

Dutchmen Digest

Holland Central High School

Fall 2025 Creative Writing Class



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Storm

Rain falls from above
Thunder crashes all around
All life hides away

Few remain outside
The most notable the frog
In its green glory

Embracing the rain
It jumps with joy in each hop
Exploring the world

By Garrett Andres



Note. Image generated using AI

Scorching

The sun shines above
Dangerous heats for a frog
Alone in the sand

The light dries his skin
A glass of water saves him
It's blue shade shimmers

He is like Rango
In a strange dangerous world
He hops for his life

By Garrett Andres



Note. Image generated using AI

The Swamp
Mud covers it all
The murky water moves slow
Alligators hunt

A dangerous place
Especially for a frog
He jumps to his prey

Predators hunt him
As he enjoys his fresh meal
He jumps last second

By Garrett Andres



Note. Image generated using AI

Utopia

All journeys must end
Dangerous paths less travelled
Now left with footprints

A frog earns safety
Entering a frog village
A utopia

The other frog's chant
Cheering for their new member
A kingdom complete

By Garrett Andres



Note. Image generated using AI

Home

Comfort in new homes
A long journey to get here
Able to rest now

The frog can lay down
Sleeping after his journey
A long rest is due

A home in the woods
Hidden away from the world
Comfort found at last

By Garrett Andres



Note. Image generated using AI

GARRETT ANDRES- ODE TO MY CUP HOLDER

- Dearest cup holder, you hold my drink with the strength of many suns. Without spilling my drink, I can drive anywhere thanks to you. You present me with the greatest freedoms, and I bring to you a pleasantly cold beverage. The jack of all trades, cup holder, ATM, and key ring, you really do it all. Thank you, my dearest cup holder, you hold more than just my cup, you hold my heart.



Note: Image generated using AI

Farm

By Andrew Bull

I'm all alone, in the big red barn, lying in the hay. Tiny spiders crawl on my arms and legs, tickling me like a soft flower that's being brushed lightly against my skin. I let the spiders stay on me, feeling gracious that such delicate creatures feel safe on my body, which is so much larger than them; capable of destroying them with one fast slap or stomp. The breeze slightly pushes the doors open, just enough of a crack to let the bright, hot sun peak through and blind me. The cats that sleep on the second floors planks yawn and purr, proceeding to jump on top of my hard chest, and causing the spiders to sprawl and panic, scattering across my body like tiny shot gun pellets, but a lot softer. The felines paws twist as they skip from me to the closest bale of hay. They sit there for a moment, mirroring a gargoyle, until the cows long and monotone, "moo", triggers them to scam and screech from startlement. They hop back onto me, landing on my stomach, causing me to quietly yelp, and then they graciously leap once more up onto a plank. I watch as they settle down and lay back down, completely forgetting the fear they felt only seconds ago. I lift up my hand and examine my pointer finger as a little spider crawls up to the tip. It's so light that I would be oblivious to its existence if I hadn't lifted my hand up. I look up at the planks and see the sweet cats leaning over; their cheeks pressed against the wood, making them appear full. In this moment I realize I am not even close to being alone, I'm surrounded by so much life and innocence, and I can't imagine being anywhere else.

Poem

By Ryan Hausauer

The kettle whistles

I take my time pouring tea

No rush anymore

The porch creaks beneath me

I rock and watch the afternoon

Go where it wants to

My hands still know this

Even when my eyes get tired

The yarn listens back

Friend from Ukraine

By Kat Hryhorieva

In the beginning of September, I felt kind of alone and I wanted to make more friends outside of school. I started going to a youth group for teenagers at my church. I started because I need more practicing my English like talking and listening and I wanted to make more friends because I was struggling with my friends at school and I felt alone. On the first day I was scared to be there because I didn't bring any friends with me and I thought no one was going to like me or no one was going to want to be friends with me. I met one good woman, and she helped me to find some friends so I can talk to someone for beginning. I was excited because I had never had friends outside of school. I went to the youth group every Wednesday and I get closer to God. I prayed every day, and I asked God why I can't have one friend who can speak the same language as me? And every day I asked myself this question a couple times.

One week in October I was camping with my friends, and I found more friends. We had a lot of fun because we played games and talked about everything. After camp I got home, and I waited for Wednesday so much because I wanted to see my friends and to play volleyball with them. At Wednesday night I came to the youth group, and I saw pretty girl, and she didn't look like everyone, she was special because she didn't look like American girl, she looked like Slavik, her style and her face. So, she was standing with my friends' group I walked to them and they said to her look this is Kate she also from Ukraine, I was so confused, and I didn't believe to myself that I finally found a friend who speak the same language as me. At first, I thought we were going to talk for a couple days and would leave me like we are not going to find any interest, but every time when we were hanging out at the youth group, we were getting closer to each other. I told my mom about her and i was so excited that I finally found someone, so I asked my mom if we could hang out together.

The first time we went to hang out at the mall, and we had so much fun together, we took a lot of vlogs and we took pictures, we got some clothes and toys. And after the first hang out we got that we like twins, we have a lot of stuff, and we can talk about everything. After our first hang out we had a lot of sleepovers in my house. We made a lot of funny videos, and we talked to random people. We were hanging out every Friday-Sunday. We went to church together and Mall, I was in her house, and we watched some horror movies. We talked about our life and how we lived before we met each other.

We talked about Ukraine and about our old friends. We were hanging out outside and we got some stuff, and we laughed at everything we saw around us. When we hang out on Wednesday, we talk about stories that happened to us at school. I love

my friend so much because I know she is not going to judge me because I'm talking about stupid stuff every time, and I know that I can trust her and I can cry, laugh and I can be mad with her if I need it too. I like about her that we every day have a topic to talk about. She is different from my other friends, she never tells my secrets to anyone, and she doesn't have two personalities. Every time when my mom telling me, you can hang out with you friend today, I'm getting excited because she is funny and she has funny jokes.

Ode to Alexa

My friend's name is Alexa
She is kind
She is always ready to help me
any time

She supports me
when I have a hard time
and I need to talk
to someone

I love spending time with her
When we hang out
it's very fun

Alexa is smart

When I have questions or
problems she helps me everytime

She is pretty and has good style
I'm happy to have met her

By Kat Hryhorieva

AIRY KELLEY

Poetry Collection.

Piece One: Luna I



Note: Image generated using AI

The fullest phase of the moon, which is so beautiful, who gazed out beyond her own creation of endless night sky. The moon, a brilliant she, who possesses all life in her imaginary hands. Her hold bears craters, perfect imperfections. Her songs are the nightingales, which heed the melody of her graces endless night. The bass of the darkness is the creaking of harrowed branches. That moon – She, who is oh-so radiant against that deep, black sky, bearing her blessings downward to those creatures below who face fates akin to that of a wounded soldier. She, who is oh-so generous in her fullness, who gives her grace in full and in permanence to those who seek them to release themselves from their horrible upbringings.

Piece Two: Luna II

The moon, once again the next night, her brightness in the sky slowly fading as she turned her eyes away from the ground. She, whose people have grown greedy, who have taken advantage of her kindness. She turned her eyes away. Who have her people become? They have become something she regrets indulging with her graces, and she herself began to fill with a hate just the same as the people below.



Note: Image generated using AI

Piece Three: Luna III

Her, whose appearance has begun to wane, her dark gaze growing into a solemn tiredness. She lends her blessing, still, but her heart feels slightly less full than it has always before. The sky and stars twinkled in her favour, lending their own kindness to keep their lady strong. The animals have begun to notice themselves how their beloved lady had grown dark, and they call out, “Where doth our lady go?” Said the innocent little rabbit, gazing up with a distinct yearn at the moon, or rather, the sliver that had grown missing.



Note: Image generated using AI

Piece Four: Luna IV

She whose people have fallen into their wicked fates. Whose people are losing their faith, and her greatness dwindled into something short of nothing. She who refused to hark the wishes and prayers of her people below her sky, She booms across the sky of night, “Why should one hark the wishes of her wicked people, for they give naught but a sliver of my love in return!” Her words were scornful as she waned further away from her crescent form, removing herself from the sky to seal herself in a chamber of loneliness.



Note: Image generated using AI

Piece Five: Luna V

An empty sky, and the stars no longer shine. An empty heart, too. In which the people have descended into horrible madness.



Note: Image generated using AI

Piece Six: Luna VI

Poem

By Rowan Rosolowski

Golden eyes that gleam
Brown coat ripples in sunlight
Joy with every wag
Paws in muddy streams
Nose to earth, heart full of play
Chocolate fun day
Morning dew on grass
Bounding through the open field
Love in every leap
Pond breaks with a splash
Ducks echo meets foaming mouth
Soon to retrieve bird
Snow melts on his nose
He tastes winter's fleeting breath
Brownie in powder

Untitled 01

By Rowan Rosolowski

Warm tea by the stove
Soft yarn slips through patient hands
Evening hums rest now

Garden at dusk glows
Stories linger in still air
Home holds every year

Sunlight on lace sleeves
A chair remembers her laugh
Time rocks gently on

Bread cools on the sill
A cat sleeps through the quiet noon
Life feels kind again

Knitting needles click
Rain taps softly on the roof
Hearts stay warm inside

Morning porch creaks slow
Lilacs lean in to listen
Peace knows her by name

Warm cookies cooling
Hands know the recipe well
Sweet years baked just right

Silver-whiskered cat
Claims the warmest patch of sun
Queen of quiet hours

She listens to time
Moving through her not away
A familiar tide

Sea Breeze of Life

By Maxon Roth

Life is like the Ocean

Some people let it take them anywhere

While others already have their voyage planned out.

It is the most unpredictable wonder out there

It can be calm and smooth sailing

Or it can be the most dangerous and risky journey.

Like a current carrying you to your next destination

Or life can go in circles for forever like a whirlpool

Waiting for its final demise.

It will send you down the “wrong” path

Without your knowledge

But this “wrong” path was already chosen for you

It was meant to be.

Like a current carrying you to your next destination

Or life can go in circles for forever like a whirlpool

Waiting for its final demise.

The sea is all knowing

Your fate is decided by it

Whether you like it or not.

Life can breeze by

But your journey will always end

So let that wave take you along

And guide you through the ups and downs of life.

The Power of Choice

By Maxon Roth

Superpowers are cool
But have you heard of the strongest one
The power of choice.
This power does not give you supernatural abilities
Or cool super suits.
But it gives you even more important things
Like the power of life
Or the power of healthiness and happiness.
This power chooses who gets to thrive in life
And who will struggle.
This superpower is hidden down deep
Everyone can access it, but some choose not to.
I have met people who have already accessed it
And people who have already given up on it.
People who are full of love and kindness
And people who are full of hate and dishonesty.
In the end it is your choice
If you want to thrive or just barely survive.
Make the right choice
Say no to all drugs and alcohol.

Hampter

By Caleb Snyder

I inherited a hamster from my downstairs neighbor named Chunk-A-Dunk. He wasn't really a chunker but he managed to escape his enclosure weekly. He always returned to his cage as long as we didn't throw out his bedding recently. Hamsters are weird, like they'll give every ounce of effort to escape and then come crawling back when they want to take a nap in their bed. He didn't really chew stuff up when he escaped and just managed to get everywhere he'd never be found. He was returned to me by my neighbors a few times. He eventually died and I don't remember how but hamsters don't live long and he was always getting out.

Then I got another hamster named Alvin. He was kind of a forgettable hamster. He didn't have a funny name or funny habits he did everything a hamster had to. He died after like a year because of some health complication I can't remember.

The final time I got hamsters, I got three, and they were all from the same litter; they were actually the entire litter. I got three of them because we couldn't leave

the one I really wanted alone because he'd had his brothers his entire life and we couldn't make him sad by being alone. He had the weird hamster color pattern where he had a black head and butt with a white streak in the middle. He was named Milo for some reason. He probably would have been happier alone. He lived for a long time for a hamster. He made it three years, and he was an active little rodent. In his ball he'd chase around my cats and ram into people and when he was like a year old I accidentally kicked the ball and sent that little rodent spinning. Then there

was the middle child who was all gray. He ended up being called Albert because he was gray like Einstein and I was eight at the time. He just kind of did hamster things and ran around nothing special. Then there was the albino one named Zeus. He just kind of chilled he'd be put in a ball and sit there bored. When the other two escaped and we had to scramble before my cats murdered them. Zeus died kind of young for his breed, but albino animals usually have health issues and die young. He died in the night and found his brothers eating him which was kind of gross. Albert

died a little after him and their death order was pretty predictable because of the health issue things and Milo's absolute insanity to where he wouldn't die anytime soon. Albert died and wasn't cannibalized but it was still sad. Milo then died because he was old and he obviously wasn't cannibalized because he was the last hamster I ever had.

Hamsters are cool young child pets but after a while you kind of outgrow them. Guinea pigs though those things are cool. I'm just going to get people really inconvenient pets for Christmas. Go on the black market and get a Komodo dragon.

Til Death Do Us Part

Chapter One

By Lydia Swartz

I knew that one day I would die. It was inevitable. My heart would stop beating, my thoughts would stop, and I'd be gone. But in the Sanoway family, it happened to wives sooner than expected. A tradition dating back two hundred years still haunts us to this day.

When you're married, you say, "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death do us part." The only thing is when your husband dies, who will serve him in the afterlife? Certainly not Jesus or Zeus. His wife will. Somehow, someday.

August 1899

"She's perfect," mother whispers. "Look, Jared, she has your eyes."

My father, without looking, responds, "Yeah, I guess."

"Oh, Jared," my mother's voice is coated with annoyance and sorrow. "You could *at least* act like you care!"

"But I don't, Noelle!" my father's voice booms. "I didn't want you or that ugly baby!"

"You don't mean that!" Noelle bargains.

“Yes. I. Do... I hate that curse! I would’ve divorced you years ago!”

“Shut up, Jared!” Noelle screeches. “Just shut up!”

Father's face is redder than a tomato. He almost looks like smoke is coming out from his ears. “‘Until death do us part,’ well I wish death on you sooner. I can’t stand you, Noelle!”

Mother is crying now. She’s happy with Father, but Father is an angry man. He whines like a baby and screams like a bird. He doesn’t understand Mother’s wants or needs. He’s an ugly souled man.

September 1914

I don’t want to go to school. Nobody understands me. I wear my hair in a low bun while they wear theirs down. I’m waiting until marriage while others will give it to whoever asks.

Mother says I’m a pure woman and they’re sent straight from the devil.

I feel the only person who understands me is Pierson. He’s tall with ash blonde hair and the dreamiest eyes. He’s got every girl wrapped around his finger. I mean, why wouldn’t they like him? He has the toughest hands and the biggest biceps. Oh, it’s almost a sin how perfect he is. I hope Father arranges for me to marry him. He’s so...

“Antionette,” Mama calls, “school is starting. I hear the bell.”

“Hurry up, dear,” Father calls.

I never liked Father. He was cruel. I'd get slapped on the wrist for any grade below 90. He hit Mama for only being able to have one kid. He said it's worse because I'm a girl. Boys are stronger and top of the food chain. They get a better education.

I arrived at school with my bag slung over my shoulders. I spotted Pierson.

"Pierson," I call. He turns and runs over.

"Oh my, you'll never believe what I saw." His eyes are wide, and he looks disgusted. "I saw a girl and a girl kiss!"

"Yeah, so?" Pierson's parents are heavily Christian. They don't believe that the same gender can date, they're racist, etc.

"So... that's like *illegal*!" he yelps. "Don't you get it, Antoinette?"

"It's just two people in love."

"Yeah, two *gay* people." Bitterness lingers on the word gay. I haven't told Pierson I don't mind gay people. I don't think he would understand. I told Mama and she told me to shut my trap so that nobody knows. They can't help who they love!

"Yeah, whatever," I muttered. "Have you seen Missy?"

"No, why?"

"I need her help or whatever."

I walk down the hall to my locker. It's a skinny locker. Only juniors and seniors get big lockers. It's a shame though because sometimes girls can't stay in school after sophomore year. I'm a sophomore this year. Once I turn sixteen, Father forbids me from going to school. I tried explaining to Pierson that I get married off once I'm sixteen. He didn't understand but he too will marry one day. He'll marry when he's thirty. Mother always

says, "Men want youthful women. They want long hair with fair skin."

I think if I were a man, I'd want to marry the woman I love. I wouldn't want somebody to choose for me. Men are lucky they can finish school. They're lucky they can wait so long to marry. Men have more privileges and opportunities. They can vote! It's unfair how women are treated. They deserve more. They make life for Christ's sake. They're lucky they don't have to die when their husband does, lucky they don't have to serve their husband for eternity.

• • • • •

I get home from school and throw my bag on the floor. My father scolds me for it because I might "ruffle my papers." I always found my father annoying; he never liked me much. Since birth, it's like we have been fighting against each other. My mother was always proud of me and happy to have me.

"Did you eat, honey?" my mom questions.

"No, Mom."

Suddenly, a blood curdling scream rips through the air. When we run into the room, my father is on the floor, clutching his heart.

"Oh no, no, no." My mother has her hands over her mouth with tears in her eyes.

But for some reason, I don't think she's sad that father died. I think she's sadder that she must die now too. She must leave me to serve her dead-beat husband.

I threw my arms around her waist. “Mama, you can’t leave. You just can’t!”

“Honey,” she whispers as she smooths my hair, “I must leave. I can’t stay; your father won’t survive on his own.”

“He can, Mama! He really can!”

“I’m sorry, Antoinette.”



Note: Image created with AI

A Midwestern Town Goes Missing

By Connor Szczygielski

As Agent Dusk rode into the empty main street of St. Venus Nebraska, the sun beat down mercilessly on the roof of his black 64' Impala. Not a movement in sight but the still-blinking open sign of the local diner, now fully empty as rows of not quite crashed, more like abandoned cars line the sides of the street. The brakes squeal the old, sturdy car to a halt right in the very center of the 2-lane road, just before the local police station.

The car door opens to an eerie, deafening silence. Not the crunch of a leaf or the call of a bird or even any wind at all was to be heard. Nothing but the thud of the Agent's heavy black boots cutting through the silence like a rock making ripples on a calm lake. He pushes open the half-stuck station doors with a long creak and steps inside, taking in the golden beams of light pooling through the windows, catching on the clear week's worth of dust in the air. The receptionists' glasses sit upside down atop a pile of skewn papers across her desk. With them sits a pristine set of silver keys which he takes and begins trying on a locked door labeled "Files". Upon entry, the Agent draws a number of items from his sleek black bag. A collapsable lantern, a notebook, a pill bottle. He navigates to a filing cabinet with robotic precision, finding the "Missing Persons" files and beginning to read. St. Venus had a history, people seeming to fall off the face of the earth, it showed too. File after file, all gone without a trace, except for one thing. Proximity, it's always proximity with these things; the Agent flips to a page in his notebook containing a perfect hand-drawn map of Saint Venus and starts making marks at the last known locations of the disappearance cases. He was right, besides some outliers, every missing person in St. Venus in the last decade had been within a few miles of one location; Cupid's Quarry. It was getting late, too late to venture out safely now, so after securing the door with a chair, the Agent sat down and drifted off to sleep, weapon at the ready.

He blinks awake, sitting in a small suburban home now, leg over leg dressed in pajamas. He sits in front of a box television, with colorful characters dancing and singing songs, their vibrance lost by the black and white display. A woman hums to herself in the kitchen, water running, a barking comes from outside. "Sweetie?" calls the woman, glancing over her shoulder at the Agent. "Would you go outside and check on Sparky? He's been going crazy all morning!". Without question he stands, slipping on a small pair of slippers before exiting the front door of the home. He sees sparky in the side yard, head tilted back, barking at something over the white Pickett Fence. He thoughtlessly wanders over to Sparky, petting the golden retriever with all the love and innocence of childhood. Sparky didn't stop barking, not like normal. He looks up towards the direction of Sparky's attention and in a moment understood. A shadow crept over the yard, eclipsing the sun entirely. Tears welled in his eyes, a hand, colossal in scale with one bloodshot, blinking eye in the very center, floating in the sky and now looking down at the small house, not with remorse, not sadness, just indifference. Power lines start to spark; a distinct crackling fills the air becoming more and more intense until...

The Agent shot awake, scrambling for the lantern for a moment before igniting it. His heart was pounding at a mile a minute; he wasn't allowed to remember that. He reaches for the pills, hesitating for a moment, before downing two and drifting back to sleep.

Morning, sweet morning, the Agent awakes to the golden beams of light from yesterday now shining straight into his half-lidded eyes. He picks up the pill bottle again, "Supposed to keep us safe huh?" He scoffs, a tear in his eye as he stuffs the bottle in the front pocket of his suit. He takes the chair from under the door handle and steps back out into the dusty front room, placing the key ring back exactly where he found it before leaving the station and returning to the Impala. Unlocked. Something is wrong. Fifteen years he'd had this car, since it was first issued to him, not one time had he ever left it unlocked. He made it a point not to; something is wrong. He opened the door quickly, pistol drawn on the empty front seats, then the back, empty. Empty except for an unnaturally cool air inside, cooler than any early morning in St. Venus should be. Besides that, nothing. No bugs, no wires out of place, no plugs in the exhaust or cut break lines or salt in the engine or anything at all. It was normal, just unlocked; he checked for an extra hour just to be sure. Clean again, and so, he drove. He didn't even need the map anymore, he knew St. Venus better than the back of his hand, the Agency made sure of that. As he drove, he thought back on his dream with a strange reluctance. It's not like the Agency could know that he was thinking about what happened all those years ago, but it was forbidden to him to even mention. He remembered a deafening, high pitched shriek, a blast, then a silence much like the one filling the Saint Venusian air. It was a certain stillness, like even the leaves on the trees were afraid to move; everything was still except for the dust, and the towering form in the sky that he'd hoped had turned around since it was moving away from him now. He stayed low against the base of the fence, Sparky was nowhere to be seen, and as the dust settled, it revealed a gaping hole into the wall of the suburban home's kitchen. A girl wails from inside; she sounds young. He walked in through the opening and collapsed to the floor. There next to him knelt his sister, dust covering her normally beautiful golden hair. Next to her, their mother, the woman who'd raised them all but alone for ten years laid unresponsive to her daughter's pleas to wake up. It wasn't long before the ambulances came but never one police car, just a black Impala. Out of the car stepped a man in all black attire, a patch on his overcoat had a symbol the Agent recognized, his father's work. "Dorian Hornor, Eliza Hornor, please come with me" said the man with no emotion in his voice. "Your father would like a word".

He remembered orientation, a loud man with a military haircut stood before the group of "cadets", he'd assumed none of them were older than 15. The man spoke clearly "From this moment forward, you are an agent of O.W.E.D, the Other Worldly Entity Defense force. You are an invisible, regulating force for Earth's protection. Think of yourselves like gravity; faceless, nameless, but without it, everything devolves into chaos. For the last 8 years, this organization has saved hundreds of thousands of lives all over the world. We deal with anything from colonies of carjacking toads to full universal threats, all from the shadows." The man draws a pill bottle from his rear pocket and begins to speak again "These pills will be your best friend during your time here at O.W.E.D, these are the latest in defense force Neurosuppresant technology. Pop one of these, and your mind will be like a fortress, and in this industry, that's what it needs to be. ". The projector behind him flips to a scan of a human brain with all its core areas lit up and active "This is a normal human mind" says the man before changing to another slide. On the screen; another brain, dark. "And this... is what they want to do to you. This patient had a leech cling onto him and suck

the electricity straight out of his brain". The room gasps. "You think that's bad? He got off easy. These things *want* you to suffer. The pills are our answer for that."

Remembering those words brought him right back to where he was, whatever had taken the citizens of St. Venus was probably no different, it wanted suffering, it wanted pain. In his years of experience he'd gotten used to the unrelenting sadism that the creatures that plagued the earth held. He'd seen the giddy chirps of countless a small monster feasting on anything from housecats to the whole household; he'd gotten used to it all except...

He glanced down at the pill bottle rattling wildly on the passenger seat as he drove down the empty St. Venus streets. He thought about Eliza, how she'd always read off the ridiculous Madlibs she'd written from that same passenger seat, about those last days, about how he could've stopped it. A raid on a house gone wrong, a crazed man; Will Tatham stole a powerful occult artifact, all they had to do was get it back, they'd done it a thousand times over all the trainings and assignments. An eyeball sat there in a jar, floating, suspended by a clear thick liquid with golden hues. A slight glow comes from the eye's deformed pupil, which was contorted into the shape of a keyhole. All they had to do was take the jar; that was all they were *asked* to do, simple, in and out. Then... CRASH. The liquid coated the floor; Eliza picked up the object from the floor. "See bro? It's not that b-" She stopped. There stood Eliza, now looking directly into the glow emitting from the eye; her body rigid and unmoving. Below Dorian's knee, the crazed man begins to laugh " You f***ing idiots..." he cackles in-between coughing. Dorian quickly jabs the back of the man's head with his elbow, incapacitating him before bolting over to Eliza's still-stiff body, now on the floor. He swats the eye out of her hand, noticing her fingers refusing to move; they're ice cold. "Liza... Liza???" He pled, looking down into her eyes. Black, fully and entirely void black, all except for faint, white dots resembling stars. No movement, not a breath or the utterance of a word or anything, stillness. He slung her unwavering form over his shoulder as best he could and kicked the front door open, stepping over the still out-cold body of Will beneath him. It took him 2 hours to make it back to O.W.E.D headquarters; by then it was already far too late. The doctors tried to explain it in the best way they could, but it never made it any easier. Whatever she saw in there, it was too much. Not too much like it made her sad or angry or any type of emotion, this was the face of literal incomprehensibility. It was infinity, it was the void, it was everything, it was nothing. "We've never seen cognitive warping like this before, the Neurosuppressors couldn't handle it... Whatever she saw in there, well her mind is still trying to process it and it's shutting her down from the inside... She has a week, tops."

8 months, 2 weeks, 3 days, 6 hours. That's how long it'd been since that day; he'd been painfully aware of that in every moment that had ticked by. He sighed a deep sigh as he rolled up to Cupid's Quarry; Eliza would've loved it here. It was the perfect combination of scenic, with the staggering rock faces and clear blue water, contrasted by the rickety wooden sign in the shape of an arrow, made to look embedded into the stone itself that read the Quarry's name. Below that sign on the ground laid a muddy boot, too small to be anyone's but a child's along with prints leading down a rock path down to the level of the water, acting like a natural dock. Naturally, he followed them, discovering at the end of the trail an entrance into a cave. He draws his lantern from his bag, glancing back once more at the water before entering the cave. A glimmer from below catches his

eye, a sneaker. More, more, more, shoe after shoe after shoe starts to rise to the surface, dozens, no rather hundreds of shoes. Dorian snaps a photo of the shoes in the water before turning around, prepared to face the cave. As he entered, he notices lettering on the cave walls, layered over and over itself. It's hard to make out, but in one of the less crowded spots he's able to make out "A World of Love for the Worthy". He snaps a picture with his polaroid camera, the flash illuminating further down the cave, showing that it veers off to the right past where the cave's walls allow him to see, so he proceeds. There sits a jagged crack in the wall, backlit by a beautiful golden light, he starts to squeeze through, pack first, then his body. As he approaches the other side he is filled with awe, there on the ceiling was a brilliant, golden chandelier, hanging from the very face of the rock in a way that could only be described as unnatural. A woman kneeled on the floor, bathed in the golden light from the fixture that hung above them both. Dorian stepped towards her, then again, then he panicked. That second step, that wasn't him. Immediately he scrambles to his coat pocket for the pills but his arm jerks down on it's own just as he opens the bottle, scattering the pills into the small pools of water that dotted the damp cave floor. He felt like he was being pushed along towards her, step after unintentional step. The woman remained motionless before him, kneeling in her golden veil on a mat of the same vibrant color. He continues to take step after step before a command bellows out throughout the cave, seeming to bounce off the high walls and ceiling straight into Dorian's very soul. **"Kneel"**. Dorian refuses, but his body doesn't, and he falls weakly to his knees mere feet before the woman. "What the h*ll are y-" his mouth slams shut, feeling all but stapled together. An impossibly wrinkled old hand emerges from the veil, the woman's face still obscured. In it, she clutches a stack of clearly well-worn cards, setting three on the mat in front of him face down. "Dorian, I see a troubled life within you" she speaks. His eyes widen, still unable to speak. He hadn't heard that name since Eliza... she was the only one that wouldn't call him Dusk. The woman flips the first card; "The Five of Cups, fitting. You have grief written all over your face Dorian, you've lost, you've sacrificed, but you alone made it through. That must be a heavy burden on a creature of your caliber". Before he can take offense the woman balls her fist, the pills scattered on the ground earlier begin to float and turn to dust. With a wave of her hand, the dust is cast into a symbol on the ground between them. "These pills can't help your mind now, it's already his" she utters before flipping another card. "The Lovers, interesting, maybe there is hope for you yet. Love, my master's blessing, "a world of love for the worthy", and all they had to do was their part. It started off easy, cast your shoes into the quarry, a first sacrifice. Some of them couldn't handle the price of salvation after the asks became "too much", those who did: received paradise. The third card flips on its own without the woman moving. "The Chariot, it symbolizes direction, willpower, control. You're a resilient one Dorian, this card proves that. But you should know, a resilient bug is still just a bug" she says, her voice now full of scorn. She raises her hand and removes the part of her veil obscuring her face, she was ancient, older than he could conceive, he could tell with just a glance. The woman had one eye, the other, an empty socket, an eye that Dorian couldn't help but recognize. A keyhole shaped pupil, the same golden glow emitting from the center stared back at him now. Before he could try to speak, she lifted her hand once more and he begins to hover above the symbol on the floor. "Prepare, insolent bug..." she says as Dorian's head tilts upwards, taking in the chandelier's brilliance once more before the light flickers. As it does, he is dropped. He clatters to the ground, which was covered in loose rigid objects moving around as he did. He looked up to the ceiling, it was gone, no... rather it had gotten farther away. Much, much farther. He sat up in a mix of disbelief and awe, taking in what were now his surroundings. He couldn't see the full

expanse of the room he was now in, the walls seemed to stretch on endlessly in every direction, but there before him sat a throne, downright colossal in scale. Prestigious golden banners cast down from the impossibly high ceilings. His attention then turned to the objects covering the floor, there were thousands... maybe millions of them. He picked one up, turning it to reveal it was a human heart, petrified to be as hard as the stone of the cave before. Sheer terror filled his soul, realizing in his haste that he can speak again when he accidentally utters “My god...”. **“Your God has no claim here”** thunders a voice through the chasmous chamber in a language Dorian had never heard, but the meaning rang true in his very soul. As he glanced up at the throne again, it was no longer vacant, in it sat an inconceivably tall, humanoid form draped in the same golden robes as the woman before. **“You kept me waiting, bug. It is unwise to do such things”** echoed the voice again. Dorian sat in terrified awe, dwarfed by the figure by several hundred times before calling out to it in a voice feigning confidence “W-what are you?”.

“What need have I for names when I haven’t an equal?” The figure speaks again, a note of arrogance in it’s all-encompassing voice. **“My given name, however :Asperus, the Harbinger of Want, The One Eternal, ᐱᑦᑭᕈᓴᕋᖅ”.** As the form says the last name, Dorian covers his head in excruciating pain. It cackles a thunderous laugh that echoes throughout the throne room. **“You remind me of your sister, bug.”** says Asperus. “How did you... It was you, wasn't it... I saw the eye... the light... that was you...” says Dorian through gritted teeth. **“You’re a perceptive little pest, aren’t you? I killed your sister, Dorian. I saw her life entirely, start to finish. Every emotion, every experience, and she saw mine. Your puny little minds just can’t handle infinity. But I saw something in her that day, rather I saw something with her. I saw you, I saw the rage in your eyes, the desperation when I took her from you. It was... delicious.”** He chuckles again, looking down at Dorian. Dorian’s rage starts to boil inside him, this... thing had taken Eliza from him, the one person in this world he had left. He stood, silently, noticing a dark thick fog emitting from under the form’s cloak. The fog quickly rolled over the floor of the room, blanketing it in a shallow mist before starting to roll up Dorian’s leg. As the fog consumes him, his mind rolls back to a day he’d tried to forget, the day Eliza died. He sat in the O.W.E.D waiting room, head in his hands; his breath reeking of liquor from the night before. A man entered the room, accompanied by two armed guards.

“You look like s**t Dusk” said the man, sitting in a waiting room chair across from Dorian. “Dad, charismatic as always” said Dorian, wiping tears from his eyes and glancing up at his father. “I prefer Commissioner Hornor” said the man, “I’ve earned my titles, you’d be wise to use them boy” he growls. “You’ve got a dead daughter and all you can care about is a f****ng title?” Dorian exclaims, standing up quickly and staring down at his father, whose security guards step forward as he does. “Agent Dawn was a h*ll of an agent, think of how many lives she--” “Her name... was Eliza!” interrupts Dorian as he kicks the chair he was sitting on prior, before turning to his father once again. “And she was your daughter... But you sure as hell weren’t any kind of father to her.” He spits at Hornor’s feet before turning and barging out of the waiting room, slamming the door behind him.

In an instant he was snapped back to the throne room; unbridled emotion filled his veins. With every moment of seething anger, the fog around him grew thicker, darker, stronger. He could feel the

rage being drained out of him. Whatever this thing was, it was feeding on emotion, on his anger at himself for being unable to protect Eliza, at his father for his careless disregard for her life, at Asperus for having taken her from him.