



The Inferno

2015-2016

Allen Community College
Online Literary Magazine

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1st Place Creative Writing Club Poetry Contest

Brave Little Lovenaut

By Isaac Bird

Little black hole, why is it so cold where you are
You used to be the brightest of stars
You tried to make this lonely piece of space
A better place and gave all your light away
Little black hole, somewhere along the road
You forgot to keep a glow of your own to hold

So I am boarding, a ship of my own making
And bringing you something you forgot
A soft fragment of light, to keep you warm at night
Pilots log, 10-23, the brave little lovenaut

Beautiful black hole, do you know
All you need is everything you are
That's all you have to be, I mean look at me!
It's gotten me this far
Kind black hole, this just goes to show
How strange life can really be
Somewhere on this journey across the galaxy
I realized you're what means the most to me

So I keep sailing, in this ship of my own making
I'll be there in no time flat
But for all my perseverance, there's been some interference
I'm not sure there will be a trip back
Black hole, I didn't know
You'd look so wonderful up close
Black hole, here is your gift
Once I flip this switch
You will have your little light
But self-destruct will
spell the end of this
lovenaut
pilots log,
signing off
Dear Black hole
Goodnight

Isaac Bird is an 18 year old artist and musician in his third semester at Allen County. He writes and plays songs for guitar and piano, sketches often (ask his teachers) and generally loves life. He can be found reading, attempting to tame his hair to no prevail, using the worst pickup lines of all time on his girlfriend, and occasionally studying. His entry into the contest is one of his more recent verses, The Brave Little Lovenaut. He thanks all the contributors and judges and hopes you enjoy his work!

2nd Place Creative Writing Club Poetry Contest

The Moment

By Vanessa Dredger

Feet of stone,
Eyes seeing not but
Backwards towards the window.
A wish,
A flash of yellow.
Screeching breaks and laughter –
floating, and an old bonnet
holding tightly.
A heart of hearts turning
cold – but a tear of memory...
Curls soft,
Caresses –

but fleeting....

Towards another stone.

About me: I am a mom of seven with a full time job who has been attending school off and on my whole life: all 37 years of it. I aspire to do more always. My job is in education as a registrar at a private school, but I've always loved the life experiences that have brought me a deep understanding of people and life in general that inspire me to write a few things now and then. A few years ago when I thought I was on a degree path for sure, I took a very insightful course with Professor Reckling at K-State. I wrote a poem for my final after which she encouraged me to write more in the future. Sadly, I had to withdraw from the college due to poor health. I didn't write anymore, but when I got the email from Allen's writing club, I thought it was about time I did. I hope you enjoy.

3rd Place Creative Writing Club Poetry Contest

I Saw You Walk By Today

By Cherida DeWitt

I saw you walk by today.
While I started your way.
I stopped and waited.
Why is this complicated?

My mind raced back.
To the day of my attack.
When I heard the news.
That gave me the blues.

The shock felt in the heart.
Knowing that we are apart.
The day you gained your wings.
Memories of you it brings.

My mind is in a daze.
Is this some kind of phase?
Am I awake in a dream?
Lord, I may scream.

I gather my thoughts,
My stomach in knots.
I have an angel at bay.
As I saw you walk by today.

I have 3 children and 9 grandchildren. My oldest is a granddaughter she is 19, we have taken a couple of college courses together. My youngest is a grandson he is three. This is my fourth semester at Allen Community College. In January I am transferring to Washburn. I am seeking a masters degree in Sociology. It is my passion to be an advocate for our seniors living in poverty. My poem was written after I noticed a woman that looked exactly like my best friend. It took my breath away because she had passed three years earlier. I returned home and wrote this about my feelings after I seen my friend walk by today.

1st Place Creative Writing Club Short Story Contest

Hycordia: Rise of the Forgotten

By Andrew Foreman

It was a warm day in the Valley of Hadvender, where the village of Takunonseen rested beside the waters of Tsadun. All was calm in the early morning, and the valley was receiving the pleasant weather its natives enjoyed. So it was that Taksun, a boy on his way to becoming a man, was quite happy to be hunting the Kateros among the green hills of his home country. Kateros are a massive species of wild bovine native to the Plains of Hadvender, not unlike our Buffalo, yet far larger. Hunting a great beast was the final part of his rite of passage.

Taksun thought of the ritual, and how one day it would end, not just for him, but for his whole village. Though the elders preferred not to talk about it, there was a sense that one day, his people would lose their ways, drafted into the folds of the Empire.

Taksun continued in this thought process until he stumbled upon the injured Kateros-De. He had been following the bull for days after wounding it in its shoulder. If he could single-handedly take down the mammoth of a beast, he could almost guarantee a spot at the Warrior Table.

Taksun bent low as he eyed the bull where it rested. It had been on a steady march west for days. He had considered the possibility it was fleeing something, but ambition had dismissed the notion. He pulled out his bow, grabbing the luckiest arrow he owned, his fathers. The shaft was made of Hadraywood; it was the most flexible and sturdy tree that grew on the plain. The feather had come from a Bald Galdil, the running birds of the plains. Taksun breathed deeply as he aligned his shot. He couldn't afford to miss, not again. This was not the first time he had been given the opportunity to land a kill worthy of warrior status. Last time it had been a Branun Tiger, and the time before that it had been a Chirping Halx. Taksun thought to himself, *this time, I won't miss. This time, I can't miss.*

Taksun prayed to Father Elim of the Blue Sky Realm, *Make my shot find her mark and I will give you whatever you ask.* He accepted the old gods along with the rest of the village. He paused. *Every time I have put my faith in Elim, I have failed. Perhaps it is time to look elsewhere.* Taksun remembered hearing an old monk from the Southern monastery talk of a god who was all-powerful. He called him Adonai. Wondering if that God could be powerful enough, he quickly made a second prayer to Adonai, offering the same as before.

Taksun felt better about his chances; he closed one eye, pulled the string to his cheek, exhaled, and released. The shot rang true striking the Kateros-De in its neck. Taksun saw the blood spurt out and knew it would not be long, as the bull, writhing in pain, made a break for a dense grove of trees on a hilltop not too far away. Taksun gave chase, worried that some animal might be lurking nearby and damage his prize. He followed at a good pace, never allowing the beast to leave his sight.

He suddenly noticed something in the distance. A cloud of dust was rising, although not big enough to be a herd of moving Kateros, the dust cloud was not small enough to be a couple of Bald Galdil. Concerned, Taksun knew he needed to find out what it was. Swearing under his breath, he marked the direction the bull was heading in and diverted his course to examine the dust cloud.

When Taksun had first seen the disturbance it had been some miles off; on the plains, it is not uncommon to be able to see things great distances away. At last, he was close enough to get a good look. From the tracks, he had already managed to gather that they were riding horses. Now, he observed many men. There were around a hundred or so. They were resting around a hastily made campfire of Kateros chips.

Taksun sneaked up as closely as he dared. He was still far too off to hear much of anything, but what he did hear gave him great pause. The men were singing in what he thought to be the tongue of the Empire. *What could bring these men out here?* As Taksun looked around, he noticed an odd man sitting some distance off of the rest. He was shaking rocks and throwing them on the ground. A *magician...* having heard of their power, Taksun was frightened by them. Magicians are very rare, some choosing to use their gift for good, but most for bad, or so the monks of Halbear say.

While Taksun was watching the men, he failed to see two others sneak up on him.

“Gotcha!” A man yelled from behind as he ripped Taksun off of the ground. The man next to him drew a sword and put it next to his neck.

“Oi! What business have you spying on us men of the King?” The second man spoke with a nasty sneer that Taksun found distasteful; unfortunately, he knew very little of Empirion as his native people preferred to call it, and so, could not come up with a response

“Hey, Fedo,” the first man who had ripped Taksun off of the ground said, “I think this one’s a bit mute. Say we take him over to the boss and have him tell us what to do with him?”

“Very well, Grimki,” Fedo spoke with a little disappointment showing. As they hauled Taksun back towards the center of the camp he began to cry out to any god he could think of for help, but it was all in vain, or so he thought.

“Boss, Fedo and I have brought you a little present!” Grimki spoke as he knocked Taksun’s knees to the ground, pulling his hair so that he looked the man in his eyes. Taksun knelt before the magician he had seen moments before. Fear overtook him as his face paled. The man wore a hood and Taksun knew why. He had ghastly scars running from ear to ear, coming down to his mouth. He dismissed the men and then began to speak to Taksun in his language.

“What are you doing here?” The man spoke in an unpleasant, raspy voice. Taksun dared not rise, fear overtaking courage.

"I...I was hunting a Kateros, and saw your party kicking up a dust cloud." Taksun didn't know what he had just done; if his brother had seen him so quickly cave to an adversary, he would be ashamed. It just seemed so hard to deny the man.

"Hmm," The magician mused for a moment. "Where is your village?"

This time, Taksun applied all of his strength to resisting the urge to tell the man everything, from the direction it was in, to the name of the girl he loved. It was futile.

"Southwest," Taksun tried to clamp his mouth shut, "three days," he was now foaming at the mouth, "it stands next to the River Tsadun." Taksun gasped, filling his lungs with air. He was shellshocked, terrified by the man's power. The magician then struck him, and Taksun passed out.

The sorcerer spoke quickly to the men, "Plans have changed. That village will ruin everything. You must kill the inhabitants. You have a few days while I prepare the incantations." The magician spoke with authority; there was no room for disapproval.

The men looked at each other, worried. "Boss, uh, how do you reckon we gonna be able to kill a whole village?" Grimki questioned.

"I expect you to do it because you are getting paid to do it!" The magician spoke with fury. "In the meantime, tie the boy's hands and lock him up. I can use him to help perform the Blood Moon sacrifice." The men looked startled at this but didn't say a word.

Taksun awoke from a less than pleasant sleep to find his hands and feet bound to a pole. He was inside a tent with one flap open, revealing night had fallen. After taking a few moments to clear his head and regain full use of his senses, he was able to gather that the majority of the force was gone doing who knows what. Taksun could only hope they weren't where he was certain they were. Even still, he identified that no more than six men had stayed behind, presumably to guard the camp as well as him. He was temporarily very glad when he realized that the magician was gone. However, after a moment of reflection, he feared that the magician had left with the small army to destroy his village.

Taksun quickly began looking around for something he could use to cut his ropes. The guards had taken three of his hunting knives but had missed a fourth. Taksun whispered a thank you to his brother. He had taught him to always keep an extra hidden, just encase. Now began the arduous task of wiggling it out of his boot into a position where he could grip it and begin cutting.

After moments of pulling, straining, and copious amounts of sweat, Taksun managed to get it in his hands. His knife was a razor sharp trinket from a Cothrodean Trader, so it sliced straight through his bonds.

Quietly standing up, Taksun rubbed his wrists, looking about for a weapon. After half a minute, and daring to spend no more time, he had landed upon nothing. All the same, he knew he had to do something. Tiptoeing out of the tent, Taksun walked over to where the horses had been pitched, or at least what remained of them, ten, including five pack horses. He had never ridden a horse before,

but he had seen others do it. He hit upon a wild, foolhardy plan. *If I could just get these horses to stampede, I could separate the men enough to pick them off one by one.* Taksun's plan was violent but necessary. He needed to make sure he wouldn't be pursued.

The horses had been set, and the cards had been played. Taksun let out his tribe war cry on top of his white charger, bareback. He forced the horses into a stampede by grabbing the rest of their ropes and charging right into the men huddled around the fire. They didn't see him coming in time, and three men were instantly trampled to death, with a fourth being severely injured. This left the remaining two men sprinting for their weapons. Taksun leaped off of his horse, rolling as he hit the ground. Springing back up, he charged one man and jumped on his back. He then sliced his throat with his knife.

As the body crumpled, he turned to see the other man. He was now approaching him with a wicked looking blade. The man looked livid with rage. *I'm dead,* Taksun thought pessimistically.

He was sure he was out of options when he espied a glinting object protruding from one of the bodies that had been trampled. He calculated if he would have enough time to reach it, the soldier was still a good ten paces off, and the sword that lay on the ground was twenty. Taksun went for it, sprinting like he had never sprinted before. When he had reached the weapon, he deftly lowered his hand and snatching it up as he ran.

He was now evenly matched, despite not knowing a thing about wielding a blade. Swords were considered a rare trophy in his village and only fit for the most astute of warriors. Taksun turned to face the adversary; he launched upon the only idea that came to him. When the man was within five paces of him, he threw his hunting knife at his shoulder, wounding him. Taksun then launched himself at his enemy, somehow managing to slice at his other arm, but not without the foe nicking him in the back. Taksun quickly retreated and began circling the man; he could tell that the soldier had gotten the worse of their first encounter, but he feared for their second. The swordsman spoke something venomous, spat, and then charged him.

The young warrior had milliseconds to act. He sidestepped the man and turned, striking with all of his might at his back. His enemy was surprisingly agile, though, and maneuvered to deflect the swing so that Taksun could only scratch his right arm. He backed away again. The man was continuing to lose blood, and growing weaker as a result. He knew, just like a wild bull, he would begin to grow reckless as he felt life waning. The man lunged once more, shockingly, Taksun managed to parry the attack and make a straight counter at his midsection. That was the man's undoing. He quickly finished him off, wiping his blade on the grass.

Looking about, he quickly spotted the man who had survived the stampede. Taksun rushed over to him, yanking at his clothes, demanding to know where the men had gone. The man said nothing but continued to cry in pain.

"Useless," Taksun screamed. He examined the man's wounds, and realizing that they were fatal, did the only just thing. In seconds, the man breathed his last. Taksun imagined it was a sigh of relief.

“Now what do I do?”

He quickly scavenged the camp finding many articles of interest that would prove themselves useful later. Among these he found a leather bag filled with the same stones that had been used by the magician; he found his bow, and he found a strange book. Taksun didn't know how to read so he chose to hold on, encase its contents would prove useful one day. Taking the sword he had found, Taksun leaped onto his white charger and made ready to ride hard for his village.

Whether he was aware of it or not, Taksun had completed his journey from boyhood. The events of that night and the days to follow would push him to the breaking point. Taksun was a man now, living in a man's world. He knew what needed to be done, and he would do it when the time came. He would carry on the way of the warrior, and the legacy of his tribe, no matter the cost.

He continued to ponder the events of the day as he rode off, cresting a green hill and plummeting into darkness, unaware he was being watched.

“Yes, he will do nicely.” The magician stood above a pool of water, watching the young man as if he were there. “Haha, yes, he will serve our purposes well.” He cackled; yelling as he transformed into the beast he was.

I am a high school student taking classes at Allen County Community College with a passion for storytelling. I enjoy creating tales that leave the reader asking questions. When I was seven, I wrote my first detective novel with my mom. Ever since then, I have been fascinated with developing unique plotlines and characters that defy the ordinary. As an amateur writer, I jump at every opportunity I have to improve my ability to craft a storyline. I have recently begun narrating my own short stories on a YouTube channel, AZF Productions. You can check it out here, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyMG9ccGtSTpxFfAxOAWePw> I hope you enjoy the adventure!

2nd Place Creative Writing Club Short Story Contest

The Last Epoch

By Nick Reynolds

It was cold here, at the end of all the ages. None felt it more than the King as he stood upon the balcony overlooking the city below. He was grave, silent, staring into the night, eyes fixed upon the fires burning in the city's square. Small figures moved about the flame, and the keen sounds of lamentation reverberated through the air and carried up to the King. They knew what was coming. Everyone knew what was coming.

On the morrow, after the rising of the Last Sun, the Earth would finally become too cold for habitation, and it would freeze. In the face of the overwhelming finality of their end, the peoples of the Earth finally laid down their weapons, put aside their differences, and joined hands as they mourned the end of their world.

It was strange, how here, at the end of humanity's last epoch, that all the trivialities of human existence are laid bare. Finally, all the faults and shortcomings of humanity are revealed to all. It seems to all that the entirety of human existence flashes before them, revealing the utter futility of the wars they had fought, how each battle was nothing more than a great tragedy, a missed opportunity for unity, growth, and prosperity.

This last Great War weighs most heavily upon their hearts; it was that war which set off the chain that would end in their demise. Finally all those on the Earth saw how pointless and petty it was. Upon no soul did it weigh heavier than on the King. As he stood alone upon the balcony of a ruined castle, overlooking a ruined world, watching his doomed people, he felt the immeasurable weight of all the grief of humanity.

He looked up at the stars, glittering cold and remote in the vast expanse of the sky. The moon had long ago ceased to rise, lost when the Earth was set on its doomed course. He looked for solace from the stars, from the heavens, but there was nothing. The crushing weight of the world finally bowed his head, this proudest of kings. Guilt, overwhelming guilt, wracked his body. It was his fault, this doomed course. He did not start the war, but he did nothing to stop it. He was the one that ordered the use of the weapon that doomed them; he was the one that used the weapon that doomed them. That horrible creation lay shattered at his feet.

His eyes scanned the horizon, as the temperature of the air began to steadily decrease, and there was a faint light beginning to cover the horizon; it would not be long, now. The King could only stand and watch, shivering in the cold dark, as the dirge of the doomed citizens increased in intensity. The end would be soon, they knew, and one by one, as the horizon began to get

lighter, they stopped their singing. Silence fell over the Earth, then the King heard something; the unmistakable music of his minstrels carrying through the ruined castle. The King turned back to towards the horizon, shivering, cold overwhelming, as his minstrels played their last elegy; the sun arose, and the Earth passed out of the habitable zone; one by one, the humans of the earth died, their bodies unable to handle the frigid temperatures of the earth. The King was last, in this world, to die; giving him one last chance of reflection, as his body froze.

My name is Nick Reynolds. I am 20 years old, I am majoring in Communications and I plan to pursue a career as a journalist for a big publication like Time magazine, or a science magazine like Discover magazine.

3rd Place Creative Writing Club Short Story Contest

Caribbean in G

By Dylan Van Sickle

The ship was somewhere in the Caribbean, and I was somewhere on it when it hit me. I just turned thirty, and no one here knows it but me. Hell, there is little chance I would know it either had I not turned my cell phone on for the first time in four days. Maybe that is why I went on this five day, all-expenses-paid-but-booze, cruise to the Caribbean and back: to get away from time for a while. I leaned up against the railing, freely throwing my weight on the metal bars separating me from a 50 foot drop into the water. There was a drizzle that created a pleasant, ocean-mist glaze around the metal. I can not sugarcoat it, I feel miserable. My sea legs have not learned to swim, and I feel a little lost in life. The boat spent most of its day rocking back and forth, terrorizing melancholy amateurs like myself as it powered through the choppy waves. It was calmer now though, as it should be, for it was night time, and my drink was getting low.

I gave my glass a courtesy shake, trying to separate the remaining drops of cheap scotch from the ice. Drinks were expensive here and dangerous too. The cruise line had a great way of making you think everything was gravy by handing you a “cruise card” when you boarded. This laminated devil of currency was the only way to buy something on the ship. My first night, I ordered some sort of margarita in an exquisite plastic glass. It was sixteen dollars, so, needless to say, I switched to scotch from that point on. The taste was acquired, but the ice helped. The price too, was respectable compared to the guilt I felt from the guilty margarita. It is hard to hide how little alcohol you put in a drink as simple as scotch with ice. Grab a glass, ice, pour, and bam! You have yourself a wonderful, charcoal-flavored liquid that is warm and appropriate and completely absent from the glass I currently held.

I pushed off from the cool metal railing and headed toward my “local watering hole”. My preferred bar, out of the five or six others, was a tiny set up near the library and game room on the fifth floor of the ship. The bartender, Suzie, was from the Philippines. I got to know her well enough during my stay here. She told me about her husband and four children back home in Cebu City. Three boys and one girl, Cynthia, who she was eager to go shop with. Her eyes were tired and unforgettable. I knew she was burnt out, but I also knew she would never tell me that. I would never get to see behind those eyes and that was okay with me. She already had someone to do that back home.

I approached Suzie’s spot as she was cleaning up. I do not know why she always called me by my first and last name. Maybe it is due to the fact that my name sounds like some gritty detective from a noir-style fiction book. Maybe I am just reading too much into it. This time was no different as she greeted me with her usual, professional smile. Suzie grabbed a napkin and placed it on the table. She knew what I wanted, and that made me feel pretty damn cool. Regardless of her usual greeting, I could tell she was trying to close up. I did not want to be a bother, but I did have a strong desire to order one more drink from her.

I felt nervous, but not in a romantic kind of way. This transaction just seemed so forced, so final. Suzie poured the drink, very generously and slid it over to me in a very bartender way. I did not want this to be it, so I pushed some small talk.

She told me she had seven more months on her contract. She expected to renew after a couple months of R&R back home in Cebu. I could have commented on how crazy that seemed, or how sad it was, but it would not have changed a thing. Suzie loved her job. She was tired and homesick, sure, but this woman had a tremendous amount of pride in herself and what she did. I was envious. I am just a mail room clerk in Boise. I signed the receipt and tipped as generously as a mail room clerk could. We said our goodbyes and parted with a quick hug.

I walked through the library, which was more like a hallway with books on the shelves. I stepped into the elevator at the end and, to my distress, it was not empty. I have never found a reason why I hate sharing elevators, but I do, with embarrassing passion. It is not because I am selfish or anything, I think. I more or less just dread the idea of having a quick, pointless conversation with someone I do not know. I turned toward the list of floors as anyone would. The door was still open, so I asked which floor, and she obliged. My elevator cohabitant had wavy, shoulder-length blonde hair with blue, almond-shaped eyes. She was pretty, and had a very relaxed way about her. I took a sip of my drink and stared straight ahead, a little nervous and a little drunk. She glanced as the glass left my mouth.

“Can I ask, how much do you tip for a drink? she asked “How much is a good tip?”

She sounded assertive and very Swedish. I answered with a hint of confusion. She explained that in Sweden, tipping is kind of rude. Everyone is paid well, so no one really tips. I told her it I usually do twenty percent or so, and she thanked me. I did not mind this elevator trip so much. She had a dry sense of humor about the subject that was attractive and intelligent. The conversation began to fade with a soft chuckle. I did not want it to end, but it felt organic. I did feel something, though. Why did this happen now of all times? I doubt it would have made a difference, but heck, I would have at least had the luxury of stewing over it for a few days. What could have been, I guess. She wished me goodnight and stepped off on floor seven. I was headed up to the dock to finish my drink. It felt appropriate and necessary to say goodbye to my time here.

The air was just as cool as it was an hour ago. I took a drink and sat on the wet bench to my left. I stared out past the ship in peace. It is dark and lonely out here, but I sense a hint of optimism in the air. The waves blended well with the night sky. The soft slap of the waves were still audible, though. Tomorrow I will be back on land, and back to my small and consistent spot in the world.

Dylan Van Sickle was born and raised in Topeka, Kansas. He now lives in Chicago, IL with his girlfriend and dog/son, Conan. He is a full time student online with Allen Community College, and has plans to pursue a degree in journalism and Depaul University in the fall.

3rd Place Creative Writing Club Short Story Contest

The Honeysuckle: Bittersweet Aroma of My Torment

By Mary Ann Richardson

The night following the Harvest Moon was very dark; almost pitch black I thought as I lay on my bed in the darkness. I lay perfectly still; afraid to even breathe, uncertain of what had awakened me. Listening intently, I failed to hear anything but the alarm clock calling out the seconds. One...two...three it called. The rhythmic sound was almost deafening in the silence. My heart raced out-of-control, I squeezed my eyes tightly closed, afraid of what might be there if I opened them. Softly, as gentle as a lover's touch, I felt the cool breeze caress my face as it came in from the open window. The tension left my weary body; easing the anxiousness I had been feeling. Perhaps, I had a bad dream, I thought to myself as I pulled the blankets up to my chin. My eyelids fluttered as sleepiness drew me back into its fold. My last thought is I have to quit eating such rich foods before I go to bed.

Suddenly, as if struck by a bolt of lightning, my senses were inflamed and I jerked upright in my bed. No gentle caress can ease this panic. No whispered tender words could ease this terror. Without seeing, I know I am not alone. It is not a touch or a sound that startled me from my sleep, but a fragrance. Gasping, trying to catch my breath, the aroma covers me, penetrating through layers of forgotten emotions, saturating my every pore. As if unseen hands are reaching for me I can feel the fingers pulling away the cobwebs, clawing, tearing at my soul, trying to bring forth the memories. I struggle against the invisible force, flailing and tangled in my blankets. I have to get away. I have to run fast and as far away as I can from this fragrance, for only pain lingers in my memory of this aroma. It is honeysuckle: the aroma of my agony, the smell belonging to my tormentors.

The pain is now too great for me. I must escape before the shadowed corners of my mind are discovered by the probing fingertips inside my head. A flash of light penetrates my memories as if someone has flipped on the lamp. I thought I had buried them deep enough, hid them away where no one could ever find them. Yet, the unseen is tugging, dragging me deeper into the abyss I had fled from so long ago. I feel myself falling, falling helplessly ever further into the darkness of my mind. I reach out for anything to stop this fall, something to grab hold of to slow the impact that will surely kill me. I open my mouth to scream, but just as when I was a child, I have no voice. No one could hear my cries for help then; no one could ever hear my anguished screams. In my silent hell, I tumble, cascading head over heels to certain death. I can see the end of the tunnel, the bottom of the pit, rising faster and faster, reaching for my tattered frame. I close my eyes, accepting this is the final moments of my life. Seconds and then minutes pass and I haven't been smashed into the ground. Afraid to open my eyes, I hold out my hand to the air all around me. I'm inches from the bottom, somehow caught by something I cannot see. My body is moving again, downward but this time, a gentle embrace lowered me to the ground. I tried to glimpse this unknown force, but with a touch to my brow, I slept.

It was daylight when I opened my eyes again. "Wow! That was some crazy dream!" I said to myself aloud. I know it was my thought and my mouth that moved when it was said but I didn't recognize the voice that spoke for a minute. Raising my hands, I gasped. They were missing the age spots and swollen arthritic knuckles. Instead, they were young! I'm guessing I was about seven years old by the healing of the scar on my left hand. I got that scar when I was fishing with Daddy at "Old Blues." It was still raised up and pink like it had just been a few weeks after that little fish got me with his fin. I lay there in amazement trying to grasp what was happening to me.

Was I really lying in a field of wheat? Could I truly be back in my hometown, blocks from my childhood home? I can see my house from here; it looks the same as when I was a child. But how could it be, when my uncle had it torn down after my parents moved away? I sat there dumbfounded as to the whole mystery of this adventure. My thoughts are interrupted, interrupted by a familiar sound. At first, I hear a child's voice calling out. "All-e-all-e in come free!" he was yelling. Laughter resonated through the fogginess in my head, reminding me of a favorite childhood game we played with our friends, but something more.

I feel myself being pulled toward the sounds of the happy playtime. My bare feet move to their own accord, cautiously avoiding Max's wheat, stepping over and walking in the furrowed paths between the rows. Something urges me to go the other way but my feet trudge onward to the hedgerow. The growth is so dense that I'm unable to get through so I continue walking down the wheat row to the road nearby. The laughter continues as I draw nearer, but it doesn't hold the same echo of childish joy. It had changed somehow. I stumble on a branch that had fallen in the path, which reminds me to watch where I am walking.

Then I smell it, the honeysuckle. It is right before me: a huge bush covered with beautiful, orange trumpets. Oh, how I loved to drink in its fragrance and nibble at the flower to taste the sweet honey on my tongue. My eyes drink in the sight, and without thinking, I reach out for a flower. Just as the trumpet touches my hand, I remember. But it was too late! The bush parted down the center like the Red Sea parted for the Israelites in the Bible. There were no happy, faces; my friends had not been beckoning me. It was THEM! The creatures of my nightmares, the demons who stole my innocence were reaching for me. Grasping my arms, they pulled me into their lair.

"She's mine!" the dark-haired one screamed hideously.

"I marked her first!" the fair-skinned one snarled, spittle flying from his mouth.

"Liars, the both of you," I heard a third voice behind them say in disgust, "I had her before either of you; therefore, she belongs to me."

The brown-eyed witch reached for me, but the brothers would not be so easily turned out. They began to fight amongst the three of them, giving me little notice as I edged away from them.

Suddenly before me was a culvert, which I thankfully jumped into, praying they wouldn't think to look for me there. Getting my bearings back a little, I glanced around noticing for the first time that I wasn't alone. There were others hiding from the demons, the bloodthirsty

demons that stole their innocence as well. Three little boys with huge, scared eyes slowly parted to reveal the tiny brown-haired girl they had been sheltering. My baby sister, not even school-aged yet, her spirit broken by the villains we hid from. I hugged each of the boys, thanking them, as I drew her from their midst. I knew I had to take my sister away from this nightmare. We found the other end of the tunnel and carefully slipped out into the cool, evening air. I prayed for my friends who lived among the monsters, hoping they would be safe once their parents got home. We ran the few blocks to our house and slipped into our bed, huddling together, until exhaustion overtook us.

The alarm clock screamed the arrival of a new day when I next awoke. I stretched, hoping to work some of the aches out before I got up. Memories came flooding over me, as I rose to look in my mirror. Staring back at me was my own worn face, marked with age, showing wrinkles, crow's feet, and the lingering effects of my love of the sun. I sighed with relief that it little resembled the young girl I'd been five decades earlier. I laughed as I reminded myself again to give up that spicy food before bedtime. My nightmares were becoming much too vivid.

Still feeling a bit uncertain, as if something was not quite as it should be, I entered the kitchen to start my morning coffee. I sat at the counter still half asleep, but enjoying the rich, coffee aroma as it filled the room. Changing out of my nightclothes crossed my mind, but I stuffed it aside as I poured my first cup of energy. I took a sip of the magic brew, picked up my book, and headed for my recliner to enjoy a bit of solitude before my busy day rushed in. Hearing the doorbell as I entered the living room, I grabbed another sip and went to find out who would be calling at such an early hour. Sitting my cup on the entry table, I reached for the doorknob. I paused for a moment, catching the faintest whiff of something other than my coffee. The scent was vaguely familiar, but I couldn't quite recall it.

A second ring of the doorbell jarred me from my thoughts. I opened the door as the person was retreating down the sidewalk.

"Is there something I can do for you?" I curiously called out.

I was mesmerized as he laughed and slowly turned back toward me. I knew that laugh! I knew that face, though his heart was now sprinkled with grey. My heart began to race as he laughed even harder at my reaction. My eyes couldn't break his gaze as he quickly closed the distance between us. I followed his glance as he looked downward at the box he was holding. Edging closer to me, he lifted it towards me. I gasped as I recognized the scent.

"Honeysuckle," I whispered. "You brought me honeysuckle. But why would you bring me honeysuckle?"

I could barely breathe; he had come too close. I could smell his foul breath. Memories of his mouth upon me caused bile to rise in my throat. I felt the plant slipping from my grasp as I tried to free myself from his overpowering presence.

"I've come to bring you home," he quietly yet menacingly said, as his hands reached for my throat.

My last thought was of my little sister who had died years earlier. How I wished I could have saved her and protected her from the agony the demons had caused her. They had killed

her little womb; she had no children of her own. But now she was free from the torment of earthly demons, free from the cannibals that waited among the honeysuckle to steal the innocence of little girls and boys. I embraced the unknown force that beckoned me, calling from somewhere far, far away: "Come, my child, freedom awaits you."

The honeysuckle plant lay crushed on the ground, its fragrance lifting like an offering of memorial, as he lifted my lifeless body into his arms.

I live in Melvern, KS, I'm happily married. I have four grown children who have blessed me with twelve beautiful grandchildren. I also have three furry kids: Tinkerbelle, Suzy and Rocket. I believe that education is a very important part of every person's life which explains why I am a student at ACC. I love spending time with my parents, crocheting for babies and teaching young people about Jesus.

1st Place Creative Writing Club Open Form Contest

Upgrades

By Christopher Boner

"I just don't know what to do, Maggie," Irene said as she finished placing the last of the supper dishes in the dishwasher. "Last night, his audio started to fail. I was so scared. What if he gets a virus and crashes? What will the kids and I do then?"

Her friend shimmered as she turned to face Irene. "With your location, you will never have that problem. The hospital is only two blocks away. The EM field covers your whole house. If something happens to one of my family we have to get them into the garage, fast!"

"But what if the field goes down for maintenance during one of his episodes?"

"The fields at all the hospitals have triple backups to prevent that from happening."

"You are right, I suppose. That is one of the reasons Greg wanted this house so badly. After the girls were born, he was determined that they would be safe from the virus'."

"Yea, losing Luke really tore him up, didn't it?"

"His first born son. The center of his whole world was shredded right in front of him by a virus. Yes, it did tear him up. I almost lost him to a Cleaner. He was so angry at the world and everything in it, that he registered as a threat on a routine update. If I hadn't come home when I had, he would have been recycled."

"Early recycle's have been occurring a lot lately. Just the other day a tube popped up about this older model that a Cleaner recycled on the Motherboard. The old guy had just dozed off while he was reading an old text novel!"

"The Cleaners are more interested in their upgrades, than where the upgrades come from."

Crash! The sound of splintering wood drowns Irene's scream as her husband, Greg, bursts through the kitchen wall, fly's across the ten feet of kitchen space and continues into the living room, leaving a considerable hole in through the interior wall that separates them.

"Dear, we are having company for supper. Get out the good USBs'," the bent wreckage that

Boner 3

was Greg, intoned from beneath the wreckage of his favorite Lazy-Boy. "They seem to have the idea that I need recycled," he said as he struggled to bend his extremities back to their correct positions.

"Would the human being known as Greg Vanteese please relinquish his hold on state

properties, and prepare for recycling?” a voice whispered from the exterior of the house.

Irene and Maggie stood transfixed as the Cleaner entered the house. It's long, jointed body supported by hundred's of tiny legs, moved effortlessly over to the twisted form that struggled to escape. As the Cleaner began it's job, Irene had to look away and Maggie quickly chose to do the same.

“Maggie Vanteese, you are to gather your children and pets for transfer to a social help center. You will be allowed to continue your upgrading, and will be provided with a suitable replacement when one becomes available.”

“Oh, I am so happy for you, Irene,” Maggie said as she struggled not to cry. “How do you get all the good luck? You must be special. If my old man kick's the bucket, I get recycled too.”

“I love you, Maggie. I'll call as soon as I can. OK. They are taking us to one of the center's. I should be able to be physical when I call you. Those places have all the best apps and ports.”

The image of Maggie scattered as the connection timed out. Staring at the space where her friend had just stood, Irene grew optimistic.

“Maybe, this is just what I need. A rollback and reboot never hurt anyone. The kids will surely miss Greg for a while, but their cache is small. Time will make the memories fade.” Smiling at the back of the Cleaner, she watches as it flows into the night.

My name is Christopher Boner. I am forty-two years old and reside in Burlingame, Kansas with my family. Having been in construction for twenty-odd years, my body has decided that it is tired so the brain has to attempt a revival. With five children (sort of), three dog, six cats, a large house and yard to maintain, and a horribly feisty woman lurking, my days are full. Words always seem to beckon, though. They delight me to no end, and perhaps, someday, I will put them in the correct order.

2nd Place Creative Writing Club Open Form Contest

Precious Time

Heather Woods

Enjoy them now, enjoy today, for how the time does fly
You'll turn around, only then to learn
she's no longer five.
I have felt the long year-to-year, and every hour late
Many days spent hanging on to my blessed fate
Sleepless nights have aged me,
the crying too, it seems, has earned me every wrinkle
interrupted nightly dreams.
Some days are just as lonely, and always very long
trying to be the godly wife
and a loving mom
They tell me to enjoy you
to love it while it lasts
They tell me to savor each new day
for all too soon will pass
That some day I will turn around
and you'd no longer be
I feel the hours, days, and years
and wonder what's the key
I brush your tangles, fix your shoes, and keep your fears at bay
Never really knowing how, or just what I'm to say
Some days the shoulders of a mother
weigh a thousand pounds
It steals my breath, spits me out, and knocks me to the ground
And though I stumble, run, and fall
I get up everyday
Not only because I am your mom
Because It's you who's shown the way

I grew up in Oklahoma, and was homeschooled along with my 12 siblings. I now live in Topeka, KS, and am a mother to five girls of my own. I am working through my Science degree at Allen in hopes of going on to become a Registered Nurse through Baker's nursing program. And I love mashed potatoes.

Additional Writing Submissions

Always

By Amy Medieros

It's that I've been up all night.
Fighting strong feelings that won't resign.
In the soul of my heart,
Nor deepest parts of my mind.
I swear that I can love,
Only by you may I know the right.
Like stars hug to the sky
You are my guide in the night,
A traveler to your heart
And a soldier without fright.
I sail the distant cold blue in the core of your eyes,
To a sea of no worries,
Having you by my side
Now I've loved you before,
And I'll love you now.
My world won't wind without seeing your smile.
I've told you then
And I'll tell you now,
These oceans are long
Like the love for you I've bound

Beaten

By Angel Spencer

You've been raped and beaten,
You've fought to stand,
And been beaten again,
You've been told I love you
From the very people who beat you,
You've loved hard and strong,
And your heart's been beaten
By the very people you swore to love,
You've been beaten so much
That the toll has been taken,
You're addicted to the oblivion,
No one can save you,
It only gets worse,
You've stood on top of the world
And now you're on the bottom,
And the very people who love you
Want to help you stand once again,
But once the beaten
Now the beater;
The cycle continues
On and on,
But I will change
My beaten heart,
I will love hard and strong
Like you once did,
And think of the one person
I loved the most in the end,
You.

Who Am I?

By Hunter Layman

Am I the countless pills professionals feed me,

For the countless diagnoses for growing up?

Am I the names given by my family and peers?

Am I a GPA for the school systems?

Am I anyone?

What am I?

Am I defined by biological science?

Am I a blip in someone's life?

Am I something important?

Am I anything?

Why am I?

Am I meant to do something unknown?

Am I the things I have done,

Or will do?

Am I doing what I am meant to do?

Am I going to be important?

Who am I?

What am I?

Why am I?

Alone

By Trent Colter

As I watch those around me I start to weep.
Why can't I be part of the crowd, one of them?
These questions mock me with every breath I take.
Standing alone in the corner, I try to speak, I try to move.
Why can't my words be heard? Why can't they hear me?
I yell louder and louder but silence is my enemy.
I try to move, to crawl but my legs cannot move me away.
Trapped alone in this corner forever.
I try to fit in to be part of something beyond myself.
No matter how hard I try, I remain invisible.
A faceless creature among them all.
Why can't they see me? Why can't they just try?
Alone-is this my destiny? Is this my fate?
I seek solace within myself but it is lonely.
Why oh why can't I be one of them?

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