

The Inferno

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1st Place Creative Writing Club Poetry Contest Winner

A Prayer to Love Erinn Bird

Come and be tamed by my hand and ride forth for me.
Come fall from your immortal heights and enslave him who has enslaved me.
Keep him from my thoughts, my hopes, and place him before my feet.
Come and be my servant, Love, since you have already mastered me.
Make his world darken in his eyes till they light on me, Love.
Bend his waking thoughts and sleepless nights my way.
I have already sacrificed my peace on an altar for you,
Come now and replenish my faith and raise me from despair.
Let his world be consumed by dreams of my waiting eyes.
Race his pulse like thunderous waves when I smile, break his heart when I turn away.
All this I have already given you, Love, by way of him.
Do not now take up your pitiless mask and turn me into a tragedy.
I do not ask you to shake him, Love, like I have shaken.
I do not plead with you to burn him even as I watch from the flames.
If you've written stories before, compose a tale for us now,
Love, if you've ever awoken in our breasts, rage on.
I cannot ask you to raise me above as mistress, or command you to have him grovel as a beast.
Love, I do not want him to worship me as perfection mortalized.
Rather, Love, let us fall before you and accept each other.
Let us kneel before you as equals, for you already bend us to your will.
Give me no power to strike him, nor yet subjugate his heart,
As I do not ask you to fling mine away so recklessly.
Let our hands meet in youth and hope as we come together to your temple,
Like so many before us have come to worship.
Let us come to you, Love, wearing the crowns you have forged,
In both our feverish thoughts and despairing imaginings, studded with the wildness and wonder
of reality.
And let us rest in the happiness that you have mothered,
Let us rest as uncertainty did not.
Let us, Love.
Let us Love.

2nd Place Creative Writing Club Poetry Contest Winner

Chiaroscuro Rebekah DeGroff

Earth.
Here life and death abide;
Goodness to be seen,
Corruption hid inside.

Nature shows its beauty
From deep trenches to vast skies;
But roses all have thorns,
And humans darkened eyes.

They struggle in the shadows
When The Light has clearly come,
They hide in secret places
Claiming darkness as their home.

But Lo, The Dawn is reaching,
Shining all the darkness through;
He turns dark leaves to yellow
And He shines upon the dew.

His light is bursting forward
Stretching forth to darkened souls;
His golden arms are reaching out
To make the darkness whole.

There's beauty all around you,
But sometimes you cannot see;
When you abide in shadows
And to light you do not flee.

Chiaroscuro: the use of strong [contrasts](#) between light and dark

3rd Place Creative Writing Club Poetry Contest Winner

Just Write to Write Spencer Arndt

Sometimes I just write to write
To help me get through the night
The need to be set free
Like a bird flying over the city
Leaving the world below
Going someplace new to grow
I'm in need of something more
This is the chance I've been waiting for

Sometimes I just write to write
Because these days I don't know what's right
So many things they don't want us to see
They don't want me to be me
I think I'm at an all time low
I don't know which way to go
What is there to live for
I hope you can help me find more

1st Place Creative Writing Club Short Story Contest Winner

Nowhere to Go Megan Blythe

Sitting on a wooden ledge on the other side of the window pane is a bird. I could not tell you what type, but I do believe it is a simple little barn sparrow. Quite common, really. Her plumage is mostly dull brown, with a soft underbelly, and dark markings on her face. She is really not all that remarkable, I tell you. Yet, this little bird holds my attention.

It is early January. My birthday has passed, and I am now sixteen. Yet, I am really not all that special. My face is plain, and my hair a mousy brown. I have eyes that are not blue, not green, but something in between, yet quite dull if you ask me. I reached this acclaimed milestone in life... I don't feel any different, though.

The sleet is coming down in torrents. Large gusts of wind rattle the shutters on the windows. I see the little, plain sparrow is still here. She is just sitting on that wooden ledge. She did not go when she should have. She didn't leave like all the others, so now she is stuck in this brutal storm.

Me... I am inside. We are not similar at all, that bird and I. She can fly, She can be free. I am rooted in this little town. Population two hundred and sixty-four plus one, me.

I fit in quite well, you see. I follow the rules, and I do my work. People praise me for being so good, so generic, so normal. For, I have a niche. That silly bird, she did not fly away when she should have, and now she is stuck. Not like me, of course. I couldn't leave, even if I wanted to. My family is here. My mother, a kind, school teacher who helps those special children, the ones of a different mindset. They need help in more than just schoolwork. They are not like me, more like that foolish barn sparrow. Those children with different minds are unable to speak and think like me, and all the normal people. They need extra attention, and there is nothing wrong with that. My father, he is a rancher from a long line of ranchers. He works cattle all day, from dawn to dusk. He and my younger brother work hard in their daily labors. My father is a good man, and I love him so. He holds me tight in his big arms, and tells me I will always be his little girl. But, I know that all good fathers say that to their daughters. So, if my dad is a good father, then I am a good daughter, just like all the other good daughters in this world.

Oh, how I pity that strange bird. She really isn't smart. That bird should have left this town when she had a chance. I shake my head as I go back to my book. However, I can't seem to take my mind away from that bird. I don't understand why that sparrow didn't leave when she had the chance. I would have left. Yet, I have everything here in Small Town, Kansas.

I do well in school. Really, I am quite intelligent, according to the teachers, the state, and even the federal government. It is because I follow all the guidelines laid out before me. It's quite simple really. Just as simple as escaping a blizzard. Stupid bird. I wonder why she did not leave. Why didn't she take the chance to fly away? This whole mess could have been avoided.

Frustrated with this dumb sparrow, I pull the curtains shut. It is absurd that my thoughts continue to orbit this bird's foolish ways when I have better things to do.

I find it is hard to be extraordinary in a small town like where I am from. I once had a teacher that was extraordinary, she's quite lovely. She was my music instructor. Sadly, she had to leave this little town. She was just too different. The wind howls loudly outside my window, and I think back to that common barn sparrow. Surely she has been blown away.

No! I see that little bird weathering the storm. Her feathers are dusted in ice. She has her little face tucked into her chest. How... amazing. This little bird, stuck in the snow and rain, is... not as common as I thought her to be. This bird must be quite stubborn to last in such a terrible storm.

I sit down and study this small beast. Ice clings to the ledge that she is perched on, and I think of how bitter and cold she must be. That sparrow must regret not escaping when she could have. Truly, she had plenty of time to fly away with her flock. Yet, here in solitude she suffers with nowhere to go. I don't understand this bird. I would have given up long ago.

It is warm in my home. This place where I grew up. Many memories fill my heart with joy, and some with sadness, but I am always warm. I am always safe, here in these four walls. Here with my own little flock, in our own little nest, I know I am loved and sheltered from the storm. That mighty barn sparrow is alone. She is cold, and so very alone. No, we are not all that similar. Her and I, we are not two of a kind.

You see that bird and I, we cannot be much alike. She is rather foolish and faces the consequences. I am smart and reap all the rewards of being common. That little barn sparrow should have been normal and flown away. She tried to be different you. She won't make it.

Really, if I had wings... I would fly away. I'd fly away from the storm and stay with the flock. I would have found shelter, and warmth, and slept peacefully through the night. She can't. She is stuck.

Stuck.

I hate that word.

I turn off the lights and go to bed. The bird will be dead in the morning for trying to be special in a small town like this. I know better.

The storm passed late in the night, or maybe early in the morning. I was asleep, surrounded by warm blankets. I don't think of the bird until I have had a warm cup of hot chocolate. I wander back to the window, curious to see that dead little thing.

Low and behold, I was wrong. I blink once, twice, then thrice. The barn sparrow, the common, normal, stupid, barn sparrow, sits prim and proper upon that wooden ledge. Her brown feathers are fluffed out, and she sits snuggled in a hole of snow. She doesn't look as cold as she did last night. In the storm, she looked small and fragile. Now this bird stares at me with triumphant eyes. I can almost hear her mocking me. Telling me that I was the fool, the stupid one.

I am stuck. Here in this little house, in the little town, with the little school. She flies away, Her bright, tawny wings beat the crisp air. That little bird endured the storm. I thought that

she would not make it. Extraordinary, different, unique things don't make it out of places like this.

I see my reflection in the glass. That bird is nothing like me.

You see... I told you so.

2nd Place Creative Writing Club Short Story Contest Winner

Office Supplies Christopher Boner

“Winding the binding. Bones will be grinding. If the stone they be finding,” chanted the pixie as she floated in darkness above a drawer as it slid into the wall. Her glowing nimbus barely illuminating the gloom.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Came a hammering from the darkness.

“Hang on! Hang on!” said the diminutive lady as she fluttered through the darkness. Light exploded through the room as curtains were drawn to expose the office to the morning sun.

Bang!

“Come in!”

“What is the meaning of this?” bellowed the nine-foot troll that barreled into the office. “What do you mean I can't requisition a new printer right now? I've been using that same piece of crap for the last ten years. It finally gives up, and now I'm just screwed?”

“We can't get any new office supplies until the gnomes are done with the new building. You know that Frank. We were all at the meeting. The damn, crazy bastards won't let anything in or out of the area until construction is complete. We are in standby for another six days.”

“Six days. Six days. Isabelle do you have any idea how much trouble trolls on a two-week leave can cause? So far I have had to broker four deals with bar owners, and call two bail bondsmen. All because these crazy gnomes don't work well with others. It's a damn good thing that most of your employees are married. Troll bachelors are complete idiots. We could be spending a mint on lawyer fees. The hill giants that work in the plastic factory across the river have been hustling the pool tables downtown. If the boys decide to go down their we could have trouble,” the troll looked uncomfortable as he shifted to look out the window at the construction site.

“Don't worry, darling. We made it through the Christmas rush of 85'. I think we can weather a small vacation,” Isabelle said as she fluttered to the massive troll's shoulder. The gnomes on the other side of the glass were scurrying to and fro almost aimlessly like ants, but another wall seemed to materialize as they watched. “They are good. Even you have to admit that.”

“Oh yea, they’re the best. I watched them build the Great Temple at Antell. Twelve days it took them to build it. The single greatest building in the entire world built in twelve days. I didn't sleep for the last three. They were so high in the air; you could barely make out the airships as they delivered materials. The bottom levels had people living in them the day after they started construction. How deep into the ground are they burrowing?”

“The initial shaft only goes down three hundred feet.”

“What? That isn't very far. They probably reached that on the first day.”

“I knew you would say that. The main shaft splits into four separate shafts that angle off in different directions for almost a thousand feet. All of it usable, wired space. Room enough for our own servers, central mainframe, hell a super-collider if we want to build one. The sky is the limit after this expansion,” the pixie replied, blinking back the tears of joy she was feeling.

“Well as impressive as all that may be,” said Frank, his toothy grin causing even more tears of joy to well to the pixie's eyes. “How am I supposed to copy of our pictures of Cancun without a printer?”

“What? You brought that SD card to work? Are you crazy? You better guard that thing with your life, buddy!”

“Don't you worry, dear. I have it in my wallet, and you are the only one that ever gets in there. What! You don't want the employees to see you getting your freak on?”

“No, I most certainly do not! That night you completely took advantage of my natural instinct to drink nectar. You purposely got my plastered so you could lord this over me, but I will not bend to your coercion. Oh no, my large, green husband, because you want to know why?”

The ear to ear smile on his tiny wife's face gave Frank pause. The last time she had had that look on her face she had been pregnant. He still hadn't figured that one out, but his son was the smartest troll in his class so he wasn't about to complain. “Actually, no dear. I would rather not know what you know, and forget I mentioned the trip. Here,” he said as he reached for his wallet. “Take the SD card.”

“U huh honey-dear, it's not that easy.”

Franks shoulder's slumped.

“What could I possibly have found that would have horribly comedic consequences for you? When would you, the proper troll gentleman, have committed something heinous enough to get them banned from,” Isabelle's voice lowers to a whisper, and she tweaks Frank's nose as she flits by saying, “The chess club.”

A flush of red overtakes the trolls face, and his face splits into a wide toothy maw as he begins to laugh. The shudders of laughter soon completely overtake the troll and he slumps into the couch that occupied one side of the spacious office.

Isabelle, seeing her husband defeated, flutters to his shoulder and whispers in his ear, “You looked hot when you had your pencil protector chained to your glasses.”

“Woe, there, little lady. We're on company property here. Conjugal relations on company property is strictly prohibited by section 2, article 3 of the work place safety code.”

“Section 5, article 6 states that company rules may be amended or suspended by the factory head at their discretion. Hmmm. Who could possibly be the factory head?,” purred the small pixie as she crawled across the troll's shoulders, running her fingers across the exposed skin above his collar.

“What if the gnomes have a problem?”

“They'll be fine.”

“What if...”

“Would you be quite. The gnomes will be fine. We are the only two people left in this building. Now give me a kiss, and let's see if we can't improve on Cancun.”

“Does this mean I get a new printer?”

3rd Place Creative Writing Club Short Story Contest Winner

Dead Heat Morgan Schmidt

Staring at the giant hole that once used to be a museum wall, Chris Blakely (aka The Neck Romancer) stood in triumph as his newest accomplishment strode off into the city. The T-rex was, by far, his greatest accomplishment yet. Chris gathered his things, no need to explain all this spell work to the human authorities. They wouldn't understand his greatness anyway.

A short recap of Blakely's life leading up to this grand achievement in necromancy, only ever previously achieved in works of fiction. Blakely was born to a quiet family lost amidst the quiet suburban lifestyle. His powers as a magic practitioner started showing around the age of eleven when Chris used his powers to pick open a locker at school. He was taken on as an apprentice by the one and only Harrold “Grave” Cusack. With Cusack, Chris learned every style and Art of magic. Chris developed a kinship for the Black Arts, specifically necromancy. D&D had nothing to do with it (maybe a little). At the age of twenty-seven Blakely was apprehended by the Council of Magic and charged with Endangerment of Mortals. This led to an eight-year sentence, which Chris only served four years of for good behavior and was let out on parole. No breaking the Rules of Magic and no exposure to humans.

Now to catch up with the dino before it wandered too far off. He had a reputation to keep after all, and destroying New York would not gain him any favors from the Council anyway. Not that necromancy gained him any favors either. Kind of the reason he needed to get the giant lizard roaming around off the streets before anyone in the community heard about this or got hurt. He was on parole for dabbling in the Black Arts and another strike like this and it was bye-bye to his head.

Blakely took off as fast as his legs could take him. That dino still needed a binding spell before he could control it. Right now, it was working on a genetic code that was about 65 billion years outdated. Not a pleasant thought considering it was roaming in the middle of a highly-populated city.

During the Information Age.

YouTube was not going to be his friend on this. It really wasn't.

Blakely took out a compass from his duffel as he ran. He bit his lip so it bled and smeared it on the bottom of the compass. He chanted a small spell and focused on an image of the walking T-rex as the spell flared to life with a pop. The compass needle swung around and pointed out the direction the brute was going. It would be forced to stay in the larger streets but Blakely would have the advantage of alleyways and side streets. He just might make it with no incident.

He ran out into the street as the Tyrannosaur stepped over him. Chris hissed in a breath before pulling out an amulet and holding it in front of him. Reciting the incantation, he watched as the dinosaur stopped and turned back at him. It roared and took two menacing steps towards Chris. He had to stand his ground, be strong about this.

The amulet glowed an iridescent blue. The wind picked up and Chris could taste something foul in his mouth. The spell was working, then.

Snap.

Crackle.

Pop!

“Rice Crispies,” Blakely muttered, the spell taking effect on the dino. And then he upchucked his lunch. So much magic at once really did a number on the human body.

The T-rex shrunk in size, becoming a living toy version of the great lizard that had occupied the space just moments ago. It squeaked at him and charged, slamming against Chris’ shin. It felt like a toy poodle had bumped against him. Chris looked down at the little dinosaur.

“Aren’t you just the cutest little lizard that I ever saw!” Chris bent down and picked it up. It struggled in his hands but soon gave up once it realized that it was not going anywhere. “Now, we’re going home and I’ll find you something to eat. My neighbor has several cats, I’m sure she won’t notice if a few go missing.”

Chris walked out of the street, ignoring the extensive damages done to the city. That wasn’t his problem, and, with any luck, Chris would be out of here before the Council started investigated the area.

That didn’t happen.

“Blakely. I never would have guessed this was your handiwork.” The voice was behind him so he turned to face the woman who had witnessed the entire thing.

Her legs were that of a dancer, covered in hip hugging slacks and devilish high heels. Her hourglass figure was accentuated by the dark grey suit jacket and crisp white button-up. Every part of her slender frame was gorgeous to look at but it was her face that was the real winner. Diana’s face was perfect from her unusual blue eyes hidden behind dark lashes and contrasting her dark skin. She always kept her curly hair up in a messy work bun. She might or might not be the reason for his good behavior in prison.

“Diana,” Chris said with a cheer that was only a little sincere. “You’re looking strangely perturbed this evening.”

“That a dinosaur in your pocket, or are you just happy to see me?” she crossed her arms.

Blakely held the dino closer to his chest and stroked its head as he sputtered out a response. "Dinosaur? No! This is...This is my dog!"

"Your dog, huh?" Diana said incredulously.

"Yes! Ha-ha! Yes," his eyes danced around the alley. "His name is Chomps."

Dropping her arms, Diana gave Blakely a stern look. "Hand over the dinosaur, Chris--"

"But-but I--"

"Or you go back to Tartarus," she finished. Blakely sighed dramatically and handed her the T-rex from his hands. He stepped away from her, sulking in the shadows of the alley. Diana smiled and shook her head at him. "You wear the dark and brooding look very well, Blakely. Your smile is better, though."

Blakely tried to hide the feelings he felt from his face as Diana walked away. This plan backfired on him, but he still had many more tricks up his sleeve. He didn't get to see his parole officer unless he was getting into trouble so he needed to keep his antics up just enough to see her, but not enough to get thrown back into prison.

Life was very dull without her after all.

1st Place Creative Writing Club Open Form Contest Winner

The Porcelain Doll Ashley Holloran

I am to sit on this shelf
I am to do nothing else
I dream of life and risks to take
But my master worries I will break
Master never seems to want to use me
Yet master is so scared to lose me
So I break in another way
Knowing in my box I'll stay
On my tomb they would write such a waste
Of a pretty porcelain face

2nd Place Creative Writing Club Open Form Contest Winner

The Banner Brooke Falk

Purple it's that color of royalty. In cattle showing this is not an exception. The purple banner is the symbol of success, coupled by a champion slap and handshake. The dark purple banner is the goal of every showman. Some find themselves "in the purple," as many call it in the business, often while other struggle their whole careers to achieve this goal. This was the goal of one girl in particular.

She had shown since she was seven and been around cattle her entire life. When she was two she ventured down the alley way between the pens and the barn and kissed the herd bull on the nose. Her passion for cattle was born with these early experiences. As she got older she began 4-H and exhibited her first calf, a somewhat ugly Simmental Angus cross calf, she named Henry. Henry started a fire in her to become the best she could in showing. For years she exhibited Limousin and Lim-Flex cattle in area shows and the county fair. In 2010, she showed at her very first junior national show. Her hunger to succeed has only grown since this time.

At age twenty she knows that her junior career is coming to a close, and still she has not achieved her goal. She had done well at some shows, but in the same breath had had her heifers torn apart by the reasons of the judge more times than she could count. She has watched as children in their first year showing are bought expensive heifers and take banner after banner, show after show. She has seen parents and hired fitters do all the work on an animal, and a child be handed the lead just before they enter the ring. She had had calves that should have easily won a class lose because of politics among judges and exhibitors. Exhibit A, was her bull Cletus who was a month younger and outweighed his competitor by 300 pounds losing his class. Knowing often as soon as she saw a show order what animals would win simply by the name of the exhibitor or prefix on the animal. She often became frustrated.

She worked day in day out. Feeding, watering, brushing, rinsing, washing, blowing, mucking stalls, practicing fitting, practicing showmanship, researching the best AI bulls, studying sales, and researching tips online. Yet she still had no banner to call her own, the one to symbol of success. Anyone in or out the business can say with hard work and dedication the goal could be achieved. Then again she was starting to doubt it. Her family has spent thousands over the years, to help her achieve her goal. This weighed on her, especially when the heifer her dad bought for her did nothing at shows and she was the most expensive animal her family had ever bought. She could not help, but feel she must be doing something wrong.

Juggling college, work, and her animals is difficult and that is just what she is trying to do. As she enters one of her last show seasons she is hopeful, but has already experience the same frustration and heartbreak that she always had. Just last weekend, she exhibited three head, two embryo transfer (ET) calves, and one bred and own heifer. The two ET calves weighed around 620 a piece. When she entered the ring in the All other Breeds class (AOB) she thought she had it licked when she saw her competitor was a Miniature Herford and couldn't have weight 100 pounds. However, she was proved wrong again.

This girl is me and this journey is mine. I have had many hardships and jubilation in my

show career, but never have accomplished my goal. As I look forward, I see the end of my show career speeding ever toward me and wonder what if this could be my year or not. I was always taught to be honest, and learn from mistake. My family doesn't cheat we don't swap birthdays or pump water into our cattle. And trust me we have made our fair share of mistakes, but we have moved forward and learned to work past them. Showing is not truly about the banner, it is about having fun with family, making new friends, and enjoying what you do no matter the outcome. This seems to have been forgotten by many in the industry. I have a good friend in Tennessee thanks to showing. My brother has friends in Iowa and my family always tries to stall near our friends from Arkansas. The truth is a banner is just a piece of purple cloth draped over a stick. Why is this so important? Isn't having friends and enjoying what you do more important? In my eyes yes, is a banner still one of my goals, yes. However, I know the true reason why we show.

3rd Place Creative Writing Club Open Form Contest Winner

Conflict of Interest Katherine Terhune

A mother and her daughter come into a doctor's office for an appointment and approach the receptionist's window. The mother discloses that she is here to see the doctor about her daughter's "accidents." She says that it goes beyond just nightmares and wetting the bed. The little girl will not go to the bathroom, and when the accident occurs, she will not go inside and change her clothes. She does not clean herself and is constantly getting infections, despite her mother's lectures and warnings. This was all sudden, as the girl stopped having accidents years ago.

The receptionist relays this information to the nurse, and straight away, the nurse, who has had experience with children in the past knows exactly what is happening.

Someone is hurting that little girl and she has been put in a position to help. When she relays the information to the doctor, the doctor immediately snaps back with a panicked "I can't ask those kinds of questions! It isn't my job to ask those kinds of questions. It makes me uncomfortable."

"IT IS YOUR JOB TO HEAL!" the nurse screams mentally, "IT IS YOUR JOB TO HELP THIS HURTING BABY."

She swallows the thought and replies with a simple "Yes, doctor. I will refer her to someone else."

The girl is forced to talk to a stranger instead of the doctor who she has seen for everything from the flu to the chicken pox. Naturally she is uncomfortable, scared, and less inclined to tell the truth, no matter how well the health professional means.

As a person, you have the right to your morals. You can feel uncomfortable and uncertain and afraid without a question asked. You can have your religion which opposes birth control and

abortion. You can choose to ignore issues such as sexual assault and depression. As a doctor, however, it is your job to leave your morals at the door, and help. It is, after all, what you signed up for.

Additional Poetry Submissions

89 Churches by Abigail Stallbaumer

O Mother of the Word, despise me
Rake you fingers into my back, bloody
Like scissors snipping at shiny locks
Pick them till they open, till they swell, till they run

Until I look down and see my own tortured hands
Not the curly fry fingers of a man I never knew
Until I can sprinkle salt on my own and sell them for a bargain
Crispy and coiled, my gaping wounds become a garden

Until children can slide down my fingernails to my palms
And I get dizzy watching them go
Until 89 churches burn to the ground
Until I speak my own word, despise me

Until unlit candles hint at unwell dreams
When the flames hit, my wrists becomes wicks, and my arms fall around the kindling
The sun drowns out the dancing tongues
And clear sky provides pure horizon for the dark cloud that comes

My pillar of smoke is guidance from God
It billows out from where my hands should be
I follow with all my wheat and recipes
But milk and honey are scarce where I'm going, and the people there despise me

When the sun sets, the dark cloud seeps into night sky
I'm blinded by this bright fire in my skin, sending sparks up my limbs
I see the creator is me
But I have no mercy for our sins

Airplanes by Adam Smith

Airplanes flying in the sky,
Such a wonder on how they fly.
Twisting and turning in the air,
Flying so smooth, without a care.
Up, down, left and right,
Turning wide, banking tight.

Midnight Dream by Cole Fately

When all you see is the midnight dream,
Don't go looking to the skies,
To the skies,
When all you hear there's no one near,
Don't go looking for a while
For a while,
Don't you know any better, don't trust him,
Don't you know any better, don't give in,
Oh I know,
Oh I know,
Oh I know,
Oh I know,
Paranoia is such a wild thing,
Paranoia is such a wild thing,
When your hopes keep giving up,
Don't Let them to your luck,
When all you see is the midnight dream,
Don't go looking to the skies,
To the skies,
When all you feel is there anything real,
Don't go looking for my life
For my life,
Don't you know any better, don't trust him,
Don't you know any better, don't give in,
Oh I know,
Oh I know.

Heart and Soul by Megan Boehmer

I want your heart,
I want your soul,
To never be apart,
To always be whole,
Our love shall be limitless,
To always be blissfulness,
So forevermore I want your love,

I want your heart,
I want your soul,
Together an art,
Born out of wistfulness,
So forevermore I want your love,

I want your heart,
I want your soul,
So forevermore I want your love

All We'll Ever Need by Ryan McLeod

There is nothing left for me
There is no where else I'd rather be
There is nothing more obvious to see
It's you, and me, it's all we'll ever need
'Cuz we are free to be
What we want to be,
Free, to do
The things we never knew
Free, it's you and me
And it's all we'll ever need

Additional Short Story Submissions

Ice Dreams by Ashley Holloway

Soft Serve Machine:

I breathe in the overpoweringly sweet smell as I walk through the door. There really is nothing quite like it. You could almost call it an addiction: The way the thin line hits the cup and forms a soft bulb; the way it cools your nerves and emotions as much as it cools your tongue; the way the soft creaminess just melts in your mouth and calms your day as much as it calms your stomach. Not everyone likes ice cream. But I do. It reminds me of my character. I pull the lever and the ice cream squeezes out. I am responsible for the effort in shaping my own character, and my hands are responsible for insuring that the creation I make is as well formed as possible. No one can create my character and attitude for me. No one can create ice cream for a customer and say it is made by my hand. Only I can do that. It is unique to me. The nice thing is, I do have help. The machine really does most of the work, and it brings the liquid material from the back—a far off place that I cannot observe with my own eyes from the vantage point of ice cream creating or character forming. Sometimes I whisper back to it in my mind, hoping it will not forsake me with its endless material even though I cannot see where it is flowing from. I have faith that there is ice cream back there, and I have faith that it will pump it out to me when I grasp desperately at that lever.

The Cone Dispenser:

Cones are by far the most popular. After all, who does not love a good, old-fashioned cone? Exactly. They are delicious! The cake cones are made in three sizes: small, medium, and large. The different sizes remind me of the different stages a teenager endures, and the tumultuousness that is sure to be a part of each as it is explored and slowly adapted to. From a child who is just a preteen, to the days spent trudging through high school, to finally an early student savoring time at a University. This thought resonates even more now as I quickly approach the dawn of a new decade and the eternal exit from the stage and classification of a teen. Two decades seems like a lot for me. I can hardly believe it is already approaching. What will the next decades hold? The anticipation is as eager as the customer who tries to decide whether they want chocolate, vanilla, or the best of both worlds. I reach for the size requested and place it under the spout. Pulling the lever, I carefully watch the dreaminess ooze out onto the cone. I shape it with the characteristic bulb and top it with the trademark curly-q. It is never quite as straight or as perfect as I want it to be, but the customer accepts it just as God graciously embraces me. I want my cones to be straight and narrow, so I strive for the best, knowing when I mess up, the world has not ended, and my creation will be enjoyed even if it is not exactly like the picture.

Cone Dip Warmers:

One of the strongest smells is the cone dip. The cone dip is the icing on the ice cream. Whether sprinkles, chocolate, crunch, butterscotch, or cherry; each one coats the cone of their choice with a blanket of extra indulgence. It hides the ice cream within, transforming it into something new—on the outside. It is still the same ice cream underneath. No matter how hard it tries to change its appearance, it cannot change who it is on the inside. Its identity stays true, and

mine is in the One who has saved me. The extra layers can be delectably sweet, but they cannot be consumed on their own. I reach for my ice cream topped cone and place it, inverted, over the warmer. It must be stirred. Slowly I dip the cone into the pool, bringing it up for air and delicately flipping it upright all in one motion. It has put a wall up around its tower of ice cream. Who can it trust? Who will see it for what it really is?

The Toppings Station:

Mmm...the toppings! Toppings are by far the most fun! From candies to brownies and hot fudge to marshmallow topping, to strawberries and cheesecake and peanut butter and everything in between. The bright colors of each unique topping set a sparkle in my eyes that cannot be removed easily. Each one adds a new, unique layer to any creation, and the combinations are endless! It reminds me of all the dreams I have. So many things to try; so much to look forward to. What flavor will I discover next? Will I like it? Where do I start? I am running out of time. Which one do I choose? I can decide what steps I take, but what about the outcomes? The endless rainbow keeps me excited for whatever lies ahead.

The Orange Julius Station:

The Orange Julius station is a little bit different. It is separate from the rest of the store because it does not use ice cream. All of its specific ingredients are placed in one place: the Orange Julius station. I do not know why I like this station so much. Perhaps it is the fact that the Orange Julius's are so different from anything else we make, and the freshness of something atypical beckons me. Or perhaps, I like how uniform the station is. A paradox, maybe, but everything has a place, and everything is returned to its place. The different array of purées are each in their own color-coded bottle, and they fit exactly under the shelter of the shiny, stainless steel cover. Maybe the fact that it stays fairly clean most of the day is what really entices me; the perfectionist inside of me always needs my surroundings to be relatively clean to contrast the messiness in my life. Perhaps I just find myself tiring of the ice cream and the creations I am requested to make over and over again. The adventure of the Orange Julius calls me.

The Cash Register:

This is probably my most favorite part of the job, though it can also be my least favorite at times. I smile and offer a soft, cheery hello to the next customer in line. The brick wall between us insures me that I am safe and secure, and I can relax. I am protected. I peer through the screen at the person who is explaining to me exactly what sounds yummy to them in this moment. I listen carefully, wanting to fulfill their order and hoping that I will be enough. That my handiwork will be enough. That it all will have some sort of purpose. That it is not all in vain. So often it feels so pointless. But I know it does have a purpose. I do not doubt. I can show that to them. When a customer is outraged, I may not feel like there is a purpose, but I know there is. I cannot always observe it with my own eyes, but I know it is there. I have felt it—seen it with my own eyes!—and that is enough for me. There may be people who do not appreciate my effort and who become angry with my inability to provide them with exactly what they want, but there is always hope. Always a customer who smiles back to brighten my day, as I hope I brighten theirs. Everyone loves ice cream from time to time, but, more importantly, I have found there is One who unconditionally loves me. There is no one or no thing that even begins to compare to Him.

Terrorizing Pterosaurs by Charles Kessler

It is a dreadful stormy night, perfect for nightmares. Not only that, but I have many of them that come back to haunt me in times such as this. My name is Doctor Alan Grant, and I was hired as a consultant for Jurassic Park by InGen to help create an interactive museum about dinosaurs, when a storm like this hit and the dinosaurs were free to roam. Now, I lead a team of skilled people dedicated to the capture and containment of said dinosaurs that have populated the islands of Isla Nubla and Isla Sorna. Charles Davidson is our weapons handler, [Alphonzo](#) Tracy is our pilot, Billie Days is our combat/fitness trainer, and Samantha Silver is our communications expert. Just as I am recollecting our previous experiences, my satellite phone rings, scaring me to death. A breathless Samantha tells me,

“I just received word from Costa Rican officials that they need our help. A cloud of Pteranodons have swarmed several popular beaches destroying much property, causing these officials to declare a state of emergency. Alphonzo is prepping the Lear jet, and Billie is pulling favors so we have more muscle.”

“Okay, see you at the hangar in ten,” I reply. I jump into my beige response suit, grab my hat and get to the hangar. Charles was able to gain three Marines from favors on short notice, and within minutes we left for Costa Rica. We prep for landing at a military airport 20 minutes away from the beaches. Already we have seen five Pteranodons, but the Lear’s onboard sonic scramblers make them leave us alone. When we get to the beaches it is absolute lunacy. Pterosaurs are hurtling everywhere, breaking things, screaming, knocking over people, and crashing into buildings. Billie, Alphonzo, and I lift our Lindstradt shotguns and start firing into the melee above us, from a hastily built sandbag barricade. Meanwhile our Marine buddies are evacuating the civilians as quickly as possible. Our ammunition is a tranquilizer derived from the South Sea Conch, the most lethal venom known to man. However, as many Pteranodons as we down, it does not seem to make a difference. Their attack still seems like the most uncoordinated thing I have ever seen, until Samantha radios in that the sonic scramblers are being cancelled by an unknown source. Suddenly, I get hit by a trash can that was sent flying in the chaos. The sat phone spins out of my hand and as I rush to pick it up I see a lab coat on the ground with the letters **BIOSYN LABS** on the lapel. I tell Samantha of this development as she just found the source of the scrambler canceller and exterminates it. It turns out that in a desperate bid to obtain dinos, Biosyn Corporation created a frequency emitter that causes reptiles to panic and scatter. They thought they would take several to the islands and capture all they could lay hands on. However, prototypes are just that, prototypes, and will not always work according to plan. In this case the frequency emitter when they were testing it in their costal labs, the emitter was not calibrated 100% on the right frequency. The frequency that they were on, actually agitated and attracted Pterosaurs, instead of scattering reptiles on a large scale. This mess will take forever to clean up, but the Pteranodons are back on the islands, safe and sound.

Day 452 by Breanna Pribble

Around 8 in the morning, I wake up. Without a thought of hunger or hygiene, I dress myself and head out the door. To my grandma's, of course. Most people are not as lucky to live right by their grandma, but for me I get to live by my best friend. It is my last elementary summer because when school comes around, I'll be in middle school. I'm running through the alley, one-hundred feet from my grandma's house. I see her backdoor and like a thousand times before, I go in without question or a knock. I smell the sweet scent of maple, I see the color of the eggs, and I hear my grandma yelling.

"Lynn, is that you?"

Without an answer, I run toward the kitchen, the scent getting strong by each inch I step. "Hi Grandma!"

"Are you hungry?"

I smile and take my place and head upstairs to watch television with her. As I am heading up stairs, I accidentally tripped. Nothing major, just a bruised, bleeding knee. It looked worse than it felt. My grandma thinks nothing of it. My grandma isn't the best at cleaning, but who is? Clutter here, clutter there, but I became so immune I never realized how messy her home was. I finish breakfast and TV, so I head to the other room where my Grandpa is. I never understood why he didn't have his own bed, he slept on a raggedy couch. I ask and he tells me not to worry, he prefers the couch. I stayed with him and played some video games until my Grandpa's phone makes a noise "Hello?" He answers and without another word, he hands the phone to me.

"Lynn? You need to tell me when you leave, now get back home."

All I say is a simple 'okay' and I get up to leave. I hug my Grandpa and head in the other room. I tell my Grandma about my Mom calling and she scowls. She says she loves my Mom, but her face said otherwise. At the time, I thought nothing of it, so I ran home. I open the door to my house and yet again, I smell a lovely smell, but this time it is biscuits and gravy. My Mom saw me, but instead of the usual 'hi' after coming back from my Grandma's, she asks "What did you do over there?"

I didn't question it, Moms are bipolar anyways. "She made breakfast, I watched TV, and played video games with Grandpa."

"What did you eat?" She asked a little too quickly.

"I had pancakes, eggs, and sausage."

"Did anything taste weird or 'different'?"

I looked at her like she belonged in an insane asylum. "Um, no why?"

"I'll explain later."

I gave her a puzzling look and went ahead and got some breakfast. My grandma gave me very little, so of course I'm hungry.

It's around 6 in the evening, my dad is in his room, my sister is sleeping, so my Mom and I watch a movie. It's an oldie but goodie, The Labyrinth. Goblin King steals a child, might turn into a goblin, ya' know, that fiction storytelling. I've been wondering when my Mom was going to explain to me the thing, so I decided to ask.

“You see Lynn, your Grandma has been different lately, I can’t say why but I just want to make sure she hasn’t been different towards you.”

I nodded and stayed quiet to finish the movie.

It’s two in the morning, I can’t sleep. What’s wrong with grandma? What did she do? Everyone else is asleep. I know my Mom doesn’t want me over there but she’ll never know, right? Right. I get out of bed, no need to change clothes. Jammies, shoes, and a coat is all I need. My stomach feels empty, even though I filled it just a couple of hours ago. Maybe it’s not hunger I’m feeling, maybe it’s the anxiety. But anxiety from what? I grab the flashlight from the table and walk out the door. My grandma said I could come over anytime and that is what I plan to do. I reach the end of my driveway. The walk to my Grandma’s house looks farther than usual. I take my steps slower looking left and right with each step. The closer I get, the fainter my flashlight becomes. I’m five feet from the door and my flashlight completely dies. No light whatsoever. All I see is a light coming from the downstairs kitchen through the tiny window by the door. I usually rush in the door without a care in the world, but this time I decided to be more cautious. I turn the handle, opening it slower and slower so the squeaks from the door isn’t loud. I step on the first step inside and close the door behind me. I don’t know why I’m so nervous. I take a deep breath and softly walk down the ten steps to the second door. I breathe in. One, two, three, four, five . . . I breathe out, and open the door. It feels different in here. The air feels heavy and I gasp for breath. The kitchen light is on and there’s water boiling on the stove. I walk in the living room. I trip and fall. I hope no one heard me. I get up and look at what I trip on. It’s an empty bottle. It says ‘Vodka’ on the label. I think that’s an adult drink of some kind, but I see more. Bottle after bottle, the same kind, making an imperfect line to Grandma’s room. I start counting them . . . One, two, three, four . . . I go on and on until I hear a loud screeching scream. It’s coming from my Grandma’s room. I think she’s hurt. I run to her room. But what I see is not my Grandma. A woman is on the bed, her right arm on a table, her left is holding a long needle. The needle is piercing her arm. She pushes down on the needle and it goes deeper and deeper in her arm. You can see the needle traveling under her skin like a bug. She stares up at me. Her once blonde hair is gray, cut at all different lengths, it looks like she has been electrocuted by an infinite amount of outlets. Her face does not look like a face. It looks like a mask of a monster. Her face looks melted, her eyes popping out of their sockets, bloodshot. Blood splatters all over her face. Her teeth look like they’ve been drilled with a tool. She stares at me with a blank expression. Not half a second later, her eyes widen, her brow furrows, she grits her teeth.

She screams “GET THE HELL OUT, I’LL KILL YOU.”

I catch my breath and run. I don’t look back. I’m not thinking, so I decided to run upstairs to get my Grandpa. I get at the top step and in the corner of my left eye, I see red. My mind flashed back to the splatters of blood on the Grandma’s face. I turn my head to the left and I see what’s last of my Grandpa. His arm. Ground meat was my first thought. I scream until my lungs gave out. I hear uneven footsteps coming up the stairs and I run to the front door, struggling to unlock it. As I finally get the lock loose, I hear a voice behind me.

“COME BACK, YOU FILTH.”

I don't look behind me as I run out the door, running home, not caring about the pain in my chest. I scream to my Mom. . . And that is how I ended up here that Summer. My support group claps. Day 452 in the nuthouse.

The Day That Changed History by Rylee Richardson

Today is January 20th, 2032. Currently I am sitting in my chair sweaty palmed and clammy. I can't help but to contract goose bumps. Sitting in my office alone, I can hear the study roar of the crowd outside. My office is a glorious room aequipt with two couches, 6 seating chairs, a fire place, a couple of paintings I painted, and well to put it bluntly it looks very much like the oval office.

As I waited for 11am o'clock to roll around, I became increasingly agitated. In two hours, I would be a changed woman. It was only just a year ago, when my life took a complete one eighty. My whole life I had always wanted to be some form of a leader for people to look up to. It's been since the year 2023 (god I'm old), that I have been head compliance officer for a national medical agency based out of Kansas City Kansas. I never dreamt working for the United States government, but nine years later here I am.

I glanced at the time and it was now 11:10. The collections of goose bumps and cool sweat increased on the surface of my body. I chuckled at myself a little because I never thought my actions would carry me this far. Here I was in Washington D.C, entering into the first day of my new job.

Most people know me as the blond gale that grew up in the forgotten state of Kansas. My view out the new office window is pretty beautiful, and has a great advantage point of the Washington Monument. But I can't help but think of the rolling prairie I left behind at my home in Kansas.

Looking back at the clock, it was now 11:14, and six Navy Seals were now in my office. Getting up from my chair, I looked at myself in the mirror. My stylist gave me a hard time on my choice of outfit, but I was wearing a neatly pressed pair of black pants, a ruffled feathered blouse, and a pressed grey jacket. I was looking pretty good I do say myself.

Collecting my thoughts for one last moment, I began to think of my family and friends. How were they going to perceive me after today? With this new job, I pray that those I love don't feel intimidated by me.

Lost in my own thoughts as usual, I failed to notice that one of my dearest friends was standing right in front of me. "Are you ready for your big day Rylee?", said Victoria. My response was as snide as usual, "Of course I'm ready Vic! Or at least I'll die trying". Rolling my eyes, I saw Vic clutching something in her hand.

Lost in my own thoughts again, Vic pinned on a pin to my grey jacket, and I consumed my brain with the speech I was about to address to the nation in less than an hour. My head secretary Alyssa, nailed me for not writing out my speech, but I told her that would cramp my style. My goal was to be relatable and honest to the American people, not rehearsed and distant.

As I glanced at my watch, the little hand stuck 11:20. Heather was now in my office (my other best friend), along with Vic and Alyssa. All of them yammered on about scheduling, and the events on tab for today. I always managed to be the most “chill” person in a room filled with people, and I was doing exactly that.

When the yammering stopped, Victoria came over and whispered into my ear “Ry I’m so proud of you, and I know that you are going to do an amazing job for this country, and it is a true honor for me to be within your presence. I love you”. I could feel my face redden, for I hate being complimented. Vic stood behind my desk as I extended a hug towards Alyssa. Thanking Alyssa for all her hard work and loyalty, I couldn’t help but feel weird about the new level of respect these people I have known for years were giving me.

Walking over to the fire place, I made my way towards Heather. Heather has always been very shy when it came big setting such as this one. By looking at her I could tell she was a little unsettled. This was in fact the moment where I wished I could read minds. Jokingly, I told Heather that if she was any quitter I would have to fire her from being my best friend. I thought to myself how grateful I was that most of my close friends and family made the move to D.C with me.

Snapping back into my unsettling reality, the Seals alerted me to the fact that it was 11:30am. Alyssa and Heather left, and now it was just me, Vic, and the six Navy Seals. I walked slowly back over to my desk where I opened a little drawer on the top right side of my desk. Inside of it was the necklace pendent I was instructed to wear before leaving the office. I sat there running my fingers through the black leather cord, making my way down to the cold, shiny slick gold balls that each held 7 inch tassels of gold platted rope.

Staring at my reflection in the gold pendent, I could feel Vic’s arm on my shoulder. I could tell that she could sense my hesitance towards this whole toboggle.

“Mam it is 11:30”. I looked up from my desk to see one of the seals standing before me. His uniform really highlighted his bottom region beautifully. Slowly getting up from my chair, Vic grabbed me and held my hands and gazed into my eyes. As I stared into her eyes I felt a tinge of jealousy streak through my mind. Embracing each other, I felt a sort of comfort with Vic because I feel that she felt the stresses of my new job. Vic slowly released her hands from mine and walked out the door.

Exiting the comforts of my office, the Seals escorted me into the hallway that was lined with platoon of Navy Seals. Walking down the hall I said to myself “holy shit, this is really real”. The hall was starting to seem like it was never going to end. Video cameras filled the hall analyzing my every step, and cameras captured my expression. I should’ve took that aspirin earlier today, because all the flashing from the cameras was starting to get to my head.

Now approaching the door I can hear a muffled voice that must be the announcer announcing my entrance.

Through the door, I could see a crowd the size of a sea that was roaring like a fleet of Boeing 770s. Feeling very unsettled I couldn’t ignore the stinging pain that was now shooting down my ribs. Ever since the age of nineteen, I suffered from acute pains in my ribs whenever I get roused up. It was more than an annoyance than a hindrance.

Averting my attention away from the crowd, I looked to the left of the podium were my family and friends were looking on to where I would soon be stepping out. To the right I could see all

the important dignitaries one can imagine. Even more of a reason for me to be on my best behavior I chuckled.

It was only just three years ago, when congress and the senate made a world changing discussion to turn America into a parliamentary ruled system. With the long rescission that started in 2020, the American people became fed up with almost every politician in the country, and riots broke out nationwide. It wasn't until 2029 that President Reginald Johnson announced that the United States of America under the newly constructed constitution, would be ruled by an elected king or queen backed by a parliament.

I remember that I had voted for President Johnson with hopes that he could save the American economy, and create a new healthcare system that I had been lobbying for on behalf of my corporation. Little did I know, along with the American people, that President Johnson was to be the last President of the United States of America.

As I took a single step outward, my chest roared and every hair on my body stood straight up like a porcupine at Mexican standoff. The crowd erupted into cheers, and all eyes were on me. After shaking some hands and looking onto the crowd I took my seat. I looked at the 6 inch glass in front of me, and contemplated on how much it must weigh. As services went underway, all I could really do was feel like I was just another person amongst the sea of people. I tried to forget that this was all for me, and that I was really just witnessing this massive overexaggerated celebration for someone else.

Now fidgeting in my seat, I figured that it was probably nearing 11:40 something. I wondered what I would be having for lunch. Of course, my stomach was raging with hunger. I was amused with the fact that I was concerning myself with food at this very moment.

The United States Army orchestra and band proceeded to come out and play a new historical national anthem song along with the national anthem. The new anthem called The Crown was a very classical yet strong song.

Growing up I was just an average person. I ran competitively in college, and around the Midwest. I never ventured far from family because I am as dependent on them as a car is to gasoline. I was just an average human that had an unhealthy addiction to ice-cream, and bounty of friends and family to relish everyday life with.

The time was probably now approaching 11:50 something, and the priests and cardinals were starting to make their way onto the podium. My time as a somewhat normal human being were coming rapidly to a close. I looked out at the sea of people and couldn't help but feel a sense of real power for once in my life.

As I rose from my seat, I felt as light as a feather. Making my way to the podium, all I could hear was highpitched ringing in my ears. With my left hand, I grabbed the scepter which apparently is a symbolic ornamental power wand thingy which was surprisingly very heavy. I then placed my right hand on the Holy Bible. Repeating the words of Cardinal Joseph, I felt like a mumbling fool. I prayed to god that I wasn't looking like a fool to the whole world. As the talking stopped a group of Cardinals and Bishops placed what seemed to be a ten-pound crown on my head. "Lady's and Gentlemen, Her Majesty Leigh Rylee Richards I, The First Queen of America".

In The Darkness by Jaci Ross

As we push off the dock further into the dark fog, my nerves are on edge. I am the only female who is allowed to go on fishing trips with the men. People say that I am around seventeen now, as we do not keep track of years. My canoe partner is a close friend of my father's, who goes by the name Little Fish, which makes no sense to me since he is not a little man. My father and Little Fish grew up together in the village where they are now raising their families. My mother is not fond of me fishing with the men; she says to my father that I should be at home cooking millet for my younger siblings. My father sticks up for me and says, "She can out fish many of the boys her age, she catches more fish than the millet she could be cooking," as he walks away to fetch his fishing sticks and canoe.

This morning started out like any other morning. We woke before dawn, made our way down the one lane dirt road used only by doctors, dragging our canoes. As we got closer to the pond the foggier it began to get. My father asked the group of men ahead of us with hesitation if we should turn back. One man I have seen only a number of times turned and said, "No, the fog should clear out before we get to far into the pond," so we continued with caution. When we came to the gate marked with NO TRESPASSING, we continued with little distress. Rumor has it in the village the farmer shoots any person found on his land. The men and I have fished in this pond many of times with no threat of being shot at nor have we ever seen the farmer who owns the land.

We finally came upon the pond after what seemed like an eternity. I have taken this trip many of times but today it seemed to have taken twice as long. The men for the village take two strides for my every one. Little Fish always drags our canoe while I carry our fishing sticks. The village's canoes are made from trees that we cut and hallowed out from behind our village. The scuffing sound of the bottom of the boat on the dirt road is a sound that I will never forget. The quietness between strides, then the scuffing sound that some cringe at, but I cringe and want to hear it again over and over again. The sound brings back memories of my first time learning to bait a hook, casting, and reeling in a fish that was so little, but felt as though I caught the biggest fish in the pond. I could tell my father was so proud of me that day.

As Little Fish leaped into the canoe with me following at his heels, something felt different this time. The men were being extra cautious of their surroundings today. As we pushed off the dock we soon realized we could barely see the man in front of us, let alone the banks. We caught a few fish enough to feed two large families in the village so we pushed on. Then came the deafening sound I will never forget. I hit the water with great impact parting the water like a boat. Next thing I remember was Little Fish scooping me up with his massive arms, then the shaking of my body as he ran on the dirt road holding me. The tone of my mother's screams to get the doctor was something I had never heard before. Then in an instant there was no light, sound, or breathing; just darkness.

The Two Roman Sisters by Virginia Werth

I pray to Zeus almighty that I will speak no falsehood in this tale, and that I shall not influence any evil in my words. I pray too that I will offend no god in my writing, and that I only write what is wanted of me.

This is a tale of two sisters both amazingly skilled in the art of war, but because the gods took a role in their lives they waged war on each other instead of fighting side by side. The sister's names were Charity and Agatha, (Agatha being the older one). Though as children it became clear of the sisters' skill in combat, Charity did not care as much for war, but wanted to start a family one day. Her sister was quite the opposite and enjoyed battle, not caring for the family life. Despite their differences they were like best friends, and became immensely close growing up together.

One day they were walking through a beautiful forest over grown with blooming vines, and tall trees that cast cool shade over most of the forest, but the bright beams of the sun still shone through spots creating a beautiful sight. As they were walking Agatha suddenly became worried if they would ever fight together again. She knew her sister was becoming wearisome of it and would possibly stop, and start a family. Because of this strange and sudden fear, Agatha decided to make her sister swear an oath to Venus, Charity's favorite god, to join her sister in battle one last time. Charity was hesitant at first, but her sister pleaded unceasingly. Charity eventually decided to swear the oath, and join her sister in battle one last time.

Soon after, Charity so happened to be strolling through the village when a kind man named Benjamin greeted her, and began talking to her. After this first meeting they very quickly became friends, and started seeing each other very often. Benjamin was no warrior, but a farmer who farmed for part of the army, and stored grain to give them in the winter. Charity liked this, but Agatha thought him to be weak, but over time, began to consider that he could be worthy of her sister.

Charity and Benjamin became engaged after a while, and were going to be married very soon, but cruel fate had a different plan. Charity told her sister to meet her at the forest for a walk, so that she could tell her sister the news. But when they met Agatha spoke first saying, "Sister you once swore an oath to Venus promising to join me in battle one last time. A force is invading Rome and I am going to fight, and you will join me for the final time. The battle should be short, because Rome's force is much larger than the intruding army. I know this will be the last time then you can start a family and never go to war again." But as soon as Agatha stopped talking, Charity broke into tears. Agatha did not understand why her sister was troubled and asked Charity what the matter was, and she responded in tears saying, "I was to be married in a matter of days, but now I cannot because of that cursed oath you made me swear." Agatha was at first alarmed by this and did not know what to say, but then she reassured her sister that the combat would be short, and marry once they returned. Charity calmed down and agreed that the battle would indeed be short. Benjamin took the news well, but still became sad of his loved one leaving to fight.

After they said farewell to Benjamin, the sisters were off with spears, bows, arrows and swords. For the first week the sister were in high spirits, killing left and right. The gods had

blessed them with manly strength, and they could hurl a spear through three men, with one throw. Agatha had become perfectly skilled with a sword, while her sisters aim with an arrow was truer than any others. Two weeks went by and the girls were fighting better than they had ever before, but the intruding force was stronger than they had thought. The sisters continued to fight valiantly though, and thrust their weapons through many men. Charity thought she would be back in a month, but fate did not allow such fortune.

The war waged on for much longer than suspected, and went for two wearisome years, but Agatha had faith that Benjamin would wait for her. The Romans won, and the two sisters started home exhausted. Venus, whom Charity loved, had always favored the elder daughter, and for some unknown reason disliked poor Charity. And on the last night before the sisters arrived at home, Venus sent Cupid down to perform some sly work. While Agatha was asleep Cupid pierced her with an arrow, and she became in love with Benjamin! Then after Cupid had done this, he traveled to Benjamin, who had been true in waiting for Charity. Cupid pierced Benjamin with an arrow making him forget about his love for charity, and forcing a new and very strong love for Agatha.

The girls returned home to their parents, and found Benjamin waiting there too. Charity became overwhelmed with joy and ran to him. He likewise started running, but passed Charity without a second look, and ran straight to Agatha. Charity was confused and did not understand what was going on. It was like Benjamin thought Agatha Was Charity, and did not even recognize the real Charity. First Charity just wept with confusion, but then as she saw them embracing each other, Iris filled her heart with rage. Charity ran into the woods crying out curses on her sister, but her sister did not notice her absence, because the spell of Cupid was so strong.

Agatha and Benjamin were soon married, but shortly after the wedding Agatha started thinking about her sister. She became worried about Charity, and she had not seen her in three months. She told her husband that she was going to go search for her, in the woods were they used to play. It was fall and the trees were turning into red, yellow, and beautiful amber colors. The trees showered different colored leaves all over the forest floor, and fall flowers popped up everywhere, creating a magnificent sight. As Agatha walked through the scenic woods, she called for her sister, but there was no response. All of a sudden Agatha her some rustling noise up ahead, and she ran to it like a lioness to her cub would. She found a small clearing with a camp set up, and in the tent there was Charity filled with horrible rage. "Sister, forgive me for neglecting you," Agatha began, "I have missed you dearly, and I was not sure why you disappeared, and did not attend the wedding." Charity filled with fury answered, "Had you forgotten that I was in love before we left for that wretched war. I would have been married now if you had not ruined my life! I loved Benjamin, but you stole him like you did not even know. But now I hate you both, and wish only ill on your family forever!" Agatha was shocked, but soon remembered her sister's feelings for Benjamin before the war, and she replied with tears, "Sister forgive me, I now remember everything like an old dream. Oh! How can you forgive what I have done? The gods blinded me and my husband sister, I do not know why. If you can find some way in your heart to forgive me, I beg that you come home and start a new life." There was no pity in Charity's eyes, and before she turned from her sister and left she said one last thing, "Leave me, and never let me see you horrible face again. If you ever come back I will kill you."

Agatha went home with many grievances in her heart as though she had just lost child, and was in mourning. She told her husband everything, and he too felt awful. Together they made many offerings to the gods to help Charity. They hoped that Charity would calm down, and come and see them, but for now they decided to let her be.

Time passed, and Agatha had a daughter, whom she named Grace. When Grace turned five years old, Agatha decided to take her for a stroll in the woods. Agatha knew it might be dangerous for herself, because she might see Charity, but she almost wanted to so she could try to convince her to come home. It never crossed her mind that Grace would be in any danger though. As they walked through the forest, Agatha remembered all the fun she had with her sister, in those woods. Agatha told Grace about the games she would play with Charity, and how close they were. Suddenly they heard rustling in the trees, and a figure jumped into the shadows. "I told you never to come back" the person said. Agatha spoke saying, "Charity, I thought that I may find you in these woods, but I hoped the anger would have left you after all these years." The figure, who was Charity, responded, "How could the anger leave me! You ruined my life, and you expected me to believe that it was not your fault. You stole the man I loved, and blamed it on Venus, who is fairer than all the gods. Now you dare to even bring your child, whom I am sure has brought you much happiness, and show me how perfect your life is, while mine lays in ruins." "Oh Charity! Fate is cruel to have given you such a destiny. Please do not hurt me, but hear me out." Agatha cried. But Charity, whose heart was still stirred with anger by Iris, took a spear and aimed it at Agatha. Agatha tightened her muscles, and became ready for the blow. Agatha did not fear death, but hoped that if Charity did this she would realize what anger had caused, and repent. Suddenly though, Charity's aim turned to little Grace, and she hurled the spear through Graces chest, and dark blood came flowing out. Agatha screamed like an animal in immense pain, and ran to her dying child. Charity ran off without being noticed. Graces eyes clouded like murky water, her muscles stiffened, and life left her.

Charity went into the forest and said, "My oath to Venus is complete, now the gods may favor me. No! I have not completed my task. I must kill the whole family, except for Agatha, so that she may know my pain!" After this Charity quickly set off for Agatha's house, here she would attempt to trick Benjamin, and cut him down.

She arrived and greeted Benjamin, who was overwhelmed with gladness to see her. She said that they were forgiven, and that she would like them to help her start over. But as she was lying, a vision flashed before Benjamin's eyes, and he saw a spear flying, and heard his wife screaming. Benjamin said, "You have done something to Agatha, you monster!" Charity replied, "I have not harmed Agatha at all, I swear." But at that moment Agatha burst into the room holding her dead child, and Benjamin quickly grabbed a sword in fear that Charity would do another horrible deed. Charity slowly walked out the door saying, "I will make you suffer more Agatha, and not just you but your beloved city Rome, which is now my enemy." After saying this, Charity ran out the door, and Benjamin was too shocked to pursue her.

Charity rallied some old enemies of Rome, and convinced them to wage war, with her as their leader. They quickly rallied together and marched towards Rome, like a hungry lion after its prey. Agatha heard the news, and prepared for war, and Benjamin joined this time. Agatha was scared, for she knew her sisters strength, and did not know if she could save Rome, and her sister. The day of battle came, and the two leaders were Charity and Agatha. Agatha again

tried to speak to her sister, "Please do not do this Charity; you have caused enough pain already. Come home and repent, it is not too late. I forgive all that you have done Charity, please repent!" Charity was not touched by the words, and ordered the command to charge.

The war began, and soldiers fell left and right, like rain drops from the sky. Agatha fought well, but did not want her sister to die, for she still had faith that Charity would repent. Agatha cut down the enemy soldiers, and tried to keep an eye on Benjamin and Charity. Benjamin actually fought quite well, and did not cause Agatha to worry. But then Agatha saw a soldier heading for Benjamin from behind, and Benjamin was oblivious to the danger he was in. Agatha jumped off her horse onto a faster one, and rode quickly to Benjamin. Agatha poised her spear on her shoulder, and with great force threw it at the moving target. Straight through the stomach of the enemy went the spear, and he fell dead from his horse. Charity saw how Agatha was quick to save Benjamin, and that Agatha would risk her own safety for him. Charity then knew Agatha's strong love for Benjamin. Charity thought that if she killed Benjamin, and Agatha could not save him, this would cause Agatha much sorrow. Charity grabbed her bow and began to aim at Benjamin's heart. And before she loosed it she prayed to Venus, the god who betrayed her, saying, "Oh Venus guide my arrow make its aim true. Let it not fail me and miss, but go steadily through Agatha's love." Saying this she opened her hand and let the arrow fly. But Agatha saw what her sister was about to do, and flung herself in the path of the arrow. The arrow hissed like a snake into Agatha, giving her a fatal wound. The air grew still, and the fighting seemed to stop. Benjamin ran to his wife, and all the soldiers grew quiet to watch. He held his dying wife in tears, while she told him it would be alright. Charity was frozen from shock, and when she was able to move again, she felt no anger, but only remorse. Charity approached her dying sister, and with tears in her eyes fell on her knees by her. Charity spoke, "Oh dear, dear sister what have I done? I am the one who needs to be forgiven now. I have let anger consume my heart, and let it drive me to do terrible things. I killed your child, my niece! I now see that I am horrible, and cannot be saved." But after these words Agatha spoke, saying, "Dear sister you are not horrible, but are now good. I do forgive you, and now I ask that you save Rome and tell all your soldiers to leave. I always knew you could still repent, and now my dream has come true. I love you dearly sister, and please go in peace now, and start a new life." After these words Agatha went to go see Grace. The invading soldiers felt the same as Charity, and it did not take much convincing to get them to leave. Benjamin knew his wife was happy, and even though it was difficult for him to take, he still found joy later in life. The country Rome was now in peace, along with Benjamin, Grace, Agatha, and Charity.

No Looking Back by Keyonna Courtney-Simpson

It's finally the end of the semester and the bar across the street has been calling my name.

I haven't had a weekend out the whole semester.

How did I do it you ask? I have no idea.

On the plus side I have straight A's and well that's it. Just straight A's. Surprisingly I still

have friends that don't hate me for not wanting to do anything, but it was my last semester of school ever. I didn't want to go and screw it up.

I've tried calling them both, but neither answered. Walking into the bar it's packed. I basically have to push my way through the front door. Right now I'm not even sure if drinking is worth it. My bed sounds particularly inviting at this moment.

There are groups of people shouting and clanging their drinks together. The only thing that comes to mind is that they are as happy as me to be done with school. I squeeze my way through and find an empty place at the bar.

Sitting on my right is a guy that looks as though he may live here. He has a scruffy long gray beard, old brown coat with a plaid shirt underneath. On the left is some couple all over each other. It's so bad, I may become nauseous. She keeps licking his ear, neck and whatever else she can find. Who does that? I sound like some crabby old lady who will forever be living with cats. But come on.

"What're you having?" the bartender asks me.

"A Coors light bottle." I quickly tell him before he decides he will come back to take my order after I have made up my mind. People are shoving their way through, throwing their money

in the air to get his attention.

Thankfully no one is bumping into me, so I turn around towards the rest of the bar, the beer bottle finally in my hand.

There are mainly large groups of people, only a few smaller groups. Mostly couples, some stragglers making their way from group to group. There are also a ton of people on the dance floor, getting their groove on pretty hard for it only being seven. I turn my head towards a group of girls with their cocktails laughing hysterically at the group of guys behind them.

I don't realize how hard I'm staring until my eyes meet some guys. I didn't purposely stare so I turn around as quick as I can. Maybe he didn't notice.

My beer went a lot quicker than I thought, clearly I was thirsty. And not drinking for the last couple months it's already warming my body. Starting with my fingers and toes.

"Can I get another one?" I ask the bartender.

"What can I get for you?"

"Another one please."

"I got yours, what can I get you?" He eyes someone behind me.

"The same as the lady please," a voice says.

The bartender hands me my beer. A hand comes up next to the side of my face. It's a strong hand, most likely some guys. I hope it's a guy anyway, what a poor girl if her voice is that deep with hands like that. The bartender hands him his beer.

"Thanks man," he sets down a twenty dollar bill. "I'll take care of hers too."

The bartender nods, reaching to take the twenty as I whip my head around. The guy who decided he would buy my beer has dark brown hair and the greenest eyes I think I've ever seen. It was the guy that I made eye contact with. The only reason I know is because of those eyes.

Those gorgeous eyes.

His skin has been kissed by the sun and the stubble on his face just increases his attractiveness. He's wearing a white v-neck and you can see his muscles through his shirt. Trying to jump out at me. Damn. What the hell was I doing?! Basically undressing him with your eyes, that's what you're doing Daisy. I tell myself.

He sips his beer, raises his eyebrows at me and turns around to head back to the table. I

watch him until he sits down. He has a nice ass too. Too bad I didn't get his name or number. God where were my friends when I needed them.

He didn't notice my eyes following him until he sat down, because he immediately started talking and laughing to the guy next to him. I quickly turn around before he notices. I'm not trying to get locked in awkward eye contact again, especially with some drool worthy guy that just bought me a beer.

I try to pass the time by playing a couple games of Candy Crush on my phone. Somehow years later I am still addicted to this damn game. I get a text from Lacey, then Trish, they both plan to meet me here. Thank god. I look like some loner girl at the bar by myself next to live-in bar man and the ever-so-gross couple.

I put my hand up for another beer, internally thanking the lord for Uber. There is no way in hell I was going to make it home tonight.

The heat has completely made its way through my entire body. I touch my wrist to make sure my hair tie is there. Yes. I pull up my long brown hair that I usually wear down if I am not wearing any make up, but at this point I don't care. I'm not trying to impress anyone. I decide to take my time on my third beer. Once Lacey and Trish get here, they will just want to keep drinking.

"Can I get a Coors light?" The same voice calls from behind me.

I quickly turn around before he can leave.

"Thank you," I tell him.

He intently stares at me, this sensual grin crossing his face. Why is he doing this? He isn't doing anything Daisy, get your shit together, I keep trying to tell myself. I try to return the sexy smile.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

Oh good freaking lord, now I just look dumb. I don't even want to know what the hell I looked like just now.

"Yeah sorry, but yeah thanks for the beer. I can get this one for you."

"Don't"

"Okay."

Keeping that same grin on his face he takes a sip of his beer, raising his oh so perfect eyebrows turning around to walk away. Is this even real?!

I turn back around, realizing it's now 8:30. I have been here for a whole hour and a half drinking beer and playing Candy Crush. I need to get a life. The girls said they would be here by 9:00, so only 30 more minutes of looking like a complete fool.

The live-in-bar guy gets up and to my surprise, leaves the bar. Guess I was wrong about him. I start to play Candy Crush again, quickly running out of lives.

"Another Coors please," I hear again.

This time he is sitting down right next to me. I turn to look at him, and he staring straight at me, not grinning like he was earlier, but still smiling with his eyes. Drilling them straight into mine. I start to feel like it might be some kind of staring contest.

He finally speaks.

"You always come to the bar by yourself?"

The bartender sets his beer down and he nods his head as if to say thank you.

"No, never."

"You can't say never, you're here right now. Alone."

He sips his beer.

“That is true. I was walking by after classes were done and decided I wanted a few beers. Now my friends are on their way.”

“I see.”

He takes another drink of his beer. Jeez could his responses be any longer. He turns around and hops off of the stool.

“See ya,” he says.

What in the hell?! Who is this guy?!

I turn around to see him staring at me. One of his guy friends keeps trying to get his attention, because one of his other friends is telling a joke, but he isn't moving. Just sexily staring at me with his magical green eyes. He slowly starts to grin and takes another drink.

I turn around. Good lord I can not deal with this right now, not that I have anything else going on, but no matter how inviting his lips were, god his lips. They were just so kissable. And I can't even get started on his body, it looked like some God's even with a shirt on top of it. I texted the girls to see if they are on their way. Lacey said they would be there in ten minutes. Finally.

“Another one,” he says again.

This time I basically jump out my seat.

“What do you think you're doing?!” I snap.

“Getting a beer.”

He says it like I am stupid for not realizing what ‘another one’ means.

“I know you're getting another beer, but what are you doing?”

“Well I came here with my friends,” he says pointing back to his table. “And we are done with classes for good, so we are just out having a good time.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes that is so.”

He sits down in the live-in-bar guys seat again.

“This seat taken?” I must have made some kind of face when he sat down to make him ask that, because he didn't ask last time.

“What is your name?” I somehow got into interrogation mode. He may be so hot that I would willingly strip off my clothes right here and now, but he is being weird and I am not trying to die tonight.

“Carter.”

“Hi Carter. I'm Daisy. Are you always this weird?”

“I'm not sure what you mean,” he says making some strange confused look.

“You buy me a drink, then don't let me return the favor. Then you sit down next to me and just stare at me and ask me if I always come to some bar alone, like some creeper.” I am now aggressively moving my hands in all different directions as I talk. “Then you walk back to your seat and just stare at me.”

“You were staring at me too,” he interrupts.

I hold up my hand, for him to be quiet and not to interrupt. He snickers taking a drink of his new beer the bartender brought. His eyes fill with fascination. I try to not to pay any mind, and now for some reason I am becoming furious.

“Now you come back here and ask for another drink! Don't you have a waitress?”

“I do,” the seriousness in his voice stops me in my tracks.

I don't have anything to say back to that, frankly I was expecting him to say no.

“You know you're even cuter when you're get mad.”

“Cute?”

He sets down his beer, put his elbow on the bar and leans his head against his fist. His eyes filling with adoration.

“Actually beautiful. You are very beautiful, but when you are mad, you’re cute.”

I start to blush, I don’t know the last time some guy called me beautiful. Then again I have been cooped up in my apartment for the last 2-3 months.

“You probably didn’t know this, but as soon as you walked in here, everyone noticed.”

“Yeah right,” I spit out.

Now I know he is being ridiculous. For one I look like complete shit, like I rolled out of bed. No way in hell was I grabbing anyones attention.

“Okay, if you say so.”

He drinks his beer.

“Do you wanna dance?” he asks me.

“Me?” I say astonished.

“No the girl behind you sucking on her mans ear,” he whispers. I laugh and my head now has a mind of it’s own because it was shaking yes.

He stands up and holds out his hand. I take it looking for a place to set my wallet, but don’t trust a single person around here. He takes it from my hand and starts to walk to his table, my hand still in his.

“Hold this,” he says to one of the guys. The guy nods his head and goes back to his conversation.

The dance floor was completely cleared out by this point, there was some slow song playing.

It took me a minute being so locked into what was going on right in front of me, that I didn’t realize it was one of my favorite songs. Breathe by Faith Hill.

He spins me around putting his hand around my waist, to pull me close. I look up at him, he grins and we start dancing. So slow, so steady. I lean my head on his chest feeling his heart beating. For a moment I feel so swept up I forgot there may be people around, probably watching us. We don’t say a word, we just dance.

I look over to the door, just for the quick second that I realize we are in a bar. Lacey and Trish are standing there, with their jaws to the floor. I usually don’t deal with guys at the bar, so I am not surprised they looked shocked.

“Those your friends?” he asks.

“Yeah,” I say.

He spins me around, pulls me in close and his lips hit mine. The chills that run down my spine I have never felt before. It wasn’t this hard core make out, it was soft, inviting, gentle. No other kiss has ever felt like this one.

He pulls away and I touch my lips, my eyes still closed.

“Want to go to dinner with me?” He whispers.

I feel like I can’t speak, all the words have been taken away, so I just shake my head yes.

“Right now?” he asks.

I finally open my eyes to look up at him. He looked as wrapped up in the moment as I was. Our eyes were so in tune with each other, it felt unreal.

“Right now?” I ask him.

He just shook his head yes, so I shook mine too.

He grabs my hand, heads back to the table without saying a word he grabs my wallet and heads toward the door, my hand still in his.

I didn’t even look back to say bye to my friends.

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