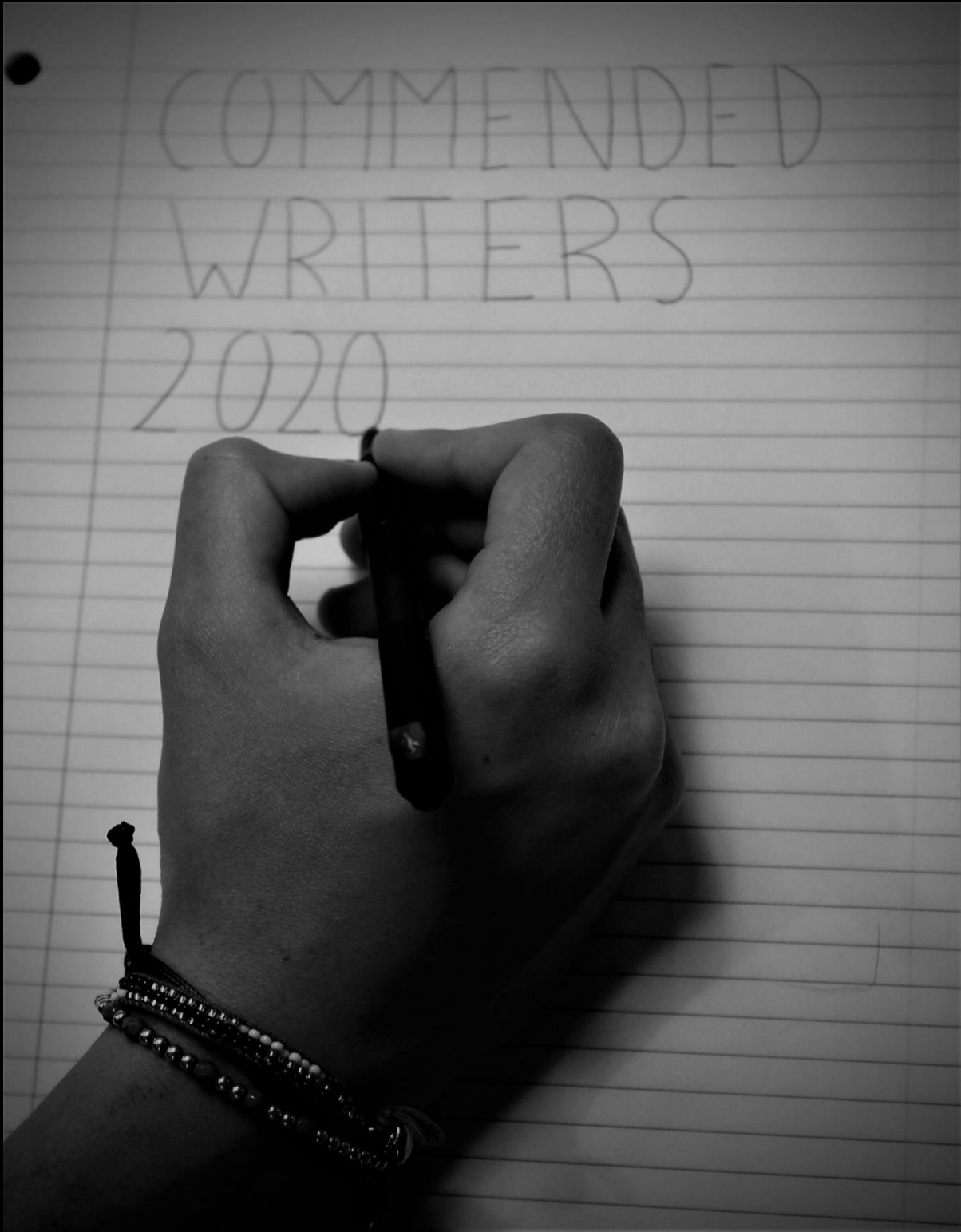


Pelham Storytellers



**“The art of writing is the art of discovering
what you believe.”**

~ Gustave Flaubert

The writing that follows reflects the work of students at Pelham Memorial High School. These students are commended writers selected by their English teachers for their exemplary work in a variety of genres. The students' work is published here as part of a collaborative effort to give our students a wider audience for the work they do in English class and to reinforce the power of the written word. The theme of this year's collection is "Transformation." Throughout their studies and within their writing, we hope our students come to appreciate the transformative power of literature to change both the writer and reader. In this collection, our students are writing about real life experiences and using the inspiration of creative elements from the fiction they have studied. They are creating their own poems, writing chapters in the style of authors they have studied, and writing their own stories. They are responding to pieces of literature and pieces of art that have had an impact on them. They are finding their voices. We hope you enjoy and appreciate their writing.

Special Thanks

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Jordan Salama, PMHS Graduate of the Class of 2015 and Princeton University Graduate of the Class of 2019. His essays and stories have appeared in *The New York Times*, on NPR's "All Things Considered," in *Smithsonian Magazine*, *Scientific American*, and more. His first book, called *Every Day the River Changes*, a journey down the greatest river in Colombia, will be out in 2021.

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A Brother's Goodbye

By Daniel Tahbaz

They walk with limps and low hung heads.
Worn down shadows of men who were once more
Than grandpas leaning on tennis ball covered canes fighting just to rise from bed.
But they received notice via mail so they pulled their cloth caps from their drawers.

Some can no longer even dress so an unfamiliar aide,
Fastens their ties and haphazardly pins their meaningless medals upon their lapels.
The car pulls away and memories flood their minds. They remember how they prayed.
Hoped and wished and prayed that they would not cry, would die like men without a yell.

But now all they wish for is perhaps the most honorable thing,
All these frail old men who were once saviors and demons, beautiful brutes
Can only hope that when taps is called and the bugle rings,
They can hold their arms high enough to give one final salute.

No matter the death, the trauma, the battle cries,
Pride beyond recognition fills their aging eyes,
As the flag, they grabbed gouge and died for proudly flies,
Wrists crack, hands stiffen, and the elder boys strain to wish a brother one final goodbye.

~~~~~

## Departure

### by Stephen Tahbaz

Hallowed are the grounds on which we once played  
As time gave way to age, and grass died  
The shirts we once wore, grown tattered and frayed  
A dream in your pocket, a vision by my side.

Revolutions came and passed, light patterned on  
The simplicity of breath, of sweetness and love  
Promises appearing as rotation brought dawn  
No reason to question below or above.

But Life is fleeting as the grass of winter  
And Love as passing as extracting a splinter  
Always Longing for the return to the old  
Soon Leaving your castle, which you've sold  
You Lie and say that you're ready to be one.  
One Lets their past go, for this world, this home, this town,  
It's done.

## Buttons By Spike Childs

my daughter had a friend whose mother  
let her pull the buttons off her coat  
every day and every night

she would sew the buttons back on  
after her daughter fell asleep only to have them  
ripped off again the next day

I wondered how she hadn't lost her mind  
and then I thought  
maybe she had

the girls fell out and I didn't see  
or think about them  
for a long time until

we were on our way home from  
my daughter's therapist one day and  
bumped into them

we talked for a few minutes and the whole time  
I couldn't help staring at the girl's coat and  
its perfect buttons

afterward in the car I looked at my daughter  
and thought about how all I wanted to do was  
anything to help her

but it wasn't like the buttons  
no matter how much I tried  
I couldn't seem to fix things

~~~~~

The Horse That Was More Than a Horse By Catherine Taubner

Inside that horse there are soldiers with hope,
Pretending to be a gift like on Christmas day,
But they are not just some wrapped up soap.

It was a way to escape the use of ropes
And to leave the Trojans with nothing to say.
Inside that horse there are soldiers with hope.

They were waiting, and with time they had to cope.
The Trojans thought that the Greeks had gone on their way,
But they are not just some wrapped up soap.

They thought it was from the gods, a present from no dope.
And the only opposer had snakes take him away.
Inside that horse there are soldiers with hope.

If only the Trojans knew their horoscope,
Since they believed the horse was a reward from a good pray.
But they are not just some wrapped up soap.

They opened up the gates with the ignorance that soon they will mope.
Nonetheless, the horse was rolled in with cheers of yay.
Inside that horse there are soldiers with hope,
But they are not just some wrapped up soap.

~~~~~

## Learning Your Heart

*Inspired by "Boy with a Basket of Fruit" by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio*

By SJ O'Connor

Two men intertwined  
As the fruit of their mothers' womb,  
Their forbidden thoughts  
Growing like stems around each other's minds,  
And like the fruit of summer they did bloom.

To pick a peach on a blue-skied day,  
And follow your lover astray,  
Where out behind black  
And white, there is gray.  
And there they shall lay.

Where art overturns color  
And values  
And rules  
To make a scholar into a sensual man  
Who knows those who run from love are fools.



# Where I'm From

## By Sorany Campo

I am from the coffee, the beans which my people grind,  
To make a drink remarkably bitter, yet it tastes heavenly.  
I am from the city of flowers, a land of eternal spring,  
Where a little man in a wheelchair, can't remember my Abuela's name.  
Each curve a distinct aroma, of each family's unique suppers  
That blend unitedly and makes me sigh  
Mmm...Medellin

I am from celebration and family,  
My grandma's house where we no longer can eat together,  
or sit under the fake green tree and listen to songs I still cannot translate.  
Where we open red boxes wearing gold scarves and dance until I can't keep my eyes open.  
I recall the final evening there, eating together on the icy wooden floor  
Giggling and cherishing the good old days  
Trying not to cry as if our tears are our memories we try to grasp.

I am from the Pearl of the Orient, the fragrant harbor.  
This is where I learned and loved.  
Growing in a world where I was naive of the chaos and hate outside of my mother's arms.  
Now I remember the experiences I was too young to appreciate  
The places I got to see and the people I met  
I am from the past and the future  
From stories my parents tell of their parents, and the daydreams I have of being an adult  
Where will I live? Who will I love?  
What would I value or hate? When would I die?  
Would I be rich? Would I be poor?  
But right now, I am from right here,  
I am from the crimson brick house  
Surrounded by yelling, arguing, fighting  
But also patience, forgiveness, understanding,  
And unconditional love.

# Where I'm From

## By Alex Esteverena

I am from the Big Apple, the busy streets of New York City  
From room 203 of Lenox Hill, the cold air and bright lights  
I am from the journey out west, the smell of the ocean  
From the year-round warm days and the dry, sandy beaches  
Where I spent most of my summer and days off

Soy de las lecturas largas, los días en la escuela Castellano  
De mis abuelos Rolando Carlos y Marta Dora Esteverena  
Soy de las cenas y fiestas divertidas con mis parientes Argentinos  
De haciendo guacamole, comiendo las picantes empanadas y milanesas,  
Siempre oleando como el cebolla y la salsa picante

I am from the hotel room in Brooklyn where we heard the news,  
After nine years, California would no longer be our home  
I am from the tears of my sister, the remorse of my mom  
The feeling inside as if I had a piece of me ripped out  
From when we said goodbye to our house, 271 Glen Summer Road  
I am from the time I saw my friends one last time

I am from the basketball games, the sound of the shoes squeaking on the hardwood floor  
From Hooperstown, my team for 4 years, until they closed the gym for a truck company  
I am from the baseball tournaments all over the northeast, waking up at 4:30 am every  
Saturday  
Listening to music as my parents drove me and my teammates everywhere  
I am from the beautiful baseball fields that always welcome me like mom into her home  
The sound of the crowd's cheers and my teammates' cries of contentment  
The taste of victory after a win or the bitterness of defeat when we lose

I am from becoming an adult at age 11, after my third anaphylactic allergic reaction to eggs  
The sound of the sirens coming towards us as fast as they could  
I am from the pain of the epi pen penetrating my skin and piercing through my thigh  
Having to double and triple check every food I eat for nuts, eggs, or sesame  
I am from the moments my friends eat foods I can't  
And the times I can only order one thing on the menu

I am from the vacations to Cape Cod my with my mom's 5 siblings and my 13 other cousins  
From the family games to working together on the crossword puzzle  
I am from the big beach trips to winning tickets at the arcade

I am from all the people that made me  
From the places that shaped me  
I am from the friends that changed me

## Where I'm From By Larisa Breskin

I come from Oz, from Hogwarts, from Spy School, from Sameness,  
And I learned that not once would I ever be blameless.  
I grew on burns, cuts, bruising, and pain, from screaming and silence just the same.  
I stepped lightly and fell, stole, slipped, tripped, and flipped,  
To find that laughing was all that I craved, and armed with laughter I was suddenly  
saved.  
I pulled my face back, thumbed the pages, closed the cover, said goodbye,  
To my only friend, which I put away with a sigh.  
Then I met them, them 3, them 3 who had come to laugh with me.  
And I learned that alone I would never, ever be.  
I come from home, and each of my relatives, and the lessons that they gave,  
Through Theresa and Greg, I both tried and cried, and was wrapped in their warm hugs.  
Through Nicklas and Noah, I fought and cursed, and was trapped in their warm hugs.  
I figured out life, I learned the secrets, then woke up from each dream,  
I put words down on pages, I stitched the story together, and I came up with a scheme.  
This scheme of course, was of the extreme, so sports I began to play.  
As Speth had done, I played with my narrative, the future I tried to delay.  
I come from these which voices roam my head, bathing in my vices,  
Pandora's box was smashed in my mind, with hope bandaging man's prices.  
I reorganize and recenter, finding my inner zen, peacefully and faithfully, as I learn to  
count to ten.  
The simplest beauties bring happiness, bring peace, bring comfort and stability,  
At the end of each day, I ask the universe for even a little tranquility.  
Even though I reach my story's end, and there are people to whom I need to attend,  
These mindless rages, and each of the red pages, show that there are lessons still to be  
grasped, so with this I am tasked.  
As Winston Churchill said "And that's the way it is"  
This is where I am from, states of strife, and loving moments, "And that's the way it is."

~~~~~

Where I'm From By Andy Wang

Where I'm from
there are
Struggles.
The raped and the rapists,
the bananas and bigots,
oppressed and oppressors
stuck in
Cycles of Conflict.
how Existence

can cause the most bitterness of pain;
more than
a fruit too ripe to be eaten
or a trivial feud
between the most arrogant of people.

Where I'm from
there are
streets,
Vendors lined across the
Sidewalk, with
Graceful aromas that can be picked up
from miles away
The ambrosial taste
Fit for a God,
but made for the masses.
From one's peripheral vision,
a child is seen,
defecating on these precious streets,
Cigarette butts thrown carelessly onto
these precious streets,
the beauty, barely
Overpowering
The unsightliness.

Where I'm from,
The faint smell of
chloramines
Mysteriously allures
people of any
race, religion, or gender
And connects them.
Complete strangers
pitted against each other,
behind them,
hundreds of animated voices.
Cheering, chants, and cries
Who will
come out on top?
The winners celebrate their
success, but,
losers weep for hours on
end.

Where I'm from,
Is an abstraction

Of not just
Attractiveness
not just
Repulsiveness,
but both.
Missing either one
would not have made me
into what
I am
Today.



Where I'm From By Kirsten Agbenyega

from the small house on the small street in a small neighborhood with a small college
overflowing merriment and mirth, mischief and miscommunications
2 mommies +
2 daddies +
3 awww! stop that! and wows! =
1 slice of a pie of people

the days grow warmer and it's time to pack bags and make our way to cooler climes
the journey is molasses
each voyager holding the other back and helping them forward in turns

from the next house near a university near a cookie truck near a bus that never waited
for us
1 mommy +
1 daddy +
2 how do you like being an older sister? and congratulations! =
1 story being written new characters being introduced personalities being developed

two barking blurs of fur competing to see who can greet us with the most excitement
the ocean is a doctor
a healing entity cooling off the entire island providing a sense of comfort and home

from yet another house in another town in another school where I meet another set of
teachers and friends
1 mommy +
1 daddy +
3 I love school! no don't touch that! and it's a boy! =
1 growing garden gifted with three thriving seedlings

time to return to being taught necessities like cribbage bread making computer games
driving on a lap that smells like happiness

Mother Nature is love
more familiar and filled with memories than the house we'll return to in the home of the
Liberty Bell

from down south where magnolia trees bloom where Duke's video library is a common
visit where we met a lasting family friend

1 mommy +

1 daddy +

3 I love the academically and intellectually gifted program! I love pre-K! and happy 2nd
birthday! =

1 school filled with students eager to learn and grow

kayaking becomes a new normal and the field of friends begins budding and blooming
the haven becoming more and more like my rock in a storm
a forest filled with flora and fauna and firs reaching for the sky with hands I love to grasp
until I can feel what they feel taste what they taste smell what they smell

from back up north to snow days to trips to the city to another advanced program to
another best friend a balloon that floats away before I've gotten my grip

1 mommy +

1 daddy +

3 you're growing up so fast! you read so much! and you're going to grow up to be a
soccer player! =

1 painting lovingly made stroke by stroke color by color thought by thought feeling by
feeling

floating in an ocean of a buttery breeze of baking waves of sugar and coffee crash down
the house is a white cloud

high above reality an escape from the black that has started to sneak up on me

from the last house in the last town with the last school that I'll go to before I leave

1 mommy +

1 daddy +

4 too fast! woah! hey! and another one! =

1 body adapting to yet another new environment

emptier yet fuller bitter yet sweet uglier yet more beautiful than it has ever been
a nest without its resident

memories still linger in the field of blueberries ready to be devoured in the waves
hungrily lapping at the shore in the gardens overgrown in a reckless sort of freedom

from the same house in the same town with the same school but from a different
perspective

1 mommy +

1 daddy +

4 seasons so different yet the same =

6 stars in a constellation ever changing but always sticking together twinkling in the
night sky

Where I'm From

By Olivia Lee

I am from wild forest fires burning and consuming everything in their path
From suffocating smoke that engraves the idea that death is inevitable
The cracks and sizzles of fire burning echoes and the sky is ignited with light
Everything is engulfed in scorching bright red and orange flames
New beginnings accommodate for the now charred and burned away
I am from a fire that created chaos and destruction but led to a rebirth of life
I am from the ashes of where there was once one, now two habitats emerge

I am from a five peaked mountain that stands high above everything else
Where each individual peak is imperative in a strong configuration
Every peak has a foundation that is made from what it has endured
I am from a peak that has been carved and weathered
That creates a scenic beauty for the human eye to see
I am from this strong mountain that has suffered through the harsh elements of nature

I am from a controlled battlefield of sweat, hunger, and determination
From a collaboration of thousands of decisions made in a mere ninety minutes
I am from a group of soldiers that give their all in combat
Where surrender and abdication are never an option to fulfill
I am from the drum of weight hitting the ground as we run towards our opponent
From the taste of salt that hits my mouth as I wipe away beads of sweat forming on my
temple

I am from a field full of fragrant flowers filling the world with beauty
Where little girls lay surrounded by a floral perfume tickling their nose
A diverse group of buds awaits their chance to grow into the mature blossoms around
them

I am from a bouquet, a variety of flowers each telling a different story
Where its togetherness brings happiness to those we love and care for
I was once from the darkness of dirt and soil but now
I flourish and grow in my own garden of beauty

Where I'm From

By Aoife Jeffries

I am from the little beige apartment on Havemeyer Street,
and the little white balcony where I liked to sit down,
To watch the cars and buses as they whizzed around.

I am from the pier where it felt like I could ride on forever into cotton candy skies,
Where my favorite scooter went bump, bump, bump up on each wooden plank,
As I admired the idle white sailboats docked over by the riverbank.

I am from the mighty oaks in Central Park who I hid behind for hide and seek,
And the hot metal playground where I ran around like a jaguar,
And the radio blaring rock songs with booming electric guitars,

I am from the little round table at my father's aromatic coffee shop,
Where I sat still and silently for hours to watch the city people walk by,
I wondered where they were going, and also wondered why.

I am from the little bedroom with the bunny stuffed animals,
From the twin sized bed with the fluffy, warm, pink and purple sheets,
Where I would gleefully dance around to my favorite song on repeat.

I am from the delicate perfume of pine needles in December,
From the miniature tree in the corner of the flat,
Where we had joyfully decorated and wrapped, and just sat to chat.

I am from the pilots, the scientists and the artists,
Who raised me to appreciate the wonderful world around me,
And that there is importance in everything I do and see.

I am from the eggs, flour, sugar, and a sprinkle of salt,
From when my mother and I used to bake together,
Where we mixed the countless ingredients forever and ever,

To create the flavorful, intricate, multilayered cake that is me.

Where I'm From

By Naiya Gonzalez-Breen

Stumbling toddler fistfing fruit snacks as her parents played pass the kid.
Little artist hiding in the back drawing with packed crayons and printer paper,
placing pictures on fridges swimming with color.

Happy preschooler racing down hills drawing on slick driveways and sleeping under stars.

Content dreamer cuddling her kitty and slapping stickers on walls,
snoozing on flower printed covers in pretty princess PJs handpicked from goodwill.

Scared explorer inching up itchy stairs to each new adventure.
Chatty child running down long hallways with pigtails and perfect pencils straight from the store,
meeting a pair of children with matching missing front teeth and kind smiles.

Excited toddler running and dirty away from the colorless confines of cement walls.
Pretty fairy painting on walls and waving to booths as she munches on yellow tomatoes,
putting out palms and petting forbidden puppies that could never be taken home.

Drawn back lover hugging cat number two as close as possible.
Vulnerable girl giving out more kindness than she could handle,
absorbing the frightening words spouting out of bitter souls.

Resparked joy at the addition of a new reason to smile.
Carefree classmate sharing the exciting news,
returning to a home missing two faces to wait patiently for recovery.

Full family cooing over cribs and caressing foreheads.
Daughter diligently listening to the discussion of plans while doodling nonsense,
satisfied by simple acts of sitting together.

Hopeful player in an oversized uniform and out of place equipment.
Hurrying sprinter rushing to catch up to new found friends,
with gasping grins as she kicked the ball up the field

Helpless crier enveloped in red and blue lights watching mom be rushed away.
Empty observer as questions were answered with guesses and I don't knows,
by the people who were supposed to have the answers and the reassurances

Shining student with all the answers she could hope for.
Dancing dreamer with dried eyes counting to the rhythm,
surrounded by smiles and cheers of those close to her.

New member meeting many teachers upon entrance.
Fulfilled friend sharing high-fives and hugs,

with more members of her new community.

Silly girl sharing cabins full of students' smiles at Sharpe.
Team player cracking the code of rope courses with classmates,
enjoying a well-earned lunch with each and every friend.

Optimistic child sharing her time with a special someone.
Maturing teenager sighting the signs and making a hard choice,
relieving pressure and pain and developing purpose

Unsure Freshman once again entering a community,
Burdened by the past year but hopeful for a new start,
full of friends and family and perhaps something new.

Where I'm From By Nathalie Brown

I am from caffeine
From the energy and motivation to get up in the morning
even when the rest of the world is still fast asleep
And to come tear me away from my adventures behind closed eyelids

I am from the gentle aroma of flower-filled bushes and dew fresh on the lawn
as it dampens the worn soles of the early risers, and the "Get out of bed!" 's
From the endless trek across the neighborhood in the mornings
while the persistent burden strapped to my back remains ever-growing along the way

I am from the seeds buried deep in the earth
that blossom into plump, juicy fruits to share with the squirrels
From the scent of dinner perfectly charring on the barbeque
as I sprint to the dark corners of the yard to grab the yellow blink of light before it flutters
away into darkness

I am from the blazing sun sitting high in the atmosphere
summoning salty sweat up out through every inch of my skin
And dripping down onto the smooth metal of my bicycle
on which I rush to keep the pace of my progenitors

I am from the "crunch" of colorful leaves crushing under my feet
and the climb to reach the highest apples in the fragrant autumn trees
I'm from the twinkle of the increasing number of candles that mark the day of my birth
and the wisps of smoke that tickle my nose when the fire disappears

I am from ice crawling into my boots in the winter
And the shivers as it seeps mischievously towards my toes
I am from the satisfaction of catching the plummeting snowflakes
piloted to land along the warm, pink runway where I can taste them melt into nothing

I am from the “splat” of the frozen sphere hurtled against my sister’s coat
And the smell of revenge when she returns the favor
I’m from slipping down the stairs to conclude a white afternoon
enveloped in warmth spilling in to comfort my chilled bones

I am from swallowing a thick dose of Tylenol when I couldn’t keep the cold out
And sweet smelling cocoa to assure that it stayed far away
I am from the soft marshmallows carelessly bobbing along the mug
that is, to them, a vast, dark ocean

~~~~~

## Where I’m From By Gavin Cuomo

I am from myself, my homes, my family, my life,  
from the busy streets of Pelham, to the suburbs, to the woods,  
square conformed hedges, willows whacking in the wind, a Dogwood standing in a wild  
yard.

I am from the ocean, on Long Island and North Carolina and Key West,  
Cudjoe Bay’s coral beaches, the sunny windy cay’s laid-back lifestyle (our tradition),  
Wilmington’s pier and swells crashing, fine white sand beach and memories of years  
with family,  
Gilgo’s sand-pits, bringing friends and brothers closer together once under the sun and  
once under the clouds.

I am of trimmed, neat, pampered, prickly-as-knives rose bushes lining streets,  
cars whooshing past, motorcycles whining at 3am in a now wide awake neighborhood.  
Four Corners, Villagio’s, Marcello’s, Pelham Pizza after school, a steaming slice in the  
winter.  
Within walking distance, 2 square miles of friends’ houses and pools in the summer.

Back to younger times but not all the way back,  
the freedom and stars and smells and vibrant fall colors on a quiet cul-de-sac,  
I am from the gray concrete I poured myself and lived in for 4 years.  
I am from the smooth round river rocks, walk to the green grass,  
then walk more through the tear-thumb and weeds and phragmites,  
remembering dad scything them all in spring, helping, picking reeds myself.  
I remember dad cutting his thumb weeding in his paradise and not minding it at all.  
Then the last 2 acres until you smell Beaver Brook, musty, earthy, irony, fishy, slimy,  
alive.

And this time to the place I struggle to remember.  
fruit snacks on the asphalt waiting for my brother's bus,  
wishing I could go, wanting to know, but having to stay with Jojo.  
Waking up early morning cartoons on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday,  
haircuts and bowlcuts and whatever I wanted, and mohawks and shaved -- I shouldn't  
have done that.  
I'm from downtown movie nights and bands and plays at Levitt Pavilion,  
and walks on Saturday mornings in the chilly hours with my family,  
racing down the road the last one's a rotten egg!  
All the way to Coffee an' Donuts and a heaping plate of eggs.

~~~~~

Conduit

Inspired by photograph from Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq depicting a prisoner being electrocuted

By Sean Holley

Standing
waiting
carefully positioned atop the pulpit
Easily diffused by earth

His posture erect
like a lighting rod

awaiting the moment
He may be laughing under that mask of his
without a mouth he speaks in figures
The afterimage burns
acid tossed at the eyes

Frozen in the invisible lens
incurring images of the redeemer
Noose in one hand as he conducts
a circuit that approaches above

A symphony of screams

Condemned by the romans
The black sheep wears white out west

A faceless idol
He preaches his silent sermon through the lens

Rock 'n' Bowl

By Sara Almo

The bus came to a grinding halt and squeaked into the mild New Orleans night. The yellow sign engraved with thick red words spelling Rock 'n' Bowl beckoned across the street, begging for me to come inside. I sluggishly jumped out of my seat, letting my hand rub against the old, itchy upholstery, until I found my bag. The wake up call at three in the morning was not doing me any favors at seven o'clock at night. My stomach growled, a quick reminder that the last thing I had eaten was coffee gelato at the Atlanta airport, five hours ago. I followed the green backwards, baseball cap, and the sea of purple shirts, including Annika and Daniella, that were flocking inside the building. I was greeted by the sound of crashing pins and the distinct smell of freshly made chicken tenders and mac and cheese. Annika waved me forward, farther into the depths of this poorly lit, quirky bowling alley. A woman reached across the bar and stamped my hand with cool, dark ink: a blaring sign that I was underage and under any circumstances not to be served alcohol. To my right lay the glorious bowling lanes, adorned with a rainbow assortment of bowling balls, all eager to make contact with the awaiting pins.

I caressed the smooth, hard surface of the first marble orange bowling ball on the rack, contemplating which one would produce a perfect strike. I slowly lifted the bowling ball behind my back and sent it flying forward in a swift flick of my arm. The only surface the bowling ball found was the gutter. Again, I tried and again the bowling ball gravitated toward the gutter. It was time to take a break; food would definitely improve my bowling skills, or so I thought. Next to the food table, seniors were gliding across the dance floor, lost in the rhythm of the zydeco music emanating from the accordion and frottoir above. Surprise coursed through my veins, as I eyed the cowboy boots and hats swing dancing as if their life depended on it. The sexagenarians and septuagenarians danced with bold confidence and uncontrollable smiles plastered to their faces. Daniella eyed the dance floor with envy, drawn to the rhythmic chaos. I violently shook my head; dancing was not for me and at that moment the very bane of my existence. Daniella's eyes and soon Annika's glowed with mischief while they half lead, half dragged my limp body into the ocean of people packed like sardines on the dance floor. At first, I resisted and stood as still as a statue, afraid that the surrounding eyes would judge. In a few minutes, the music infected me too, and I let the blues transcend me into a world far away from New Orleans, into a world dominated by downbeats, notes, and steps.



Shore Park Shenanigans

By Lucy Edmunds

The sun was ducking behind the strip mall building, painting the sky shades of pink and orange. The air was crisp enough to wear a sweatshirt, but that perfect temperature when you can comfortably wear shorts. A light breeze ruffled the leaves of the surrounding maple trees overlooking the worn gray Subaru. Henry sat in the driver's

seat, drinking the remnants of his melted Red Mango frozen yogurt from the cup. When he was finished he looked over to me, chocolate dripping down his chin. "Where to?" he said. We headed down Shore Road, passing people walking their dogs post-dinner. The calming feeling that summer has washed over me as I realized that I had the entire night to enjoy.

I scraped the edges of my polka dot cup with the red plastic spoon in an attempt to salvage the last sticky drips of the melted nutella frozen yogurt. We turned onto a pitch black road, pulled over to the side, and clicked the Subaru into park. "I've done it before. It'll be fine," Henry whispered, encouraging me to crouch down and lie on my stomach. The pavement was cool and rough on my bare skin; the bottom of the wired fence gently scraped my back, not hard enough to leave a mark through my grey college sweatshirt. Once on the other side of the fence, I got up onto my feet, dusted off the remnants of the dust and gravel that had remained on my worn jeans, and looked up at Henry. I turned on my phone flashlight, although it did almost nothing to aid my vision, it still comforted me to have some form of light. We walked along the clay path, soaking in the silence. As we approached a bend in the path, two lights appeared streaming through the bushes to our right. It took us both a moment to process the sight, almost instantaneously, we both turned and started to run towards the fence we had come through.

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## Inspired By "City Limits" in *Colossus* By Helen Cahill

Slow down. Now, and do it quickly. You have now entered the hidden gem of Nassau County. The Hope Diamond sitting quietly past a few swirling parkways and creaky drawbridges. Make sure that you are looking at those signs. Fifteen miles per hour. If you are not creeping down the street by the time you pass the gas station, you will have just earned dirty looks from everyone up and down Lido Boulevard. Speed tracking signs were established on the boulevard a few summers ago, shaming any disobedient drivers in neon orange LED for all the other drivers to see. Everything but the peak season seems to just casually roll along. The speed limit is not the only driving rule to follow here. Pulling into town seems to require that one must roll down the windows and turn off the radio, as if to let the spirit of Point Lookout embrace them, and as soon as possible, without distraction. A common habit is to say hello to the marina from the bridge, peering over the boats and the marshes below that always seem to have been delicately painted in watercolors.

There are a lot of unspoken traditions here. A code of behavior seems to travel through the air, or maybe it comes in with the tide. Everybody knows the drill, simple as that. Everyone has their places, and their names, and their slang. You can take an Uber here as often as your heart desires, but you can't learn the town's subtle details and quirks until you have been here for a while. For a town so small, a vast number of people seem to know and love it. Point Lookout. Generation defining nicknames. The recent crop of wild children affectionately know it as "Plo" - one word. They have even gone so

far as to call themselves “Plocals,” and wear it as the highest badge of honor, as evident in their Instagram profiles’ bios. The older kids, have reluctantly acquired “Plo” into their lingo, but only out of irony and a fear for defunct slang. Some of us still wear treasured t-shirts from bygone gift shops, faded by sunshine and detergent, emblazoned with zip codes and shark fins and every other nautical embellishment that could come to mind. Our parents and grandparents have all the golden stories of previous eras. They remember the driveway parties, the famed and mysterious hardware store that took up a whole block and the rare but bright celebrity story. Stop into the library or sit at the counter at the diner, and the stories will seem to fall into your lap.

Everyone’s aunt’s cousins’ ex-boyfriends’ kindergarten teacher seems to have taken a wrong turn once upon a time and ended up here instead of Long Beach or Island Park or Wantagh or any of the neighboring towns. It is how everyone seems to know it, and love it, as a matter of fact. Everyone speaks of the scenic beach and nice little restaurant on the bay, and a few will even find themselves stopping at one of the neon-encrusted Real Estate Offices on their way back home, or at least their home until they close on a Point Lookout house. Nobody seems to have ever not enjoyed driving through town. That has got to count for something. That positivity seems to make up for the long, grey winters, the lack of a grocery store and a few other bits of contention that pop up in conversation. The months of May to September make it all worth it-not that October to April isn’t lovely, that time of year is perfect for peaceful walks on the beach.

Take Lido Boulevard to the dead end on any given July night. Come at exactly six in the afternoon and you will hear the Fire Department’s six o’clock alarm bell notifying everyone that it is time to leave the beach and go their separate ways. Watch the kids biking home in time for dinner in their juvenile bike gangs, swarming like dragonflies. You will then find a golden hour little league game, drenched in Americana and Gatorade. A living diorama as an unknowing ode to Norman Rockwell. Ride the winding highways and find yourself, then stay awhile.





# Welcome to Paradise

## By Julia Meyerson

Sam lurched over the fanged monster, kicking it in the face. She landed just missing the red laser below and continued along the creaky bridge to her destination.

“Almost there,” Sam mumbled under her breath, heart beating fast, “just one foot in front of the other.” Slowly she made her way across the bridge, when suddenly, *BOOM*, a knife flew across the room. Sam looked down at her feet, seeing a thin wire she’d stepped on. A second knife followed. She could see her reflection in the sharp metal as time slowed down and the knives inched closer.

A numbing sensation took over her.

Suddenly, everything went dark.

Then darker still.

“Welcome to Paradise” announced a familiar voice. Sam opened her eyes and squinted at the bright blue light inside her Paradise Immersive Reality Set. She threw off her set and stepped outside her Dayroom of Glee into the stiff Venus air. A gust of ovenlike wind danced around, smelling of decay and dust.

“Ugh! Not again!” Sam yelled to no one.

A loud ring sounded from a nearby speaker, the Nightbell of Charm. She stepped onto the long piece of reflective metal, the Pathway of Delight. Her boots rapped against the Pathway of Delight as she looked around at the murky, orange scenery. To her right and left, as far as she could see, there was a person too tiny to see the facial expression of walking from their Dayroom of Glee to their Nightroom of Disappointment. It looked as if two mirrors had been placed beside Sam, creating the illusion of infinite Sams on either side of her that became smaller and smaller until eventually disappearing. No one ever crossed paths. Everyone simultaneously arrived at their Nightroom of Disappointment, where they would eat a tasteless meal and go to sleep before returning to their Virtual Reality Worlds in the morning. They had done this every day for their whole lives, exploring pixelated worlds far beyond the hostile Venus in isolation.

“It hadn’t always been this way,” Sam whispered to herself as she fell asleep, careful not to wake the Monitor of Triumph.

When Sam was a young and curious child, before the Monitor of Triumph trained her to stop, she had seen a piece of paper fluttering by her, carried on the humid Venus winds. She caught the paper right at the point on the Pathway of Delight that she calculated was the Monitor of Triumph’s blind spot. Sam was about to report it to authorities who would have promptly burnt it to ‘help with terraforming Venus’, when she read the title, “History of Humankind, an Introduction.” Fascinated, she read the rest of the paper. Here she learned of humanity’s past failures. How the beautiful Earth was destroyed by global warming, how warfare had rendered the moon uninhabitable, how sentient robots took over Mars, and how companies had exploited and destroyed the resources of Europa. Almost every planet, moon, or asteroid in the solar system that could have been habitable for humans was promptly destroyed by human activity.

Then came Venus, an unimaginably hot place that humanity had yet to destroy. They called it the final hope of humankind, a detestable yet tolerable planet.

Civilization was built upon the sulfur clouds. A new society began and people wanted, needed, this one to be sustained. A new government was elected, the Rulers of Bliss. They promised the people that they would keep Venus safe from humanity’s

failures. They placed Monitors of Triumph in everyone's rooms to guarantee people were following the rules. People who didn't 'disappeared into ecstasy.' They burnt books and stopped all education systems. They posted signs all around the planet saying, "Listen to Your Leaders," and "Ignorance is Bliss." They hired scientists to create the Paradise Virtual Reality System to give people an opportunity to achieve greatness without impacting the actual world. They prevented change and progress in any way they could, for they believed that if they prevented change then they would prevent the inevitable destruction of Venus.

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Sam woke up early the next morning. The light of distant stars radiated into the room, making the grey floor glisten with specks of brightness. The Monitor of Triumph was angled towards the ceiling. Sam slowly crept across her small room and, carefully avoiding making noise, lifted up a specific floorboard, revealing a number of pieces of paper, some pristine looking and others almost completely burnt.

Every time a piece of paper had blown past her while she was walking across her Pathway of Delight, Sam grabbed it and placed it here, just as she had with the paper labeled, "History of Humankind, an Introduction". As she collected each paper, her heart would beat fast and an unfamiliar energy would fill her. Later at night when she'd contemplate what she had done, the same energy came back. This time it prodded at her with a seething vengeance. Yet each time a fragment of paper, of knowledge, blew by, she would grab it despite the mysterious energy that she could only describe as unpleasant that resulted, for at least it was something. For at least it was different than her habitual life. However, unlike with the "History of Humankind, an Introduction," Sam had never read these sheets of paper. The Rulers of Bliss wouldn't want her to. So instead Sam continued the daily routine of seemingly everyone on the planet, collected remnants of books blowing in the wind, and occasionally glanced under the floorboard.

Until last night she'd had an epiphany. *If the Rulers of Bliss were so great then certainly nothing could change my mind about it*, Sam thought to herself.

Sam removed the floorboard and took out a sheet of paper. It was labeled "Sheet Music" at the top and had squiggly lines below that Sam didn't understand. Confused, Sam tossed it aside and picked up the next piece of paper, a recipe for blueberry pie. The picture made her mouth water as Sam thought back to the bland, tasteless food she'd eaten for her whole life. She read about the amazing animals that inhabited Earth, from the tardigrade to the giraffe. She devoured a comedic play that made her laugh and a murder mystery that made her gasp in shock. She studied moons, planets, suns and galaxies. She learned about war and oppression, but also about peace and freedom. She read a portion of a novel that made her cry for the first time since she was a toddler, but another portion that seemed to lift up her heart. Lost in this emotion, Sam almost forgot about the morning Bell of Charm until it rang loudly. Sam shoved all but one of the papers, the one she hadn't read yet, back in her floorboard. She carefully crumbled up the last paper and put it in her pocket.

She walked across the Pathway of Delight with her mind buzzing and looked around her to see her fellow citizens staring into space, thinking only of the Paradise Immersive Reality System. The sun was rising and reflecting off the atmosphere, creating a beautiful blend of colors above them, but everyone was just looking directly at their Dayroom of Glee. A gentle breeze ruffled their hair, but nobody noticed.

*Why is the food so bland? And why does nobody know any differently? What even is the word 'why' and why have I never used it before? Why do we spend so much time in*

*Paradise? Why have I never felt any of those feelings? What were they called again? Emotions? Why are books not written any more, or music? Why don't we study the cosmos? Why don't we wonder what's out there beyond our own world? Beyond our virtual world? We wonder what's in the virtual world, what things we can achieve. It's all pointless isn't it? The virtual world is just that, not real. Nothing comes of it, nothing ever will, yet day in and day out that's all we do. Why? Because the Rulers of Bliss tell us to. Because we're afraid of being punished if we don't. Because everyone else does it, and certainly they can't all be wrong, but they are. And these things that surround us are all words that no one has ever felt. Bliss! Glee! Delight! Triumph! Paradise! They've become meaningless. Why don't people have any freedom? Because the Rulers of Bliss get to decide everything. Everything! What the clothes we wear, the beds we sleep in, the time of day, how much fresh air we get, how we spend our time. And what happens when you disobey? You Disappear into Ecstasy! Whatever that means. We don't have love either. The only thing we feel is obedience. To the Monitor of Triumph and even to each other, but mostly to the Rulers of Bliss. Why? Why do we do this? Maybe because they give us this virtual dream world and force us to obey? The Rulers want to prevent change by distracting us. Do they think that we'll never accomplish anything in the real world, only in the virtual one? Do they think that this is the only way to save us from ourselves? But I don't think it's the only way. Not all change is bad change, a lot of it is good. We've had to make, we've been forced to make, so many sacrifices of our rights, our joy, and our sadness. If only people could see that! If we weren't so distracted our whole lives by Paradise, then we would see how bad our current situation is! That's it, Sam thought to herself.*

Sam counted 20 steps from her Dayroom of Glee, the Monitor of Triumph's blind spot, and carefully opened the last piece of paper. In large, bold print, it read "MEETING BELOW THE CLOUDS OF DESPAIR." The Clouds of Despair were the clouds of sulfur that separated the Sky City of Glory from the Land of Evil. The Paradise system had a function to explore the Land of Evil, a supposedly scorching and gruesome place. Sam had tried it once before screaming in fear at the hideous monsters that roamed the land. However, Sam knew that she had to risk it. Sam took a deep breath. Still in the Monitor of Triumph's blind spot, she took off her sweatshirt and held both sleeves as if it were a parachute.

*This might be my only chance to escape my existence of nothingness and help the civilization, to help my neighbors that are unable to even smile at each other in the morning,* Sam thought to herself.

She counted to three.

She jumped off the Pathway of Delight into the Clouds of Despair.

Sam was suddenly aware of the noise of the boots of millions of people simultaneously stomping to their destination. They quieted as the thick, pungent clouds slowed her descent and muffled her fear. A determination greater than anything she'd ever felt consumed her entire body. Time lost its meaning until she spotted the orange, rough ground.

"Shoot, shoot, shoot!" Sam exclaimed, followed by a scream as she remembered how she'd gone skydiving with a sweatshirt as a parachute, even through the thick clouds of venus. *At least in the Sky City of Glory I wouldn't be hurtling at top speed towards ground that is as soft as concrete. And what if the Land of Evil really was as it was shown on Paradise? Oh gosh, I'm not gonna make it.*

All of a sudden, a large creature with huge teeth swooped under her. His large scales were every color of the rainbow. His wings were strong and reflective. His claws were that of a falcon. Sam screamed when she landed on his scaly back. The large creature looked back upon Sam and appeared to smile. Using his long tail, the creature gently pushed Sam towards the back of his neck. Sam breathed a sigh of relief as he gracefully descended to the ground near a mountain and bent down so she could get off.

The surface of Venus was somber and oddly calm. The little light that came through the sulfur clouds gave the landscape an eerie effect. Sam struggled at first to gain footing on the rocky surface. She spotted a cave within the mountain and glanced inside, seeing three people. They indicated for her to come closer. Upon doing so, Sam saw that there were about twenty people in all. She showed them the flyer that had read, "MEETING BELOW THE CLOUDS OF DESPAIR." One of them spoke.

"I'm Lucy. State your name and purpose," she simply said.

"Sam. And I want people will realize how unethical everything is . . . I'm going to shut down Paradise."

"Join the club," she responded, "Or rather, the Uprising."

A second individual sitting beside Lucy continued, "Welcome to the 'Uprising of Misery,' as we're so kindly called by the rulers as blissful as a violent storm."

...

Every day, Sam and the others in the Uprising of Misery spent the day in the Land of Evil, before being carried back up by the magnificent creature Sam had met on her first day, simply named the Beast, to their Nightroom of Disappointment. It required perfect timing that the Uprising of Misery had mastered. In the morning, the Beast would bring them back down towards the cave at which they met. Here they would deliberate and train for their challenging mission, carefully accounting for every possible component.

Slowly, Sam adjusted to her new view on life. She became friends with the members of the Uprising. For the first time ever, Sam cared for someone else and they cared about her. She felt at home. She felt emotion, real, nonfabricated emotion. The Uprising had a huge collection of books on every topic, which Sam devoured. She read anything that could be helpful for the Uprising from battle strategies to software engineering. She was an expert on numerous topics by the year's end.

"The Paradise software system is stored on a server in an undisclosed location," Jeremy, the oldest member of Uprising, explained.

"Until recently, of course," continued Lois, another member of the team, "By tracking the electric signals Sam and Evan were able to find it on a map." Lois carefully unraveled a sheet of paper with a detailed drawing of the Venus. "The Beast will transport us to the building. The front door is heavily guarded and locked. We can enter through the back, though it is heavily boobytrapped." Lois paused, seeing the worried looks on her companions' faces. She sighed. "I don't even know what will happen when we get inside the building. There's no way of predicting that. It's best if we don't all go at once. This way, if we don't succeed, if we 'Disappear into Ecstasy,' then not all hope is lost." Lois began to tear up. "Who volunteers?"

Sam stood immediately.

"I'm going. You all are the first people I've ever cared about, and I'm gonna make sure that doesn't change, that you all make it out alive, that the human beings around us

make it out alive, not just these automated droids with no goals, no motivation, no will to do anything!" Sam proclaimed. "I'm not risking everything, this is my everything."

She took a deep breath "And another thing, no weapons. We can't take Paradise by force or we'll be like the Rulers of Bliss! We need to let the people decide their fate." Sam took the sharp piece of rock she had been using as a knife and smashed it against the ground, rendering it useless. Slowly, each member of the Uprising took out their weapons and did the same. Pages of battle strategies were thrown out. Three other people stood up and volunteered for the mission.

"To Paradise!" declared Sam.

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A fog of orange dust blew around the Paradise server. It seemed to beckon the people inside. The gust of wind that would occasionally blow was muggy and stale. Sam squinted at the building ahead of her. This was the first building in the SkyCity of Glory that Sam had ever seen that wasn't the cookiecutter day and nightrooms connected by a pathway. It looked superficial and two-dimensional despite its complexity. The sunlight hit the building giving it a ghostly glow.

Each step forward felt suffocating yet invigorating.

Within each step, her focus became exponentially smaller.

By now, Sam could see the front door.

No one on the entire planet had noticed her, they were all engrossed in their virtual worlds.

Sam and the Uprising approached the front door.

There weren't any guards.

They entered. Fear had blended with her other emotions, creating pure determination.

As they did, a blaring noise sounded from the alarm. The machinery surrounding them started shrieking and flashing with bright lights. Sam ran across the high tech room, quickly locating the server and the switches that controlled its power supply. The others followed.

Suddenly, a humanoid robot, ten times the size of Sam, came speeding in, holding a serrated shield and a laser cannon. Its metal glinted as a laser shot at the Uprising.

It was heading straight towards them.

Straight towards Lois.

Without hesitation, Sam jumped in front of Lois. She screamed as the scorching beam hit her arm.

"Proceed! We're so close!" Sam yelled, collapsing onto the cold floor.

The Uprising rushed towards the power switch and pulled it without hesitation.

Suddenly, everything went black.

"Oh my gosh! We did it! It worked! People will no longer exist in their mechanic state. Change, good change, can occur!" Lois cried out before running to Sam.

Through the windows, they could see people cheering. Millions of people exited from their Dayroom of Glee to see the commotion. They hugged each other for the first time. They looked overjoyed.

A large projection of a group of unrecognizable people sitting around a conference table suddenly appeared on a screen nearby.

"We are the Rulers of Bliss. Now that we are not so distracted Paradise we can see what is wrong with our society. We can see that the people are better off without Paradise. We can see that we must change. Thank you," one of them spoke.

A second man continued, "But we also see that we are not the best rulers for our society, for we have failed the people for too long. The people should choose their leaders. And we are going to make this change immediately, with your help of course. Click this button to teleport to our offices. There, we'll tell you all about this new government." With that, a button protruded from the metallic wall.

Lois smiled at the Uprising. She was about to press the button when she noticed Sam still lying on the ground. She helped Sam up.

"Here, you do it, Sam. You saved my life today, after all."

Sam laughed softly.

"I can't," Sam muttered with her remaining strength, "It's a trick. We're still in the Paradise Immersive Reality system now."

Sam pulled a second switch next to the power switch.

Suddenly, the world seemed to crash down, the virtual world anyway. The houses and the happy people became mere pixels on a screen before returning to nothingness.

A horrible sensation took over as they realized the overjoyed people celebrating the death of Paradise were in fact forming an angry mob. Their life's work had been destroyed with the flip of a switch and they were furious.

"What do we do?!" an Uprising member cried.

"Convince them. With words and facts. Here, point a camera at me and project the image on the building," Sam replied. The Uprising member did just that.

Sam took a deep breath.

"Umm, Hi. I'm Sam. And umm I, I umm, I guess I don't like Paradise," Sam started. The mob grew louder.

"It's a distraction. It's virtual. It's not real. Nothing in our life is," Sam continued more confidently. The mob, acting almost as one person, quieted down. "We never have to fight for anything, not because we already have everything but because we don't. We don't form bonds with other people. We don't have aspirations. We don't have dreams. We just have Paradise and an authoritarianism government that we don't even question because we're content with our fake world. They actively invade our privacy. They punish those who resist. We think we have all the freedom in the world, the virtual one, the one where it won't make a difference what anyone does because we do it in complete isolation. People use to feel things. They use to innovate and make progress. And yeah, a lot of that was for the worst. People use to do unspeakable horrors to each other. But we don't have to. We can learn how to be good people. We can help each other. We can use the energy that goes into making our virtual society better into making our real society better. Now we are just doing nothing. Doing nothing and hurting people. And that's not a place I want to live in. That's not a place anyone wants to live in."

Someone in the mob started clapping. Another person did too, followed by a third person. In seconds, almost everyone on Venus was clapping. Sam beamed.

The Rulers of Bliss, of course, were not of the people clapping.

They turned a dial.

Suddenly, hundreds of the same huge robots that had attacked the Uprising before appeared and charged towards the mob.

But hundreds of huge robots and a few Rulers of Bliss are still no match for millions of inspired people.

“Look at me, Jimmy. I’m a knight! A knight in a rocket ship exploring far off places!” a five-year-old child yelled to another and beamed.

“Well so am I, David! I’m a knight in a rocket ship,” Jimmy yelled back, “And I’m a wizard!” Jimmy yelled back, running around the newly built playground.

Sam passed, smiling at the kids pretending to blast off into space. It had been five years since Paradise shut down. This previously unseen sight of kids using their imagination and playing with each other was now commonplace. Parks and playgrounds were built from melted Monitors of Triumph. Beautiful murals and public art were displayed throughout Venus, both in the Sky City of Glory and the Land of Evil, now just known as the Sky City and Land. Astronomers would study the cosmos and doctors would help the sick. Chefs would cook delicious food from every cuisine. Architects designed unique buildings to replace the identical rooms that people lived in before. New pathways were built to connect people. Engineers and scientists made great scientific and technological advances. However, it was agreed that any new technology would have to be approved by a panel of randomly chosen people, where the positives and negatives of said technology would be discussed in great lengths.

A new government, elected by the people for the people was established. Sam herself was elected to be a leader of Venus, but opted out in favor for a full education. Together, the citizens agreed upon five basic rules.

1. Everyone has an equal voice.
2. No violence.
3. No weapons.
4. No hate.
5. Everyone must have an education.

A good education for everyone was established where students would learn everything from science and math to art and philosophy. Many teachers were hired. Scientists studied the best education systems for the development of students and the success of the society. Students looked forward to school each day and got jobs that they loved when they graduated.

Eventually, the rulers decided that the Paradise system should be turned on again, albeit only for an hour a day. After a day of speeches and scientific evaluations about the benefits of the system in moderation, Paradise was turned on for an hour. Surprisingly, not a single person on the entire planet used their immersive reality set. They were all busy at school, or reading a book, or talking with their friends.

“Welcome to Paradise,” Sam said.



## By Cristina Stefanizzi

Walking through the dense town woods, east of Clayton, Ohio, on November 14th, Kelly Bennet called out her twin brother's name, her soccer cleats crunching the dried leaves and sticks on the dirt floor. "Austin...Austin where are you?" Kelly cried. The sun was setting on the small town.

"Austin!" The booming voice of Austin's lacrosse teammate Derek Payer-Turner filled the woods.

Outside the woods, three other teens searched Clayton Falls High School for Austin.

"Did you check the newspaper room?" Emily Hun asked. She had been friends with Kelly and Austin since Kindergarten.

"I checked, twice," Samuel Bassett said, another friend of Austin and Kelly's, who wrote for the school's newspaper with Austin. "We didn't have newspaper today since Mrs. Jackson was out sick," Samuel said. Mrs. Jackson was an English teacher at Clayton Falls High School and ran the school's newspaper. The two were standing in one of the dimmed hallways of their school, it was already eight-o'clock at night. "But, I did find this." Sam added, throwing a backpack onto the floor of the hallway. "It's Austin's. It was in his locker." Before he could add anything else, Jessica Wythe ran into the hallway, panting.

"I checked the gym and asked the office if they saw him, nothing," Jessica said.

"God where could he be!?" Emily exclaimed.

Kelly and Derek walked around the woods for around twenty minutes calling out for Austin. "Kel, are you sure that Austin went this way to get home?" Derek asked.

"Yes I'm positive," Kelly said, "He said he was going to cut through the woods on his way home to take pictures of the autumn leaves for the newspaper. I checked his phone tracker and it's last known location is somewhere in the woods." The two Ohio teens brushed away bushes and kept searching for Austin in the dark woods. They used their cell phone flashlights as their source of light. Kelly was still in her soccer uniform, she just got out of a game when she got a call from her mom.

"Kelly? Where's Austin? He texted saying he was going to be home at around three-thirty today and it's already six. Is he with you?" Mrs. Bennet asked. Kelly looked around the stands by the field she just ran across and scored the game winning goal.

"No, he's not here. Wait, I see Derek. Maybe he was with Austin," Kelly told her mom.

"Please check with him and let me know, If you could look around campus and keep me updated?" Mrs. Bennet answered.

"Of course, mom," Kelly said.

"This soccer uniform is not meant for being outside later than six pm," Kelly stated, "It's freezing out here. I left my jacket in my bag in your trunk."

Derek looked over at Kelly and saw she was just wearing her soccer shorts and t-shirt.

"Here, take my lacrosse jacket," Derek said, while pulling off his letterman jacket with number 42 across the back.

Kelly took the jacket from Derek and could feel the warmth as she put it on. The two kept walking when Derek received a text.

"It's Sam," Derek said, looking down at his phone. "He says him and Emily and Jessica checked the entire school and they didn't find Austin. I'm going to tell him that we're in the woods, they can wait in the parking lot." Derek looked up from his phone. Kelly was nowhere to be found.

"Alright I just texted Derek." Sam told Jessica and Emily, who were sitting at a table in the library. "He says we should just wait in the parking lot."

Emily got up from the table. "You're kidding right? It's freezing outside." She walked over to the window and it was pitch black outside with only the light of the moon shining on the school's property.

"We can wait in my car, it's in the parking lot," Sam suggested.

Jessica stood up. "I think that's a good idea. It's creepy being in the school this late."

"Fine," Emily said. The three teens grabbed their bags and walked to the main lobby.

"Where do you think Austin could be?" Jessica asked.

"I have no clue, but I hope he's okay," Emily said.

Jessica and Sam shared a glance, as Sam put his hand on the door to push it open. It was locked.

"What's going on? Sam, open the door," Emily said. She pushed on the door and it would not open. Sam slammed his fist against the door, and it wouldn't budge.

"Maybe just the main entrance is locked," Jessica said. "Let's try a different exit." They walked away from the main entrance of the school.

"Kelly!" Derek shouted. "Kelly where did you go?" He looked around the dark woods, clutching his phone in his hand.

"Derek? Derek! I'm down here!" Derek heard Kelly's voice from below. He looked around and noticed he was standing on the top of a ledge. Kelly walked forward to see Derek. "Come down here! There's something here!" she said. Derek hopped down the ledge and landed his feet on the leaf-ridden dirt.

"What?" Derek asked.

"Here! It's Austin's camera bag," Kelly said, kneeling down beside a black bag with a shoulder strap. "He must be near here. Call his phone.

"Derek slung the camera bag across his shoulder, unlocked his phone, and dialed Austin's number. The two friends stood in silence together listening for a ringtone.

"Wait, I hear it. I hear his phone!" Kelly exclaimed. She led the way with Derek in tow and sprinted through the woods. They came across a clearing lit by the moonlight and found Austin's phone, lying on the floor, ringing. A picture of a smiling Derek and Austin holding a trophy at their lacrosse championship game lit up the screen.

104 missed messages. 26 missed calls. Still 1 missing Austin.

The three friends were nearing the south exit of the school. Sam sprinted to the door at the end of the cafeteria and pushed on it. Locked.

"Now what?" Emily asked.

Reaching into her pocket, Jessica pulled out her cell phone. "It's fine. I'll call Kelly and tell her to come open the door when she comes back with Derek. We have heat and

food in here, so we'll be fine." She sat down at one of the circular lunch tables and dialed Kelly's phone.

"Why would he leave his phone? Austin never goes anywhere without his phone," Kelly asked Derek.

Derek could see the stress in Kelly's face now lit up by the moonlight. "He probably dropped it while taking pictures," Derek said, consoling Kelly. "Let's look around some more."

Kelly picked up the phone and put it in her pocket. They could only hear the sound of complete silence in the woods. Before the two could separate and start searching, a phone started ringing. Kelly's. She pulled her phone out, a smiling Jessica and Kelly in the snow gleaming back at her.

"Hello? Jess, hey. What?" Kelly said into the phone, glancing at Derek, a confused expression on her face. "You're locked in? Are you with Sam and Emily?" she asked Jessica. "Okay, stay there, we'll be there soon and open the door," Kelly told her friend. Derek looked at Kelly while she ended the call.

"Are they okay?" Derek asked.

"Yeah, they got locked in the school and we need to unlock the doors to let them out," Kelly told him.

"Let's look around for a little bit more. If we don't find anything soon, we'll go back." Derek shone his phone flashlight around and shouted for his friend. "Austin! Austin! Where are you man?" he shouted with no response. He could feel the cold autumn breeze flow through the woods and rustle the last lying leaves on the trees.

"Derek! Derek help!" Kelly shouted. Derek looked around and found Kelly shouting from 20 feet away. He ran over to where she was standing.

"What's wrong?" Derek asked, panting, his breath fogging up in the air. Kelly was frozen with fear.

"What," Kelly asked, "is THAT?"

"Kelly said she and Derek should be back soon, they can let us out," Jessica informed Sam and Emily. The three teens were sitting at a small table in the cafeteria, eating chips from the vending machine.

"Maybe we should go wait in the lobby for them," Sam suggested.

Emily and Jessica nodded their agreement. The three of them picked up their bags and began walking to the main entrance of the school to wait for Kelly and Derek.

Kelly and Derek ran faster than they had ever ran on the field before. They were almost out of the woods, they could see Derek's Chevy Silverado parked next to Sam's Ford Explorer from where they were. It was dead silent at night and all you could hear was the loud stomping of Kelly and Derek's sports cleats on the pavement. The camera bag flopped around on Derek's back. Derek's letterman jacket flowed in the wind on Kelly's shoulders, while her blond haired braid whipped her face. They passed both cars and made their way to the front entrance of the school.

Half asleep, Sam was sitting upright with Jessica laying down across his lap and the rest of the bench. "What's that noise?" Sam asked.

Emily looked out the window. "It's Kelly and Derek!" she exclaimed.

Sam nudged Jessica, and she woke up.

"Are they here yet?" a fazed Jessica asked.

They got up and gathered their things, waiting by the door for Kelly and Derek to open it.

"They're pulling on the handles of the door, but it's not budging," Emily informed them.

"Well, let's push it open!" Sam said.

Grasping the handles to the weighted doors to Clayton Falls High School, Derek attempted to pull them open using all the strength he could muster.

Kelly could see the strain on his face and grabbed the lower part of the handle as well. "Push it!" she called, hoping her friends inside could hear her. The doors pushed open from the force and tossed them onto the pavement outside the school.

Emily, Derek, Kelly, Sam, and Jessica, all piled up on the pavement together were laughing about their tumble. Calming down, they started to sit upright.

"You guys won't believe what we found in the woods," Derek said.

"Um, well for starters we found Austin's backpack in his locker," Sam stated.

Emily rolled her eyes. "Clearly his backpack would be in his locker. What did you and Derek find?"

Kelly reached into her pocket as Derek pulled the black camera bag off of his shoulder. They set Austin's items on the pavement.

"His phone and camera bag," Derek stated.

A silence fell amongst the group.

"So," Jessica added, "He's somewhere in the woods then, right?"

Kelly, looking at Derek, matched his frightened expression. "Okay, hear us out," Kelly stated, "I promise we're not going crazy, but..." Kelly trailed off.

"Maybe it's best if we just showed you," Derek offered. Kelly nodded her support.

The five friends picked up their belongings and walked through the parking lot towards the woods. They each tossed their remaining belongings into the back of Derek's pickup. Kelly reached inside her soccer bag and pulled out her fleece jacket.

"Thank you for your jacket," Kelly said to Derek, handing him his jacket back.

He took the jacket from Kelly and put it on. "Anytime," He added.

She nodded and smiled, walking towards the rest of the group who was making their way to the woods.

"Oh, and Kel," Derek called.

She turned around to face him and within seconds he was by her side.

"We're going to find him. Don't worry," He told her.

She nodded, agreeing with him. They caught up with their friends and walked into the deep woods, exact of their destination this time, and ever as determined to find Austin.

Kelly pulled out her phone and dialed the house phone. It rang, but nobody answered.

"Hi, it's Kelly," she said into the voicemail. "We haven't found Austin yet but I'm with Derek, Jessica, Emily, and Sam looking for him. We think we're really close, and we should be back very soon. See you soon, love you both."

She ended the call and turned on her flashlight. The only lights in the woods were five phone flashlights and the moonlight from the sky. It was almost ten-o'clock, but

Derek and Kelly insisted on showing the rest of their friends what they found in the woods.

They stepped on dried leaves and branches, and left footprints of Nike lacrosse cleats, Nike soccer cleats, heeled Steve Madden boots, Doc Marten Boots, and High Top Converse in the dirt.

"Austin!" the friends chorused. No reply, only the rustling of leaves in the wind. Then, they made it.

"Oh. My. God," Emily said, her eyes wide open with curiosity and concern.

Jessica's eyes were a hazel storm of fear. "W-w-what is that?" she whispered. She clutched Derek's arm.

As Kelly bent over to get a better look, Sam put his hand in front of her. "Don't get too close, it might not be safe," Sam said.

Kelly started to tear up. "Listen! I don't care if it's not safe, my brother might be in there!"

Derek handed a scared Jessica over to Sam and held Kelly in his arms. "There's only one way to find out."

After searching around town for Austin, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet went to the Clayton Police Department to file a missing person's report on Austin.

"I-I just don't know where he could have gone," Mrs. Bennet cried. Sniffing into her crumpled up tissue, she was being consoled by Mr. Bennet. "It's just not like him to do this," she added.

"Ma'am, we're doing our best out there," Deputy Harris said.

Mrs. Bennet regained her composure. "Mr. Harris, do you have children?"

Mr. Harris nodded.

"If one of your children was missing what would you do?" Mrs. Bennet asked him.

Mr. Harris sighed. "I'd probably be doing exactly what you're doing; running around town looking for him."

Mrs. Bennet nodded and gathered her purse. "Thank you," she said to Mr. Harris, and walked out of the station with her husband. They got into their SUV and turned the car on. The heat blasted. Mr. Bennet's phone rang, connected to the car's bluetooth.

"Hello Dave. How are you?" Mr. Turner, Derek's dad's voice filled the car's silence.

"On the road with Laura, looking for Austin. I can't thank you enough for letting Derek out with Kelly and the rest of the kids to look for him," Mr. Bennet replied, his voice tired.

"Of course. Austin is like a brother to him," Mr. Turner said.

Mr. Bennet stopped the car at a red light, the windows fogging up from the car's heat hitting the cold windows.

Mrs. Bennet shifted in her seat. "Hey John, it's Laura," Mrs. Bennet said. "Would you like to come over for some coffee and food while we wait for the kids? It's awfully late and since we're both waiting, we might as well all wait together. I'll call Lindsay and the rest of them to come over too."

The line was silent for a minute. "Sure, thank you so much for the offer Laura. I'll be over in a few," Mr. Turner replied.

"Alright, see you soon John," Mr. Bennet said, ending the call.

The Bennets called Lindsay and Emmett Hun, Joanne and Boston Wythe, and Sara Bassett, and invited them all over to their house.

"We're not seriously going in there!?" Emily shouted. "You don't know what could happen!"

Derek and Kelly were kneeled over, peering into the glowing hole. The light filled the portion of the woods, lighting up the dark night.

"Who's going in first?" Jessica asked.

The five teens looked around at each other.

"I'll go in first," Kelly said. "For Austin."

Derek nodded.

"For Austin," the group chorused.

One by one, starting with Kelly, they went into the portal.

As Kelly was preparing to go inside the portal, she wrapped her arms around Derek. "Whatever happens, thank you for everything." Silent tears were trickling down her cheeks.

He took off his letterman jacket and put it on Kelly. Derek wiped the tears from her face and wrapped her in a hug.

Moments later, they released and Kelly was gone.

Next, was Derek, followed by Emily. Jessica was next, and as she prepped to go into the unknown, Sam bent down and laid a kiss upon her. Finally, Sam went through the hole, and with that the woods was as silent as it was any other day.

Closing the door, Mrs. Bennet let the last parent into the house. Gathered in the living room around small pastries and cups of tea, coffee and other drinks, were the rest of the parents.

"Do you have any idea where he could have gone?" Mrs. Hun asked.

"No clue," Mr. Bennet replied.

Mrs. Bennet guided Mrs. Bassett into the living space. Mr. Turner was sitting on a section of the Bennet's L-shaped couch and sat up when Mrs. Bassett entered the room.

"Hey, Sara, how are you doing?" Mr. Turner asked.

Walking over to the couch, Mrs. Bassett replied. "Oh, I'm doing fine, John, how are you?"

Mr. Turner took a sip of his coffee. "Doing okay, thanks for asking."

The eight parents sat together and talked about their children, waiting for their return home.

Kelly stood in a blank, white room that seemed endless. "Huh," she scoffed. "I guess this is what happens when you die." She looked around, defeated.

**"You're not dead,"** a voice called.

"Who is that? Austin? Derek?" Kelly shouted.

The voice did not answer her question, but instead asked, **"Where do you wish to go in time?"**

Kelly was confused. "What do you mean, 'Where I wish to go in time'?"

The voice didn't reply.

Kelly stood, wondering and calling out her confusion to the voice, but continuously being ignored. She finally understood. *If he could travel back in time, where would Austin go?*

“Kelly is one of the sweetest girls I’ve ever met,” Mrs. Wythe said to Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. “She was so kind to Jessica when we moved from Wisconsin a couple years ago.”

*There are so many possibilities,* Kelly thought. She started to get sad. *Maybe he would go back to when we got Arnold.*

“Your son works very hard too, John.” Mrs. Hun said, turning to Mr. Turner. “Derek and Austin worked so hard last year in lacrosse. I just knew they were going to win that championship.”

Mr. Turner smiled and playfully punched Mr. Bennet on the shoulder. “Hey, they’re just two chips off the old blocks, we won our championship game back in high school.”

*Austin would definitely go back to our championship lacrosse game,* Derek thought.

“Emily is such a talented young girl,” Mrs. Wythe said to Mr. and Mrs. Hun. “She was fantastic in the school’s musical last year.”

Mrs. Hun smiled. “Thank you so much. She works really hard.”

*Maybe Austin would go back to opening night of the play, when he brought me flowers,* Emily thought.

“Your daughter Jessica paints, right? Sam has told me all about her, and has shown me a bunch of photos, she’s amazing!” Mrs. Bassett said to Mr. and Mrs. Wythe. Jessica’s parents smiled at the mention of her daughter’s artistic capabilities.

*Maybe Austin would go back to the time I won the art competition with a painting of all of us together.* Jessica thought.

Turning to Mrs. Bassett, Mr. Turner was thinking. “And your son, Sam, didn’t he win an award for the newspaper last year?”

Mrs. Bassett smiled. “He sure did. He loved working on the paper with Austin.”

*Austin might think to go back to us winning the gold medal for the newspaper last year,* Sam thought.

Each friend put their decisions in and were transported to their place of choice.

Starting with Kelly, she was transported back to her house in second grade, and found Austin sitting on the steps, playing with their childhood dog, Arnold, who died last year.

“Austin!” Kelly screamed.

Austin looked up and met eyes with Kelly and embraced her in a hug. Arnold barked and wagged his tail, happy to see both of them again. The golden retriever pup, Kelly’s favorite breed, was a sight for sore eyes.

“What’s going on, how did you get here?” Austin asked.

"We were searching all over for you," Kelly replied. "I was with Emily, Jessica, Sam, and Derek. They all went through the portal to come find you. I don't know where they could have gone."

Austin and Kelly thought long and hard about where each of their friends decided to find Austin.

"I bet you Derek went to the lacrosse championship game," Austin stated.

"Then that's where we'll go," Kelly said.

"Number 42, Derek Payer-Turner, sprints down the field and passes to number 16, Austin Bennet, and scores! Clayton Falls wins the championship title!"

The crowd in the stands erupted into cheers.

"Kelly!"

Kelly and Austin turned around and facing them was Derek. Kelly and Derek ran to each other, Austin in tow.

Derek reached Kelly and lifted her into a hug. After what felt like an eternity, they separated, and kissed.

"Ewww. I'm gone for a couple hours and my best friend starts smooching my sister?" Austin added.

Kelly and Derek parted, and Derek reunited with Austin.

"Who was after you to go through the portal?" Kelly asked Derek.

"Emily," he replied.

"I think I might know where she went," Austin said.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we hope you enjoyed our drama club's spring production!" The theater at Clayton Falls High School fills with applause as the curtains close on last year's play.

"There she is!" Derek points towards the side exit.

Austin ran towards Emily and scooped her up in a hug, followed by Kelly and Derek.

"Oh you're okay! Thank the lord!" Emily said.

"Emily, quick, who went through the portal after you?" Derek asked.

"Um, I think it was Jessica," Emily replied.

"Great. Where would she go?" Kelly thought for a moment. "She probably went to the art competition! Where she painted the group painting of us!"

"And this is our first place winner, painted by artist Jessica Wythe of Clayton Falls High School" Kelly, Derek, Emily, and Austin searched around the room for their friend. "Over there," Emily said, as she pointed to the back of a crowd of people. "Jessica!" she said, waving her down.

Jessica ran over to her friends. "I didn't think you would all find me, I got worried," Jessica confessed.

"Where's Sam?" Derek asked, "Where do you think he could have gone?"

Austin thought for a moment. "He probably went to the newspaper class where we were told we won the award!"

Standing outside the classroom, admiring the newly hung plaque for the Clayton Falls High School newspaper, Sam Bassett was found.

"Sam!" Jessica ran over to him.



All six friends were reunited at last.

"Now how do we get out of here?" Emily asked.

"Maybe if we all want to travel back to tonight, we'll end up home in present time," Derek thought.

**"Where do you all wish to go in time?"** The voice, it was back.

"We want to go back to November 14th!" Kelly exclaimed.

"I wonder what's taking them so long," Mrs. Bennet stated. "Maybe we should go out and find them. It's getting late and I don't want six kids missing instead of one."

**"Travel through time only by giving up that who's time is worth yours,"** the voice replied.

"I might be wrong, but I think it's saying we have to give up that who we value the most time with." Emily predicted.

The friends fell silent.

"I'm going to go get my coat," Mrs. Bennet said.

"I'll come with you, Laura," Mrs. Hun said.

"Sit down, the last thing we need is for us to spread out around town so they can't find us," Mr. Turner said. "We have to stay here."

"It's me," Kelly said. "It has to be."

"What difference is it going to make if we stay here John! Our kids are out, alone, it's almost midnight, for all we know, they could be gone," Mrs. Bennet said. "For good."

"Kel, no." Emily said. "There's another way." Tears were streaming down her face. "You'll be stuck in time travel forever, what if we never see you again?"

"The police are doing their job, Lindsay, all we can do is wait," Mr. Hun said to his wife.

"Laura, please, stay here," Mr. Bennet added.

"Kelly, please don't do this. This isn't the solution," Jessica said, her face turning red and splotchy. Sam, bewilderment in his face, couldn't say a word.

"You don't know what kind of decisions they could be faced to make out there," Mrs. Bassett said. "What do we do if they make the wrong choice?"

"Kelly, you can't do this," Derek said. "I almost lost you once I can't lose you again." Derek was now crying, for the first time Kelly had ever saw him. She was starting to cry but tried to keep it together. She gave him one last hug.

"They're becoming young adults, they have to learn how to make decisions on their own, right Emmett?" Mr. Turner said to Mr. Hun. "Exactly, John. Laura, Sara, and Lindsay, please sit down." Mr. Hun added.

“Austin, I love you. Thank you for being the best twin brother I could ever ask for,” Kelly told him.

Austin hugged his sister and broke down in tears. “Kelly, KELLY NO,” Austin cried out.

“Fine,” Mrs. Bennet said, collapsing in the armchair, rubbing her temples, as Mrs. Hun and Mrs. Bassett took their spots on the couch again.

The next moment, the friends returned in the cold, dark woods, outside their school. Austin was crouched on the ground, sobbing. Emily and Derek stood right behind him, crying silently. Jessica cried silent tears on the shoulder of Sam, who had a bewildered and solemn look about what he had just witnessed.

Kelly was gone. Austin was back.

The chill, crisp air filled the woods as the bright moonlight shone across their bodies, reminding them they were back in reality.

Driving home to his ranch house where he lived with his two recently adopted golden retrievers, Charlie and Masie, and his dad, Derek was in a rush. His childhood friends Emily and Austin, Jessica, and Sam, were all coming over to take his boat out on the lake, their annual end of spring break tradition. It had only been a week that he had not seen them. As he pulled his Chevy Silverado pickup truck into his dirt driveway, he noticed his friends beat him to the house and were sitting outside at the wooden picnic table, playing with Charlie and Masie.

“Hey stranger! Long time no see!” Emily said, embracing her friend.

“How are you, Derek?” Jessica said, prying herself away from petting Charlie.

Derek was happy to see his friends, but his heart hurt. Austin could see the pain in his eyes.

“I miss her too, buddy. Every day. We all do,” Austin said as he pulled Derek into a hug. Sam did the same thing, and the friends sat and talked over lunch. It had been almost 4 months since they lost Kelly.

As Sam, Austin, and Jessica sat in the living room in Derek’s house, Emily helped him bring in the dishes.

“You know, I was her friend since kindergarten,” Emily said. She could see the sadness in his face. “I miss her every day.” Derek nodded silently, gathering the dirty plates and glasses. Masie trotted over to Emily, carrying a red ball. “Hello cutie, what’s your name?” Emily took the ball and threw it into the large, grassy field.

“She’s Masie, and the other one is Charlie,” Derek answered.

“No way,” Emily said. “Back in middle school, Kelly, Jess, and I would talk about what we would name our future children. And Charlie and Masie were the two names Kelly mentioned. Did she ever tell you that?”

Derek had a gleam in his eyes, a spark that had been missing for months. “I never knew that.”

Thunder boomed, and a light rain began to fall. Derek and Emily began to collect the dishes more rapidly.

“Here, I’ll bring the rest of this stuff in, you worry about the dogs,” Emily offered.

“Thank you,” Derek replied. Emily pulled open the wire-mesh door and went inside the house.

Derek walked down the slight hill into the field and found the dogs playing in the rain. The storm started to pick up, and it started to pour. He laughed, for the first time in months. Woods surrounded the property, and most of the properties on the east side of Clayton. Derek put his fingers to his mouth to call in the dogs to the house, but something stopped him. Sopping wet in his gray t-shirt, he saw a figure at the edge of the woods. It was a girl. With blond hair in a braid, wearing a Clayton Falls High School letterman lacrosse jacket with number 42 written on it.

Kelly.

Just then, Austin opened the wire door, holding one of the plates he was drying with a rag.

“Derek, you should come inside, it’s starting to pour-” He noticed the same figure across the property that Derek was staring at and dropped the ceramic plate. It shattered when it hit the concrete step.

Emily, Jessica, and Sam came running out of the house. The five friends all directed their attention to the woods and stared at the figure for what seemed like hours.

Then, they ran. They all ran towards each other, through the rain, joy in each of their faces, and tears meshing with the rain droplets from the storm running down their faces. Derek looked into Kelly’s blue eyes, smiling, and crying tears of happiness. He scooped her into a hug and kissed her to make up for all the kisses lost over the past 4 months. She smiled back at him in her drenched clothes.

“It’s really cool,” Kelly said. “I can time travel now, but still return home.” Her friends looked at her in awe. “It’s like a secret power.” Their clothes were drenched in rain, but hugs were flying all around. The six friends were finally reunited together once again.



## A Soaring Heart

### Chapter X

Inspired by *Ethan Frome*

By Sophia DesMarais

Mattie gazed out the window, squinting slightly to see through the layer of sheer frost. The world outside glinted and swam in strange ways as the ice on the window shifted, melting and freezing again. Mattie could not say how long she had been staring out the window. Hours, days, weeks—it made no difference. Ever since the smash-up—but that was in the past, she told herself firmly. It was time to move forward with her life.

The doctor had told Mattie it was unlikely she would ever be the same, yet deep down, she didn’t believe him. She knew that logically it was ridiculous, and yet she couldn’t help but feel a glimmer of hope within her. While she waited for the ice to thaw at last, she stared out the window, dreaming of where she would go once she regained

full control of her body. Her heart fluttered as she imagined running, flying through the fields again. She couldn't give up on that.

Mattie's eyes continued to wander across the empty landscape when a brightly colored flash caught her eye. A bird (she couldn't identify it from that distance) soared across the gray sky, and her heart fluttered as she watched it. It seemed so free of worries, of pain, and it drew closer to the house—until a shot sounded in the distance. Suddenly, the bird was trailing downward in a spiral of feathers, and the bare trees came up to meet it... Mattie shrieked.

Zeena's angular frame filled the doorway. "What now?" she inquired irritably, a frown frozen on her face.

"There- Then- I was- a bird flying-," Mattie stammered, her mind unable to put together the events. Finally, her words fell into some sort of pattern. "I was sitting here and I saw someone shoot a bird, and it fell, and won't you please check if it's hurt?"

"I see," Zeena snapped. "Next time, don't bother me if it isn't important. I'm very busy, as you know."

Mattie sighed. "Will you at least tell Ethan when he comes home?"

"We'll see."

Mattie was alone again. But now, a new purpose consumed her mind. She had to help that bird.

The sun had completely set by the time Ethan entered Mattie's room. "Zeena tells me it's been a difficult day for you." He seated himself at the foot of the bed. His voice was rough, and even more tired than usual. "I brought you something. Don't bother Zeena about it, though. She has enough on her mind." He placed a tattered old shoebox on the nightstand, restlessly shuffled his feet for a few moments, then exited. A few chirps echoed from within the box.

In the next few days, Mattie grew to think of the little creature as her own. Ethan had bandaged its wing, which was badly broken, and warned Mattie not to get too attached to it. Mattie, however, had other plans. If she could help the bird fly again, surely she could heal herself. Though she couldn't do much for the bird on her own, she did her best to keep it entertained, and tried to keep Ethan informed of its condition. And little by little, it gained strength, as did Mattie.

When the sun came up in the rosy sky a week later, Mattie was already awake. The bird was ready to fly; she was sure. All day, Mattie felt restless. For the first time after the smash-up, she felt something beyond quiet optimism—she felt herself soaring with excitement.

"Doctor said you need plenty of fresh air, now it's getting warmer," Zeena chattered as she moved Mattie to the porch. "And Ethan's got it in his mind you intend to release that bird. At any rate, I won't have to worry about it any longer."

Mattie shivered as her hair flew in the breeze. "Open the box!" she chirped.

Ethan shuffled forward and lifted the lid. The bird lightly fluttered its wings a bit and fluffed up its feathers. Zeena sighed loudly.

"Get going, silly thing," she grumbled, muttering something about "overgrown cat food" under her breath.

Mattie could almost feel a shiver on her spine as the bird crept to the edge of the porch and leaped. The bird took to the sky, sailing majestically into the distance. That night, Mattie dreamed of walking through the woods and watching it glide.

Next morning, Ethan stepped heavily through the doorway of Mattie's room.

"I'm sorry, Mattie. You did your best, but the cold must've been too much for that little bird. I found it outside the door, limp and cold. Sometimes, there's nothing you can do." He let out a long sigh, nodded solemnly, and limped away.

Since a thaw hung in the air, it was decided that it was time for Mattie to make another visit to the doctor. Zeena helped her dress, and Mattie was loaded into the cart. The air was thick with Spring, but oddly empty, still missing the bird calls that warm seasons bring. As the office neared, Mattie sniffled, trying to hold on to the last shard of hope in her heart, wishing that against all odds she would be healthy again. Yet deep down, she was not surprised when the doctor gravely informed her that she would certainly never walk again. Her heart no longer fluttered. Her mind no longer soared. Just as with that bird, there was nothing she could do.

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Shadowed Flight

Inspired by *Ethan Frome*

By Katherine Elliot

Ethan never knew why, but he often recalled the worst moments after the smash-up. The worst ones that made his heart feel as though it would be swallowed by an inky blackness that was unknown to him previously. Memories that contrasted so greatly with the livelihood that he had known before would replay in his mind as he tried to fall asleep. Ethan would stare at the slit under the door, while he wondered if a light would ever again move across the hallway in the darkest nights.

When Mattie was able to be moved back to the Frome house, Ethan was elated that she would be okay and could still stay with them. He was stunned when Zeena allowed Mattie to come back to the house and live with them as she had been the one pushing for sending her away in the first place.

"The sheets are scratchy." Those were the first words that Mattie had said since the accident, and they were a dig at the meager living that Ethan could barely provide for the trio. Her voice was hoarse from neglect, and it came out with a slight raspy whine. In her bedroom in the Frome household, she and Ethan were alone as Zeena prepared dinner for the three of them.

"I- I'm sorry, Matt," Ethan stuttered, surprised by her speech as she had avoided all conversation on the ride in the buggy to the house. "I ain't got any other ones we can get you. Maybe I could figure out something else for you—see if we got an extra blanket or something."

The girl ignored Ethan's comment and turned to face away from him. The house was filled with silence once again, and Ethan entered the hallway where a dimmed light shined.

Some months after she had resettled in the house, Mattie was in her rocking chair in the front room. Every once and a while she was able to hold a conversation with Ethan, and the duo commented interestedly about the weather or some color she had watched in the sunset through a glass window in the house.

Today had not been one of those days. Instead of engaging Ethan when he asked if she saw the color of the sunset, how the fiery orange sun blended into the

disappearing reds and purples of the surrounding sky, she turned her back to the man who loved her so much and stared through the glass window into the pure black night without making a single sound.

For the next day, and the next few, Mattie simply looked past Ethan as he tried to strike up conversations. The following weeks, which would turn into months, also left the house quiet when he returned from long days on the farm and working in the mill, as when the woman spoke, she would now only complain. Mattie only spoke of how everything had been messed up and what was wrong, not of the beauty they would find when the two of them spoke so animatedly in the past.

After many years of living with Mattie and Zeena, Ethan had finally figured out that while she was still Mattie Silver, she was not his Matt. She only talked to point out the flaws in the household and how inadequate Ethan was as a man, being unable to provide for his wife and the girl he helped to paralyze.

Mattie was older and bonier now, with creases around her eyes and forehead, certainly not caused by smiling. Her voice that had only gotten more high pitched since the accident had taken to it a whiny tone. Her figure had become so boney she looked as if she was already six feet under in the cemetery where the three would lie following their demises. Though less than a decade previous, Ethan could not seem to realize how the once young girl began to look as she did now.

Years later, when Ethan would reflect on the smash-up, he would think of how they laid there in the cold, white snow until they were found. Ethan would remember the young girl who kissed him so passionately, like the sun before it sets, putting out one last fiery display with clouds edged in pink and gold. He couldn't recognize that girl two decades later after the dust settled, and the inky black of night left nothing to be seen in Starkfield.

Ethan could, however, remember how it felt to be in college at Worcester. The warm Massachusetts sun shone through the windows of the technological college's classrooms and onto him during lectures. He would learn everything he could want about the sciences that they never knew back in Starkfield with no limits on him or his creativity. His heart soared when he learned that he could go away to college, as it was known that not many people who grew up in Starkfield left Starkfield.

When he walked on Worcester's campus, with the spring sun that bore down on him and his classmates as they walked to classes, or when they hung out after said classes. He had never truly known how it was to have people who he could share his thoughts with and who understood, and if not tried their best to learn how his mind worked and his thought processes. Even their nicknames that poked fun at his serious sense of the world and strong work drive were kind, and he relished them considerably.

Ethan moved with strong, sure movements as if he were a bird flying in one swift swoop to go wherever it wished. Ethan's steps were light and carefree as he fluttered around the campus to his various classes where he learned how he could achieve the dreams that he had never thought possible in the small, desolate town of Starkfield where Ethan had existed all of his young life.

Ethan used to be able to remember when he spent time working on an engineering job down in Florida. He spent the short amount of time he had in the hot state between working the small job and basked in the golden glow that the hot summer sun seemed to radiate to Earth for the sole purpose of Ethan's delight.

Ethan later, however, became unable to recall details of his time in Florida, and then anything about the majority of the trip at all, the melody of a memory consumed by

the inky darkness in Ethan’s mind that returned when he had to move back to Starkfield to care for his sick mother. It was in this same way that Ethan began to forget many of the reasons that he loved Mattie Silver, or even Zeena Pierce, in the first place.

Ethan’s mother had been so strong for his whole life, having contact none too often with the townsfolk due to their far distance from the rest of the town. His mother, who would encourage and engage Ethan’s talents in engineering, even though she understood so little of it, had gone almost mad after the passing of his father. She barely spoke, and when she did, she would not engage with Ethan in conversation at all; instead, she spoke of voices that did not speak and people who did not exist.

Ethan would drive the heavy wooden sled in the frigid Starkfield winters, except there had been a change, and now he would drive a young man who studied science to and fro. Ethan could see the light in the boy, and really he was just a boy with so much of a future ahead of him and opportunities that would skyrocket his success. The boy reminded Ethan much of himself, seeing the same passion for his study and curiosity that he, too, once held in his eyes. However, whereas the boy was free to do as he wished, Ethan was forced to return home, made to abandon his passion to come back to the cold Starkfield winters, he felt like a bird with clipped wings— forever unable to fly.



Defrosting

Chapter X

Inspired by *Ethan Frome*

By Jordan Schwarz

The morning breeze was different than it usually was. Ethan walked towards the village of Starkfield with his usual dark cloud hovering over him. It wasn't like he wanted to be upset all the time. He just couldn't get the thoughts of that night out of his head. He could still feel the pinching of the cold against his skin, the wind blowing in his ears as they dove towards the old oak, the limpness of the body next to him as he tried to save her. The darkness just followed him, even when he tried to shake it.

As he neared the village, he noticed the flowers, budding from the earth. The sun was shining brighter than it had in awhile. Could it really be Spring? The winter had seemed to go on forever. Since the night of the smash up, all he could feel was cold. The warmth of the sunshine today was almost shocking.

From behind him, Ethan could hear the sound of horse hooves on the flat dirt road. He turned to see Ned Hale approaching him.

“Ethe’ good to see you, how have you been feeling?” Ned shouted, a yard away from Ethan.

“Just fine, Ned,” Ethan responded.

“Great weather we got today, huh? I cannot believe it is already Spring,” Ned replied, riding by.

“Yeah,” Ethan called back, feeling a sense of emptiness. “See you, Ned.”

Ethan could not remember a Spring that had come with such slyness as this one had. Spring had always been almost a celebration in Starkfield. After the ruthless winter, Ethan always had loved the first signs of Spring. The bees starting to come out, the smell of flowers, the melting of the leftover snow. He loved seeing the trees start to regrow

their leaves. It was always so refreshing; he didn't have to be stuck inside all day, imagining what could have been. As he looked around Starkfield, he noticed the signs of Spring were already there. But the colors didn't seem as bright as normal. The spring smells were not as intoxicating and the sounds of the birds seemed muted. It was as if his eyes were foggy, as if his feelings were numbed. A shiver ran through his body; the winter was following him into the Spring.

Ethan started walking again, now looking in every direction, taking notice of every sign of spring. As he passed by the post office, the memories of his childhood springs flooded his mind. He was shorter then, scrawnier. His blue eyes had been brighter. As a young boy, Ethan would go into the village almost every day. He would stop at the market to see what new fruits and vegetables were for sale. He would smile at the townspeople and wave at the new baby; she had grown so much over the winter. He could still remember the days when Starkfield wasn't a trap.

The people still walked from the stores and into loved ones' dining rooms for a nice dinner. They still chatted about the train delays and the newlyweds, but to Ethan, it was as if the village was in an eternal hibernation. He tried to let the past winter's affairs escape his mind but they tracked him down, pinning him back to the same memories. They made his every move feel like his last. He feared for his life as his brain drove him crazy. Why couldn't he enjoy the simple things anymore? He felt hopeless. Ethan dragged his tired body back towards the farm, the failed attempt at a short escape from his bitterly cold home weighing him down.

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## Wayward Son

### Chapter X

Inspired by *Ethan Frome*

By Andrew Kelly

The shadows created by the half moon striking the trees shifted eerily, creating the illusion of moving figures all over the Frome farm. Isolated by the deafening silence save for the rustling of the pine needles blowing in the wind, Ethan limped towards the stable and away from the small comforting glow emanating from the kitchen window.

Just a few minutes ago, Zeena had woken to the sound of painful cries coming from Mattie's room, and, rushing in there, she spotted the girl lying in her bed in immense pain. Mattie and Zeena locked eyes, and a silent message reached Zeena, sending her right back to Ethan in their bedroom. "Mattie's hurtin' bad, she needs the delivery early," she snapped. Her voice was somehow colder than the frigid air that frosted her breath as she uttered the words.

At that point, Ethan was already awake, and, upon hearing Zeena's indirect command, he stood up, a small groan escaping his lips as his injured side creaked and groaned in protest. This was the third time that Mattie had had one of these incidents in the year after the smash-up, and Ethan was beginning to tire of the way that Zeena refused to get the delivery herself. Previously, any attempt for Ethan to get Zeena to receive it had been unsuccessful, but maybe there was a way that he could postpone his



trip until dawn. Once the sun has risen, any journey would be a lot less likely to end in catastrophe, as the nighttime chill makes travel a potentially deadly endeavour.

“Well I guess I’ll pick it up in the morning when I go into town for supplies,” Ethan stated, desperately hoping that Zeena would agree with him. However, from the look of disdain on her face, he already knew what was coming.

“Mattie is cryin’ in pain on her bed, and you really think this can wait till dawn? I’d say that if you head out now, you’ll be back in time for breakfast. That works out quite nice, now doesn’t it?” The sickly sweet tone of sarcasm in her voice bit into Ethan, but after years of having to endure her jabs at him, he had toughened considerably. Looking at her one more time with a quiet burning hatred in his eyes, he hobbled over to the door, grabbed his coat, and set out into the night towards the stable.

His two horses, sensing his approach, whinnied a greeting, and a small smile spread over Ethan’s face as he pulled two apples out of a nearby bin to feed to them. They munched on the apples gratefully, and Ethan took some time to brush them both down before attaching them to the sleigh.

The night was bitter and cold, and the wind whipped into Ethan’s face as he traversed the snowy landscape, assaulting every part of his body that was not covered by a thick layer of clothing. Icy hills and dark, looming elms passed by at a steady rate, the sounds of the horses’ hooves setting a tempo for the journey. After cresting a small hill, a massive one loomed before him, the moon striking on the ice and making it glisten like the pure night sky. The horses began their ascent, climbing the slope with ease and barely even letting out a whinny of exertion. However, upon reaching the peak, the rightmost horse lost its footing, and the sleigh began to careen down the hill.

Cries of pain came from both horses as they both attempted to control their descent, and while the left horse regained its control, the right one was not as lucky. The sleigh came to a stop at the bottom, and the sight that Ethan beheld made his stomach churn. While one of the horses was standing, tossing its mane, the other was on its side, and its front right leg was twisted at a crazy angle. The bone had broken through the skin, and a small pool of blood was beginning to color the ice, the splash of red clashing against the gray and white serenity of the cold winter night.

By the light of the moonbeams glistening off of the perfect coat of ice, Ethan jumped out of the sled, completely encompassed by his worry over the animal. He knelt by the side of the horse, and it met his eyes in an expression of immense pain. Ethan removed the rope binding the horse to the sleigh, and assessed the damage to its leg. Somewhere in his mind, he knew that the horse was gone, and that he should put it out of its misery, but that part was overruled by the majority of his brain that was screaming at him to find a way to save the poor beast.

Rushing to the treeline, he grabbed two sticks, and out of the back of the sleigh he pulled some bandages. Moving to the horse, he placed the sticks on either side of its leg, and began to use the bandages to fashion a makeshift splint. The cries of pain from the horse tore at Ethan’s soul, but soon enough it was done. Mustering up his strength, he grabbed the horse, and attempted to drag it into the sleigh so that it could be brought back to the farm.

Immediately, he realized that his efforts were futile. In his prime, he may have been able to perform such a feat, but now, with his injuries hindering every aspect of his life, there was no way that he would be able to hoist the horse up. Yet, he persisted. Minutes went by, and the sweat began to run into his eyes, blinding him while he

continued to attempt to save the horse. Its exclamations of agony began to be drowned out in his concentration, and yet it still was all for naught.

Eventually, the sweat chilled him to his very bones, and he leaned back against the sleigh, breathing heavily as he stared at the now unconscious horse. He had tried everything that he could, and now there was only one thing to do. It would be immoral to leave the animal to die a painful and slow death, so he reached into the back of the sleigh, and pulled out his rifle. He had purchased it a few years back after another farm in Starkfield had been robbed, but he never expected to use it. Stepping out and standing over the horse's body, a single tear streamed down his face, mixing with the sweat so that Ethan wasn't even sure that it was there in the first place. He breathed in deep, the night air burning against his lungs. Closing his eyes, he squeezed the trigger.

The shot rang out through the night, and the shallow rise and fall of the horse's chest ceased. It lay there, the small pool of blood from its leg slowly growing larger as a new hole sprang up from its chest. The tears flowing more freely now, Ethan walked back into the sleigh, and continued towards Starkfield. As he rode away, the only thing left behind was the horse's body lying cold in the road, and a single bloody boot print.

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A Disturbance in the Night

By Emma Almo

The night was sultry. The street was as quiet as a graveyard, the night swallowing up any creature unfortunate to venture into its midst. A lone street lamp flickered feebly but soon succumbed to the velvety darkness. The silence was shattered as an old car hurtled down the street, screeching to a halt in front of the house with crumbling walls and an overgrown jungle of a yard. A thin, disheveled man leapt out of the car, his eyes darting like a caged animal's, finding shapes in the darkness that did not exist. He paced next to his car for several minutes, his eyes shifting to his watch every few seconds to check the time. After one final glance at the watch, the man started to make his way to the front door of the house, hesitating before placing his feet onto the jagged path. The man's breath quickened with every step, his legs turning to lead. His bony fingers soon hovered above the crooked door knocker, and in a moment of absolute terror, he rapped the door twice. This would quite possibly be one of the worst decisions of the man's life.

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Call It: The Role of Fate and Its Animalistic Harbingers in No Country For Old Men By Spike Childs

In his novel No Country For Old Men, author Cormac McCarthy employs the motif of wild animals to portend the arrival of death for the many characters who occupy the role of both the hunter and the hunted as they try to escape their inevitable demise. McCarthy pulls his title from W.B. Yeats' classic poem "Sailing to Byzantium," which focuses on the inevitable tide of time. Regardless of any character's actions or hope that their journey could end otherwise, their demise, accompanied and underscored by the presence of animals, is certain. McCarthy seems to be suggesting that as humans we are no different than any other beasts that walk the earth; that all of us, as animals, are part of a simple cycle of birth, life and death that ultimately does not change due to one's imagined place in the hierarchical pecking order of predators. By repeatedly examining the ways in which his characters are cast as both hunter and hunted in their own narratives, and the direct connection made at critical moments to animals nearby, McCarthy clearly and intentionally illustrates that the young will forever drive out the old and that an uncaring world will move on, unstoppably continuing to spin. It is a bleak assessment that seems to suggest that the "old men" in this "country" are no different from any of the birds or beasts that he metaphorically connects them to; the aged will either be driven out of society or killed.

In the opening scene of the novel, Llewellyn Moss is hunting antelope and holding a boar's tusk he wears around his neck on a chain when he comes upon the aftermath of a gruesome shootout in the desert. A survivor of a drug-deal-turned-robbery has been shot and sits in the front seat of his Ford Bronco, bleeding to death and begging for water. The man is an outlaw who has ridden his Bronco, a modern horse, into danger. "Agua, cuate, the man said. Moss scanned the surrounding country. I told you, he said. I ain't got no water. La puerta, the man said. Moss looked at him. La puerta. Hay lobos. There ain't no lobos. Sí, sí. Lobos. Leones." (McCarthy, 14-15) The man tells Moss that there are wolves and lions lying in wait and Moss doesn't immediately understand, knowing this violence wasn't the work of animals. But it becomes clear that the man is suggesting that his killers are the animals; that the human murderers are the predators that Moss should fear.

Nervously touching the boar's tusk for comfort, Moss stands "fingering the boar's tusk at the front of his shirt" (McCarthy, 15) in a possible attempt to feel that he figuratively holds and has power over the very same beasts that are on the prowl. Like a hunter, Moss follows a trail of blood through the desert, finding a duffle bag at the end of the trail with two million dollars inside. Moss has reached the symbolic end of the path, one marking the end of his hunt, his quarry no longer the antelope he originally sought, but now a sack of money that will lead to his end. At this moment, Moss shifts from being the hunter to becoming the hunted; the "wolves" and "lions" who are responsible for the carnage in the desert will now come for him. More specifically, the animal that the "cuate or friend, in the truck warned Moss about is Anton Chigurh, the antagonist of the novel, who is "a true and living prophet of destruction." (McCarthy, 4)

Chigurh, a harbinger of death and the embodiment of evil, does the vast majority of killing in the novel and in the first scene in which we see him working as an assassin,

McCarthy again chooses to employ clear animalistic terms to reiterate the motif. The author echoes his earlier use of wolves and lions, hunters who stalk their prey ceaselessly and without mercy and harbingers of Moss' dark fate. Chigurh uses a tracker to follow and hunt down Moss all across Texas, always right on his target's tail. McCarthy writes, "If you knew there was somebody out here afoot that had two million dollars of your money, at what point would you quit lookin for 'em? That's right. There ain't no such point." (McCarthy, 29) McCarthy is making it abundantly clear that Chigurh will not stop until Moss is dead and the money is retrieved, and he uses the symbolism of an animal driven by violent instinct to illustrate the deadly manhunt that occurs between the two characters.

Much of the novel circles between Moss's attempt at escape and Chigurh's chase. Once Moss takes the money, Chigurh becomes the death incarnate that is following him. Throughout the novel, Chigurh's weapon of choice is a cattle gun. McCarthy writes "Sheriff, he had some sort of thing on him like one of them oxygen tanks for emphysema or whatever. Then he had a hose that run down the inside of his sleeve and went to one of them stunguns like they use at the slaughterhouse." (McCarthy, 5) The deliberate use of altering what we think is a tool commonly used to dispose of animals and changing it into weapon employed to murder humans suggests again that McCarthy is intentionally linking the human condition with the animal to propose that Chigurh values the lives of his human victims as little as the life of a cow, sheep, or pig. The use of this weapon employs the motif of animals accompanying the acts of gruesome violence and death that take place throughout the novel. Because Chigurh is representative of extermination, and, from his point of view, a human life is equivalent to that of a farm animal, McCarthy is clearly commenting on the indiscriminate nature of death. McCarthy is saying that death isn't unique or "special" when it happens to any person, and the fact that it is so inescapable highlights that it comes for every living thing, be it human or animal. However, McCarthy is not saying that life itself is futile. Death is an inescapable force of nature, and the only futility lies in the attempt to run from it.

This idea is shown through the multiple instances of Anton Chigurh using a coin toss to decide his victim's fate. This is the ultimate game of chance, a pure fifty-fifty scenario. When Chigurh goes to kill Llewelyn Moss's wife, Carla Jean, she tries to convince him that he does not have to kill her. Chigurh gives her the best he can offer, a flip of a quarter. He arcs the coin high in the air and slaps it down on his wrist, telling her to "call it." When she calls heads, McCarthy writes, "He lifted his hand away. The coin was tails. I'm sorry. She didnt answer." (258) Carla Jean pleads for her life, but Chigurh explains he has no choice but to go through with his intentions and kills her. Carla Jean attempts to cheat death through the coin toss, giving herself some semblance of control over the situation. The heavy symbolism of this interaction lies in the choices and subsequent outcomes that Carla Jean is faced with here. The coin will either land on heads, which literally shows an image of a human, or tails, which will offer the image of an eagle. McCarthy uses a game of chance that specifically includes two opposing outcomes of humans and animals. He makes Carla Jean choose heads over tails because he is further developing a connection between the appearance of animal imagery accompanying the arrival of Death. When Chigurh moves his hand to reveal that the coin has landed tails, on a literal image of an eagle with wings spread, fate has been sealed: Carla Jean's death must follow. This scene can be viewed in comparison with a moment earlier in the book in which Anton Chigurh forces a gas station clerk to call a similar coin toss. The man calls heads and McCarthy writes, "Chigurh uncovered the coin. He turned

his arm slightly for the man to see. Well done, he said.” (56) In this scene, the man was confronted by Chigurh and was previously minding his business. He made no attempt to escape death, nor avoid Chigurh’s game, and so the coin landed heads and the animal on the tail of the coin did not appear. It is important to note that both characters choose heads, thus avoiding the eagle and the symbol of an animal. Once again McCarthy ties the animal motif into the larger theme: regardless of the path they think they can choose, all species on earth will ultimately suffer the same fate.

The power of McCarthy’s prose is his ability to find a central theme and the motifs that echo repeatedly in his narrative. His use of the motif of animals that coincide with the presence of death makes a statement about the attempt to flee from one’s inescapable path. McCarthy opens with Moss’s transition from hunter to hunted, compares a cattlegun-wielding human assassin, Chigurh, to wolves and lions, and lets fate be determined by the appearance of an eagle at the flip of a coin. The author establishes and circles back again and again to suggest that there is one path that every earthly beast walks and however much they may try to stray from that, they will never avoid their fate.

Work Cited

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