

A Viewmont High School Literary Journal

VIKING *Legends*

Volume 1

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Poetry	5
Lighthouse	6
King David	7
God's Decision	8
Senseless	9
Untitled	10
A Play	12
There is a Place	13
A Love Poem	14
What to do with a second chance?	15
The End of the Rainbow, A Children's Poem	17
A Stranger	18
I'll never forget...	19
"Adios potatoes"	20
Life's choice	21
Never Again	22
I'm Fine	23
Senseless	26
To live out my life numb and blind	26
Gone	27
Selfless	28
Time	29
Lighthouse	30
The Epitaph of Lily Clark	31
Silence is rare and hard to have	32

Love	33
Words	34
And scarring up their arms. The Burial	34
summer	36
Riley Smith	37
Short Stories	40
BERSERK	41
Guardian Angel	45
That Night	46
Abyss	47
Better This Way	49
Things	52
Life	53
by Emma Blood	55
A Dwarf Named Yith	57
Photography	59
Photograph by Ariane Pereira	60
Photograph by Ariane Pereira	60
Photograph by Jasie Rast	61
Photograph by Jasie Rast	62
Photograph by Jasie Rast	63
Photograph by Hudson Christensen	64
Photograph by Brooke Wild	64
Josh Day	Photographs by Daria
Andrus	65
Art	66
Art by Ashley Mohr	67
Art by Caden Smedley	67
Art by Cole Sherwood	68
Art by Cole Sherwood	68
Art by Mac Peterson	70

Still Life by Emily Erikson	70
Art by Emily Erikson	71
Art by Seth Lindgren	72
Laney by Gracie Cook	73
Art by Kevin Christiansen	74
Art by Paige Jensen	75
Art by Paige Jensen	76
Art by Christian Bruderer	77
Art by Christian Bruderer	78
Art by Tori Taylor	79
Art by Laryn Naegle	80
Art by Laryn Naegle	81
Art by Caden Smedley	82

Poetry

Lighthouse

by Ryker Fraughton

Wrecked by a storm of life's darkest moments
Unable to maintain, I could not reach the shore.
I know that I am sinking.
Weighed down by a bag stocked with fool's gold
Pulling me further within the abyss of destruction.

My dreams remind me that I know better than to keep holding on
Yet somehow it seems I can't turn my back; I can't let that bag go.
Protected by my reflexes, I wish I could dismiss them.
They keep me in this cycle; old habits want to remain perpetual.

And when bystanders get involved they strangle me with shame
As if that somehow helps me when I'm drowning.
Then they just dismiss me, asserting that I'm lost
They'll never give my soul a second thought.

And despite knowing everything that corrodes inside of me,
Making it certain I'll let you down,
I hear your voice like a whispered prayer,
And it keeps me in the fight.
Because I know that, even still, you choose to believe in me
Until I can get my head above the surface.
It gives me resolve to change my fate,
And hope to contest my every fear.

Yes, the battle is within me
But there will be no victory without your solace.
Therein is my providence
Prodding me forward, step by uncomfortable step
Until I finally let go, vowing to take care
Because I know that someone gives a damn
About who I am right now.

King David

by Ryker Fraughton

I look to Joseph,
am I about faith or desire?
But gaze o'er the edge.
In the service of the Shepherd,
yet I feed the wolves.
They have not come to taste sheep's blood,
they are here for me.
I, prophet-king of higher thoughts,
for tonight only,
smothered my dull candle light.

God's Decision

by Kiernan Keyes

The land that once protected me, now hunts me
The people I grew up with, now hate me
The father that beat me, says he “loves me”
The sixth commandment of God states “No Murder.”
Obviously, God wasn’t loved or hated
For if he knew the pain of losing somebody You loved
He would have brought Hellfire to the Men who hurt his son.

My old God is cruel, but I trusted his faith, his plan
She was Your child too, how could You turn Your back on such an innocent soul?
My Faith has been broken by a being who brings faith.
The Third commandment of God states “don’t misuse God’s name.”
Obviously, God wasn’t born of color or race
For if he knew inequality and being born of the wrong world
He would have Crucified everyman who spoke such evil.

The look of her was transcending, a being of light
I took Your words and placed them on others
But in the end, You didn’t care for me or her.
The First commandment of God states “no other gods.”
Then I dare ask You, why did You create beliefs of others?
To show the true way of one? Or did You do it as cruel joke
In the end though, I shouldn’t have believed in you.
But, I wished to help others in need of faith
But now, I ask You this one question... are You real?

Senseless

by Alli Wagner

Nothing's the same, now that it's dark
The demons are here, with the curse of their mark
I search and I beg, for your life, for your spark
But I can't see a thing
And I can't feel a thing
Although I know
There's a scar on my chest
From where death ripped my heart
It's a trace left behind
A trace to remind
That painful death stole you
And left me alive
To live out my life numb and blind

A Play

by Jack Albertson

It felt just like a play.
You knew your part, I knew mine.
The way you held my hand,
The way we kissed,
It felt so natural,
Yet unreal—
Just like a play.
I felt emotion and attachment.
I thought I didn't like you like this,
But it turns out that I did—
Just like in a play.
I can't tell where we will be.
Now I'm in the audience,
Not knowing how you'll be,
Because now I'm just a spectator,
And to you I am nothing. Now I see.

There is a Place

by Ashleigh Southwell

There is a place
That is too far to see,
But real enough to feel.
It was all mine,
But not anymore;
I lost it a long time ago.
Time did not exist there,
Yet it went by so fast, and it's been so long.

There is a place.
It's not mine anymore,
But it was...once.
It was magic
Like a daydream, it was perfect,
Cliché even.
Sometimes I wonder if it even existed at all.
Like feathers and cotton and fleece,
It was light and warm and soft.
If I try hard enough, I can still feel it,
But it's not the same.
Its faint. Fragmented. Barely there,
Like a wispy stratus cloud.
I reach out and try to grasp what's left of it,
But it's too far away
And it's no longer mine.

A Love Poem

by Samuel Jewett

I didn't know where I was,
but you helped me find the way.
You're always there, waiting.
In the darkest times, you give me light.
When I'm bored,
you give me someone to talk to.
You always have all the answers.
You wake me up in time to get to school.
I always want you with me.
I love you, phone.

What to do with a second chance?

by Jadagan Maw

Standing alone before a mirror
My cuts and bruises and shattered dreams
Though blind to the eye, can't be clearer
I cry out for help with silent screams

My cuts and bruises and shattered dreams
Passion sears boundless, third degree burns
I cry out for help with silent screams
Love only hurts me, why can't I learn

Passion sears boundless, third degree burns
Bittersweet fervor, a storm within
Love only hurts me why can't I learn
Hate can't let go, and love hath no twin

Bittersweet fervor, a storm within
Turn my pain into violent resolve
Hate can't let go, and love hath no twin
Always press on 'till the rest dissolve

Turn my pain into violent resolve
Protect with no limits, keep them strong
Always press on 'till the rest dissolve
Care for them and sing no other song

Protect with no limits, keep them strong
Rules of the jungle I must abide
Care for them and sing no other song
Hold my head high, still broken inside

Rules of the jungle I must abide
A man once lost, once dead, again lives
Hold my head high, still broken inside
Trapped behind bars that never forgive

A man once lost, once dead, again lives
I clean up the pieces off the floor
Trapped behind bars that never forgive
Parts don't fit together anymore

I clean up the pieces off the floor
Though blind to the eye, can't be clearer
Parts don't fit together anymore
Standing alone before a mirror

The End of the Rainbow, A Children's Poem

Alexa Christenson

The end of the rainbow, where everyone wishes.
What if it's just dirty dishes?
What if it's bugs that have been squishes?
What if it's a bunch of very dead fishes?
What if it's the scary old lady named Trishes?
Gee, Trishes sure is a scary Mrs.
What if it's green, ugly witches?
A witch with that long broom that swishes!
What if it makes you fall into ditches?
What if when you fall, you need lots of stitches?
Do you see?
Do you see what the thing is?
The end of the rainbow, where everyone wishes.
It might not be a bucket of riches.
Maybe the leprechaun doesn't want to share his.
And is that what everyone's fear is?
That in the end, you won't find blisses?
How about we try to dismiss this?
The end of the rainbow, where everyone wishes—
We no longer expect a bucket of riches.

A Stranger

By Andrew Gerber

Not known by road or town
Unwelcome under tree and roof
A brown cloak and grey frown
Overcome with sorrow aloof
The moon inside shall never set
For his sun will never rise
Till her eyes find him yet
And joyful tears cast the shroud aside

I'll never forget...

by Gwen Rasmussen

Your sweet soft fur
My vision starts to blur
Your cute lazy eye
I'll try not to cry
Your pointy little ears
Must hold back the tears
Your loud annoying meow
Keep it in I don't know how
Your jingling bell
I really want to yell
In my heart you'll always be
So please don't ever forget me
(R.I.P. Jabba, ????-Feb 1 2018)

"Adios potatoes"

by Rachael Petersen

Stepping out of the car,
Looking over my shoulder,
My family drove off,
Leaving me to walk
The difficult path alone.

Terrified, quaking
I took one step,
Then I stopped. To wait
For the car to pass me.
I looked both ways and walked on.

My thoughts went wild,
Thinking of new ways to say goodbye.
A thought came into my head,
As if placed there be a Potato Chip Co.
"Adios, Potatoes."
And with that, I walked into the high school.

Life's choice

by Trevor Atkinson

It's the choices that make us who we are.

We are what we choose to be.

Every day we embark on the dumbfounded journey that is a new day

And a clean slate comes with a good night's rest.

Will you let someone else's perspective of life change your own?

Too often we get caught up in outsider's beliefs, and may lack desire to let ours be known.

Some wander through life like fishermen in the desert,

Simply relying on the thoughts of another man.

So whatever comes our way,

Whatever fears, depression, discouraging thoughts, or pains writhe inside us,

We always have a choice.

Choices are what define us.

Never Again

Anonymous

There was a shooting on Valentine's Day.
In Florida.
It was the first one I'd heard about this year,
but it was the eighteenth school shooting of 2018.
So far this year we've averaged more than one school shooting per week.
We walked out of class today.
We read the names of the seventeen who died in Parkland.
We were silent for seventeen minutes.
Classes continued as normal after that.
The cafeteria was as loud as any other day.
Nothing really changed.
Life continues on.
In the face of tragedies life continues on.
For better or for worse we continue living.
Until we step into the wrong school,
the wrong movie theater,
the wrong church.
and we get shot.
And we die.

I'm Fine

by Gabbi Shirts

Concealed lines on her body
From waging siege within,
Lashing fresh crimson over silver scars
That with each anguish, aching grew.
Yet she plastered on a smile, and said,
“I’m fine.”

Hiding under covers
Darkness whispering about her.
Drowning in old, familiar nightmares
As she yearned for release of sunlight
Held captive by her endless night,
Repeating almost like a chant
“I’m fine.”

Perched upon the throne
Her crown of bones and blood
Forged from torment, dark and pain.
She looked upon her betrayers
While chills ran down their spines
As she coldly spat,
“I’m fine.”

Words have great power
When repeated over and over again;
Casts a spell that holds the speaker,
Gives belief in what is said
And takes control of how she acts.
But, it comes with a twist
For errant words may not express
Our true feelings, what we actually want,
And we may lose all, if
All we can tell ourselves is,
“I’m fine.”

Her feet were bruised and torn,
Her fingers scratched and scraped
Pierced from underlying thorns.
Out the hole she pulled herself,
Brushed herself off, and willed,
“I’m fine.”

At the end of the day
As time lengthened, slowed down,
She sank into her chair and breathed.
Haloed in the fading light
And enjoyed the calm quiet,
Breaking it only to say,
“I’m fine.”

She lilted under stars
Dressed in moonlight,
While Sky plucked a tune
And she danced the night away,
Until even Moon went to sleep.
Arms open wide, she sighed,
“I’m fine.”

Basketball

by Damon Tittle

I have known this game for most of my life.
I've played it since I was 7 years old.
While others dreamt of being doctors,
I dreamt of being in the NBA.
It has helped me grow in more than just basketball,
gaining friendships, learning life skills and on court skills.
It has been there for me whenever I've needed it.
It has been one of the only consistent things in my life.
It has helped me in ways that people cannot,
giving me a joy that only it can bring.
It has lifted me up, but also brought me down.
From giving me a purpose, to rejecting my talents.
It has been the most bittersweet thing throughout my life.
I will always be grateful to this game
and for all the memories it has given me.
I don't know who I'd be without it.
For most, it may just be a game,
But for me, it is and always will be a part of my life.

Gone

by Kenzie Scheid

It's gone.

The light inside you was suddenly absent.

It just disappeared.

Your hopes and dreams completely vanished.

It kept flickering.

You had known for a long time you had very little left.

You never spoke.

Or, maybe you did and we just never listened.

It doesn't matter.

Somebody blew out that tiny flame that kept you alive.

You went with it.

Selfless

by Jordan Farnsworth

I offered you my shoulder,
You soaked it with your tears.
I comforted your broken heart
And chased away your fears.
I mourned when you were mourning,
I wept with you when you cried,
I knew you needed to lean on me
So I hid my own heartache inside.
But once your tears were dried and gone,
Your happiness restored,
You walked away, you didn't think
That maybe you could do more.
You left me with no one to lean on,
No shoulder on which to weep
I must carry my burdens alone
And cry myself to sleep.
That's the problem with being "nice,"
Being selfless and having it known,
Everyone needs a listening ear,
But when I need one, I'm left on my own.

Time

by Paula Hampshire

Time is like a broken clock,
It speeds up, then seems to stop.
The ticking and tocking of the time,
Puts us in a trance which we can't escape.

Time slips and slides through our fingers
Like a river through a fishing net.
For we only have the time we are given,
There is no more, and there is no less.

We go to work, we go to school,
While time seems to lay back and relax.
Then when we go to have some fun,
time silently and secretly scurries past.

Time is the villain in our story,
it does the exact thing you don't want.
It slips, it slides, and it slithers about,
But it will never be captured nor stopped.

Lighthouse

by Ryker Fraughton

Wrecked by a storm of life's darkest moments
Unable to maintain, I could not reach the shore.
I know that I am sinking.
Weighed down by a bag stocked with fool's gold
Pulling me further within the abyss of destruction.

My dreams remind me that I know better than to keep holding on
Yet somehow it seems I can't turn my back; I can't let that bag go.
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It gives me resolve to change my fate,
And hope to contest my every fear.

Yes, the battle is within me
But there will be no victory without your solace.
Therein is my providence
Prodding me forward, step by uncomfortable step
Until I finally let go, vowing to take care
Because I know that someone gives a damn
About who I am right now.

The Epitaph of Lily Clark

by Lily Clark

LOOK upon this wilted flower, gray and brittle.
And be warned of what happens,
when no chances are taken to see the sun,
or drink the water life's challenges have to offer.
I thought I was content,
to live my life under the shade,
Protected from the harsh rain and blazing beams.
But as I watched the other flowers
in the garden begin to grow and blossom,
I yearned for the courage to reach into the sun,
And be the flower they were becoming.
Yet I stayed beneath the tree,
afraid of the unknown that lay ahead of me.
So there I gradually lost my color along with my strength,
and died under the protection that gave me comfort.
So gaze upon my lifeless form,
and beware of the tragedy,
that happens to those who shrink from life
and believe that it's better to die slowly
then take the chance of being insignificant.

Silence is rare and hard to have

by Hannah Richards

Surrounded by opinions and pride,
People talk, but no one listens,
Silence is rare and hard to have.

Yelling signs, the conversation has died
People left with sadder existence
Surrounded by opinions and pride.

Conversation is one, but arguing, two halves
If nothing productive, then keep some distance
Silence is rare and hard to have.

Silence is powerful, with what is implied,
Many can't handle it, and are prone to resistance, intentionally
Surrounded by opinions and pride.

Communication is lost and untried,
Silence is rare and hard to have,
Surrounded by opinions and pride.

The Miserable House

by Landon Haslam

Inside the house, my life resides
Along with all my darkest fears.
My secrets, weaknesses, memories, pains
All dwell with me in here.
The exterior looks normal, cozy, calm,
The same as every house on the street.
The lawn is mowed, hedges trimmed,
And on the door hangs a wreath.
Inside is wretched, cold, and damp
As if no life could ever thrive.
Fungi live but nothing else
Except the roaches in the pipes.
A sheet of dust covers every surface.
Cobwebs fill each corner.
The carpets feel crusty yet moist
And create a pungent decaying odor.
This house seems miserable, you may think.
Why have I not left?
Although staying might drive me mad,
And I may have stayed too long,
Once I leave, I can't return,
And I don't know what's beyond.

Love

by Maya Fuller

Love isn't butterflies,
It's not jittery chills
Or the heat of embarrassment,
Love is calm.
It's the smell of rain,
And as the sky breaks
It's the rhythm of sunbeams
Dancing between clouds.
It's the still of the air
On a sleepy summer day
While your mind wanders
And your heart sleeps.
Love isn't always the beat of your heart,
Often love is the still of a night,
Or the warmth of a fire
And though it can fade,
It will linger in a memory

Words

by Maya Fuller

Words may never hurt me,
That's what's often said.
But few know the stinging pain
They often bring with them.
So many friends have scars
From words too overused;
Describing them in ways
Too far from the truth.
Yet they still believe,
No matter what I say;
Beautiful and Bold
Will always slip away.
Selfish, Shy, and Stubborn
Cling with poisoned thorns.
Fogging up their brains
And scarring up their arms.

The Burial

by Maddy Bruse

Her day had drug on,
She felt nothing but sadness and misery.
As she sat there staring at his picture
with her foggy and tearing eyes,
The love of her life was to be buried.
The last part of him, the candle
Flickering in the darkened church.
She gets all her strength and walks towards it.
Trembling as she blows it out,
The tears finally start pouring down.
For a moment her heart stops beating,
Leaving a part of herself in the dark and empty church.

summer

by Lauren Vercillo

melancholy
is how she feels,
as rain drips down her skin
like golden honey.
she bites cherries off the stems
with the tips of her teeth,
on her roof one night at
12.
she knows the stars
are inside of her,
and if she breathes in one more galaxy
she might explode.
she almost remembers life
isn't meant to be lived in a
cage.
she feels the summer breeze
brush her cheeks
as the moon kisses the velvet sky.
summer nights are kinder than summer days
she thinks,
as she falls asleep dreaming of
honey,
cherry pits,
and the moon.

Riley Smith

Untitled

Your fingers brushed the back of my hand gently,
It was almost sweet that you didn't even notice.
You didn't even realize the memories that flooded back,
Along with shivers that ran their course on the surface of my skin
Then began to weave their way through my spine.
It spread through me like a drop of blood on a silk sheet.
The way your hand brushed against mine,
Brought me back to us.
Flashes of a smile I once adored,
The feel of warm fingers intertwining mine,
A mind as captivating as the setting sun,
With radiant screams of orange and gentle licks of blush.
Your words sounded like a drop of morning dew
Gliding gently down a single blade of grass.
Your hair smelled of honey,
Your touch made me glide carelessly
Through a thin sheet of crumbling ice,
Into a pool of biting violet and deep blue.
Shocking as the freezing water may be,
I'll be content to stay.
Even if it turns my skin to prune,
And ice begins to trickle through my veins.
I'll have the permanent smell of honey in my nose,
Screams of orange and licks of blush
In my line of sight forever.
You'll guard me from the harsh and biting cold,
As the brush of your fingers
Heals my broken soul.

Short Stories

BERSERK

By Ethan Baer

Erak Thorbergsson ducked under the swing of the massive broadsword and countered with a two-handed sweep from his battle axe. His axe struck his opponent's helmet and glanced off, sending sparks into the dirt. The other man became enraged nearly to the point of a berserker and swung madly with another attack. This time, Erak blocked with the haft of his axe, and the two weapons locked together. He strained, pushing his axe downward. Strengthened by years of rowing longships through storm-ridden waters, Erak was clearly the stronger of the two, but there was no fear of death in his opponent's eyes. That was good; he would die with honor. Erak forced the sword into the dirt and screamed a fearsome war-cry, slamming his helmeted forehead into the other man's face, cracking bones and sending him to the ground. He ripped his axe away from the sword and spun, slamming the blade into his opponent's chest.

The watching crowd filling the arena exploded with cheers at his victory. Erak grinned, pulling out his axe and raising the weapon into the air, doubling the cheering of the crowd. *Thor-bergs-son! Thor-bergs-son! Thor-bergs-son!* Thunder boomed in the distance, as if Thor himself were complimenting his victory. Erak laughed, reveling in the glory of victory.

On the far side of the arena, chief Hroskellsson stood from his throne and yelled, "SILENCE!" When the crowd had quieted sufficiently, the chief addressed Erak as two attendants removed the body from the dirt arena that was dark with blood. "Impressive, Erak. You have defeated every combatant put against you with ease. I propose a challenge." At that, the crowd began to whisper to each other. The chief paused, probably for dramatic effect, and the crowd went quiet. "I propose you fight two Viking warriors at once."

The crowd stayed silent and seemed to hold its breath, waiting for Erak's response. He raised his double-bladed war axe and yelled, "I accept your challenge!" The arena boomed with cheers and war cries, and someone threw a round wooden buckler to him from the crowd. Erak caught the thick oak shield and slipped it onto his left arm, raising a fist toward the man that had tossed it. The chief stroked his beard and waved to the guards outside the arena. Two Viking warriors stepped through the gate, one with a sword and round shield, one with a battle axe slightly longer than Erak's and a horned helmet. His mistake. The first warrior wore a helmet much like Erak's own, dome-shaped with a small face guard around the eyes and nose. Erak grinned, settling down into a battle-ready pose. This was going to be fun.

The chief back into his throne. “Fight!” The warrior in the horned helmet charged ahead of the other, swinging his axe in a diagonal sweep. Erak dodged to the side and grabbed one of the horns on the ridiculous helmet, dragging the Viking around and into the way of the one with the sword, who cursed, jumping to the side. Erak roared a war cry and charged. The warrior raised his sword to parry, so he simply slammed into him with his shield, toppling him. A yell came from his left, and Erak spun, slapping away the axe with the shield and planting a boot in the Viking’s chest before he could recover. Behind him, the sword fighter had gotten back up and slammed into Erak with his shield. Erak absorbed the blow, diving to the side and rolling off his shield arm, coming up to sweep the other man’s legs out from under him.

With the sword-wielder back on the ground, he turned his full attention to the axeman, charging and swinging both axe and shield in a mad flurry of attacks, never giving him enough time to recover. The man parried, ducked, and dodged as best he could, but Erak managed to land a few blows on his helm and leather chest-guard, not wanting to kill him just yet. He had a show to put on. He heard a footstep behind him and blocked a downward sword strike in the curve of his axeblade, shoving at the sword. A moment later he was forced to block an axe stroke on his left with his shield, shooting out splinters of wood but sticking the axe in place. The combined pushing force of both warriors forced Erak to his knees, the crowd gasping and cheering.

Straining, he twisted both arms down in a quick motion, throwing sword-man off balance and tearing the axe out of the axeman’s hands. Erak spun and slammed the pommel of his axe haft into his temple, and the axe wielder collapsed in a heap, unconscious. The remaining warrior screamed and chopped at Erak’s head. The shield still weighed down by the axe, he was forced to dodge back and the sword nicked his cheek, setting a light trickle of blood running down his face. The warrior grinned wickedly, and Erak growled in response, snapping the axe off his shield and crouching in a defensive position.

The warrior charged at him, and Erak deftly stepped to the side, letting the warrior run straight passed him, and slapped his back with his shield. He face-planted in the dirt and came up with utter fury on his face, his eyes wild. Erak circled the man with deliberate steps, stopping when the sun was directly behind him and in the other Viking’s eyes, hopefully blinding him. The warrior stood up and leapt toward him, chopping down with his sword to cleave Erak in two. Erak dodged and struck the side of the sword with his axe, and the warrior spun to swing again. He parried the blow with his shield and made an overhead swing with his axe. The

Viking ducked, and Erak was exposed by the attack. The Viking swung at his head, and the sword rang off Erak's helmet.

"So," Erak whispered, "Toying with me, are you?" The warrior smiled, and Erak's vision turned red. He raged and went berserk, attacking with a mad series of blows, coming faster and faster. The warrior's sword was slightly faster than a heavy battleaxe, and he managed to cut Erak a few times across the chest and arms, but nothing could match the ferocity of a berserk warrior. He rained blow after blow on his opponent, who gave up parrying and tried to block most of the onslaught with his shield. Erak swung down in a crushing two-handed hammer blow on the shield, and the wood and metal circle shattered, leaving a small board strapped to his opponent's arm. There was a loud crack: the Viking's shield arm breaking. Still driven berserk, Erak barely paused to notice the broken shield, and kept swinging like mad. He slapped away a sword swing and punched the warrior in the face with the edge of his shield, crumpling the front of the helmet. Continuing with a follow-through, Erak swung his massive axe as hard as he could, smashing through the warriors studded-leather armor and into his chest.

Erak tore the axe pack out, the blade dripping blood as he raised it above his head, the red fading from his vision, along with the immortal feeling of being a berserker, leaving Erak tired but exhilarated. The crowd was silent, most staring with their mouths gaping and their eyes wide. Erak roared a war cry into the sky, and the crowd exploded with cheers once again. Everyone in the arena was on their feet once more, chanting his name. Erak stood in the center of the arena, chest heaving, his arms and face glistening with sweat and blood. Chief Hroskellsson stood and once more quieted the crowd. "Well done, Erak! That was an impressive fight indeed. However, I notice that you left one of them alive." The whispers started again in the crowd, people wondering why.

Erak looked back into the arena, the broken corpse and the unconscious Viking both being dragged off the dirt field. He shrugged. "Normally I wouldn't begrudge a warrior the honor of dying in the Thor's day arena," he paused, making a show of thinking and stroking his beard. "But I'm pretty sure that one owes me money." The crowd burst into laughter, and the chief smiled and nodded.

After the laughter died down, chief Hroskellsson called out, "And now to the Great Hall! We feast in honor of Erak Thorbergsson and his victory!" The crowd cheered and began to shuffle towards the edges of the arena benches. Erak shook the battered shield off his arm and rested the axe on his shoulder, striding out of the arena's gate. Many of the crowd congratulated him on a battle well fought, including some of his closest row-mates on his longships, as they walked toward the Great Hall. It was a massive oak building decorated with an engraving of Prince Sigurd

fighting the dragon. The inside would be lined filled with enough tables and benches to fit the entire village, and Erak could smell the roasting meat inside. He laughed, sliding the haft of his axe through the loop of his belt. This was turning out to be a momentous day.

The Door

by Landon Haslam

To whomever finds this note,

The inevitability of my death grows close. It is incredibly unlikely that I will live to tell my story to the world, so, in my final moments, I will tell it to you now.

It was a dark night when I ended my shift at the local bank and began to walk home. I lived close, so walking home was not much of an ordeal, especially because I took a shortcut through the same alley every day. This time, there was something I had never noticed before: a wooden door on the wall in between the two familiar dumpsters.

The door did not stand out from other doors in design, but it intrigued me. I knew I had to get home to my family, but I couldn't resist. My hand shot out and grabbed the doorknob, which was surprisingly warm. I turned it and pushed through. The door was heavier than I expected, so I let it slam as soon as I got inside.

After waiting for my eyes to adjust, I looked at the room around me. It was small—maybe ten or twelve square feet—and almost completely empty, with nothing but a small table in the middle and a closet-like door parallel from the entrance. What drew my attention was a device that sat on top of the table, with every side slightly hanging over the edges. Upon first glance, the device appeared to be an old movie projector, but I found it had many differences upon closer inspection. Numbers were inscribed on the back of the device glowing bright green. Without their light, I doubt I would have seen anything at all. Connected to the front of the device was a rifle-like barrel pointed at the entrance of the room. I tried to pick the object up to look at the bottom, but it wouldn't budge.

I had no idea what the machine was, so I went to the closet for some answers. I opened it and peered inside. It was filled with objects that I had never seen. I gently rolled a clear foggy ball off the bottom shelf and then picked up a large bronze rod. As soon as I touched it, I felt a surge of energy and instantly threw it back. The other objects varied in shape and size, but I now feared to touch any of them. Just as I was thinking of stopping my search, I saw the one object I knew: a 10-millimeter pistol.

I heard the dark room's exit to the alleyway creak open, and I, almost impulsively, jumped into the closet and closed the doors. The crack between them was just big enough to see out of.

The source of my excited fear slowly entered the dark room dragging bags behind him. He was muscular and probably in his thirties. His entire body was

covered in black except for his shiny bald head. Every feature of his hardened face seemed to be chiseled from stone, and although I never made direct contact with his grey eyes, I could clearly see their intensity. The man slowly pressed each number on the device with precision, and, almost instantly after he finished typing, a beam of bright purple light shot out of the barrel directly at the entrance of the dark room. A light hum accompanied the beam for about five seconds before the beam suddenly stopped. The man grabbed the bags and walked out the way he came in. Realistically, this process only took about thirty seconds, but with my anxiety, this felt like hours. Whoever this man was, I didn't want to deal with him.

I grabbed the pistol from the shelf behind me in case I needed protection and after waiting inside the dark room for about a minute to make sure he wouldn't see me sneak out, I ran as fast as I could. I exited the room, and to my surprise, the alleyway from which I entered was gone. In its place was a dimly lit hallway lined with doors exactly like the door to the dark room. I had no choice but to look for a way out.

I opened the closest door. You'd think after three times of opening doors to something I didn't expect I would have been desensitized, but my heart pounded as I saw the scene on the other side. The room opened into a garage-like room filled with tanks, missiles, torpedoes, bombs—things intended to destroy and kill. On the far side of the room, a black sheet draped over an object on a handcart. I wanted to know what was under the sheet, but my fear overpowered my curiosity and I slammed the door. I opened the next. Although this room still wouldn't help me escape, it was much less terrifying. Every wall was filled with bookshelves, and an oak desk sat against the wall with a large leather-bound book on top.

My first thought was that the book on the desk may be important, so I grabbed it and hastily opened it. Each page I flipped through was filled with diagrams of the buildings -- I recognized the White House and the Lincoln Memorial -- many of which had parts of the foundations circled.

I heard him coming from the only room I hadn't yet entered, so I slammed the book back and sprinted into the closet in the dark room. He soon followed, now wearing a black, almost motorcyclist helmet and was pushing the handcart I had seen in the armory. After sitting the handcart to the side, he began to type on the device he had before.

My options were limited. I thought over the option of waiting for him to leave and then contacting the authorities, but I didn't have enough time. I had to do something. No one else could.

I stepped out of the closet and shakily aimed my pistol at him.

"Step away from the device," I said. My voice was wavering.

He continued to type on the device. I should have shot him, but I was too afraid, or maybe too indecisive; still, I didn't wait long before he finished typing and the beam shot out of the device at the door.

He finally looked up at me. "Do you know where we are?"

I stared at him silently, still pointing the gun in his direction.

"We're on the moon—or at least that's what's on the other side of the door," he said with a slight sinister smile that increased my discomfort.

He didn't have to elaborate. The vacuum of space would kill me before I even finished opening the door; I was trapped.

He started walking slowly towards me.

"Also," he added, "know that the pistol you are holding only has one bullet. Because everything I'm wearing is bullet proof, I wouldn't advise trying to kill me."

I stood still, thinking of options. Finally, one manifested itself. I ran across the room so that the man wasn't blocking my view of the device. My finger tightened on the trigger and the bullet barreled itself into the machine. It sparked, screeched, and smoked, and then sat silent and still.

"What have you done? You've killed us both!" the man loudly yelled, running toward me. Without thinking I raised the pistol and fired an "imaginary" bullet at his chest. He collapsed; his apparel was only as bulletproof as my own. He lied.

I have been stuck in this room for what I believe to be around six days, though telling how much time has passed is hard without daylight. At one point I hoped to repair the device, but the device was too badly damaged and I had no ideas of how to begin. There are no supplies to keep me alive in this room and I can already feel my body failing. If I stay here, I know I will die. I have but one option; I must open the door. Perhaps the man was lying, as he did about the pistol's ammunition and his armor; I'll be able to get the hell out of this cursed room. If the man wasn't lying, and the door truly does lead to the moon, I will have a far more pleasant death than if I starve here. Either possible outcome couldn't be worse than my current situation.

Although I fear the other side of the door, I must open it. It is the only logical option. In case the more fatal outcome occurs, my last hope is that someone finds this note in this room and shares my story. Even if I do survive, I am sure I will never step inside this door again.

Guardian Angel

by Tamera Condie

I question this kid sometimes, I really do. I was so excited to finally be a guardian angel, but now? Not so much. How could I get stuck with someone so idiotic? It's honestly shocking how stupid this kid can be sometimes.

I sit here watching the kid hang out with his friend, Geo. Usually, things like this would be safe and fun at the same time, but nooooooooooooo, he's a 'teenager' now, so he has to have fun while disobeying all of the safety rules I've made. Too bad the kid can't see or hear me because I would give him a piece of my mind, and tell him it clearly states in safety rule #203 that you should never, and I repeat NEVER, play on abandoned railroad tracks. That basically screams that someone's gonna be hiding near there, and come murder him. The only way that can be avoided is if he listens to the safety rules. Well, if he could hear them.

Suddenly, I get knocked out of my thoughts by a loud sound that makes the ground shake. Once I realize what's gonna happen, I look at the back of the kid's head—he's frozen in fear--swoop down, and push him out of the way, breathing a sigh of relief. After the rumbling passes, I realize two things.

1. This abandoned railroad isn't so abandoned.

And

2. This isn't my kid.

Well... technically, I did my job. Just... for the wrong kid.

That Night

by Bryson Barker

Ever since I was a child, weird things have been happening to me. I see, hear, and feel spiritual presents. Different things that no one else ever dreams of seeing. Figures appearing in the hallway or at the bottom of the stairs. I hear voices calling my name but there is no one else around me. There is one that scared me the most because it wasn't a figure or voice, it was a physical creature. The thing is, I live alone.

It was an unusually dark night, and I had just gotten out of the shower. I was brushing my teeth. The mirror was fogged but it was nothing different. As I bent down to spit out the toothpaste, I saw a blur run past the bathroom door in the hall. I thought nothing of it at the time.

I went to my room and changed so I could go to bed. It had been a rough day at work so, I was excited to get into bed and go to sleep. As I was getting into bed, the lights in the kitchen flicked on. I thought nothing of it because it was an old house and things like that always happen.

I was already comfortable so I didn't care to go investigate. My eyes began to feel heavy as everything started to go black. I woke up and looked at the clock, it shined red in my face as I read 3:03. The light in the kitchen was off. I cocked my head in confusion. I decided to stay in bed. But as I was about to close my eyes, I heard the floorboards in my hall creak. They have never done that before. I wanted to investigate but I was shaking with fear.

I hesitated to uncover myself, but I had to investigate. I crept to my bedroom door to peak out. I felt chills go up and down my spine but there was only an empty hallway. As I was heading back to bed, I saw this creature move on the ceiling. Long creaky fingers and deep red eyes reach towards me.

That's the last thing I remember about that night. Ever since then, I have not been the same. I don't see any more figures or hear any voices and don't sleep the same. I rarely dream but when I do, they seem to come true.

Last night, I had a dream about this creature coming after me. It caught me and did horrific things to me. When I woke up, I could feel the pain coursing through my veins. Nothing has happened to me yet, but as I am writing this, I can see the glow of its eyes in the closet. I'm afraid that it is coming true.

Abyss

by Cameron Brown

She walked into the room with her eyes glued to the floor. I wouldn't say I was staring, but I took a prolonged glance at her. I always do. However, this was different. She didn't have the same skip in her step, and that shine in her eyes. As she sluggishly shuffled over to her seat and sat down, she sank into the chair. I could tell something was wrong, and as I turned towards the room, I began questioning what was wrong.

She usually had an almost visible aura of happiness around her, but today when she walked into the room, it darkened. I don't think anyone else realized what was happening, but how could they not? From across the room I could see a shimmer in her eyes, but it was the shimmer of wet eyes, holding back tears. Despite her best effort to hide the tear that slowly rolled down her face, it was merely visible to me. The class dragged on from that point on. I couldn't help but looking over at her every opportunity I got. She sat hollowly in her chair. At some point during the class I began scheming all ways I could potentially help.

Perhaps I was too lost in thought. The teacher had called on me and I panicked not knowing what to say. As sweat rolled down my forehead I bluntly said the first thing that popped into mind. Of course it was wrong, and I heard a few giggles and chuckles throughout the classroom. Usually I would feel sick to my stomach about being wrong and laughed at. However, I heard something from across the room, a slight giggle, I quickly jerked my head and saw a soft smile and a glimmer of hope within that smile.

The light from her eyes slowly began to fade away into a dark abyss. That flicker of hope within her smile, stuck with me and grew, shown by the grin on my face. So next time the teacher asked the class a question, I spurted out the wrong answer, hoping it would make her laugh, but suddenly my hopes were crushed. By now the class was almost over so I decided to wait. I glanced over at her, and my hope was reignited. The bell rang and I decided to do the most logical thing I could think of. I simply asked her if she was okay. She suddenly wrapped her arms tightly around me and buried her face into my chest. I was taken by surprise and I began to feel my shirt dampen where her face was, and I could hear her sniffing. I hugged back and I could feel my heart pounding out of my chest.

We weren't close, we had only talked a few times before that. She was popular but still an outsider. She was beautiful, in a way that makes you appreciate all things. And I could feel her grip around me loosen, and as I slowly began to loosen mine, we let go. She apologized for getting my shirt all wet and I told her that I was hot anyway and it felt refreshing. She smiled, her face still wet with tears.

The darkness that was in her eyes retreated and was replaced with a bright and happy sparkle. I walked with her to her class and we reminisced about our elementary school days we spent together, which had completely fled my memories until now. She thanked me and I told her I would see her tomorrow in class. We parted with a smile and as I back tracked my steps to go to my next class, I walked with an upbeat step and a grin on my face.

The next day I hurried to class, and I sat there watching the door as a hawk stalks its prey. The class began to fill and she hadn't walked in. I assumed she had just ditched the class or something. The following days I repeated the process and waited patiently for her to come. However, within the week I had heard the heartbreaking news that earlier that week she had taken her life. It had been the same day I had walked her to class. And now I walked into the room with my eyes glued to the floor, sluggishly shuffled over my seat, sat down sinking into the chair, and slipped into a dark abyss.

Better This Way

Mikayla Maloney

Color was the first to go. Next came the light that seeped from my vision, then all was black. That's how my love story goes.

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The invisible scars that etched my skin used to scorch like the heat of a knife being welded by a vicious blacksmith, the outline of them being re-branding every time my mind wandered to the fiery depths of my memory. The pain of my damage would burn the threads tying my vital organs into place, making it hard to breathe. Sometimes each step I would take carried the burden of a ball and chain, the weight taking me father and deeper into the depths of the ocean. Often it would be easy for me to forget to breathe, while other times, I wouldn't want to.

I'll never forget the day I got the call that left my first significant scar; its impalement having ripped the threads of my chest so much they'd begin to unravel. Over the phone had been my mother's quiet voice, steady and calm long enough to assert my brother's death. Death by suicide.

He took his life by choice, meaning it could have been prevented, but it wasn't. My love wasn't enough to save him and that's something I'd always regret.

The gashes in my heart would expand with the passing of my mother; the years of her life snatched away like a boat falling victim to the force of a storm, becoming part of the many treasures hidden beneath the wreckage of the sea. The youth she had was, robbed on a chilled winter's night when her heater betrayed its purpose of providing warmth to allowing a leakage of carbon monoxide. Mother would never awaken from her sleep.

Most of my wounds were momentarily patched up when I married an old best friend. His presence brought a fleeting happiness that was drowned out when the comfort of childhood he brought with him became overshadowed with the bruises that lined my arms and neck. There were times I would walk outside to get the mail on a humid day in a turtleneck sweater, bellbottomed jeans, and sunglasses, only to rush back inside when a neighbor came out to mow their lawn. The pulling in of his sleek black car soon coated me with fear when I'd peek through the blinds.

I knew it was going to be a good day when he slipped into his study, aware he'd stay in there for hours. Of course, nighttime was always the same routine, being strangled with aggression and hate as he'd strike me down for never being good enough.

There came a point when I had had enough. Late one night, he snuck into his office, thinking I was fast asleep. Seeing the opportunity, I creaked the door open just enough for me to slip through. Not turning on any lights, I grabbed my wallet and his keys, making a run for it when he turned on the lights in the kitchen. My head would not soon forget the rattle of his fist striking the window of his car, as I fumbled to put on my seatbelt behind locked doors.

I drove straight to the airport, beginning by journey of traveling the world with the savings my mother had stored in my high school bank account. It was these trips that would lead me to going into journalism, and have me wind up on a particular park bench in the state of Washington.

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I remember it perfectly.

My pen tapped against the soft pages of my journal as I anticipated a call from New York. On a nearby sidewalk, a tall man with dark shades walked his service dog alongside a girl who looked to be his sister, due to the same curve of their noses and shape of their chin. Both had similar shades of dark, almost black hair that complimented their copper skin.

He said something that made the girl throw her head back laughing, and when he glanced in her general direction, our eyes met.

Everything went black.

I blinked a couple of times to try and restore my vision, breaking the gaze of the man. My sight swiftly returned but I noticed the man had halted in his footsteps, a bewildered look on his face. I returned my focus to my journal, shaking my head in disbelief of what happened. The darkness had been so sudden.

I saw out of the corner of my eye the man in dark shades sit down on the bench beside me, his sister hovering a few feet away. He introduced himself as Chance, and it was during that conversation I felt the string of fate tie around my heart, slither across the bench, and wrap around his. In the moment of our gazes catching, I didn't know it then, but it had made the blind man sitting across from me see for the first time.

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Chance become my only and closest friend, one that I slowly fell in love with. He followed me everywhere so I could show him the world he little by little was able to uncover. As my vision deteriorated, his came with new surprises. Opposite of me, things began to grow brighter, and the outlines of shapes soon came into his view. Primary colors made themselves known to him first. Steadily, more and more crept into the once blind man's vision.

I knew that if I stayed with him I would lose my sight all together, and his would be fully restored. I was okay with that.

The imaginary crater in my chest was not only patched up this time, Chance helped me mend it. The ball and chain around my ankle was broken, allowing me to swim up to the surface of the ocean I'd been trapped under for so long, gasping for air. The invisible scars on my arms were still there, but their searing burn dulled to a slight ache as Chance took up my burden with the promise of always being by my side.

I didn't trust him at first. The torture of my past kept me from noticing the light he carried with him, like a constellation in a night sky. I started to believe him when he gave me the most precious thing there is. Time.

We made a vow that, while I would guide him through all of the new things he processed, he would show me the world only visible to those without sight. I may have given a blind man sight, but he gave me something I would give up my vision over and over again for. He gave me a sense of security and comfort. He gave me someone to love.

Some say love makes a person blind—literally in my case. I believe it's better that way.

Things

By Jacob Boam

The visions of my best friend danced in my head: skin bleached; hands cold, nearly balmy—the decrepit remains left behind after one dose to many. I still remember watching him, the subtle rise and fall of his chest, and the last whisp of air left him. I watched as his body slowly forgot to breathe.

It's not the body that stunned me. I was a med student, so I've seen plenty of bodies. It wasn't the knowledge that the same thing could happen to me. The only thing that scared me was the thought.

Right after he died, you would imagine I was worried. You would think my heart should be pounding, that I was smart enough to not do exactly what I just saw him die doing. You would think my brain would be screaming and yelling at me go get help and try and save him... but there was the thought. Burned into my mind and hanging in the stale air; the thought that the only thing that his death meant, was another needle for me. Another vial, another hit of my sedating secret, another chance to feel numb.

Being a med student, I knew the danger I was getting into. I shouldn't even say getting into, I was making the stuff for heaven's sakes. I knew how it killed, slowly suppressing the neurons, literally making you forget how to breathe as you slowly fell asleep and asphyxiated yourself.

I never should have sampled my own product, but there I was. Same place as always, same dingy bed, same crusted curtains, same strange stain on the carpet. Different pounding on the door. Different voice yelling at me telling me to open up. Different sobs, different tears, different begging, different people. Same old numbness. I laid back, to far distanced from reality to stand up and the open door.

I felt like I was sinking.

Sinking.

Sinking.

“When I wake up,” I thought. “I’m gonna wean myself off this. I’d hate to end up like him.”

Sinking.

Sinking

Sinking.

A door slams open.

Screams.

Sinking.

Gone.

Life

by Ethan Lefevre

I close my eyes and position my hands. Breathing deeply, my hands begin to fly.

The melodies are woven into my being, the harmonies singing in the background of the canvas that I paint. My heart beats in time with what I—no, what my soul plays. Time slows, the music being the only thing that truly matters in this moment.

I can feel the song begin to end; and yet, I never want it to stop. This is how I know that what I am doing is my dream. I never want it to end.

My fingers start to slow, my breathing catches up with me. The final few notes ring out, and the piece is over, for better or for worse.

I say goodbye to the feeling of peace, but only for now. I will see it many more times in the rest of my life, until I say goodbye to that too. For better or for worse.

Once, some time ago, there existed, in the world, a great body of water in which Death swam. He tossed and turned about the waves, throwing the mass of ocean high into the air for miles around, and the peoples of the Earth knew Death waited in the waters for those whose time had come.

Now, at the peak of a lone mount that stood some miles inland from the great sea, a child was born. She shone ivory pale, with hair that shimmered ebony black. Her mother, a young, frail maiden, named the child Duri, meaning two; for with the infant was born a soul of purity and naivety.

Duri grew older much as winter often does—at the very first, she blossomed with light and wonder, dusting the meadows and hilltops with her perpetual joy. The surrounding peoples loved to watch her dance, pale limbs twirling through the air. And always her soul trailed and danced with her, dressed in white that mirrored Duri's own silken gowns. They played together, the girl and her soul, for many years, filling the mountains with their light.

But as Duri grew beyond her childhood years, a change began to take place in her heart. She had watched many walk the long path down toward the great sea throughout her childhood. Many had been friends, and Duri cried when they did not return.

When, as a flowering youth, she finally asked her mother why so many walked the path and disappeared, Duri received truth that chilled her blood and made her insides swim. Death was a stranger to her, and she had never once entertained the idea of an end to life. The thought filled her with dread—and thus she changed.

All bright, early winters eventually fade into cold, bitter grey. So it was with Duri—the child of light gave way to a woman of cloud and fear. The great waves of Death's ocean haunted her mind and filled her heart with sorrow, putting an end to all dancing and cheer. Duri ceased to wear white, instead cloaking herself in thick folds of black. And yet through all, her soul stayed innocent and light, dancing through the meadows and wearing the purest of whites.

One day, as Duri walked the paths of the peaks of her home, she stumbled across an old woman crouching in the dirt. Stopping curiously, Duri inquired after the woman. "Are you quite well, ma'am?"

Lifting her wrinkled head, the woman smiled a gap-toothed grin. "I am, my dear. But I sense that your heart is not." She traced a finger through the dirt absently, staring deep into Duri's questioning eyes.

"And by that, good woman, you mean..."

"I mean to say that you are afraid."

Duri flinched, asking why the woman thought so.

"I have seen the shade you have become, my dear. I know the shadow that haunts your mind and hoards your steps. You feel as though Death himself watches your comings and goings."

Hesitating slightly, Duri nodded, just once. "I dread the day that I will feel his pull...."

"What if you did not have to?"

Duri stiffened. "I beg your pardon?"

The woman smiled a fearsome smile, full of concealed malice. "If there existed a way to keep your life for eternity... would you take it?"

Duri's heart jolted, and she nodded furiously, no flicker of doubt ever crossing her mind. "I would walk to the ends of Earth for this."

Grinning, the woman continued. "You have something that Death desires above all else. Something good and pure. If you trade it with him, he will grant you your life."

"I know of no such possession," Duri murmured warily.

The woman said nothing, only pointed. Turning, Duri's eyes fell upon her own soul, picking her way carefully across the rocks towards them.

And at once, Duri understood.

A Dwarf Named Yith

By Andrew Gerber

There was at one point of time in a small village a dwarf who wanted to fly; fly like the birds in the sky. This dwarf was so unlike any of his brothers or sisters in his childhood. When they went fishing, he looked at the birds. When they played in the dirt, he climbed the trees. His name was Yith.

Sometimes, Yith would simply lie down on a green hill and watch the clouds sail across the vast blue, blue sky. In all of this time watching, Yith would constantly desire to be among the clouds, to touch the fluffy cotton in the sky.

As the years went by, Yith's brothers and sisters went on to become miners, fisherdwarves, cooks, seamstresses, farmers, and other jobs a dwarf can do, but to everyone's surprise Yith became something else: a toy-maker. He came to enjoy tinkering around with spare parts and bits and creating wonderful things for children. Toys had always been scarce or poor quality, but Yith's toys were almost magical (which some might argue to be true). They would vibrate and spin, run and jump, and make all assortment of noises. They were loved by the children and amazed even the eldest of dwarves.

However, Yith wasn't fully content. He had a dream, a dream to fly. As he went on with making his toys, he started tinkering and inventing with other things (not toys). He used old bits and fragments of toys, clocks, or any other things that could be broken down. He tried to make them fly and glide, but all of his ideas and different designs fell to the ground. Yith worked on more ideas and tested theories, which made no difference to his dream, but as he did so his toys began to improve.

His work slowly spread into other cities and towns, his wonderful toys enchanting everyone. Soon his work was known throughout the land. One day, Yith found a dwarf official on his doorstep, inviting him to work in one of the most important dwarf cities in the country. He was given assistants and merchants to work for him, and soon became one of the wealthiest dwarves of all time. However, he was forced to put off his real dream for his career for many years.

Time went on, and before Yith could start working on his dream again, he suddenly found himself in love with a wonderful hairy dwarf maid. Lovely years came to pass afterwards, but regret was growing in Yith's mind as he worried that his dream would never come to pass.

More years passed away, and as each one slipped past, Yith started to get less busy. During earlier times, he would have tinkered around, but Yith was getting old and weak. It was at this time when Yith took his son on top of a great mountain. It

reminded Yith of his dream, and it only took eight words from his son to get Yith back on to it.

“Father, don’t you wish you could fly sometimes?”

Yith was suddenly back into his tinkering and theories of flight. Fears of being too late to complete his dream, Yith worked frantically on old prototypes and dusty ideas. This time however Yith had more knowledge about mechanics than ever. He worked all through the day and into the night. He would skip meals and forgot to sleep, but his mind had never been as focused in his entire life till this time. He was progressing, his designs were working, problems becoming fewer.

Finally one day, the dwarves of the city looked up to see a giant bird flying over their heads. They gasped as they realized that it was not a bird, but a dwarf! Yith had somehow done it!

As his son landed, Yith proudly hugged him and gave him a soft headbutt.

“Thank you for fulfilling my dream, son.”

The Most Original Story Ever

By Christian Bruderer

Once upon a time, in a far away land, there was a small kingdom nestled in a valley, at least, most of the population was, the kingdom inexplicably also owned an extensive amount of unused property in case questing was needed. In this small kingdom, a young pale messy-haired boy named John was apprenticed to a stern, yet loving craftsman who was also his uncle. Every day the boy worked ceaselessly in the shop, sweating in the hot sun, yet somehow gaining no muscle mass.

His only respite from the labor was his best friend, a quirky young man named Chad you was always getting into trouble. They would galavant through the streets like vagabonds, stealing bits of food and teasing younger kids, even though John was still the purest of heart in all the land. By night, he would stay with the kindly old man who lived just outside the village, the one who was cast out for being an outcast but was also the most beloved member of the community. John lived with him because the poor boy's parents had died long ago mysteriously. Their death had been mourned across the town even though nobody knew anything about their shadowed past.

John liked his life, but he yearned for more than what he had. He wished he knew more about his parents, for all they had left him was a small trinket that shimmered in the light. It was a mystery to as to its purpose, but it was all he had left. The old man told him that it had great importance and that he was to keep it safe at all costs.

"John! It's time for you to come in for your lessons!" the old man called out in his shaky old man voice. "We have to get you an education, and I can give it to you

despite the fact that we're both in the bottom percentiles of economic welfare because your only possession is a trinket and I've been denied citizenship by the townsfolk."

"Coming, sir!" John yelled as he ran over a small garden filled with nothing but cabbages.

"Now, you need to take this education seriously, even though learning a trade from your uncle will make you more likely to do well in life, an education is important." the old man chastised as he pulled out an enormous leather tome that looked much too heavy for his frail body to lift. He blew off the layer of dust that inexplicably appeared on its cover every time it was brought out. The old man set it on the table and sat down in a large chair. "Would you like a slice of rhubarb pie?"

"I sure would!" John said joyously, his eyes shimmering as he watched the old man cut it. "But sir, how is it that you have so much food when you're so poor?" he said, looking at the storeroom filled with every vegetable he could think of except cabbages.

"It's best not to ask such questions, you'll give yourself a headache thinking about it. We ought to be grateful for what we get and not concern ourselves with the means by which it is gotten."

"Sir, pardon me, but that sounds like some pretty dangerous words to live by if you ask me."

"Nonsense! I only speak wisdom and quotable proverbs my boy!"

Suddenly, a clatter arose from outside the shack. The boy and the old man dropped everything to go out and look at the spectacle. A soldier clad in a black and red uniform was riding into town on a large black stallion. He looked like the kind of

soldier that a single hero could defeat along with several of his comrades later on, but not right now.

The old man's face grew pale. "Oh dear." he said in his raspy old man voice. "We need to go, now."

"But where, sir?" John asked

"To find my colleague in town, I believe we may have an emergency, and it's imperative that we get you to her right away."

The two quickly set off, slipping into town and onto the bustling streets. "Hurry, my boy, we must find her before I get another fine for trespassing."

"How do you pay those off by the way?"

"Fool of a boy, what did I tell you about not asking those kinds of questions?"

"I really don't think they're too hard to answer, but nevermind. Don't you know where your colleague lives?"

"Of course, but I'm really bad at directions unless it's over vast distances and/or in the form of prophecy or song"

They rushed through the street until they came across the house they were searching for.

"Sir, no offense, but why was it so hard for you to find this place. It's a tall, dome shape covered in flowy purple curtains."

"I know, she's breaking sooooo many zoning laws" the old man mumbled in his old man voice.

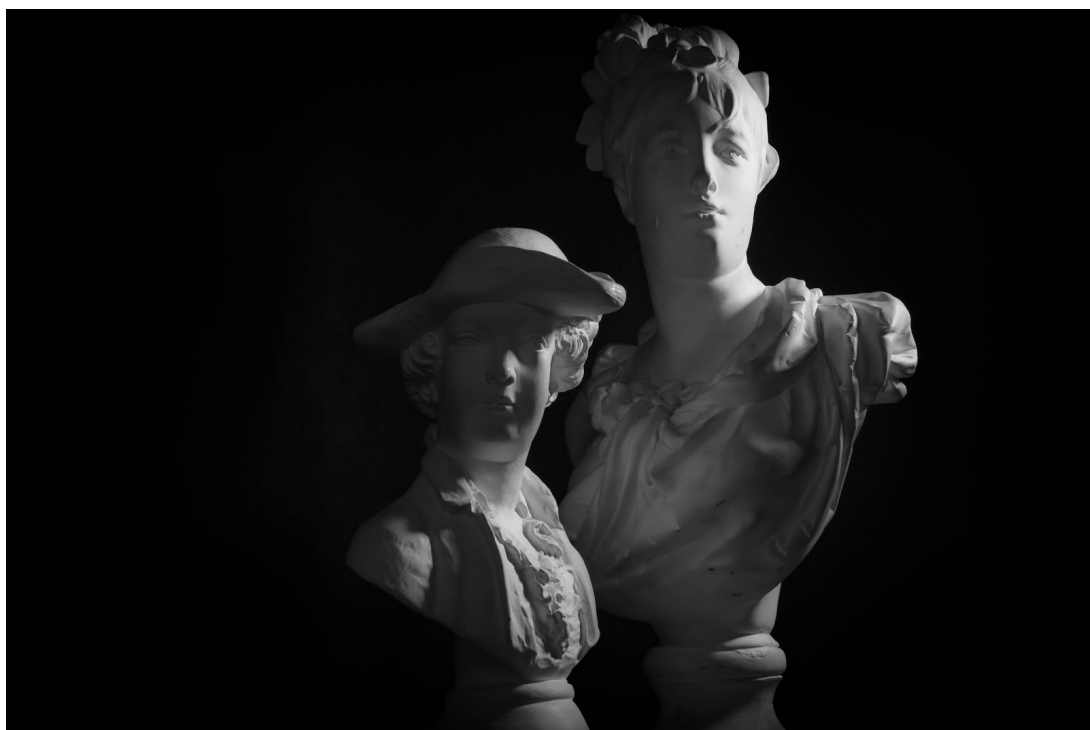
The two entered the building to see a small old woman wearing a bun in her hair and a shawl over her shoulders. "Ahh, I've been expecting you." she said.

"Can you tell the future?" John asked.

“Well, yes, but I knew you were coming because your uncle is already here.”

The craftsman emerged from the shadows. “Ah, nephew, I fear it’s time we tell you something we should have told you years ago. Your parents... didn’t die from natural causes, they were slain by the dark overlord, the terror from beyond our borders. Your parents were magicians, descended from the elves of the ancient woods. They had just stolen a powerful artifact, the only thing capable of defeating the dark overlord. They left it with you before they died. It is connected by blood, and only you can wield it. The prophecy foretells of a hero who wields this powerful item to defeat the dark overlord once and for all. You, John, are the chosen one.”

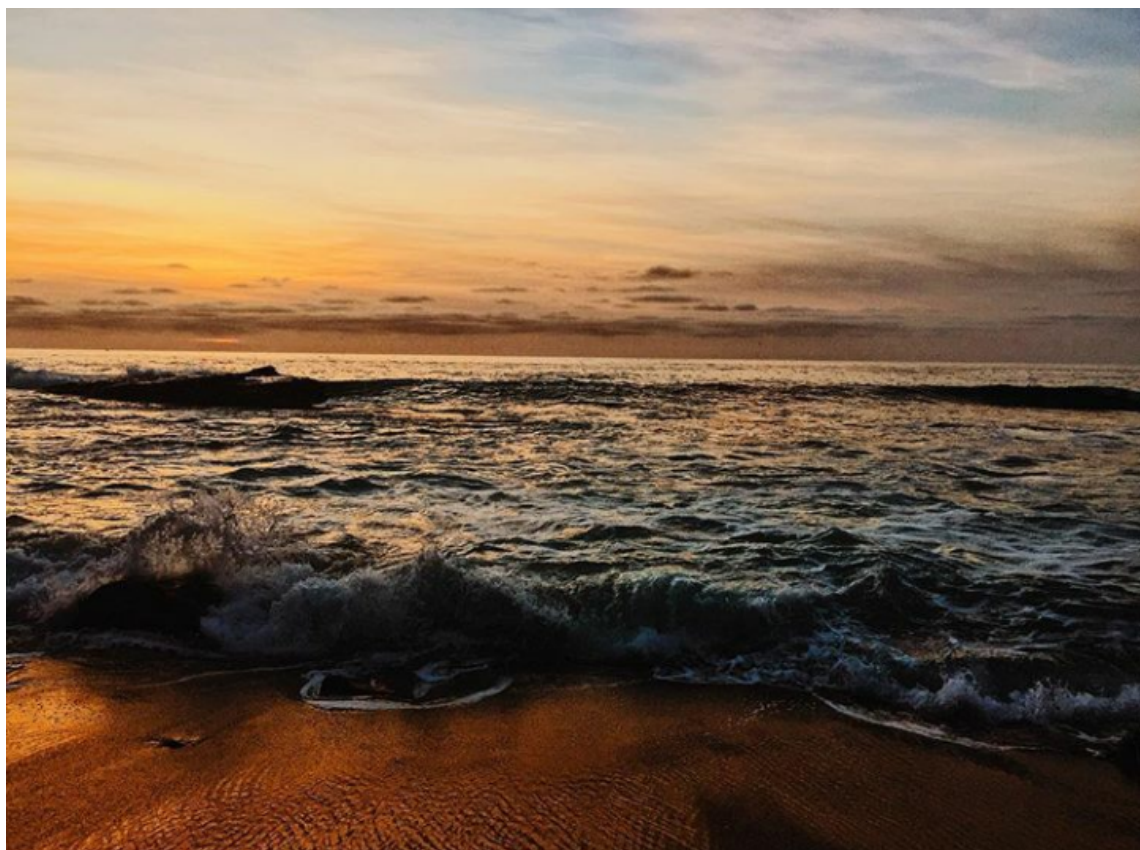
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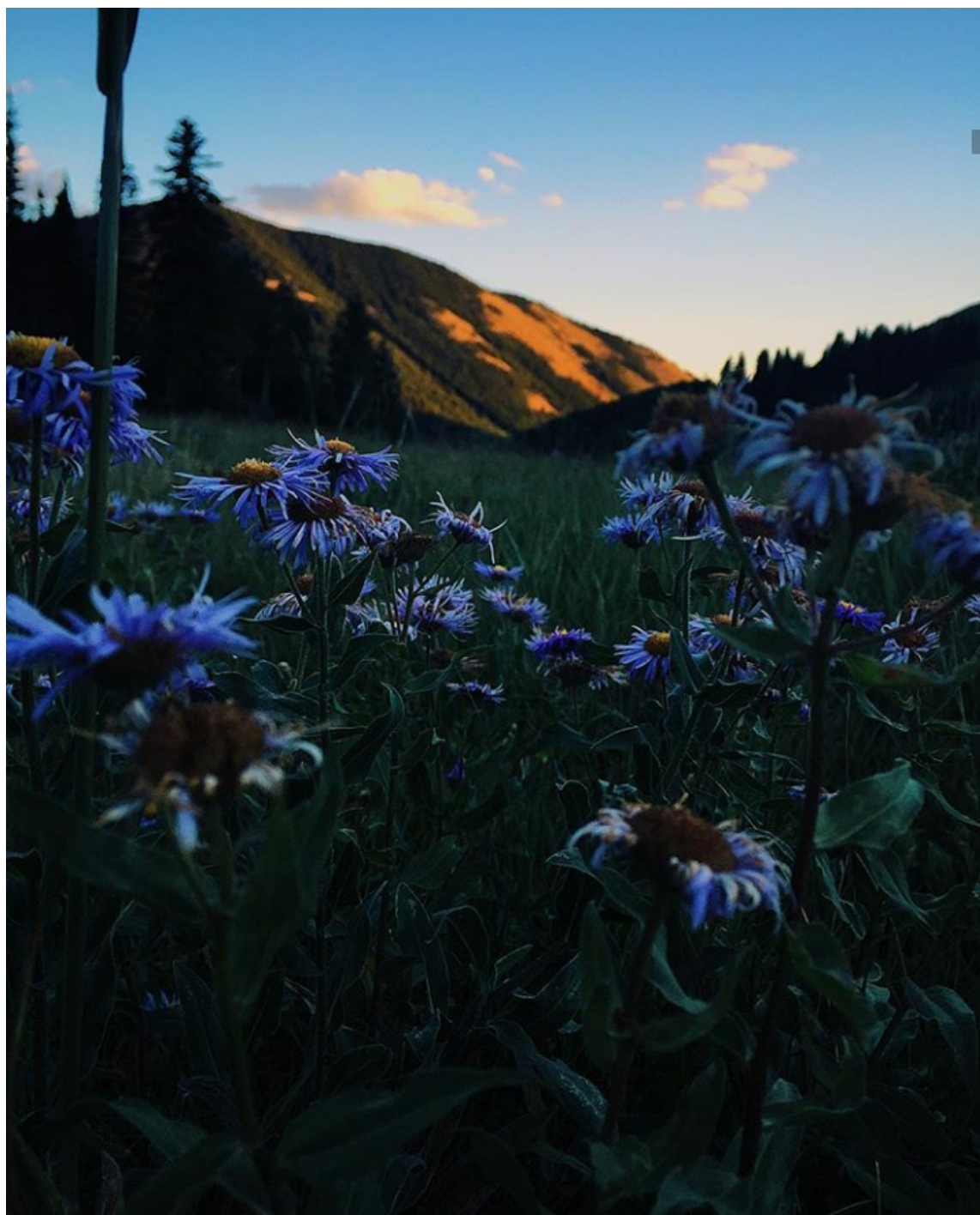
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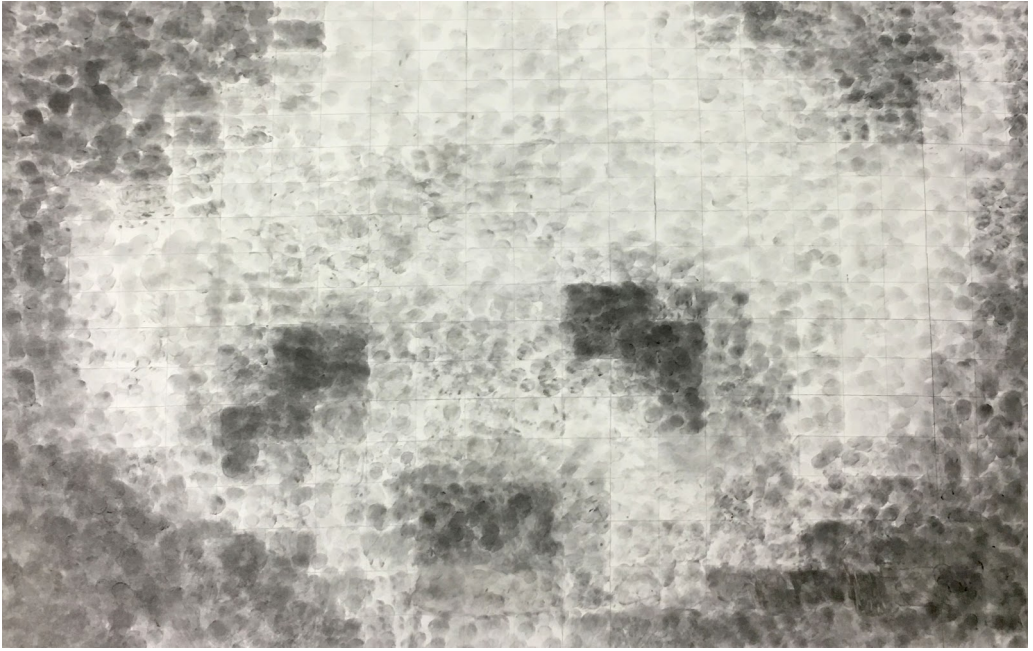


Josh Day



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Art



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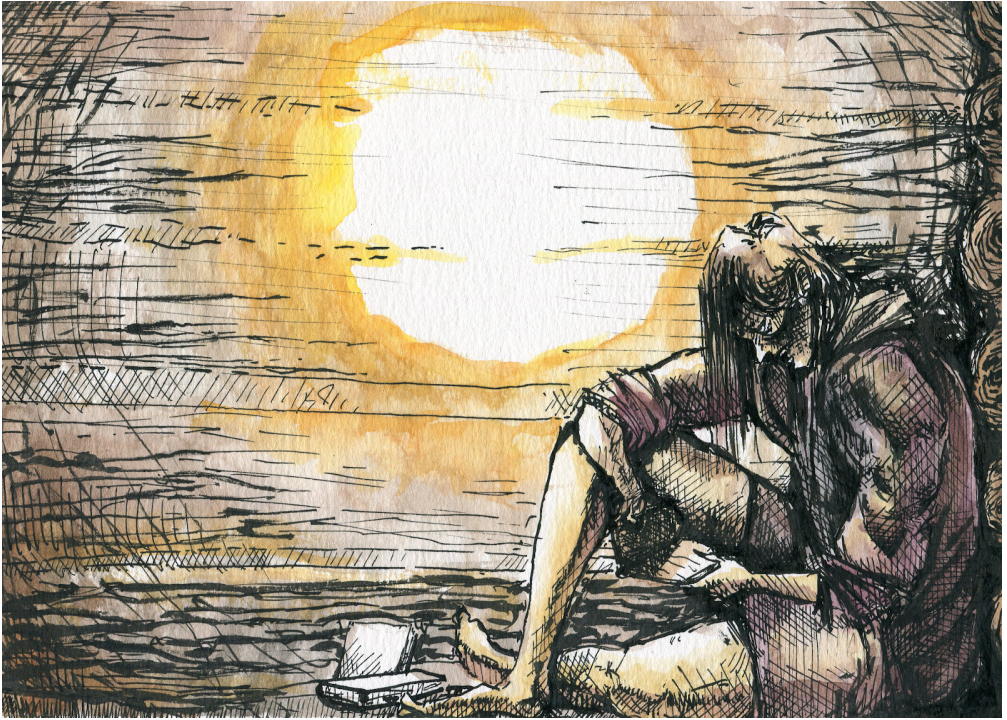
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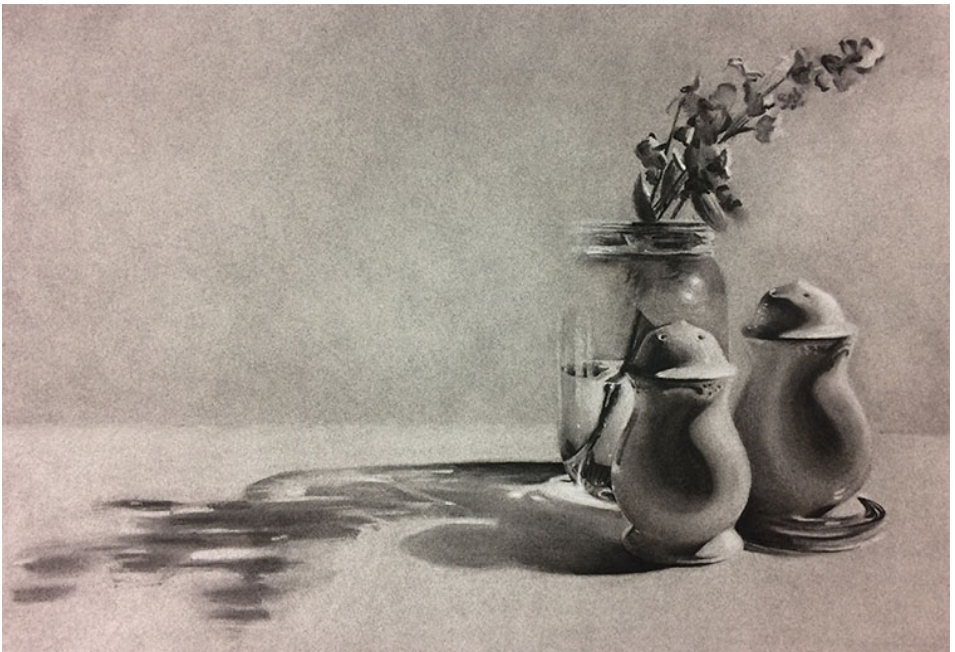
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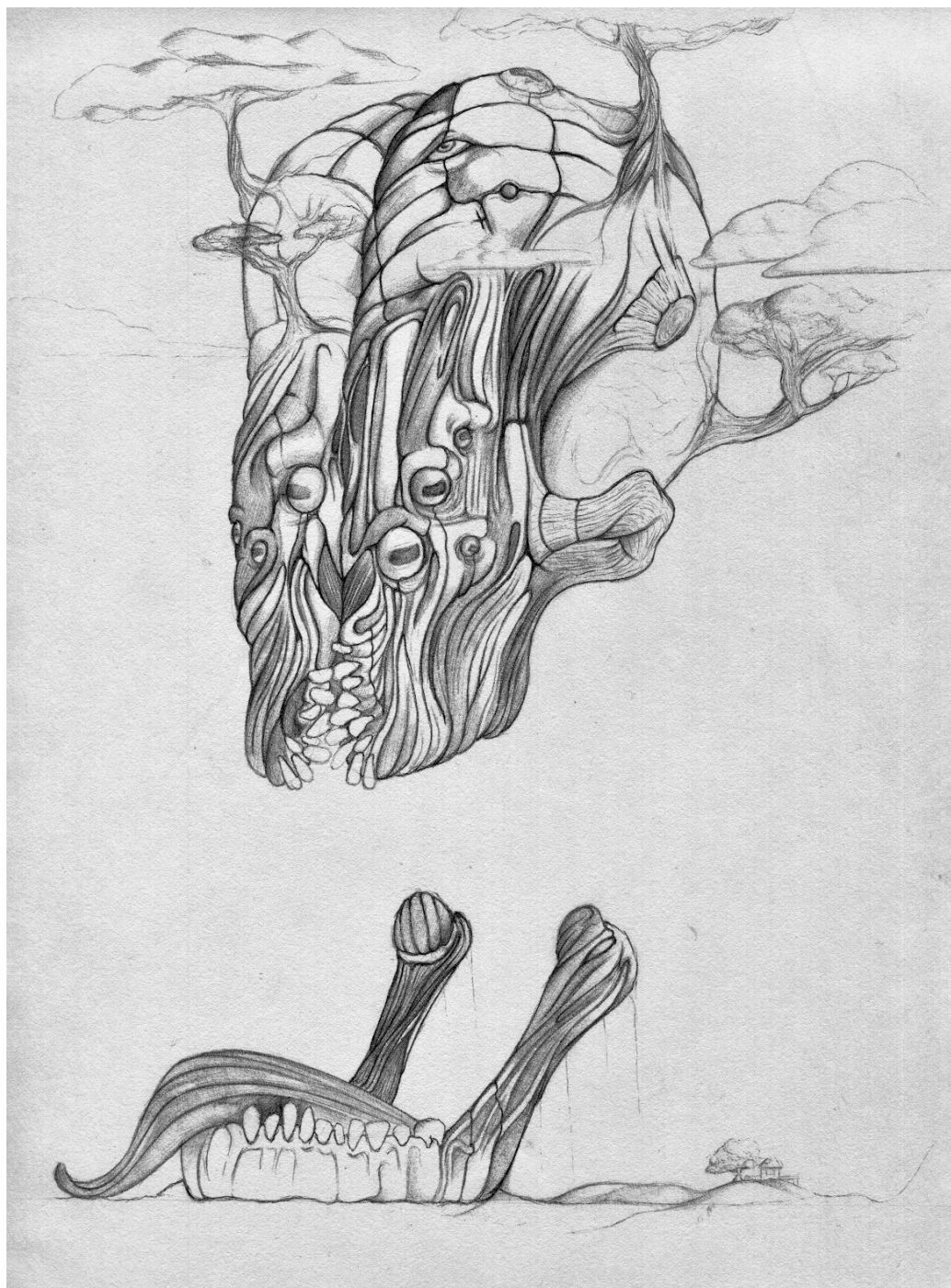
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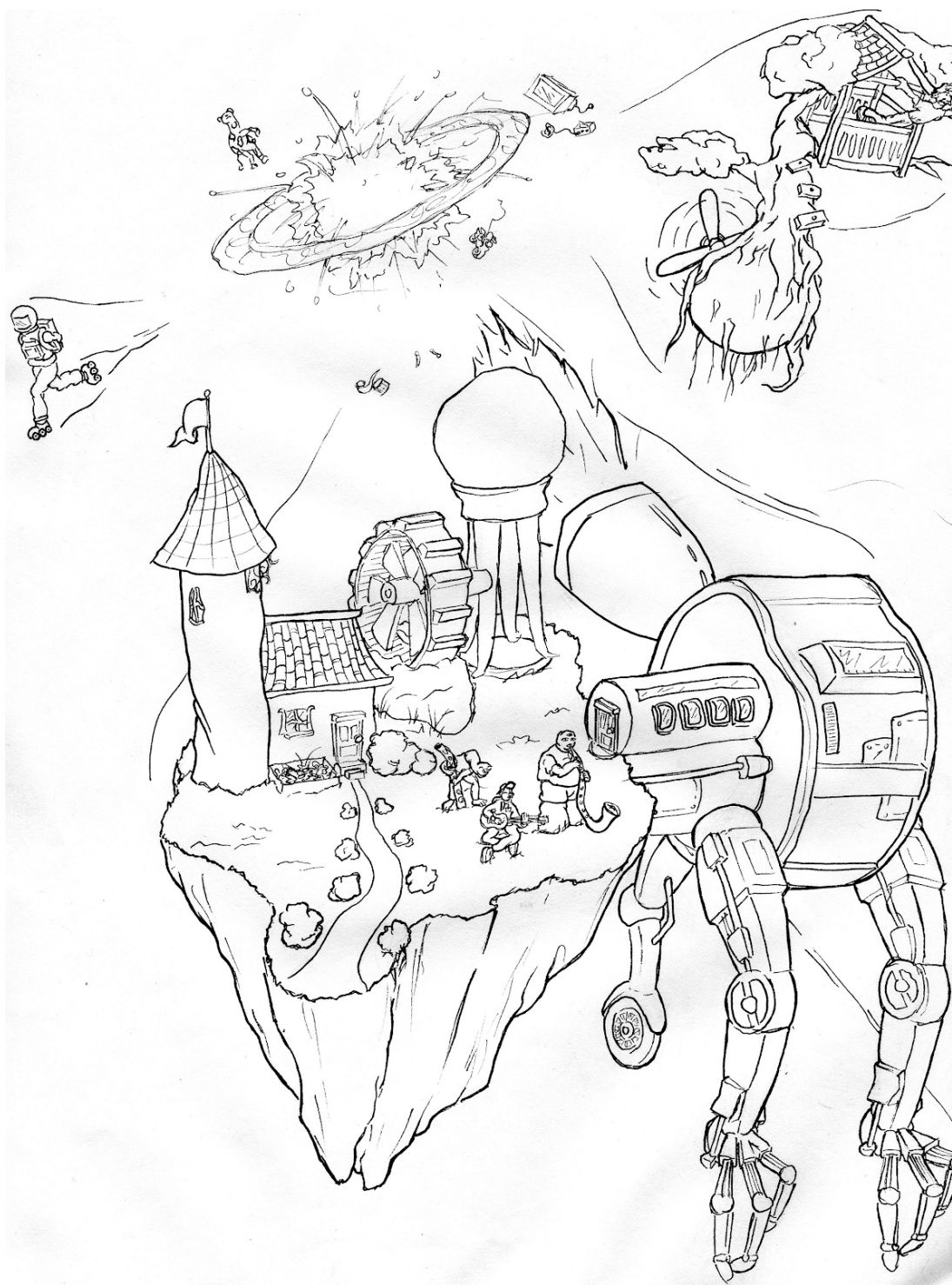
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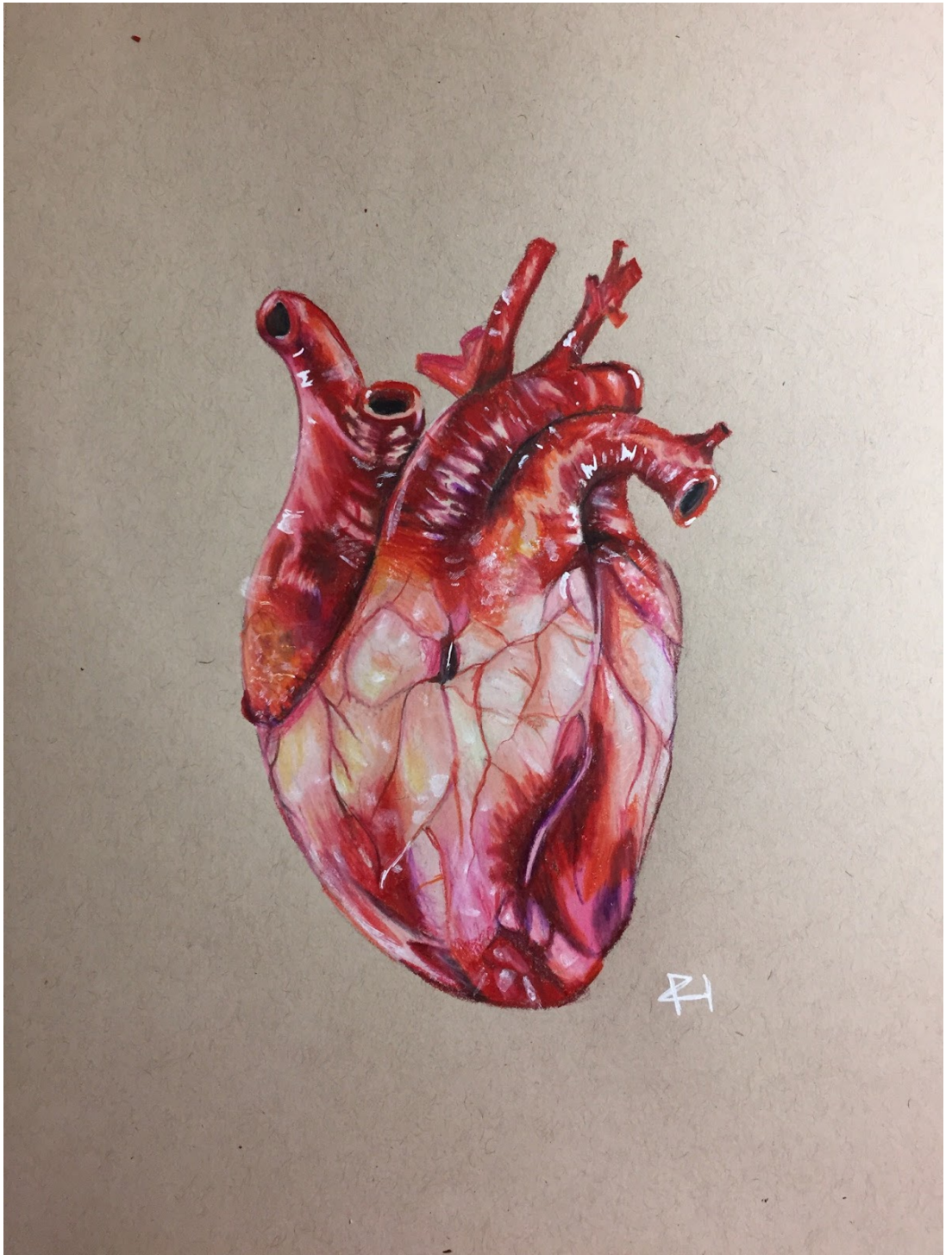


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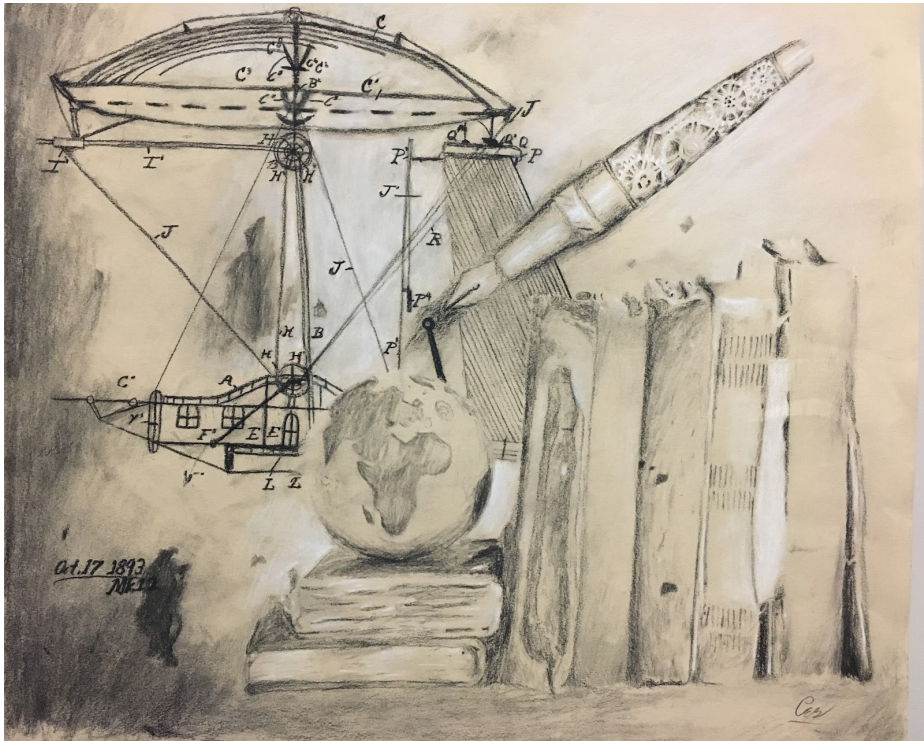




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