

The Muse



Literary and Art Journal of Seminole State College
2014 edition

The Muse

Volume 7
2014 edition



Sponsored by SSC's Upsilon Alpha Chapter
of Sigma Kappa Delta

Faculty Editors:
Rayshell Clapper and Yasmina Choate

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Sax Me Up

By Aaron Pybas

Walking down a neon-lit street,
I walk with each step matched to a beat.
The sound of the sax tickles my ears;
I keep humming the tunes as I walk on.

I walked into the smoky bar.
I see a glimpse of someone from afar.
I ask the bartender for a scotch on the rocks...
ask the woman beside me what she'd have

She says her name is Jennifer Lenn.
Her red hair shines like a sun-setting sky
I ask what she wants to do for the night—
she says she wants to be mine.

We speak until the bartender tells us to leave
We walk back to my place that fall's night
We make love till the sun was high enough to see.
Jazz was the anthem of that November eve.

Cradling Sunburned Shells

My son,
you ran with me,
our feet snuggled deep in the scraping sand.
I mingled with goose bumps and smiled loosely
As you hovered, cradling sunburned shells of ivory and tan.

Tales of a Broken Day

Sweet sunshine –
you are a mask.
How you cover in denial
the doom rising in those walking, talking
as if awake to the sleep of this trial.

Goodbye

However could a death like this be known?
Living out the days as if without end.
Parting with the thought of this notion of you –
I cannot!
You were here, and we loved
and felt
what unknowingly could be swept away.
The lightest hope lived out till its end sank dry –
It swallowed you, my love, whole.

Innocence Against the Sea

On a single white wave
she embraces
a scene so desirable,
clouds of angels thrust forth
to stare.
Stillness – as the ruby takes ponder.
She lets down her hair
to the open.
Torso of milky white
innocence against the sea.
So anxious and dark,
the offer of fruit comes gracefully.

Geisha

So rich –
in ebony pinched hair
lives a yellow rose.

A sharpened glance
from departed eyes
delays behind deserted lashes.

Consumed by unchosen honor,
a rosy kiss is meant
for the darkness.

Such fair form,
beauty –
in the purest of masks.

In the Old Village

In the old village
There rests cobbled walks –
assortments of rock mock them in trail.
The sky sits idly
dusted with faint hues –
trees bear fruit and burst with foliage.
Cottage warn windows are adorned
by ivy and muck,
greeting each neighbor with fragile grin.

In the old village
stride plump cheeked ladies –
time escapes all who dawdle here.
There's a drip and a squash
from the reminisce of rain
coercing long-standing rooftops
to weep over cradling countryside.
Vineyards reside in the remoteness,
tip-toeing a mesmerizing plum-tainted aroma
throughout the morning air;
in the old village

Complicated

By Jessica Ellis

Absence makes the heart grow fonder,
all dressed up and nowhere to go---
ah, to be young and foolish.

An apple a day keeps the doctor away;
always look on the bright side---
All's well that ends well.

Are you a man or a mouse?
An idle mind is the devil's playground
as far as the eye can see.

Moods Of Brandy
By Brandy Mcmillan

Hot breath on my neck,
sends chills down my backbone-
making it hard to think.

To My Love

To my love,
You came from above.
You're my one and only.
With you I won't be lonely.
I could never ask for better
even if I wrote a ten page letter.
Without you, I am lost.
I look forward to seeing you like a frost.
In your arms I am secure,
You are my only cure.
I hope you understand what you mean to me.
You are the one who sets me free.

My Shadow does not judge

In the light I want to walk around,
My feet under me, dancing I abound.
Had the shadow of mine, vanished nope,
But who other to judge me but the pope.
I am who I am, and that is a true fact,
For only my shadow knows my own tact.
I cannot apologize to my shadow,
Because it knows me to well to wallow.
My shadow is a true friend of sorts,
It does not care if I am in my shorts.
Shadows never judge or have a grudge,
They do not care if you even eat fudge.
They stay with you through thin and thick,
And do not care if your cubby or sick.
It is comforting to think of not being alone,
And my shadow hears my every moan,
Not a truer than true friend than this-,
If I did not admit it I would be remiss.

It Was Not Me

Previously unaware,
I intended on a different outcome.
Someone says, "He did it."
She says, "I am responsible."
Evidence is nowhere to be found.
Dammit, I am not guilty!
Openly, I tell my side of the story.
Fervently, I plead,-
Fired is what I heard.

My Babies' Woe

Oh, my babies' woe,
for they do not know
What lies ahead?
No, it is not a bed,
but life is hard.
Not like a greeting card.
Life has its joys
not only for boys.
So my baby prepare,
life is not fanfair.

Peace
By Brionna Duke

I touched many lives in my short years-
filling a room with laughter
or tears.

Since my goodbye,
your heart aches with sorrow,
but I was tired.

My battle was hard.

It was time for me to go;
you will come to understand.

The wings I have earned
were all part of a bigger plan.

Now my hand He holds
as I walk streets of gold.

Heaven is a relief;
no more fighting.

At last I am at peace.

Helpless
By Kimberlie Bryant

Helpless
Can't speak.
Won't tell.
Close your mouth.
Close your heart.
Don't feel.
Don't show.
Hide.
Hide.
Hide.
Stay far away from the emotions in your mind.

What will I do with my life?
For my twenty years, I've nothing to boast.
I feel like I'm stuck in a rut,
but if I follow my gut,
I still may not get what I want the most.

I envy those who know what they want to do.
My future is invisible to me, drowned out in haze.
Will I make a way in life of my own?
Will I wind up sad and alone?
Will my future's fog forever dictate my days?

Forgive me, but I'm scared.
It was always "You have time to decide! Don't worry!"
Smiling faces, so sublime,
making saccharine promises that I had time,
and yet now it seems I have to hurry.

I don't know if I like my major.
Nothing against business – there's jobs everywhere!
But is my heart in it?
Rounding up, maybe a little bit.
I want to be grounded, but everything's up in the air.

It's not that I hate this, but rather that I don't love it.
I've a job already that required no degree,
and it makes me want to come home and cry.
I feel my time is wasting, flying by,
and that's a bad thing to happen, don't you agree?

Am I asking for too much?
And I know this is all too whiney and sappy,
but I used to feel so alive.
But now that the future went and arrived,
it's a lot harder to be happy.

I don't mind not being anybody special.
Fame, riches, I don't think they were meant for me.
But to have my bliss,
to feel like nothing's amiss...
Just... I want to be where I'm supposed to be.

You visit me in my dreams.
We dance, we laugh, and we sing.
You make me feel so young.
You make me feel so beautiful
as you kiss me endlessly.
We walk along a flowered path
as we talk and reminisce
of all the cherished memories.
The hours come so quickly,
and the minutes pass on by.
Now we have to say goodbye.
We seal it with a kiss,
but one day we will meet again-
In my peaceful slumber, we will dance.

World of Beauty

The ocean soars high,
as the sun shines bright with gold.
Beauty in the world.

Mr. Big Feet

There once was a man with big feet
who stumbled across the street.
His feet were so wide
That he went side to side
and people were too scared to greet.

Mrs. Mom

There once was a lady who was married.
So many babies she had carried:
Mary, Lizzy, Jasey, and James.
So many babies, she forgot their names:
her hair grew old, and she was buried.

Baby Boy

For love I do show,
but you may not know
how much I truly love you.
Your embracing smile,
your enchanting laugh,
and your beautiful sweet and kindness.

You are a gift from God.
My heaven sent.
My sweet little baby boy.
You brighten my days,
and lighten my nights.
You are the beat in my heart.

So naive and young.
So gentle and caring.
You are the perfect creation.

For when times get rough,
just look up and you will see
Mommy will always be right there.

My Lady My Love
By Moku Romena

The eyes through which she see me...
...are dancing shades of emerald green.
Set in a face of ivory, they are framed with curls of fire.
Her smile is set with the whitest of pearls...
...Embraced by the softest rose colored lips.
Those lips are inviting, open, and offered so freely.
She smiles for me.
Her skin is the semblance of the finest silk...
...With the fragrance of lilies on a warm summer day.
Skin that is mixed with the softness of down,
I am lost as she embraces me.
Her laughter is heard as music, lilted and sweet.
The notes dance so sweetly upon my ears.
It indulges and envelopes me.
She laughs with me.
Her heart is open and full of pure intentions.
A heart filled to capacity, overflowing with love.
Even at my worst...
...She gives her heart to me.

My Mother Ocean
By Moku Romena

I hear her call across the miles,
My mother ocean, her lulling voice,
She beckons me from far away for my return.
Her voice, gentle like the lapping waves upon the sandy shores.
It tells this island boy to return.
The sing-song dancing lilt, so loud and clear,
I hear her as she says...
She misses carrying me upon her back,
when I rode my board toward sandy beach.
I must admit I miss her caress,
upon my skin, so tender and soft.
Warm and inviting, this is my mother's embrace.
Too long I have been away,
from my mother's touch.
My mother ocean, she is an island boy's first love.

My Sister, Gone
By Moku Romena

Blinding and white a fire that lights the night,
the creator of panic and fear, a call to inform.
"My sister?" I shout, "It's not right!"
Dejection, disbelief, my expression is forlorn.

A crash! No, it can not be true.
My time spent waiting, pacing to see.
But, my sister, it can't be you!
My sister, don't leave me.

There are survivors? Yes! There are three.
Where were they taken?
Please tell me!
My sister is gone? No you are mistaken.

My sister is such a beautiful soul,
She is gone from this place.
Never again shall I hold.
I feel empty, so cold.

What ever will I do?
My sister, my friend...
...Without you?
How can you just end?

My heart is broken.
Our lives are in refrain.
All of us full of things unspoken.
My sister, Aloha, until we meet again.

My Sunshine
By Moku Romena

He holds my hand, tight as if for his life.
His eyes are of chocolate, shining so bright.
In him, I see all the goodness that life can be!
The awe, the joy, the acceptance, the love...
I talk to him daily and he hangs on my words.
We have much to share, my boy and I.
Superheroes, comics, movies and so much more...
Today we'll be pirates looking for loot,
tomorrow we are superheroes searching for justice.
No matter what comes he knows I am there.
I am never too far for him to find comfort and love.
I am his biggest supporter, it is true!
He is my buddy, my pal, my friend...
to him I am his hero, his mentor, his dad.
In him is my future, my forever, my joy...
...My ray of sunshine, my son, my boy!

Ode to Maui
By Moku Romena

The trade winds carry your fragrance.
It is the essence of tropical flowers and sea.
A fragrance so familiar,
it will never be forgotten by me.

Your rocky, yet sandy shores,
are kissed by the Pacific with its turquoise hue.
You are an island, an oasis!
Your people love you.

You have food for gods...
...Hamburger steak, two scoops rice,
throw on brown gravy,
a side of mac salad, so nice!

Your dancers celebrate you.
They are gentle, graceful, praying...
...with arms extended to the heavens,
bodies to your rhythms swaying.

Your sons and your daughters,
we live to ride on your waves.
Nothing like guiding a board...
... Upon the ocean on sunny days!

Playing songs on the uke;
Your children they sing!
For on this island, Maui...
...They have everything!

Unceasing – Time marches.
Purple flowers bloom in springtime.
Fast – time came and went.
Tall, fair-haired maidens dance where
Young girls once played among the blooms.

Toboe, Hige, Tsume, and Blue,
Kiba and Cheza and Darcia too.
All consumed in a vicious cycle.
Searching for a false Paradise,
Find it with their yellow eyes;
Now consumed in a vicious cycle.
Paws deep in snow and blood,
Extinct to humans, yet seen as gods.
They're consumed in a vicious cycle.
The love, the hate,
Their tears, their fate;
Always consumed in a vicious cycle.
Watch as they cry,
See as they die.
Again begins the vicious cycle,
the vicious cycle...

I find myself here again,
staring at the wall,
lost in the thoughts that plague me.
Faggot! I hear from my own mind
Loser! Tramples through my thoughts.
Give up now!
You're no more than shit anyway.

I light a cigarette.
Yah, I think I'm cool.
Not really.
I'm just an infant in a grown world-
A glass boy,
a fragile existence.

God do you hear me?
I know you can't
(Why do I try?)
You only help the good...
That's not me.
(It never was.)

I see the dance
Yet I don't know the moves.
Masks are for children.
Then I must be a child.
Playing hide and seek-
Alone.

I feel the water over me,
cascading into red.
What would they do without me?
Live, that's right.
Go on, happy.
He didn't say much anyway.

Who's that boy in the background?
Oh him, he's just a pawn.
He'll be gone soon.
Just wait and see.
He holds up space for now;
until someone good comes along

Don't even try young man.
You'll never succeed!
Just play your games-
Let the men handle the job.
It's no place for you.
Go back to your books.

No one will love you.
Look at yourself;
a shell of a person,
a drone of some sort.
Just another weed in the grass
waiting to be mown.

Don't try and speak.
It's not like we'll listen.
What a pretty song,
to play at your funeral.
Make the others look good.
yah, that's your place.

Don't try to be gold.
Even copper out shines you.
You're more like a rock,
just made to be kicked.
Roll down the hill,
so the river can swallow you whole.

Don't move a muscle.
(Lay there and take it bitch!)
It's what you deserve.
Don't try to leave your place-
You worked so hard to get there.
Don't you like what you have achieved?

All your work has paid off.
You're alone and pathetic.
Like you knew you always were
just a sad reflection.
In a world of mirrors,
you could've been great!
(That's a lie.)

Don't strive for love.
It's just out of your reach.
You're hideous to the eye after all.
He just wants your body.
No one wants your heart!
It's cold and dark.

So know you'll end it.
Good for you!
Just take the razor and go ahead.
Oh, before you do,
You know it's all bullshit.
Really, kid, get over yourself.
Stained Glass Windows
By N.E. Starchild

What a perfect vision, dancing on the water,
at least that's what I heard.
Nice to meet you and your daughter.
No, I won't take her hand she's not wearing any gloves!
I don't subscribe to plastic people,
because I'm a marble of a man.
Take your diamonds and your silver.
I would have shit on it anyway.
Metal people shouldn't be bought.
They are so unreliable.
If I needed something to love,
I'd buy a dog

Stimulate me, make me Crazy.
Please do something with my brain.
Cuz if you can't,
I'll buy some Mary Jane,
have a party,
and fuck your best friend all night long.
You think you're perfect?
Your daddy says you're "Pretty."
(Honestly, I think you look like a cow.)
A stained glass window,
Is still a window-
When it comes crashing down.

Is that your baby?
It's fucking ugly!
You should really go complain to the dad.
So you say I'm an alcoholic,
when I've just been sucking dick all night.
Try and judge me.
cast a stone
That's why the doctor gave you "happy pills"
People are fickle things,
always singing about sex.
Honestly, I could care less.
Just leave your underwear when you go.

Rock my body, and My soul.
Give me faith in mankind.
Because I just snorted some addies,
and rainbows are now my friends.
You act like a sterling sculpture,
when in reality you're just a pile of rocks.
A door is still a door,
even without the hinges

I see you.
You see me.

Bitch get out of the way.
I have to keep up with the Joneses.
Because I think their sons got it going on.
Hey cunt! You still there?
I thought I told you to leave.

Red is my world; green is my heart.
It's all really bullshit anyway.
Flowers are dying.
The world's already dead.
Let's just play ring-around-the-rosie
because, after all,
a worlds still a world
Without your "GOD."

Fall Out Boy
By Jacie Chaffin

When the heat comes from my inner being,
the crowd pushes out my last stable breathe.
Lights make me unsure of what I'm seeing,

but this is not a description of death—
A crowd of seven thousand dying fans
all looking at the gods from underneath

No two feet are missing their pair of Vans.
Hours of waiting in tedious lines
leads to screeching lyrics in lengthy spans.

The flames on stage create sexy designs.
The first line heard is "Put on your war paint"—
Every fan girl in the arena pines.

Oh holy Patrick Stump, our one true saint,
a chance to dance and cuss my fury out,
Punk rock strangers so easily acquaint.

A drumming-off makes all the people shout.
The hands of his screaming fans, Pete will mount
getting overly loud and knockabout.

A night that enlivens, I'll recount.
Much over a hundred spent on band merch—
Fuck Paramore! I need my paramount.

The inner humming causes me to lurch.
Know "You are what you love, not who loves you"—
A concert is my only kind of church.



Starry Night
Shawna Elmore



The Pepper
Tyler Martin



Elegance
Russell Kilpatrick



CAUTION: ABSTRACTION AHEAD!
Russell Kilpatrick



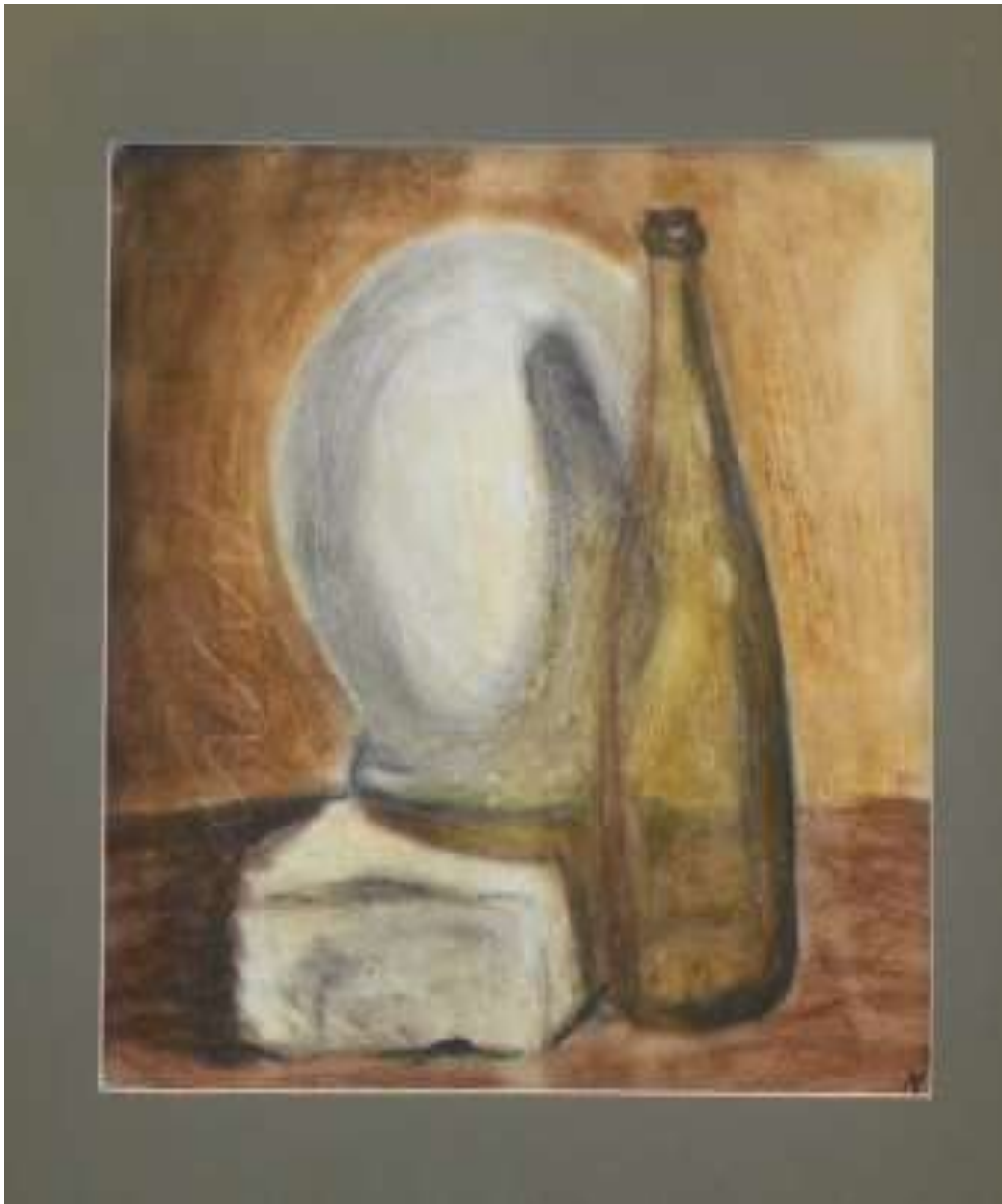
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Rustic
Russell Kilpatrick



Great Wise Owl Looks On
Jessica Ellis

Pure Insanity
By Alecia Neash

I remember that day clearly. Police sirens and flashing lights everywhere. A hysterical mother being held back by many intimidating police officers. Detectives zooming into the house with their cameras and white gloves on their hands. And then, a bed being pushed out with a body bag on top. The mother screaming, reaching out her hand as if someone was trying to grab it. She ended up on her knees, crying so much that it soon came out mute when she saw the body bag get out into the back of an ambulance. It was like I was living a nightmare that chilly fall evening. I was in a shock and couldn't move. I slowly tuned out the sirens and the sound of a screaming mother. My eyes wide and full of tears. What is life right now? Who says whether or not it is okay to take someone else's life?

Flashback. I'll first tell you the story that finally led up to that day. My name is Sarah Donald and I am currently a senior in high school without a job. I just recently started babysitting for a couple people around town, but one family started needing me more frequently to babysit and offered to pay me more money. So, naturally, I had to quit with the other parents and just focus with this family, the Holland family.

The Holland family were well-known around town. I live in a fairly small town called Stonebridge. The Holland family is known to donate money to our local businesses to help them keep going. They are a very wealthy family who lives a little outside of town with about 20 acres of land to themselves. The Holland family is also well-known because of their youngest daughter. She went missing about two years ago in the spring. It struck the family and the town hard. Her name was Kylie, and she was only four years old when she went missing. It was said that a man in a black truck had driven near their house one day to find her playing outside and kidnapped her. The Holland family had seen this truck near their neighborhood before but hadn't thought anything about it. One day, little Kylie was playing "tea party" outside with her dolls and when the mother went to check up on her, she was gone. She saw a black truck zooming down the dirt road away from their house and suspected it was the person that took their daughter. Nobody in that town owned a black truck like the one they had seen. They started a search party that lasted for about eight months. After about two years, people stopped looking, but the family kept going strong. Well, it seemed the mom did anyway. There was a point when she didn't come out of her house for a year straight. The dad seemed heartbroken too, but he eventually had to go back to work. He was hardly ever at home because of his job. They soon had to accept she was gone and were probably not going to find her.

Anyway, I started to babysit for them full-time. They had a 10-year-old son, Michael, and an 8-year-old daughter, Kayla, Kylie's twin sister. They were sweet kids. The son loved to play video games, and the daughter would often play with her imaginary friends in her room. The only thing I had to do was make sure they behaved while their parents were gone.

So, one fall evening I got a call from Mr. Holland. "Hey Sarah, this is Jack Holland. I was wondering if you could babysit tonight. The wife and I want to go to this restaurant in the city and probably won't be back until midnight. Is that okay?" I agreed.

"Yeah! That's totally fine! What time do I need to be there?"

"Um, are you able to around 7 o'clock tonight?" Mr. Holland said frantically.

"No problem! I'll be there!" I agreed.

"Okay! Great. We will pay you double for staying late. Thank you so much"

"No, thank you!" I smiled, then hung up the phone. I was seriously looking forward to the extra cash.

I made my way over to the Holland house. As I was about to knock on the door, Mr. Holland opened it. "Hey Sarah! Again, thanks for being here. I think I just need to get my wife out of the house for a bit. She... she had another breakdown."

My eyes widened. "Oh, I am sorry to hear that."

He nodded, "It's all right. Hey, make yourself at home and your welcome to anything in our kitchen!"

I smiled, "Thank you! I sure will."

Mrs. Holland made her way to the door. "Oh, hey Sarah. Welcome. We should be back soon." Mrs. Holland said very monotone. I could tell something was bothering her.

"Anyway," Mr. Holland jumped in, "we will see you later!" I nodded and they proceeded their way to the car. Mr. Holland quickly turned around,

"Oh! By the way, stay clear of my office. It's really dirty and embarrassing!"

"No worries!" I waved as they drove past and went inside.

"Sarah!" Both Michael and Kayla ran up to me and gave me a hug.

"Hi guys! Are you ready to have a fun night?"

"Yeah!" They both yelled and ran to the living room.

"Wanna see my new game I got, Sarah?" Michael asked as he was already pulling it off the shelf.

"Of course!" I laughed.

"She wants to see my new dollhouse first Mike!" Kayla jumped in.

"Guys, I want to see all of your cool new stuff!" I ran over to the living room, and they both started pulling out their things. And all night I played video games with Michael and dolls with Kayla.

It was about 10 o'clock at night, and Kayla was starting to nod off sleepily. Michael was still playing video games in the living room. "Hey Mike, I'm gonna put your sister to bed, okay?"

"Okay. She is a lightweight and can never stay up like me and you, huh Sarah." Michael said while still staring at the T.V. I giggled,

"I guess not!"

I carried Kayla upstairs to her room and laid her in bed. I looked around her room. She had so many pictures of her and her twin sister in her room. I picked up a picture frame sitting on her dresser. They looked so happy. I started to tear up and sniffle. "Sarah?" Kayla said from her bed. I put the picture down and turned around.

"You and your sister were really close, huh?" "Yeah," she answered while ribbing her eyes.

"I still talk to her sometimes. My mom told me even though she is gone, she is always with me in my heart wherever I go. And if I need her I can always talk to her."

I wiped a tear as it rolled down my face. "Well, your mom is exactly right!" I walked over to her bed to tuck her in.

"Sarah, my dolly's button fell off her dress. Can you fix it for me?" I nodded and grabbed her doll.

"Nothing a little glue won't fix! I'll get right on that. Try getting some sleep though, okay?" Kayla nodded and I left her door cracked open.

I walked downstairs to check on Michael. "Hey Mike, it's getting pretty late. Wanna get ready for bed soon?" Michael paused his game.

"Yeah, I guess I'll go brush my teeth and get ready for bed now."

I smiled, "Awesome! I'll be up there to say goodnight in a bit." He nodded and ran upstairs. I quickly turned around, "Oh! By the way, where do you guys keep your glue?"

Michael looked down the hall. "Well, I know my dad has some in his office, but he doesn't let anyone in his office."

"Oh, darn." I frowned.

Michael looked back at me. "But, I know where he keeps his office key. He always locks it when he leaves and sometimes I go in there just to look around. I can show you where the key is!"

I smiled, "Okay! I just need to get glue for Kayla's doll, and then I'll be right out." Michael walked to the front of Mr. Holland's office door, lifted up a piece of the hardwood floor and reached in to grab the key.

"Tada!" Michael smiled and handed the key to me.

"Thanks Mike! Now go brush your teeth." Michael giggled and walked to the bathroom. I put the key in the lock, and went inside. I was nervous going into Mr. Holland's secret office.

The office was just a little dirty, not bad. "If I were glue where would I be?" I said while looking around the room. I looked over to his desk. "Aha!" I opened the top desk drawer and rummaged around. Nothing. I opened the second desk drawer and took out this box to see if the glue was underneath. "Found it!" I grabbed the glue and went to grab the box to put it back. The box had a big red "X" on the top. I just had to peek at what could be inside. I opened the box and snooped around. There were a bunch of pictures in the box. Some of Kylie and some of Kylie, Kayla, and Michael, but Kayla and Michael were both crossed out with a marker. I thought that was weird, but I kept looking. There was a picture of Mr. Holland's closet in his office. The next picture had an arrow pointing to a door on the floor in the closet. I thought that was strange. Maybe it was to a cellar. I then came across an envelope. I opened it and pulled out the pictures that were inside. I dropped the box. I dropped all of the pictures and they scattered all over the floor. I couldn't move. I couldn't scream. My eyes were just opened wide with me looking at the floor. How could anyone do this? I blacked out and fell on the floor.

Michael came running in the room. "Sarah, are you oka...Sarah!" Michael ran over to me laying on the floor surrounded by pictures. He started to shake me, "Sarah! Wake up! Are you okay?!" My eyes opened and I looked at Michael. I quickly jumped up.

"We have to get out of here!" I yelled.

Michael was freaking out. "Why? Sarah tell me!"

I looked at Michael and my eyes teared up. "We just have to go, now!" I heard a door close outside. I ran to the window. Mr. and Mrs. Holland were home early. "No! We have to go!" I screamed and ran to Kayla's room and grabbed her out of bed. I carried Kayla to the office and Michael quickly followed. I sat Kayla down and locked the office door.

"What are we doing," Michael questioned as I was frantically picking up the pictures. "What are those pictures of?"

I put all of the pictures back into the box. I turned to Michael. "You don't wanna see these pictures. Just please, watch over your sister." Kayla was still sleeping on the couch I had laid her on. I heard the front door open.

"Guys?" I heard Mr. Holland say. "Are you in here?" My eyes widened at the sound of his voice. My whole body was shaking. I didn't know what to do. His voice started getting closer. "Kids?" The office door handle shook. "Are you guys in there?" Mr. Holland looked for the key but it wasn't in his spot. He started to pound on the door. "Nobody is supposed to be in my office! You guys know that!" He started to shake the door handle harder and faster. The pounding continued. I turned to Michael. "Grab your sister and hide behind the couch!" Michael nodded quickly and grabbed Kayla and sat behind the couch. "Mike, don't leave that spot no matter what, okay?" I said as I grabbed my phone to call 911. The pounding continued. Then I heard Mrs. Holland say, "Jack? What's going on? Where are the kids?" Mr. Holland didn't answer her and continued shouting. "Do I need to call the police?"

"No!" Mr. Holland shouted at Mrs. Holland. "I got it!"

Mrs. Holland started to cry and scream, "I just want to know what is going on! Where are my kids!?"

I connected with the police station on my phone. "911, what's your emergency?" I paused. "Hello?" they said.

I finally answered back, "Yes! I'm here! I need police at 124 Oak street now! There has been... a murder here!" I started to cry hysterically. "Please! Hurry! I have kids with me and he is trying to get in!"

"We have someone on the way now, ma'am. Can you identify the murderer?" I paused. The sound of pounding and the sound of Mr. and Mrs. Holland screaming and yelling went mute.

I answered, "Jack Holland killed his daughter." I dropped the phone and blacked out again.

I woke up to a police officer over me. "Ma'am, are you okay? The police are here now."

I jumped up. "Where are the kids?!" I looked around.

"Ma'am, the kids are safe with their mother and some officers. They are just answering a few questions." I ran outside to about five police cars, an ambulance and two big black SUVs. I saw Mr. Holland in the back of a police car. He made eye contact, and I just shook my head with tears rolling down my face. "How could you!" I screamed. He gave a faint grin and put his head down. I heard Mrs. Holland standing next to a police car with a blanket over her shoulders. The kids were in the car with another officer. Mrs. Holland was getting questions asked to her by an officer. Her face was lifeless. Her eyes were wide, staring at the ground and she was just swaying back and forth. She looked at me and started to cry. "My baby! How could this have happened!" I couldn't help but let the tears roll down my face. I was hysterical. A body bag rolled out of the house. Mrs. Holland screamed at the top of her lungs for her murdered child and reached her arm out. Kylie's body was found in the basement of the house. There was screaming and sirens everywhere. I started to tune them out. How could a father do this to his own child? I'm not sure we'll ever know what drives the mind of an insane father.

People Deserve a Voice By Kristen Elliott

It is election time again. The American people are encouraged to vote, but do their votes really even count toward anything? Dating back to the Constitution, a group known as the Electoral College was established to vote for and elect the President and Vice President of the United States. It is an outdated practice that needs to be eliminated altogether. The Electoral College should be no more because the people of America should directly elect their President.

How did the Electoral College begin? When the founders drafted the Constitution, the founders were divided on how the President should be elected. Some members favored a direct election by the people and others a congressional appointment to office (“Rethinking the Electoral College Debate” 2527). This was also a compromise between large and small states as well as free and slave states (“Rethinking the Electoral College Debate” 2527). Of those who “favored popular election of the president” were James Wilson, Governor Morris, and James Madison (“Rethinking the Electoral College Debate” 2528). Their voices were stifled, however, and the Founders did not even expect in many cases for the Electoral College to have the final voice. Without a majority of electoral votes, the presidency is to be decided by the House of Representatives. “When the founders set up that system, democracy was practiced differently from today” (Jefferson-Jenkins 173). Now the people are informed voters thanks to the media, or they can be. In the founder’s day, they feared the ignorance of the majority of people. Women and African Americans were not even allowed to vote as they are today (Jefferson-Jenkins 173). Times have changed; therefore the time has come for a change as to how the President and Vice President are elected because the practice of the Electoral College is outdated and undemocratic.

What composes the Electoral College anyway? Each state is given an elector per member in the House of Representatives plus two additional electors, one per Senator (Ginsberg, Lowi, Spitzer, Tolbert, and Weir 226). The District of Columbia is given three electors. Each state is given a minimum of three electors (Bolinger 179). At one point the electors were chosen by state legislatures, but today they campaign for election (Deatrack 10). “Currently, the magic number for a majority of electors is 270” (Jefferson-Jenkins 173). A total of 538 electoral votes exist (Ginsberg, Lowi, Spitzer, Tolbert, and Weir 226). “In each state (except Maine and Nebraska) the party candidate who wins the popular vote wins all the electoral college votes for that state, in a winner-take-all fashion” (Ginsberg, Lowi, Spitzer, Tolbert, and Weir 226). This is not to say that whoever wins the national popular vote will win the presidency. Twice in the 1800s, the President was chosen by the House of Representatives. Twice in the 1800s and again most recently in 2000 with Gore and Bush, the candidate who received the majority of the votes by the Electoral College did not receive the popular vote (Ginsberg, Lowi, Spitzer, Tolbert, and Weir 227). Much controversy followed the 2000 election when Bush was elected over Gore, who had sealed the popular vote of the nation. It would be hard to imagine the outcry if the President today was elected by the House of Representatives, but under our current system this is a possibility. It makes one feel as though their vote does not count. However, while one could say every vote counts, it is hard to see when for example in Oklahoma, despite a percentage of votes that go for the Democratic candidate, all seven electoral votes would go for the Republican candidate. This is under the winner takes all system in which the winner for a state takes all of the votes from the Electoral College for that particular state.

Some specific states receive more attention from politicians gunning for the presidency. These are called the swing states (Deatrack 10). The swing states could go either way in an election as opposed to states that predominately vote either Republican or Democratic. These are the two opposing parties from which the President will most likely be

elected. This two-party system did not exist when the founders established the Electoral College. In the dominant states, the voter turnout is less than it would be in a swing state because voters believe their votes don't matter (Cebula and Meads 60). People know their state will most likely vote one way or another, so they neglect to vote whereas they may vote if the election were being decided by a national popular vote. Furthermore, politicians would be forced to focus their attention spread equally across the nation when campaigning rather than predominately trying to appeal to the swing states. When politicians focus all their attention on the swing states, other states' interests are overlooked. The attention of politicians should be spread equally over all the states.

Arguments for a bias exist for both large states and small states through the Electoral College method of election. As far as the small-state bias goes, every state no matter what its size receives two additional votes for Senators. This means that the same number of votes go to both California and Wyoming while in the 2000 election, California had 10,965,856 voters compared to the 213,726 voters in Wyoming ("Rethinking the Electoral College Debate" 2533). "The effect of this bias, though often overwhelmed by the winner-take-all bias, is quite clear- it gives more influence to small states" ("Rethinking the Electoral College Debate" 2533). This is bad because the small states receive an advantage over the large states, with every state receiving two votes for their senators. Others would claim in the "winner-take-all system" that the larger states are at an advantage, having more influence than the smaller states ("Rethinking the Electoral College Debate" 2533). According to this logic, politicians would focus on the large states while campaigning while ignoring the smaller states because they have less impact. Whether the larger states or the smaller states are given the advantage, the intermediate states, which are not swing states, are falling through the cracks. These states, who are being ignored, have specific interests which are also being neglected by politicians, and they do not receive an equal voice.

The disadvantages to the Electoral College are quite apparent, but what is the best alternative? Only a popular vote election would give each person an equal voice and would promote a true democracy. This would require a constitutional amendment. "First submitted in Congress in 1797, reform of the electoral college system is the most frequently proposed constitutional reform" (Jefferson-Jenkins 173). For whatever reason, enough inside support has not existed for change to cause a reform. The people of the United States need to make their voices heard and pressure those who represent them in the legislative branch to make a change. At one point Senators and House Representatives were voted for by state legislatures, but today the people elect their representatives. It only makes sense that the people should directly elect their President. Voters should be trusted "in a way that the founders, two centuries ago, did not" (Jefferson-Jenkins 173). Today there is media that did not exist in the time of the founders through which people can be informed. The states are also united in a way that they were not when this system was founded (Deatrick 10). For instance, a division existed between the slave and free states that does not exist today. Times have changed and so our current system should be changed.

Some advocate for keeping the current system. They claim that the interests of the states, especially the small states, are being protected by the Electoral College method (Jefferson-Jenkins 173). They also claim that "minorities and others in large urban areas would lose influence without it" (Jefferson-Jenkins 173). First off, in protecting the small states are they not being given too much of a voice, placing the large states at a disadvantage? Furthermore, would not minorities have an equal voice to anyone else in a one-vote-per-person system? If everyone is given a vote, then minorities have just as much say as anyone else. Therefore, under scrutiny, neither of these arguments hold up. The only way to bring about justice and fairness is giving each person an equal voice in this nation when it comes to electing the President.

Never again should there be an occurrence as in 2000 when the popular vote did not ensure the presidency. The Electoral College should not be given more of a voice than the American people as a whole. There must be a change. Never again should the House of Representatives elect the president as they did in the 1800s not one but two times. Such an occurrence today would be unthinkable. The system that elects the President such reflect the current times. People can be informed about the presidential candidates through modern media in a way they could not when the founders established the Electoral College. Give all the people a voice through the removal of the Electoral College in favor of one vote per one person.

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Death; There is Nowhere to Hide
By Brianna Hilton

Running away from death is something that nearly everyone does. This can be in the form of trying to focus more of a person's time on the events that happened in the past or trying not to do anything that appears to be too dangerous, whether it is something they want to do or not. Although, in some cases, running from death can be as simple as not communicating with new people or doing new things because it reminds a person that time is moving forward. This can be extremely true in many teenagers and young adults. They can feel indestructible and nothing can take away the sense of freedom and the idea that nothing will stop their carefree lives. When people are younger, death seems like a far-away myth that is used by parents to scare them rather than a harsh reality. In "The Masque of the Red Death" by Edgar Allan Poe, all the guests at Prince Prospero's party are running away from death. This is signified in many ways, such as the black room, ebony clock, and the masked figure. The short story "The Masque of the Red Death" uses symbolism to show how many people try to run away from death even though death will always win the race.

There is a great deal of symbolism in "The Masque of the Red Death." In some instances the symbolism is easy to spot, but in some it requires a much deeper look to fully understand what Edgar Allan Poe was writing. Many people discuss the symbolism of the different colored rooms when talking about this short story. As with almost every single piece of literature, there are many different interpretations. However, one that seems to be easier to see is that the black room in Prince Prospero's castellated abbey symbolizes death. The first hint at this idea is the description of the room.

The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet — a deep blood color. (Poe 2)

The description of the room clarifies that the color of the room is specifically the color black which is usually the color represented by death and is the color most worn to funerals. Also, the guests and Prince Prospero refuse to enter that room, and do not until they are forced to by chasing the masked man. Furthermore, in the description of the room it mentions how dark and desolate the room appears to be except for the windows. The color of the windows is significant because it corresponds with the color of the disease that kills all the guests and Prince Prospero at his party. To further understand how the color red and the Red Death relate, it is important to look at the symptoms of the Red Death.

Blood was its Avator and its seal — the redness and the horror of blood.

There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. (Poe 1)

The blood-colored windows are significant because the victims of the Red Death experience the loss of a significant amount of blood before they die. In addition, another symbol of death is the ebony clock that chimes each hour. It strikes a sense of fear into the guests each time they hear it chime.

Many people are afraid of death. Instead of finding a way to cope with the idea of death or embracing the fact that in the end it will happen to everyone, they try to force the idea that it will never happen to them. In the short story the guests, including Prince Prospero, seem to be people who cannot embrace death. The reason the guests have gathered at Prince Prospero's is to escape the Red Death that they believe is contained outside of the abbey's walls. As the story progresses we realize that this is not true. Each

time the ebony clock chimes it, reminds the guests of death. The clock's chimes are symbols of the amount of time that the guests had left to live. Each time the clock chimes, the guests go through ritual-like actions. It is very similar to how a family member reacts when a close relative dies. However, the ebony clock is not the only reminder of death at the party. The masked figure is a staple for reminding the guests that the Red Death is still right outside their doors. Or even more terrifying, with the masked man in the party it represents that the Red Death could affect one of the guests at the party or even Prince Prospero. Of course, Prince Prospero dies along with all of his guests. Even though they tried so hard to hide themselves from the horror of death, it found them.

Many people who read "The Masque of the Red Death" identify with the idea that the masked figure is death. However, as with any opinion or a person's view of something, some people disagree. Some of these perspectives are that the ebony clock symbolizes life instead of death, the rooms represent the different seasons, and that the rooms are different stages in a person's life. A large idea about "The Masque of the Red Death" is that the narrator is actually death or the masked figure.

Careful analysis of Poe's masterpiece of irony, "The Masque of the Red Death," reveals that there is indeed a first person narrator in this seemingly third-person tale. That narrator is the Red Death himself. Masking this narrator becomes the means by which Poe develops the full ironic implications in this deceptively simple tale. (Rosenblum)

It is clear that the idea of the narrator has been developed by some people. This indicates that not only is there room for many interpretations, but also there are many places that can be analyzed in this story. It is important to look at every aspect of a piece of literature to fully grasp the concept of what the author is trying to get the reader to understand. Many parts of the story that can be analyzed that I have mentioned. However, the ones that have been mentioned are essential for interpretation of this particular short story.

Each person deals with death in many different ways. The people in "The Masque of the Red Death" try to run from death, but instead they only bring it closer to them. It is hard to see each detail of symbolism in the story. However, some of the symbolism such as the black room, which is symbolic of death, the scarlet windows, and the masked figure are integral to the story line. No matter, how these symbols are portrayed one thing is clear: death is a focus within this story. Death is and will always be something that fascinates and scares many people. People will always try to run from death, but it is how they react when they are faced with it that makes the difference.

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Enough Aloha
By Moku Romena

Cast

Narrator (Voice only):

Never seen, simply a voice that offers background, history, and translation of Hawaiian spoken in the play

Kahanamoku:

A young, bright Hawaiian boy with insight well beyond his years; insight that was merited through the situation of their current way of life; he lives with his grandmother.

Mariah/TuTu (Grandmother):

A beautiful, yet old Hawaiian woman with a contagious smile; she lives her life using a wealth of traditions and insight bestowed upon her by generations of proud Hawaiian people.

Setting:

Oahu, Hawaii. A small multi generational family home centered on a Hawaiian Homestead allotment of land. The home is nestled against the island's mountain. It is not the setting of movies about tropical locations. The land is harsh, dry, and with patches barren of grasses and foliage. The home is a simple, modest, and well cared for dwelling; it sits next to a busy highway that cuts into the landscape. Across this highway is a stretch of beach lined with jagged lava rock, beyond and adjacent to this rock lay a stretch of sandy beach, and the expanse of the Pacific Ocean.

The stage is dark. Playing slightly in the background can be heard soulful Hawaiian chanting. These are the only sounds that can be heard from the darkness. These sounds gain in tempo and decibels until they stop suddenly. Silence is the only sound until the narrator speaks from the darkness.

Narrator: *(chanting begins again just audibly in the background)* In the middle of the Pacific Ocean is a paradise made of a group of islands; islands that once were united by a king. This king established a monarchy and developed a country where his people lived virtually untouched by the outside world. However, this kingdom did not remain undiscovered, and once it was unveiled, exposed to the outside world, the very existence of it changed. The Hawaiian people were forced to share their land with strangers, alter their lifestyle, modify their customs, and ultimately lose their sovereignty.

Thunder rumbles and the chanting continues as light starts to rise from the bottom of the darkened stage.

Narrator: *(speaking with the chanting audibly in the background)* Our story takes place in a time well after the discovery of the islands by the outside world. It is a new world where the Hawaiian people struggle for existence; struggle to retain their heritage on lands allotted to them by the country that annexed them; struggle to maintain aloha in their hearts.

Chanting stops. Light increases to project the first rays of the sun. These rays of light reveal Kahanamoku and Mariah in their shared bedroom.

Mariah: *(gently shaking Kahanamoku's shoulder)* Eh, boy! You no can sleep all day. Get up.

Kahanamoku: *(yawning, stretching)* Aloha kakahiaka, TuTu.

Narrator: *(translating)* Good morning, grandmother.

Mariah is moving about the room preparing for the day: brushing her long salt and pepper hair, placing a plumeria flower behind her left ear. She nudges Kahanamoku, silently hurrying him along.

Mariah: *(singing)* 'Aloha Hawai'i ku'u one hanau. Mai Hawai'i kua uli. A ke one o Ni'ihau. He wehi no na lani... *(she drifts to humming as the narrator translates her song)*

Narrator: *(translating, singing)* Love to Hawai'i, sands of my birth. From verdant Hawai'i to the sands of Ni'ihau, you are a string of pearls and adornment for the heavens...

Kahanamoku: TuTu, I'm ready

(he washes and dries his face on a towel while skipping to the door)
The door opens and reveals that their sleeping room is directly attached to a small, sparse kitchen. It is neat and orderly. There is no pantry, and the food on its open shelves is limited and minimal. Mariah shuffles slowly about the small area, cutting a pineapple and ladling a purple pasty substance into two small bowls. Kahanamoku is bouncing and dancing about the small room as she works. She places two small bowls and the plate of pineapple on the table and motions for the boy to sit. They bow their heads in prayer, but there is no vocalization of it. Their actions are a demonstration of their gratefulness of their meal. They simultaneously raise their heads, and immediately Kahanamoku grabs a slice of pineapple and starts to dip it in the purple substance.

Mariah: Boy, you need to learn to slow down. My old bones do not dance the way yours does in the morning. *(chuckling)* Happy you like your pineapple and poi; eat plenty, you will need your strength today.

Kahanamoku: *(speaking with his mouth full)* That's not true! You can dance TuTu! No one can dance hula better than you.

Mariah: *(chuckling again and swatting her hand towards him.)* Just not in first thing in the morning, boy.

They finish their breakfast in silence. The boy stuffing himself to fullness never noticing Mariah's slow eating pattern that would insure he had his fill, even if she did not. After a quick cleaning of their table, they move about their tiny space gathering items. They open the door on the opposite side of the kitchen and they walk through this door. On the other

side of this door is the grassless yard and with the concrete highway visible. Just beyond that their destination is in sight. They begin walking toward it, the beach.

Scene 2: The sounds of the ocean waves pounding gently on the sands can be heard. Jagged lava rocks line the shore. Mariah and Kahanamoku walk in silence toward a spot where the open ocean has to fight to rush around a natural rock wall which forms a perfect ocean pool. The waters there in the pool are calmer. They stop directly in front of this pool.

Mariah: Here boy, help me get the net ready.

Together they stretch the net its entire length on the sandy beach. They then expand it and inspect the weights attached to the edge. After this inspection Mariah nods her head up and down signaling it is acceptable. They each grab a corner opposite each other and then cast it out into the ocean pool. Gently, using the attached ropes, they pull the net into them while talking. When it reaches them in the shallows they sit on the sand and start to sift through its contents. They separate the fish and crabs from the debris the net collected, and place them in a container.

Kahanamoku: Why do we always have to work so hard?

Mariah: *(smiling)* you like to eat don't you, boy?

Kahanamoku: *(his mouth turning downward lips together, exhaling audibly through his nose)* but why does it have to be this way for us? Why do we have to struggle just to eat? *(He sighs)*

Mariah: Hush boy! Your ancestors never complained about work. They knew the truth about life on the islands. They knew the ocean is our mother. The ocean, she gives us life, but not without effort. We should cherish the offering she gives to us. We are her children. We will not go hungry because of her.

They cast the net again, repeating the process of pulling and then sorting.

Mariah: *(Looking out over the ocean speaking almost reverently)* Boy, we Hawaiians have 'kuleana'

Narrator: *(translating)* responsibility.

Mariah: for 'Malama ania'

Narrator: *(translating)* to care for the land.

Kahanamoku: *(scoffing and mumbling)* Care for the land? Like it's even our land anymore. Stupid haoles!

Narrator: foreigners!

Mariah: *(speaking sharply)* 'Kulikuli' boy!

Narrator: Be quiet, boy!

Mariah moves towards Kahanamoku and places her arm across his shoulders. She hugs him next to her.

Mariah: Boy, our life is hard. This is nothing new to us. But it doesn't matter who owns the land, or says they own it. These islands are our life; the islands are who we are, our existence. No one, no matter how hard they try, can take that from us. The islands give us what we need.

She pats his shoulder as she walks back to her net casting position. Again they begin the process of casting, pulling, and sorting the net.

Mariah: I need you to know something important, boy. We have 'pilikia'

Narrator: Troubles.

Mariah: Yes it is true, plenty troubles, but we also have 'pomaika'i'

Narrator: Good fortune, blessing.

Kahanamoku: But TuTu, how are we blessed? We have so little. We are made to live only in this small part of our islands. We have to struggle for food, for space, for everything! It's not fair, it's not a blessing, right?

Mariah: Boy, you make statements that are true and we live this truth, but you are looking at this the wrong way. I am living here on my islands with my mother ocean everyday, and despite all these circumstances I can rejoice because we have enough.

Kahanamoku: How can that make you happy? Our family was kings! Don't you think you should have more? So you could rest and not have to always... have to always struggle? You deserve that TuTu! It makes me so angry! I want more for you!

Casting the net out again, pulling back in, but Mariah stops pulling and sighs. Her face is saddened; she shakes her head slightly from side to side.

Mariah: Yet, you still do not understand, boy. It makes my old heart heavy you are allowing anger to well inside you. None of this is about more. It is about aloha. Have you ever wondered why this one word has so much meaning to our people?

Mariah: 'Aloha kakahiaka'

Narrator: Good morning.

Mariah: "Aloha 'oe"

Narrator: Farewell to you.

Mariah: "Aloha 'aina"

Narrator: Love of the land.

Mariah: "Aloha nui loa"

Narrator: Very much love.

Mariah: It is because “aloha” lives in you. It lives in me, and in all the Hawaiian people. We exist today because of it.

The boy shakes his head from side to side in disbelief.

Kahanamoku: How cans that be, TuTu?

Mariah: Because boy when you live with enough aloha in your heart things and situations no matter. Who claims to own the land, where we live, our struggle, no matter. Enough aloha keeps us fed, keeps us happy, keeps us together. That no one can ever take from you.

The two are silent for a moment as Kahanamoku dwells on Mariah’s words

The only sounds are those of the ocean waves and the shore. Kahanamoku hangs his head in shame.

Kahanamoku: (*whispering*) I’m sorry, TuTu.

Again Mariah makes her way across the beach to the boy’s side. She kneels in front of him, wrapping her arm around Kahanamoku’s shoulders, and speaking softly to him, she uses her index finger to tilt his hanging head up and looks into his saddened eyes.

Mariah: No need for that, boy. Nothing to be sad about. You just have to learn. Aloha is what binds our people together. It is what protects our hearts, and protects our ohana.

Narrator: Family.

Mariah: When I am gone, it is that aloha that will live in you, and as long as it does... you will always have enough. That is my deepest wish for you, that you always have enough aloha. If you have this then you will always have enough of everything else.

She kisses his forehead as she rises from the sand. Silently they pull in the net, sort, and retain edible items. Mariah nods her head at the boy and smiles. Without words he knows they have acquired enough for the evening meal. They stand and gather their things. Making their way silently back down the beach toward home.

Mariah: “Aloha au ia ‘oe” boy.

Kahanamoku: I love you too, TuTu.

Lights begin to fade as they walk along the beach until the two completely fade into the darkness. Slight Hawaiian chanting can be heard, then silence.

The end.

By Shawna Elmore

Hello, my name is Shawna, and I'm a biiiiiig girl! I often wonder, "Has anyone ever stopped to consider the locomotion required for me to move through this Earth?" There are people who weigh less than I do that are confined to motorized chairs, yet, here I am, ~~waddling my way~~ ^{The waddling my way} across campus. I don't feel like I think I'm supposed to feel. I can sense the circumference, and notice the heft, but I don't feel the obligation of shame. I'm a great adaptor, which might also be my biggest problem. I got so comfortable being big that big got comfortable being me. Even when I was younger and wasn't big, I was still big. I was always taller and thicker than every girl and every boy. I look back at pictures of myself from that time and am perplexed as to how I was big at all and if the thought of being big wasn't in my head then, would I have been so apt to be this big now? (Please disregard the 90s-ness of



this picture!)

Hell, there was a time that I marched on football fields playing the fat version of the trumpet, (the marching baritone). It was certainly something to see, but it's always taken a certain violence to keep my forward momentum.

So, let's get to this "violence." Let me start with saying that it's not insidious or particularly willful, but I think it's what drives me. In physics class, we learned the force it takes for a rocket to blast off of this Earth; I deal with a similar situation....example: I get up from my computer desk and grab my phone, what instantly flashes in my mind is a scene in which some anonymous person smashes the phone on my face, breaking the glass. It only lasts a second. There's no before or after, just the impact. For the longest time I never questioned it. My brain is a sassy diva, and she does what she wants. Finally, though, one day I did sit and think about it. For those who know me, I'm not an overly violent person. I'm not depressed. I'm not anxious. I don't feel alone. In fact, I feel quite healthy when it comes to my mental state. Yet, all throughout my life, I've had these flashes of violence constantly happening to my person. Please, allow me to regale you with the repeat offenders my brain seems to enjoy the most. Of course, there's the phone to the face, there's also the giant hook in the cheek, and then there's the one that I involuntarily act out the most which is the knife in the left side of my neck. Many times I've acted out catching the knife, fighting against the person wielding it, trying to keep it from going in any further. There are others as well but just variations on these three.

I'm never scared, though, it's not like a waking night terror or anything like that. It's just a flash that's almost a transition from one state to another. Like from a resting state to a mobile one. That's when I figured that perhaps these flashes are how I've adapted to being big. That my brain requires this height of a fight or flight mechanism to simply inspire my

limbs to get up and move. I do have an active imagination, and I do watch action flicks and kung fu movies and play violent video games, but what I experience seems very disconnected from that. The flashes are things that have become normal and don't affect my interactions with people. In fact, no one who knows me knows about this at all. And perhaps, having people find out through this personal essay is not such a good idea as it might color me in a different light. I assure you, if you know me, then you know me, and this is just a weird aspect of myself that I'm trying to quantify.

I think my massive need for music has something to do with this. If you ask my mother, my choice in music is a type of violence as well. I'm always listening to music, ALWAYS!!! I could function without it, but I prefer not to. It's sad, but you could pretty much equate me to the ectoplasmic slime from Ghost Busters 2; kinetically activated by music. When I'm in the sonic realm, I can ignore the whining of my body, and, let me tell you, it's worse than Scarlett O'Hara. Music is my all-purpose playground, and I find strength within it. It keeps me safe from socializing with strangers, it becomes the soundtrack to my imaginings, and I think the beats have the same effect as the violent flashes on my limbs, which bids them to move. With every good, there's a bad, though. My hips may be popping, but my mind is sinking. The music acts as a concert hall for my fantasies whose performances are so spectacular they leave little room for real world passions. If my brain was an ocean then music would have me believe that the light was coming from below, and the closer you get to gravity, the faster it pulls.

Which brings me to my biggest sadness; only I can get me out of this gravity well of my own creation. It's taken me about fifteen years to see the truth of the past and the bricks that I have laid because of it. It's like encasing yourself in a brick wall, and then, after 15 years going, "Oh! I see what I did, here." However, I'm worried it might be too late! My flashes are starting to go away. Does that mean my mind is starting to give up? That I've become so complacent within this huge mass that I don't get to move anymore? That I was coasting on simply being young and as I age I'm grinding to a halt? But, if it takes violent images to merely create a burst of kinetic energy, how can the slow degradation of my condition inspire any type of movement at all?

Physical, Cognitive and Emotional Effects of Male Circumcision Throughout Life-span
By Vance Neely

Abstract

Newborn male circumcision is the most prevalent surgical procedure performed in the United States; it has serious physical, sexual, and psychological consequences. As customarily performed without analgesia or anesthetic, circumcision is noticeably painful too. Some studies link non-consensual male circumcision with an assortment of undesirable sentiments and even post-traumatic stress disorder. Some circumcised men have pronounced their outlooks in the language of mutilation and sexual assault. In view of the present and long term risks, as well as the legal ramifications which may arise, it is appropriate for health professionals and scientists to re-examine the so-called evidence and contribute in the ever-growing dispute about the suitability of circumcising non-consenting minors. This invasive, useless surgical procedure carries serious complication and health risks as well as many ethical considerations.

Physical, Cognitive and Emotional Effects of Male Circumcision throughout Life-span
Americans believe circumcision is merely a routine procedure performed on infant males a few days old. That is likely where their circumcision thinking ends. Very few people will think analytically about the procedure itself or even contemplate its risks, both physically and perhaps even cognitively and emotionally. Or, more specifically, that there can be severe psychological risks that are a direct result of physical damage from circumcision.

Circumcision, as a routine medical practice in the United States, began as a response to boys masturbating. In an article found in *The Journal of Social History* that details the history of circumcision in the western world, we find a comprehensive history of the procedure. It was in the 1930s when a study determined that a high percentage of underage children with “psychological and behavioral problems” had been “threatened with mutilating operations on their penis if they masturbated.” (Darby, 2003, p. 738)

David Llewellyn is an attorney who specializes in legal cases involving male circumcision, in Atlanta, Georgia. In his article, “Penile Torts in the Courts”, Llewellyn discusses how the infant is taken from his parents and strapped with Velcro to a specialized board generally known in the medical community as a “Circumstraint.” His foreskin is then torn from the glans to begin the nearly ten-minute procedure predominantly done without anesthetics of any kind, topical or otherwise. Llewellyn goes on to describe the second half of the procedure where the foreskin is crushed against a clamp and sliced off with a scalpel. Llewellyn describes a typical circumcision as follows: “His screaming increased, together with his heartbeat, cortisol level, and respiration rate, ultimately reaching levels of distress consistent with the torture that the doctor was inflicting upon him” (Llewellyn, 2004, p. 70).

Pain and trauma found in neonates are significant issues because infants are unable to successfully communicate verbally, and have a rapidly developing nervous system. Elimination of the nerves within the foreskin by circumcision produces a scarcity in sensory input into the central, parasympathetic, and sympathetic nervous systems. The male foreskin, analogous to the female clitoral prepuce, is abundantly innervated for maximum sensual pleasure. “Circumcision ablates the most sensitive parts of the penis” (Sorrells et al., 2007). One, therefore, would presume to discover a rather negative alteration in sexual response due to circumcision.

Babies go into shock, which can look like a tranquil state, but it is actually a semi-comatose state that the baby’s body enters to endure the excruciating pain and trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a psychological condition characterized by tenacious mental and emotional stress resulting from a result of physical or psychological injury,

likened to a constant flashback of past trauma with a dulled sense of reality. During circumcision an infant undergoes life-threatening levels of pain, terror, and powerlessness so that the psychological effects meet the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder. Nurses may tell parents, "He slept right through it," in order to keep angst at bay. Who wants to hear that they have subjected their child to torture and agony?

One would expect to find psychological effects associated with the pain of circumcision. Anna Freud has indicated that

any surgical interference with the child's body may serve as a focal point for the activation, reactivation, grouping, and rationalization of the ideas of being attacked, overwhelmed and (or) castrated...where they have overstrained to integrate the experience, the child reacts to the operation with neurotic outbreaks; where the ego is unable to cope with the anxiety released, the operation becomes a trauma for the child. (Freud, 1952)

According to Anna Freud's hypothesis, individuals can also suggest that circumcision around the phallic stage, with understanding the emotional state of already being castrated, will spark in the child a rampant confusion about his own sexual identity. The child may perceive circumcision as a violent attack, and that will have unfavorable effects on the ego withdrawing from fear of castration yet constructing a sense of reality to them and thus instituting the present feelings of being castrated.

Circumcision negatively impacts adolescent and adult relationships during the intimacy and isolation stages of development. Circumcised males suffering from unresolved post-traumatic stress disorder regularly feel endangered and betrayed due to the lack of maternal intimacy during infancy. Spouses, friends, or family members may feel unsettled because the survivor has not taken the necessary steps to live peacefully with his own permanent injury. Spouses may become distant toward the survivor due to the lack of communication and aversion from the real issue. This may help explain the rising rates of divorce in the United States.

Many adolescents and adults hold anger toward their parents for their circumcision. It is encouraging to observe them giving voice to their understanding of the harm inflicted upon them without their consent. At one International Symposium on Circumcision, there was a Healing Ceremony for individuals fighting to end non-consensual circumcision. Gathered around in a circle, circumcisers, as well as their victims, shared their personal stories. As men begin to fully understand what has been done to them and the façade of denial comes off, a compelling vigor for healing and defending the sons of the future emerges.

In a recent ground-breaking study completed by Dan Bollinger and Robert S. Van Howe, they were able to successfully exhibit a correlation between infant male circumcision and personality trait disorders. They found that rates of alexithymia, the inability to process emotions, were 19.9 percent higher in men who were circumcised than men who were left the way nature made them. Another key aspect of their study demonstrated the increased desire for erectile dysfunction medications in individuals who underwent circumcision as infants. (Bollinger & Van Howe, 2011)

Circumcised men often feel a great deal of anxiety about their circumcision status. This manifests itself either in an unwillingness to talk about their situation or a melodramatic proclamation that they feel perfectly fine with their circumcision. Similarly, many men who were circumcised as infants grow up to become circumcisers themselves in an unending, repetitive pattern of abuse (Gleiser, 2003). The select few who do decide to speak out against their own mutilation are often mocked by their peers and accused of being delusional. Stereotypically, a circumcised father will adamantly insist that a son should undergo circumcision although this is contrary to holistic medical advice. The aforementioned is identified as the adamant father syndrome.

There is no consistent, positive impact of circumcision (Van Howe, 2013). There is a serious concern among rational opponents of child circumcision that children who grow into adolescence with the idea that circumcision prevents STI/HIV will become more promiscuous. Empirical evidence supports this concern in that the United States has the highest rate of HIV infections of all industrialized nations (HIV/AIDS). By diverting attention away from more effective interventions, circumcision programs will likely increase the number of HIV infections (Storms & Van Howe, 2011).

While sexual intercourse is an important part of a romantic relationship and helps couples bond together, it is easy to see how problems with erectile dysfunction can result in psychological issues such as feelings of inadequacy. When passionate love is not present in a relationship, other aspects of the relationship, such as commitment and intimacy, can be affected to cause anxiety and a gradual reduction in sexual activity. These feelings can make the man in the relationship feel as if he is responsible for marital or relationship problems, causing even more psychological harm for both partners.

The only way to exhibit what these men feel is to personally hear the very thoughts and feelings from normal men who feel they were damaged and disfigured by their circumcision. Many men who talk about their circumcision will frequently quote the medical oath to "First, do no harm." They do this as a way to point out that, in their eyes, the medical community has failed their right to a whole, natural body.

Jim Bigelow, Ph.D., clinical psychologist and expert on the increasingly popular foreskin restoration movement, notes that, "...abused children are apt to become abusers. We know that violence begets violence. And we know that a variety of childhood traumas result in rather predictable behavior and personality problems later in life" (Bigelow, 1992, p. 6). He says to go on, "...inflicting excruciating trauma on a large segment of our infant male population and assume that there are no related consequences later in life is, in this age of enlightenment, sheer madness" (Bigelow, p. 6).

As far as human development is concerned, cognitive and emotional trauma directly linked to circumcision are important enough issues that there is a need for individuals in the counseling field to recognize this emerging trauma and be aware of the implications. While being competent in the counseling of men going through problems related to circumcision is unrealistic for all counselors, there seems to be a need for counselors to at least be aware of this problem and be willing to refer out when necessary. In view of the adverse physical, cognitive and emotional effects of male circumcision, there is now strong and growing support for reconsidering this procedure as being an unnecessary mutilation of the genitals.

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What's in the Box?
By Diana Heath Smothers

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

ZACH, *an imaginative 8-year-old boy*
ADAM, *a realist, father of ZACH, in his early 30's*
ALICE, *a busybody, mother of ZACH, in her early 30's*

SETTING: *The backyard porch of a pristine suburban house in the summertime. On the porch sits a white table and chairs surrounded by white fencing. Outside the fence lies lush green grass and marks of where ZACH has been digging in the ground. There are several toys in the yard baking in the sunlight.*

SCENE 1

(At rise, ADAM sits with his legs crossed at the table and reads a newspaper. He hears ZACH shouting at him and rushing up to the porch with something in his arms.)

ZACH

Dad, Dad! Look what I found, Dad! It was over there in the back of the yard by that bush! Look!

ADAM

(Distractedly)

What did you find, ZACH? Come set it on the table so we both can see it.

(ZACH sets a wooden box on top of the porch table, making a loud thud and getting dirt all over the place. At this, ADAM rolls his eyes, and sets down his newspaper. Very annoyed, he brushes some dirt off the table.)

ZACH

It's kind of heavy. I wonder what's inside? It could be anything, right? Like a pirate's lost treasure! Imagine all the gold coins and red rubies that could fit in this box!

ADAM

Well, ZACH, I hardly doubt that there is treasure in this box. We don't even live near the ocean. Pirates would never have come this far inland to bury their treasure.

ZACH

(Confusedly)

Could it be something else, then? Maybe it's a magic box. There could be something like pixie dust in there. Fairy dust, you know? That stuff that can help you fly! I'd want to fly everywhere if there's some in here!

(He flings his dirty arms up in the air and starts pretend-flying all over the porch making "whooshing" sounds as he does so.)

ADAM

What an extraordinary idea you have there, ZACH. It sounds like you've been watching too many Disney movies. You do know all that is fiction, right? That means it's not real. That box can't contain fairy dust because it's impossible. So stop pretending and let's really try and figure out what's in the box.

(ZACH stops flying and trudges back over to the table. He sits in the chair across from his father's. He puts his elbows on the table and his head rests in his hands as he stares at the box curiously.)

ZACH

(Disappointingly)

Well, what else could it be?

ADAM

To be honest, ZACH, I don't think we'll find anything in this box that we'd want to see. Maybe we should just keep it closed and throw it out.

ZACH

(Desperately)

But Dad, I want to play with it! We can't just throw it away! I found it; I want to see what's inside! There could be anything in there! What if there's a little world with a tiny village in there with little people that need my help? Maybe they need the sunlight to keep their food growing. We need to open it for them!

ADAM

(Shaking his head)

Honestly, where do you come up with these ideas? There are no little people in there, don't worry. You can't expect there to be villagers that small living in a buried wooden box in our back yard. Where *do* you get these fantastical ideas? Maybe we shouldn't let you watch cartoons that close to bedtime anymore...Hm?

(ZACH hunches slightly, still staring at the box. He seems more and more impatient the longer he stares. His feet swing back and forth as he sits in his chair. Long silent seconds pass. ADAM finally notices how uncomfortable ZACH looks and starts surveying the box himself.)

SCENE 2

ADAM

You know, I didn't really want to tell you this, but I think you'll like to know what I think is in here. It could be something sad or dirty. Maybe the family that owned this house before us had a pet. That pet may have died, and maybe the family buried it in this box? --I know that's sad, but how would you feel if we opened it and found a dead cat in there? You'd be very

sad right? Let's not open it okay? We should just throw it out, like I said. Or, we can bury it back where you found it.

ZACH

(Frowning)

I didn't think about that. I just thought it was cool that I found something in the dirt over there... I was just having *fun*...

ADAM

Well, I know you were having fun, but when it comes to things that we don't know a whole lot about, we should tread carefully. You know, be careful of what we are getting ourselves into. Right?

ZACH

Yeah, I know Dad...But what if it's not a dead cat? I mean it could still be something cool, right?

ADAM

(Thoughtfully)

I know you really want it to be something fun and exciting, but the truth is, I'm worried about what's in the box. Scared, even. I was just reading in the news earlier about how the local police had a drug bust just a few blocks away from our house. Criminals and bad guys were meeting up and selling drugs around that area, and do you know what they do? --They hide large amounts of drugs and large amounts of money all around town so they can handle their transactions quietly. Kind of like--one bad guy hides bad stuff somewhere so the other bad guy can go pick it up at a different time...Hm...Maybe we should take it to the police station?

(ADAM shivers a little at the thought of the chance that the box his son found in the back yard could be part of a big drug-related scheme.)

ZACH

(Shocked)

Well I hope it's nothing like *that*. I was just playing! I never think of stuff the way you think of stuff, Dad! You never have any fun ideas. You never want to play games with me, or read me cool stories, and now you won't even open this cool box that I found with me!

(ZACH gets red in the face and even more impatient. He crosses his arms and looks straight into his dad's eyes. The seconds seem to tick by slowly and silently again.)

ADAM

(Calmly)

Look ZACH, you can imagine what you want, but I really think there is nothing of interest to us in this box. I don't want to open it. Okay?

ZACH

(Angrily)

But I *DO* want to open it!

(All of a sudden, ADAM and ZACH hear footsteps in the house. ALICE just gets home from running errands. They can hear her hum mindlessly as she sits down grocery bags and trots around inside the house, making herself at home.)

ADAM

(Grumpily)

Sounds like your mom's home.

SCENE 3

(ALICE enters onto the sunny backyard porch where ADAM and ZACH sit grumpy-looking across from each other. She stops her mindless humming abruptly.)

ALICE

(Cheery)

Well hello you two! Such a nice day outside isn't it? I'm so glad the both of you are out here enjoying it! Oh! —

(Her eyes dart toward the dirty wooden box that sits between them on the table.)

What's in the box?

(Adam and Zach barely register what she asked until, without warning; her hand goes straight for the wooden box on the table. Within a second, ADAM has a strained and fearful face, while ZACH scoots up in his chair excitedly. ALICE lifts up the top of the box and sets it aside on the table.)

(Sighing)

Hmph, nothing's in there at all.

(ADAM and ZACH both look extremely confused and seem to be in deep thought. ALICE notices this abrupt change in their demeanor.)

Well, you both seem so worked up right now. What did *you two* think was in the box?

ADAM

(Worried)

ALICE, I swore there would have been a dead pet or drug money, or something terrible in there. I didn't want to risk opening it--

ZACH

(Excitedly)

--And mom, I was thinking it was going to be some buried treasure, or fairy dust or something fantastic! I wanted to open it up so badly!

ALICE

Well, if I would have sat there and thought about it long enough; I wonder what I would have made for the box to hold? What would anyone see in this box? ...Oh well, I guess that's life isn't it? *(She made a cheery sigh)*--So who wants dinner?

(The curtain falls while ADAM looks solemn with his hand to his chin, ZACH looks hungry, and ALICE stands next to them smiling, looking forward to dinner.)

END OF PLAY

Forget Me Not
By Chalee N. Groves

CHAPTER ONE

I leaned over and kissed my soon-to-be-husband on his stubbly cheek.

"Isn't it beautiful?" I sighed, marveling at the gorgeous two-story home in front of us.

"Not as beautiful as you," he offered sweetly, chuckling at how cheesy he sounded.

I stroked my hand across his well-defined chest, inhaling the scent of Hugo Boss cologne that escaped from the fibers of his shirt.

"Oh, Mr. Benson, I'm in debt, aren't I?" I asked playfully. "Whatever will I do to repay you for this stunning, new home you've provided?"

He laughed as he swung muscular arms around my waist, lifting me off the ground.

"Well, Mrs. Almost-Benson, I think I can figure something out," he said with a wink.

I giggled, moving in to kiss his gorgeous lips, but the sound of click-clacking heels interrupted me. Adam returned me to the ground, draping one arm around my shoulders as he always did.

"Hello, neighbors!" The woman excitedly approached, holding the hand of a tall, lanky man.

"Hello," Adam replied, reaching out his hand, "I'm Adam Benson, and this is my fiancé, Emily Hamilton."

I smiled in response, boastfully holding out the hand that was home to the 14 karat, princess-cut – *Damn. Her ring makes mine look like a Cracker Jack prize.*

"Nice to meet you both, this is my husband Jason Asher, and I'm Lila."

We all exchanged handshakes.

I couldn't help but notice how beautiful Lila was – both of them actually. Lila's thin frame fit perfectly inside her designer dress suit, and her long, toned legs seemed to go for miles until they reached her pedicured toes peeping of her heels. Her shoulder-length, blonde bob framed her face, drawing attention to a set of stunning green eyes. Jason also looked as if he'd just stepped out of a GQ magazine. The sleeves of his white button down were snug around his biceps, which he obviously paid a lot of attention to. His sandy-blond hair was clean cut, and his face was free of stubble.

My God, I've just met Barbie and Ken.

"You all are welcome to come inside," Lila offered after several minutes of small talk, motioning towards the house next door.

Adam glanced down at his watch, and then back up to me.

"Our dinner reservations aren't until seven-thirty, sweetheart," he said, "we have a little while."

"Sure, baby, let's go."

I slid off my Converse sneakers, and sat them neatly by the door next to Lila's, completely embarrassed at the Kate Spade : Chuck Taylor comparison. I could've kicked myself for dressing down. I looked around the room, feeling as if I were in the home of some big-shot celebrity. The crimson-colored walls were so perfectly accented by the turquoise drapes that cascaded to the floor. I took a seat on the elegant leather sofa, which was perfectly aligned with the large, mahogany coffee table that held pictures of the magazine cover couple on their wedding day. *Good lord, they're hot.*

I was just looking up to compliment Lila on her extravagant taste, and noticed that she and I were the only ones in the room. She was sitting next to me, blankly staring at the television that wasn't on. *Wait – oh my god.*

"Adam?" I screamed, scrambling to get away from Lila's body. She had blood oozing from a large gash that stretched from ear to ear.

"Babe?" I yelled again.

I was beginning to cry when I suddenly felt the familiar hand grip my shoulder, and the cold steel against my neck. *Not again.*

"Please, don't do this," I pleaded.

The figure led me forcefully through the house, holding the blade uncomfortably close to my throat. I knew what was coming, but my eyes weren't capable of looking away. I approached the grim, black door. The same as always.

"Open it," the voice commanded me.

I reached for the knob, my sweaty palm slipping as I turned it.

"No," I sobbed, seeing the puddle of blood surrounding my fiancé, "Adam!"

Cold hands jolted me awake. I opened my eyes to see long, black hair, and a familiar smile. My heart began to slow back to a normal pace, and the beads of sweat on my forehead began to diminish. It had been 8 years since the murders in Charlottesville, Virginia. The news quit talking about it long ago, and the police had called off the search for the killer, leaving the case unsolved. But my memories hadn't faded a bit. I was stuck in Southwestern Virginia Mental Institute a year ago after the judge ruled that therapy was no longer "helping me."

"Dreams again, Miss Hamilton?" Rita guessed.

"What do you think?" I croaked back, still a little shook up.

The white walls surrounding me were plain. No decorations. No color. Just a single picture of Adam and me at the beach the day he proposed. It seemed so long ago. The last 8 years without him have been the longest of my life. Especially spent in this hell hole. Who did these people think they were? They had the woman who got away from a psychopath locked up in some institution for being "unstable," but he's still on the loose. *What the hell does "unstable" even mean? Who wouldn't be unstable after witnessing a blood bath that took the lives of several innocent people, and nearly their own? Anyone would.*

"Can I go outside?" I asked Rita, itching for some Nicotine. Smoking was a habit I'd picked up after Adam's death. I may as well, right? What did I have to live for?

"Not right now," she replied, "after breakfast, okay?" She leaned down and untucked the corners of my covers, prompting me to get out of bed.

This is why I hate you, Rita.

Without answering, I got up and walked over to the small wooden dresser in the corner, opening the top drawer.

"Here, let me help—" she tried.

"I don't need your fucking help," I shot back, "I'm perfectly capable of dressing myself, okay Rita? I'm sad, not paralyzed!"

"I'm sorry, Emily," Rita breathed, leaving the room quietly.

The words rang in my head after I said them. *I'm sad, not paralyzed.* The truth was that I was paralyzed. Every moment that sick bastard was still alive, I would be. Paralyzed by the fact that he took everything from me and didn't have a care in the world, paralyzed by the constant fear that he would find me and do what he didn't get the chance to do before – finish the job.

After I pulled on my clothes, I walked over to the picture on the wall. I looked at the version of Emily in the picture, she was different than me. Her wavy, brown hair fell just below her collar bone, the salty air had given it quite a look that day. Her brilliant, brown eyes popped with happiness on account of the hunk of a man standing beside her. *My Adam.*

.....

I walked into the dining room, instantly noticing the wild, gray head of hair in the corner.

"Good morning, Mrs. Angela," I said, sitting down next to the small, wrinkled woman. The kitchen aid appeared at the table almost instantly with a bowl, and a cup of coffee.

"Emily," she sighed, reaching over and resting her hand on mine without looking up from her breakfast, "have they caught him yet?"

Mrs. Angela was a frail little thing, but she had the biggest heart. She was admitted to Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute when she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. She was under the impression that the police were still actively searching for the man who killed Adam, and asked about it every day, several times a day. Her husband died from a heart attack many years ago, but her fragile mind believed that he was coming to get her any day now, and she had promised me that they would help find the man who was responsible.

"Not yet," I sighed, "but they will."

"Don't you give up, honey, I'm sure they are right on his heels."

I gave her hand a little squeeze. I wasn't grateful for much anymore, Mrs. Angela was the only exception. Without this woman, I would be completely alone.

"When Jimmy gets here, we're going straight to the police station," Mrs. Angela piped up, changing her tone completely, "and we're going to demand some answers. I want to know what is being done to find this son of a bitch!" She scooted her chair back as forcefully as her weakened muscles allowed, threw her napkin in her plate, and began to get up.

"Where's Jimmy?!" Her voice echoed through the dining room. A nurse approached rather quickly.

"Its okay, Mrs. Angela," the nurse cooed, "Jimmy will be here shortly, let's go take your medicine, and lie down for a little while."

She grabbed her by the hand, and led her out of the dining area towards her room. She could be heard yelling obscenities down the hall.

I looked down at my breakfast.

Oatmeal – again. Yay.

I pushed my bowl back after a couple bites, thinking about what Mrs. Angela said.

What was done to find the sicko that did this? How could no one even care anymore? Everyone who had been assigned to the case eight years ago had now moved on to new cases, or retired. Did they stay awake at night, wondering if the killer might strike again? No. They didn't care. They had their husbands or wives in bed next to them every night, and had the privilege to kiss them goodbye in the mornings before leaving for work. What did I have? An uncomfortable bed, a best friend that didn't know her own name half the time, and three repulsive meals a day.

"Rita," I called, making her appear from around the corner almost instantly, "I'm going outside now. I need a cigarette."

"Okay, but you need to be back in by 10:00," she said politely, "we're playing bingo in the activity hall today."

"Great," I mumbled, sarcasm dripping from my lips, "can you get my cigarettes now?"

"I'll be right back, don't you go anywhere," Rita said playfully, walking away.

I found my eyes rolling back in my head without any effort. This happened nearly every time Rita spoke.

I'm twenty-nine years old, damn it. I should be able to do what I want.

My jaded mind suddenly came to life, like a dry sponge being soaked in water again. I had an idea.

.....

I sat down on the wooden bench outside, overlooking the back yard.

More like a grassy cage.

I lit my cigarette and inhaled deeply, feeling the smoke sting my lungs.

I scanned the yard with my bloodshot eyes. *I'm all alone.*

I took a few more drags from my cigarette, and threw it down next to the barrel marked, "**LEAVE YOUR BUTTS HERE.**"

I went straight to my room, where I found Rita putting away my clean clothes.

"Hey, Rita, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, anything."

"I really didn't like sitting out there alone today," I said, possibly in the nicest tone I've ever spoken to her, "do you know what time the others go out for a smoke?"

"Monica usually takes them out around 9:45, right after breakfast," she answered, seeming a little taken back by my tone, "Sammy, Alvin, Charlie, and Mrs. Bolley. You can go with them if you'd like."

I plopped down on my uncomfortable bed, and waited for Rita to leave the room. When she was gone, I pulled the small, brown journal from beneath my bed. The pages were a little yellowed, but I didn't mind. I had written in the journal almost daily for several years, at least up until Adam was killed. I enjoyed reading the happy entries, it's what kept me from drowning in my own brain most of the time. I flipped until I came to my favorite page and started reading:

March 12

I'm starting to think he's perfect. We went into Norfolk this evening for dinner, which makes this our fifth date. He opens the car door, and pulls out the chair for me in the restaurants. Is it possible to love someone I just met a month ago?

I stopped there.

Of course it's possible, I thought, and i'll never stop.

Later that night, I laid in bed, waiting on the sounds of footsteps in the hall to die down, and the voices to rest. I had a big day ahead of me tomorrow, but I had a few things to take care of first.

When I was sure the hall was empty, I crept out of bed, and pulled the door open as quietly as possible. Mrs. Angela's room was only three doors down. I knew for sure she'd still be awake. She was always the one caught wondering the halls late at night looking for Jimmy.

I tiptoed down the hall, pausing when I reached Mrs. Angela's open door.

"Mrs. Angela," I whispered, "it's me, Emily."

"Emily," she replied, just as she always did.

I entered, softly pushing the door closed behind me. Mrs. Angela was sitting at a desk on the far wall, staring out the window. I approached her slowly so as not to startle her.

"What keeps you up this late, honey?" She asked.

"Well," I started, taking her hand in mine, "I just want you to know, I'm leaving tomorrow."

Chapter One

Someone once told me not to plan too far ahead because plans fall through. Plans change. Times change. You change. That same person told me that I should start planning my future. They told me to nail down my five year plan and paint a picture of what my life should look like.

Someone else told me that time is fleeting and just a figment of my imagination. They told me that nothing really mattered so I should just enjoy every moment the best I can while trying to push the thought of my looming death from of my mind. They told me that eventually things fall together and eventually they fall apart so something else can fall together.

But what if I don't know what I want my life to be? What if every time I look into the future, it just sits there blank, waiting to be filled in? How exactly do I know when I'm on the right track? What happens to all of us who come from screwy families who never taught us how to be? The ones who are shot into this world like a bullet in a tiny room filled with balloons. The ones who feel every emotion times ten and who hunger for something deeper than a mundane existence.

"So what do you think constitutes a drinking problem?" I asked, leaning against the wall.

"I mean, I don't really know." Corrie shrugged, folding her arms across her chest as a worried look crossed her face.

"Then what exactly makes you think you have one?" I asked.

"Like, last night, after I got home from work, I was so stressed out that I drank an entire bottle of Boone's Farm," Corrie replied. "And then I cried and then I ate an entire pizza, which is not good because I'm trying to lose weight for my wedding!"

I never understood Corrie's constant obsession with her weight seeing as though she stands at a tall five eleven and weighs a hundred and fifteen pounds. She's one of those girls that other girls hate because of her model-like looks.

Corrie had always been this way since we met in high school. She was easily one of the prettiest girls at our school and yet the most insecure. Regardless, we clicked immediately and spent most of high school at each other's side.

"Oh, you don't have a drinking problem, you're depressed," I said. "Like, even if you do have a drinking problem everyone our age does. Ya know?"

Corrie took the gumball machine in her hands and, with a quick jolt, slammed it against the wall, leaving a rough mark.

"Hey, what the hell is going on?" Enrique asked.

"Work, Enrique," I replied.

"Work?" his eyes grew wide as he observed the mark on the wall. "You're standing around! I should fire you both."

"Enrique! You sound crazy right now!" I rubbed my forehead. "Do you hear yourself?"

"Enrique, I'm kind of dealing with some heavy shit so if you could just back off."

Corrie rolled her eyes.

"Leave your shit at the door and go find work to do." Enrique pointed at us.

I smiled at Enrique. "You've gotta relax. None of this shit is good for your blood pressure."

Enrique took a sip from his flask. "Just finish? Yeah? Now." Enrique stormed off, mumbling profanities under his breathe.

"You don't have a drinking problem," I repeated. "Adam. Now, Adam has a drinking problem."

“Oh, so you’re saying I don’t have a drinking problem but my fiancé does? Beautiful. Thank you, Bliss.”

“I’m totally just being honest,” I said. “Like, I’m pretty sure it’ll work itself out. It always does, right? Like, remember that month where I kept taking Adderall and oxy’s? And now look at me.”

We continued our work in silence until my shift ended. I wiped the tables down and stared out the picture window, insuring myself that no customers were going to come in. Another empty day at Enrique’s dying restaurant.

I took a look around at the cramped space. The walls were a sickening green color and the carpets looked as if they hadn’t been properly cleaned in over ten years. The tables stood unevenly on their legs causing a swaying motion for every person that sat down. The general vibe of the place was unsettling.

“I’m leaving.” I popped my head in Enrique’s office.

“Is Debbie here?” he asked.

“No.” I shook my head.

“Any customers?”

“No.”

“Are you coming in tomorrow?”

“No...yes.”

“Then get the fuck out and go learn something.”

“Then you stay the fuck here and don’t burn the place down.”

He threw a crumbled up paper at me, hitting my backpack as I walked away.

My life could be worse. But it also could be better. I go to a small Liberal Arts college in a small town. I live in a crummy efficiency apartment two blocks away from campus and five blocks away from my job. I don’t have a car. But I do have a balcony with no fence.

Life is okay.

....

“Do you ever think of yourself in terms of a weird mutation?” Owen asked, plopping down next to me.

“Sort of...I mean, we’re basically just weird, walking pieces of overgrown matter that evolved from...slimy things...”

“I think we’re all science experiments gone wrong,” Owen said. “Killing each other and the earth and ourselves...slowly.”

“You’re fucking depressing today,” I said. “Why are you talking to me?”

“How can I not be?” Owen asked. “It’s eight am and I’m in an algebra class in the middle of bum fuck nowhere. And I sense that you don’t think about where the human race came from, do you?”

I shook my head.

“You should.”

“You should lower your expectations,” I commented.

“They can’t get any lower,” He said. “If I lower them more then I’ll have more friends than I can manage. Then I would be a fucking...meatball.”

“A meatball?”

“Yeah, fuck you.”

“You’re the type of person that could kill someone,” I commented. “Have you ever killed a guy?”

Owen shook his head and buried his face in whatever weird novel he was into at the moment. After a few minutes passed, he let out a long sigh and slammed his book down.

“Just what exactly are you doing with your life?” he demanded. “Still working on that “book” you’ve been trying to finish for the past two years?”

“Okay, for your information, yes, I am still working on that book because you can’t really write a good book in one day,” I pointed out. “And, secondly, I’ve been extremely busy with school and work and life.”

“School, really? And work?” he raised his eye brows. “It’s community college, Bliss! And you can’t really blame your job because it’s an irrelevant job.”

“Irrelevant?” I stood up, “is that really a word you wanna throw around right now, Owen?”

I began packing my bag just as my professor walked in, announcing how wonderful she believes college algebra is.

“Where are you going?” he asked, rolling his eyes.

“None of your business, Owen,” I said. “This is bananas.”

“Bliss?” my professor called to me as I was walking out the door.

“I’m having a personal problem right now and I have to go,” I mumbled. “It’s very personal and very problematic, possibly medical.”

She looked at me, bewildered.

I managed a shrug and escaped the classroom promptly.

“Bliss, what’s wrong with your face?” Ashley asked, stopping in front of me.

“It’s just...it’s just the way my face looks,” I replied. “Nothing’s wrong. This is just my face. What are you up to?”

“Just got outta Physics,” she replied, rolling her eyes.

“That’s really insane,” I said. “Like, this is community college and we’re sociology majors. What about any of that says we are willing to take a physics class?”

“Exactly my point.” Ashley shook her head.

When I first met Ashley two years ago, she always dressed up with full makeup and the trendiest clothes. Now she wears the same sweat pants with the same sweat shirt every day. Her ratty blonde hair sits on the top of her head in a messy bun. Life has that funny effect on people my age. We’re launched into this world with hope and then halfway through we’re terrified and confused.

“I always felt like I was probably secretly good at braiding hair,” Ashley said. “Can I braid your hair at some point?”

“I don’t know about that,” I said. “I’ve never really been that type of person really.”

“What do you mean?” she asked, offended.

“Oh, you know, the type of person who’s really into braiding hair,” I said. “Just...”

“That sounds really judgmental,” Ashley commented. “Like, I’m...I’m a little hurt.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” I said. “Not my intentions at all. Look, you can totally braid my hair at some point over the summer.”

“But now I know you’re lying so this is all irrelevant,” Ashley said.

“Ashley, don’t even.” I put my hand up. “Our bromance is beautiful.”

Ashley stayed uncharacteristically quiet until we parted ways. She didn’t say goodbye. But I waved at her even though her back was to me.

I wandered the campus aimlessly, feeling as though I didn’t really exist since this was the time I was usually in class. It was as if I was a ghost and all the other students could see right through me. Everyone looked tired.

Unrequited
By Jessica Ellis

In a place where magic meets present day, there rests a great Forest; ever vast, it knows all, hides all, and in it there are great mysteries ripe with intrigue. It was forever changing, morphing, and those who ventured into it swore that it moved and breathed. It was a trickster, causing adventurers to become lost within its green maze.

A town was eventually founded and many of the founders hoped to master the Forest. Many frightening years were spent trying to combat all the forest threw at them, until they erected a wall to keep forest and town separate. It was put up to keep people safe, away from the creatures of the dark wood, though the howling of wolves could still be heard coming from the profundity that was the Forest. The towns' folk stated that anyone who ventured in was as good as dead. They kept their children in doors most of the time, and lights were on constantly. The town of Foxmarsh was a paranoid town, born of dark yet always seeking the light.

In this town there lived a young girl by the name of Annabelle Fairchild. She was described by most of the townsfolk as very beautiful. Throughout most of her childhood she was the object of all of the boys' affection. Her mother had died when Annabelle was very young, leaving her with only a father to look after her. Her father was a very successful lawyer and had all of the single women fighting in the streets for his affections. But they held no sway over his heart, for Annabelle was the only girl for him. He was considered a great and loving father.

Jump ahead a few years, Annabelle had turned twelve, it was the year that her whole world changed dramatically after the joining of Mr. Fairchild to a certain blonde haired beauty by the name of Margaret Stone. Margaret had a charm about her that drew people to her like a flies to honey and Mr. Fairchild was no different. He became enamored with her and he had only known Margaret for only three weeks before he proposed and demanded a speedy wedding. After the union, Annabelle was forced by her new stepmother to stay inside the house at all hours of the day to clean, cook and basically wait on her stepmother like a servant girl. With the change of atmosphere and the forceful ending to her childhood, Annabelle became very quiet and introverted. Young Annabelle's favorite pastime was sitting at the window to people watch and look for cloud pictures. Her warm brown eyes watched the boys she knew in childhood grow into young men, and she fell in love almost every day. There was one she especially admired, the dark haired boy she had never talked to nor did he seem to notice her, he played on the fringes, he was always by himself. She dreamed that he would be her prince charming, and he would rescue her from her stepmother. They were the dreams of a child.

"Annabelle, get away from that window and clean something for once in your life!" Her stepmother would snap when Annabelle gathered at the front window. She had always wanted her father to make the woman leave, but he was never any help; he loved his new trophy wife and always tried to keep her comfortable with fine jewelry and an expensive home. Every day it seemed the life of her father was being sucked out of him, his hair going white and his skin looking like translucent paper.

Down the road lived a very different person. He never took time to look out a window to watch the clouds nor did he dream. Draven Michaels was just...different. He didn't like to participate in sports or school. The adults were afraid of the youth with the ice blue eyes and hair as dark as midnight. The towns' folk thought him to be some kind of demon, but Draven didn't care what they thought. He claimed he didn't care about anything or anyone. But he was lying. Only one thing held some value in the cold boy's heart. Twelve-year-old Draven

loved Annabelle Fairchild. He loved the quiet way she daydreamed and how she would look at him without flinching when his ice blue eyes landed on her. Others claimed they loved her, but what they thought they knew about her was seriously lacking. Draven saw Annabelle for who she truly was.

The second Tuesday in June, Annabelle was ordered to fetch milk from the local corner store. Her father had been ill for a few days and Margaret thought Annabelle was being a pest when she was trying to attend to her father. Annabelle had been living with her atrocious stepmother for over five years and over those five years Annabelle had become more beautiful, much to the dismay of her stepmother. As she grew into her beauty her stepmother's treatment of her worsened. Annabelle had become fed up with the way she was being treated and the way her father just sat there, he was just withering away and no one but Annabelle seemed concerned; hence being sent to fetch milk.

Right above her head, dark clouds were starting to form and threatening rain. They reflected her mood perfectly. Wind; it whipped Annabelle's hair around her head, nearly blinding her. She was trying to watch where she was, but and she ended up bumping into a dark object heading in the opposite direction. She fell ungracefully onto her backside; she peered up at the boy with the pretty blue eyes through the curtain of her auburn hair. Her heart skipped a beat.

"Sorry," she burst out. Draven just looked down at her. He had come a long way since she had watched him from her window five years ago. He had gotten taller, his shoulders broadened and he went from twelve year old skinny to seventeen year old muscle. He offered her his hand; Annabelle reddened when she realized she had been staring.

"Thank you," she said, taking his hand and letting him pull her to her feet. She hastily put her hair in order while he smirked at her bewildered expression.

"See you around," Draven said placing his hand on her arm when she wobbled slightly. Annabelle stood looking at his retreating figure with longing in her heart.

Annabelle had gotten milk, but it was two hours later that she returned home. She had taken her sweet time in the small store, going up and down each aisle slowly, looking through every magazine even reading the nutrition facts on all the candy products. When the store clerk threatened to throw her out she quickly bought the carton of milk and leisurely made her way home. She watched as the sky darkened even more; she hoped for rain. She also thought of Draven and how the dark sky matched his hair. The streetlights were starting to come on, the wind swept streets forever empty of life at this time of day.

Annabelle made it back to her own house after walking down the road at a slow pace. It was the house with the strange plants growing around the walk way and the catalog lawn furniture. She walked slowly up the brick pathway when a feeling of wrongness overcame her. The front door was open, a large black hole that no light could penetrate. Annabelle knew that her stepmother would never allow the door to remain open for a long period of time, especially on a windy evening like this. Annabelle felt numb as she stepped inside the blackness.

"Hello?" Annabelle squeaked into the dark. She felt for the lamp that was next to the door; it was gone. She inched her way inside; her nerves stretched tight like guitar strings. She felt her way along the wall searching for a light switch. Feeling the protrusion in the wall, she flipped the switch, illuminating the room. Furniture was thrown about the room, expensive end tables carved from red wood casually tossed around as if by a large toddler. Picture frames were knocked down, showing shadows on what Margaret called "light cucumber" walls. Speckles of red dotted the cream carpet, and a faint red hand print could be seen smeared on the far wall.

"Oh, Annabelle you're finally home, did you get the milk?" Margaret Fairchild's overly cheerful tone asked. She stood in the doorway leading to the kitchen, and wafting out of the open door, Annabelle smelled the stench of death.

Annabelle stood there struck dumb. Gone was the jealous, blonde trophy wife; now a streak of black and gray roots could be seen, frown lines and crow's feet completed the haggard look that was Margaret Fairchild. She smiled at Annabelle, her teeth still white, a gift from her husband.

"Oh dear, it looks like it's going to rain. Shut the door, you're letting in a draft," Margaret ordered, though her commanding voice seemed hushed. Annabelle felt an icy chill go over the back of her neck; she didn't want to the door to close.

The door slammed on its own, shaking the wall and causing Annabelle to jump. Margaret laughed, low and harsh, making Annabelle cringe internally.

"Oh sweet baby, come give your mummy a kiss." Margaret opened her arms as if to embrace her. Annabelle shook her head; she didn't want to kiss Margaret. Margaret dropped her arms, seemingly hurt.

"I see how it is." Margaret said walking forward and grabbing Annabelle by the arm, almost wrenching it from its socket and walked her upstairs. Annabelle could feel the long curved claws that served as finger nails dig into her flesh. Annabelle tried to pull away, which wrenched her shoulder out more. While she was being dragged upstairs, Annabelle glimpsed at the pot simmering on the stove top. Inside was a deep crimson brew that resembled tomato sauce. Poking through the surface of the liquid was the tip of a finger with a ring that looked eerily familiar. Annabelle grew dizzy and even tried to go limp on the last stair on the second floor.

"Get up" Margaret half dragged, half carried her as she deposited Annabelle in her room, mumbling something about the moon and deadlines, Annabelle heard the lock *click*. Annabelle leaned against the door and tried not to vomit over the smell of death and copper. She couldn't believe it; she didn't want to think about the pot on the stove, or where her father was. She didn't see him sleeping in his bedroom when she was dragged by the open door. Covering a scream with her hand, she backed up until she felt the sharp jab of the closet door knob in the small of her back. She held back the hot tears threatening to blind her. She had to get out of here, Margaret had finally gone nuts, and not home shopping network nuts, but full out Jeffery Dahmer crazy. She looked around for a weapon, escape route, something that would help keep her alive for a few moments more. She stumbled toward her small bedroom window, ripping the hideous flowered curtains Margaret had bought off the wall. She tried to lift it stuck from lack of use. Annabelle's heart beat quickly, it was there in her throat, threatening to choke her on her own fear. Outside the door, there was the faint telltale sound of the squeaky floor boards on the stairs. Margaret was coming back.

"Come on!" she whispered savagely at the window, clawing and hitting at it with the flat of her hand. The image of the large kitchen knives was dancing in her head. Finally at long last it squeaked open and she jangled it up until she could perch on the sill. She kicked out the screen, behind her she could hear the door unlock and the knob starting to turn. Annabelle jumped, and fell screaming onto the small hedge separating their lawn from the neighbors'. She lay there dazed, her back practically on fire with so many little branches worming their way through her light jacket and into her skin.

Annabelle knew that Margaret would be down soon; she could picture her stepmother dragging her back inside and slicing her up like her father and put into the Fairchild stew.

Thunder rumbled in the distance; Annabelle rolled onto the ground, leaving the jacket, and hopped the neighbor's fence, disappearing into the shadows.

Draven had just sat down, alone, with his dinner when he heard the screaming. He didn't even hesitate as he grabbed his coat, nearly taking the door down as he barreled out of it. Outside became eerily quiet, like the world was holding its breath. Thunder growled in the distance, warning of the imminent torrent. He ran toward Annabelle's house; it looked deserted with the front door standing open and a window screen hanging off a nearby shrub.

"Annabelle?!" Draven whispered into the dark recesses of the house; he covered his nose at the smell that seemed to make the air heavy with every breath. He turned and scanned the yard, noting a red jacket donning the boarder hedge. He ran and jumped the fence, hoping he could follow her, even as it began to rain.

Annabelle knocked on several doors, even banging on a few of them, pleading to the people on the other side to let her in. They were too afraid of the night; they thought her a banshee come to steal their children. The town's folk huddled together in their homes, waiting out the dark and the storm. Annabelle was soon drenched as the thunder wielding clouds produced buckets upon buckets of rain. She saw a shadow person at the edge of her vision, and thinking it Margaret, ran blindly toward the Wall. She ran along it trailing her hand over the stone as she was blinded by the stinging drops of water. She came to a stop when her hand went through the stone. She explored further, feeling nothing at all but rough concrete, the hole seemed large, large enough to swallow her small form. Looking up, she saw the tall trees looming over her, so tall that the topmost branches blended in with the dark. She backed away; instinctively fearing the shrouded forms that appeared to be scaling the one thing people thought protected them from the monsters of the Forest. Looking back, Annabelle saw that no one would help her; she was either doomed to suffer at her stepmother's hand, or the creatures of the forest. Stepping toward the hole, she started crawling. She would rather take her chances with the forest creatures.

It wasn't raining under the canopy; in fact it felt dry and warm. It almost didn't feel like the same blustery place that she had left behind. If it wasn't for the hushed sound of raindrops on the leaves above she could swear she was in another world. Annabelle looked back at Foxmarsh through the hole in the Wall; the air in front of it was shimmering like heat coming off a paved road in the summer time. She could see a backyard and the back of a house, the curtain of rain and the shimmering air distorted the picture. She turned her back on Foxmarsh and started weaving her way through the trees.

It felt like hours had passed when Annabelle stumbled across a small stream. Her throat was dry, and licking her chapped lips she relished the thought of cool water on her desiccated mouth. Cupping her hands she started toward the crystal clear water.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. That stream has been poisoned," a minute male voice said from the gloom. A small rock sailed from the shadows and into the water, splashing it onto the surrounding moss which turned a sickly brown. Annabelle fell back, a surprised gasp escaping her throat.

Looking up in the direction the rock had come from, Annabelle squinted in the dim light to make out the shape of a small animal coming toward her. She watched as the small red creature emerged from the gloom, and asked the obvious question.

"Did you just talk?" Annabelle asked, and quickly scrambled back in astonishment as the fox answered her.

"Well... Yeah. I am addressing you am I not?" The fox sat down in front of her and wrapped his scarlet tail around his paws.

"Well, I don't see many foxes going around and talking to people," Annabelle didn't know the etiquette for not offending foxes, so she just sat there looking at him. It had to be a

dream of some kind, maybe stress related. Animals didn't talk; it was a fundamental rule of the universe. Annabelle felt her world tilt slightly on its axis.

"Many foxes can't talk. I know from experience." The fox stood up and took a small bow on his crimson paws. "I am Briar. Former human, turned fox."

"Oh," Annabelle tilted her head in surprise. "How does one become a fox?"

Briar told his story about his lying cheating ways as he did everything and anything to further himself. All in all he wasn't a very good person. His grandmother, a very powerful witch, was asked to intervene. Even after all that Briar did, he did sing his grandmother praise.

"Can your grandmother help me?" Annabelle asked, desperation coloring her voice.

Briar nodded, "Anything and everything."

Draven, with the help of the rain, had followed muddy footprints to the edge of the forest. It was hardly misting now and the rumbles of thunder were off in the distance. He had followed them to the Wall where they suddenly stopped.

"Annabelle! Annabelle?!" Draven yelled over the wall. His carefully crafted mask of indifference shattered. There were footsteps trudging through the mud toward him. Draven turned quickly, the hair on the back of his neck stood up causing a chill to go down his spine.

"Hello? Who's there?" Draven squinted in the limited light at the womanly figure coming toward him. He heard the sound of leathery wings flapping; soon it was all he could see before everything went black.

Draven was lost in a world of light and dark. The shadowy figure of a woman loomed over him. She was chanting in a language that sounded like an animal growling. He tried to move his arm, but it was like he was moving in slow motion. She was mixing strange smelling herbs in a clay bowl, her eyes practically rolling back as she chanted. She put her hand on his shoulder. Cold infiltrated his body, seeping into his bones. His body wasn't his anymore. Dark fur sprouted, he developed claws and a muzzle, Draven let out a scream that turned into a howl as his body was contorted in sharp angles.

"You have to find her." Margaret whispered in his ear. "The forest must not know what she is, and I cannot enter while the waning moon is in the sky. Bring her to me, my pet."

Margaret stroked Draven's furry head, admiring her creation. He lay dazed, his blue eyes staring at nothing. He growled at the physical contact, he scrambled on large paws to get his feet under himself. He turned on Margaret, fur raised, his lips pulling back from his elongated teeth.

"Be gone beast. The quicker my task is carried out, the sooner you can have your freedom." She held out her hand threateningly, the smell of ozone and the feeling of electricity close to the skin made Draven back away, and upon seeing the open door he made a mad dash to the outside world.

No one in town saw the large black wolf running around the edge of the Wall. With his nose to the ground he came upon where the opening had been. Draven had no choice but scale the wall and to follow Annabelle into the forest.

He ran with a predator's single mindedness. He wasn't Draven anymore; he was wolf. There was a faint buzzing in his head, it almost sounded like chanting, *find Annabelle, find Annabelle*. It was a drive that he had to follow, no matter what he had to find her. In every fiber of his being he had to kill Annabelle Fairchild.

Draven passed where Annabelle had stopped for an ill begotten drink. He could smell

the forest trick, the poisoned stream for those who were dying for a drink. With the scent of Annabelle in his nose, Draven couldn't help the howl that escaped from his throat.

Walking along the forest path, Annabelle was barely listening to Briar babble on about living in the Forest. She hugged her arms to her chest and tried to keep from trembling. It seemed that the adrenaline had finally worn off, and in its place there was a coldness that she couldn't shake.

Behind them, a long menacing howl burst out from the surrounding trees. All of the fur stood up on Briar's back; he looked over his shoulder at Annabelle.

"We must hurry. Something bad is in the Forest." Briar picked up his pace; Annabelle had to sprint to keep up with the more agile fox. After a few hundred feet, Annabelle was falling behind. Winded she was practically running horizontal from the ground; she kept putting out her hand to keep from falling completely on her face. Briar kept trying to help her, even pulling on her shirt when she tripped.

"Not far now. Grandmother's cottage is right over that hill." Annabelle got up clutching her side, her breathing heavy, and her clothes stained with dirt.

Over the hill Annabelle stumbled, with Briar encouraging her from behind. She looked at the small cottage with creeping ivy on one side and roses growing in the window boxes.

"Grandmother's house," Briar sighed in relief. He lead Annabelle up to the door; he scratched at it with his fox claws.

"Briar is that you? I swear if you have come to steal from me again, you'll be turned into something worse than a rat." The door opened and an elderly woman stood there smirking at the pair.

"Oh, can I help you, dear?" the Grandmother asked, smile disappearing into a frown of concern at Annabelle. Annabelle sagged in relief, feeling safe for once in her life.

"Yes ma'am," Annabelle wheezed. Her heart was beating a million miles an hour and she felt like she was going to pass out any second. She hoped that from the look of her that Grandmother would help her. The howling was close, too close for comfort and Annabelle knew it was coming for her.

The Core of Discrimination
By Damera Krenzer

Is it the influence of experience that suggests there is a standard to withhold in order to be worthy of love? Humanity is forgetting that each grain of sand is essential to building an exquisite sandcastle just as each human being is needed for the strengths and weaknesses that complement each other and accumulate a common respect and love. People hold themselves to the mental standard of perfection imposed upon them by society, their experiences and even by those they love. They berate themselves for not attaining this elusive perfection in areas such as appearance, social acceptance, behavior, finances, and occupation. The self-judgment worsens as the list inflates. It is only natural that a person holds standards for others parallel to the standards held for oneself. So by observation one can conclude that discrimination begins in oneself, of oneself. Self-discrimination is produced by one's experiences but can be transformed by self-acceptance achieved by evaluating the root of these judgments and planting positive views.

"We share a common tendency to blame ourselves, or to see ourselves as in some way defective. It's as though we all, to whatever degree, suffer from the same chronic "virus" of self-doubt" (Seltzer). When one feels as a person one is insufficient in any area of life, overwhelming feelings of doubt and sadness consume one's being. One is guided by what he or she experiences and the perception one has of said experiences. Lily Myers reflects through a poem, her family's unintentional tradition of bestowing patterns of low self-worth upon the next generation saying, "We all learned it from each other, the way each generation taught the next how to knit, weaving silence in between the threads which I can still feel as I walk through this ever growing house, skin itching, picking up all the habits my mother has unwittingly dropped....." A child who admires her mother and views her as a wonderful woman will question the worthiness of herself subsequent to her mother's portrayal of self-hatred. It would then become easy for her to deplete all her beauty and uniqueness by incessantly focusing on her faults and shortcomings. For isn't this how she was taught? Taught by her mother's example and by the way society indulges in her self-discrimination, that she is not enough in her present being. She is taught there is a mark she must hit to obtain acceptance and love. She is told she must be pretty enough, smart enough and wealthy enough. Her "insufficiencies" are delineated in commercials and magazines and by those around her also falling prey to these lies. "In fully comprehending our current reservations about ourselves, we also need to add the disapproval and criticism we may have been received from siblings, other relatives, teachers—and, especially our peers who (struggling with their own self-doubts) could hardly resist making fun of our frailties whenever we innocently "exposed" them" (Seltzer). The relevance of one's interactions with others is apparent when realizing the impact their opinions can have on one's feelings of worth and validity. Their discrimination of a certain quality or aspect of a person may be the exordium of one's own discrimination of this specific quality of oneself. Don Miguel Ruiz, the author of *The Four Agreements*, says that "Whenever we hear an opinion and believe it, we make an agreement and it becomes part of our belief system" (35).

With the collection of socially defined faults and flaws one has so delicately nurtured over time, how can a person eradicate self-discrimination and shame? Brené Brown explains that "Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging" (39). This habit which dominates the opportunity for happiness can only be erased with self-acceptance. Accepting those traits viewed as unacceptable and unworthy, as well as those considered to be positive, will allow a person to release the pressure to achieve unrealistic perfection. When a person learns to simply be with the way one is, the sadness and frustration subside. Rather than constantly

criticizing oneself and trying to alter what one considers to be less than satisfactory, one can choose to accept oneself. It is a choice that opens the door to happiness and relief. Having compassion on oneself relieves the stress of aspiring to meet the standards of the multitude. Brené Brown interviewed men and women who live with the perspective of worthiness, and she details her findings by saying “First they spoke about their imperfections in a tender and honest way, and without shame or fear. Second, they were slow to judge themselves and others” (59). When a person has compassion on oneself and accepts the highs and the lows of one’s existence, the healing begins, and one’s perceptions are transformed.

How is self-acceptance procured? How can one break asunder the years of detrimental self-talk and abuse? Evaluating the core beliefs that employ one’s actions and emotions can provide clarification as to why a person feels unworthy or inferior. Breaking these beliefs into the experiences that caused them can impart insight into why the irrational beliefs began. Following this evaluation one can then decide to appreciate one’s beauty and strength and replace old irrational thinking with new positive beliefs which augment the healing of scars from one’s self-discrimination. “Only when we can better understand and pardon ourselves for things that earlier we assumed must be all our fault can we secure the relationship to self that till now has eluded us” (Seltzer). Guilt and feelings of unworthiness can feel like boulders strapped to the backs of those who have strived to become worthy of love and happiness. When one accepts each mistake and flaw as a growing experience and as having a purpose, then maybe the lenses on one’s glasses will provide a broader view. Maybe then these flaws can be accepted as blessings when seen from a new angle.

Others may suggest that there is a standard for a reason and that people may start wandering around aimlessly without implementing thought and care into their lives. If people do not have some discipline on themselves there would be chaos, right? No. When people have compassion on themselves for their downfalls they can proceed with confidence and focus rather than be subjugated by their fear of failure and unworthiness. Their focal point will become clearer and their newfound happiness will illuminate their lives. Accepting their humanity and inevitable nature for mistakes and imperfection will support their direction in life and enrich the relationship with themselves and others. The self-criticism and mental belittlement may not be viewed as discrimination, but when a person dislikes themselves for any reason, one is discriminating against one’s very existence. A person’s experiences, family, friends and society all play a role in how one defines who one is. Discrimination often begins when one witnesses others reflecting negative beliefs about themselves. When someone is aware that this is the case, one can evaluate one’s own personal experiences and the effects it had on his or her self-perception. With self-compassion and acceptance, soon the self-discrimination will be destroyed. A person must constantly remind oneself of the very unique and dynamic characteristics one has and the love and worthiness which is one’s birthright. A person must search deep inside and contemplate what one might see in oneself without external influences. For the beauty inside each living being is indescribable but has been distorted over time. It has become so distorted that humanity has forgotten the core of strength, love and wonder that each being radiates without exception. Humanity will one day recall the brilliance in each person and being, and people will revel in the love and acceptance from within that was once hidden behind the incongruent fabrication of unworthiness that threatened the zest of life.

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Internal Struggles
By Destine O'Brien

Many authors have tried to successfully embody a themed character into his or her own story. But none have done this quite as successfully as J. R.R. Tolkien, the author of *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. In these four books Tolkien has created two main characters that he uses to represent Good versus Evil: Gandalf and Gollum. Through those characters Tolkien was able to physically represent the internal struggle present in everyone. As a reader goes through *The Hobbit* and continues in *The Lord of The Rings*, one cannot help but notice the characteristics that Gandalf and Gollum display. Throughout the novels these two characters are paired as polar opposites, but bring out striking themes inside each other worth a second look.

While one character is just as important as the next, let's start off with Gandalf. In both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of The Rings*, Tolkien perfectly crafted the character of Gandalf as a Christ-like figure as the portrayal of Good. It is hard to narrow down all of the specific examples, but let's give it a shot. In *The Hobbit*, Gandalf is first introduced as the mythical "troublemaker" among the hobbits: "Gandalf! If you had heard only a quarter of what I have heard about him, and I have only heard very little of all there is to hear, you would be prepared for any sort of remarkable tale. He brings along with him unfamiliarity and adventure which are a combination that every hobbit fears" (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 3). All that the hobbits have ever known is Gandalf as the cause of mischief; they have never experienced him as the guiding force that Bilbo will experience. He proves that he is not just a mischievous wizard, but also a sacrificing "savior". This is just the beginning of his journey as a guide to the company of dwarves and Bilbo. Continuing in *The Hobbit*, he maintains watch over the company, coming back from his disappearances in their greatest times of need. The two greatest examples of Gandalf becoming a salvation to the company are in two books. In *The Hobbit* Gandalf could not only be defined as a Christ-like figure for his sacrifice but also for his leadership throughout the first adventure of Thorin's company and his comfort to Bilbo. Many times along the journey in *The Hobbit*, Gandalf is the only one who is determined to see the journey through and provides strength to the rest of the group. For instance, after the group escapes from the caves of the goblins, they once again are trapped. "He gathered the huge pine-cone from the branches of the trees... he set one alight with bright blue fire... and threw it whizzing down among the circle of wolves" (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 103). Facing death by either way they turn, Gandalf saves the day. He sends for help, and they are saved...for now. Tolkien uses these near misses with the group to show Gandalf as a saving force to this group. He risks his life for a quest that really does not benefit his life.

The next moment that stands out the most is in *The Lord of The Rings*. Gandalf comes face-to-face with a greater Demon and refuses to allow him to pass: "At that moment Gandalf lifted his staff, and crying aloud he smote the bridge... with a terrible cry Balrog fell forward... and vanished" (Tolkien, *The Lord of The Rings* 371). But by doing this Gandalf allows the others to escape at the expense of his life. This is the ultimate sacrifice made by Gandalf in all of the books up until now. And it is not until his return that he is glorified in white clothes bringing an almost biblical theme there. But even looking in these books and seeing these examples of sacrifice on his part, nothing makes him more Christ-like, and thus the representation of Good than the internal struggle he carries. Tolkien makes Gandalf a relatable figure because like us, Gandalf faces real struggles within himself. Many times he could have used his powers to destroy and harm for his benefit; instead, he chose to use his strengths to help bring peace to Middle Earth. One great example of this is the moment Frodo first comes into contact with the ring. As a reader one can feel the apprehension on Gandalf's part because he knows what the power of the ring would do. "No!" "Cried Gandalf, springing to his feet, 'With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the ring

would gain a power still greater and more deadly.'... 'Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to be come like the Dark Lord himself... I dare not take it! (Tolkien, *The Lord of The Rings* 67). Here Gandalf understands the great responsibility of his powers and knows that with that he could easily be corrupted. Tolkien crafted this moment beautifully! This is one of the defining moments for Gandalf because he shows his fallibility even for someone with his power. In Literature, the known struggle of Good and Evil is very much present. Tolkien uses Gandalf's sacrifices and realistic characteristics to represent the Goodness in him.

In Tolkien's works he also created another character, which in his own right is somewhat redeemable. Gollum from *The Hobbit* to *The Lord of The Rings* is in a constant battle with his side that is slightly good and his side that the Ring controls. Gollum in the past was known as Sméagol. All the while Tolkien is displaying Gandalf as good; Gollum is in the background with his own story. The times that the reader does see Gollum, it is hard to see anything other than evil. He wants nothing more than the rings and will endure great tortures and commit unthinkable acts to ensure he is in its possession. It is in these times that Tolkien visually shows the corruption of Gollum as a result of the evil Ring. One example of Gollum's cunningness is when he tries to turn Sam and Frodo against each other in *The Lord of The Rings*. He pits their insecurities against each other in hopes of breaking them apart before the ring is destroyed. While Gollum's main appearance is not until *The Lord of The Rings*, his first appearance in *The Hobbit* is something to be noted. The narrator first describes him "as dark as darkness, except for the two big round pale eyes in his thin face" (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 71). Tolkien creates something about Gollum that automatically makes the reader weary of him. The fascinating thing about Gollum is that he is evil and murderous, yet the reader feels sympathetic toward him. Bilbo and eventually Frodo will see the spark of goodness within Gollum. When Bilbo first encounters him. "Bilbo dared not to disagree and nearly bursting his brain to think of riddles that could save him from being eaten" (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 73). This is the Gollum that a reader will encounter for the rest of the books; he is cunning and evil. Tolkien allows this sympathy for Gollum, to show that he too struggles internally, that most beings are not completely evil or good. The very last time that the reader is exposed to Gollum is when he is going after the Ring into the fire. Here is the defining moment in Gollum's story because his life was tied to that ring. It had become his life force. Tolkien defined Gandalf for readers as Good and Gollum as Evil, but what is so unique to the story is that both of this hero and antihero struggle internally with their opposite sides.

Both Gollum and Gandalf display an interesting characteristic, that being their other side. Gandalf is not entirely good just as much as Gollum is not completely evil. From the part of *The Lord of The Rings* where Frodo offers Gandalf the ring, readers see the greatest example of Gandalf being torn. Of course, he is attracted to the Ring and the power it could potentially bring to him, but he is also conscious of the fact that such power would completely destroy the goodness within him. This is an interesting technique that Tolkien displays in both of his main characters. It makes Gandalf more fallible and human. On the flip side with Gollum the reader can see a few pieces of good that contrast with the darkness within him. While those moments are rare, it presents the idea that these characters are not entirely one sided.

The Lord of The Rings and *The Hobbit* are some of history's greatest literature. This is because not only are they written well, but also Tolkien has written a story relatable to the readers in everyday life. While the greatness of elves and other Middle Earth may not be real, the struggles that they withstand internally are very much relatable. Each of Tolkien's readers is in a struggle within their everyday lives that are just as great as the ones we read about. This is why Tolkien's books are a great work of literature, and why Gandalf and Gollum are just as human as the rest of us.

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For Joshua
By Jessica Johnson

Aubrey just didn't know what to do anymore... Every morning was just a reminder that she was slowly dying inside. Every day she is without him, is another day of her soul disintegrating brick by deadly brick. Aubrey is in love with a man she never sees.

The anniversary is on the eleventh of every month. An anniversary is supposed to bring joy and happiness. Not this anniversary. Every month, Aubrey becomes more and more depressed every time the eleventh hits. Every anniversary just marks another month without him.

She faintly remembers the way he smelled that night he held her close. She could never forget the feeling of being in his arms and stress free for once in her life. Sure, they had a rough start, but that never extinguished the love Aubrey held for the man.

Her heart aches every time she wakes to an empty bed. Death is gradually seeping through her veins. The emotion is turning her blood cold. All she wants now is to be alone even though her heart rate slows every hour she is alone. She wants to be left in a room with nothing but herself. She cannot go on without his presence.

"Be strong!" every one chants in her face. She even whispers it to herself as she forces her body to retreat from her bed every morning. Sometimes she does not win the battle and stays incubated in the warmth of their bed and the memory of his presence.

It is so hard to stay strong when you feel so weak. The medication slightly helps, but when Aubrey is alone with her thoughts, the medication wears away. She knows that what she feels is herself slowly fading from the world. She no longer feels connected to life like she used to.

All she does is sit alone blame herself. She knows this is all her fault. She knew what she was getting into when she began the relationship. Aubrey, however, is a hopeless romantic and prayed that lady luck would be on her side. Sadly enough, lady luck had other teams to take care of.

Every night, right before Aubrey's brain auto pilots for sleep, she prays to see him the next day. She pleads that when she wakes his sleeping figure is the first thing she sees. To be able to reach over and feel the warm skin of his chest as it rises and falls with every deep breath he takes. All she has now is a picture and the cold absence left on the sheets.

As she stares at the stilled photograph and takes in every single detail, she cries. Through the blurred lines, she admires the playfulness in his eyes, the way his hair flips out under his hat, because he had started to grow it out that winter, and the love for her written all over his face. He loved her. He loved Aubrey the way every woman ever hopes to be loved by a man.

The love he had for Aubrey was stronger than she had ever felt before. Just his simple stare could melt the ice inside of her veins when she was infuriated with him. It could send her from the bottom pits of hell to cloud nine in a matter of a breath being exhaled. Aubrey had found her soul mate in this man. A man, who she will never get to walk down the aisle with, a man whom she will never dance with ever again, and a man who will never get to see their creation grow to be a beautiful woman.

As she lays a single rose on his grave she remembers that no one could ever love her the way Lt. Joshua Austin Kelly could. She will always remember this. Even now, as she takes the hand of her five-year-old daughter and smiles down at her with tear droplets gliding down her cheeks.

"Say goodbye to Daddy, Dandelion. We'll be back soon."

The little girl with the dark hair of her father and the blue eyes of her mother raised a small hand and waved to the headstone that laid flat on the ground, "Goodbye, Daddy! I'll be back to see you soon!"

Aubrey chocked back the sob that was threatening to burst through as she guided their daughter back to the vehicle. Three years ago today, Joshua was killed in the bombing.

September eleventh was the day that every American would remember, but Aubrey would remember it the most of all.

“Come on, Dan. Let’s go get things together for your birthday party.”

He was a loving son, brother, uncle, and husband. Joshua Austin Kelly never let anyone down, and he would sacrifice his life for the people he loved and for his country as well.

A Stranger Lived in My House
By Sarah Smith

A man use to live in my house. This man is only a stranger to me. He sat at our dinner table, ate our food, watched our television, and slept in one of our beds, but this man was a stranger to me. A stranger that I feared from nearly day one. But still a stranger I saw every day, every night, every time I went home.

I will never forget the first time I truly feared for my family's life; and began to hate this stranger. My brother was off at college, so he wasn't home, but my mother, sister, and I were. It was dark outside, I remember that, and I was watching television in my sister's room; it was much quieter in there. My sister was in the next room-my brother's room-on the computer. My mother was in the living room with the television on. Then the front door came open, it was always loud enough to hear through the walls, it helped that the stranger always slammed the door. So, immediately, I knew the man was home.

The yelling began then. Right after I heard the television go off. Mother was upset and angry about something, but that was normal, the yelling and arguing. I simply reached up to my sister's television and turned the volume up. But my ears still twitched to the sounds coming from down the hall. I couldn't understand what either of them were saying; it was almost like they were yelling in a foreign language.

Suddenly, everything went eerily silent. The only noise I heard now was my episode of Inuyasha on the screen; I turned the volume down. Mother was done fighting with the stranger; she was probably tired of arguing and decided to go to bed like usual. But something felt odd; wrong. Something was different. A cold sensation filled my bones and my stomach suddenly felt ill.

When I heard my brother's bedroom door creak open, I felt a little relief. That was until I heard my mother and sister whispering back and forth. Again, I couldn't understand a word of what they were saying; it was a foreign language once more. Then the door screeched shut and my sister's bedroom door came open. What stood in the doorway left me speechless.

My mother stood with bloodshot eyes and tear stains down her cheeks. This was not a regular fight. All she said to me was, "I'm going for a drive, I'll be back later." Then she stepped out and shut the door. I listened as I heard the front door open, then shut.

Her car engine roared to life, and I listened as the tires crunched the gravel until it became so quiet, it couldn't be heard anymore. My young mind couldn't comprehend what was happening; I didn't know what the stranger had done to make my mother so sad. It made me angry, very angry.

My sister then entered the room. Her face was streaked with tears just like Mother's had been. Seeing her puffy eyes made me even angrier. Her purse was hanging from her arm and I knew what she was going to say before she said it, "Come on, we're leaving."

I didn't ask any questions, I don't think I even turned the television off. I rose to my feet like some kind of zombie, walked to my sister's closet, which was also mine, and put on a random pair of shoes. Looping my arms through my jacket that had been laying on the floor, I followed close behind my sister. When we reached the front door, my sister grabbed her car keys and opened the door, letting in the cold night air. Before she got three steps outside, the stranger appeared between us.

"Where are you going?!" His voice boomed around the room. Out of instinct, I cowered. He was so much bigger and taller than I was; he was terrifying. My sister responded with "We're leaving, like Mom." Suddenly, the man's eyes stared down at me; I froze.

"Go back to your sister's room." He growled. I didn't want to, of course, I wanted to go with my sister and leave this place, but he stood between us.

“Go back to your sister's room.” He repeated.

“Come on Sarah.” My sister's voice was so much kinder than his.

“Go back to your sister's room.” The man kept demanding.

“Come here Sarah.” My sister pleaded.

My sister; I have to go to her. I wanted to leave with her; I didn't want to stay here with this man. But I couldn't get to my sister; this giant boulder was standing in my way.

“Go back to your sister's room.” He was becoming impatient. My nerves were wearing thin.

“Come on Sarah.” How can she say that? Like it was that easy to get over to her.

They kept repeating themselves, back and forth, like some sort of ping-pong game. I was so young and little, this man could brake me like a twig. I was scared, terrified, and angry. I had no choice really, I was trapped.

With nowhere to go, I finally ran back to my sister's room and locked the door behind me. Betrayal and guilt ate at me, I felt like I had abandoned my sister, but I never had a choice to begin with. Once the stranger entered the game, it was all over for me; I lost.

Then the true terror began. My sister took off in a run; I heard her through the windows; and the stranger was on her tail, his heavy steps following hers. My ears caught the sound of their palms hitting metal; they had reached the cars. But I guess my sister couldn't get inside of her car quick enough, because I heard the noises continue. Then they began yelling again. It seemed to be one of the stranger's favorite things to do. I could never figure out what they were saying, maybe because my heart was pounding like a nail gun on steroids. The fight went on for so long, I thought my sister was going to die. But then my sister's car engine started. Her tires crushed the pebbles underneath them as she drove away. Thank God, she was able to get away. But then realization struck me as a sharp pain in my chest. My sister left me.

Panic overwhelmed inside me as tears began streaming from my eyes. The front door opened, then slammed shut. The tears poured harder. The man's angry footsteps stomped down the hall and up to my sister's room. He banged on the door, yelling for me to come out. The door shook, I was sure it was going to come down. I crawled into my sister's bed and curled into a ball as the banging continued. He continued to shout angry words at me. I shut my eyes and covered my ears. I could still hear the horrible noises, so I began to hum.

He eventually gave up, and left the door. My mind was swirling in my head. I had a terrible headache. I carefully pulled the blankets over my shoulders and curled back up in a ball. I slowly ventured off to sleep.

My mother and sister came home later that night, but they didn't wake me.

This stranger that use to live in my house was someone everyone saw as some kind of 'angel'. No one knew his true colors, except his immediate family. This man, this stranger, someone might call him my father. But to me, he is nothing of the sort. Of all the things he has done to me and my family, he cannot be called my father. A father is supposed to protect his family, not put it in danger. So to anyone who wants to say otherwise, let me save you some time, this man is not my father in any sense of the word, and nothing will ever change my mind. This man was and is, only a stranger than lived in my house.

The Kiss of Obedience
By Tina Heaton

I grumbled to myself as I jiggled my keys to get the store locked up. A blast of wind blew my long blonde hair into my face and sent my purple sun dress flying everywhere. I cursed myself for wearing this stupid dress. I didn't know what I was thinking this morning. *Why?* I said to myself. *Why am I out here in the middle of the freakin night, out in the middle of nowhere playing with this stupid key? Cause you need this job, Dammit.* I kicked the bottom of the door. *Ouch!!! That was kind of stupid.* Finally the key turned, click. The store was locked, and my heart rate started slowing back down. I hated being out in the dark. My eyes see only images of evil. The black silhouettes of pain and anguish, but this was the only job I could find. I talked to myself as I walked to my car. Trying to stay focused on the jeep and not let my mind wonder. "Now Laura. Just walk to the car; you're almost there."

With my hands shaking, I got into my black Jeep Liberty and locked the doors as I found my other set of keys, the ones for my car. Putting the keys into the ignition, I turned the key and only heard err, err, err, then nothing. "Shit !!! What Now !"

I tried again, just a clicking sound. The jeep wasn't even trying to start. Thinking about getting home, I started digging through my purse and found my cell. No luck; Battery was dead, so I just plopped it into the seat next to me. Knowing a little about cars from watching my husband, I decided to pop the hood. I cursed my slender frame now because I always had trouble pulling the inside lever of the hood. It was half broken and required strength to get it. But, maybe by sheer dumb luck, I would see something out of place. Nope!! Nothing. Climbing back inside my Jeep, I sat there for a little while trying to decide what to do. I grabbed the store keys again, deciding to call for help in there, hoping that the unlocking process of the doors would be a whole lot easier than the locking up. The key went in and turned easily with only a few jiggles back and forth.

While I was going behind the counter to get to the phone, I heard the click of the door locking and soft footsteps coming near. A man over twice my size appeared in front of me. My heart leapt into my throat, and my hands started shaking. There was a cold sweat that engulfed my body. He must have seen my fear. Oh God!! Not this. Not again. He was dressed in black sweat pants and a dark blue hoodie pulled up over his head so the only thing I could see were his eyes. Those evil eyes. They just burned into my very soul and cut me to ribbons from the inside out, leaving me hollow and senseless.

He got to me before I even realized and shoved me hard down without much effort on his part. It was as if I was a toy he got mad at. As I was falling I hit my head on the corner of a shelf, Which made me a little dizzy. My mind went blank, my body limp, like a rag doll. I no longer had control of myself. Knowing what was happening, still I was frozen. He pulled me up on a low standing table that came up to my knees used to stack heavy boxes on, which happened to be in the only area of the store that had no cameras watching. The wind knocked out of me as I was forced face down on the table. I felt his steel hands pull my dress up and rip my panties, and in the same motion pull his sweats down. I felt his bare legs against me, holding me. Keeping me pinned down by his sheer weight and a hand that he placed right next to my face, I saw a small tattoo in between his thumb and finger: a tattoo of a human skull with a double image of a feather in between the eyes of the skull. The tattoo that haunted my dreams. As the first thrust went deep inside me, it sent pain like electric current all through my body. Fighting, I slowly let the black abyss take me, and I felt my eyes close.

The next thing I remembered was hearing the beep beep beep and the shuffle of people and equipment of some kind, and the god awful smell of too much disinfectant. While my eyes fought to open and the blur of my vision adjust so I could see around, I finally

realized I was lying in a bed of what appeared to be a hospital for a nurse was standing next to some kind of monitor taking numbers down and scribbling them on her hand.

A police officer was talking to my husband in a corner of the room looking like they were in a serious conversation. He had on his favorite jeans that outline his fit waist with a button-up cotton shirt and the sleeves rolled up to his elbow accentuating his muscular upper body. His black hair looked damp, and I could even smell the musky rugged sent of his cologne that just lingered in the air.

The nurse looked up and said, "Laura, how are you feeling?" While she was walking toward me. "Wow!! are you glad that your husband came and checked on you when he did. He said he found you unconscious and hurt at that store you work at."

I just stared at her.

My husband came toward me with his soft, sensuous eyes. Those "I love you forever" eyes, kissed me tenderly on my forehead, grabbed my hand gently with both of his, and said, "How are you, Honey? I have been so worried. I love you so much."

And as he grabbed my hand, I saw, once again, the small skull tattoo with a double image of a feather inside.

* * * *

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

CHILD ABUSE

RAPE AND

SEX TRAFFICKING;

THESE HAVE NO AGE LIMIT

THESE DON'T CARE WHAT SOCIAL CLASS YOU ARE IN OR

WHAT COLOR YOUR SKIN IS.

THESE DON'T CARE WHAT GENDER YOU ARE, MALE OR FEMALE.

THESE KILL !!!

EMOTIONALLY,

MENTALLY, AND

PHYSICALLY

BY TAKING LITTLE STEPS TOWARD HELPING TO STOP THIS EVIL.

MAYBE SOMEDAY THERE WILL BE NO MORE OF THIS VIOLENCE.

A Vicissitude
By Jacie Chaffin

I had never considered myself to be a feminist before, but I suppose I did have the underlying attitude of a feminist. My subconscious brain had always told me that I was not being treated properly by the men in the world, but my conscious brain remained content for a very long time. There was a time, however, that those subconscious feelings bubbled to the surface and forced me to rearrange my life. I found myself finally embracing those feminist qualities that I possessed and using them to see past prejudice people and take control of my career. In order to appreciate the amount of power that I would eventually obtain, I had to start at a completely miserable workplace.

I worked at an insurance office as a secretary and had been for three years. They sent me out to deliver the mail, make deposits at the bank, get coffee, and pickup lunch. For the entire three years that I managed to keep the job, I learned nothing about insurance; however, I did learn a few sad facts about how women are treated in the working world. Angeline moved from junior secretary to senior secretary when I was hired, and that remained the only female promotion to occur within three years. Jarrod, Andrew, and Jim all moved up several times and were in constant competition over who the company would be passed along to when ninety-year-old Bob finally died. I found it disgusting that those piggish men sat around waiting for Bob to pass away. Even though Bob refused to let his female workers advance in any real way, he still treated us with respect and kindness. I hoped he stayed around just long enough to cause Jarrod, Andrew, and Jim to go completely mad. Bob really was a darling. He treated Angeline, me, and all the other female workers as if we were his beloved daughters. He told us not to let any of the men get under our skin, and we just smiled and listened. Even though Angeline despised Jim for the special treatment he got due to his gender, she still slept around with him on most weekends. Because of the lack of understanding from even my female companions, I was dramatically unhappy at my workplace.

I realized my unhappiness at the close of my third year. When I had written down all the messages for the day, sorted all the mail, and filed the last bit of paper work, I sat down at my desk and cried for what felt like the millionth time in the past year. I knew that that insurance office would never give me the satisfaction I was desperate for. At that point, I grew suddenly tired of bathing in my own misery, of remaining in an awful job day after day, of allowing men to pass me while I remained still, of only ever smiling and listening and understanding and caring, of being the female secretary. I grew tired of being this perfect follower and only ever hoping to be blessed for my kindness and reliability. It was not at that moment that I knew exactly what I needed to do, but I did become aware of several practices I needed to stop doing. First, I would no longer allow Jarrod, Andrew, and Jim to get under my skin. Second, I would stop seeing Angeline as a friend and tell her that she could go screw herself. Third, I would quit my job at that dreadful insurance agency and tell Bob that although his kindness had always been appreciated, his sexism certainly was not. Fourth, I would stop being a submissive, loving, caring woman. I believed those four acts to be the root of my unsuccessful life and by stopping those acts I knew that I could become a successful person. I wanted to live only for myself. I directed my full determination to being truly as powerful as a man, and that is exactly what I became.

I moved into a new apartment a month later. I felt the need to be closer to the action. The sounds of traffic and the sights of suits walking back and forth on the sidewalks at all times of day were enough to push me to the steps of each major advertisement corporation in the area. The first building I entered screamed male supremacy. Females in tight pencil skirts answered phones and offered drinks to the people in the waiting area. The occasional man that walked by only ever went up the elevators; they never stayed on the bottom floor.

I nervously made my way to the front desk and shakily stated that I had a meeting with Mr. Brad. I did not want to assume that the egotistical sounding name was a reflection of his personality, but would soon find that my assumptions would have been correct. The beautiful woman made a few understanding noises that were not really even words, handed me a slip of paper, and then pointed to the elevators. The slip of paper revealed that I would be travelling to the twelfth floor. I stepped into an empty elevator that soon filled up with six men. They all gave me awkward looks and sideways glares. It seemed that they were a bit frightened by my presence. In that first exposure to the new fear men would have of me, I did nothing, but I would later learn to use this fear against them and give them all a bigger reason to loathe me. In that first elevator of seven, I only avoided eye contact and held my breath.

The twelfth floor consisted entirely of Mr. Brad's office. It was a giant open space with a perfectly polished desk in the center and a perfectly polished man kicked back with his feet propped up on said desk. He snapped his fingers and a younger looking woman who I had not noticed at first walked over from the corner and waited for a command. Mr. Brad asked her to conjure a chair, and she quickly did it. He did not ask me to sit, or even tell me to; he simply looked at me until I figured it out for myself. Once I had taken my seat, Mr. Brad quickly explained that they had several secretary and assistant positions that I would be lovely for. I found myself smiling and listening, even acting enthusiastic about it, but when I walked out of the Male Supremacist Headquarters, I only felt disappointment. I refused to work as a secretary or assistant when I possessed the qualifications to be working in the actual advertisement process.

The next day, I went to another interview in another dramatically tall building with another egotistical boss on the top-most floor. In that elevator ride with four men I was not as nervous as I had been before. I did not make eye contact with any of them, but I did allow myself to breathe that time. I found that just as in its twin tower from the previous day, that building gave me only disappointment. Mr. Standler was a jerk and did not even act as if I was capable of being a secretary. This pattern continued for another four days after that second one, but by day seven I was no longer waiting for a big break, I was determined to make one for myself.

I walked into a place called "Sold Everything Advertisement," which Mr. Jackson was the chief executive officer of, and took an elevator ride to the sixteenth floor. On that particular elevator ride I looked into the faces of five different men and showed them that I was plenty capable of being their superior and plenty qualified for a dominating position such as supervisor. I breathed evenly and even smiled. They acted as if they wanted to say something, maybe warn me about Mr. Jackson's hellish personality, but were utterly intimidated. I finally walked out onto the sixteenth floor and spotted Mr. Jackson at a perfectly polished desk, almost identical to those of Mr. Brad and Mr. Standler. I walked over to the chair that the assistant had already managed to put in place and took a seat without even looking at Mr. Jackson for permission. He began to give me the expected descriptions of the secretary and assistant jobs, but I quickly cut him off. I clarified with him that I was not interested in any such position. I explained my desire for a hands-on position that would be dealing directly with the creation of advertisements. I rambled off my list of accomplishments and credentials while smiling sweetly. He gave me a weary glance and asked his assistant to leave the office. Once he and I were alone, he filled me in on how big businesses work. Mr. Jackson explained that in order for a company to succeed financially, only the most well-trained and intelligent men could be put in charge of such important decisions. He also mentioned that women should stick to what they do best: answering phones and taking orders. I then proceeded to tell Mr. Jackson that if he did not give me a respectable, dignified position at his corporation, I would personally ensure that his life span become shorter than expected. On that lovely day, I took my stand without care or

compassion. I stood facing that man with ferocity and boiling blood. I did not truly listen to what Mr. Jackson had to say. I paraded around and pushed his opinion aside. I seized a bit of power, and it multiplied inside me. I stomped on Mr. Jackson's toes until he was begging me to take a top position in his grand corporation. I would be editing all advertisements before they went out and could veto any ad that looked the slightest displeasing to me. All ads had to go through me, and few would be fit for the cut. Ultimately, I had the final say. It was the job of my dreams.

I jumped into my work routine the very next week. I caught on to everything surprisingly quickly and made my superiority known among my male colleagues. They rolled their eyes when my back was turned but would not dare to blink when I spoke to them. They hated me but were completely scared of what I could do. I had succeeded. As a female I had accomplished great feats and had not let any man stop me. I was strong, fearless, powerful, unmoved by emotions, untouched by love, unbothered by fickle girlie issues. I had achieved equality. Chauvinists everywhere would swoon and bow down to me.

Five months into my non-stop dedication to work, I had to attend a photo shoot for an extremely important advertisement. The ad was for a certain designer who had never stooped to place her designs in the pages of a magazine but felt that it was now necessary in order to maintain her financial status. She paid the best advertisement corporation, the one that I worked for, to create the most elegant magazine ad ever seen. She offered the company an insane amount of money to get the job done, and all of the dirty work was immediately placed on my shoulders. On a particularly windy morning, I made my way over to the photography studio and began delegating tasks to each person I saw. Casually standing next to the advertisement model was a beautiful, exaggeratedly tall woman that felt there was plenty of time for chit-chat. She smiled at what the model was saying and took a sip of her latte. I walked over with an annoyed determination to explain to her that there would be no time to tell "life stories" before the shoot. When I gave her my rigorously practiced lecture about the delicacy of time and the importance of hard work, she smiled even wider and giggled. I was a bit confused at her tactics and considered for a moment that she may have been daft. She had a lovely attitude that I would have adored if it was not entirely irritating.

I later learned her name was Iris. She was the head stylist for all advertisement shoots at "Sold Everything Advertisements." She screamed "girly-girl" and "prissy idiot," the exact type of woman I wanted to remain miles away from. I inferred that the only thoughts in her brain concerned men, clothes, and gossip. On the day that I was incredibly rude to her, she told me to calm down and have a wonderful day. Instead of trying to cipher her thought process behind those words, I walked away and got straight back to business. I assumed that I would never have to encounter Miss Iris again because that was the one and only time I ever had to attend a photo shoot. I was sadly mistaken.

It seemed that Iris had asked around about me after that day and was rewarded with a full load of favorable and unfavorable gossip about my entire life. She realized that I was a woman not to be messed with; so, naturally, she decided that she would become my best friend. It started with the lattes on my desk every morning. Then, each latte was soon accompanied by an English muffin. She left magazines on my desk with arrows pointing to and circles around all the fashion advice columns. I threw the lattes away, picked at the muffins, and read the magazines so that I could do the exact opposite of what they said. She started calling my office phone to ask if I wanted to go out for lunch with her every Tuesday, but I always declined. She was very close to Mr. Jackson, and he absolutely adored her gorgeous personality. Finally, she complained to him about me being "too busy" to accompany her to lunch on Tuesdays. This resulted in me actually having to accompany her to lunch every Tuesday.

We went out to a small Chinese restaurant every time. Miss Iris had a strict eating schedule, and Tuesdays were the only days that she had room for greasy Chinese food. I was embarrassed to admit that I shoved my face full of greasy Chinese food five days out of seven. At first, I refused to get along with her and eat my lunch happily, but her irritatingly peaceful demeanor broke my walls, and I soon found myself being somewhat kind to her. Even though I allowed myself to be nice, I never let down my guard. I still strutted with the same show of power that I did in front of all my male colleagues. She laughed at the way I carried myself and acted as if she knew a secret that I did not. I felt a bit insulted by her lack of feminine pride and the way she treated every single man with unwavering respect, but I supposed that a friend had been what I was missing, and Iris was the only woman to desire my friendship.

Everybody loved Iris. Miss Iris threw the greatest parties. She gave the best advice about anything. Miss Iris was always sympathetic and understanding. She *really* cared. While spending ever more time with her and listening to every last word of what each employee of “Sold Everything Advertisement” said about her, I started to form a new theory on feminism. She did not just dedicatedly hand out respect to every single man; all the men dedicatedly respected her even more than they respected Mr. Jackson and certainly more than they respected me. I was mostly unsure of my hypothesis and uneasy about the results if it was, in fact, supported. Even though people adored Iris for her kindness and care, it still seemed a very weak and submissive way to be. The history of females’ struggles did not allow present day females to give up all desire for equality and just submit. There was still a need to fight. There was still a power struggle between the two genders, and women like Miss Iris made it seem as if there were better ways for females to spend time than desiring what men have. At that point, my misconstrued ideas of feminism were obvious to everyone else, but I was still firmly on my path to power and success.

Iris was nominated “Woman of the Year” in December by the *Women in Business* magazine. She accepted the award gracefully and sat down for an elegantly precise interview with the magazine. The entire advertising company came to a consensus about throwing Miss Iris a congratulatory party, and since I was her new best friend, they left all the important details to me. The party would be held in the ballroom on the company’s second floor. It would be fabulously formal with all the styles and decorations that Iris would surely love. I arranged a menu, the entertainment, and the guest list. I felt almost as if I had taken up wedding planning because that is how big of a deal this party seemed to be. Of course, I was ever so proud of Iris but a bit resentful. I felt there were plenty more fitting women for the award and that it was carelessly given to a *stylist*. I could not bring myself to respect her for what she did in the same way that she respected everyone else.

We held the party on December 20th, and I could not help feeling that it was just the company’s excuse to have a Christmas party since they did not have one any other year. I sent Miss Iris a ball gown by her favorite designer accompanied by a note telling her that a car would be by to pick her up at eight. As for myself, I went simple and more business than formal. I figured I could get away with it since I was the party planner. I put on a tad bit of makeup, slipped on my one-inch heels, and ran down the stairs of my apartment building to meet the car on time. I told the driver to get to Iris’s place quickly, and he managed just that. I stepped out in front of her ten-thousand-a-month apartment building, said hello to the doorman, and made my way up to her place. Thankfully, she was completely ready when I got there. We made our way back down to the car while chit-chatting about the exciting night that was ahead of us. Iris was not yet aware that the entire party was for her.

The party went along flawlessly. Miss Iris made a grand entrance and was surprised by the company’s dedication to her. She managed a few tears while giving a splendid speech. I was suspicious that she had been warned to prepare one. There were laughs and drinks and dances, and I carelessly allowed myself to have one too many of each. By

midnight I was absolutely trashed. I managed to make my way to the sitting room directly off to the side of the ballroom and lay down on one of the plush couches. Moments later, Iris stumbled in, a bit drunk, but not nearly as much as me. She sat down on the floor next to my commandeered couch and smiled at me. In that moment I felt it urgent to ask her my one burning question.

“Iris, do you consider yourself a feminist?”

“Certainly,” she replied with an easy smile. She said it as if it was an obvious answer to an almost irrelevant question.

With a tone more heated than necessary, I countered, “How can you see yourself as a feminist when all you do is typical girlie things? How can you be a feminist if you treat those idiot men with the respect that they certainly do not deserve? You act without thinking about how it looks coming from a woman. A female stylist, it’s so typical! Your only concerns are care, kindness, love, compassion, and understanding. These feelings are what have been expected of females for ages, and they are exactly what we are trying to get away from. Why do you do the things you do?”

Iris looked at me with sad eyes, and I was stunned because Miss Iris never diverged from her optimistic attitude. She smiled a sorrowful smile and said, “Oh Chantry, how can *you* be a feminist when you do not even act like a woman?”

Miss Iris returned to the ballroom after that, and I made a mad dash for the elevators in order to get the hell home as soon as possible. I was stunned that Iris had said such a thing to me and was not quite sure what she had even meant by it. I made it home and stumbled into my apartment. I crawled into bed and stared at my ceiling for four hours pondering over that one question that had turned me inside out. Iris had looked at me with obvious pity, and it had been *intimidating*. She had made me feel so small, smaller than any man had made me feel, just by caring about me. She was concerned with the way I presented myself, and wanted me to change for the better.

I looked back on the way I had acted since I quit my job at the insurance agency, and what I saw was only a careless, egotistical, rude, bossy, and straight-to-the-point person that was the spitting image of someone like Mr. Brad or Mr. Jackson. I even reminded myself of good old Jarrod, Andrew, and Jim. I had not even thought about someone I loved in ages. I had not felt the need to worry or care about the lives of those important to me. I had not felt sympathy or empathy towards any of my colleagues, and certainly not toward my only friend. In my rush for feminine success, I became the opposite of feminine. I became a man. I was certainly no feminist. I realized that by caring about men and women equally, Iris was the “ultimate feminist.” I was a piggish female, an enforcer of female supremacy, while Miss Iris smiled at males and females both the same. Iris had mastered the art of being delicate, beautiful, elegant, and glorious while being powerful, intimidating, important, and respected. As I lay in bed burning a hole in my ceiling, I decided that I had it wrong all along, that becoming a man would not make me happy, becoming a successful and powerful *woman* would truly satisfy me.

Finding My Religious Self
By Jacie Chaffin

I have come to realize that my experience with religion and the freedom thereof, relates to any allegory symbolizing a progress of knowledge. Plato helped me realize that my religious issues deeply define who I am, and now I better understand what it has meant to grow up with different religious influences from my family and my peers. To say that I am religiously confused immensely understates the workings of my brain, but I could say that I am very thoughtful about the subject of higher powers. Studying only one religion is the cave, and acknowledging and learning about all religions is the blinding sunlight.

It all began before I was even born. My Mema and Papa belong to the Jehovah's Witness faith. They raised my mother and aunt to be as much. Although my mother debated her faith at times, she remained with the Witnesses until an age of about thirty. My father grew up as a Baptist. This obviously created a tense situation in our family. My sister and I followed my mother in her faith until she finally gave it up when I was four and my sister was nine. This religious cave found my sister and me to be "strange prisoners" (Plato 1). There were so many rules that we did not understand yet were made to follow. My father allowed us to behave in ways that went against our religion. We knew that my mother would be angry, and it would surely cause an argument, but we easily gave into the temptations. His leniency danced in front of us like shadows on the cave wall. My father sympathized with Glaucon's question, "...how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?" (Plato 1). My mother suddenly threw us into a world of no sure religion, and everything changed.

My sister left; I mean from the cave, of course. She accepted the world of light, and it accepted her. She skipped the steps of "adjustment." Maybe she pitied me for my unsure state of mind, but the jury is still out on that. My sister could "see [the sun] in his proper place, and not in another" (Plato 2). My parents divorced when I was ten. At this point my father decided that we would start attending a local church. Through all the preaching, singing, soul searching, and saving, I found not a single belief there for me. I knew that I would never belong with those people. I knew it as a fact, but I could not figure out my reasoning behind it. My friends from school hounded me every day, "Come to our church. It's so fun." My problem, I thought, could only be solved by reversing my direction. I studied the theory of evolution and a world without a higher power. I stood for gay rights, and still do. I did anything imaginable that goes against the Christian way. Devastatingly, I discovered that I had forced myself back into a cave of sorts. I searched desperately for something to cling to, something that would give me a sense of purpose. I had heard before that the need for a sense of purpose created religion in the first place. I ran back to my "puppeteers" and learned so much about the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses. I did not necessarily agree with all of their beliefs, but I did learn about them. I listened, nodded, and asked many questions. Suddenly, I saw "the reflections of men and other objects in the water" (Plato 2).

Eventually I would stare directly into the sun, but religion would not guide my line of vision. I found my way through knowledge. Knowledge of all beliefs helps one get a better grasp on the world and the people that live in it. I have not learned all there is to learn, but my religion is knowledge. I worship the few people on this earth that have a completely open mind. I hope that I can train my mind to eventually be open to all ideas in this world. My sense of purpose was found. Plato explains everything in my heart and soul, and therefore my sense of self, when he says "...wisdom more than anything else contains a divine element which always remains" (5).

As I learned what it meant to have faith in all sorts of ways, I came out of my cave of a single faith. The light of all the religious options blinded me at first, but I adjusted and

found my way. I can easily see why Plato stresses the importance of “virtue and wisdom, which are the true blessings of life” (6). I learned to use my many different influences to create an idea entirely of my own, and I defined who I am. By acknowledging all beliefs one can come to their fullest intellectual level. One can leave their cave by simply having an open mind.

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The Knee Surgeon
By Jacie Chaffin

Perhaps it was an inconvenient obsession of mine, but I found it rather enjoyable. The hunt for a perfect pair, it was thrilling. I had this desire for perfectly round ones: not too big, not too small. I could not have cared less about the legs on which they came, or the rest of the body for that matter. It was always just about the knees for me. Once, in the dead of winter, I realized that my collection was not the size that I wanted it to be. I only had six pairs of knees displayed on my basement wall, but I wanted seven. Therefore, I decided it was time to go on another hunt.

My favorite hunting place was the running track near the local park. I loved to watch those knees in action. By observing the knees as their owners ran, I could determine if they were strong and full of calcium, or weak and withered away. On that particular day, I drove my 1994 blue, pickup truck to a spot just hidden from the track by four trees. I stepped out of the truck, grabbed my fold-out lawn chair, and got comfortable. From my hidden observation point I could see five different people using the running track. One was an older woman walking her dog. She looked to be about seventy-five years old, and it was easy for me to guess that her cartilage was almost completely gone. It would make me an ignorant hunter if I even considered going after those knees. Two of the people running the track seemed to be a couple. They were dressed in matching athletic suits of a putrid orange color. This couple was also far too old for my prey. They may have been around fifty years of age. One young looking man was sprinting at incredible speeds, but he was way too fit for me to be able to abduct. Lastly, my eyes fell upon a girl who seemed to be just of age. She jogged quickly but was nowhere near muscular. Her frame was perfectly slim, but all that mattered to me was that perfect set of kneecaps that I would soon have the pleasure to remove.

I must not confess my kidnapping strategy, for it is far too ingenious and clever for anyone else to understand. What I can confess is that no matter how exciting and intense the hunt and abduction, it does not compare to the charge and pleasure I get from the surgeries. However, I must practice patience in my preparation. I had the young woman tied down to a metal table placed precisely in the center of my basement. She was unconscious for a week; the drugs stayed in her system longer than expected, but I had everything I needed down there and no trouble waiting. My collecting was something I could learn from and revel in. I loved to take my time. Eventually she would awaken.

A person's ability to scream for impossible lengths of time fascinates me. If this girl were to attempt to scream for two hours straight while sitting in her living room and being perfectly comfortable, there is no way she could do it. However, I am certain that she could scream for a good four hours if she ever attended a rock concert. Once she awoke, there was no way to determine how far this genuine nightmare would drive her precious vocal cords. When her breathing grew quicker and her eyelids finally started to flutter, I braced myself for the initial reaction. She seemingly stirred in slow motion at first, but then her eyes shot open as she remembered the last sight before her deep slumber. She suddenly remembered my face and the curious look I had given her before she was out. That memory was enough to get her started. She tried to rise up only to realize that her arms and legs were strapped down securely. She yelled out a furious "Hello!?" before she finally turned her head to my dark, damp corner. The young woman's eyes fell upon me in such a way that I knew my face was causing them pain. I saw the horror in those eyes, but they were not what were important. I cared only for those delicate knees. Soon, they would be mine. Soon, I would have a complete collection of seven pairs.

At a young age I realized that I could not feel sympathy or empathy. No matter how much a person suffered before my eyes, I had no urge to help them. It is most likely this gift

that has facilitated my chosen hobby. I never had to deal with a guilty conscious. Therefore, when that young woman looked at me pleadingly for the hundredth time and whispered "please," I felt only fascination. She had been in my basement for two weeks at that point. I fed her and made her drink milk every single day. Mostly, I just sat in my dark corner and watched her. She yearned to understand me. She begged for me to simply explain to her why I was doing this, but I could not. There was no way for her to understand me. Just as I could not produce sympathy for her and this horrible situation she was in, she could not produce sympathy for me and my overwhelming obsession for knees. When her wrists began to form blisters because of the constant rubbing of the straps, I did not provide ointment or bandages. I let her suffer, not because she deserved it, but because suffering is interesting.

She mentioned a family at times. She pleaded for me to reunite her with her boyfriend. I just stared at her until she looked away with immense fear and sorrow. I am not entirely sure why I always held them for so long. It may have been the excitement and satisfaction I got from knowing their fate while they lay there desperately clueless, but the point finally came when I had observed and learned all I could from this woman. I had waited long enough. Therefore, I began to prepare for the surgery.

I kept all of my tools in my bedroom so that I could make a dramatic show of bringing in each tool, one by one. This always got them going. They would fret and holler, "What are you doing!?" I never answered their questions. First, I brought in two clamps that would be placed just above and just below the knee so that the young woman would not be able to move her knee in even the slightest way. Next, I brought in some metal trays for the placement and sanitation of the knees once they were removed. Then, I brought in the materials for cleaning the knees. I carried in a contraption to put over her mouth in order to muffle her screams. After that, I carried in a single paring knife followed by a jagged bread knife. Lastly, I carried in some towels for the mess and a pair of rubber gloves for myself.

Once all of the items were in the basement, I had to organize them properly. I moved an old table next to the table where the woman was strapped. On the table I placed the two metal trays and the cleaning materials. I grabbed my filthy apron off a hook on the basement wall and put both my knives in one of the pockets. I slowly tied the apron around my waste so that it fit perfectly. For my last preparation, I had to place the cover on her mouth and put the clamps in place on her leg. She tried to resist the mouth cover, but there was little fight left in her. Finally, I placed the clamps on her right leg; this was always the leg I started with. I started with the right leg for the same reason that I did everything else in my surgical process, because it felt right. I had felt pressured to choose between the two knees, and as a result I chose one randomly and stuck with it since.

I had the rubber gloves on my hands and was almost overcome with anticipation. I am sure that the woman felt the same. Her eyes looked around speedily, as if searching for a last minute escape plan. I pulled out my paring knife and began to cut a circle around the knee cap. The paring knife was only for the skin; once it was gone I would get out my bread knife. I used the bread knife to cut the muscle that entrapped the knee cap. She screamed as loud as she could, which was not very loud with the cover on her mouth. She wiggled and fought, but could not even get her knee to budge. She finally realized that she was only causing herself more pain by straining her knee muscles.

The tears were something that surprised me. Most of my victims did not cry during the surgery. They got angry, frustrated, horrified, and furious, but their will to fight was too powerful to allow them to break down and cry. By three minutes, she was balling her eyes out. Her body convulsed and shivered with her cries. Her face was scrunched up and red. She kept shaking her head as if trying to deny what was really happening. She could not let herself believe it was real. Somehow, I could understand that. I felt myself wishing she would just pass out already, and thankfully she did within another ten minutes. I still had

much work to do before the first knee was even finished. The cutting away of the muscles required much delicacy. If I so much as nicked the knee cap with the knife, it would be ruined. I had to cut precisely around the cap but still detach the muscles properly so that all my work would not be without reward. I quickly decided that her unconscious body was a lot less annoying but also a lot less interesting than her conscious one.

After an hour, the first knee was finished. I pulled out the beautiful cap with my gloved hands and placed it delicately on the metal tray. I used distilled water and the other sanitation materials to clean it off. Once all the red was gone, it sat there gloriously in only ivory. I gave the knee cap a sad smile and whispered, "Don't worry. You will soon be reunited with your mate." I removed the clamps from the unconscious woman's right leg and placed them securely on her left. To make it a little more fun, I woke the woman up. She seemed a bit disoriented at first, but she quickly remembered what was happening and started up another round of screaming. There was no crying this time. She hollered after each breath she took and kept attempting to meet my eyes so that she could give me evil looks. This made me all the more determined to focus on the surgery. She passed out again after twelve more minutes, but I kept on with the surgery without the slightest feeling of sympathy. I removed her left knee cap, placed it on the tray next to its pair, cleaned it up, and marveled at its wonder.

Since I was ten, I had been fascinated with the human body. Different parts spoke to me as if they wanted me to realize just how important they are. Eyes are overrated. They get attention from everyone. They get the chance to express emotion and take in all that the world has to offer. I found it unfair to a lot of underappreciated body parts. I found my fascination in such places as vocal cords, wrists, shoulder blades, the hidden place behind ears, and rib cages. Most of all, though, I felt incredibly sorry for knee caps. They are these hidden tools just seen as part of the leg. They do not get to be shown off or admired. They are buried in skin and muscle, entrapped in cartilage. Only when they become old and start to wither away are they even acknowledged. That's why, when each one of my patients saw the gaping hole where their beautiful knee caps once were, they became enlightened. I left no room for doubt. I know they learned the difference.

Four hours later, the woman began to stir. The clamps were gone. Her arm and leg straps were gone. She slowly sat up on the table and stared at the place where her knee caps should have been. After a moment of contemplation, she screamed a deafening scream made up of horror, excruciating pain, exasperation, confusion, and shock. She saw me in my corner. I stood up and commanded her to get off the table and walk. She looked at me as if I was insane. I may have been; however, I still had not entirely gotten what I wanted from her. Once again, I demanded that she get up and start walking. That time my voice was more intimidating. She painfully slid off the table and put all of her weight on her shaking feet. With each step that she took, she made a noise, whimper mixed with cry. I encouraged her to come to me. I knew she would because I could see that she was ready to die. She had finally given up and just wanted the pain to end. She made it close enough to me that I could grab her arm for support. She stood still and looked at me. She said, "Please." I pulled my paring knife out of my apron and shoved it directly into her heart.

I must not share my methods of disposing of the bodies for I cannot reveal my hiding place. However, I will say that that is my least favorite part of the entire process. Once the observations and surgery are over with, I just wanted it to be done. I did not want to have to deal with getting rid of a dead body. Once the body was taken care of, I hung my final pair of caps on the wall with all of the others, stepped back, and admired my beautiful collection. I smiled at the way they all seemed to be happy with their showy display. They loved to be appreciated.

The Theoretical Psycho
By Jacie Chaffin

By book two-hundred I felt it. I had been sitting in this room for one-hundred days, each of which I read exactly two books. All of the books I had read pertained to theories, whether philosophical, religious, or scientific. I had commanded myself to do a study. I was determined to learn about every single theory ever recorded that discussed the purpose of human life. My goal was to decide for myself what the real purpose for human life is, but I could not do so until I clearly understood every theory that there was about it. I asked my brother to lock me in my study, give me food twice a day, and only let me out when I needed a bathroom break.

I had pummeled my way through all religious texts, the Greek philosophers, and most of the scientists up to Steven Hawking by the time I realized that I was going mad. I could no longer sleep, for the different thinkers and writers of the past kept talking to me. It did not end when I put a book down. They all fought with each other because they knew that I eventually would have to make an ultimate decision. They knew that I had to decide which one to believe and discredit all the others; so, they fought for me to choose them. They argued points not even included in their books. Because of this I began to believe that it was not just in my head. They must have been real in some sense in order to make these arguments. I decided that the spirits of all these men and women had attended a council in my brain to fight over and eventually declare who had been right all along.

I never really talked to them. They just talked to me and with each other. Some were more enjoyable to listen to than others. I had already told Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John to “shut the hell up,” but got along perfectly with Aristotle. By book 200, though, all of their presences were extremely unwelcome. Somehow, the pain they caused me had gone slightly past being only mental, and it kept getting worse.

I began to get headaches that lasted hours and would start as a pain right behind my eye and then slowly grow to make my entire skull ache. They became terrible migraines. The pain was so intense that I would often slip into unconsciousness. The pain got in the way of my reading and put me behind in my study. I would look in the mirror and see not just myself but all those intelligent spirits. They were no longer helping me along with my understanding of life; they were haunting me.

One day, as I sat at my desk, trying to read, I felt a stabbing pain at the back of my skull. I reached my hand back to the aching area, and when I drew my hand forward, my fingers were covered in blood. I tried to look at the injury in the mirror, but it was placed in the exact spot on the back of my head that I could not see in the reflection. I considered calling my brother to give it a look, but I was already two books behind schedule and did not want any more distractions. I grabbed a dirty shirt off of my floor and held it over the bleeding spot. It probably should have worried me that the next day I got a very similar pain on the top of my head. It also bled heavily, but I was too engrossed in my studying to care. I grabbed another old shirt, completely black, wrapped it around my head, tied it under my chin, and went back to reading. For two weeks I left that shirt tied around my head. The pain never went away; it actually seemed to be getting worse every time the spirits visited my mind, but I did not want to deal with my physiological problems. My brother questioned the shirt, and I made up an excuse about it helping me sleep at night. I would rinse the shirt out when I went to the bathroom, but I never looked in the mirror without the shirt on. I was scared of what caused all the pain in my head. Some of the spirits that were medical geniuses told me that I needed to see a doctor. They kept saying that I was being ignorant and could not live much longer in the present state. I just ignored them. They certainly drove me crazy, and I often wished them away, but I had not yet placed the blame on them for my head situation.

The spirits began to argue even more with each other, and their words seemed more hostile than usual. They feared that I would not live long enough to finish my readings and make a final decision. It was becoming ever harder for me to even think about everyday things. My lunch was interrupted by scientific facts. Brushing my teeth was interrupted by biblical scriptures. Sleeping did not exist for me anymore. I only pondered on the purpose of human life. Every day. Every night. The only subject my brain had time or room for was that impossible question and its even more impossible answer. The facts, opinions, and overlapping theories consumed me and would eventually split me in half.

I finally decided to remove the shirt and properly look at the wound in the mirror. When I untied the shirt and pulled it off, my entire head started to sting. I stepped in front of my mirror and was horrified at what I saw. There was a huge gash that started right in the middle of my head just above my eyebrows and went straight back all the way to where the base of my skull met the back of my neck. It was a perfect gash. It seemed that someone had cut it so precisely, but that was impossible. Realization did not come to me until my historical spirits showed up once again. They were splitting my head! I screamed at them to leave me alone. They were not only separating the components of my brain in a mental way but also in a physical way. I ran about my room furiously. I grabbed all the books that would fit in my arms and threw them into my fire place. I lit it and watched them burn, but the spirits threatened me. They warned that I was already too invested and burning the books would do me no good. They explained that the information was already in my mind. I could not unread the books.

I walked back to my mirror and looked upon myself as my brain was overcome with the greatest pain yet. I watched as the gash grew wider and wider. I simply stared as my skull pulled apart and my brain along with it. My mental state was severed. My brain was halved.

The Wolves and Dogs
By David Tulsey Jones

A long time ago when the animals could talk there was a village deep in the woods. There were turkeys, guineas and chickens that the people raised for food and because it was close to the woods it was the dog's job to protect them from the wolves. There was to be a council meeting that night by a pack of wolves who had been trying to get at the chickens, but time and time again the dogs would fight and chase them off. "Quite down, quite down", We have to do something about these dogs" said the Wolf Chief," I for one am tired of fighting these dogs, we have lost a lot of our brothers " The time had come to use trickery and to lead the dogs into a trap. " I have a plan that will take care of these dogs once and for all, now this is what we will do, we will go and meet with the dog chiefs and invite them to a feast but in reality we will set a trap for them" said the Wolf chief.

The Wolf Chief chose three of his brother wolves to talk with the Dog Chiefs at the edge of the woods." That is far enough" yelled the Dog Chief, The other dogs stood tense and ready to fight. "We bring an offer of a truce from our Chief to stop the bloodshed between us, at one time we lived as a single tribe, we honor you for your bravery and courage and we want to give you a feast of deer meat and rabbits" yelled one of the wolves. The dogs never got this kind of offer of meat before and were used to scrapes so this was too good to turn down and they talked and talked and decided to accept.

The Wolves set up the tables for the feast that was to be stacked with meats of deer and rabbit as promised right in the center of a clearing surrounded by high rocks and trees. The wolves added more logs and brush until it enclosed the area completely. When the day arrived for the feast he dogs had passed the word around and soon everyone was ready but then an old dog shouted "wait I heard about the feast, now let me tell you youngsters something, I wouldn't trust those wolves, I say it's too good to be true so I better go to so I can protect you youngsters The young wolves started laughing and hooting at the old dog and told him to crawl back under the porch and go back to sleep where he belonged. The young dogs trotted off to the feast singing and joking to each other.

The Wolf Chief opens the gates "Come In! Come in!" He said "In your honor for being a brave and worthy enemy we want all to eat and have a good time as we were brothers once!". The food keep coming and coming and the singing and dancing was going on and the Dogs ate and ate until they were so full they couldn't move. "Shut the gates! Shut the gates! Ah-haw! We have you now and you'll will never bother us again, today you'll die!" The other Wolves sprang up behind the rocks and brush and started howling the death howl," Help! Help! "The dogs started crying and wailing and they tried to run but were so full they couldn't move, suddenly they heard someone banging hard against the gates and a loud shout "Open up!! Open these gates up!! and let me in".

The Wolf Chief looked over the wall and saw who it was started laughing "Who are you old dog? You are not worth eating much less killing "The old dog was hurting from the long walk but he stood tall and straight as as he could. They call me the "Wolf Killer!" and I have killed so many of your kind that your blood got on my conscience because it was so easy but I can still kill if need be." The wolves started rolling around the ground hooting and laughing until they saw the Old Dog reach in and pull out a wolf tail out of a tote sack he was carrying, "Here is a tail that belong to one of your brothers "and then he pulled another and another so fast they couldn't keep up for his paw was quicker than the eye and he was singing and dancing the war dance as loud as he could. The wolves' eyes were getting bigger and bigger and their legs started to twitch. The wolves were so terrified that they never noticed he was putting the same tail back in and pulling the same one out over and over.

Wolf Chief cried "Oh mighty warrior have mercy on us, if you let us leave we will go far into the forest and never bother you again" "Go leave now before I change my mind" roared the Old Dog as deep and loud as he could muster up his voice. The wolves broke and ran so fast they trampled the Wolf Chief to get out. The last thing the dogs saw was the Wolf Chief being dragged away.

The Old Dog sat down on the nearest rock he could find and started shaking and sweating and trying to catch his breath, his plan had worked. The young Dogs began shouting in celebration and started doing the war dance. The old dog had saved them and they all made a circle around him, suddenly it became quite and one of the dogs stepped forward and said "Grandfather, Will you forgive us for the way we treated you?" The old dog nodded and said "let's go home!" and one by one they followed the Old Dog who led the way limping a little but head held high.

There are times when we neglect our old ones and forget that they were born on this earth a long time before us and all the patience and wisdom that they have acquired over a life time they gladly would share this knowledge with us if only we ask for their advice. The old ones are to be loved and respected and to be taken care of in their old age for they have earned it.

This was a Seminole fable told to me and my brother when we were very young by my father who was told to him by his father a long time ago.

The Muse

Literary and Fine Arts Contest

Sigma Kappa Delta, Upsilon Alpha Chapter, sponsors a contest for authors and artists submitting their works to the anthology. We send all submission to a qualified judging committee, and they choose the winners and honorable mentions (HM) in each area (poetry, prose, and art). Cash prizes go to the 1st place winner in each category and honorable mention recipients receive recognition and a certificate. Only students of Seminole State College are eligible for prize money. Should a judge award 1st place to a work by faculty or staff, Sigma Kappa Delta acknowledges their achievement with a certification, and the next ranked student will take the case prize.

The winners for the 2014 edition of *The Muse* are listed below by category. We thank our judges and all contestants for their hard work. We would also like to thank Lana Reynolds specially for her continued support of *The Muse* Literary and Fine Arts Contest.

Poetry:

- 1st: Moku Romena, "Mother Ocean"**
- 2nd: N.E. Starchild, "Stained Glass Windows"
- 3rd: Jacie Chaffin, "Fall Out Boy"
- Honorable Mention: Moku Romena, "Ode to Maui"

Prose:

- 1st: Shawna Elmore, "The Violence in My Mind"**
- 2nd: Vance Neely, "Physical, Cognitive and Emotional Effects of Male Circumcision Throughout Life-span"
- 3rd: Chalee Groves, "Forget Me Not"
- Honorable Mention: Jacie Chaffin, "The Knee Surgeon"

Art:

- 1st: James Vaughn III, "Azure & Midori"**
- 2nd: Shawna Elmore, "Starry Night"
- 3rd: Jessica Ellis, "Great Wise Owl Looks On"
- Honorable Mention: Jessica Ellis, "Foxy"