person, yet different  
 The puppeteer to his obedient  
 life  
 He finally understands  
 what's wrong  
 And who's controlling his  
 dreary existence  
 Every move he makes isn't  
 his own  
 Every thought he thinks belongs  
 to someone else  
 He really is stuck in this world of  
 his  
 And there's no way of  
 ever escaping



By Clara Engstrom

## Questions for my Great-Babica

By PJ Elias

Why did no one tell me about you?

Was it because you disowned your family?

*"I always loved my family."*

Was your daughter, grandchildren and great grandson not family?

Did anyone tell you about me?

I was told everyone knew about me, my Babcia gave everyone photos of me.

*"(Silence)"*

What about your sister?

Why destroy your family over jewelry?

Was it necessary to rip a small family in half?

Is there more to your story then,

the person who destroyed photos, papers and people

I hope there is...

because I would like to be proud of my ancestors

*"there's always more to a person, people aren't one-sided."*

What did you want to be known for?

Or did you just want to be forgotten like your ancestors were?

I would have loved stories about Warsaw.

About the Russian Army

About your father's sibling

But I got nothing,

Your side leaves a hole in my family

In my history

I wish I could figure out what makes a Baginski

Why are there so many Gay people on this side?

Why do most of the people on this side have mental health problems?

Why are there more criminals on this side than my Italian family.

Why.

*"(Silence)"*

## Garden

By Aniyah Berry

There's a garden in town

Belongs to someone,

They have many lilies and roses,

But they can't find something they don't see,

A flower that can be special as it should be,

Unknown colors, they say, wishing they could stay,

In the garden of flowers, with special kind, they find, wishing they could keep the unknown roses and lilies.

## Scent

By Devin Godfrey

Scents are all I can recall  
 From back when life was sublime  
 No memories, no visions  
 Just feelings of a better time  
 The smell of autumn  
 I can simply describe  
 As a cool, crisp breeze  
 On the countryside  
 Winter, a unique aroma  
 One that can't be replaced  
 Like warm, hot chocolate in your hand  
 While you talk by the fireplace  
 Spring smells of fresh grass  
 And rainy morning dew  
 Like laying on the lawn  
 The sunlight, strewed  
 Summer wreaks of the ocean  
 That salty, fishy smell  
 Like visiting new and different places  
 But too soon having to wave farewell  
 Every single moment  
 Each and every season  
 Can be traced back to some memory  
 Without meaning or reason  
 Why is this, you might ask?  
 Why do these moments resonate so much?  
 I believe it's because of some primal longing  
 For the past, just one touch

## Flower

By Aniyah Berry

I think I shall never see.  
 A lovely poem as a flower.  
 A flower whose hungry mouth is preset.  
 Against the streets flowing ways.  
 A flower that looks good all day  
 And lifts her petals arms to fly.  
 a flower that may in summer wear  
 A nest of pollen in her hair.  
 Poems are made by clowns like me,  
 But only seeds can make a flower...

## Her

By Aniyah Berry

She is a flower in the wind.  
 Her bloom is fly.  
 The wind takes her petals one by one.  
 Lean stalk of a stem, the wind once proud of now  
 wails in and about her.  
 The seer cannot see herself.  
 Dying is the winds full of grief.

Flower  
 By Sureyemi Santiago





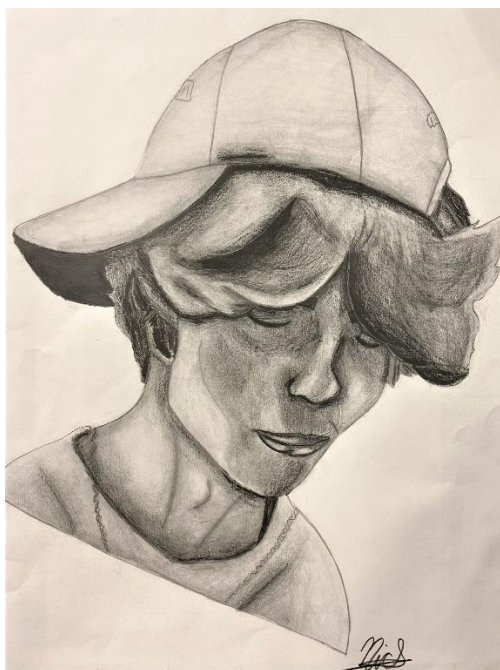
Fuzzy Caterpillar by Clara Engstrom

## Books By Sabrina Steffenhagen

My love for books:  
 Books, they never fail  
 Full of knowledge  
 Never ending excitement  
 Books are like food  
 We crave and we ponder  
 Wondering when it fills us  
 With what we need  
 Books live on and foretold  
 Many stories  
 Unlike us, we die  
 Books live on forever, they're immortal!  
 So fascinating, another time period  
 Passes by, books remain knowledgeable  
 From then on  
 Books have made us smile,  
 Cry, or grow terror from  
 The stories we've heard  
 Books, forever a tool  
 A tool that creates humanity  
 And never stops evolving  
 Till the end of time

## Life and Death Poem By Zack Jennings

Life is all around us every day,  
 But we are still deaths prey.  
 Life is in everyone,  
 Until are life is done.  
 Death will claim us all  
 Whether that is from old age or a fatal fall,  
 Life will still be with us.  
 Even when we are on the death bus.  
 Life will always be there,  
 Through your ups and downs, helping you avoid  
 deaths snare.  
 While death is knocking,  
 Life is there, distracting you by talking.  
 So, when you reach the end of our lives,  
 Life will still be there, looking at all the fun times  
 in our old dusty archives.



By Nico Schreiber



Stream of Consciousness  
By Chloe Simmons

I remember when I was younger, I was always playing with an abacus toy, I specifically remember a particular bead that was in the center of every row. My mother used this to teach me how to count at a young age. Now that I am an adult I stop and think that if things like credit and debit cards did not exist that would be a real good skill to have handy. I also have a very vivid memory of sitting in drama class and counting the minutes on the clock. Thinking back on this brought to memory my best friend at the time and how I used to question her motives within the relationship at times. Like there were a few times where I would tell her about something that I accomplished and she would one up me, but I was so blind at the time that I thought it was a coincidence. But at the end of high school, I finally came to the realization that she wasn't loyal; she just wasn't a good friend to me. I think it's quite funny how one thought from your childhood could lead to so many other events that you don't even know you have.



By Joanna Godfrey

**Crystal ball****By Sky Krampitz**

He holds me up for the world to see in his crystal ball, he likes when I wear white.  
 He likes to watch me cry and fall, he gives me clothes that are too tight.  
 He tells me I will be prettier the smaller that I get,  
 through the glass I watch them pass, he only wishes to protect.  
 When I try to leave, he will not let me out no matter how loud I get.  
 I sit in silence in the tight white dress, filled with lust and regret.  
 I try to catch someone's eye, but no one hears my call.  
 It gets lonely inside the crystal ball.  
 He loves me I think, he would not want me to sink.  
 "I love you but please let me free"  
 The glass shatters but he is leaving without me.  
 He finds a new girl to wear the white dress, but it fits her perfect,  
 she is everything I am not, at least at the surface.  
 I have never felt such grief for someone who put me through hell,  
 the worst part is I still love him, and everyone can tell.  
 I miss my captor, he filled me with love and laughter, he made my heartbeat faster than ever  
 before.  
 Although I know he was not good to me, there is no where I would rather be than in his arms  
 again.  
 Or we can just be friends, or you can leave without saying goodbye.  
 I recount my story from beginning to end.  
 All I think is I would give anything to  
 be trapped again.

**Ball****By Sabrina Steffenhagen**

Ball in my hand  
 So shiny yet shows my true age  
 Time have passed by  
 When will the mystifying  
 Ball age, oh I wonder!  
 The ball of mysteries  
 Powers of knowledge that is far  
 From our time  
 What will it tell?  
 My mind so amused by its sparkle  
 The ball that will outlive me  
 Passed down by generations  
 Knowing each person that owned it  
 The mystifying ball have lived in many  
 Era's, unlike me, a mortal, it will  
 Outlive me and will be passed  
 Down by many more  
 Generations to come  
 The mystifying ball will  
 Tell more stories till  
 The end of time.



By Joanna Godfrey

and when my dad waved to you and called you buddy, I felt like fainting in that parking lot.  
 The ever so familiar malicious look in your eyes killed me.  
 you took a part of me with you to hoard with all the others.  
 I can't catch my breath.  
 I shake when I hear your name.  
 I wish I could do so many things to you  
 I wish you could ache how I ache.  
 but you can't,  
 and you never will.  
 despite my desperate wishes and pleas to every god dead and alive,  
 you will never understand how you made me feel.  
 alone.  
 pitiful.  
 a mess.  
 you made me a disaster.  
 and I genuinely hate to say there's still a part of your evil inside of me.  
 they just diagnosed it.

**untitled**

**by Victoria Filson**

I saw your picture today,  
 and instantly my stomach churned  
 my head ached  
 I went numb.  
 I started into your cold, unforgiving eyes  
 and remembered how you looked  
 into mine.  
 my innocent eyes.  
 they used to be, at least.  
 you didn't see a kid you saw an  
 opportunity to corrupt and steal.  
 I hate you for everything you did  
 to me and I can't look at you without  
 wanting to scream,  
 cry, breakdown.  
 but I can't.  
 I must keep my composure  
 because I'm supposed to be the strong  
 one.  
 I can't bring myself to cry over you  
 because you don't deserve my tears.  
 but I do.  
 every time I hear a knock on the door,  
 every time I fumble with a door handle,  
 every time I wear blue  
 I die a little inside.

### **The Polish Diaspora**

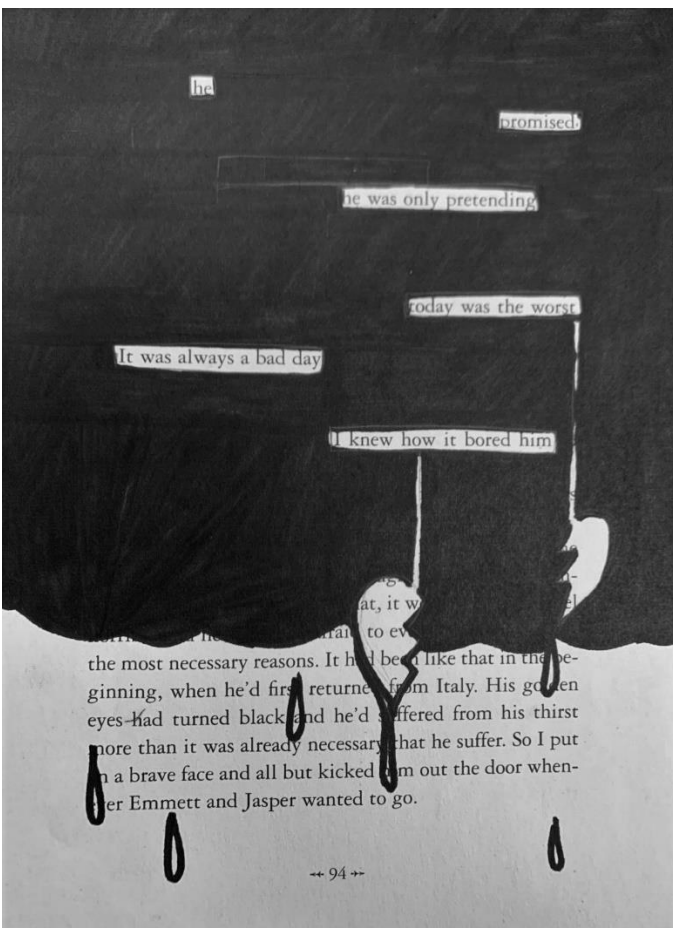
**By PJ Elias**

Our grandparents didn't identify as American  
 They didn't speak English they spoke a  
 different tongue  
 Quotas were put on our people  
 We are often grouped with Jews  
 Some of us are Jews but we come from  
 many faiths  
 Our ancestors were part of a  
 religious experiment  
 An experiment where you would be of any race  
 or religion  
 and you were excepted for being you  
 Our history is a dying one  
 This is our ancestor's legacy  
 We are the Polish Diaspora

### **Help Me**

**By Aiden Vanasco**

Help me out please  
 I'm not stuck but  
 I feel like it  
 Promise that you will...  
 I know I missed my chance  
 And I know I had more,  
 But the more scared you are of getting hurt  
 The more you get hurt  
 Promise that you will...  
 This poem makes no sense  
 But I get it  
 I feel it  
 I hate it  
 I don't wanna see myself anymore  
 I don't like how it looks  
 So please help me out of here  
 Promise that you will...  
 I wanna open up to you  
 But I'm closed right now,  
 Maybe I'll open tonight  
 But by then you'll already be gone  
 Stay another night  
 Promise that you will...  
 I tried getting advice and all I get is  
 "Be yourself"  
 But I don't know who that is.  
 I see him  
 I feel him  
 I am him  
 But that's as far as we've got  
 He's trapped and he's sad and he's mad and  
 he's bad  
 At conveying what he believes in  
 Mainly because he doesn't know  
 Promise that you will...



By Madison Parrish

poet

by Victoria Filson

out of my mind and out through my fingertips  
 like a waterfall of words.  
 you say you can't write poetry but that is evidently false.  
 because you yourself are a poem,  
 a collection of masculine beauty with delicate tone and  
 hypnotic rhythm.  
 the way you speak is fruitful, my tongue dances behind my  
 teeth at the sound of your voice and  
 all worries are subsided.  
 your eyes speak of every Greek tragedy and every gothic  
 love epic  
 Homer has nothing on you.  
 nor does Poe, Plath, Hemingway, Shakespeare  
 none compare to your poetry.  
 they wrote it but you live it,

**The one that got away**

**By Eliana Patwary**

I got the privilege  
 Of loving you from afar.  
 But by doing that,  
 I had to watch you fall in love with  
 someone else  
 Because what I felt for you,  
 You could never feel for me.  
 I was the one that got away  
 And you never even realized  
 Until it was too late  
 And you had lost me.

art and love, lust and masterpieces they go  
 together like you and I.  
 magnificently.  
 history has gotten it all incorrect,  
 the best poet is not a man 6 feet under  
 but a man standing 6 feet tall  
 my lover, my earth, my moon and all my  
 stars  
 my poet, my muse, my work of art.  
 you are my starry night.  
 my Van Gough  
 and you are my music  
 the sweet melody of your voice.  
 you are my universe  
 every star and  
 galaxy manifest themselves in you,  
 stardust.



**Snow****By Sky Krampitz**

Buried in the snow sits a woman in white,  
 The man in red comes into sight.  
 He speaks to her "come with me my dear."  
 She looked up at him with a face full of fear.  
 He pulled her hair, saw the look on her face,  
 "I love you my dear now move from your place.  
 I'm trying to help yet you continue to hide,  
 now come with me, we must go inside."  
 She tries to speak but he hinders her reply.  
 "Things will get worse if you continue to lie."  
 She looks up with tears in her eyes.  
 "Please help, the snow burns me inside."  
 The burns stretched down he arms and back.  
 He knew she was in harm, so he put her in a sac  
 In agony she screamed as he marched up a hill  
 he hung the sac from a tree, up his spine went a  
 chill.  
 The sun came up and the snow began to decay,  
 then the woman and white simply melted  
 away.

**Slipping Away****By Eliana Patwary**

I think the only reason it hurt  
 Was because I already knew what was  
 happening  
 And that I couldn't stop it.  
 So instead, I watched as you slipped away  
 And found someone else  
 Without even realizing.

**Past Tense****By Eliana Patwary**

I loved you,  
 And for quite some time,  
 You loved me back.

**Time is a Concept****By PJ Elias**

Old man, old man.  
 Walking along the shore, leaving footprints in  
 his wake.  
 Crash! Rumble! Boom! The lightning shrieks.  
 The thunder never ends. Boom!  
 Time means is nothing here.  
 The clock of time stopped long ago.  
 Always looping.  
 Back and forth  
 Back and forth it goes, forever.  
 "WHY!" the old man screams to the sky.  
 Boom! Crash!  
 Old man, old man.  
 Walking along the shore, leaving footprints in  
 his wake.  
 Crash! Rumble! Boom!  
 A turtle lays her eggs.  
 Continuing the cycle of life.  
 Crash! Rumble!  
 The old man sits under a tree.  
 Abacus at hand.  
 he moves one bead forward.  
 Then on back.  
 Back and forth  
 Back and forth  
 "Why can't I leave!" the man screams?  
 Boom! Crash!  
 Time now gone

**The Class Example****By Aiden Vanasco**

There was a man full of bitterness,  
 Who put cuss words in his limerick!  
 So then when Ms. L,  
 Needed to tell,  
 She sure could not deliver it.

**Untitled Thoughts**  
**By Chloe Simmons**

As I stroll past the field of thistles, I noticed this lone tomato that lays by itself in the middle of the field. As I went on with my day, I started to realize that in a strange way I felt I related to that tomato, someone who stood out from everyone else and was accepted by no one. I wished that I were just like everyone else. Soon after I got off work, I was on my home and walked past that same field but, this time there was an elderly woman was frolicking through the field in a smock. She stopped when she noticed me picking up the tomato and continued walked, she offered me a bag of toadstools and told me that I was now bestowed with the gift that I had been wishing for. As I continued my walk with the bag in hand I began to wonder if she were just bluffing or if she could possibly be telling the truth. With all loss of hope and a feeling of desperation I decided to take a chance and I ate one of the toadstools. As I lay on my rusted bed, I dream of a man who approached me and began to yodel. While this was not a usual dream, I just chalked it up to the fact that I had eaten the toadstools. As my dreams continue, I soon realize that everyone around me looks the same, they all looked like me. They all had the same job as me and enunciated their words just like me. They had medium length brown hair and the world was so boring. After spending what seemed like days in this never-ending cycle of doing the same thing and seeing the same people over and over again, I finally woke up and real mixed that the “gift” was showing me that I should be careful about what I wished for and I should be grateful that we’re not all the same and we should embrace our differences.

**Be Careful What You Wish For**  
**By Mykayla Mefford**

Her gown seemed to swallow the light of the forest as she tossed the tomato from one hand to the other, sitting atop an oversized toadstool and kicking up dust with her feet that energetically tapped the ground in an everlasting song. The tomato, still being tossed back and forth, brought a poetic air to the girl, and she laughed as she recited her lines aloud.

“Oh my plump and juicy fair tomato plant,  
Green as a vegetable yet red as an ant,  
If I were to bite your redness into two,  
Tell me, then; would death ever stop you?”

She couldn’t help but tap-tap-tap her fingers on the toadstool still, chuckling amongst herself in the loneliness of the forest. The vines around her seemed to circle in at that last line of hers, though her fanged grin paid them no mind. The end of her smock, stopping just at her knees, danced from side-to-side as her legs did the same. Though eternally old, she was cheerful as a child, and that was something that brought forth many favors and many terrors.

A whisper echoed throughout the forest. A favor, it asked of her. A terror, it was sure to bring. She cared not for the latter. Hopping off of her stool, there was an everlasting bounce in her step as the tomato fell carelessly to the ground.

“Oh, dear. Is that a child, all alone, in *this* forest?” it asked, that whisper in the trees, a lilt of mockery to its voice. An ordinary child would have followed, and it was perfectly aware of that – but she’d stayed behind. Her feet were planted firm in the dusty dirt clearing, face covered by that iconic crowned hat, and a smile was all that shone over her shadowed white face.

“Are you lost? I would assume so. Don’t worry, child, I can lead you out of here. Just follow the sound of my voice.”

“...Who’d stop me if I turned around?”

The second the girl spoke; the voice fell silent. The trees stopped their rustling, if only for a moment; and the whistling of the breeze fell on deaf knowingly ignorant ears. She fixed the pendant on her chest and smiled to the sky.

A drop of rain fell on her nose, and the torrent that followed was vicious and never-ending. – without a purpose. “I love rainy days!” She beamed to the covered sun, flashing a smile at the silver lining that had vanished from her sight, “I could yodel to the sky and no one would ever be able to hear me!”

“That... that is great and all,” The voice whispered, though it was quickly drowned out by the flood and the screams of the wind. It raised itself, now booming in the clearing, “But if you’d ever want to leave, you better come with me!”

“And who says I wanna come with you? I got in here on my own, I can get out on my own too!” She hollered. A crash of lightning roared overhead.

“You do not know of this forest’s magic, child!”

“I know of your bluff! You think you know my parents?”

“I know everything that happens in this forest!”

*“Then you’re a fraud!”*

The girl tossed a rock at the direction of the voice. Though only a pebble, it caused a mighty branch to fall from the thicket, leaves and thistles billowed in the wind. The voice went silent. The storm seemed to calm, and as quick as it came, it was gone. She fixed the pendant on her blouse yet again, and the sun rose from behind the clouds. The silver lining in the storm still hadn’t made itself clear – so she’d found her own.

The girl stepped forward. The trees retreated. She stepped again. And again, and again, approaching the end of the clearing with a fanged grin plastered on that shadowed face of hers. She gripped a branch fiercely, denting the bark. Her smile grew wider, and the voice quivered.

“W-What sort of child are you? I never asked for this! This isn’t what I wanted!”

“What did you want, then?”

“I wanted to fulfill my duty!”

“You can fulfill it, still,” She said, making sure to enunciate her words clearly and with a click of the tongue. The emerald pendant shimmered brightly in the light, not a sign of a single drop of rain on it. The girl seemed completely dry, actually.

“R-Really?”

“Yes, of course. You can do it elsewhere.”

All was silent in the clearing. All except for a small whimper, a small trace of tears behind the darkness of the thicket. The trees around her were afraid. They should have been, after all.

“My mother told me this, right before she’d died a thousand years ago,” Said the girl, “‘Always use the gift bestowed upon you.’ Isn’t that funny? How the ones who gave me this gift are about to meet their end with it?”

“...The Chosen!” The trees hiss, their scornful voices trembling with hatred and fear.

“Yes! Good! You get a gold star. Now, say hi to her for me, will you?”

The voices hushed. Everything was quiet once more.

Everything was quiet forevermore.



By Clara Engstrom

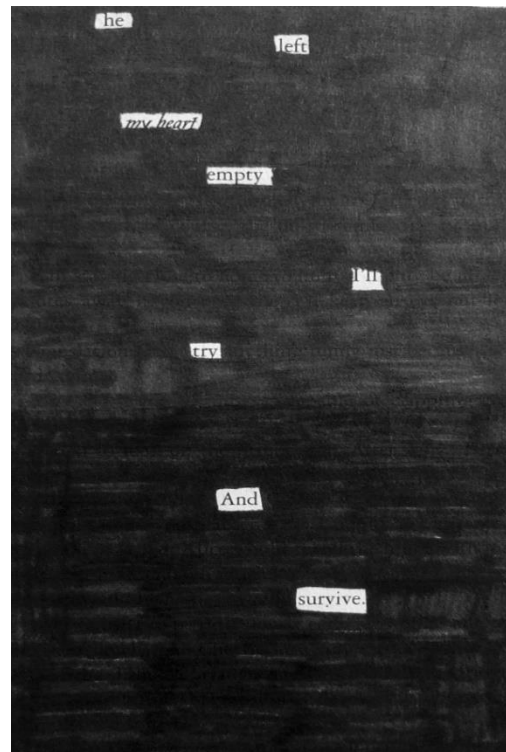
**Cat and human(relationship)**  
**By Monique Garces**

There once was a cat  
 Mina  
 Her human had picked her out  
 one day  
 At the beginning their relationship  
 wasn't all that great  
 She wasn't her mate  
 But time went on  
 Mina's fear was gone  
 They were drawn together  
 Two peas in a pod  
 Inseparable  
 Fight together  
 Against all odds

**Untitled**

**By Madison Parrish**

A blank reflection stared back at me  
 Where was I? it was glass wasn't it?  
 So where was I?  
 My hand gripping the glass  
 Reminded me I was real  
 Tethered me to the earth in a way  
 The shattered reflections on the floor  
 Reminded me I was real  
 So why was it so hard to see the true me  
 Was I not good enough?  
 Or maybe It saw me for who I was  
 Just like everyone else did  
 Just like I did A broken fragment  
 Unable to piece back together.



By Destiny Reny

## Dorm Barista Banter

By Alex Ung

Joseph walked into his dorm room, breathing heavily as he tossed his Starbuck's cap onto a hook and kicked off his sneakers. He plopped down on the bed. His friend, Andy, walked in after him, putting their coffees on their desks before he sat on his own bed.

"Rough day?" Andy asked as he pulled a pencil and his sketchbook off his desk.

"I guess..." Joseph responded blankly as he turned away from his roommate and looked at the embroidery of a deer's skull that a girl in his class gave him. "Well, actually, it was just another grueling day in the cafe... unless you count a certain windowpane there that has been bugging me all day."

Andy just laid down on his bed as he began drawing his roommate and stared at a decaying deer. He took inspiration from the embroidery and Joseph's sulking as he went to work. "What about it?"

Joseph sighed as he sat up and turned back to Andy, "There was this small crack in the front window of the cafe I work at... and they just... placed a flyer in front of it like it doesn't matter. Who does that? We need that win--"

"Joe," Andy interrupted as he sat up "you're making a mountain out of a mole hill, a small crack shouldn't be an issue. What would really be an issue is the insulation of the place I'm working at. I swear, it's so freezing in there that as soon as the coffee gets in the cup, it's already cold."

"It doesn't justify the fact that they left that crack in the window for more than a week." Joseph said as he grabbed his coffee off his desk.

"Look, if it has already been a week, then there should be someone who has already been called to fix it." Andy finished up his sketch of Joseph staring at the corpse of his old dog with a deer skull over its head and a loveless gaze, as if Joseph was the one who ended the canine.

Andy got up and walked over to Joseph, showing Joseph the sketch. Joseph took the sketchbook from his roommate's hand and placed his coffee back onto his desk. Joseph looked at the surprisingly detailed image and nodded, slightly baffled about the fact that Andy was able to do it so fast. "Ni- wait... are you trying to get my mind off th--"

"Just appreciate it and quit being OCD about everything." Joseph said as he got back on his own bed and pulled up his covers over his legs. He opened his laptop to see if he had any classes the following day. Joseph sighed as he tossed the sketchbook back to his friend and pulled out his phone to check his own schedule. Joseph cursed as he realized that he had an assignment due in 24 hours. He pulled out his laptop from the drawer in his desk and sat down in front of it as he got to work on his creative writing assignment.

"Night, Joe. See ya at lunch tomorrow?" Andy said as he closed his laptop and left it to charge on his desk, next to his phone.

Joseph looked at Andy, "you have classes that early tomorrow?"

"Yeah" Andy placed on a sleeping mask so light wouldn't bother him. Joseph placed on his earbuds before turned down his lamp's light to its lowest setting and turned off Andy's desk lamp. Joseph continued typing away as the moon slowly rose over the girl's dorm building across from his, wanting to write his "worst" story ever.





By Angelique Ballew

**Hamilton's Point**  
**By Cava Boyd**  
**Chapter 1**

My name is Jack Green, and there is something in the forest.

I live in the secluded mountain town of Hamilton's Point. The town sits on the edge of a vast forest. Hamilton's Point is small, one of those stereotypical everyone knows everyone sort of places with a population of 180. Most residents have lived here their entire lives, putting down roots and refusing to leave. Whether it's out of a sense of love for the town or if they're just too stubborn to leave is beyond me. The other portion of residents are the ones who moved here in search of a fresh start. I'm the latter. I moved here a few years back to get a breath of fresh air and a better grip on my mental health. But some things aren't exactly easy to forget, and some people aren't exactly deserving of forgiveness.

I'm still living in the same apartment as when I first moved here. At the time it seemed like a good fit: it's right on the edge of the forest meaning every time I looked out my window, I could see the stretch of trees that seemed to put me at rest. There's just something about watching the branches sway in the breeze that I can't explain. Not to mention the sunsets, it doesn't matter how awful I feel, how horrible my day was, just watching a sky filled with vibrant oranges and reds slowly slip away to breathtaking blues and purples is something that calms my nerves. But despite the seeming wonderful location, I can't ignore the red flags.

It all started yesterday. It was an early Saturday morning, the light from the window woke me up from a strange dream. I had dreamt that the sky had turned a dark shade of crimson, the air was heavy with the scent of ozone and the forest had caught fire. A thick cloud of black smoke blanketed Hamilton's Point, seemingly blocking it off from the rest of the world. The sound of screaming and car alarms made my head spin as that suffocating smoke filled my lungs with every breath. It caused me to choke and

sputter out coughs. my eyes burned from the catastrophic fire before me, but despite this, I couldn't rip them away from the sight. Something about the way the enormous fire consumed everything it touched captivated my attention. The moment I tried to move I was made painfully aware of just how much every muscle in my body ached as if some unseen force was keeping me in place. When I was finally able to look over, I was alone. For whatever reason, this filled me with such an intense feeling of grief that my eyes watered up. Soon that feeling was replaced with so much self-resentment and anguish that I fell to my knees and clutched my chest, as the first sob escaped my throat, I was snapped awake.

Now I'm no stranger to odd dreams or night terrors but I don't think I've ever experienced a dream- if you can even call it that- like that in my life. Everything was so vivid, from the burning heat on my face to the empty feeling of loneliness in my chest. I'm not sure what it means but every time I think back on it, I can't help but feel a pit of dread start to build up in my stomach.

I stayed in bed going over my thoughts when I got a text. I leaned over and lazily grabbed my phone off the nightstand. When I unlocked it, I saw the text was from Marcy. Marcy is a coworker of mine and a friend. I tried to ignore the dull anxiety in my chest as I opened the text.

'Hey Jackie, I'm headed down to sleepy peaks around seven. I was wondering if you wanted to join me? if you ever pull yourself from your bed that is lol'

Sleepy Peak is the name of the town's local hole in the wall and is a place I've grown quite familiar with. The owner's name is Larry Smith and he's probably the most laid-back guy I've ever met. When I first arrived in town, he offered me a hand with unloading my boxes, I accepted, and we've been chatting ever since. Sometimes if he finds out I'm having a bad night he lets me come in and chill for free. I've even come down just to talk with him a few times.

*Do you want to make plans? You know darn well you don't want to. Just ignore her and go back to sleep. She probably doesn't even want you there.* The intrusive thoughts continued to swirl around my head like a dizzying vortex that only seemed to pull me down into my mind further and further. I felt my chest tighten as the thoughts took a more negative tone. An abrupt buzz from my phone snapped my attention away for a moment.

'It's on me tonight, I know you've had a bit of a rough week. But if you aren't feeling it that's ok too, whatever you want Jackie.' She usually liked to mess with people, but I could tell she was being genuine with me. At least I thought she was. And I'm not complaining. It took me a moment to pull myself together and write out a cohesive message.

'Thanks, I appreciate the invite. And yeah, I'm down for a night out. I could use it haha'

'Oh, for sure Jackie, I can tell. You've been a bit spacy recently. Are you alright? I'm here to talk if you need.'

I thought about the offer for a moment before doing what I always do, 'I'm alright, but thanks. If I need to, I promise I'll reach out.' I won't. I never do.

'I know. Oh, you'll meet me around seven, ok?'

I shot back a 'gotcha.'

After a few more minutes of idle conversation, we said our goodbyes. I spent a little time on my phone before placing it down and trying to rest. I've been having trouble sleeping recently and that weird dream wasn't doing me any favors. I rolled over onto my side, trying to block the morning sun from shining in my eyes, and curled up. Slowly I felt my mind lull itself back into that warm blanket of sleep.

I woke up a few hours later, dehydrated and tangled in my sheets. After a moment of confused scrambling, I was able to untangle myself and get up. I made my way to the bathroom to inhale handfuls of water like I wasn't just a few steps away from my kitchen. After I regained my breath, I happened to glance at myself in the mirror. That's when I noticed just how tired I looked; gray bags hung below my eyes. I stood in my bathroom for a while, my mind was blank.

I just looked at my reflection. After some time, I was able to rip my eyes from the mirror, before I did anything else, I grabbed some concealer and covered up the bags under my eyes as much as possible, I was growing sick of looking at those. I finished getting ready and set out to the local grocery store. I was running low on supplies and eating a single hardboiled egg and a cup of dry cereal for dinner isn't exactly fine dining.

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I rolled the windows down as I drove, the cool air of the afternoon blowing in the car. The weather is great this time of year and the scenery is beautiful. The breeze held the sweet scent of cinnamon and freshly made pumpkin bread. I made a mental note to go pick up something from the local bakery and say hi to the owner while I'm there. She's a sweet old lady who's been extremely kind to me since my arrival.

The wind caught my hair sending the curls flying. I did my best to keep my hair out of my eyes as I drove. While lost in thought I took my attention off the road and didn't notice the man crossing the street until the last moment. Luckily, I was able to stop my car in time, but I was still shaken up. I leaned my head out of my window to apologize to the stranger. He only smiled and waved at me as if he didn't know why I was talking to him. I thought it was weird, but I couldn't do much about it. I grabbed a hair tie that was in my cup holder and snatched my hair up. The ponytail was by no means perfect, but the light had just turned green and I wasn't about to hold traffic up. The rest of my drive was smooth.

As I made my way down the aisle my eyes were immediately drawn to a tall figure in a light brown trench coat, I recognized the man as the same person I had almost hit not even twenty minutes earlier. The man was wearing a white button-up with gold details on the collar, it was tucked into a pair of high-waisted pants with a button zipper. As I brought my eyes up to his face, I felt a warm fluttering in my chest. He had a defined jaw that looked like it could cut a diamond, his lips looked smooth not unlike the rest of his porcelain complexion. His eyes were a strange gold color that seemed to swirl in the overhead lights. The man slicked his hair back and looked at me.

"Hey, I think I've seen you before." the man walked over to me and extended his hand out. I looked at his hand for a moment, I could feel my face growing hot as embarrassment bloomed in my chest. I let out an awkward laugh and shook his hand. "Haha yeah...we saw each other on the way here."

"Oh, you're right," he chuckled "Well, what's your name?" he kept his hand around mine, a part of me didn't want him to let go.

"Jack," I was finally able to look up at him, a calm smile sat on his face, I felt another dizzying flutter in my chest. "What's yours?"

"Sariel. Are you ok? You look red." At that moment I felt my heart skip a beat.

"Oh! No, no- I'm fine," I let out another chuckle "I'm all good."

"Alright then," there was a moment of silence before he spoke up again. "Well, it was a pleasure to meet you, I hope we run into each other again some time." he let go of my hand and went to turn away but stopped, he turned back to me with a smile, "Oh, by the way, I like your hair." Sariel pointed to my sad excuse of a ponytail before waving and walking off. I stood there for a moment, a bit in awe by the odd stranger. The embarrassment was still fresh in my mind.

After gathering my thoughts, I continued with my shopping. Every so often I'd catch myself thinking about Sariel, a part of me wished I had gotten his number. That fluttering in my chest continued as my mind ran wild, but I stifled my thoughts and proceeded with my errands.

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I felt a muted pop under my foot as I stepped before my apartment. Looking down I saw I had stepped on a dead snake, it looked like it had only been dead for an hour or so. Its head was chopped off and its body had been dropped at my door like some macabre offering, or warning depending on how you look at it. I let out a loud "what the heck!?" while stepping back. My eyes darted down the hall to see if I could spot anyone looking suspicious, but I was only met with an empty hallway. Turning back to my door I stared down at the poor creature before unlocking my apartment and crossing the threshold.

I put my food away before getting a plastic bag and paper towels to take care of my unfortunate friend. After I got back inside and washed my hands, I made myself something to eat and sat down to watch some mind-numbing TV before I had to meet Marcy. Ghost, my cat, had been waiting at his food bowl when I got back. He looked up at me with those orange eyes of his before letting out a hungry 'meow' I bent down to scratch his chin before getting him some food. After he was done, he curled up on my lap to watch some tv with me.

Eventually, I decided I should freshen up a bit and head out. I brushed my hair as much as my stubborn curls would allow. Along with this, I fixed up my concealer a bit, part of me was hoping I would run into Sariel again. Before heading out I kissed Ghost on his nose and told him I would be back shortly. He followed me to the door, I gave him one last head scratch before heading out. It was a nice night; the cool breeze was welcome as I made my way down the sidewalk. As I drew closer to the end of my street I picked up on the scent of smoke. Looking around I spotted a small stream of smoke peeking out from over the trees.

I stood there for a moment, watching the gray stream dissipate into the sky. A familiar sickly twisting made its way into my gut. For some reason, I couldn't shake the feeling that this was a bad sign. I mean, it was a completely normal sight, plenty of people go camping here so it's rational to assume that someone had started a fire seeing as it was dark. But even still, something just felt...off. Despite this nagging, I turned and kept walking. I wasn't about to let some imaginary paranoia ruin my night out.

I found Marcy sitting at the counter, she waved to me as I approached. I went to say hi when a loud "Jack! How've you been?" interrupted me. I looked over to find Larry, a huge smile on his face. I took my seat down and returned the smile.

"Hey Larry, hey Marcy. I'm fine. How are you guys?"

Someone sat down at the other end of the counter and waved Larry over, he said he'd be back in a moment before going to see what they needed. I turned my attention to Marcy. Looking over at her, I saw she was a bit dolled up. Her dirty blonde hair was down for once and she was wearing a nice outfit, well nicer than her unusual gray turtleneck and jacket.

"You look nice tonight."

"Oh? You sound surprised Jackie," she smirked as she spoke. "do I not usually look nice?"

I rolled my eyes at her "you know what I meant." I shot her a matching smirk.

She chuckled to herself for a moment, "you know it's nice seeing you smiling for once, but that being said watch yourself Jackie, you're on thin ice." She laughed to herself again before looking down at her phone.

After a moment she shot her head up at me "I'm so sorry, I almost forgot, I invited Mason. he should be here soon; I hope you don't mind."

Mason is Marcy's boyfriend; in my opinion, the guy is a bit of a tool, but I always find myself doing whatever he says. I'm not sure how he does it, as much as I hate to admit it, he has some charm to him. I shrugged despite the pit of annoyance growing in my stomach, "nope, we're all good here." I hoped she couldn't tell that I was lying through my teeth.

A moment later Larry came back, and we ordered our drinks. Marcy and I caught up for a bit while we waited for Mason to show up. I wasn't sure if I wanted to bring up that strange man from the grocery store, Sariel. I wasn't sure how she'd react, but after a few drinks I decided to throw my dignity to the wind, and I told her.

"I met a guy today-" before I could finish my sentence Marcy let out a loud gasp and grabbed my shoulder to pulled me close.

"Tell. Me. Everything." I was hit with the smell of her perfume. I let out a nervous chuckle before pulling myself away.

By now I had forgotten Mason was coming. Well, that was before I felt a hand roughly connect with my shoulder and a loud, "Hey, Tiny!" From beside me. The sudden commotion caught me off guard causing me to flinch nearly spilling my drink. Mason laughed before taking a seat next to Marcy, a toothy smile on his face.

"Have you gotten smaller, or have I gotten bigger?" He laughed again. I steadied my glass and tried to force a smile that didn't seem too fake.

"Hey man...it's been a minute, hasn't it?" I picked at my nails as I spoke, it's a bad habit I have when nervous.

"Yeah, man! I was almost starting to miss you." A second later and he busted out laughing.

"I'm just kidding, Tiny."

I choked out a laugh, "Wow man, that's so funny. You got me. Good one." I shot a deadpan look at him. He didn't seem to pick up on the sarcasm seeing as how he still had that big dumb smile on his face. Marcy wrapped her arm around him and pulled him a little closer, she started talking about her day. Soon enough I wasn't even part of the conversation anymore. I played on my phone, pretending to text someone so I didn't seem as pathetic. The music playing in the background was starting to be drowned out by the conversations of the guests. I paid attention to some of them, I like listening in on these small clips of people's life. Across the room, a girl was gossiping about her boyfriend, every time she came to the counter her friends would complain about her. I wonder if people do that to me, maybe I'm just being brushed off. It wouldn't surprise me to find out every time I turn my back someone has something to say about me.

As my mind wondered I felt my mood shifting, the atmosphere that was once acting as a mood buffer was now starting to be my downfall. How would I have guessed? The thought of leaving crossed my mind but, before I could debate it further, I heard my name, "Oh! Jackie! Tell Mason about that man you saw today" a wide smile sat on her face. She had a light pink flush across her cheeks; it was very noticeable compared to her usually pale skin.

I averted my eyes and looked down at my cup "I'd rather not"

I was interrupted by Marcy letting out a whine, "pleaseeeee~" she gave me a pouty look, after a moment Mason gave me a matching expression.

"Yeah, come on Tiny, pleaseeeee~" he brought his hands up into a begging motion, Marcy did the same.

I looked between them both before letting out a sigh. I caved and repeated the story to Mason, waiting to see his reaction. He thought for a moment, "he hotter than me?"

Marcy slapped him on the arm, "Mason."

"What? I wanna know" he raised his eyebrows at me, waiting for a response. Mason laughed.

"I'm just messing with you man." Marcy tried scolding him but soon enough they were neck deep in another topic.

I turned my attention back to people watching. I was in the middle of finishing my drink when I noticed the tail end of a familiar brown trench coat whip out of the door and into the night. I had a sudden strong desire to follow it. I looked at the door for a moment, tapping my fingers on the counter as I thought the decision over. After a moment I got up and turned to excuse myself. Marcy looked a bit bummed I was leaving but didn't say much to keep me around.

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I left quickly. Soon enough I found myself wandering into the forest, normally I would never go into the forest at night without some sort of protection but in my state, I didn't give a crap. I was more focused on finding Sariel again. The air grew progressively more and more frigid as I made my way deeper behind the tree line. I could have sworn I heard footsteps behind me but every time I stopped walking so I could listen they would also stop as if someone was trying to time our footsteps to be in sync. Now for some reason, this didn't throw me off, but the sound of whispering did.



I froze in my tracks and looked around; I couldn't shake the feeling that I was being watched. After a moment I bought myself to speak up, I let out a shaky "hello?" And waited for a response, though a part of me dreaded the idea of something watching me from the darkness. I wasn't expecting an answer, if anything I thought it might have been some teenagers messing around in the forest, but I couldn't have been more wrong. After a few seconds of pure silence, the voices started up again, they progressively grew louder and louder until I felt the group rumble under the force. Pain flooded my head as the voices spoke. I couldn't make out the words, they seemed to be in a different language. I clasped my hands over my ears and tried to run. I felt something wet drip down the side of my face from my ears, but I didn't care. The only thing I was focused on was getting out. The voices followed me through the forest, but I wasn't listening.

I had just made my way through the tree line when someone grabbed my ankle causing me to face plant. When my nose connected with the ground, I heard a solid crunch as pain exploded in my face, but I didn't have much time to focus on that before I felt something sharp stab into my leg and pull down. I let out a scream and looked back at whatever the heck had a hold of me. I found myself face to horrifying face with something I can only describe as a walking nightmare. The creature's skin had a pale, sort of translucent appearance. It had a deformed head and milky white eyes. Its large gaping mouth had dozens of tiny sharp teeth that sparkled in the moonlight.

The thing let out an inhuman scream that shook my eardrums as it stabbed its other razor-sharp claw into my leg and pulled me back. The pain snapped me out of my shock and kicked in my adrenalin, I let out a horrified "WHAT THE-" before I kicked the ugly thing off. I scrambled to my feet and tried running, but as soon as I put pressure on my injured leg, it gave in causing me to fall again. I pushed myself up and continued to try and run but I was slowed down by my leg. My head was going a mile a minute, it was hard to focus on any one thought but the one that sticks out the most to me is: 'you can't let it get you. You can't die tonight. You're still needed.' This strikes me as odd because I've never been the self-preserving type, so it's strange why I'd think that. It didn't feel like a natural thought, almost as if someone had placed it into my head.

After getting some distance between me and the forest I finally let myself look back. The thing was gone but I didn't stop running. In my distraction I ran into someone. Looking up I found myself standing in front of what looked like a walking shadow, the only thing I could distinctly make out was a set of golden eyes. I felt another wave of fear hit as the figure moved down slightly and let out a smooth, "oh my...are you alright?"

I couldn't answer him, I just pushed past and started running, even faster than before. It hurt, but I didn't stop, especially when I heard a set of footsteps start running after me.

"Hey! What happened? Why are you running?"

It was the same voice from just a minute ago, in my fear I couldn't remember who the voice belonged to, but it sounded familiar. Despite this, I couldn't stop myself from letting out a terrified "I don't have any money! Leave me alone-" but was cut off as my foot clipped a bump in the sidewalk, I tried to catch myself before I fell but just ended up skinning one of my wrists and one of my palms. I landed on my face once again. Hot pain blossomed in my nose as I let out a yelp and a string of cuss words. The man who was chasing me was at my side when I looked up. Now that I could get a good look at him, I recognized him as that man I had seen in the grocery store, Sariel. He knelt beside me and tried helping me up.

"Oh my gosh, are you alright? I didn't mean to scare you, I'm so sorry Jack."

I took his outstretched hand and with his help, I was able to get up. I must have looked like absolute garbage because his apologetic expression changed to one of shock and concern "Are you alright?" He wrapped his arm around me and held me up, so I didn't have to put as much pressure on my leg.

Embarrassment filled my chest like a ton of bricks, I tried to think of something to tell him other than that I was just attacked by some ungodly nightmare creature in the forest. “I...I was attacked by some animal in the forest...I didn’t get a good look at it.” it was believable enough not to raise too many questions.

Sariel took a long look at me before leaning in closer, as he did, I got hit with the scent of Lilies. “I think we should get you home, yeah?” To save myself from taking any more than I had to, I gave him a nod. He helped me walk as we made our way back to my apartment.

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When we finally got inside my apartment Sariel helped me to the couch. By now I was having trouble focusing on anything but the pain. My head was spinning faster by the moment. I moved to hold myself as Sariel approached, glancing up at him I saw he had a look of concern on his face.

He placed a hand on my shoulder and looked at me with those ever-spinning golden eyes, “you need some help...luckily I can assist with that.” I winced as his fingers brushed against the scratches on my arm. A soft yellow light spilled from his hands and soon enough the pain in my palm had faded, he pulled away so I could see it. My hand was completely healed up, nothing but a few small scars left to hold a reminder of what had happened. I stared at my hand for a moment, just trying to process what he had done. After a silent moment I looked up at him, he looked a bit nervous. “Does it still hurt?” I shook my head and looked down at my hand, it felt fine. Like nothing had happened. “Would you like me to fix you up completely?”

I gave him a nod. Glancing back up at him I noticed how the light above his head was positioned in just the right way to make it look as if he had a halo of warm light, it gave him an angelic look. His golden eyes sparkled slightly. The man gave me a soft smile that made my chest feel fuzzy before he got to work on fixing me up. I felt my heart race when he grabbed my face.

Everything about him set me on fire in a way I can’t describe. His hands were soft against my skin, I felt myself lean into his touch as he repeated the process that he had done on my hand. I could feel a comforting warmth coming from him. Soon enough my face was fixed up, with it the headache was gone. Despite this I didn’t want him to let go of me; I wanted to stay like that for a while longer. I looked up at Sariel for a moment, then it hit me, I could invite him to stay, it was late after all.

“Sariel?”

“Yes, Jack?” his voice was calm and soothing.

“It’s getting pretty late...if you’d like you can stay...”

He gave me a warm smile. “I’d love to.” Sariel fixed up the rest of my wounds, as he did, I felt myself getting progressively more and more tired. By the end of it, I almost couldn’t keep my eyes open, the soft scent of lilies and a calming warmth all around me was putting weight on my eyes like you wouldn’t believe. Luckily, this was around the time he finished, he moved to hold my face again.

“I’m all done, would you like to sleep now?”

I nodded with my eyes shut.

“Would you like me to help you to your bed-?” I didn’t give him the chance to finish his sentence before I rested myself against him, he moved to lay me down on the couch.

“Goodnight, jack.”

I fell asleep almost immediately. I was woken up to the smell of coffee, opening my eyes I found that I was alone, Sariel had been replaced with Ghost, he was still fast asleep. I pushed myself up and was struck by how spotless everything was, I’m a clean person but everything looked as if it had just been cleaned. The scent of fresh coffee and lilies floated through the apartment. Looking at the coffee table I found a cup there, a note, and a beautiful rosary. I sipped the warm brew as I looked over the note. The coffee was precisely how I like it. The note simply read: “Jack, if you’re ever in trouble just hold onto the rosary. P.S.: how’s the coffee? I hope you like it. Have a good day :)”

I chuckled at the little smiley face for a moment, I then turned my attention to the rosary. It was a lovely gold with very intricate details. It seemed to vibrate under my touch. I'm not sure what's going on, but I think the incident I had in the forest was tied to Sariel in some way, though a part of me feels like I'll be finding out the truth soon enough. But for now, I'm going to avoid the forest and keep my eye out for Sariel. I'd like to ask him what the heck is going on. I could have easily imagined everything that happened last night but that still doesn't explain the thing in the forest. maybe I should make a police report? I'm not sure... either way I should probably wrap this up before it gets too long.

If you're in the Hamilton's Point area, please avoid the forest. There's something in there and It might be looking for its next meal.

I'll update if something else happens but for now, this is Jack signing off, stay safe everybody.