

INSTRESS

Journal of the Arts

2024





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Instress has been published by the students of Misericordia since December 1966. The word *instress* was coined by Jesuit priest and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. Bernadette Waterman Ward describes instress thus: “Instress is an action of the will — a moral action, for good or evil. Instress is assent, to use Newman’s term, to an inscape. To call out an inscape is a pleasure, though not one necessarily leading to God; … But the ability to see and instress inscapes is the imaginative faculty that makes love possible.” *Instress* at Misericordia is therefore an opportunity of the artistic and literary imagination to make possible something — call it *love* or even *grandeur* — like the following, from Gerard Manley Hobkins’ “God’s Grandeur”:

…
And for all this, nature spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs-
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

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SPECIAL THANKS

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BOIL & BUBBLE

1ST PLACE



Aubree Zimmerman

A LITTLE MISSION

By: Eleanor Pitcher

3RD PLACE

If she's quiet enough,
They won't hear.
The stolen heels too big
And makeup too pigmented
Will stay secret.

The lightsaber for danger,
Her bear for protection.
Tootsie rolls for sustenance
Juice as a potion.

A series of steps to the door
Or a maze to conquer?
The little frame won't notice
She has been found out.
A figure watches from the shadows.

Quick! Out! Out the door!
She flies to the sidewalk
Boards her vehicle,
A royal blue scooter.

She glides down the road,
Not long before the figure emerges,
Watching cautiously,
Waiting to intervene.

She needs more speed.
The too big heels ascend into the air,
Landing in the yard of a neighbor.
A casualty of her mission.

FLOWER FIELD BEAUTY



Jenna Chackan

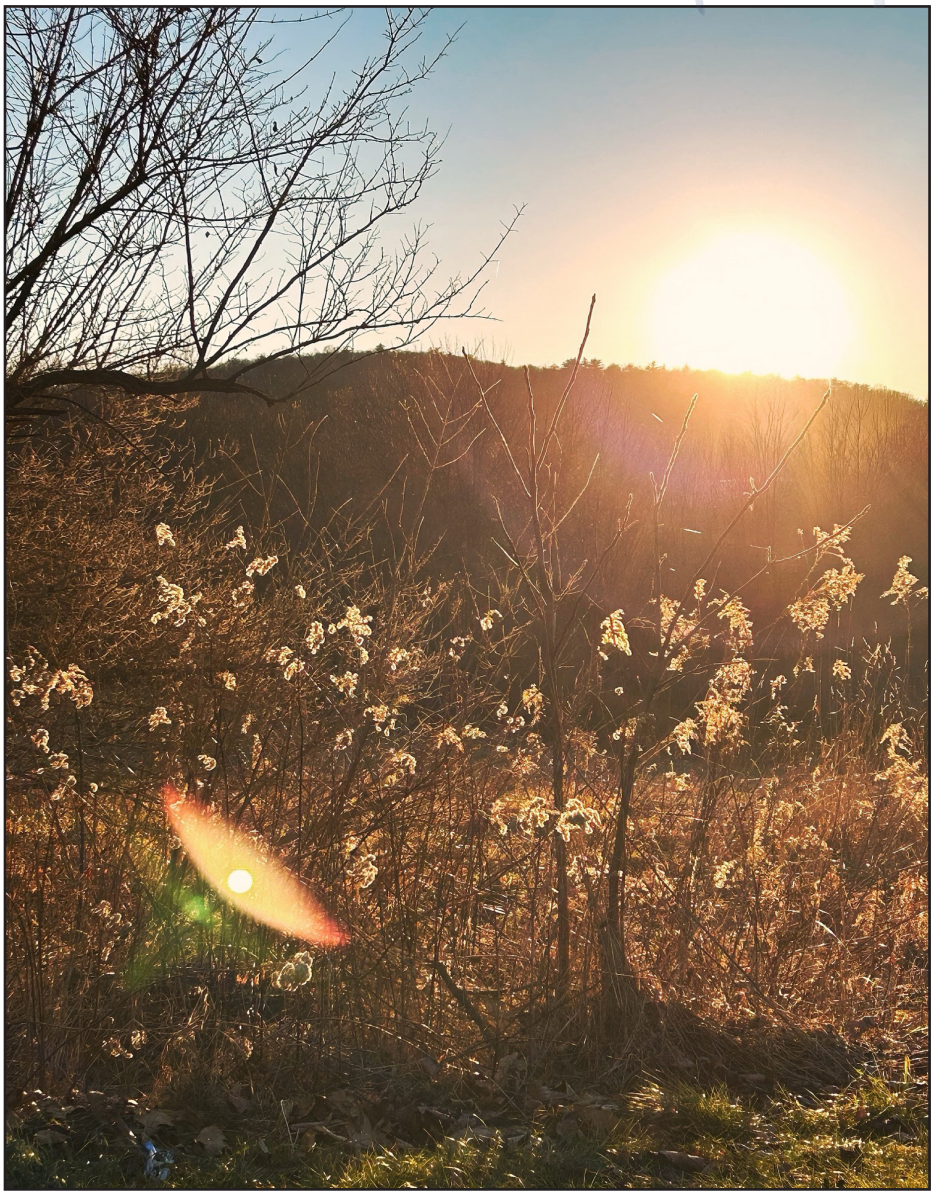
APPLE TREE

By: Layla (Pidge) Kolodzieski

Yesterday they cut down
The Apple Tree
that stood dormant
in the yard of
my childhood home.
Little hands were never
blessed enough to pluck
sweet fruit from her boughs.
Her fruits were sour.
And she has been dead
for a long time.

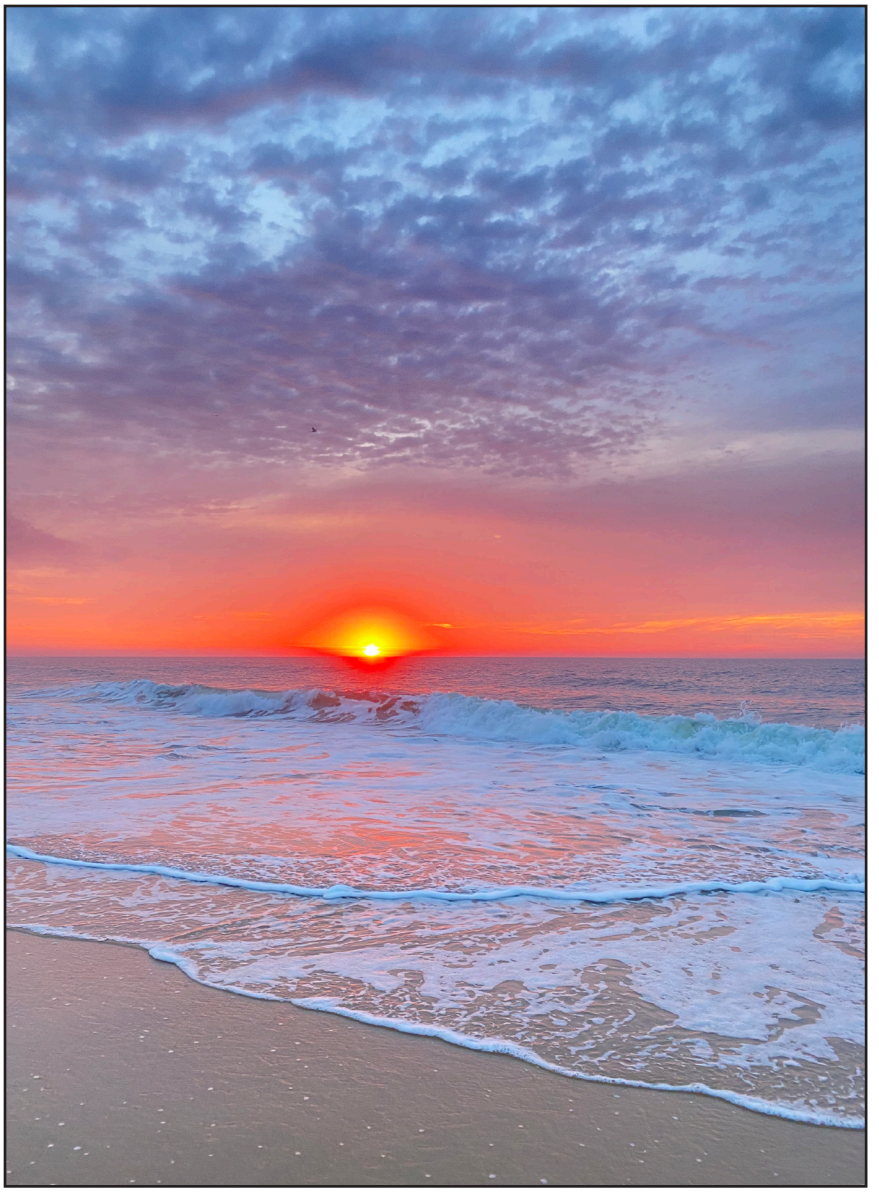
As saws were brought down
upon her mighty limbs,
dust filled the air.
My grandfather sawed,
and sawed,
and sawed.
Until all that remained
was a wide stump.
Rings spiraled and swirled toward her center.
Like water in a drain.
And her roots crumbled under my grandfather's boots.

HOPE FOR SUN



Samantha Romero

RISING SUN



Nicole Zurawski

RUMINATION

By: Chase Ross

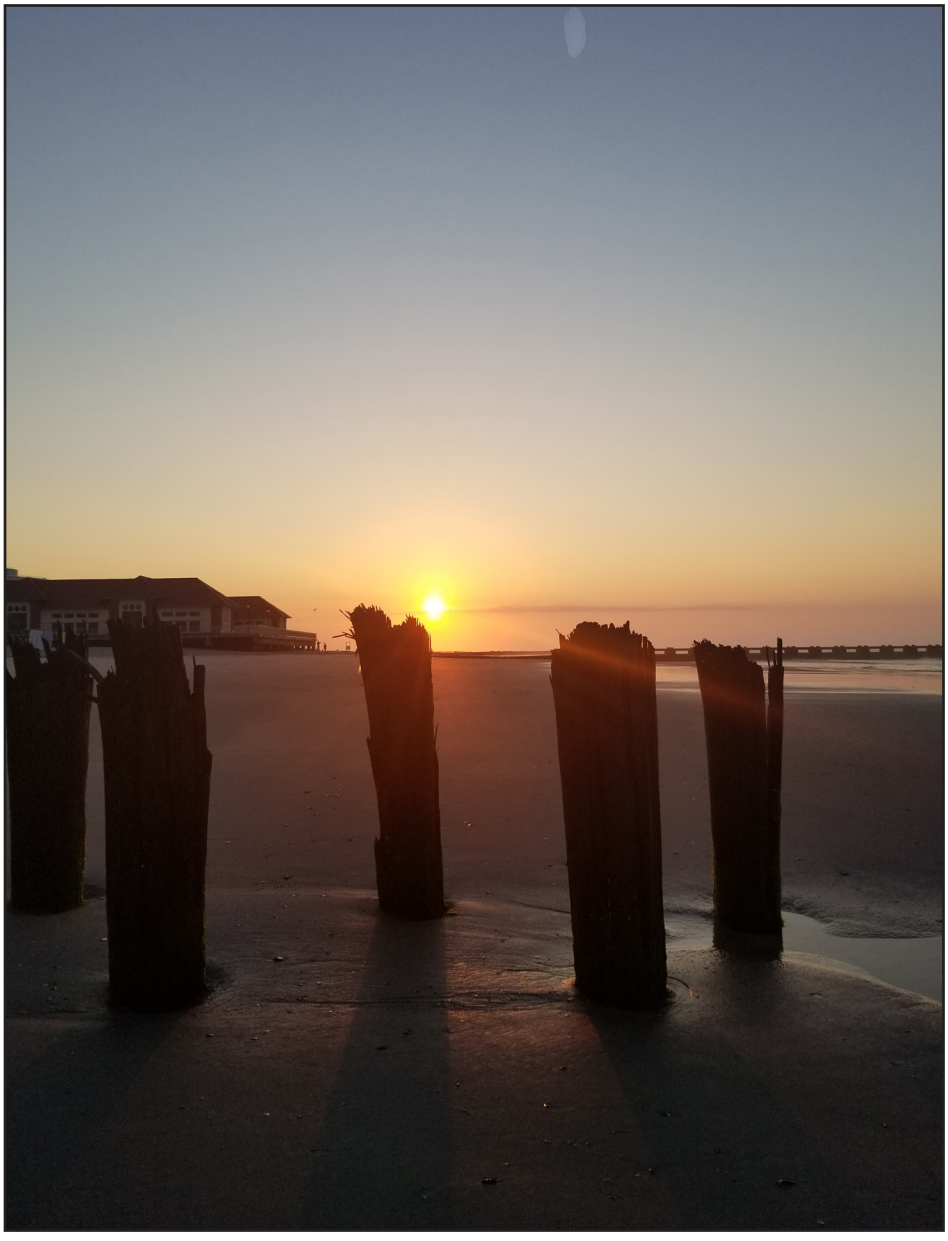
Rocky shores sit uncomfortable
In place beneath my feet,
watery foam laps the log
that I now claim as home.
Leaves rustle overhead in a silky breeze,
Pushing the page right from my hand,
leaving me with only my thoughts.

I can still hear the bonfire
crackling and popping,
twirling in the bitter air,
consuming all that falls prey
to this bright apex predator.
Smoke rises from the ashes,
filling my lungs,
clouding my mind,
puppeting my pen,
controlling every action,
every inaction,
every decision I make,
all as I sit and let the ash drown me out.

Flmaes rise and fall,
ignite and extinguish,
consume and create
with a never-ending cycle
of continuous ruination.
Slight chirps ring out
overtaking the flames,
reaching an unseen hand
through the illusionary smoke.

That bonfire becomes a bluebird
which found a home next to mine.
Its azure head looks at me
as its cobalt wings stretch around
its chest's early morning hue.
It gleefully leaps away and takes flight,
all as yesterday flies alongside.

THE HAZE



Chase Ross

MICHAEL & MATTHEW

By: Matthew McCaffery



I am Matthew. I have had a lot of time to think as of late, ever since Mikey passed. The journey may have lasted 46 years, but my newfound suffering has just begun. When a loved one passes, we all grasp to remember the fun memories and meaningful time we spent together. Purposefully disregarding the dark times life inevitably throws at you. I have had over a year to reminisce alone about the relationship. I wake up and still say "good morning, Mikey". His toothbrush is still in the bathroom. His dresser is still full. I still make dinner for two. I do not even eat the other half as it is not mine to eat. I do not know if others have this immense struggle with grief. Maybe it is due to the fact that Mikey was the first person I considered family to die. I lowered my one and only family member in the cold ground. I sat down to write these stories as a way to keep Mikey's memory alive. At 72, I am lucky I still have the memory that I do but I presume it will fail me sooner rather than later. The first tale that needs to be told is the first time I realized all relationships struggle. Before this incident, I thought Mikey and I were perfect, inseparable, and that of a fairy tale.

Both of our birthdays had just passed, we were both now 28 years old. Three days prior we had moved into our new apartment in a new city, Nashville. A studio apartment downtown made the most sense for us financially.

We moved to Nashville because I got somewhat of a dream job in advertising at an international company. It was my first day at my new job. I decided to surprise Mikey to celebrate. I picked up a tray of both of our favorite food, buffalo chicken pizza. Since it was my first day, I stayed a bit later to make my office feel more at home. I arrived at the door of our apartment and to my surprise the door was locked,

this was particularly odd as I had texted Mikey just minutes prior to unlock the door because I was almost home. I knocked as I did not have a key, our landlord was still making us an extra copy. As the door opened, I heard 3 voices, one of my lover and the others unfamiliar.

Mikey handed me 20 dollars, said “boy that was quick, just keep the change”, and promptly slammed the door.

I received a text. It was from Mikey and read “my parents just came, I’ll let you know when they leave”.

I stood at the door for what felt like 20 minutes but was probably more like two. My blood boiled at the same temperature as it would when I was ridiculed for being myself in high school. I had been married to this man for 2 years and he just made me feel like the smallest man in the world. I had been married to this man for 2 years and he just pretended like I was a pizza delivery guy. I had been married to this man for 2 years and he was too ashamed of me to introduce me to his parents. I had half a mind to knock on the door for a second time. I had always known Mikey struggled with his true self. I, on the other hand, knew who I was since I turned 13. I did as Mikey insinuated, I went to the lobby of our building and waited. Half an hour later, he escorted his parents out of the building as I humiliatingly ducked behind a column. He tried to justify the situation by regurgitating the same speech I heard tens of times about how his parents would disown him, and he is too embarrassed to come out to them. Our Nashville journey began with the worst night of our relationship.

Up until this point, he was everything to me. This was the first time I realized I was not everything to him. You know when you look at a building and you see a bunch of windows, but everyone in each window just sees the person on the sidewalk? This is how I viewed our relationship that night. I was inside the building looking at the only thing in my life, but Mikey was looking at a skyscraper.

It was clear to me that I needed to have more in my life after that night, but this problem would arise multiple times again. Clearly, from the insufferable grieving and longing for Mikey to be at my side even after a year after his funeral, I still view him as everything.

GOOD OLD DAYS



Nicole Zurawski

EMPATHY

By: Emma Blakiewicz

2ND PLACE

Sometimes I wonder
How you could know a place
Never having been there,
With the fluorescent lights and all, all the noise,
With lanky yellow chairs and rotted legs
(because, of course, yellow is a happy color)
With the swells of sickly antiseptic
So strong that my eyes water
Just by thinking about it,
And still, on my side
Of the invisible door,
I keep my vigil for you.
I wish we were closer.
I wish we weren't.

JANUARY REFLECTION



Matt Hinton

STAY GOLD



Aubree Zimmerman

BABY COUSINS

By: Eleanor Pitcher

I'll get just angry enough that I can get my work done before the sun comes up. I will play an album that I've heard too many times and think about the way I may never see my little cousins again. Or at least not until I become a doctor and have something to tell my aunt and uncle. Until then all I have is the smell of babies waking up from naps on a Wednesday afternoon in winter and the sounds of their yawns muffled by the shoulder of their big brother. Sweet and melancholic. I loved each of their smiles and laughs, all four varieties of similar genes. I loved them and I still do, but I know I will never get to be their big cousin, to be a part of their life like I was and want to. Family feuds change more than just where you go at the holidays. Those people I knew once in those clothes in that house in my memories don't exist anymore, and neither does the girl that committed it all to memory. So here I sit in the quiet of a dorm room (the sun about to rise, the work not quite done), thinking about baby cousins like they're all still too small to understand why I don't visit.

CINNAMON HOME
(Acrylic Painting)



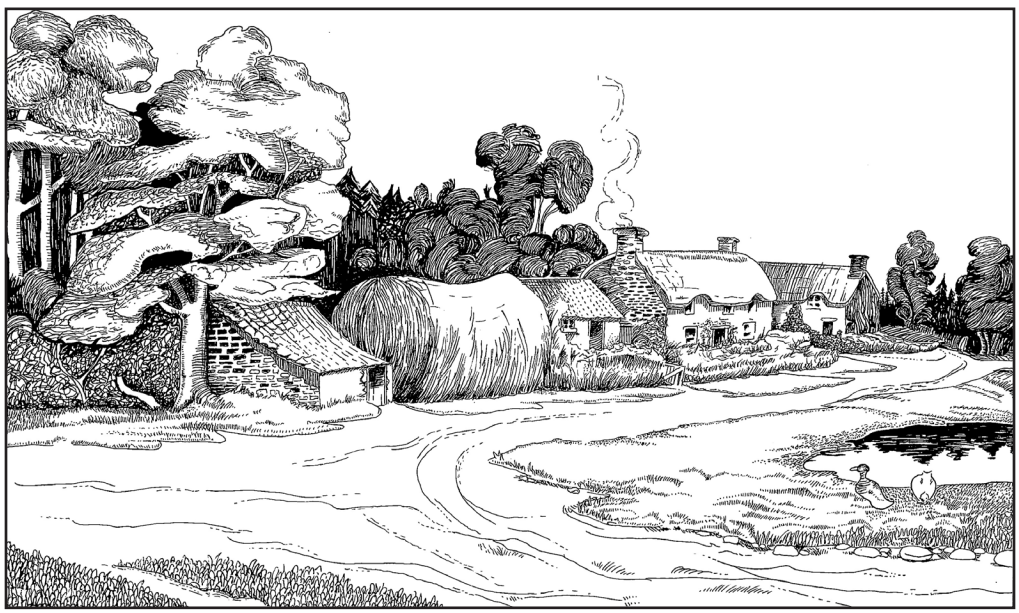
Eleanor Pitcher

JUST AS A SCULPTOR CHIPS...

By: Matthew McCaffery

Originating from a heavy block,
possibly marble.
Naturally just a dense rock,
nurtured, artful.
Cared for, thought out.
Loved for, no doubt.
Just as we wake up in disarray,
just as a sculptor chips away.

TWO LITTLE DUCKS
(Ink Painting)



Abbey Stokes

SNOWBOAT



Matt Hinton

WHITE RAIL



Matt Hinton

DIRE WOLF

By: Chase Ross

Not so long ago, only 13 millennium gone by,
there lived a single wolf, loved by many
yet hated by none. He roamed the land,
presiding over his kingdom.
Never had he flashed his fang,
nor had he slashed his claw,
ruling over his realm without
an iron fist, upholding his law
with none but a gentle grasp.

His rule was benevolent,
filling his pack with reverence
as he welcomed all to his family.
He trekked along his life,
ruling from his royal rug.
He went on countless journeys,
leading others to start their own.
He would watch each and every creature
as they would come and go,
always making sure they were welcomed back home.

His journeys slowly became more arduous
as he approached old age.
White whiskers like powder snow
grew and grew, blanketing his face.
Soon his journeys became trips,
his expeditions mere outings.
Yet enthusiasm never escaped him,
as he enjoyed every second
of every excursion, dreading the day
he sets out for the final time.

His muscles grew weak, his bones
turned brittle, yet he would still
patrol his kingdom, ensuring
his family, his pack, was safe,
always returning to rule from his royal rug.
His hips grew weary, his trips
more laborious, until eventually,
without warning, his expeditions came to an end.

Patrolling his kingdom, he dreamed
of once again conquering mountains,
running through plains,
and discovering long lost lakes
and passages, looking through
the land surrounding his territory,
longing for just one more journey,
and so he began to pace through his domain.

He paced and paced, head caught in his dreams.
As he passed the same bushes and flowers
as he always had, all he saw was
a brand new scene. Maybe he was on a shore
of some hidden lake, finding a fallen log
to rest on, bluebirds flying by,
maybe the tundra where he could run
and enjoy the vast snowy landscape,
or maybe a new civilization with some
locked aways citizen watching his roam free.

His pack watched him pace minute after minute.
The minutes turned into hours.
Hours turned into days.
His pakc speaked of his patrol,
worried for his sake as the march
went on, and on, and on.

His roayl rug laid lonely,
as his place of rest became
dormant and unused, just waiting
for this trek to reach an end.

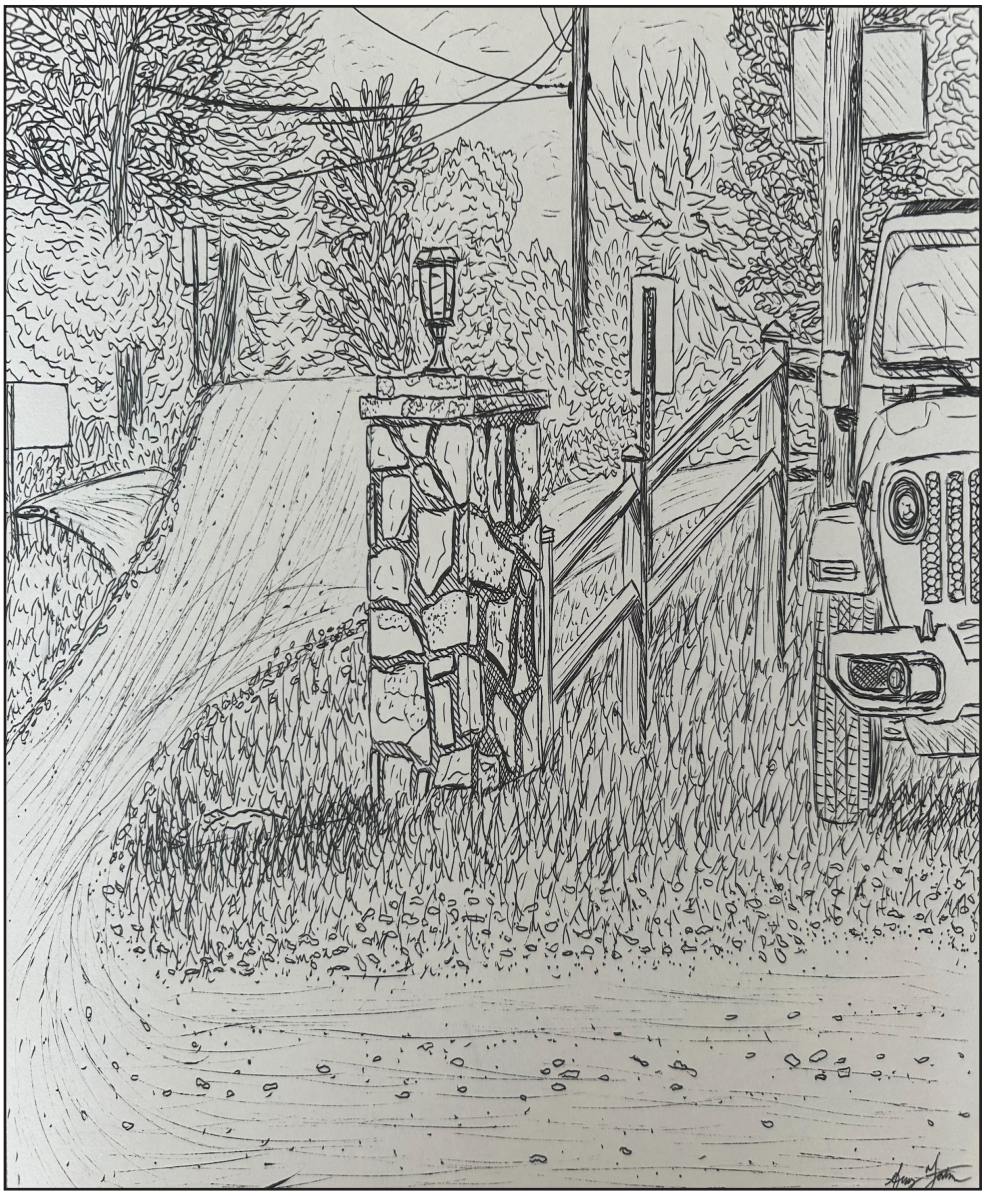
His legs grew weary,
his eyes just short of crazed as
his paws began to drag behind.
Stepping on broken toes, he continued to pace,
to dream, to once again roam free.

One of his pack, out of sheer concern,
brought him down, laying him on his royal rug.
Chaotic eyes darted around the room,
exhausted paws lay still on the ground.
His mind still ran wild with dreams of journeys
and aspirations of voyages.

His wear breath filled the air
as the royal rug began to rise.
He began to calm, looking around
to find himself in a new land.
Cliffs of marble surround him,
a waterfall cascading through one of them,
all as he continued to ride his royal rug.

He looked around more and saw his pack,
no, his family surrounding him.
His weary face smiled, looking to
each of them with tears in
their eyes as he ;aid there on
his royal rug, on his final journey,
never to rise again.

SUMMER AFTERNOON
(Pencil Drawing)



Avery Fortuner

FULL BLOOM
(Acrylic Painting)



Abbey Stokes

MORNING RAYS



Nicole Zurawski

REGROWTH



Samantha Romero

THE GARDEN

By: Aubree Zimmerman



Over the river along through the pines
you'll come to a garden that used to be mine.
The trees bear no fruit, no saplings or seeds,
and all of the paths have grown over with weeds.

The Eden in my childhood
was planted long ago
in a valley cold as wintergreen
and frosted o'er with snow.

Over the river along through the pines
a path to a garden choked under with vines;
over the valley and under these trees
I'm diffing for answers that nobpdy sees.

The saplings still surviving here
can't be bright and great,
but patient little things
waiting for a change of fate.

Buried somewhere 'neath the dirt on my boots
lies a child whose fear was too great to plant roots.
I'll find her somewhere and unearth the bones,
piece myself togehter and carry me home.

BURNT OUT

(Acrylic Painting)



Makenzi Walsh

BRIDGES

By: Makenzi Walsh

Rage.
It burns within.
I can feel it blister, hear it splinter.
I can no longer glide atop shallow waters.
Fire courses through cracks in my bloodstream.
I clench my fists, grind my teeth, my bridge is shaking.
Their fake, repatitive cries for help make me scream.
My phone blows up with hope of redemption, they're mistaken.
Narcissism crashes in waves, they admit no wrong, always the victim.
This bridge is breaking, unable to withstand arrogance or greed.
I am expected to cater their needs, what a botched system.
Each text loosens another steel nail, I crave to be freed.
I cannot do this anymore; I'm afraid I'll drown.
But don't worry dear "freind" YOU have my attention.
Sorry MY text responses were never found.
I was too busy lighting the matches to answer you.
May the bridges I burn light the
path I take on my way to
find MY sanity.
Our friendship.
It burns.
Finally.
Free.

IRON FURNACES



Rebecca Steinberger

WATERS

By: Makenzi Walsh

Peace.
It settles within.
The heat begins to cease.
It's gentle breeze covers my skin.
I can hear the crackling fire in the distance.
I let its comforting blaze accompany me.
I float relaxed, watching it melt into nonexistence.

My nose graced with the scent of burning wood, such bliss.
What I've granted myself is divine, I smile pure and true.
I cannot be reached at this time, so spare me, please resist.
My feelings were trivial, after everything we've been through.
That bridge is in pieces, you have nowhere to turn.
I tore out those steel nails, watched the wood sway from your mistakes.
I lit those matches, ready for you to give me a reason to watch it all burn.

Those flames now dance across dark water, nothing left at stake.
I feel the smoke cloud around me, remnants of wood almost gone.
I decide I no longer need bridges for those who matter to me.
For them I will swim, the waves will guide me rightfully.
You weren't worth my love, I deserved better.
The water swallows the fire.
That bridge is finally gone.
Here I am.
Finally.
Free.

HELLO FROM THE OTHER SIDE



Rebecca Steinberger

THE NEXT STEP
(Oil Painting)

1ST PLACE



Abbey Stokes

HOMES OF CELLARS HIDING

By: Aubree Zimmerman

You'll find me listening for thunder,
listening for the rain
to someone who's been struck before
all storm clouds look the same.

Perhaps it's temporary,
perhaps just passing through,
but I have built foundations
that passing storms uproot.

To learn to love the tunder
is not something I can choose—
I have fought and bled to get here
and I have too much to lose.

I can't make homes of cellars,
hiding from that looming storm.
No amount of wind rocks me to sleep
and fear can't keep me warm.

KEEPING SOMEONE OUT… OR KEEPING SOMEONE IN…



Rebecca Steinberger

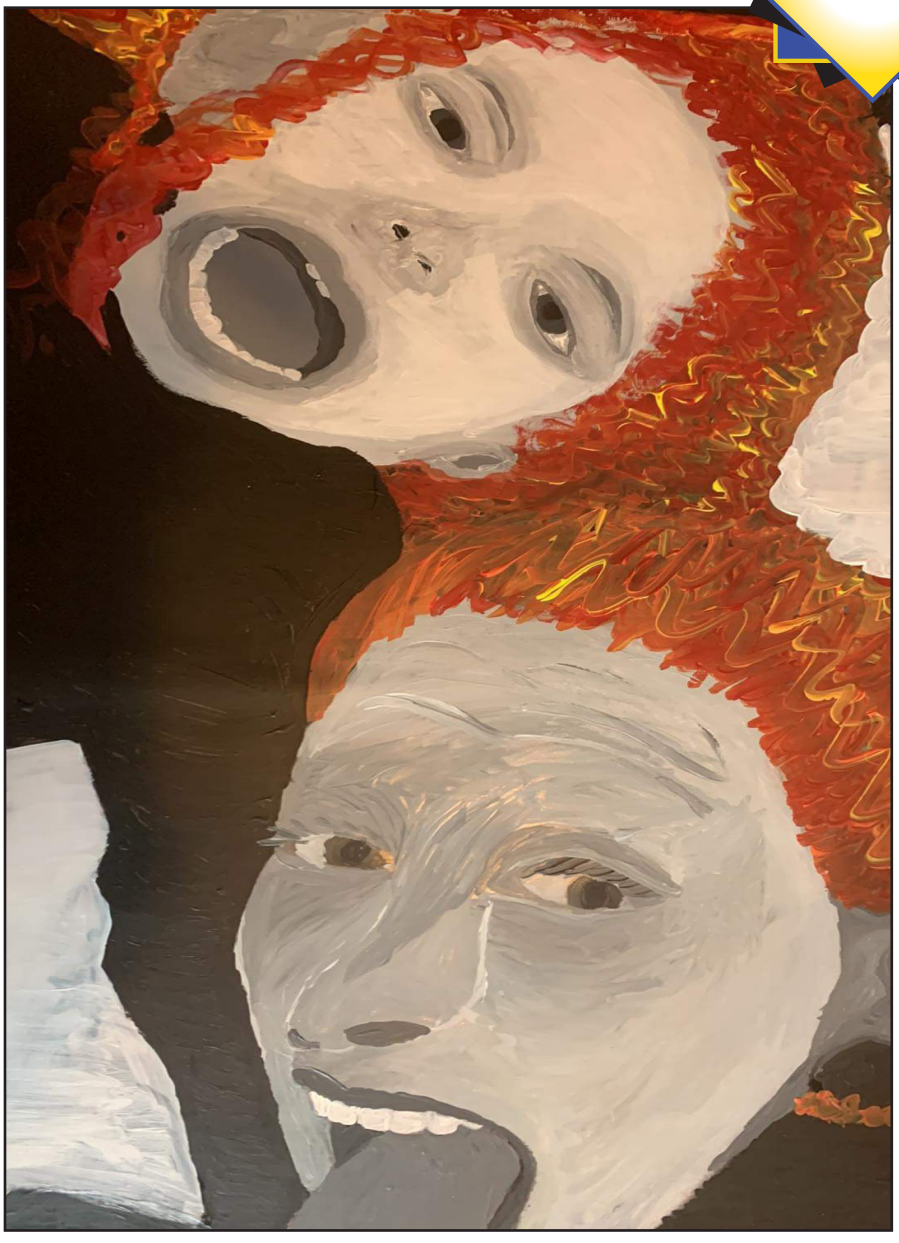
OUR UNKNOWN ENTERPRISE

By: Emma Blakiewicz

When i say i want to know how the universe ticks,
What i really mean is how
For four point five billion years the moon danced
With the sun and regardless of missteps for thousands of years
A small gravity neither can understand has brought us both here,
That in this dimly lit empty space I am the Milky Way
Drawn in by your Andromeda with
Your foreign stardust's and unknown planets
And unnamed atoms yet it doesn't scare you
That in four point five billion years we are set to collide
And waht i really mean is that I was taught
Love is having so many options
But choosing to choose the same one over and over again,
And in the face of an endless expanse in which
Humanity can hardly fathom the size of,
The only thing I want to know are the names
Of all the stars you have in your eyes,
And beyond my understanding I hold a gravity
That does the same to you.

MOMMY & ME
(Acrylic Painting)

2ND PLACE



Emily Davenport

GRAY WHISPERS

By: Eleanor Pitcher



Lingering between thoughts of cold air and spices, plane rides and sweaters, there exists clouds of dark gray. These shapes that live and breathe, change and adapt. They transform into whispers to my own blood about softly broken promises I tried to keep. They whisper that the cracks in the ice hurt no one but me. I used to listen intently between ice cold plunges. Now I stay warm and crush cardamom between my fingers while cinnamon sticks simmer with tea leaves. There's something there, some sort of twisted peace to my twisted reality like warm vapors escaping the scalding water. I remember your eyes lingering on those lines I drew. You asked me *why*? The same feeling comes each time there's eyes on those lines. I can't decide if it's pride or shame. Let me show you what I don't want you to see. I'll crush my spices and boil my teas. I'll plan days in Amsterdam and eat sandwiches no one's heard of. Next summer you'll see those same light lines on my bare ankle and arm, and maybe your stomach will sink, or maybe you'll feel relief. I think it's like a dance, how the clouds get wispy and gray, floating and jumping through it all, threatening to land at my feet.

SHEPHERD'S FIELD



Daniel Myers

HOPE



Daniel Myers

APPALACHIA HYMN

By: Aubree Zimmerman

Mountainous curve of your throat
with its shadows and ridges
and I the strom, rolling in
to bed in the dark.
Love is older than bones,
older than coal and stones;
old is what we'll grow.
Love will outlive us
when I collide against
the jagged silhouette of you
and we swallow the sky.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

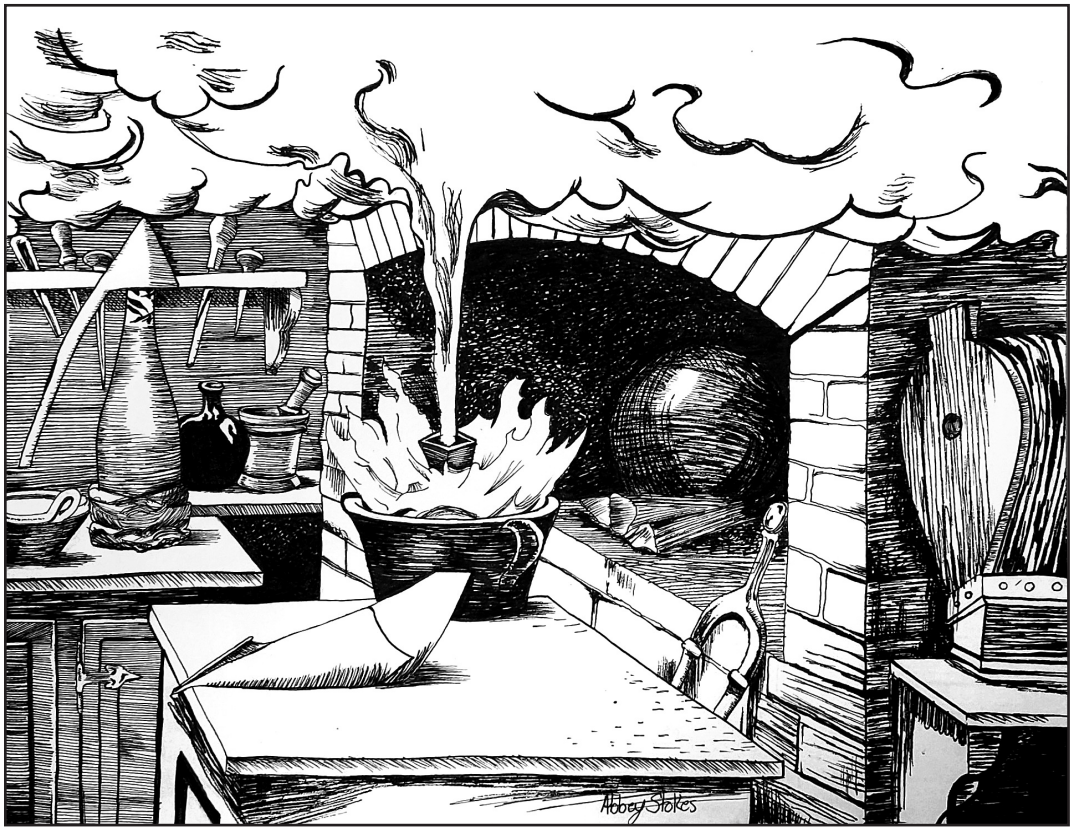
Rebecca Steinberger

FUNERALS

By: Eleanor Pitcher

I have been to four, each with their own set of mourners, words, and remains. I find it off putting that I am transitioning to the phase of life in which you follow and hold your friends while they bury their parents, and in rare cases, you just watch a parent as they bury your friend. It's not quite that dark, but maybe it isn't exactly all light. It's a mix of the two. I sat in the church at the fourth and I could feel this orb of energy, massive and light blue, as it settled atop all of our heads and grazed the ornate brown beams of the ceiling. At the third, the room felt tight. As if there was not room for a single thought unrelated to the dead. At the second, the church was loud with great thunderclaps and downpour, a life that had held more power than it was ready to let go of. And at the first one, it was soft. Soft like two lovers finally returning to each other; leaving behind only love in their wake. I collect them like cards, each of those moments that I sat and grieved someone. Oh, how I allowed myself to connect with strangers and loved ones as we all let go of a collection of plans, we once had.

TIME FOR DINNER
(Ink Painting)



Abbey Stokes

LULLABY OF THE CROW

By: Aubree Zimmerman



The young lord's son who dances with crows,
he tells them the secrets that nobody knows.
Under the willows and by garden rose,
the young lord's son, he grows and he grows.

The fair lord's heir, he sings them a song,
in flutters and laughter they're waltzing along.
How then, asks he, how could it be wrong?
The fair lord's heir hums each tune like a psalm.

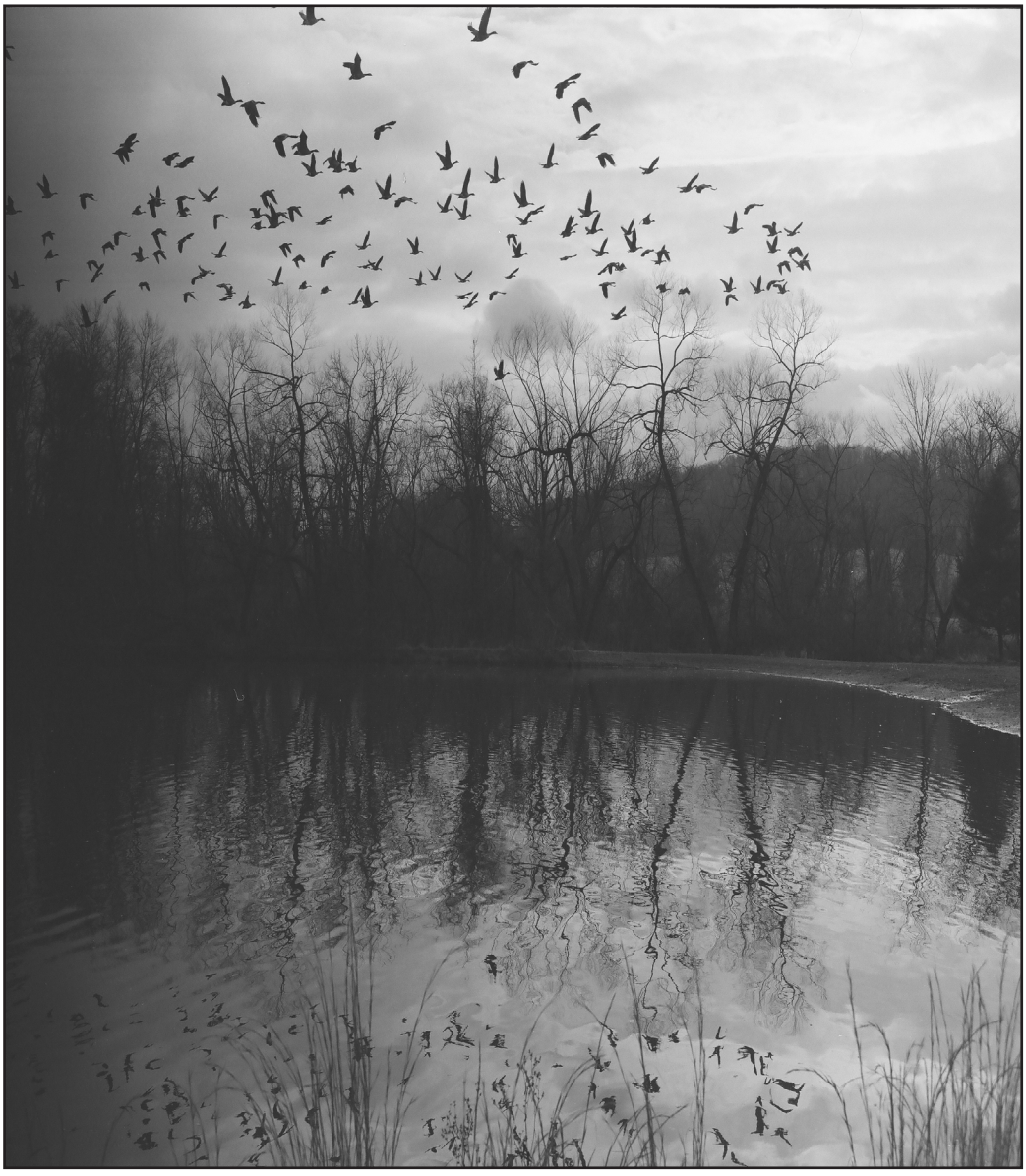
The tired lord's squire, he visits some days
between dinners and dueling and meetings and blades
beseech him for wisdom, he has it in spades
but songs fade away in the quiet old glade.

The young lord's son, a crown on his head,
wanders and wonders which maiden to wed.
His mind is an ocean of battles and dread
and the crows of the willow are silent instead.

A fair young man took the mantle of king,
ends all his letters with a wax sealing ring.
No blooming rose, neither tied up with string—
but marked with the crows who taught him to sing.

An old king, he sighs to the years passed him by
"Though paths of this garden, halls I call mine,
my child, my wife, lift their hands to the sky
and my friends still remember, sing our lullaby."

LATE FLOCK



Matt Hinton

MARK OF PHILIP

By: Emma Blakiewicz

2ND PLACE

**Based off of Dana Terrace's "The Owl House"*

Phillip had assumed God had a plan for him. In the blueprints of the world the inner workings of man had been written: Adam was to fall. Evil was to win. Only then was his Christ to come again. This was just common sense to anyone that lived in Gravesfield in sixteen thirteen, hopefully, because if it was then quite a few people would be getting saved, and in the end that's all that mattered.

The story had fully enraptured him. He was always willing to learn more, attentive to the sermons on Sunday morning, looking in every crease and crevice he could find. He was constant and unchanging, the fire on the canticle candles, bending and swaying to the hymnal cries of praise and mercy, hands towards the heavens in an attempt to grasp his own wings from thin air. He thought that if he stood still enough, and if he stayed quiet enough, he would hear the angels crown him, that it would be Paul and Peter and Phillip, that he would never die.

But Paul Peter Phillip didn't sound right to him, as much as he forced it. Something was missing. He belonged to this big, broad, mysterious story, but where?

"Pip, you've got to *stand*. No butts on the pew."

Phillip, dejectedly, rose from his slumped over position in the pew. The only voice he'd be hearing was his brother's, and the priest's monotone drawling on in the background. He didn't like standing; Caleb was taller and could see the scene unfold over the sea of heads, Phillip couldn't. Being on his shoulders would earn a slap on the wrist for the both of them. So, Phillip's experience of the entity he'd be destined to serve for the rest of his life, and even after, was cotton shirts and suspenders in front of him. Boring.

At least Caleb had flashed him a quick grin as he looked over.

"What was this sermon about again?"

"Something something snakes, something something sin." Caleb's shrug indicated that he didn't really know either. Phillip suppressed a giggle, avoiding the disdainful stares of those around him. "Did I tell you that they caught a witch last night?"

"Ooh, do you know who?" Phillip, barely contained in a whisper, was interested now. His eyebrows practically darted out of his forehead.

"No, I don't. There's a public trial tomorrow. We should go."

Should as in have to. Neither of them particularly enjoyed trials. It was all the same. Witch gets convicted. Witch gets hung. Witch is dead. Aside from being gruesome and morbid in every sense, hangings were also incredibly boring. For once he would like to see the witch beg to be spared, or put up a fight, even use her wicked powers against the council in rebuke, something to truly prove that she is in fact evil, only to have it crushed under righteous heels.

Caleb, on the other hand, was surprisingly more squeamish than his younger counterpart. He could never look the convicted in the eye. He lowered his head as the floor dropped out beneath them. Sometimes, he almost seemed sorry for them. Phillip could care less. He only looked away when the deed was done, only barely flinching as the floor fell out, staying behind only until he was certain justice was served.

"What is this, the fourth of the year? How many have we had?" Caleb's fingers fiddled in his palm-to-palm position, pushing up against one another, actively scouring his memory. Phillip snorted, earning them a few stares.

"Not enough. The wicked don't rest and neither should we."

Caleb swallowed hard, staring ahead. It was easy to see that Caleb was slightly uncomfortable with Phillip's attitude regarding the trials, but it wasn't exactly his fault. His sense of justice was fixed and Caleb's was not.

Even then, though, he was slightly jealous of his older brother. He walked with certainty in each step, confident that if he should stumble the angels would break his fall. In the infinite plan of Paul and of Peter he had a place—his brother's keeper. Phillip could scarcely remember his mother, much less his father. And in this tragic two-man band, in this wildly rotating universe Caleb was the sphere of the Sun, blazing his trail in blackness for his Moon to follow.

It was quite a bit of responsibility for a fourteen-year old to take on, but the Lord's timing was always right. And Caleb had only risen to the challenge.

"Don't you think it's a little ironic, Pip?" His older brother broke the silence.

"What's ironic?"

"'Thou shalt not kill.'"

A bolt of panic shot through Phillip, only growing in intensity as the eyes on them both glowered.

"Caleb! Are you saying the Lord's word is ironic?" And to his horror, his older brother had almost *laughed*.

"No, of course not. But isn't it strange? 'Thou shalt not kill.' We're talking about mercy today and we will show none tomorrow."

Caleb's gentle smirk did nothing to ease the pounding of his chest. If the people, now staring intently at the both of them, some even frowning slightly, had been listening, they would no doubt tell the priest. If the priest had heard, he'd declare them heretics.

And heretics got themselves hung.

"So what? They're sinners! They get what they deserve!" Phillip hissed the words, straining to keep his voice down and eyes forward.

"Yes, but aren't we all?" Indifferent to Phillip's pleading eyes and harsh, hushed tone, Caleb hums, only lifting a questioning brow higher.

"We're doing what's right and just!"

"'Let thou that has sinneth not cast the first stone.'"

"It doesn't matter! These witches, these *barbarians* will reach the children and then-"

"Ahem." Somewhere in the flurry of brotherly banter, the priest had caught wind of their little argument. Phillip could feel the blood leaving his face, gripping his brother's hand, which was trembling between his fingers. "Is there a problem, Mr. Wittebane?"

"No, Father McKinley. I apologize for the interruption." Caleb choked the words out, trying and failing to hide both the embarrassment and the fear in his voice. Phillip was rendered entirely speechless. For a moment, they were both certain they would die.

Instead, the priest only shook his head.

"You two will be present at the trial tomorrow, yes? You would be well to learn something." His breath eased slightly. The reverend was angry at the interruption, but not *that* angry. Maybe a slap on the wrist and a stern talking-to, but not claims of apostasy. Not yet. Caleb's tremors refused to slow down.

"With all due respect, Father. Phillip had no hand in this. I will accept the consequences for my petty banter if you leave him out of this."

Now all eyes were on him. The priest turned to the altar, considering. Phillip, eyes full of confusion and awe, tugged on his older brother's arm, who offered him a kind smile, despite the receding wobble of his lower lip.

"As you will, Caleb." The words came across the priest's shoulder. Caleb sighed in relief, straightening his stance as the priest's glaring eyes landed on him once more. "For now the two of you are to be separated."

"Go, Pip." The voice was a gentle whisper, afraid to cause any more cacophony. Phillip only clung on tighter to his brother's sleeve. He looked up to see a serene face looking back at him, leaning forward into his ear. "I'll meet you in the rectory."

To his right, the townspeople shrunk into their pews, making room for him, cheeks flushed red at the disdainful eyes aimed at the both of them, but understanding that he didn't have much of a say, he nodded slightly moving into the path created for him. Awkwardly he stepped through the silence to the pew closest to the wall. Satisfied, the priest made his way back to the pulpit.

But when Phillip looked over to Caleb's pew, he caught him smiling back at him. Unabashed. Unashamed. In a way, triumphant.

Father McKinley cleared his throat a little louder than necessary, Caleb regaining his full attention to the altar.

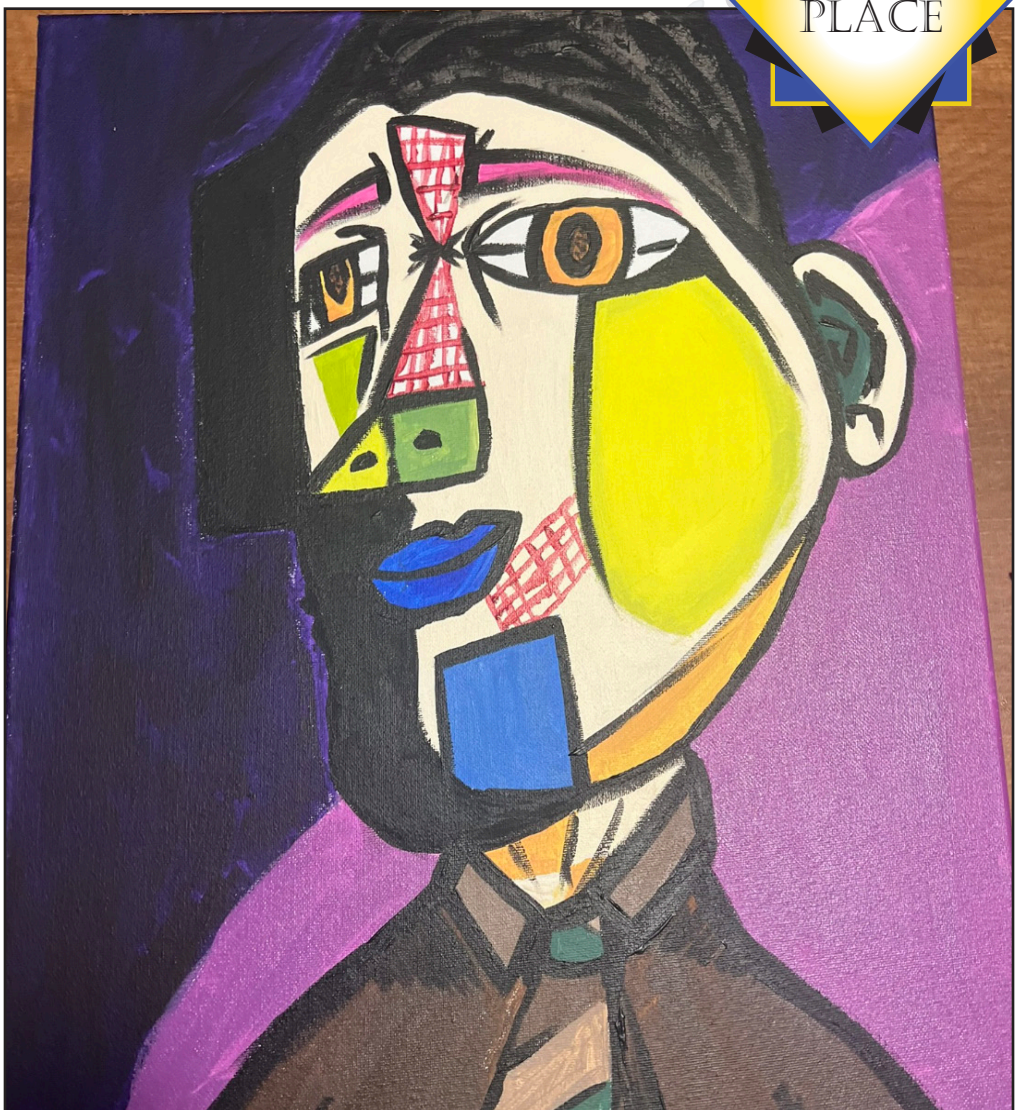
"Let us continue. And after Adam knew his wife, he bore two sons in original sin…"

Caleb had taken the blow for him, and Phillip had almost laughed; it was such an older brother thing to do. He really was his keeper.

What did that make Phillip?

ANTONIA
(Acrylic Painting)

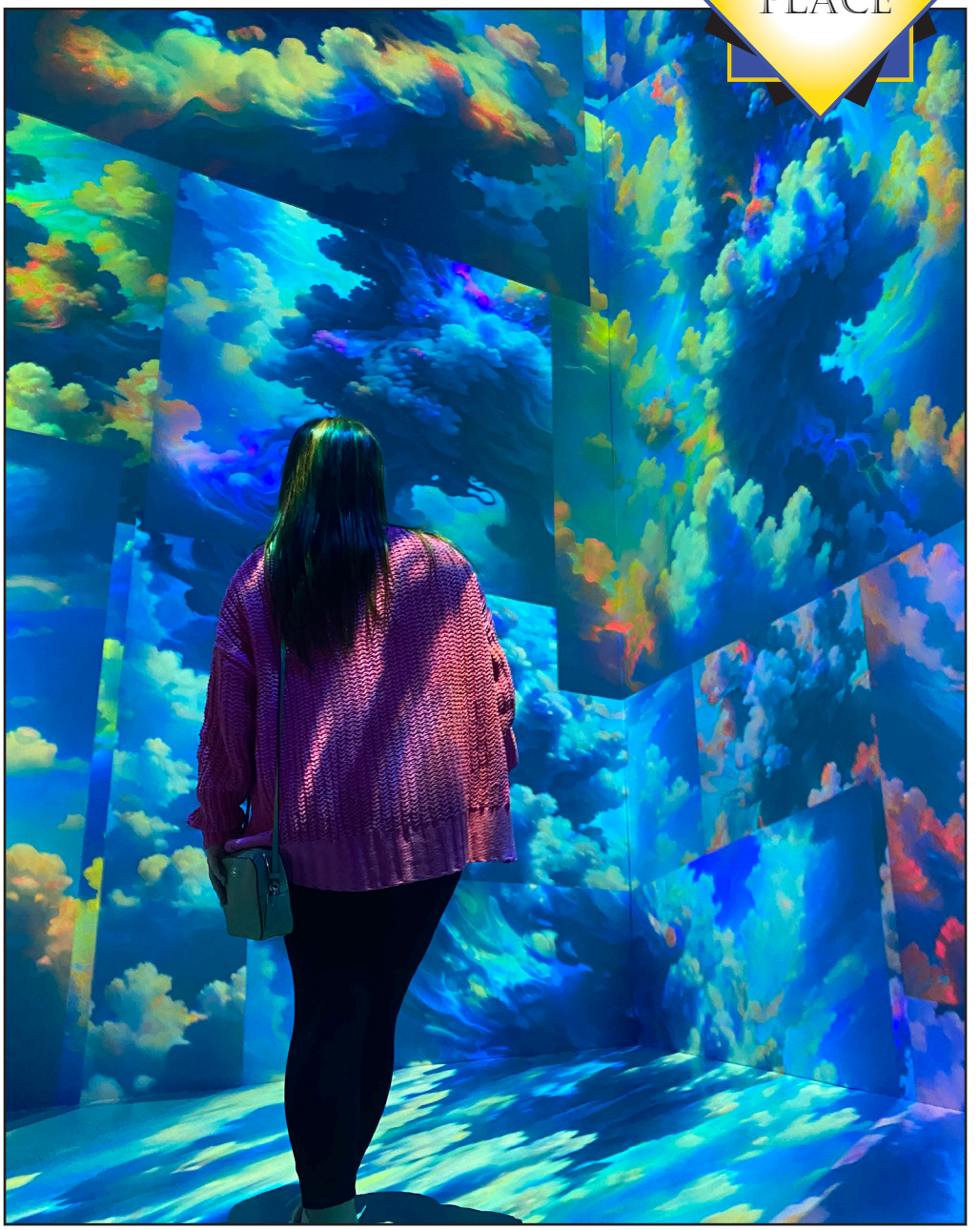
3RD PLACE



Alana Hadden

CLOUDY MINDS

2ND PLACE



Nicole Zurawski

NOT KNUCKLES

(A very short play)

By: Jason Miller

KNUCKLES and **SWIFTIE**, two…ahem…legitimate businessman, are standing in line waiting to buy concert tickets. They are surrounded by unseen fans. They wear suits. They wear gloves. They rest their gloved hands on the shiny fabric pulled taut over their ample bellies.
Knuckles: Two or four?
Swiftie: Huh?
Knuckles: What'd he say? Two or four?
Swiftie: I wasn't,uh listening.
Knuckles: What'd you mean you weren't listening?
Swiftie: Watch.
He turns away."Hey, Swiftie!" *from off stage*.
Who's,uh that?
Knuckles: Huh?
Swiftie: Ya didn't,uh hear that?
Knuckles: I wasn't listening.
A moment.
Swiftie: Someone here knows me.
Knuckles: What are you going on about?
Swiftie: Sure, Mr. Grammar, end your sentence with a preposition.
Knuckles: Huh?
Swiftie: For about which you are going on…
Knuckles: I could shoot you for that.
A moment.
Two or four?
Swiftie: This again?
Knuckles: Three? Seven?
Swiftie: We just listing numbers now? Eleve…Thirteen!
"Thirteen!" *from off stage*.
What's,uh up with these people?
A moment.
They moved.
They move ahead.
Knuckles: Two or Four?

Swiftie: Jesus. Four.
Knuckles: You sure, Swiftie?
Swiftie: Yes, four.
Knuckles: I thought you weren't—
"Hey, Swiftie!" *from off stage.*
Swiftie: There's,uh no way ya didn't,uh hear that.
Knuckles: That, I heard.
Swiftie: Who's,uh here who'd,uh know me?
Knuckles: You think he sent someone else too?
Swiftie: Nah.
A moment.
You think?
Knuckles: I mean, think about it.
Swiftie: It's,uh for her. She's little, but she gets what she wants.
Knuckles: Yeah, but, one large for two? It's just a concert.
A moment.
So, we need to stand out here? He couldn't use his connections?
Swiftie: It's,uh how it is. Hope we get'em.
Knuckles: There are a lot of people here.
A moment.
Swiftie: They moved.
They move up. A moment.
Knuckles: We'd know if someone else were here...wouldn't we?
Where's Shoulders?
Swiftie: At the tops of your arms.
A moment.
Knuckles: I should shoot you for that.
He gives Swiftie a look and then continues:
Me and you are here, Jake's back / at
Swiftie: I know where Jake is. Mo...move.
They move up.
Knuckles: Alright, alright. Joe's in, Harry's running protection, Calvin's in, Cory's...
Swiftie *makes the sign of the cross and looks down.*
What about Snickers?
Swiftie: Who name's,uh these fu—
Knuckles: Hey...
Swiftie: These funny names, is what I was gonna say.
Knuckles: There's kids around, that's all. Be a mensch.
Swiftie: What now?

Knuckles: Don't be a douche.
Swiftie: Wise guy.
Knuckles: Move up.
They move up. A moment.
Swiftie: I bet it's,uh Travis.
"Travis!" *from off stage.*
Knuckles: They know Travis, too.
Swiftie: That's,uh it. He's,uh gotta be here.
"If he's here, she's here!" *from off stage. And then* "She's here!" *It echoes and builds.*
Knuckles: Stand back.
"She's here, she's here!" *repeats. The thunderous sound of hundreds of young adults drowns out* Knuckles *and* Swiftie *as they continue to talk. A moment. It's quiet.*
Swiftie: Well, look at that.
Knuckles: Window's open.
They approach.
Four please.
He turns back to Swiftie, *waving the cash at him:*
This just worked out, huh?
Swiftie: I don't,uh get it.
Knuckles: I told you it would work. Lack of...uh...permanence.
Swiftie: Lack of what?
Knuckles: Point is, it worked.
Swiftie: I'm,uh still not sure I believe it.
Knuckles: This...
He stops and addresses Swiftie *directly:*
This is what we're using our talents for.
Swiftie: Jeez, Knuckles. Lighten up.
Knuckles: Don't even—
Swiftie: You gotta embrace it.
They walk away, Swiftie sings:
Shake it off. Shake it off.
They walk off stage.
Knuckles: I did warn you.
The sound of a single gunshot.
End.

PIER

3RD PLACE



Samantha Romero

LORD ANDREAS

By: MakenzI Walsh

I saw the net. I heard them speaking to each other. I heard them laughing. They were excited about making a breakthrough. There were so many of them, some had long metal rods with sharp probes at the end. They were lined up along side of the boat, stabbing at the floating dead fish. The boat was violently swaying due to the waves, making it more difficult for them to balance, as well as stabbing the dead fish. The winds were picking up as the storm rolled in. I don't know how they accomplished such a massive kill at once, but I knew we shouldn't have been scouting it for food. I knew it was suspicious, I should have followed my gut.

The chaos was suffocating. I felt the tides rolling into waves, I heard the men yelling from the boat, I felt my clan retreating. The men grew tired of stabbing at the dead fish and threw out a big net to gather the rest. Why they didn't do that in the first place is beyond me. However, the net was too close to us. If the fishermen caught even one of us, they would never stop hunting us. They would continue to come back over and over and over again until they caught every single siren in the clan. I can't even imagine what they would do to us. The possibilities are endless. Experimentation would be my first guess. It sounds gruesome but every part of a siren's body can be used for medical research. Our bodies admit healing properties for thousands of diseases, known and unknown. The medicine industry would thrive with our bodies as a magical antidote. I can't let that happen; everyone needs to get far away from here. As the leader of the clan I had to lead the retreat. I opened my mouth and released a tune of my song, communicating with the clan in our mer-like form. I told everyone to get back to their coves, and to stay unseen by the fishermen. I suddenly heard the beautiful tune of my clan in response letting me know they understood the order and were safely swimming back. I looked around in the dark sea, looking for Ryker. His response was the only one I didn't receive and that's not like him. Men sometimes have such a hard time following orders it's like all I'm ever doing is talking through bubbles here. I started circling the boat from underneath, far enough to where their net couldn't reach me.

Then I saw him.

I stopped circling. I stopped breathing. The current around me was closing in and I felt like I was drowning. Ironic since we live 90% of our lives underwater.

I saw him trapped in the net being stabbed and probed by these goons. Then I saw how the blood stained the water. I heard him screaming. Not a beautiful melody like it was supposed to be, but a terrible screeching noise instead. It sent a terrible chill down my spine. He was stuck in the net, and they were reeling him up out of the water. I could see the dark figures aboard the boat from underneath the water, all working to get Ryker in their grimy hands using those long metal probes to make sure he couldn't fight back once he surfaced. All I heard were the mechanical workings of the real on the boat and muffled screams from the sailors. I tried using my abilities to manipulate the water into pulling the net back down. I tried using the air to strengthen the wind and possibly tip the boat. If the boat tipped and they landed in the water... then it was my turn. Game over.

I tried. I kept trying. I tried again. Any advantage I could have gotten I tried. It wasn't working. This was the first time my abilities were letting me down. I was trying to use them but for some reason my body wasn't allowing me too. I can usually feel the hum of the power under my skin when I call upon it, but as I continued to try and stop those damn goons… I couldn't feel the hum. I knew the power was still there because it warmed my chest, but I couldn't call upon the power. I don't understand what's happening.

The warmth in my chest was starting to burn as I continued to try and do something… literally anything. This was the strangest sensation I've ever felt, and one I have never felt before. I could feel the panic setting in. I was going to lose him. For the first time in my life, I don't know what to do. They almost had him completely out of the water by now. I began to swim around the boat to get a better view. There had to be a way to get him out. I could see the gashes to his ribs and through his scales. I looked around franticly analyzing the boat and everything on it. Trying to spot something to help me. There was nothing.

Amid my observing, I caught the eye of a man towards the front of the boat. Overseeing them reel up the net full of dead flesh. He looked right at me through the water.

He was tall. Had dark hair almost black. Kind of scruffy but in a bad way. Looked like he hadn't showered in days. He looked right at me, or maybe rather through me... like he knew something that I didn't. He smirked at me. That's how I know he saw me. The sparkle in his eyes reminded me of my own. Only slightly terrifying but alright. But the thing that caught my full attention was the tattoo on the left side of his neck that furthered down the front of his chest. I could see the ink through the ripped dirty button-down shirt, and muddy jacket. The tattoo was a human heart wrapped in iron link chains. Surrounding that were deep shades of ocean blue waves, intertwined with tall orange and red colored flames. They seemed to be strategically placed spiraled down his neck and around to his chest. On each link of the chains were three individual letters. There was an "A," "S," and a "D" engraved in the iron. On the sides connected to the human heart were a pair of beautiful bird-like wings made from what looked like yellow and blue flames. The tattoo was sinfully beautiful. Looking at it made me feel sick to my stomach. I don't know what those letters meant, but I have a feeling it wasn't good. The tattoo didn't look like something to be proud of. It looked like a brand, as if the man had no choice but to wear the design. It had long white scars across it in all directions, like someone had been trying to cut it from the skin and failed multiple times. The tattoo was beautiful in a sorrowful kind of way. Something about how this man was looking at me and how he was carrying himself leads me to believe that what happened here was entirely under his command.

He's to blame. I've made my decision. He's the one I'm going to have to kill.

***

I kept thinking about that night as I continued to train on our communal training grounds. Every part of my clan needs to be able to completely defend themselves, especially after what happened that night. I needed to continue to lead by example. Something I'm having a hard time doing because everyone I love seems to find a rather brutal way out of my life. There are three people in this world I hold dear, and those people are Ryker, his mother Agatha, and my best friend Edith. Ryker's mother I considered like my own, in a mother-in-law kind of way since I kind of fell in love with her son. She was the one that found me alone on the beach soak and wet from the rising ocean tide. I'm surprised I hadn't drowned before she found me. I was just a baby, but she still took me in and raised me as her own. She was the leader of the Andreas clan before she passed.

Andreas is from a Greek legend meaning strong and manly form. Agatha always liked mentioning that because people doubted her often for being a woman. The Andreas clan was just one clan of sirens that were banned from the kingdom for being undesirables, or in this case, just freaks that the king didn't understand. Everyone else was a siren but as for me... no one really knows. Like I said she found me and all the sudden as I get older, I suddenly have abilities no one can explain? I'm an interesting case as everyone likes to say.

Thinking about what happened to her and what I can only imagine is happening to Ryker right now only made me swing at the punching bag harder. Right. Left. Duck. Left. Right. Duck. Right. Spin and kick left. I'm sweating bullets at this point.

She was killed by a previous blitz attack from the fishermen. They got her with an arrow but didn't get the chance to take her body for further experimentation. They never got the chance because I happened to be there to kill them all. It wasn't a pleasant sight, but I was quite proud of what I accomplished when I was finished. I used my abilities then, to manipulate the earth to get the roots from the ocean floor to help me bring down their boat. I wasn't sure if any of them were good swimmers, so I subdued their air supply and had the sea water ingested into their lungs. They exploded from the pressure. It was grotesque even I can admit but they killed the only mother figure I've ever known and continue to hunt others in our clan that I swore an oath to protect, so I regret nothing. I was the do it first and think later kind of gal.

After Agatha passed, she handed the clan over to me because I was the strongest. I am now considered Lorelei Andreas, Lord to the Andreas clan and ocean territory. Lorelei was the name written on the back of my locket that was found around my neck as a baby. The locket itself was nothing special just a round locket with a picture of a wave inside. I don't know where it came from and neither did Agatha, but she deemed it fit to call me Lorelei anyway. I was seen as the strongest because of my "unique talents" as Agatha used to say. The elements earth, water, and air are at my beck and call. I have the elements down pat by now since I found out about them when I turned 13 but the whole beast thing has only ever happened once. By beast, I mean that one time I transformed into one, at least according to Agatha and Ryker who were the only two who seemed to witness it happen at the time.

I personally don't remember since I blacked out from the pain mid transformation. That was when I turned 16. Now I'm 21 so at this point, I have a hard time believing it even happened at all.

None of that matters anyway, what matters is that my clan stays safe for when that man with the tattoo comes back. There's no doubt in my mind that he won't, I wasn't able to use my abilities the night he took Ryker. I'm not sure why but I have this hunch that it had something to do with that man. The way he smirked at me told me he'd be back for more. As I was picturing the man's face on my punching bag, I suddenly heard a scream and a disgusting crunch. I snapped myself out of training mode and looked down to the source of the scream, and there on the ground lay Koen.

Koen was Ryker's best friend so when he found out what happened, he's tried his best to not leave my side. Says he's worried about me. I don't know why because I'm fine.

"Jeezus Lore you can pack a punch, mind watching where you throw that thing next time?" he muffled out from holding his bloody nose.

"Well, my god Koen why would you sneak up on someone who is clearly in training mode. It's like you wanted to be punched in the face" I said. Anyone could have heard the annoyance in my voice. I don't know how Ryker used to put up with this guy all the time, he drives me crazy.

"I figured it was a wise decision to tell you, that's enough training for today. You've been at it for hours, as you are every day, and you need to remember to take care of yourself." He responded wishfully.

"Koen! That is such a load of corn nuts, of course I take care of myself I don't need a babysitter. Get the hell out of my training area you're getting blood everywhere and it's irritating me." I say this making sure he gets the point that if he doesn't leave now, he's going to have more than a broken nose to worry about. I begin to pick up the equipment and clean the training space up a bit. It was getting late, and I wanted to get a jump start on everyone else's training tomorrow.

"You should listen to your wise best friend Lorelei!" he says with irritation while he follows me out of the training area and onto the path leading to the dining area.

“You, Koen, are not my best friend, and no one around here ever said anything about you being wise” I snap back.

“She’s right you know, just because your name means “wise” German doesn’t make it true Koen,” another voice appeared to the left of me as I continued to walk the path.

“Besides, I am her best friend, not you” the voice said smartly. That ladies and gentlemen would be Edith, who is my best friend, she was right about that. Behind me I can hear her, and Koen begin to argue about who is and who is not my best friend, which forces me to turn around and shut them up.

“Will you two fish sticks please shut up you’re giving me a headache!” I said looking at them both with disapproval. Just as I’m about to turn back around and into the dinning cove, all the sudden Edith has me in a tight embrace. Now, my problem with this is I don’t like to be touched. Edith knows this and continues to hug me every chance she can get because she insists that if I practice allowing people to touch me then eventually, I’ll get used to it and the whole thing will just fade away. I think that her theory is a steaming load of tartar sauce.

“Edith please let go of me before I am forced to end your life, you know I don’t do touching,” I squeaked with the little breath I had left. She finally releases me, and I gasp in relief. Then she just creepily gazed at me in pity and warmth in her golden/hazel eyes.

“You know Lorelei, one of these days you’re going to miss my hugs, and all this bitterness you admit will come back to bite you. I’m sure.” Not going to lie, she had a bit of an attitude with this statement. I didn’t appreciate it. No matter if it’s true or not, that’s beside the point. I glare at her to make my point.

“First of all, you’re full of snails. Secondly, whatever you assume is going to come and bite me… already did, which is why I am the way I am. So, leave it Edith.” I said sternly. Don’t get me wrong she’s my best friend but after everything that’s happened these last few months, she should know better than to push my buttons for no reason.

“Oh no,” she says.

“What.” I say as I begin to load my plate with sustenance.

“Did you have another nightmare?” she asked softly as she continued to follow me down the food line. Edith was the only one who knew about my nightmares. She wasn’t there with me when they took Ryker, but I’d trust her with my life. So, she knows me well enough to know how I handle things. However, I didn’t want to answer that question, so I simply ignored her.

I took a seat at one of the dining tables with Koen and Edith trailing me like lost puppies. They sat in front of me waiting to pry me for questions while I just took the time to stuff my face with food.

I guess I took a little pity in them worrying about me so much, so I go to answer them to let them know that I promised I was fine, when screams break out through the coves. Now all our coves are underground underwater. So that each siren has spaces where they don’t need to be in their siren form, and they can relax in human form. However, there are about fifty or so more sirens in our clan which means we have a lot of cove space. So, a scream to break out through every single cove that loudly by one person… can only mean trouble.

I dropped what I had in my hand and snapped my head to look at Edith and Koen, my second and third in command. We all jumped up and immediately took off towards the noise. I told Edith to go secure the coves and everyone inside them and I told Koen to go round up the troops just in case. I was going to go see where the scream came from. Just then more screams were heard along with cries of help from people running past us in the other direction. I looked at Edith and Koen, “Hurry up, we might be under attack. And if that’s the case… we need to prepare ourselves.” They looked back at me, nodded, and broke off to do their duties.

I rounded the corner only to see that my suspicion was right. There were fishermen everywhere in the cove this time and not above the water in a boat like usual. My heart stopped, how did they know how to get to the coves underground and under the water. There was no way a human could have held their breath for that long to get to where we felt the safest. I looked around and saw my people fighting for their lives, I immediately jumped in using my elements.

Since I'm not really a siren I'm more balanced on my feet then everybody else since they're used to fins. I used the earth to create a blade for myself to make fighting a little easier. It was made from roots, rock, and sand. I used the air to help me use it with a light hand, so it wasn't weighing me down. I started swinging. One guy came at me from the left with a syringe, but I saw him first. That must be how they were getting the upper hand, by sedating us. I swung around and slashed him open with my newly made blade and moved on to the next. There were too many of them, I didn't understand where they were coming from. I had killed 6 already just myself, but they just kept coming. I heard the footstep of our troops coming to join the festivities. They piled in to help protect our people, but it still wasn't enough. It was like a whole village of fishermen just decided to drop by and kill everyone. I need to know how they got down here.

Then I saw him. I saw that man with the neck tattoo whose eyes were like my own. The one who took Ryker. He was covered in blood and currently trying to best one of our warriors. He made eye contact with me as he made the final blow and killed the siren. That only made me angrier. I knew that warrior, his name was Wade and he had a family. A family he should have been able to grow old with and enjoy. I started my way towards him when he moved slightly to the right revealing someone next to him on their knees restrained in chains. I stopped in my tracks.

It was Ryker. My Ryker was tied up on his knees next to this man. He was covered in blood and bruises and looked like he was barely holding on. We made eye contact, it looked as if he didn't even know me. I looked at the man again with rage and started running at him. The man just smiled at me, raised his sword, and swung it directly at Ryker's throat. I was so close. I was almost there. I was screaming, "NO PLEASE!" or was I crying? I'm not sure if the warmth on my face was due to tears or blood from my previous kills. I was just about to reach him when the blade connected to Ryker's throat and cleanly departed his head from his body. I stopped running. I sunk to my knees in tears and blood. My heart stopped beating for a minute, and I looked at this man dead in the eyes. And I could see the storm brewing in my own. My soul was on fire with rage.

Suddenly… I transformed. I saw the reflection of my body change in the man's eyes as I turned from my human form into a siren fully made of water with horns atop my head, and electric eels winding up and around my fin and body. My fingertips were talons made of stone, and I gave off a yellow hue as if you could see the magic holding me and the wave that I sat atop of in place. My hairs where whisps and they moved around as if having a mind of their own. I was over six feet tall in this form, so I looked down at this man and at the reflection of myself in his eyes and thought of myself as beautiful. This must have been the form that Ryker and Agatha had once told me about. Then I saw the fear in the man's eyes. His men started to scream and retreat. My own people had stopped fighting as well, in awe at what they were seeing. I calmy looked at the man as he started too slowly back away.

"Don't be afraid, this will only hurt… a lot," I said with a sickly-sweet voice and a smile.

That's when he started running.

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