



English '57 Series

WORDPLAY

THE WEIGHT OF WORDS

Fall 2019

“A writer is a writer not because she writes well and easily, because she has amazing talent, or because everything she does is golden. A writer is a writer because, even when there is no hope, even when nothing you do shows any sign of promise, you keep writing anyway.”

~Junot Díaz

The act of writing is brave. No matter the genre, whether it is prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, the act of creation requires a certain amount of courage. To write is to put into words the thoughts that play in one’s head, and no matter how personal or impersonal they are, that work still a piece of that writer laid bare to the world. Some writing is forged in the fires of conflict and pain, some is found in quiet snowy evenings, and some is conceived in dreams of far-off lands and peculiar people. What matters is that it is written, and that it could not be written by anyone but its author.

And if writing itself is brave, then sharing one’s work is downright heroic. It is a beautifully vulnerable step in the process of writing, sometimes easy and sometimes arduous. It can be an infinitely rewarding experience, especially when sharing with another writer, who can relate to the experience.

Stories and poems are meant to be shared, just as they have been since time immemorial. I read the works included in this anthology, and I find hope, even in the darkest of tales. If we continue to share our humanity, our connections, our creativity, perhaps borders will fall away and we may begin to understand each other a little better. Hopefully you will find this hope too, dear reader.

Acknowledgements

First, to the authors and poets of the anthology: thank you for being brave. This anthology quite literally would not exist without your talent and willingness to share yourselves and your work. Thank you to the consultants for your continued hard work throughout the semester to assist your learners in any way you could, and for promoting the growth of writer and writing alike. Thank you to the UWSP English Department for their continued support of collaborative learning in the Writing Lab. Thank you to Cheryl Solinger for her many years of wonderful service welcoming students to the Writing Lab and keeping everything in order; we will miss her deeply but wish her the best in her retirement. A big thank you goes out to Emily Wisinski, the Writing Lab Coordinator, for always supporting her students, learners and consultants alike. The Writing Lab is the wonderful and indispensable place it is because of her hard work and the work of others in the TLC to make it so, and the university would be worse off without it.

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Poetry:

Kasaundra Fellner

It's been an amazing experience to have the opportunity to work with Kasaundra this semester! She has a clear passion for writing and poetry, which has always been reflected through her excitement over being able to share her work with me during our sessions! Something that really stood out to me about Kasaundra is the ways that she actually offers details on her writing processes, going as far as showing past revisions of poems so that I can get a vivid sense of how her thoughts evolved over the course of creating any given work! Along with this, she has always been open to receiving feedback, and regularly looks for ways to improve her writing even further. Ultimately, I'm thrilled that you have the opportunity to read these poems, which are excellent examples of her craft!

~Alex Kampmeyer

Fireworks

One after another they came;
whistles followed by explosions.
The reds conquered,
and the golds sizzled.
The greens shimmered,
and the pinks dazzled.

I stare rudely up at them in my apathy
as couples and families "oohed" and "aahed" in unison.
I watched the artificial stars wink down at me,
and I felt the guilt of a long-lost friend
that was never able to keep in touch.

Everyone was eager for the next one to come,
yet I was left saddened by the ones before
that were not granted enough admiration.
Their ashes were still falling but no one cared—
no one saw their smoke patterns that scarred the night.

When the time between each launch
began to taper into that knowing pause,
my heart sank like a weighty stone.
Eyes grew wide in anticipation
and without thought,
I hastily closed mine.

The finale had begun at last.
Blasts resonate within my chest,
light sliced through the air—
and yet I still refused to watch.
I forced my eyes to shut tighter,
flinching with each burst—
but I did not budge.

It was a show meant to impress the audience
but I dare not watch.

I couldn't bring myself to see them burn.
It'd be a tragic waste
for that magnificent sight to die inside of me,
instead of being shared with loved ones
and given that one last encore it deserved.

So as people clapped
and began to pack up their things,
I shrank into myself.
Resting my forehead against my knees,
I wanted nothing more
then to stay in my place upon the grass,
and mourn that hazy decision,
to come and enjoy the fireworks

The Runner

For his life,
He is running.
He leans at a slant,
Tempted by the air that sustains him,
Encouraged by the shifting of the earth beneath him.
Disciplined steps glide into their rhythmic pace
As the colors of a kinetic world blur, bleed,
And yield to him.
Adrift is he in makeshift time
As he treks upon those oblate paths
That fuel his chemical ambitions.
And when he pauses to catch his stolen breath,
So shall the world that embraces him,
As if he has returned from some far-off dream
That we static few could not obtain.
For everything he knows and doesn't;
For his failures and his stress,
For his triumphs and his bliss:
And for the feeling of control
And and the loss of it,
This runner,
Will never stop running

Almost

There was no occasion
attached to the late evening
that had encouraged me
to sit on that bench.
I had no intention to appear mindful,
or rather oblivious,
to the escalating weather.

As the clouds above me
layered with their foreboding hues,
I remained, adjusting my scarf,
as fleeting glances passed me by
hoping to avoid any unpleasantries
the sky may bare down upon them.

Thunder began to growl
at the rushes of chilled wind
and the hissing leaves
upon their yielding branches.

Droplets soon arrived
and caught in my beard;
Such an invitation for an icy drizzle
to transform into an unforgiving downpour.

Still I found I could not be so bothered
when thoughts of a sunnier place
nurtured warmth within my cheeks.

Against walls of shimmering rain
memories with familiar faces strobed,
and I found myself longing
for the crisp laughter
that still rang sweetly in my ears.

And with those few fragments,
I reminisced.
It was almost home.

I wish to hold it all
in my grasp once more, but to return
is to invite sickness unto my heart.

Because with them, I know my stories cease
and theirs continue to thrive
in ways I cannot understand.

So I beg time to be gentle
to this sentimental soul,

and to forgive me
for holding on so greatly.

The storm progressed with intensity.
Tired hands remained folded in my lap,
as somber breaths rose and fell
and the world passed by.

To the stranger
I was the fool sitting in dampened clothes,
surely insane for smiling blissfully into nothing.
And with that,
I had no reason to disagree.

Portrait of a Protégée

1

Enters that young and hopeful mind,
Attempting rigidly to distract
From obvious cues of her naiveté.
I assume she possesses the ambition in her heart and soul
That had cast her aside from the conventional crowd,
Otherwise she would not have found herself at my door.

And if not for her audacity and boldness
Wrapped in a subtle defiance of me,
Perhaps I would have turned her away
And continued on with my work.

Oh but this mentee, I knew,
Would not obediently trail my steps.
She would not so eagerly fill her notes with dictation
In order to amount to me and my supposed expertise.
No, this one has her own exquisite grandeur
That might even provoke me
With new, worthwhile hindrances.

2

Naturally I suspected many a time spent in quarrel,
But never could I predict
That I should grow so fond of those occasions.

Two vultures were we, squawking and arguing;
Hunched in close proximity over our papers,
Picking apart their meaning and toiling with their contents,
As pencils lay strewn across the table— too blunted for use:
We dare not break our concentration to sharpen them.

My pupil's spontaneity tends to be slightly reckless,
Yet still she is of the most charming characters
I have grown to hold in highest regard.

Her passions have not been squandered
 In her spurnéd years a child,
 And to think of all those voices and their duplicity
 Draped over her shoulders in weighty strain:
 I knew it well.
 But astonished am I at the cooing dove,
 That tempts from me a most benevolent smile.

3

Oh and how my novice *flusters* with hues of red
 Brimming beneath frustration's crinkled nose,
 So forgetful of the fact
 That her astute teacher has failed
 More than the number of times she has even attempted.

Yes, gifted to an extent is she, but still,
 There is much to be learned.
 But even so, I tend to forget which of us
 Is truly guiding the other to their betterment
 (I recognize that it is not always me).
 Every now and again I falter.
 I'll wake too soon with a start in the night,
 Sobbing my uncertainties into my palms,
 Because unfortunately, I find that I am just as human,
 And although it is blesséd to be,
 A curse it is, nevertheless.

And against my efforts, and despite my dignified manner
 To appear as though I were above such weaknesses,
 Like poetry with her learned eyes, she deciphers me,
 Interpreting my worth, as if no one has done so before.

4

I fondly await the day she will come to me
 (As she would throughout years prior)
 Inquiring of the lessons I am to lecture,
 Only to find that there are none.
 And I foretell a look of worry will overcome her
 As she is accompanied to the door.

*My dear, I'll say,
 I welcome you to the world of an eternal scholar,
 Though from it, you will be granted a different title.*

Then on her way she'll go, my sweet friend,
 For I would have relinquished my duties
 Unto the world she was meant to conquer.
 And if I have done right by her;
 If somehow, I had something of value to bestow,
 Then my lessons shall still be recalled,
 And still those lessons are forever taught.

Kelsey Wilch

The following submission was crafted by a student creator who demonstrated a distinct knack for thematic composition throughout the previous semester. The author showed her creativity by innovating unique methods of brainstorming and adapting them to her already competent eye for detail. The following poem shines brightly with the passion of someone celebrating the lights of this world and challenging the darkness. Be sure to keep an eye out for future creative works from this illuminating writer!

~CJ Dahlman

Night Light

She waited for the day, that would turn into the night
 To see the tiny balls of light
 They spread across the horizon
 They were reminders of her childhood past
 For as a child, she was scared of the dark
 Terrified of the monsters under her bed
 Filled with fear, until a light would appear
 This light was safety
 This light was protection
 In this moment, as she looked up at the sky
 Not one, but trillions of lights flickered every single way up so high
 But only one did she consider her night light
 Her protection and safety from the night
 The reason to give her strength
 It only came in a second
 But she would stare for hours on end until she could find her light
 This light was unlike the rest
 It would stream across the sky in a blink or a flash
 And when you found it, happiness and strength would overcome your soul
 She would wish upon this light for everything to be alright
 For as she grew older, her fear of these monsters turned into her fear of the world
 She fought and dreamt of a better future
 One with happiness and a brightness so intense
 That it could fill her up inside and push out the rest
 The rest of the darkness
 The rest of her pain
 The rest of the weights that pulled her down
 “No more fear!” she proclaimed
 They seemed to disappear in a flash
 From the light
 That streamed across the night
 From the light
 Strength, safety, beauty, and hope found in this world by sight
 From the light
 From her night light
 Fear was vanquished
 At last
 No more fright

Rebecca Spencer

My sessions with Rebecca were always enjoyable because of her excitement for her work. I always looked forward to enjoying her inspirations and feelings behind her writings. During this semester Rebecca was always looking for ways to expand as a writer. Rebecca was always exploring different inspirations for her writing and different ways to convey her ideas. I know Rebecca will continue to grow as a writer as she continues to explore.

~Taryn Wield

Live, you got this

Life is precious
 Conscious one second and unconscious the next
 Your consciousness may be teleported to a mythical world
 Or
 You become unaware of your existence
 Either way, you no longer exist
 You are no longer in the living database
 It's not the death itself
 It's the living that are left behind
 They suffer more you, yourself ever have
 That is,
 The loss of you
 All they can hold on to is the memories
 Your smile, laugh, smell, personality, love and touch
 Therefore, death can cause destruction inside someone
 They'll never be a you
 Your brain dissected out of your skull
 The powerful machine shuts off never to be brought back to life
 Your remains are displayed for people to see one last time
 They wish this was all a joke and you would open your eyes and climb out of the casket laughing
 But your pale and stiff
 Lips in a tight line
 Dull waxy skin
 The whole room is full of sorrow, knowing you will never knock on their door again
 Hear you say their name
 Feel your warmth during a strong embrace
 You are gone and all that is left is your memories in others

Connection

Damn, can I get a connection?
 Maybe it's the demons inside
 Sometimes they take over
 Overcome with darkness, detachment and wild emotions
 Embracing negativity
 A reversed meaning to everything good

Yes, I'm a survivor of myself
 Battles internal feel like a never-ending tug a war
 Battles on the outside are bloody betrayals and cold-blooded torture of pure agony
 Gun shots with exit wounds
 Throat slashed from behind
 Heart deeply bruised from abandonment, deception and broken trust
 No choice but to pull the plugs and withdraw
 I'll be back on my feet in no time applying the lessons learned
 But first, let me feel everything
 Devastation occurs as my pillow is soaked with the saddest tears
 Foolishness occurs when I beat myself silly. So naïve you are!
 Embarrassment occurs when I fell in love with a joker who only had the intentions to win games
 Regret occurs when I realized I could have prevented my own murder
 Anger like a bull being released at a rodeo. Run for your life!
 Misery occurs in the eyes...dead on the inside and ready to sacrifice a beating heart
 Alarms set off a lockdown
 Undeserved brutal overkill
 Hurts like a long-lasting sting from the hardest whip
 I refuse to accept this nonsense!
 Tears were replaced with owl eyes
 Hurt turned into power
 I must get myself up and running again
 I got to find a way to recharge
 And follow the smell of a flower bouquet that drifts through the air.
 So,
 Can I get a connection?

Where's Waldo?

Things that capture my attention are things nobody pays attention to
 I store the information away for when an original idea sparks a wildfire.
 I'm now fixated, and my pen becomes a tool that puts together a word puzzle only to be
 described as a remarkable transformation.
 A story knocks when I release my focus that allows my feelings, emotions and thoughts run free
 for them to find one another in harmony
 The deeper you go the more riches you'll find.
 The darker the berry, the sweeter the juice
 The quieter the mouth, the louder the mind...
 Yknow,
 It's okay to be in the unknown
 Like a magic sac, you can pull anything out of it you wish
 Just be careful about what you wish for...
 The unknown usually stores the keys for doors you subconsciously locked
 Take a stride when the owls hoot and the coyotes howl at the mesmerizing full moon
 You might just find what you are looking for

Beyond

So, I walk along a paved path feeling that light breeze cooling the heated temperature
My eyes fixated on the scenic view of the summer land of woodlands and apple trees

There is so much for my view

How could everything be in motion but seem still?

The sky looks as if somebody smeared pink, orange and blue paint across it

It calls from way beyond

Hell, birds must love it up there

They are the true seekers because they know earth the best

The green embeds itself in my soul

Calms me

Eases my overwritten mind

Renews me

There is so much beyond and god,

It needs to be explored.

Sit. Relax and Think.

Sometimes your mind needs a time out just like sport teams do when things aren't going well
Sometimes you need to kick up your heels when life has been demanding too much focus and

not enough play

And sometimes people choose to be or are a lone wolf because their life journey is only meant
for them

It's sometimes hard to believe things will work out fine when life is like a huge unsorted bucket
of Legos.

One thing I learned is that the tiniest supply of hope can save you from drowning in your own
tears

Gosh. Smiles. They can be the most deceptive thing. But...it's a part of survival because we all
want to survive from ourselves.

So, we fake it until we make it.

Sometimes the power of words can either save someone's life or end it

It's best to be mindful and aware

Correct yourself if you are in the wrong and do better. It's the least you could do

And lastly, sometimes the very thing you need, is a friend.

Devastated

How could you?

You disappeared faster than a dead leaf taking flame

As I fall on my knees

As I look up to you with a broken heart and cried out eyes

You smirked and walked away

I tightly closed my fist, squeezed my eyes shut and lowered my head

My heart just exploded

The hurt was so great my eyes drowned in unlimited tears

Nose became so stuffed the slimy liquidly snot drooped from my nose

I crump up my body and lift my head only to seem him link his hand to another woman

I couldn't help but bring my hand to me heart as I cried uncontrollably

No, no, no!

I watched them get into a car and drift off.

He never looked back

With force, I brought myself to stand

I brought myself to swallow a deadly feeling

Only thing keeping me warm at this point were continuous tears rolling down my cheeks

The sky shook of thunder and clouds came together brewing dark

Lightning struck and severe storm took power

Even when the cold rain drenched me

I did not have the will to move

I did not have the will to do much of anything anymore

All the switches turned off

Mind blank

A piece of me had been taken

Taken!

All that was left in me was the will to scream all sorts of things

House looked as if ransacked

Oh, sweet bed

I tore off my clothes and plopped on my bed

Soaking my pillow with tears of devastation

Mountains to climb

What do you think when you are at the bottom of a tall mountain looking up?
Do you say, "I'm not hiking up that" or do you take on the challenge with determination?
When you come across a mountain in life...don't focus on the size. Focus on how breathtaking
the view will be when you get to the top.

Sure,

You may sweat, become exhausted or even get muscle cramps but hard work truly does pay off.

The results will not only surprise you but will surprise others.

Those who sat at the bottom of the mountain will wonder how you succeeded and those who
took on the challenge will wonder why those at the bottom decided to not even attempt.
We all come to diverged roads in life and those who are willing climb their own mountains are
not seen on the highways but on the winding back roads instead.

We sometimes can become blind to our own potential, even I.

Thinking, "there's no *way* I can do that" or

"I can't, I can't, I can't, I CAN'T."

No! You can.

I thought I could *never* become a better reader. After I picked up book after book, I could read
just fine.

I thought I could *never* get an A because I didn't test well. After I took time to learn proper study
techniques and put immense effort into learning the material. I received an A.

I thought I could *never* get the hang of cornrowing. After practicing over and over, I developed a
new skill.

You see just because something seems out of reach or impossible, it does not give you the right
to give up on yourself.

Even if don't succeed, at least you can say you gave it your all.

Take on mountains!

Paralyzed

As my thoughts search for an escape, the scale balances until there is stillness, but my lips stay
sealed

How can a situation make you so uneasy, that your brain to your body no longer sends
messages? You're at a loss as to why you cannot respond...

"Please, at least *do* or say *something!*"

Do not push me, my mind with venom has flooded!

Silence can either be a weapon or a shield, but more often than not, consciously or
unconsciously, it is both

Knotted up and stiff I feel, when emotions twist so tightly

My stare emotionless, and my dark chocolate eyes, suddenly, with fog, become frosted.

Demanding not to make a sound, I abduct myself or this newly sharpened knife will meet my
throat.

Like scrabble-the board game, words become scattered, and oxygen becomes non-existent, as if

I just teleported to space

Reality is switched out for a comical fantasy

Where I can not go up or down, left or right

I become paralyzed

Into a sculpture....

Turned.

I Want To Ease The Sorrow

Emotions fly high and migrate like birds do when seasons change
 An emotional time can be draining, especially if your heart is hurting from someone else's pain.
 Prolonged emotional trauma keeps the hurtful experience fresh.
 Peoples suffrage tugs at my lowest heart string
 When someone you love is experiencing depression...and your hundreds of miles
 away...completely helpless to the unfolding of something out of your control...
 Emotions bubble over like a shaken bottle of soda being opened
I know you blame yourself, but you are not to blame!
Drugs are not the answer to heal. Put down that bottle of liquor, put down that lighter and
pipe filled with grinded sticky weed. Take my hand and let me show you the light of hope.
 It's upsetting to know voices in people's heads are ruthless
 Unlovable, unappreciated, unworthy, not heard, not enough, stupid, incapable, helpless, broken,
 stale, weak, reject, lost, useless, inconvenient, hideous
 Each word can hold your head down in 2ft of water
 Lifting your head seems easy but the hold is so unbelievably strong.
 The powerful urge for air is the only thing that can break them free.
 Some do fortunately make it, some unfortunately do not.
 Sometimes people may feel doomed because they have not experienced happiness in a very long
 time
 This makes my whole-body tender to the touch and squeezes my heart until it bleeds blue,
 sending my mind to the underground of torture
 Oh, how can I ease their sorrow? How can I tell them its going to be okay? How can I help turn
 their pain into fuel so they can drive somewhere sunny?
 Things don't happen overnight, and I know that
 But at least they are presented with another path. A path of victory not defeat.

“You’re unreadable.”

Okay. And? Am I supposed to read you a bedtime story?

“Still a loner?”

Yes. It’s peaceful.

“Just be more open!” *Says someone who probably hasn’t had their heart unexpectedly broken into a million pieces.*

“You’ve changed, you’re more black now.”

Yup. I guess that’s a thing...

“I want your stomach to go to your ass.”

Wow. Thanks for body shaming me.

“I realized I’m still in love with my ex.”

Wow. Thanks for spending two days with me to figure that out.

“Show us how to twerk!” *screams all the white girls to the only black girl. Jokes on them, I can’t twerk...*

“You’re the laziest person I’ve ever met.” *Says someone who didn’t recognize the sighs of high-functioning depression*

“You’re crazy.”

Okay? Tell me something I don’t know

“I really do like you BUT...” *Says someone who doesn’t like you and has already chosen someone else*

Ladies, if a man ever puts you in a competition with other women, disqualify yourself!

“You look so exotic.”

Uhhhh, thank you?

“Why do you need to know everything beforehand? Just come and see!”

You should read up on the Acetylcholine pathway of an introvert’s brain.

Macy Powell

Macy was such a joy to work with. Through the 57' course I had the pleasure of reading several of Macy's poems, each one giving me a different insight into her thoughtful and creative mind. Our discussions about her inspirations behind each piece, her word choice, her poetic structure, and just life in general, made each and every session with Macy easy and fun! I was able to expand my knowledge of poetry and learn several things throughout our weekly sessions, the most memorable being that all poems do not have to rhyme. I truly admire Macy in her writing skills and her amazing ability to put her thoughts and feelings into words. I am positive her writing will take her far in life and I am honored I got to work with her on her writing this semester.

~Sierra Maatta

Prime Number (10162019)

we are primed, I think

primed to be stuck between living

in a big world or a small world,
primed to make ourselves accept the vertigo
that our spinning earth must feel
amongst the chaos of order

there is comfort in making oneself small,
it is easy to ignore the pandemonium that way

whether we blend into a crowd
or whether we hesitate from the edge of it,
whether we up peer up at the intimidating mouth of the sky,
or whether we settle to stare at the uneven sidewalks

some of us choose to do the things
that keep us small,
and that is okay sometimes

we are primed to want a big world,
but maybe not primed to live in one,
so I think it's okay to shrink ourselves,
small enough to live just a little at a time

in the midst of all of this space,
I will stay inside my small world
even if it is not as lush and verdurous as the rest

There is comfort here
amidst the warm bathwater of introversion,
and if I ever swallow too much of the world,
maybe I could say it was an accident

Worm Food (11042019)

I hope the earth's teeth are sharp
when it finally takes me,
hope my meat is not too dry to swallow

Please chew me up finely
because I do not want
to ever come back here

Put me more than six feet under
so that the wolves of this earth
will not find me again

I hope I taste as bad at the end
as I did at the beginning

Autonomy (10102019)

still learning how to use this body,
slowly but surely

it's taken years
to learn the ropes of this thing,
years to learn
the trigger fingers,
the switches and sliders,
volume control

it's given me a residue,
but what is it?
my harddrive is balmy and uneasy,
like nicotine on an empty stomach

"stay in the present," it says,
but that button isn't labeled,
and my asdfjkl; typing fingers seem to stick
to every other key on the board

wires crossing and uncrossing,
who knows when my chattering teeth
will finally gnaw through them
and cook me to a medium rare

this body has too many controls
and switches and sliders
and levers and toggles

sometimes I crave a conductor
for this intricate and barreling train of a body

other times,
I can only yearn for an eject button

I guess I'm still learning

Strawberry Seeds (10022019)

Sometimes
it feels like nothing is here
nor there
or anywhere really

In the Descartes sort of way,
my hands are an elaborate illusion

Catered to disassemble what they touch,
any fruitful relationships spat out like seeds
as cinders crumble through open fingers

Everyone says to rise from the ashes
but I can't help burrowing myself under them,
taking my shoes off,
and making myself at home

Ex Nihilo (09302019)

under the skin
there's something crawling,
wet and loud
squelching
ferocious
foaming at the mouth

an animal caged
rattling against its bars
maw open and waiting
echoing with no sympathies
or reason to stay intact

“pull it together,”
I repeat like a mantra
underneath my own breath

but what will a mantra do?
what is there to pull together?
sure as hell not the same brain
or the same heart
that used to work together
without the indifference

gone is their synchronization,
they are somewhere else
just as I am somewhere else

I rattle against my cage,
ferocious
foaming at the mouth
echoing with no sympathies
or reason to stay intact

waiting for a pin to drop,
just waiting for something

but there's nothing

ex nihilo

Heidi Propson

I had an absolute blast working with Heidi this semester. She has such a creative mind and her poetry never ceases to amaze me. Throughout our time together she took on some intense themes, used unique language to her advantage, and always kept me entertained and inquisitive. It was so impressive to begin, and when she came back with revisions, I was that much more awed. It was so much fun to watch her write such creative and individual work.

~Shannon Lagore

A Cheesy Little Ditty

Purple Pointer Pride,
Pulsing through our veins.

Purple Pointer Pride,
Bringing out people's crazy sides.

Bleeding Gold and Purple,
A truly special thing.

Bleeding Gold and Purple,
Royal colors fit for a King.

Purple and Gold spirit,
A great infectious disease.

Purple and Gold spirit,
A feeling that will never cease.

When Thunder Roars

The storm rushes in,
The heavens opening.
Thunder strikes,
Mom says it's Angels bowling.
Lightning flashes,
Sister says smile, it's God taking a picture.
The rain starts pouring,
It's our loved one's tears, happy to see us again.
The storm rolls on,
Thunder then lightning.
One, two, three, four counts in between.
That's four miles until fully upon us,
And we can hear God's creation really sing.
The bowling and pictures continuing to grow,
Trees waving like mad,
Wind howling like a hoard of wolves,
The rain splattering and pa pa pattering,
All a harmonious thing, adding to the show.

Until it meanders out of town,
 On to share it's glory and gifts,
 With the others,
 Around the globe.

Tearstains

Rain drip drop plopping,
 soaking,
 the world,
 while providing help
 for new growth to start.
 Rejuvenating.
 Mixing and mingling
 with my own salty tears,
 adding to the watery tracks,
 making their paths
 down my face.
 Tears,
 the overflow of my emotions,
 both good and bad.
 Leaking,
 seeping.
 Mixing with the rain,
 Providing help,
 Rejuvenating,
 Allowing new growth to start.

Beautiful Strangers

I know you, but not really.
 I kind of know you, but not actually.
 I know your name. That's about all.

The next time we pass,
 It won't seem like we're strangers.
 We may introduce each other to others even,
 as Friends.

Friends.
 If we are Friends,
 then I know you enough
 to know more than others at glance.

But I only know Your Name,
 Green Sea Eyes,
 Muddy Hair,
 Accented Voice,
 Casual Stance,
 Nervous Hands,

Close-lipped Smile.

What more can you say of me?
There's nothing else you really know.
Friends?
A word to be used,
Perhaps more guarded.

If you call me Friend,
Don't be surprised
if the sentiment goes unshared.
If we know each other better,
Then perhaps one day, Friends.
Until then,
"Hello Stranger"

The Little Things

Voices,
traveling on waves,
carried through ears,
background chatter.

Lavender,
floating on a fan's breeze,
filtering in noses,
calming scent, a sneeze.

Light,
glaring through windows,
infiltrating halls,
familiar sight.

Pen,
round and smooth,
fitting snugly
between fingertips.

Mint,
exploding on my tongue,
a burst of flavor,
fresh gum.

The dorm life,
a special kind of world,
all of its own.
A happy place,
Neighbors and friends all around.
Familiar, comforting,
My new, favorite home.

Rei Goehrs

It has been an absolute pleasure working with Rei this past semester in our '57 sessions! Throughout our sessions, Rei has experimented with different writing genres, styles, and techniques, proving to be a very versatile author. Her writing is emotional, moving the reader with great fervor. I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to work with Rei, and to see her refine her art of writing. I am confident that Rei will continue to succeed and thrive in whichever genre of writing she pursues in the future.

~Hannah Jackson

Fostered Darkness

The days of dark had come to be
 When my enemy was me
 Crying into the night for help
 Without response to that yelp

It all began many years back
 I was only doing all I knew
 I only ever did attack
 Until it was those nightmares I view

They called me a monster, a child of evil
 I never knew it was true
 I thought myself a knight medieval
 Until those fantasies I outgrew

That night I thought I had my heart's desire
 To get away, to be free
 Yet instead I lost my fire
 And a redo was my plea

Let me out, let me go
 I cried from my cell of ice
 The only response was the sound of snow
 If only I had more than vice

The nights drew long and lone
 Silence and regret filled the air
 If only my actions I could atone
 My life would not be despair

I prayed time again, but hope had gone
 My soul left my body, my eyes lifeless
 With body curled, and mind withdrawn
 A walking corpse, I must confess

Hungry, down, skin and bones
 I turned animal for survival
 No longer any moans
 It felt like revival

I put my life and soul at risk
Every day, to feel alive
I gained a feeling of frisk
But on stealing could I thrive?

Over months I planned and I acted
An escape into the night
Far away was I attracted
With my blood I would no longer unite

I clutched in my hand a charm of silver
A butterfly that hung by a wing
It brought hope of a time familiar
And to it did I cling

Like freedom from manacles of rose
I held the silver chain in my mouth
My dreams it did expose
As my life continued south

As the day crept closer, the snow fell again
It was to be the promised day
Better than the year had been
On that day I had fallen astray

At once, my world altered
I was in someplace new
At once, my soul faltered
Turned another hue

Back to where I began
A lifeless body with cold dead eyes
Happiness I had come to ban
It was buried in countless lies

I stared and wondered how to be free;
Pollution, cyanide, overdose, nightshade...
The end of suffering I could foresee
Despite the actions once forbade

My body shook and quaked
It soon went dark, the world silent
On this my life was staked
I had hoped it was compliant

Alas, by morning I awoke
With fever and fatigue
It was death I wished provoke
But more invoked intrigue

Much damage my body attained
As I fought an inner war
To my blood and mind I was chained
And it all I tried to ignore

The days went on, such is life
I still felt that betrayal from my kin
That they abandoned me in my strife
And I felt the blade touch my skin

It wasn't me, I had no control
I bled and bled, with hands red
To write, my body it stole
"I will not tell" the bloody message read

I didn't know what it meant
The nightmares continued in the night
Countlessly I would lament
The creatures gave me fright

I ran into the darkness
Frightened by creatures I only saw
I fled to the woods in distress
No courage could I draw

They lurked in the shadows
They looked through the walls
They peered through the windows
Upon me a nightmare befalls

Countless nights I cried
Just leave me alone, leave me be
Under the sheets I would hide
From these terrors I wish to be free

They all told me how I'm strong
They said I'll be fine as always
They never knew how it was wrong
I just smiled through dark days

Yet another perishes tonight
Oh how I despise you
Kneel down my mischievous light
I have a task for you to do

Take with you my darkness
Take with you these chains
I care not the cost regardless
Why do you not leave? Why do you remain?

I looked upon my history

I have many regrets scarred in my soul
Please, do you blame me for not being sisterly?
Are you filled with hate? Does your heart bear a hole?

I'm so sorry, for your mental halt
You've been hurt, you've been broken
My sister, it's all my fault
My regrets cannot be spoken

How can I fix it, how can I forget?
What should I do, how should I be?
I was very mistaken, and that I regret
Could you ever even forgive me?

Many nights these questions were torture
They never left my mind
My mind came into disorder
If only the answers I could find

Before long, I was a stranger to me
I endured oceans of tears
Just let me go, let me be free
I am tired of living in fear

Just let me go home, set me free
This was my wish but not what I want
I was as broken as could be
Yet I appeared nonchalant

Finally upon my sweet sixteen
After two years have passed
This wish I'd never foreseen
But the pain I had not surpassed

I finally cried tears of joy
Finally my trial reunion
I just hoped I wouldn't destroy
I finally felt human

And now where invisible chains once bound
A butterfly can be found
It flies free, in the clouds so high
And just like it, I will shine and hold up the sky

Nichole Hougard

Working with Nichole this semester has been so much fun! Every time she came in, she brought in some really incredible, unique writing. We worked on a wide range of pieces, from a contemporary short story, the beginning of a fantasy novel, to some really emotional poetry. Everything she brought in felt engaging and creative. It was really rewarding to see all of the work she put in to take our conversations and turn them into revisions that made her pieces that much better!

~Shannon Lagore

To all the girls that have loved you before,
I know that I don't know you
Or your stories.
But I know his.

I have picked up the broken pieces
Of his shattered heart and soul
And am still looking for them.

Missing:
middle pieces of heart and fragments of soul

If found:
Please return with a bottle of super glue

I've heard how you made him feel.
How you broke his spirit until all that remained was a shattered mirror;
A mirror of misery and past pain.
That he had to glance in every day for god knows how long and remember the pain you caused him.

How could you?
Obviously he wasn't your soulmate like he is mine.

But how could you?
Walk away from such a compassionate person?
Stop loving someone that obviously loved you even when you didn't?

How could you walk away from that love? That unrelenting love?

How could you walk away from someone that promises such a bright future?
That would do anything to make you happy?

You might still be with him, if fate hadn't taken a toll.
I might have never got him
Away from you.

I guess it doesn't matter, you'll probably never read this anyway.
I'll never know why or how you could leave someone so understanding.
Because I can't.

Never have I found someone who holds me through my crying fits,
Makes me smile everyday,
Gives me hope that there is good left in the world.

I love him in a way that you never could:
I love him for who he is.

Katelyn Voorhies

Katelyn was wonderful to work with this semester. I feel like through the sessions we both learned so much from each other! She has impressed me with her ability to craft entirely original worlds in her mind and transfer them so eloquently on paper. During our sessions, we were able to explore the boundaries of these worlds and develop her characters to the point where it felt like we were there ourselves. It was amazing seeing her stories grow so much, and even more amazing seeing her grow with them. I truly wish the best for Katelyn as she continues her work as an emerging author and I look forward to one day reading her published books.

~Lucy DeLain

Goodbye

The phone rings
 You miss the call
 It rings again
 A different caller
 You miss it again
 One more call
 You answer
 A tear-filled voice answers
 A sobbing voice of loss
 Shock engulfs
 Why him?
 Why now?
 Call ends
 Memories of the past flash within
 Complete silence fills the crowded room
 Death has done its damage
 Diverting the punishment as it leaves the room
 Loved ones gather to split what is left behind
 Memories of his life on the walls
 The scent of his life wafts through your nose
 Tears fill your eyes
 A Brother
 A Father
 An Uncle
 You call the uniformed
 The phone rings

Myke Williams

This is my second semester seeing Myke flourish as a writer. During this semester Myke stepped outside of his comfort zone and created some beautiful pieces in the process. I always looked forward to my sessions with Myke and discussing the diverse muses he drew his ideas from. In the future I know Myke will flourish further as he continues to look at new forms of writing and inspirations.

~Taryn Wield

Icarus

I wanted wings.

I'm not sure if I thought those wings would save me from the mundane things on the ground...

Or if I thought wings would save me from freezing from my frigid heart.

Each breath was more icy than the last, and It was between my cold breaths that I would contemplate about being able to take flight, over the clouds that had cast me into these shadows...

I could only dream of being enveloped by the feeling ,the warmth ,and light of the sunshine that I wanted to embrace.

I couldn't help but smile at the idea, because to me...that sounded pretty hot.

Enticed by my fascination I searched for an angel kind enough to share her feathers with me, someone who can see my dream as clearly as me...

I happened upon someone...

...her eyes ,hazelnut, and her skin was the richest shade of dark chocolate carrying the sent of fresh coconut. Every few inches was tattooed with her scars.

She saw me not only physically, but also emotionally.

She dreamed with her eyes open, and bleed her feelings out of the shards of her heart.

Her wings were dyed blue from all the tears she had shed, sky blue like the sky I wanted to embrace.

The embrace we shared was a brief, silent covenant.

A promise that it was alright to not feel alright. A quiet agreement that life isn't fair and that we all inflict tragedies on the hearts we shatter. A brief moment for peace of mind, knowing that your sunrise is just yet to come.

I no longer wanted wings....or at least not her wings.

It felt selfish to take from someone who already had so much taken from them.

All for no other reason than to save myself.

It would be better to make my own means, my own wings to allow me to embrace that warmth, that hope.

I'm content to walk under these clouds a bit longer if it means she might see the sunshine, because the only way she will find the warmth she needs is if she realizes she has the means to seize it herself.

Within(Understand)

There is beauty that lives within the shadow of understanding, a truth unreached by the light of judgement.

Something you can't see...if your blind.

What lies there;

Vibrant, Lavish, Hidden.

a place you can't reach with your eyes or your feelings. Feelings you can't grab, Light you can't see.

what lies there,

my essence, my feelings, my being.

If only you would thrive here with me,

If only you weren't blind.

If only you didn't let your judgement guide you through the darkness, your eyes would adjust and you would,

Understand.

You might even, Understand me.

Repine, Repine, Repine(Loss)

Repine. It's a new word i learned, and just putting the definition aside, I love learning new words, you should too. Learning new words strengthens your ability of self expression and understanding. From my point of view it also gives me new tools to describe those around me, but I'm spouting nonsense, back to my point....

[Repine], (verb)

<To express deep sadness or discontent; to long for something lost.>

....to long for something lost....

I like that.

I Like having a word that expresses my feelings with more clarity now. I hate losing relationships prematurely...lover, friend, family etc. It's my connection to the people close to me that makes them real to me, it makes them vivid, vibrant, and tangible. That discontent is a knife which stabs into, and crack my very resolve on reality; If the people closest to me aren't vivid and tangible, but instead distant and lifeless, or more specifically not in my life, then what's to hold the idea of other people being real? And if the world around me is a product of those people then how do I know that's real if they are fake? The reason I care so much about 'real' is because my reality is in a sense my anchor, and my escape rope from the insanity of my loneliness. The wall between me and my madness. By process of my logic, if it's not real then its a dream. I don't pay attention to my dreams, they're either wet and shameful or happy and meaningless. I never try to remember what I dreamt of the previous night because, as my resolve states, I have to focus on what's real. People make me real, they make the idea of me seem vivid, vibrant and tangible, but i feel like I only interpret that because I reflect them, the people closest to me, to a certain extent....if there's no light source then there's nothing to reflect. I can't trick myself, if it doesn't feel Real then I can't Feel for it, I can't bring my self to pay attention.

Don't misunderstand, I'm not saying without people I don't have a purpose, my purpose is as clear to me as the full moon on a dark night, it would take something astronomical to change that. I'm just saying that people are very helpful for self discovery, as ironic as it sounds understanding others helps me understand myself, and it just feels me with the antonym of repine ,I'm not sure of the word, but it's a tranquil feeling of almost and near completeness, it's uplifting, and makes me feel like I can never dream again--, which would be great for me, because then I'll only see what's real. Because I can't dream when my eyes are already open.

It's harder to keep them open than it is...to close them.

Progression

When I think back on that place, there was never really anything there for me...

...nothing but stepping stones and memories, people to learn from and appreciate, people to rise above and ignore. It's as if I've been climbing a staircase, and each step up brings me closer to the bright future I've always imagined for myself.

Closer to that light, and with the growing intensity comes a warmth, that grows warmer still as I step ever closer. I grow more accustomed, and comfortable with the warmth the further I go...

In contrast, as the warmth from the light in front of me grows, so does the chill of the breeze from the dark below at my back, a breeze that grows more and more icy, and each time it caresses my back, it slides past my ear and whispers:

"regression."

...To think that I could have such nightmares while my eyes are open...

I wouldn't dare turn around to take steps down and face those freezing voices.

Brionna Zygarlicke

Though seemingly quiet at first, Brionna's and my relationship opened up with a passion for working with others and expressing ourselves through writing. Watching Brionna's writing evolve this semester was like watching a butterfly emerge from its chrysalis; she started small but approached a beautiful complexity as time progressed. Brionna's picturesque compositions conjure a full circle of human thought and emotion. Her style of writing is creatively genuine, and it has been an absolute delight getting to be her audience this semester.

~Aja Heuss

Serenity

Snowflakes fall outside my window
 Bringing a calm and lazy sort of day
 With a blanket wrapped around my body
 Candles flicker up on the shelf
 A cup of coffee warms my hands
 Perfect for this cold, fall day
 An open book eases my mind
 As I fall into another's story
 Captivated for hours among the pages
 I wish every day was as simple as this
 With nowhere to go and nowhere to be
 Curled up in the warmth all around me
 Yet snowflakes fall outside my window

Wild

To the mountains I want to go
 Find peace within my soul
 Feel the fresh air against my skin
 Let my hair blow wild in the wind
 Amongst the trees so much bigger than us
 Footstep by footstep I find my way
 Getting lost in this wonderful world around me
 Far from society, yet I feel so connected
 Nowhere else have I felt so free
 With mountains surrounding
 I am right where I want to be

Tyler Moeller

Week after week this past semester, Tyler displayed strong dedication to building upon his skills and growing as a creative writer. He tried writing some creative writing and ended up crafted a very intriguing and entertaining story about the future. One especially unique quality of this story is that it is from the point of view of the reader. Anyone reads this will seamlessly be enveloped into the story and feel as though you are the main character. He also created his first poem this semester and it is quite evident he is a natural poet. Both of these examples are a testament to the quality of his storytelling abilities. It was great to see Tyler's writing abilities progress the past few weeks and his skills will evolve as he continues writing.

~Klaire Brault

Present Moments

Present moments flourish and seem to be a dream
But sadness is knowing they will be distant memories
As people come and people go
One thing it is good to know
When life seems fast and out of touch
One thing is near and true to trust
The present moment can only be
What one recognizes and can see
Don't waste the time; do what you love
The moment will pass if you don't rise above

Austin Brooks

It has been so wonderful working with Austin this semester! Austin and I have talked a few times about how, throughout the day, he will think of an idea or an element from his life that causes a creative spark, driving him to write songs or poems about the idea! So, it's been really enjoyable to have the opportunity to work with him and have him share these ideas with me through his writing. Something else that I've really enjoyed about our sessions is that, after reading through the poems a few times, we have gone in and re-written and revised them, reflecting Austin's desire and willingness to evolve as a writer! In the end, Austin's creativity and the ways that he looks for ways to incorporate feedback into his writing have made him an incredible learner to work with, and I'm so happy that he has the opportunity to share a few of his poems through *Wordplay!*

-Alex Kampmeyer

My People

Gasping.

Heavy breathing.

Body.

Nonstop bleeding.

We know it's not fair.

The whole country can see

Unidentified body.

Could be you or me

I don't blame you, I'd want power too
 The only real difference is. I'm not you
 Being a policeman I can understand being scared and feeling like you need your finger
 on the trigger
 But what you can't justify.
 Is why you feel the need to constantly call us a nigger
 Just so you can feel bigger
 And our already small lives become so much thinner.

You have all that power
 yet you choose to abuse it.
 Even after all the murders
 you know you'd never lose it.
 There's nothing we can do
 you know we've been trying.
 Even the judge won't put you in jail
 when he know you've been lying.

My people just want to live.
 Live life
 Get money.

Your people want to see mine dead.
 7 warning shots
 Chest bloody.

I'm looking towards the future.

Hopefully we can make it.
But we'd never forget the past.
When you'd rape us and leave us naked.

The ? In the Mirror

"If it ain't don't fix it", but what happens when it shatters?
Do you just leave it there or do you pick up the pieces?

When a mirror shatters
You pick up the pieces and try to put it back together
Once you have reformed the mirror
You notice it's not the same
You notice all the splits and cracks
You notice how different and crooked you look
This mirror that has been shattered and put back together reflects your life
Reflects the pain, the struggle you've been through
Each crack represents a death
Each split represents someone that has left you
Each fissure represents the hardship you've endured
You look at yourself and see a disformed image
You see a strange, uneven figure
But even after seeing yourself
You smile
You cry
You laugh
You live
You realize that even though you have shattered, you can still be fixed
You wear the pain on your sleeve and come to the realization that you've fought through the pain
and endured the worst
In this shattered mirror you see hope
Hope because there will be better days
Hope because you will continue
Hope because you will succeed

Prose:

Jaime Logue

Jaime is a very talented writer and it has been amazing to watch her writing change and grow with her story. I have always loved '57 sessions with Jaime and getting the opportunity to see the story develop and characters come to life. Each character has their own unique personality with the perfect amount of sarcasm and sass built into each person. I love where this story is building up to and where Jaime intends for it to go. Jaime's passion for writing and her own research of the Salem Witch Trials makes her writing enjoyable to read and plot lines and character charts fun to talk through and see where she gets her inspiration from, hint of the past in a modern, fictional world.

~Heidi Propson

Salem Daisies

Prologue

My name is Daisy, I am seventeen, and I have bounced all over this freaking country, okay maybe not all over the country but definitely all over New York and some of Massachusetts. I was born in New York City, maybe that is the reason I've grown tough, or maybe it's the fact that I've never had a real home. I've lived in houses, apartments, condos, but never a home. Being a foster kid is the cause of that, having to move from place to place, never staying anywhere for too long, makes it impossible to have a real home. I've never had any friends either, the moment I gain a friend I end up getting uprooted and moved to another city. "This time will be different" that's what they always say but it never is. At least this time I am going to Salem, Massachusetts, I have always been fascinated by Salem, you know Witch Trials and all. I love its history, maybe this time really will be different, maybe I'll enjoy it.

The Salem Inn

When I arrive in Salem it is pitch black, stepping out of the car I can feel the cobblestone street under the soles of my cheap knock-off converse. Breathing in the crisp October air, smelling the fallen leaves and slight mist. Letting my eyes flutter shut for just a second, taking in the smell, before opening them again. Retrieving my fossil of a phone from my pocket and flipping it open I attempt to see what is in front of my face. The slight glow from the screen doesn't do much, but from what I can see, Salem is beautiful. Something about being here does feel different, I feel like I belong here. For the first time, I feel like I might be close to having home.

"Daisy. Daisy. Daisy!"

"Hmm." I mumble, feeling dazed looking at the old streets of Salem through the small light my phone's screen provides me.

"Can you please look at me?" I whip around startled, forgetting that Timothy is here.

Timothy is my case worker, aka the only constant in my life. He's been there for me since I was a baby and is like my brother, even though he is 20 years older than me. He is annoying and picks on me but I love him anyway.

"You aren't meeting your foster family tonight, it's too late. We are going to stay in the inn down the street." Relief fills me, meeting my foster family at three in the morning would not have been great, talk about a rough start.

"Ooh where are we staying?" my voice filled with a child-like intrigue.

"The Salem Inn, it's nice and haunted for ya. I know how much you love ghosts and haunted things." I snicker at Timothy's commentary on my weirdness.

"You are definitely right about that, thanks!" Laughing even more we walk through the doors of the Salem Inn and see an older woman behind the desk. Her name tag says "Danielle". She is smiling, it's a kind smile, one that makes me think she could be a safe haven for me in the future. She just has that vibe. Looking to my left I see a small boy, probably around 6 or 7 years old. I think about how a boy that young should be in bed, just as my thought finished the little boy gave me a grin and ran away as if he had heard what I just thought. Did I say it out loud? Timothy taps my shoulder, then dangles a key in front of me. The key has a circular gold keychain on it. I snatch the keys from him and look at the keychain. It has Celtic knots around the outer edges and is engraved with the number 17 in the center. I run my fingers over the engraved number and over the lines of the knots, the back side of the key chain is smooth and polished.

"C'mon kiddo, I'm in room sixteen."

I jump ready to see what the room looks like. Skipping towards room 17 I trip half-way to the door, Timothy laughs at my misfortune.

"I thought daisies were supposed to stand tall, not trip and fall." I turn around and glare at him. He pats my blue and purple haired head. I glare at him some more, he knows I don't like that.

"Good night my little Daisy"

"Good night Timothy" I say still glaring at him. I turn to unlock the door but drop the keys, hearing Timothy chuckle some more. After turning on the lamp just inside the door, I see a cozy room, with warm white walls. It's easy on the eyes. I spot a couch with an old lady flower pattern on it. I walk over to the couch and plop my duffle down on it. Pulling my turquoise & amethyst hair up into a messy bun I shuffle over to the bed which is conveniently close to the couch. I slip under the white floral comforter; the flowers are embroidered with a pearlized white. Daisies. The bed is warm and comfy. Soon enough I doze off.

I am in some sort of graveyard and there is a bunch of flat headstones, one of them reads "Susannah Martin". Martin, That's my last name. "What's going on? Where am I? How did I get here?" I'm so confused. A gust of wind whirls past me and a piece of folded up notebook paper blows with it, catching on the headstone. I pick up the paper and unfold it, on the inside of the folded paper there is a beautiful sketch of a daisy. Another gust of wind blows past but this time it is more of a whisper. I squint as if that would help me hear the wind's whisper better. For some reason it does seem to help, and I hear the wind more clearly. It whispers the words "Corwin House" What does that mean?

I wake up to hear someone running back and forth in the hallway. I grab my phone to see what time it is and it's only 4:30 am. Rolling out of the comfortable bed, that is beckoning me to stay, to see what is going in the hallway. I open my door and the moment I do the running stops. I stick my head out the door and there is no one there. After making my way to room sixteen I knock on Timothy's door.

"Just a minute" he grumbles. While waiting outside his door about a minute passes, then the door opens.

“What? It's four-thirty in the morning”

“Didn't you hear the running back and forth”

“No Daisy, I didn't”

“But it was so loud it woke me up.”

“Woah it woke you up, it must have been earth shattering.” Timothy says this sarcastically.

“Go back to bed Daisy you are probably just nervous to meet your foster family” I can tell he doesn't believe me, so I go back to my room. Lying on the unmade bed I begin to think. Thinking is a dangerous thing, especially when the next day you are meeting your new house mates. Sometime in the next half hour I fall asleep.

When I wake up someone is pounding on the door.

“Daisy! Now would be the time for you to wake up.”

“UGH!” once again I have to leave the security of this bed that I so badly want to say in.

Trudging to the door I open it for Timothy to shuffle in. I head toward my duffle and retrieve my hairbrush, clothes and toothbrush. I pull the pony out of my no longer bunned hair. Brushing my hair like this is hard but it must be done. I grab my hair tie and put my hair up in a tight ballet bun.

“I have to brush my teeth and change” I mumble while slinking to the bathroom.

“Hurry Up. You don't Have much time.” I shrug him off. Going into the bathroom and shutting the door behind me, looking to the mirror my forest green eyes stare back at me. I am hoping and praying that this time things will be different. Squeezing the tooth paste out on to my toothbrush, I begin brushing. My thoughts drift to what being in Salem could possibly be like for me. Will I finally fit in and belong? Or will I be a loner like in the many placements I've had before this. Imagining situations like a warm family welcoming me with open arms and fresh baked cookies to cold people locking me in a closet. I really hope it's the former.

“Daisy! Hurry Up!” Rushing I finish brushing my teeth and walk out of the bathroom straight to my duffle bag, picking out what I want to wear, slipping on a dark violet tunic.

“Hurry up we're going to be late.” Timothy's voice is muffled through the door, not that I would have payed attention even if it was as clear as crystal. Pulling my black ripped jeans up to my waist I hop around, as if that will help me any. Timothy insisted I not wear these pants but if these people are going to be my family, why lie to them? Right?

Tyler Moeller

Week after week this past semester, Tyler displayed strong dedication to building upon his skills and growing as a creative writer. He tried writing some creative writing and ended up crafted a very intriguing and entertaining story about the future. One especially unique quality of this story is that it is from the point of view of the reader. Anyone reads this will seamlessly be enveloped into the story and feel as though you are the main character. He also created his first poem this semester and it is quite evident he is a natural poet. Both of these examples are a testament to the quality of his storytelling abilities. It was great to see Tyler's writing abilities progress the past few weeks and his skills will evolve as he continues writing.

~Klaire Brault

What Does the Future Hold?

The year is 2092 and you live in a small suburb just outside the city of Denver. You have just graduated and were able to land a steady job to get your own place. Things have most definitely changed since the early 2000's. In fact, most everything has been streamlined to be more efficient than anyone could have ever imagined. Life is fast paced as people don't have time to sit around and wait anymore. Cars are used rarely as most people have indestructible hovercrafts that are self driving and can move through terrain. It wouldn't be uncommon for someone to hover from coast to coast in under three hours. Even with this technology, people are still constantly looking for faster ways to do their tasks. Two main inventions of the time have been teleportation and time travel. Little is known to the public about these two inventions, however the public has been notified by the government that the inventions are currently being tested and manipulated in a secret facility with the end goal being to benefit society.

You have become accustomed to things being more technologically advanced than ever before. You tend to look back upon your ancestors and think, "I don't understand how they did it with such little technology." As you hop in your hovercraft and buzz off to work, the chip that is planted in your forearm vibrates and a holographic screen pops up in front of your eyes (Phones are now irrelevant due to the new Apple iChip). It's a message from your friend Jake asking if you want to go disc golfing later in the afternoon. You glance across the keyboard to confirm and your response is automatically sent. Your hovercraft quickly pulls up to work and it parks itself as you go inside to your office.

As you are working and doing your normal things you notice everyone around you talking and being obnoxious but instead of talking to them, you just keep working. There's a staff meeting after lunch and when you come into the meeting and sit down with the leftovers of your lunch, you again see the same crowd of people talking loudly as they stroll into the meeting. Before the meeting starts, your co-workers begin to talk about some new technology that has been rumored by online retailers. With the technology of teleportation, there would now be digitally integrated retailing mechanisms that would teleport the product to the customer's door in less than thirty seconds. This seems pretty cool however you don't think much of it because you are so accustomed to new technology always coming out. As your day wraps up at work, you say your final goodbye to the last coworker and hop back in your hovercraft.

You meet your friend Jake to go disc golfing and after the first few holes, Jake also mentions the new technology that has been rumored by the online retailers. Jake works for a retail company himself so he mentions that he hopes his store will decide to use teleportation as

well. As you finish playing, you start to think to yourself why everyone is obsessed about the new teleportation technology. It just seems odd to you. You say goodbye to Jake and jump into your craft. You fall asleep for a few minutes as you are quickly shuttled back to your apartment.

The hovercraft parks itself and wakes you up. As you walk to your doorstep you see a package that is addressed to you. You sit back and recall what you have ordered in the past week but nothing comes to mind. You grab your stuff from the hovercraft and pick the package up to bring it inside. After getting settled you grab the package and take a better look at it. It's a regular sized package and as you turn it over to look at the label, a chill runs down your back. The label itself had symbols and signs that were impossible to read and the delivery company name was not at all familiar. You glance to see who it is from and are left stunned when the name is none other than yours. The return address didn't make sense and it was almost as if it had come from another dimension. You feel a bit uneasy but proceed to open the package anyways. As you tear open the first corner, you remember that your iChip has x-ray vision and would enable you to see through the package to determine what it was. As the hologram boots up, there is simply a white blurr where the inside of the box should be. This has never happened before and you decide to call your friend John to take a look at it with you. You decide to put the box in your room while John is on his way over and you pour a cold drink.

You start to think about what could be in the package. As your mind wanders, you begin to get scared and wonder if the government might be doing a test. As you are pondering the scenarios you hear your door swing open. You jump and quickly turn around to find John walking in. You take a deep breath and relax.

You say "Hey John how's it going?"

John replied, "Not too bad. What's up with this package?"

You fill him in on the details of the return address and the sender being yourself and John doesn't know what to think. You can tell that John is a bit uneasy and when you go to grab the box, John starts to put his shoes on. He tells you that he is too scared and doesn't think it is a good idea for him to see what it is. After a long discussion, you finally convince John to stay under the condition that he could leave if he wanted to right after you open it. You put the package in between both of you and both take a deep breath. You begin to tear the box open again and can only see styrofoam packing peanuts inside the whole package. The adhesive holding it together is too strong to be torn by hand. You go to grab a scissors and come back to finish opening the box. You make six hard cuts into the adhesive and finally the box flaps open. The packing peanuts begin to rumble and a poof of air sends a note into the air. As you and John huddle around the note you realize that it is from the future. John realizes this too and decides that he wants to know what future you has to say. You begin to read the letter out loud.

"This is you from the future. I was able to gain secret access to send this package as the word in my time is very chaotic. I want you to know what is going on in my time and want to warn you about events in the future. To start, you must be wary of new technology that comes out. This period of time that you are in is very innovative with many good products, but good innovations also bring bad innovations and bad intentions. The current technology that will be introduced with shopping and teleportation will seem good at first, but as I have recently found out, it was controlled by the government. All online retailers have been taken over by the government agencies and their products are being used to spy and collect data on consumers who have packages delivered. Everything in my time is now single handedly controlled by the federal government and nobody saw it coming to deny access to the packages. If you can warn others about this danger and cut the plan off early, there may be a chance to save everyone."

You look up at John as you feel your heart beating faster than ever. Nobody says anything for thirty seconds. You feel as if a dream has settled in, and the fine line between reality and fantasy disappears. Your mind begins to loop and you can't decide what needs to be done.

Finally John speaks up. "That sounds crazy, man. What do you think we should do?"

You can tell that he is uneasy, but also very willing to get to the bottom of the situation. As you fade back into reality from your scare, you suddenly think of Jake and your other coworkers. You remember how eager they were to talk about new products, and specifically this new technology that was mentioned in the letter.

You say to John, "I will begin spreading the message to others and keeping them aware. My other friend works at a retail shop and I will see if he can get more information on how it plans to be used."

John likes the idea and decides to do the same thing. After John leaves, you signal your iChip to turn on a hologram of your favorite show. As you are watching you slowly drift off to sleep thinking about your mission for the next day.

You suddenly jolt awake and feel a certain tension in the air as you survey the room. You look at the clock and see that it is an hour before you are supposed to be up. You head to the kitchen to grab some water and decide to go into work early to figure out what to do about the package situation.

As you hop into your hovercraft, the same eerie tone fills the air and it almost seems as if someone is watching you. The hovercraft zooms away as you crawl in and before long you realize that another hovercraft is following you. Your hovercraft goes into panic mode as it senses your emotions and decides to isolate itself from the path to get away from the other craft. As soon as you turn one way, the other craft follows, as if knowing your move before you make it. The hovercraft eventually gets within arms reach from you and you look to see who the driver is. The windshield is completely blacked out and you cannot see a thing through it. As you turn around to auto drive the hovercraft, suddenly it malfunctions and turns off the road as you are sent off of a cliff. The craft hovers down with an emergency parachute, but the following hovercraft pulls up next to you within seconds. The doors open and a flash of light blinds you as you wake up to find yourself laying back in your bed. As you are recovering from the dream, your alarm rings and just about gives you a heart attack. Time to go to work.

You get out of bed and pinch yourself a few times to make sure you aren't still dreaming. After concluding that you are fully awake, you start to get dressed and reflect back upon your bizarre dream. It's one of those kinds that leaves you feeling off key and you can't stop being a little frightened by it. Your hands are still shaking as you finally get to your hovercraft to head to work. Everything seems like Deja Vu as you suddenly feel the same eerie tone as your dream. You take deep breaths and eventually calm down when there is nobody following you and everything seems like it is going back to normal. As you are about to pull up to work, you see a traffic light explode for no reason and the flash of light looks exactly like the one from your dreams. Your hoverboard pulls up as you are confused and frightened yet again.

As you enter the office, everyone who sees you tells you that it looks like you've seen a ghost. As you tell them the story of your dream and the odd chain of events that followed, you can tell they are all uneasy as well. Suddenly you recall the package and remembered that you needed to warn everyone. Before everyone disperses, you begin to tell them about what you had received in the mail. After hearing about what had happened and what the note said, all of your coworkers who had been talking about the new technology previously are now totally against it. Your coworkers mention that they know of a large group of people who had originally told them about the technology and they immediately start sending messages to that group to get the word out.

Meanwhile, after you have informed everyone at your work, you give Jake a call to see what he is up to. His phone goes to voicemail, which is odd because he usually always picks up; even if he is at work. You decide to leave work early as everyone is in chaos and you head off to find Jake. You swing past the disc golf course, hoping to see him there; but come up empty handed when nobody is in the park.

As you are driving around town thinking about where Jake might be, you remember that he had been trying to get his retail company to use the new technology. You head to Jake's store and see his car in the parking lot. The store is surprisingly busy and it is hard to find a spot. As you finally squeeze into the last spot in the corner of the parking lot, you glance up at the front of the store. You notice that everyone walking in and out of the store seems to have no life or personality to them. Everyone is going through simple motions and something seems off key.

You walk up to the front of the store at a hurried pace as the sliding doors barely open before you fly through. Everything is silent as you glance around and not one person is talking. Nobody over the intercom, nobody talking to one another, nobody on the phone, nobody is doing anything except for browsing the shelves. You are more weirded out than ever at this point and set off to see if you can find Jake to ask him a few questions and tell him what you know.

You slide through the last aisle as quickly as you can but Jake is nowhere to be found. At this point, you decide to sneak into the back and see you can find him. As you open the doors to the back, you walk into darkness and decide to take your phone light out. You can see some inventory lined up on the shelves, a break room, and a bathroom. As you snoop around even more, you stumble upon an empty corridor that is hidden behind the shelves of inventory. As you shine your light, you see something at the end of the corridor and decide to figure out what it is. As you get closer, you can see that it is a small opening of light that eventually leads to a door. You carefully make your way to a slit and peep through. You have to cover your mouth before a gasp escapes as you see none other than the hoverboard that was chasing you in your dreams. A man wearing a mask suddenly appears and you see him take a funnel out of his briefcase. Before hopping into his hovercraft, you see him place an item in the funnel; and the same flash of light that you saw before appears again. His item had disappeared and the only thing left is the funnel in his hand. He hops into his hovercraft as he makes his way out through a secret garage connected to the back of the store.

Once the man had left, you open the door and start to look around and you find blueprints for the new retailing technology and see that the end goals were also written with the instructions.

Big bold letters read "To suppress and control a population."

A shiver runs down your back as everything in the note seems to be proving itself. Suddenly you hear a faint cry from the back of the room. You run over to see Jake who seems to be waking up from a sedation.

You scream "Jake! Jake! What happened!"

Jake comes to his senses and immediately begins to tell the story.

"Man, the day after we went discing, I came back to work and everything seemed different. I had a meeting with my boss at lunch about the new technology and he became really uncomfortable when I started asking questions about it. Before long, everyone at work seemed to be robotic and I couldn't even have a normal conversation with anyone without getting a creepy vibe. Then, today, I saw my boss go into this corridor so I decided to follow him. I saw that he was already using this technology but was also tapping it with equipment to spy on the general public. After confronting him, I saw three of his bodyguards appear out of nowhere and now I'm sitting here with you!"

You can't believe your ears as you are trying to gather your thoughts. Your phone starts to ring and you see that it is John calling. You pick up your phone and before you can even say a word, John starts rambling, "Oh my goodness I can't believe what I just saw! After telling all of my friends and family about the package, I witnessed one of our head community members using a funnel to send out multiple packages with teleportation. I started recording with my phone while staying hidden and was able to see him putting small cameras and microphones into the products and mail that he was teleporting! This is not good!"

You tell John to meet up with you and Jake at the retail store. As you and Jake are trying to make sense of everything, suddenly you have an idea. You tell Jake that the video John had recorded could serve as proof to everyone about the dangers of the new retailing technology.

Before long, John calls you again saying that he is at the store. You tell him to come back to the corridor. John shows you and Jake the video and you decide to forward it to your social media accounts and many local news.

As the community starts to gain knowledge about the dangers and bad intentions, online shopping drops to an all time low and people start to shop in physical stores again. The shoppers who had seemed like zombies are now more aware and the stores look like they are full of life again. Conversations are booming and everyone is more aware of their surroundings. All of the talk about the online retailing teleportation has been halted and, for now, it seems as if everyone will be watching out for one another in terms of new products and technology.

You, John, and Jake are exhausted but relieved. John's video and the power of social media had saved the day before the situation escalated. You three decide to go home back to your place and finish the day off with a few drinks and some video games.

As you pull up to your house and go inside, the first thing you look for is the package. Oddly enough, it is nowhere to be found. You can't even find traces of packing peanuts or the adhesive you had to cut through. After searching up and down you conclude that the box is no longer there. You take a deep breath and relax. You grab a piece of paper and start recording exactly what happened, in the hope that you could report back to your future self. As you are halfway through the letter, you realize that not having the box anymore means that you have rewritten the future and saved the fate of humanity, making it unnecessary for future you to send a letter back in time. The box would have never existed in the first place. Knowing that you have done what you needed to, you turn the Xbox on and hand a controller to each of your friends.

You sit down on the couch and say, "Good work boys, we did it." The loading screen pops up and before long the game starts. The only thing to worry about now, was beating your friends at Xbox.

Emily Worrying

When I saw that Emily had submitted to Wordplay, I was so excited. I look back at the beginning of our semester and I'm so impressed with how much she's grown as a writer. She took '57 to get better as a writer, and I believe she's done just that. We worked on finding the right process together, and then worked on the personal essay she submitted for a significant portion of our time together. It's honestly unrecognizable from how it started, and I'm so proud of the work that she put into it!

~Shannon Lagore

Winter

Winter is something that can include bad things like, the icy roads, and below 0 temperatures. Those factors are very annoying to deal with. I hate driving in winter cause the roads are always slick and you need to be very cautious. It takes about double the time to get places than in normal weather, which means I will need to watch my time so I am not late. It becomes dark very early, and I am not a fan of that, or the dark in general. Walking back after class to go home will be an adventure in the winter for me. However, everything else winter has to incorporate makes up for the unpleasant things. My energy level can dip a bit in winter. This happens to everyone in winter, but a lot to me. The cold weather makes me want to stay inside a lot.

Winter is the type of season where all I want to be is wrapped up with a blanket watching movies. When winter comes, I don't accomplish a lot in a day as opposed to in the spring. In the winter I am like a bear who hibernates. In the spring I am like a flower bud who has energy to get out of the house. I will sadly have to become more productive in the winter because of the responsibility of college. High productivity and Netflix do not work together. The warm blankets will have to wait because I have school work to complete.

Despite the laziness of winter, I actually can't wait for the season. It is my favorite season of all time. I love to be all cuddly and wrapped up in a blanket. It is just so comfy and, I just love it. I love to ski; it is a big hobby of mine. I have been skiing since I was 3. My father and my grandpa would ski together. When my father started his own family, we hit the slopes together. We go out to Montana every Christmas for vacation and go skiing. It takes about 2 hours to get to the nearest ski resort. I get very tired in the car ride, which makes me not motivated to ski. My dad and brother are great skiers and they take 25 runs in a day. On the other hand, my mom and I take it easy. After we get out there on the slopes and take a run, I become energetic. Somedays when I am tired, I will only go for 6 runs and that is pushing it. It all depends how bad your legs are burning and that all depends how well groomed the trails are.

In addition to skiing, Christmas is another favorite thing about winter. It is the best time of year because of the music, family get togethers, and the festive decorations that are around. When it snows it is so pretty outside. The trees have frost and snow on them. It looks very beautiful. I love going out and getting our Christmas tree. We have a pretty tall ceiling in my house. We get a 11-foot Christmas tree. We always get a real tree, which they are the best. Even though they are kind of messy, the look of them and their smell is so magnificent. Even though you have to give it soda, and can fall over because it is so big, which has happened before, it is superb. Now you can buy those fake smelly sticks that you can hang on the branches to give fake trees a scent but, it is not the same as a real Christmas tree. I like going to the Christmas tree farm and pick out the tree you want. It makes me very happy and cheerful. I love decorations in general, they spruce up your house to get you in the season. The stocking on our fireplace, a little tree in my room and, a wreath on the front door. They make me exuberant when I see them. I love drinking hot cocoa in the winter season. Being warm and cuddly is the best in the winter season. I enjoy making cut out cookies with my family for Christmas. One Christmas I want to New York Rockefeller Center and have a good time out there. Winter is a great season and is my absolute favorite time of year.

Dennessa Kohel

It has been such an honor to work with Dennessa this semester. Her creativity and imagination are truly inspiring. Every week I anxiously awaited the next chapter to her novel, and I am so excited that she is sharing the first chapter with all of you!

~Sarah Zingelman

Untouchable

I am Kylie, and I have Aquagenic Urticaria, which is an allergy to water. The minute it touches my skin, it blisters. Water is like acid as it touches me. I can drink water. However, I always wondered what it would be like to touch the ocean and feel the waves splash up on my body, to wear a bikini and not feel threatened to go into the water, or to enjoy a walk in the rain and kiss a cute guy like I have seen in *The Notebook*. That's a dream I have that will never come true.

I was teased at school because I wore a brown pair of waders. I did not want to have my skin get blistered. My teachers did not know about my condition because my mom did not think it was any of their business. The only people that knew were my mom, my homeschool teacher, and my friend Marissa. Marissa is the greatest friend I could have because she came to my defense when a couple of girls, Neisha and Leah, gave me the nickname of Fraidy Wady. I always tried to avoid water and I always carried hand sanitizer ever since then. However, after an incident in third grade I was taken out of public school.

So, you may be wondering how I am pursuing my education. Well, I am homeschooled and I take a lot of art classes because I have a passion for both art and poetry. I love to paint the sky, horizons, oceans, and imagine in my head as if I am there. I even write poems about it. Recently, I have felt that my heart was someplace else. I have had feelings for the neighbor-boy and I have not felt like this since 3rd grade. I remember this boy. I only met him once. Marissa and I were outside laying in the grass, picking dandelions during recess and he was playing soccer. He accidentally kicked a soccer ball at my head. I am happy that happened because it gave me a chance to meet him. He introduced himself, shook my hand and gave me a hug. I felt so happy because I never felt emotions like that. My face turned bright red. Marissa playfully teased me about it for the longest time, until I was taken out of public school. The sad thing was that he did not know what happened to me in third grade. We were best friends in 5 minutes and then I was gone, I guess that's how it works when you are younger. I am sure he made new friends after me, but I do not think he realized that I was taken out of school.

My mom is a stay-at-home mom as well as a substitute teacher because it gives her an option if she needs extra money. The good thing is since 3rd grade, I have not had to wear waders anymore. Sometimes she calls in sick because she wants to be here when I am sick in result of malnutrition. Everybody always called her Mrs. Smith and sometimes when I was ahead in my schoolwork I would go with her and sit in her class even though nobody knew who I was. I would stare out the window and just watch the sun beam. My mom would never let me go outside if there was a 10% chance of rain, so I guess it is a good thing I live in Nevada where we get an average of 9.5 inches a year. Yesterday it was raining so hard, but it was so humid. I saw the neighbor score a basket. He was playing basketball with his friends. He had the most incredible brown hair and brown eyes that changed color sometimes and he was tall. He was very sweaty, right now he was leading by 5 points because he was the best at sports. He played every sport that the school offered as long as they did not overlap them, but his big passion was basketball. My mom always knew I liked him, but also never introduced me to him. She always told me his name was Liam. It was amazing when my mom was having a debate in class whether or not Vince Van Gogh was famous or if he was infamous. I interrupted, "Vince Van Gogh is an amazing artist now but not back then, kind of like Leonardo Da Vinci".

"Really, do you think he was famous?" interrupted the man in front of me.

"He was not at the time but now his paintings sell for millions."

“Interesting”.

He then introduced himself, “Hi, I am Lee”.

“I swear he said his name was Lee”, I thought to myself.

“H....Hi, I am Kylie”.

“Wait Kylie Smith?” He questioned.

“Yes” I replied.

“It is me, you know Liam? We were best friends in like first grade?”

“Oh...” I smiled.

“Hi, Lee”.

“Wow, it is great to see you Kylie I never thought I would see you again!”

“Yes you too Lee”.

My mom then interrupted us and said,

“You guys can talk more after class ok? I have to go to the grocery store anyways after school”.

“Mom, he lives right next door,” I replied.

Lee turned and him and my mom both said “Really?”

“Yes, you were playing basketball with your buddies yesterday.”

“Oh, well I guess I’ll talk to you later then?”

“Ok”.

When I got home I ran to the bathroom and put a little mascara on. I also went to my room and put on a cute shirt and jeans before I ran outside and met up with him.

“Hey”. He smiled.

“Hey”.

“So, where have you been all this time?” He questioned.

“Well, I was taken out of school at the age of 8 and I am homeschooled now”.

“Wow, all this time you have been my neighbor? How come I have never seen you outside?”

“Well my mom likes to have me inside most of the time because she does not like me being outside a lot.”

I was debating telling him, but I did not want him thinking I had a disease and I was contagious, so I did not say anything.

“Oh, well it is great to see you!, Will I see you tomorrow?”

“I do not know, I have got a lot of studying to do I gotta go, but you can text me, here is my number”.

I get a text while studying “hey, wyd”.

“Studying, hbu?”

“Oh, playing video games!”

“Really?”

“Yes, I really like them, do u play video games?”

“Well I used to, but not anymore!” :(

“Why?”

“Well, I always got bad grades, and I felt school was more important than that!”

“Well, how about sports?”

“I mean I like sports!”

“What type?”

“Basketball,disc golfing, soccer and football” replied Kylie.

“WAIT U LIKE FOOTBALL? ME TOO! I am the champ” said Lee.

“Lol”.

“Well maybe sometime u should get out here and we can play a game?”

“Only if your friends and my mom are ok with it.”

“Okay.”

I ran downstairs to see if my mom was there. She was not, so I ran to the kitchen where she was cooking hamburgers.

“Hey mom is it ok if I go outside and play basketball with Lee?”

“Only if you finished your studies, did you?”

“I only have to finish the last chapter about Newton’s law, please?”

“Okay fine, but you have to wear sunscreen”.

“Thanks mom!”

I ran outside and went by his house where the basketball hoop was. I did not see him. He was probably inside changing into a jersey. I started shooting hoops and he came out in his Horace Grant number 54 jersey. He walked up and flushed his mouth with water. He placed his water bottle down and said

“Are we going to do this?”

I replied, “I do not have a jersey”

He said “I will be right back”.

He came out with an Allen Iverson number 3 jersey.

“Here put this on!”

I smiled and blushed “thanks”.

“No problem, so what do you know about basketball?”

“I know horse!”

“Oh, that is a really good game, but you know what we can play? Lightning, if you let me call up my buddies!”

“Okay that sounds like fun”.

Lee called his friends Bob Aaron and Jesse, but Jesse was too busy to play. He was working on his running.

“heyyy Lee” said Aaron.

“Lee” said Bob.

“So who is this chick?” asked Aaron.

“She is the neighbor girl Kylie” replied Lee.

“Well let us play!” said Bob.

“Girls first” said Lee.

“No, let us shoot for it, first shot shoots first and so on”.

I shot the first shot and made it in. Everybody looked at me in amazement because my form was perfect. Lee shot it and made it even though he jumped kind of weird when he shot. Aaron and Bob shot, and they both missed. So, Lee and I decided that they should do a round 1 of lightning by themselves. Bob shot his basketball but he missed it because Aaron took his basketball and threw it knocking Bob’s ball out of the hoop backwards. Lee and I just sat there laughing until Bob finally made it once more than Aaron. We continued laughing and the worst part and best part was the butterflies. Then finally, we all decided we wanted to do a 2 on 2 game. It was me and Aaron against Bob and Lee. Of course, I defended Lee because I liked him. He smiled back at me. I almost grabbed the ball from him and I even touched his sweaty veiny biceps on accident. I could not believe the feeling I got and that the feeling distracted me so much that my heart pounded. Then, it was Aaron and I’s ball now. I took the ball and I dribbled to the hoop. Lee was all up in my face and even touched my hand until I said it wasn’t fair because he was so much bigger than me. He laughed and said it was cute when I was bossy. He gave me a grin that made my cheeks turn as red as Rudolph’s nose. When we got the ball I passed it to Aaron to try and make a lay up and it went around the rim, and back out. I caught it and threw it back at Aaron, and he caught it and made a basket. But we were still losing. Aaron made the three-pointer shot. Lee made a retaliation as I saw him make a 360-spin layup. Obviously we won.

“Wow that was one hell of a game”. said Aaron.

“Kylie, how are you so good at basketball tricks” asked Lee.

“Well, I’ve seen you play basketball a few times!”

“Oh” Lee blushed.

Bob and Aaron told Lee that they had to go because they had to go to a party. They always go to parties. They invited Lee and I to go but I said no and so did he. After Bob and Aaron left, I went up to my room and finished my final chapter about Newton’s law.

Chloe Strecker

It has been great getting to know Chloe throughout the time I've had with her in our '57 sessions. Chloe is very talented and has a clear view of what she wants to include in her story. Her creativity and passion for writing made each week interesting and I never knew what sort of new twist was coming. One of our main focuses was figuring out what was relevant to the story and if anything needed to be added and where. The excerpt Chloe submitted for Wordplay is a great build-up to the rest of the story and I feel bad for anyone who doesn't have the chance to read the rest of it!

~Heidi Propson

Secret of the Shadows

Prologue

Snap...a twig snaps behind me.

Oh no, they are after me already, I think, How did they find me so quickly?

The crunch of leaves and sticks resounds underfoot as I run through the forest, careful not to drop the bundle I was carrying. The warm, wriggling bundle lets out a small cry. When I look down he looks up at me with green eyes that are eerily similar to his father's.

"Shh, baby, Mommy has you. Nothing is going to happen to you. I won't let it." I whisper quietly to reassure him as well as myself. I have to get to Rachel and quickly.

I lean against a nearby tree, feeling dizzy. I gaze down at my side where there are three long, deep, bloody gashes running from the middle of my abdomen to the edge of my right hip. I attempt to staunch the flow, but the blood trickles through my hands like grains of sand in an hourglass leaving a metallic scent in the air. It even drips down my stomach to soak the top of my jeans. If anyone were to look under my shirt they would realize that the wounds were not made by any weapon.

The forest around us is eerily quiet. The only thing I can hear is animals scurrying about on the forest floor as if trying to escape from some predator. The moon is full and gives off enough light for me to see the area around us. It is both a blessing and a curse. I can survey our surroundings for danger, but that meant that if I can see them then they can also see us.

I push myself away from the rough bark of the tree and start to run again as fast as I possibly can. The forest flies past us as I run, if I am not in such a rush I would stop to admire the scenery. Again I hear a snap behind me. The cold wind blows my long black hair in front of my face, and with it brings the scent of gunpowder. I whirl around and raise my hand to defend against the interloper.

"Woah! Amanda it's just me. Calm down." she says. I sigh with relief. Finally, I found Rachel.

"Jesus Mandy! I came to warn you guys that they were coming for you. That they had found you. When I got to the house there was so much blood. I couldn't find you, Collin, or the baby. I was so afraid that you had been killed, or worse kidnapped." She pauses as if thinking about all that could have happened if we were captured then she ran towards us.

She embraces us so tightly that it sets off a whole new batch of sharp, shooting pains in my abdomen. I flinch. I must have made a sound because she pulls back and gasps at the sight of my shirt.

"Mandy--"

The sound of feet crashing on the forest floor not far away cut her off.

"Rachel, listen to me. I want you to take the baby and protect him. Collin is gone so it is just going to be you and him. You must not, under any circumstances, tell him about any of this,

not what he is, not what he is destined to be, and not about what actually happened to us. Do you understand?" I whisper furtively.

"Amanda don't do this. You will be fine if we can get to my house I can patch you up. You can take care of him yourself." She protests.

I won't listen to her. I am not going to make it and we both know it. With all of the blood I lost and what I will have to do to give them a chance to escape, there is no way I could survive this.

"Rachel." I say and stare at her until she met my eyes. I give her a small smile.

"We both know that they will be watching your house for me and the baby. You have to take him and get far away from here."

I push my son at her and she takes him with reluctance. I look down into those bright green eyes one last time and kiss him on the forehead.

"Be safe Matthew, and don't give your aunt any grief. Rachel, hide him and protect him from his uncle at all costs, do you hear me?" She nods her head as tears stream down her face.

"Remember, I love you both, now go." I say as I give one last look at Matthew. He looks up at me and smiles while reaching his small arms towards me as if trying to grab hold of something precious. Tears began to pool in my eyes as I think of the life I could have had with him and Collin.

"Run, Rachel." I say, choking back a sob.

She gives me one last hug, and takes off running with Matthew in her arms. The voices and footsteps are getting closer. I wipe the tears from my cheeks as I prepare to go towards the voices.

If I can't get away with him myself then I will make sure Rachel gets him away for me. I think determinedly.

"Be safe Rachel." I murmur. I turn towards the voices, which were getting louder, and run toward them.

Chapter 1

I was running through a forest. A feeling of panic and fear is stabbing me in the chest as I run. I feel like I am running from something or someone, but I have no idea what. I stop to attempt to figure out where I am. There are trees all around me, and there seems to be no end to them. It is nighttime and dark except for the light the full moon cast. Within the trees a swirling fog forms, and it seems to have a life of its own as it gathers in one spot. As I stare at it, an uneasy feeling begins to pool in the pit of my stomach. The wind picks up as I stare into the forest.

'Matthew.' a male voice whispers. It sounds cold and malicious.

I whirl around to look for the source of the voice, and as I look around that uneasy feeling solidifies.

'Come to me Matthew,' the malicious voice said.

The fog starts to swirl at my feet. It starts to take the shape of a human a couple feet in front of me. Before the fog could completely manifest itself I ran. Behind me I heard a maniacal laugh, as if he was laughing at my pitiful attempts to escape him. It sends chills up my spine. I keep running. I run until I burst through a small clearing. I stop, and hunch over my knees as I try to catch my breath.

I look out into the fog as I try to orient myself, and figure out where I am. I turn abruptly to survey my surroundings. The fog seems to stop at an invisible line around the clearing, as if something is preventing it from entering. I keep spinning as I try to get a feel for my surroundings. As I was perusing the woods, I see a black wolf emerge from the thick shroud of trees and fog.

It has fur as dark as ebony, and shines bright in the moonlight. It has such a bright and human like pair of eyes that I was startled to see them on a wolf. The odd thing about them is that they are purple and glowing. It just stands there and looks at me knowingly.

We stand there for a while just staring at each other, assessing, when the wind blows through the forest and I hear a woman whisper 'Bring him to me Kyrian.'

I spin around trying to look for the source of the voice. There is no one in the small clearing with us. The odd thing is that this voice does not make me feel uneasy, like the other voice does. I feel myself relax, as all the tension I hadn't realized was there left my shoulders. I look back towards the wolf, who I assume is Kyrian, but he is already on the other side of the clearing looking at me expectantly.

As I look at him, a feeling of calm and serenity settles upon me, and it feels like I am huddled up in a little cocoon of warmth. I don't feel even a hint of fear after the wolf appeared, not even when I heard that strange voice. I walk towards him, and he turns around as he leads us to where the woman was. As we walk, the eerie fog parts around us and dissipates. Every once in a while he stops to look back to see if I am still following him.

We keep walking until I can spot a fissure in the trees. I hear the roaring of a waterfall, and everything seems to get brighter the closer we get to the breach. We reach the opening, and I realize that it expands into another clearing. I stop in my tracks as I stare, the moonlight shines on the surface of the water as it pounds down onto the river below, and I see a young woman in the clearing. The young woman wore a pale, victorian style dress and is standing in front of the waterfall with her back to me. She has thick dark hair, bordering on black, that seems to float off her shoulders as the wind blew through the clearing.

As if she senses our presence, she turns around and I get my first look at her face. She has delicate fairy like features. Her startling emerald green eyes are rimmed with a thick black line of khol. She has full cupid bow shaped lips that curves up at the ends. She has laugh lines that are clearly visible, as if she used to laugh a lot, but her face is pulled into a deep frown as she looks at me. Her eyes bore into me as she scrutinizes my appearance. The frown slips from her lips to form a small smile, her eyes hold a hint of something that looks like worry, but a shroud of indifference quickly falls over her expression removing any hint of emotion.

She opens her mouth to speak, "It's time, Matthew, he is coming. Be careful."

"Wait!" I call out as she turned away. I have the sensation of falling as everything starts to fade from my sight. All I see is a dark abyss that swallows my conscience.

"Matthew get up." I hear Aunt Rachel shout as I bolt straight up in my bed in a panic. I peer at my surroundings and realize that I am in my room and calm down. I look over at the alarm clock on my nightstand, and as I look at the time I groan. It is time to get up for school. I think of the weird dream. Why did the lady and the wolf seem so familiar? The niggling thread of recollection shatters as Aunt Rachel shouts.

"Are you awake yet? If you don't get up now you are gonna be late." She called out. I stay that way just thinking, until I remember what today is. I throw off the covers, and roll off the bed. As I walk to the bathroom, I smell the scent of the birthday breakfast that Aunt Rachel makes for me every year. The smell is stronger than usual though, it is as if I am right next to her cooking. I smile as the fragrance of bacon, sausage, and waffles permeates around me. I am still smiling as I close the bathroom door and get in the shower.

Ivy Deremo

It has been a pleasure working with Ivy on her writing this semester. It was clear she enjoyed writing this story and put a lot of effort and research into it from naming her characters, creating the timeline of her story, and everything in between. I looked forward to seeing where this story was going week after week. “The Little Necromancer” combines the darker topic of death with magic, plenty of comedic relief, and characters with a lot of personality that you can’t help but fall in love with. Please enjoy this short excerpt from the story and welcome to the world of “The Little Necromancer.”

~Keri Squires



The Little Necromancer

The overcast sky grew lighter, marking another day in the desolate, sunless wasteland.

Hala woke with the darkened sun and sat up to rub the dust out of her eyes. She then turned and picked up the bag she had been sleeping against. Shouldering it with an adult determination, she chose a random direction and started walking.

She trekked along for some time, only stopping to eat when the sharp pangs of hunger became too much for her. There was very little food left in the bag, which at least made it easier for the child to carry.

Suddenly Hala’s foot caught on something and she and fell onto her face.

A cloud of dust rose up and settled on her. Hala lay there for a moment, feeling so greatly defeated for a four year old. Tears welled up in her eyes and she tried to wipe them away to no avail.

After some time she sat up, causing more dust to be kicked up and resulting in a fit of coughing. Looking back, mid cough, Hala found she had tripped over the skeleton of a horse.

Most people would be afraid of a skeleton, but Hala was not. She had been used to them in her father’s study, and given recent events, Hala had come to realize there were much scarier things than skeletons.

She turned around and gently touched the horse’s skull.

It was cold and smooth to the touch.

“Poor horsey,” Hala murmured, stroking the skull as one might a living horse, “But father says it’s natural. And that we are all at peace when we die.”

As she stroked the skull, a gold dust came from her palm and swirled around the skull before drifting into the eye sockets, nostrils, and mouth. A moment later, a gold light began glowing in the skull’s empty sockets. The bones began to rattle and Hala watched in quiet awe.

This was something she had only ever seen her father do. He would often demonstrate it to Hala with the birds the neighbor’s cat liked to kill. Hala had never realized it was something she also had the ability to do.

Shaking with energy, the bones rose up in the form of a horse, as if it were still alive. The skeleton stood still with its jaw slacked. Then it tilted its head and snapped its jaw shut. It

looked around curiously before settling its golden gaze on Hala. The skeleton lowered its head and bumped it gently against her cheek. Hala stroked the horse's head again.

This caused the skeleton to let out a sort of whiny. It sounded like a living horse, but there was something echoey and eerie to it as well.

Despite herself, Hala gave the horse a small smile.

She got to her feet and brushed her clothes off.

"Come on," she beckoned the horse to follow.

The horse regarded her for a moment then stepped closer to her. Hala started to walk again, and the horse tilted its head at her, then began to follow. She smiled and was almost skipping as the horse caught up to walk alongside her. The horse whinnied in its otherworldly way then butted its head against her arm.

"What?" Hala stopped.

The horse knelt down then nodded at her.

Hala looked in confusion at it for a moment before going around to its side.

She put her hands over the horse's back and glanced at it again.

The horse butted its head encouragingly at her.

Hala planted her hands on the boney back and hoisted herself up.

The horse's back was of course rather hard and bumpy. But Hala squirmed around until she found a comfortable enough spot. Once she was settled the skeleton stood up and began trotting along, deeper into the Barrens.

Rhiley Block

Our first few sessions, Rhiley was very shy, but I noticed immediately that what she didn't say in person, she was able to communicate in a written format eloquently. I found myself encapsulated with Rhiley's stories that she would bring in weekly and was always excited to read them. Rhiley revealed in our first session that writing fiction wasn't something that she had typically done or was comfortable with, but I pushed her to go outside of her comfort zone and try something new. This class is what you make it, so I encouraged her to try a new skill because there was nothing to lose. As the semester progressed, Rhiley started writing fiction pieces that I thought were nothing short of amazing. Rhiley has a natural gift for writing and should be proud of the work she has produced over the course of this semester. I enjoyed getting to know Rhiley as a writer and watch her progress in her skills!

~Paige Zeratsky

The Necklace

It was a Tuesday morning in early April at about 9 o'clock and I was at work. It was a relatively normal morning so far, with people coming in to get their caffeine fix for the day. I was putting in another order when I noticed that a woman in line was staring at me. She had short brown hair and was wearing professional business clothes. She came up to the counter and I took her order.

"That'll be \$4.95," I tell the customer. They smile at me and give me the money. I turn to put in her order, and when I turn back, there's an envelope with my name on it sitting on the counter. I search for the mysterious customer, but don't see her anywhere. I cancel her order, then inform my manager that I'm going to take my break.

"Should I open it? You don't even know the person that gave it to you," I deliberate with myself once I get back to the breakroom. "*The woman who left the envelope didn't even wait for her order, so how can I trust her?*". After a few minutes go by, I decide to open the envelope. Inside there is an eerily familiar necklace with a note attached to it, "*Meet me at the Statue of Liberty at 8pm sharp,*". Chills run down my spine. "*Why is this woman that I don't even know asking me to meet her at the Statue of Liberty? Why would she think that I would even go? And why does this necklace look so familiar?*". I look at the clock and see that it's the end of my break. I put the envelope with the necklace and the note into my locker and exit the breakroom; I'll worry about them later.

The clock strikes 4pm, signaling the end of my shift. Going back to the breakroom, a hundred thoughts float around in my head about the envelope as I debate about whether I should meet the woman or not. "*It might not even be the woman who you end up meeting. It could be a complete stranger who is just luring you to a familiar location to make you more comfortable,*" I think to myself. "*However, if I do go to meet her, I could figure out why the necklace looks familiar to me...*". Still perplexed, I signal for a cab and head back to my apartment, hoping that I'll make a decision soon.

I arrive back at my apartment and tried to decide what I should do for dinner; however, all I could think about was the envelope and the necklace. I pace around the kitchen in an effort to make my decision. Subconsciously, I start to grab ingredients to make homemade macaroni and cheese - one of my favorite comfort foods - to see if that'll help me think better. As I start to cook, I start to think of more positive reasons that I would have for going to see the woman. "*Maybe she knows me somehow; just because I don't exactly remember her doesn't mean she doesn't know me, and if she knows me, maybe she could explain the meaning behind the necklace...*". However, my more rational side kicks in as I think of all the reasons why I shouldn't go meet her, such as not knowing who she is or how she knows me. I decide to not go meet her.

One Month Later

It is now May, and for the past month I've been thinking over, and regretting, my decision to not go meet the woman at the Statue of Liberty. I've been lying awake at night kicking myself for not going to find out why the necklace is familiar and how the woman knows me, while I have no memory of either. Whenever I'm at work or walking around the city I've been looking around to see if the woman would appear again, but she didn't; at least, not for a while.

It was a Saturday morning and I was on my way to meet a friend at a bagel shop for breakfast when I spotted the woman on the sidewalk. I tried to look for somewhere to hide, but there wasn't anywhere I could go, and she already saw me anyway. It looked like she was wearing the same outfit she did when I first met her, and it looked like she was carrying another envelope. When I walked past her, she handed it to me very quickly and precisely, as if she has done this hundreds of times. I moved out of the way of the walking traffic and opened the envelope to find another note inside.

"You made a mistake by not coming to our meeting. However, I'll give you another chance; meet me in Central Park next Friday at 7pm. If you do come, I will tell you why the necklace I gave you a month ago looks familiar."

My hands start to shake a little bit. She didn't outright threaten me, but it appears as though I don't have much of a choice in whether or not I want to go meet her this time if I want to find out some information that I don't remember. On the bright side, I will finally be able to figure out why the necklace is so important.

One Year Ago

I need to get out of here.

It's now March, and I've been in this place for months now; I know something suspicious is going on. A lot of people keep coming in and out of here and asking me questions as if I know anything. Heck, I don't even know why I'm here in the first place! There are a lot of people in white that ask me questions and write down my answers on either a clipboard or a computer. Also, this necklace is driving me crazy.

"Just relax, we're only going to run a couple more tests," a man tells me.

"No!" I yell, "I don't want to do anymore tests!"

The man left the room to give me some space. However, I hear a slight beeping sound coming from the necklace. I rip it off my neck, and the beeping continues from the gem in the center. I take out the gem with a pair of tweezers I find nearby; inside there is a small tracking device.

I leave the necklace on my bed, and grab my medications. I'm getting out of here.

Present Day

I wake up with a start.

It's Friday morning, and today is my meeting with the woman. It also happens to be my day off from work. I get out of bed and start to get ready for the day. As I shower, I start to think about how this meeting could go. What if something really bad happens? What if she doesn't give me any information about the necklace or why I lost some of my memories? But what if she does? This meeting could be a really good thing for me; I could find out some things about myself that I don't remember.

I get dressed and head to the kitchen to make breakfast. It is currently 9 am, so that means I have 10 hours until my meeting. That should give me some time to prepare myself for anything that the woman says. I tell myself that she might lie, so I shouldn't get too worked up about anything that she says. I also write down a few questions, including one that has to do with my lost memories from a year ago. I guess I'm as ready as I'll ever be.

The rest of my day is relatively normal; I clean my apartment a little bit, do some grocery shopping, and watch a couple movies to stop worrying about tonight. At about 6:30pm I hail a cab and make my way towards Central Park.

I arrive at exactly 7 o'clock and the woman is already there waiting for me. With her is a man that also looks slightly familiar; maybe he'll know something about me too. I approach the two and get ready for whatever they have to tell me.

"You came," the woman states.

"I did, but I didn't come for you; I just want to know what the necklace is and why I lost some memories from last year." I reply.

"And you will get those answers. First off, my name is Janet, I was your nurse when you were admitted to the hospital in March of last year and this is George Smith - he was the doctor that monitored you. You probably don't remember us, and that's ok. We specialize in helping people like you who have unidentified health problems and trying to figure out how to help them. Your mother checked you into our hospital last year when she couldn't figure out your mental health issues. Dr. Smith here worked on your case and tried various medications; some worked better than others, and the ones that didn't work attribute to your memory issues as some medications had side effects that we were unaware of." Janet explains.

One Year Ago - January

"Mom, I'm fine. I'm an adult; I can take care of myself." I argue.

"Sweetheart, you are not fine. These people could really help you." My mother responds, desperate for me to listen.

I look out my window, knowing my mother won't give up. We've been to various doctors all over the state, but none of them can figure out what's going on with me. I've been having night terrors, but some of them feel too real to be dreams. One doctor said they were hallucinations. I told them I wasn't crazy. I will be once I come out of this hospital.

Present Day - Central Park

I stand there in front of the nurse and doctor, dumbfounded. I know that I don't have to believe what they say, but somehow I can tell that she isn't lying. The situation is just too bizarre to make up. I nod my head, internalizing all that Janet has said to me. "What about the necklace?" I ask meekly.

"We gave each patient a necklace with a tracking device just in case any of them ran away; it was a safety concern. We weren't anticipating anyone finding out about the tracking device, but somehow you did," Dr. Smith answers. "You must have heard the slight beeping sound one day, and you took off the necklace and ran out of the building." he concludes.

"So why are you here now? Why are any of us here?" I ask them.

"We believe that we can still help you, and in turn you could help others who struggle just like you. If you come back with us, we will be more careful choosing medications to try out. If one is successful, you could help many others who are in the same situation as you. You are an extraordinary person, you're just a little different than everyone else, and that's ok. You just have to let us help you." Janet tells me.

I think about it for a couple seconds, wondering why I'm so special.

"Ok."

Tess Bigalke

Tess is a very talented writer and it has been exciting working with her this semester. She is an incredibly descriptive writer who loves to focus on scenes involving nature. She draws inspiration from her own love of nature and when you read this piece you feel as if you're in the woods yourself! Tess worked on this story for most of the semester and put in a lot of effort to finish it up. Throughout this process, we had several brainstorming sessions, made many outlines to keep the story on track, and had various rounds of editing. The final piece was an engaging story of a dedicated hunter and it was well worth the work she put in. I hope that Tess continues to write and grow in the future.

~Kassidy Spees

With every lightning strike and roll of thunder I was losing time. Each drop of rain seemed to pull me farther away from my trophy. I knew that if I moved any slower the source of food for my family would be lost and the monstrous bull elk I had taken would fade into the Rocky Mountains forever. The thought of my family struggling through another harsh winter, not knowing when their next meal would be, kept me pushing forward through this intense downpour. The sign of my kill was becoming harder to read, for the blood was washing away at an alarming rate and his tracks were no longer making sense. My feet were cold, wet, and blisters were developing around my ankles while the raging winds burned my flushed cheeks. I was forced to crawl over ginormous lodgepole pines that had freshly fallen in the storm and through thickets of wild raspberry bushes that had been picked so clean by a black bear that there was nothing left but razor-sharp thorns. My skin was being torn raw as I wondered what was keeping the brave elk going. Every aching part of my body was telling me to stop chasing after him, that there would be another opportunity to provide for my loved ones, but my mind would not let me give up on him.

The flattops wilderness area was one of the most beautiful sights I had ever seen. The glistening blue lakes accompanied by the arrow-straight pines made me feel as if I was standing in the middle of a freshly printed postcard. The sharp smell of sage pierced my nose as I moved through the forests. There was plenty of animal sign here, therefore I was confident that this was the correct place for me to be presented with an opportunity to provide many meals for my family. I hiked roughly six miles from the White River National Forest Northern trailhead into the Lost Lake basin. The area greeted me with meadows that stretched as far as the eye could see and over mountains so steep that I pondered if the terrain would appear completely different on the other side. My 45-pound pack was tugging on my shoulders every step of the way but the view I was presented with once I reached my destination was worth my troubles.

When I reached the bottom of the basin, I immediately removed my pack and unlaced my boots. Lost Lake spanned out in front of me and the cool breeze rippled the waves against the shore and filled my nose with the fresh scent of mountain air. I found an aging cedar tree to lean up against for a quick nap before I set up camp. I pondered how old this tree was and what it had seen during its time. The thought of the thousands, if not millions of animals that had passed this very spot astonished me. As I faded off to sleep under the shade of the old cedar, I felt the swaying of grass tickle my arms and heard the squeaking of a nearby chipmunk as it scurried across a fallen log. The crunching of fallen pinecones on the hard-packed soil drew me from my sleep. I did not move, for I recognized this sound, a sound I had only been fortunate enough to hear one other time. Slowly, I opened my eyes and peered towards the hoofbeats. A herd of nearly a dozen elk was passing into the meadow bordering my camp. Somehow, they were completely unaware of my presence. The bull elk was making a fairly ineffective attempt at pushing the mature cows along through the field. He was hoping to avoid any conflict, for he was rather young, and any competitor would likely take his herd from him with little difficulty; it was almost as though his haste drew in exactly what he feared.

I sat watching the herd graze for nearly half an hour as the sun headed West in the sky and the South-bound breeze became cooler. Suddenly, I heard a bugle that sent a shiver through me and caused goosebumps to cover my body. An elk larger than any I had ever seen crashed through the dense pines and emerged with a few boughs and vines entangled in his enormous antlers. He ran straight through the herd of grazing cows and immediately challenged the young bull. My heart began to race as the two sized each other up, I almost felt sympathetic for the smaller of the two. As their antlers scraped and jabbed, I knew that the dominant elk would be the one whom I hunted, the way he emerged from the mountains made me want to understand him, to put effort into establishing more of a meaning for my hunt. The juvenile bull had lost, and the monstrous bull trotted away with his newfound herd. The defeated bull sulked around the meadow for the remainder of the afternoon. He bellowed, hoping for a response, but the only one he did receive was me. I stood from my resting place beside the tree and the bull simply lowered his head and briskly walked away.

As I prepared camp that night, I began to think of a way to hunt the bull that I had encountered. He was extremely intelligent and observant; how would I possibly outsmart him? Hunting this elk with a compound bow presented another challenge, I had to be even more patient and get even closer to him before taking a shot. I realized that I could do none of these things without finding him first. I assumed that he probably stayed in the woods during the day, unlike most bulls. I predicted that he only came out to feed or challenge others and that the only way I would be able to track his movement through this wild area was by observing the cow elk. He likely was always near large herds of cows, not necessarily mixed among them, but in the wood line nearby, watching over them. These cows would be easy to track because their movement would greatly impact the soil and they would trample any small vegetation.

I became excited to possibly see the bull for a second time as I sat near the bright campfire and enjoyed the beautiful view of Lost Lake. The thought of my family going hungry if I was not successful saddened me. My children would be so amazed if I brought home the huge bull and I was sure that they'd ask me the story over and over. I could already see them running to my truck when I pulled in the driveway, just waiting for me to open the tailgate to see what I'd brought back. They'd learn the steps of processing the meat in different ways to ensure we had enough to last us throughout the snowy winter. As I put the fire out for the night I became even more determined to find the bull again, not for me, but for my family.

I was awake before the sun touched the snowy mountain tops, it was a brisk 46 degrees and the air was crisp, perfect for a hunt. I pulled my hunting pack around my shoulders and started West, towards the pines. As I stomped through the dense forests, I began to look for signs of my target. The amount of sign was unbelievable, nearly each green sapling had been bitten clean off at the top as a herd moved through the area. The soft mossy soil was covered in hoofprints all heading in the same direction. As I followed the tracks I came upon a gorgeous, sunny meadow. The scents of hundreds of wildflowers intertwined with long green grasses flooded my nose; I'd never seen somewhere as beautiful and diverse as this area. Along the edge of the opening were two large trees that had fallen from a recent storm, their branches were still green and plentiful. This storm fall would provide the perfect amount of cover for me to hunt the giant bull. The sun was quickly rising in the sky while birds played in the meadow grass and a curious chipmunk stared at me from above. I enjoyed the sun and watched over the playful meadow for the majority of the day but there was no sign of the bull. As the day was coming to an end, I began to hear the familiar trampling of footsteps once again. An elk herd was near and I prayed that I would be fortunate enough to see the bull again. I never did see any elk that night, but I learned many things about their immense knowledge and the area in which I was trying to locate them.

As I ate fresh Brook Trout cooked over the fire that night, I began to consider my options for the rest of my hunt, where I'd go tomorrow to ensure my success. I assumed that the area I hunted over that night was likely a very good spot, I just hadn't been patient enough. The amount of sign leading to that secluded place made me believe that it was impossible the bull hadn't been there. Bagging this elk would take an enormous amount of skill and patience. I mentally prepared for the moment that he would walk out in front of me although I knew that nothing would prepare me for that. While I stoked the fire, thunder rolled over the lake and lightning lit up the mountain tops. I prayed for my safety and for a successful hunt as the storm continued through the basin. My tent was dry as I drifted off to sleep, but the wind made me feel as if I was lying within the branches of a thin pine.

I awoke to a roll of thunder while pouring rain was penetrating my rainfly, my clothes were soaked, and the floor of my tent was basically a small pond. I checked my watch and decided to start my day. While pulling my raingear from its Ziploc bag I was glad that I had some dry clothing although it wasn't much. I attempted to rekindle the fire from the night before but had no luck, all the firewood was drenched and the warm coals were long gone. I was unable to warm any breakfast, so I went hungry. I tromped through the quickly flooding forest towards the meadow, wondering if it was worth it to hunt this morning. I knew that every time I went out in search of the bull, I increased my chances of crossing paths with him. Once I reached the meadow, I quickly settled in between the two fallen trees I had sat amidst the night before and began attempting to avoid the rain. The blue spruce pricked my side as I lied below it, still listening for any sign of the elk. The soothing sound of the raindrops against the forest floor sent me back to sleep, but I did not sleep well for I was worried of missing a chance at my target.

Thunder and lightning raged on as the storm persisted through the day. The storm clouds overhead darkened the meadow, and I was concerned that I would possibly be unable to spot the mature bull amongst the soaked brush. The large raindrops falling against huge Red Oak leaves entertained me for quite a while. The heavy drops rolled down the leaves and the young, green branches sprung up once the raindrop fell from the leaf. Suddenly, a herd of cow elk emerged from behind the dripping oaks and began to graze in the stormy meadow. My heart began to race, and my eyes were never still as I searched for any sign that the bull was soon to

make an appearance. The cows did act as if they were being followed, possibly it was a predator, or another herd. The small chance that it was him they were looking for made the time go faster, for I was hopeful. I knew that one of these cows would provide plenty of meals for my family, but I had a goal to reach, I would not settle for anything less than the bull.

As the rain poured on and the cows grazed I felt the rush of adrenaline begin to fade away. I feared that I would be unable to achieve my ultimate goal of bagging the elk whom I had been impacted by my first day here. The thought of returning home unsuccessful tore me. I knew the smart thing to do would be to set my sights on one of the many cow elk in front of me and ensure that I provided food for my family this year. On the other hand, I kept thinking of how meaningful it would be for me to be fortunate enough to bag the giant elk. This downpour was definitely not making this hunt any more enjoyable and I was about to give up on the day when I thought I heard crashing brush under the rumble of thunder. I became excited once again for the possibility of it being him. The thunder was becoming louder and the sky darker as he trotted into the meadow from the mountains. I began shaking so hard that I was sure I would be spotted as I stood from between the two fallen trees. I quietly picked up my bow from the wet ground as I stood and watched to see if he was aware of my presence even the slightest bit. It appeared that I had not startled him as he continued to move in my direction. When the bull got within 50 yards, I drew back my bow, pressed the string against the tip of my nose and corner of my mouth and lined up a shot. When I felt the best opportunity was presented, I exhaled, released the arrow, and held my breath. I watched as my arrow hit right behind the shoulder and the entire herd ran into the forest.

I remained standing for nearly five minutes praying that I placed a good shot on the bull. I eventually sat on the log in front of me, knowing I needed to wait to track him to avoid pushing him along. I also was aware that the rain would be washing away the blood trail and that I must get into the woods before it's a lost cause. I decided I would wait five more minutes. Ideally, I would've waited an hour or more before going to search for him, but I knew I did not have time. I stood from this memorable spot, knowing I'd likely never return.

With every lightning strike and roll of thunder I was losing time. Each drop of rain seemed to pull me farther away from my trophy. My feet were cold, wet, and blisters were developing around my ankles while the raging winds burned my flushed cheeks. I was forced to crawl over ginormous lodgepole pines that had freshly fallen in the storm and through thickets of wild raspberry bushes that had been picked so clean by a black bear that there was nothing left but razor-sharp thorns. My skin was being torn raw as I wondered what was keeping the brave elk going.

After crashing through brush for hours on end trying to follow the faint blood trail, I reached a rushing stream and became worried that I had lost him to this current. I searched along the banks for any sign that the bull was washed up on the shore. Instead of finding him I found more blood, on the other side of the river. I now had to find a way across it, I knew that the current was too strong for me to swim but it appeared there was no other option. I became thankful for this rainy day as I stepped into the ice-cold water. My clothes were already soaked so only the temperature of the water affected me. I was in waste deep and the water was already pressing hard against me. I continued to cautiously step towards the blood trail, but suddenly I fell over a large boulder and was swept off my feet. I began swimming for my life and trying to keep my head above the surface as my lungs filled with ice cold water. The current drug me

along the bottom and into a patch of dead trees. I held these trees sharp branches in my hands and used the rest of my energy to pull myself out of the water and onto the bank.

I was chilled to the core and my hands would barely move as I lied on the shore and tried to regain my breath. I again visited the thought of how I should've taken one of the cow elk who grazed in my sights for the majority of the day. I pulled myself to my feet and removed a few layers to attempt to prevent hypothermia. I was still able to see the blood trail and I followed it over the next hill into another large field. This meadow had nearly been picked clean by various herbivores but was still extremely breathtaking. As I gazed upon the grassland, I saw an elk, lying amidst a patch of prairie grass. I ran to it, astonished by the mass of his antlers and how much meat I had harvested for my family.

As I began to field dress him, I realized how thankful I was for this opportunity, although it was not easy. I wondered if this was the bull I had been after the entire time or if it was just another elk and my nerves got the best of me. As the sun set and I finished preparing my bull for the long journey out of the wilderness I gazed at the beauty surrounding me, wondering what else hid in these woods and if I had truly taken the one whom I had been targeting, if this hunt was truly over, or if it was only the beginning.

Shannon Lagore

I really enjoyed seeing the beginning of Shannon's story grow over the semester. I always looked forward to our sessions together and loved conversing with Shannon about new ideas. Shannon was always looking for ways to improve the story and make it more enjoyable for the audience. It is clear Shannon developed a bond with the story and the characters which made it. I think this bond, pursuit for improvement, and creativity will create a beautiful finished product.

~Taryn Wield

Carry Your Crown

Nix

At first I think it's an animal—a deer. But it sounds too big, too angry, and too stupid to be a deer. I stay atop my horse, not willing to run away from a bear on foot if that's what it is. I nock an arrow. I can feel that my horse is anxious; we're both unsure. And the creature crashing through the brush comes closer. It's... speaking.

"Who does she think she is?! She can't slap me like that! *Ugh!*" With a final grunt, a small blade flies through the clearing and embeds itself into the trunk of a large, knotty oak. I hop off my horse and pull him back into the trees. I don't need to get involved until I need to get involved. The horse nuzzles my shoulder, his lips exploring my arm before I shrug him off.

"Where the... where did the bloody thing go?!" she roars, barrling into the clearing. I can't see her too well from my hiding spot, and she's fairly hidden as well. Her dark dress, skin, and hair keep her in the shadow. "Oh good gods, Cat," she says, coming up to the oak tree. With a huff and unintelligible grumbling, she attempts to pull the knife from the trunk. It doesn't work. She's tiny, but I can see the fire in her personality. She tries again, putting her foot up against the tree to get leverage. Another pull, more struggling, and then I caught a glimpse of her face. The princess. I hold back a gasp. She's definitely not supposed to be outside the gates on her own, and the soldier in me wants to approach. But she's... the princess. I haven't stopped thinking about her since earlier. How she heard us joking about the queen, something she could've had us *killed* for... I think. Instead, she laughed with us.

She continues battling with the tree, now almost screaming in pure frustration.

"Princess!" A booming voice spooks her and my horse. She claps her hands over her mouth and looks—to no avail—for somewhere to hide.

"No, no, no," she says, just as a manned horse bursts out of the brush.

"Princess Catherine, thank the gods!"

"Oh come on," she says. "Get out of here, Marke."

"Now you know I can't do that. We've got to get you back to the castle." He smiles down at her, but it isn't a smile any sensible person would trust.

The hairs on the back of my neck stand up and I ready myself to get involved. I sense trouble.

Marc hops off his horse and saunters over to the princess. "We don't have to go back right away, though." She looks panicked as she turns back to try again to retrieve her knife. "I hear you're looking for a king. I'll have you know, I would make a *very* good one." He traps her between his body and the tree, and I spring into action.

"You pig, get off of me!" the princess cries as I jump out of the bushes. One of Marke's hands sits aggressively on her hip, while the other caresses her cheek. I yank his arm back, ripping it away from her face. Thinking quickly, he pulls Catherine's small dagger from the tree and comes at me with it. I think quicker, and my blade rushes up to meet his. I take the advantage as my sword is much longer than his puny knife and in my dominant hand.

"Nicola," Marc says, as he takes in who I am. "What the hell are you doing?"

“I should ask you the same thing,” I spit, knocking the dagger out of his hand. Catherine scrambles to grab it, backing up against the tree and holding it out at us.

“We were just talking, there’s nothing to worry about. I was only... escorting the princess around outside.” He struggles to pull his wrist from my grasp. “Can you...” He gestures to my grip; I don’t let go.

“Your highness, was he escorting you?”

She looks between the two of us, panicking, not sure who to trust. She chooses me with a shake of her head.

“Listen, Nicola, I was just... gods, let go will you? I was escorting her back! She’s out here alone, she’s grieving, she’s—”

“Vulnerable?” I fill in. “Get out of here, Marke. If I see you even look at her wrong, you’ll lose a finger. And if you use my full name again, I’ll take a toe.” To back up my threat, I break one of his fingers and smack his behind with the flat of my sword as he trips away, trying desperately not to cry through the pain.

I turn to Catherine. Her eyes are wide, knife still pointed out in front of her. I tap it gently with my sword and it flies upward, out of her loose grip. It falls gracefully into my hand.

“Don’t back yourself into a corner. You won’t be able to run as easily. And you’re going to want to run if you’re holding your blade that loosely. Won’t hit anything with it if you don’t even trust yourself to hold it.”

“I—”

“You shouldn’t even be out here alone if you can’t hold a blade. Besides the fact that you shouldn’t be out here alone as you are the *princess*, heir to the throne.” I give her a sharp glare, the first time we’ve actually locked eyes. She looks hurt. *Fuck. She’s the damn princess, Nic.* “Sorry. That was harsh.”

She shook her head, trying to pull herself back together. Clearly, she’s had practice hiding emotions, but I’ve had practice as an observer and I catch the brimming tears before she blinks them away.

“No, you’re right, I’m not allowed out here alone.” She looks down, a tight, frizzy curl hanging in her face.

I look down at her dagger. “This is a nice piece,” I say, changing the subject. I’m not in the position to reprimand her.

“Uh, a friend of mine got it for me. Just in case I need to protect myself.”

“Your friend got you a knife to protect yourself, but didn’t teach you how to use it? A little pointless if you ask me.”

Her brow furrows and it’s her turn to glare at me. “It’s punishable enough that he gave me a weapon. It isn’t like he could teach me how to use it all that subtly.”

I shrug. “I s’pose.” I flip it so the handle is facing her. She hesitates, but slowly takes it out of my hand. “There are two good ways to hold a dagger. But the key is to hold onto it *tightly* and keep the pointy part facing the bad guy.” I take her hand and mold it around the dagger’s hilt. “Tightly,” I repeat, and stand back. Her eyes make a point to avoid mine. She faces me and holds the dagger out.

“Like this?”

“Hey,” I say, gently knocking the tip of the blade away from my direction. “I look like the bad guy to you?” She keeps her grip on the knife.

“Sorry.” She looks at me through her eyelashes. They’re long.

“Good job holding on, though.”

A smile.

I clear my throat. “We should get you back to the castle. Sheathe your blade, m’lady.”

She locks eyes with me. And then, she begins hitching up the skirts—skirts plural, royals are absurd—of her dress to reveal her bare calves. Before the hem of her dress reaches her knees,

I turn around. In vain, I will my cheeks to remain their regular temperature. How dare they show any sort of feeling. Any sign of weakness.

“Alright, lead the way,” Catherine says finally. I turn back to see her smiling sweetly. The princess is... hard to read. All over the place.

“You know how to get on a horse?” I ask, clicking my tongue to call the animal from the bushes. “I don’t have a side saddle.”

She lets out an unladylike bark of laughter and effortlessly hops up onto the horse. “Lippy and I are good friends.”

“Lippy?”

“You don’t know the name of your own horse?”

“Well he’s not mine, he’s just one of the available horses,” I say in defense. I start to walk the horse back towards the castle.

“You should learn their names. After all, it took a lot of thought on my part to come up with them.”

“You name all the horses?”

“I did. It’s a job I’ve had since I was a child, and I take it *very* seriously. When Percy would have his future-king lessons or get official future-king duties, I’d be unbelievably jealous. After a particularly loud tantrum, I was given the official position of horse-namer. I think it was actually Percy’s idea, as he always felt bad that I wasn’t included in things. Half of the information I have about the warfront is from his letters.”

I look up to see her smiling sadly. She’s taking the death of her brother hard. I’m not about to let her get emotional, however, so I say, “And the name... you came up with for this horse... was Lippy?”

The emotions on her face disappear, replaced by offense. “Of course! You’ve never noticed his tendency to look for treats by rubbing his lips all over you?”

“Lippy,” I repeat judgmentally.

“I was 11, leave me alone.”

The horse—Lippy—begins to move his lips over my shoulder and behind me, the princess bursts into giggles. As I wish I could help it, I laugh too; her’s is infectious.

We don’t speak much after this as I guide Lippy back through the woods. She’s gone quiet, and I just am quiet. It’s nice to let the trees do the talking. I’m able to stay alert. Pay attention. Every rustle of a bush, each animal track in the dirt. We leave the density of the forest behind as we get closer to the castle, and human voices take the place of the breathless whisper of the branches.

“They’re all looking for me,” Catherine says matter of factly about the shouting ahead.

“I’m aware,” I say.

“Sometimes I wish they wouldn’t. Is it pretentious of me to say that sometimes I wish I were just a commoner?”

She’s sad. I should just let her mope as her brother did *just* die. But I’m not a good person. “Absolutely. You know how much those people would give up to be in your position?”

“Those people?” she repeats.

“Commoners,” I clarify, confused as to why she needs me to.

“No, that’s not what I mean. You said ‘those people’ as if you don’t count yourself among them.”

“You assume I’m a commoner?”

“Are you not?”

I don’t answer.

“You don’t want what I have?”

I roll my eyes. She really got it right with “pretentious.” With my head facing forward, I say, “What want do I have for frilly dresses with 18 skirts, 12 servancets for three jobs I could do myself, or, I don’t know, arranged marriage? I’m plenty happy with what I have.”

“Hm,” is her only response. *Hm.*

She’s lucky Charles comes running up before I can continue my rant.

“Cat!” he exclaims. “Where the— What the hell have you been doing?” He nods at me.

“Nic, thank you for finding her.”

“Just doing my job.”

Charles helps Catherine down from the horse and hugs her. “Stupid of you, you know. We go off into the woods together for a reason.”

“I can take care of myself,” Catherine huffs and marches off. As I watch her leave, she bunches up all 27 skirts in her arms, picking her way over the uneven ground, cursing her heeled shoes as she goes.

“She can’t take care of herself,” I tell Charles.

“I know,” he responds. I’m relieved, he could likely have me banished for talking about the princess like that. “She has the capacity to be able to. She’s not weak. She just... doesn’t know things, wasn’t allowed to learn things.”

I feel like he isn’t supposed to be saying this to me, but I let him. There’s something about the girl. I want to know more about her. Anything about her. Everything about her.

He continues, “Sorry. You don’t care about this.” I do. “Uh, my father’s looking for you. Something about Marke?”

“Shit,” I mutter, but I expected it to come back to bite me in the ass.

“Don’t worry, you won’t be in too much trouble. Just enough to make it look like you’re being punished for Marke’s sake. I’m assuming he did something to deserve whatever you did to him.”

“He cornered the princess. I’m surprised actually, he seems too cowardly to actually try anything like that, but I suppose the lack of watching eyes lends itself to false confidence. She’s lucky I was there.”

“She was. Thank you again.” He looks ahead to see that Catherine’s gotten quite far away. “How? Oh, she took her shoes off. Have to go, see you.” He runs off after her, shouting “Cat! Wait up, you fool!”

The princess only lifts her middle finger at him and I hold back a smirk. She’s definitely got *some* fight in her.

Kellen Tharaldson

Kellen enrolled in this course looking for a way to improve his writing skills after taking a two year break from school to play hockey, but you wouldn't know that from reading this piece! Kellen went above and beyond the required amount of work this semester and almost tripled the amount necessary. He started out writing journals about different adventures he had during hockey and eventually started writing short stories about his past experiences. This semester, we focused on descriptive writing, writing complete stories, and expressing personal emotion in his work. Kellen used these skills when he created his final story about a car accident he was in that has impacted his entire life since. This story does an excellent job of explaining each event and showing how he has been affected by this incident. Kellen's writing ability grew a lot this semester and I hope that he continues to write in the future.

~Kassidy Spees

Car Accident

December 26, 2015 my life would be changed for the rest of my life. It was a sunny day right after Christmas, my family from Minnesota was visiting and we were all enjoying the holidays. The Wausau West Hockey alumni game was going on at the local rink and as a player on the team we had to bring a dish of food for the alumni to have after they play.

Around 11:30 my mom told me to bring the dish of food to the rink and as any good son would do, I got in her car and drove to the rink. I live in the country and when I got into town, I pulled up to a stop sign turned right and got back up to 35 mph. In about a quarter mile after my turn there is an intersection to go into the DMV, I saw a car wanting to turn left to go out of town and I was coming into town so that means she would have to look both ways. I watched her look the opposite way and never saw her look my way... this is where she pulls out in front of me and I'm going 35 mph there's not a lot of time to slow down. I honked on my horn and slammed on my brakes and it was too late. I T-boned her driver side door and it was almost all a blur from there. All the air bags went off as well as hers, I was in a panic of what had just happened. I scrambled for my phone, and when I found it, my mom was calling me. I picked up the phone told her what happened and my dad and her rushed to come and see what was going on. They asked me a bunch of questions as well as the cop on scene and he asked if I needed an ambulance. I had so much adrenaline going I couldn't feel any pain.

As my parents started comforting me and calming me down, I finally got some feeling back in my body and I could tell my left wrist was aching quite a bit. My mom and I went to the walk-in clinic to get it checked out. They took an x-ray on my wrist and told me I have broken the scaphoid bone in my wrist. If you know anything about this bone, it is the smallest bone in the body, and it is the hardest to heal because there is no blood flow that comes to it. I was devastated, I was in the middle of my junior year of hockey and I was very successful this year, until now.

I had to get surgery on my left wrist on January 4th and it would take about 3-4 months to fully recover the bone. Now, all this time after the accident my right wrist was still bothering me, and I thought because I am left-handed and must use my right hand for everything, I just have some bad tendinitis. It was irritating quite a bit, so I decided I wanted a better look at it. I went and got an x-ray on January 20th. The doctor said they did not see any break in my right wrist, so I went back to thinking yes this is just bad tendinitis! I had been to 20 different doctors during this time period getting work done trying to fix my wrist to see if it will ever heal.

My lawyers wanted to know more about my right wrist so we could get further verification on why it was still hurting. In May 2016 later that year I had another x-ray and this time they found a break in my scaphoid bone. The same bone broken in my left hand was broken in my right hand. This was devastating news for me, but news that I had already heard before. I

was speechless not knowing what to do if I should get it fixed or let it linger more and continue to play hockey. I had a couple options at this point. I had gotten an MRI on my right wrist to see the damage to the bone. The MRI showed that my bone was deteriorating and soon enough there would be no bone left if I kept it going. One of the options was to get surgery immediately but the doctors said that it would not be a 100% guarantee that it would get fixed. They had different plans to maybe take out cartilage in my kneecap and bring it up to my wrist but that was only a 90% chance of healing fully. I was a little questionable on this call. During all this I was trying out for junior hockey teams and if I were to get surgery, I would be done with hockey for good because of how long it takes this bone to heal. My parents and I thought about this for a week or so and concluded that it was not in our best interest to get it fixed at the time. Our doctor did not agree with our decision, but it was not his decision to make. So, for the past three years my right wrist was still broken, and we haven't gotten it fixed.

During the past three years, my parents hired a lawyer to sue the girl who caused the accident and her insurance for pain and suffering. Over the course of this process, I have met with my lawyers 6-7 times trying to figure out my side of story as well as hers to get the most money I can from this injury. My lawyers and I had an initial goal of suing them for \$340,000. Yes, I know wow! Our lawyer thought we had a good case for this and thought it would look good that a young man like me got many things taken away from him at a very young age in his life.

When we went to the mediation where I sit with my lawyer and their lawyer is in another room, we have a mediator come in the rooms back and forth. We were set on a specific price of \$340,000 and we offered first. He went into the other room and their lawyer only offered \$75,000 because he thought they had a good case as well. Their case was that if I would have gotten surgery in May of 2016 that I would be healed, I wouldn't be having this ongoing pain and it would all be over. Yes, they were right, if I did get the surgery it would be much better but timing was bad, the doctors diagnosed me wrong the first time and said it was never broken so I went on with my normal life and continued to play hockey. Our lawyers weren't very happy with his price and thought this will not go anywhere today and we did not get the price we wanted. The next step after mediation process is court.

Court is a different animal. Depending on the jury that you get this could go well and I would be running out of the court room with \$340,000-dollar check in my pocket good to go. Or, it could end up with me getting \$75,000 and that would be very disappointing. At any given day in court anything could happen and that is the sucker about it. My lawyers were very questionable about court even though a young guy like me would look exceptionally well. So, it was our turn to counter his offer and we went up to \$100,000 to see if he would go any higher if he didn't, we would take this to court and settle it there. They did bump up to \$100,000. I was given the decision if I wanted to take that money and this would all be over or push it back even farther and go to court. I thought about this for a week and it was completely up to me, no parents involved no lawyer it was my decision what I wanted to do. This put a lot of pressure on me. I was at the Packer preseason game against Houston thinking about this in the hotel room and concluded that I wanted this to be over. I would take the money.

During this crazy 4-year process I learned many things about the law and many things about myself as well. I overcame things through all of this, it was tiring and painful, but I did it and am still alive. I learned that whatever you want to do you can do if you push yourself and keep going. I have a broken right wrist to this day, play hockey on it, and get through life with it. I must modify many things I do but that was a decision I had to make at one direct moment, and I am happy with the decision I chose. Who knows where I would've been if I would have gotten surgery in May of that year? That's something I will never know but I came out of this a better man and person. I am thankful that it is over and past me.

McKenna Rentmeester

It has been an absolute pleasure to have been McKenna's tutor this fall semester. McKenna is an incredibly talented individual; her remarkable literary prowess shining through her work. I am by no means exaggerating when I say that I looked forward to every Tuesday session with McKenna. The way that she crafts and relays her stories will leave you on the edge of your seat; the final delivery of things such as a climax or plot twist, being executed eloquently every time. I am completely thrilled that she has published her work in Wordplay. There is no doubting that readers will enjoy the beauty of her work as I have.

~Monae Taylor

Her Choice

Her father exited the automobile, their driver opened her mother's door and helped her out. She slid over from her side of the automobile and accepted her father's hand so she wouldn't trip on her elaborately layered gown. After she adjusted her ruffled skirt, she followed her parents but smiled at the many cameras that littered her path to the door.

"Miss McKenzie!"

"Is that the newest style from Madame Marie?"

Claire McKenzie smiled but kept walking until she caught up to her parents who smiled fondly at her. "Now just remember sweetheart, you need to make a good impression. Many of my colleagues will be here along with their sons," her father, Ray McKenzie said. He looked powerful in his new suit but had kind eyes that made her feel like a little girl.

"Stand up straight, remember to smile and mingle. Don't humiliate us here Claire," chimed her mother Vivian McKenzie. Although others thought Vivian was a cold hard gossip, she was a good mother to Claire. Except when there was a party or public outing to be had.

"Announcing, Lord and Lady McKenzie with Miss Claire McKenzie." The stiffly dressed man shouted as the heavy double doors opened ahead of her, revealing the most elite families from the upper east side. The glittering lights glinted of the polished hardwood floors making it seem like she was walking through the galaxy itself. A fantastic glow bathed the rest of the room in a gold hue. Girls dressed in the latest fashions swirled and flounced with their dance partners, chosen very carefully by their eagle-eyed mothers no doubt. Claire eyed up the expansive snack table, noting the quality ingredients that Mrs. Shooler handpicked weeks before the party. Even though Claire's corset was taking all her unused breath for granted, she still reached for a stuffed oyster but was rudely interrupted by a swatting hand.

"Claire! This is not where your focus should be. Come," her mother's voice cracked behind her. Claire nearly dropped the oyster but turned around to see the pinched annoyance on her mother's face when she saw who Claire was keeping company. Of course, Claire knew that she should be mingling but all she wanted was to cut herself free of the elaborate dress her servants had strapped her into. "Get your head on straight now." Vivian expertly wove her way through the dancing couples until she got to her husband's side, Claire followed her but was very careful not to step on her mother's small train. Claire admired her mother's obvious grace in how she carried herself, although they didn't always agree on style, Claire hoped she would be able to carry herself with the grace and confidence that her mother had.

Claire's father seemed to be in a deep discussion with the men surrounding him, all of them nodding along to whatever Ray said. Claire didn't understand a word of what they were saying but smiled at everyone, "Gentlemen have you met my lovely daughter Claire? She has just

come back from school for the year,” the men nodded their heads to her giving her small smiles, “Claire these are some colleagues of mine, we were just talking about how the business is doing. Carlisle, your son came with you tonight, didn’t he?”

Ray gestured to a tall man with his dark hair greased back out of his face. Carlisle smiled warmly, which contrasted his striking appearance. He swept his gaze around the room, “He is here somewhere, but I’m not sure where he is at the moment, but I know he was interested in meeting Miss Claire.” Ray nodded, hugging Claire to his side as much as her gown would allow. Claire got the hint that her father had set this up earlier, but she knew he just wanted to see her taken care of after she left the McKenzie household.

“Perhaps later in the evening then?” Claire asked politely, she had no idea who she was going to meet but she needed to find out who he was.

“Yes, that sounds wonderful. Until then Miss Claire,” Carlisle tipped his head and Claire smiled before walking away. She didn’t know if the butterflies in her stomach were from the oysters or the fact she was just set up by her father.

Claire kept walking around the ballroom, watching others dance and talk. She knew that everyone was invited to the Schoolers’ house for business purposes, but it also gave the wives a chance to show off their newest wardrobes. Claire’s mother was wearing a vibrant sapphire gown where all the other wives wore gowns in gold or red, clearly Vivian enjoyed standing out. Claire ran her hands along the smooth silk of her skirt, *a brilliant purple for a brilliant girl*, her mother had said but Claire preferred the subdued colors of her day gowns. The extravagance of her life has never appealed to Claire, yet she was grateful to be where she was.

A shrill squeal echoed around the grand ballroom and Claire found herself sandwiched between her two friends, Caroline and Justice. The girls have been friends since they found each other at finishing school, a dreary experience that few girls actually enjoyed.

“Claire! You look positively royal, you have never looked better,” Caroline gushed, her own gown swishing around her ankles. She held more appreciation for the extravagance and glamour that their status offered. Caroline was done up in a pink gown that was trimmed in gold with ruffles all around her skirt, “And to think you don’t like to stand out. Darling you were born to shine.”

Justice nodded along with Caroline, “You really do look fantastic Claire, I love the purple,” she shared Claire’s preference for dimmed colors but followed Caroline’s love for fashion. Justice wore a simpler gown with ruffles around the bodice but had decided on a cream color.

They all shared a hug, giggling at themselves, “You both look fantastic, I’m so glad you’re here. Father wants me to meet Mr. Carlisle’s son tonight,” Claire fidgeted with her hands, her nerves spilling out.

Justice gasped and put her hands to her face, eyes getting misty. Clearly, she was more excited than Claire was. Caroline grabbed Claire’s hands and spoke low, “You can’t possibly mean Benjamin Carlisle?”, her eyes were as wide as the coffee cup saucers, “Claire, do you even know who he is? How big their family is?” Caroline got more and more excited with every question she asked.

“Of course, I know who he is, my father has worked with his father for years. I’ve never met Benjamin though, is he nice?” Claire asked.

“I’ve never met him either, but do you know what this means?” Justice’s eyes gleamed with light and happiness looking from Caroline to Claire. Both girls just stared back at her, waiting for her to continue, “We are going to be bridesmaids! Oh, this is so exciting!”

“Justice, I haven’t even met him yet and you are already talking about a wedding?”

“Oh, Justice is right Claire this meeting is all to do with a possible marriage between you and Benjamin. I wonder where he is,” Caroline started scanning the groups of people, determined to find him.

“I need some air, I’ll be right back,” Claire put her hands to her stomach as she walked away from her friends who were quickly planning her wedding. She started to regret the oysters she ate earlier since they threatened to make an appearance again.

Claire maneuvered her way to the balcony, took a deep breath of the cool night air and tried to calm her fluttering nerves. She knew that she was at the prime age to start looking for a husband but never thought that it would happen so quickly. Having her father pick a boy she had never met didn’t help calm her nerves any more than being set up tonight. Claire smoothed her hands around her skirt, took another deep breath, as much as her dress would allow, and reminded herself that she was a McKenzie. Her family was one of the most influential families of the time, she wouldn’t let a boy take that power away from her. If her parents wanted her to meet this boy, she would do it, but she would do it on her terms.

Claire turned to head back inside; a slight chill ran over her arms making her wish her dress had sleeves instead of being strapless. She ran her hands up and down her arms, trying to get back inside as quick as she could, but was stopped short by someone coming outside, “Excuse me,” she said announcing herself.

The person in the doorway to the ballroom turned revealing a man, who couldn’t be much older than herself. He smiled, eyes kind, “Oh please excuse me, I suppose standing in front of a doorway was in poor taste.” His lips turned up in a smirk, almost like he was laughing at himself, “Could I escort you inside? Your lips are starting to match your dress.” He offered his arm, which she took not wanting to offend him and he shut the door behind her.

“Thank you, it was getting fairly chilly out there. What’s your name?” Claire felt natural being on his arm, something she wasn’t used to feeling.

“Besides your knight in shining armor? My name is William, but I’ll make an exception to letting you call me Will, if you agree to dance with me,” they stopped walking when they reached the edge of the dance floor.

With a small nod of her head, “Well Will, it is nice to meet you. My name is Claire,” and with that she offered him her hand to dance. He smiled at her and led her to middle of the dance floor, he placed his right hand on her waist and took hers in his left hand. He twirled her around and around with grace and strength that not many men had, Claire didn’t remember a time when she had smiled so much. Her skirts swished at her feet but dusted the floor when he stopped them and dipped her to the floor but brought her up slowly to stand in front of him. They gazed at each other, the music dulled to the background; Will smiled down at her and his eyes danced with laughter. Claire offered him a small smile when he took a step closer and placed his hand on the small of her back bringing them closer still.

They were set to start again but, “Excuse me, I would like to dance with Miss Claire,” were interrupted by a boy about Claire’s age standing with his hands clasped behind his back.

Will stepped back from Claire but took her hand and kissed it, “Thank you for the dance Claire. I’ll look forward to seeing you again.” Will nodded to the boy and walked off the dancefloor.

Claire watched Will walk away, “Care to dance Miss Claire?”, the boy asked her again. She smiled and accepted his waiting hand; his shoulders were squared to hers as he led them around the dancefloor. His movements were elegant and practiced, but Claire appreciated the effortless care he put into the dance. Claire had an idea of who she was dancing with but needed to be sure.

“You seem to know your way around the dance floor,” Claire said, “Could you tell me your name?”

“I suppose you have never met me so you wouldn’t know, but I am Benjamin Carlisle. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you,” Benjamin replied looking down at her while he slowed the pace. Claire looked up from under her lashes, “You look positively radiant tonight, every other man wishes he was dancing with you.” Benjamin’s low timbre vibrated when he spoke low next to her ear. Claire felt heat creep up her neck but tilted her head to rest his. She then felt his hand flex on her back and move them closer together, the dance becoming more relaxed, like they had been dancing all their lives.

“You look handsome tonight as well Benjamin, I have to say I wasn’t sure if you were going to show tonight.”

“I would never miss a meeting with a beautiful girl, yet I confess that I have known who you were for a while Claire McKenzie. Your father is a striking businessman,” Claire raised her head to look at him.

“I suppose he is doing quite well on his business ventures, yes. Are you a businessman yourself?” Claire asked, her mood dipping as they talked about business.

“Of course, my father is pleased that I am following in his footsteps. I hope to get to the level of success that your father has brought to your family,” Benjamin replied, his tone taking on a prideful manner.

The song drew to a close and Benjamin slowed them to a stop. He stepped back and gave her a deep bow before offering her his arm. Claire looped her arm through his and they walked to where their parents were waiting; their smiles told Claire that they had been watching them as they danced. Claire suck a glance up at Benjamin to see him smiling widely in the direction of their parents.

“You two looked magical during your dance,” Vivian smiled at the both of them.

“Thank you, Lady McKenzie, Claire is an enchanting young woman. You and Lord McKenzie have raised her in elegance and grace,” Benjamin bowed his head slightly towards her parents.

“Thank you, Benjamin, you have the makings of a good man and from what your father has told us about you, a fine businessman,” Ray gave Benjamin an approving nod, “Would you excuse us Claire? Caroline and Justice were looking for you, why don’t you go say your goodbyes and then we will be on our way.”

Claire nodded and dipped her knees, giving Benjamin a fleeting gaze before looking around for her friends. She found her friends talking in a corner and failing to hide the fact that they were pointing out all the attractive men in the room. Justice spotted Claire heading towards them and quieted Caroline’s flippant chatter. “How gracious of you to take time out of your busy evening to speak to us,” Justice teased.

“Oh, my gracious lord, so good to see you again Claire,” Caroline gave a deep bow to Claire but came up giggling.

“You two have always been so dramatic, I haven’t been gone that long,” Claire gave them a small sigh as her shoulders sagged slightly.

“You’re right, we have been pretty busy dancing the night away with two dreamy boys. You have to be kidding Claire, did you not enjoy yourself?” Caroline’s pitch was starting to rise when the thought of Claire not enjoying herself became more real in her mind.

“Don’t be so daft, of course I enjoyed the party. The food was fantastic, and the music was divine,” Claire listed.

“Stop trying to avoid it Claire, tell us about the boys and the dances. You looked like something out of a story while you were dancing,” Justice’s voice took on a dreamy quality as she relived Claire’s night.

Claire looked at both girls and their eager faces, she thought that she should get it over with now before her parents came to take her home. “Both dances were lovely, I felt like I was floating through both of them. Those boys know how to lead their way through a dance,” Claire felt her cheeks heat up as she remembered how both of them made her feel, “The first boy I danced with was charming and warm, it felt really natural to be with him. And the second was very elegant and he seemed passionate,” Claire trailed off lost in remembering both of the boys she danced with.

Claire jumped when she felt a hand grasp her elbow, “Claire, darling, its time that we return home for the night,” her father’s voice rumbled behind her. She turned to see her mother holding her shawl open for her.

Turning back to her friends, she gave them each a hug, “Why don’t you both come over for tea tomorrow? We can talk more then,” Claire told them before going to her mother, slipping her arms into her shawl and settling it around her shoulders. Claire twirled her fingers towards her friends and followed her parents out to their automobile. She settled between her parents for the ride home, her father slipped his arm across the back of the seat and sank into the seat.

“What do you need to talk to Caroline and Justice about darling? They seemed tight lipped when your mother and I came to get you,” Ray asked casually. He gazed at her, but Claire kept her sight straight ahead. She wondered what her father was trying to get at, Caroline and Justice had been over to their house many times before.

“They wanted to have more time to continue our conversation. We had left before the party was over father,” Claire replied. She didn’t think her parents needed to know that they were fawning over boys the whole night, unless they had known all along.

“Of course darling, I’m sorry to have cut your evening short. You seemed to be the princess of the ball tonight,” Ray said with a slight smirk playing at the corner of his mouth.

“You looked pristine while you were dancing Claire, everyone watching was enchanted. Did you enjoy yourself?” Vivian asked leaning forward slightly to see Claire’s reaction.

Claire looked at her twisting hands in her lap, she didn’t know what they were after but she had an idea, “I enjoyed myself greatly, Benjamin was a perfect gentleman and my dance with Will felt magical,” she said rather quickly but glanced at both her parents to gauge their reactions. Ray smiled and nodded while Vivian’s lips pinched tightly, Claire looked between both of them confused but they both kept quiet the rest of the drive.

Their family arrived back at their house, servants flurrying around, helping them out of their coats and taking them upstairs to prepare them for bed. Claire stood in the middle of her bedroom, her thoughts drifted to Will and she smiled, remembering how he called himself her knight in shining armor. She had never met anyone like him and found it refreshing how he made her laugh. Her hair was being brushed out, but she felt herself swaying slightly, thinking of how they danced together so easily. Yet her thoughts were split as Benjamin’s presence was strong and radiant. He commanded her attention but made her feel precious. Claire fell asleep but continued the dance in her dreams.

David Kollman

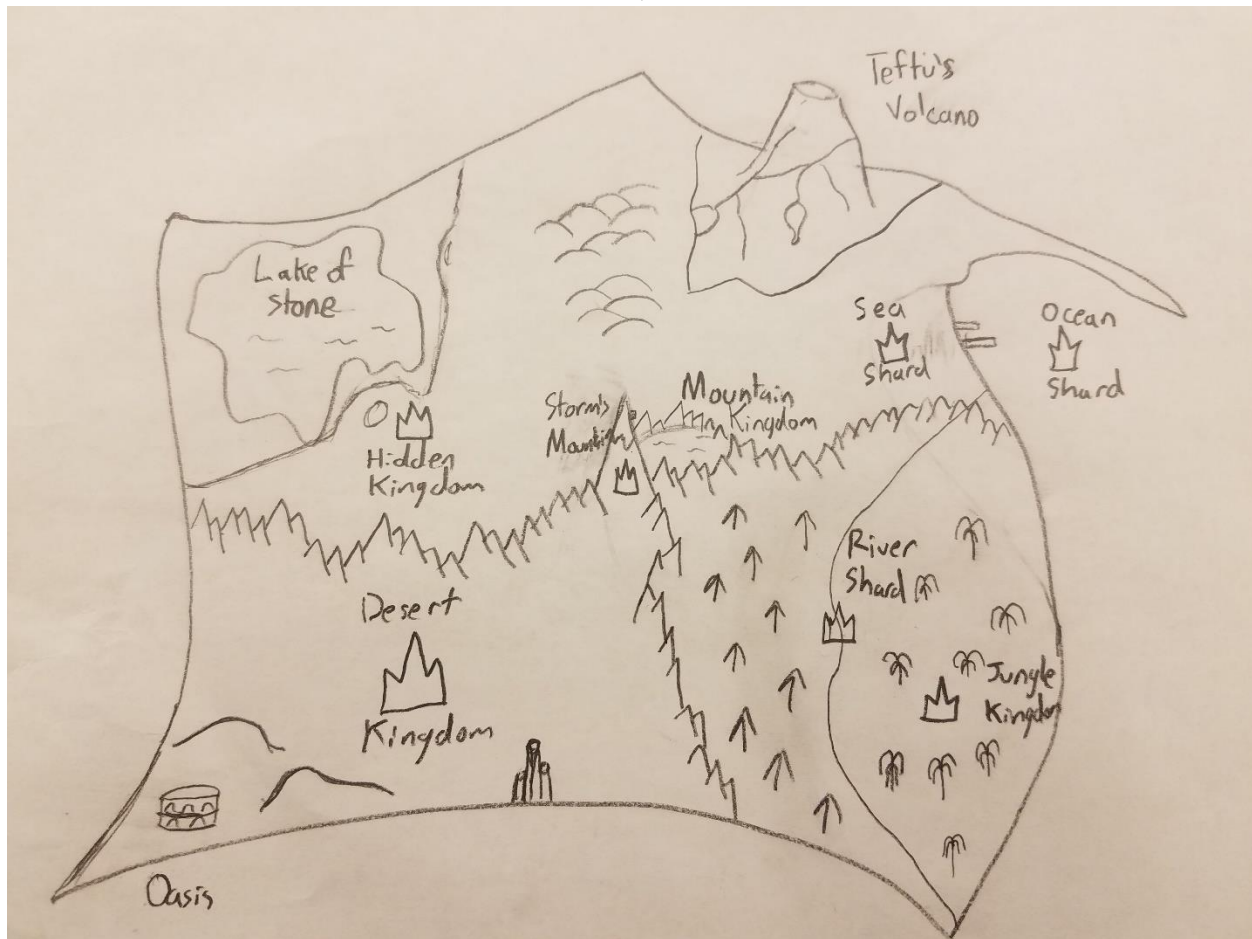
Throughout the semester, David and I saw his original idea grow and change into the piece before you today. What started with an outline- just an inspiring notion- is now a complex collection of stories, songs, and poems from an equally complex world. In addition, he created an original and captivating backstory to give these works context. The amount of deliberate and meaningful details David wove into this project is astonishing. He has worked extensively on developing the different regions of his world and was dedicated in making each unique in the way they share stories, which included selecting specific fonts to represent regions' characteristics. He has a unique perspective which I know will continue to add so much to any writing project he decides to create. I sincerely hope every reader appreciates his efforts and enthusiasm as much as I do.

~Abby Joski

Logs of the Observer

Continent 57023

Attempt 17



I have watched for millennia. I have seen Kingdoms rise and fall. The ancient ones test their strength. Strength is all they care about. Millenia I have watched their tests. Many a cruel gods have been formed because of these tests. Cruel gods

grant strength, but they also create fear and pain. No gods start cruel. They all are made cruel by the tests. These young ones are stubborn, they still work together, still hold council. And yet they fail again and again. They want to do more but the laws forbid it. They have failed again and again. And still I watch. Still I listen. I hear the cries of their people. They failed. A fresh start. One sits out. She is at the crossroads, the start of the cruel path. Will they feel the fury of her volcano? One destroys his own, unsatisfied with their greed. Yet I am curious. This time feels different. I wish to hear more. My focus has to become absolute. I need to watch more than the gods, I shall watch their people.

- Ilyos the Observer

Log #405231762/Continent 57023, Attempt 17 - Start

Attempt 17:

Region	God/Goddess	Visited
Mountain Kingdom	Storm	
Desert Kingdom	Pandora	
Sea Shard	Kreoken	
Jungle Kingdom	Skorri	
River Shard	Kreoken	
Ocean Shard	Kreoken	
Hidden Kingdom	Onyx	

Tale of the Mountain King

The group camped at the base of a mountain, and sat around a campfire while they waited for the storyteller to start her legend.

"Long, long ago, on the peak of this very mountain, sat a hall. And in that hall lived the mountain king, the storm god. On his head sat a crown of tempests, and in his hand, a spear of lightning and thunder. The king was kind, his hall a haven for those that could reach it. Feasts were had every night so that none would go hungry. Now it is important to know there was reason to his name, the storm god. The king was kind but his wrath mighty. Slow to anger was he, but when the king rose he rose with sound and fury. So it happened many ages ago. The people of this land grew greedy, coming to his hall when not in need of nourishment or even simple company. They came and took food so that they may gorge themselves, they came and took jewels and fabrics so that they may dress themselves in fancy wear. The king did not approve of greed, but he did not judge them until they blocked the path. The greed of the people drove them to form a guard, and make those that needed the king's help unable to attain it. So the mountain king rose, and he rose with fury. One night there was a terrible storm, winds strong enough to move an ox, lightning falling so

violently it destroyed their houses, rain enough to turn the ground to water. Through the tempest the storm god walked, spear in hand. Whenever he came across one consumed by greed, he took everything from them. Whenever he came across one that had nothing, and had needed his help, he shielded them from harm. The rain fell for four days, and when it had ended there was a lake where the homes of greed once stood. The path that once led to his hall was lost, but the lake he made provided fish, fowl, and vegetation for those that needed rest. There are still tales of those that brave the mountain, and they come back with tales of an ancient hall, but nothing more. Where the storm god went, no one knows, but wanderers have rested at his mountain for generations, for here they have food, water, and shelter from his wrath."

I don't understand Storm's decision. Yes, a large amount of his people became insatiably greedy. Yes they prevented the weaker ones from getting his help. Which, by the way, was a dangerous thing to do. A hall to help his people? The ancient ones believe that gods should not be seen at all, let alone directly give gifts to their people. Maybe they were satisfied with his rage. Whatever his reasons the Nomads he left behind certainly learned a lesson about the faults of greed. And they work together better than the greedy ones ever did, the Nomads even make their way to the Sea Shard and help out those poor poor fishers. Storm does seem pleased about that, he likes that they are kind. I don't expect much from the Mountain Kingdom in this trial, but their familiarity with mountain paths will be invaluable if the Kingdoms ever attempt to unite.

- Ilyos the Observer

Log #405231763/Continent 57023, Attempt 17

Attempt 17:

Region	God/Goddess	Visited
Mountain Kingdom	Storm	x
Desert Kingdom	Pandora	
Sea Shard	Kreoken	
Jungle Kingdom	Skorri	
River Shard	Kreoken	
Ocean Shard	Kreoken	
Hidden Kingdom	Onyx	

Windrider's Dance of Salvation

The child sat on the edge of the canvas and looked up at his mothers in awe. He glanced at Heart-heart who was wrestling with the reins as the leather bellowed furiously above the deafening

wind, then returned his attention to Heart-mind who was dancing the elaborate tale of the Desert Queen, the Wind Goddess. This was the windrider's tradition during the pilgrimage, to show the tale of salvation. The child watched as Heart-mind danced the woes of the wanderers who got lost to the desert, were ravaged by the wind, were driven hopeless by the endless screaming. She twisted and bowed, her arms outstretched and flailing, showing the chaos of the first days. The dance grew calm as she danced of the arrival, the quieting, the gift. That day the first windriders were born. They were given modest flight, just simple sheets to cling to, far less advanced than the reed and leather mounts of now. His mind drifted off as he daydreamed about earning a symbol. He hoped he was kind enough to follow the heart of his mothers, and he realized he was absentmindedly doing the symbols for his mother, two fist taps on the heart. A sharp gust of wind jolted the flyer and the child returned to watching Heart-mind. She was finishing the dance, making triumphant movements and standing tall, as compared to the cowering their people did in the beginning. In this she showed the joy at the finding of Oasis, the one place the windriders could stay for multiple nights, for the Wind Goddess had blessed the wind to never change its path there. The child had never seen Oasis and his excitement bubbled with his mothers, and together the family danced the dance of salvation while gazing upon the horizon as Oasis appeared, and the sky filled with fellow windriders.

I feel awful about Pandora. Every single trial she gives her all. Every single time she makes the most beautiful land you've ever seen. Some of the gods just throw away attempts because they need a break. But not Pandora. This attempt though. She went to make her paradise and just. Screamed. She screamed until she lost her voice and collapsed crying. What was left was a desert where the winds never stopped. The winds threatened the rest of the continent and she couldn't control them so she begged Storm to extend his mountain range so that she wouldn't ruin the attempt. He obliged of course, he hates seeing her in pain. They all do. What's worse for her is she tried to spare her people the hardship she created by placing them in Storm's range, but they were drawn home. Now she's done all she could, set them on the path to flight and planted the seeds of a non-verbal language so they can communicate. One good thing can come out of her pain, when the trial comes her Windriders will be able to traverse the continent with ease.

- Ilyos the Observer

Log #405231764/Continent 57023, Attempt 17

Attempt 17:

Region	God/Goddess	Visited
Mountain Kingdom	Storm	x
Desert Kingdom	Pandora	x
Sea Shard	Kreoken	
Jungle Kingdom	Skorri	
River Shard	Kreoken	
Ocean Shard	Kreoken	

Hidden Kingdom	Onyx	
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Poem of the Sea Shard

In the kingdom by the sea
 What was one there are now three
 Oh how happy by the sea
 To not be one but now be three
 When was one the one was sad
 Or perchance the one was mad
 Though now surely one is glad
 That three are now wholely had
 In a boat the three now go
 Off to fish but first must row
 Where're the fish someone must know
 Look a storm oh no oh no
 Back to shore the trip be done
 Back inside now now for fun
 Back to home the three do run
 Back their steps fall dun dun dun
 Now at home the three do play
 Oh be merry and be gay
 Long the night the storm does stay
 Oh to play and play till day
 Day has come and fun must end
 What is waiting round the bend
 Not one of them shall contend
 They wished night would never end
 In the kingdom by the sea
 There are there are no longer three
 Oh how longing by the sea
 To not be one but to be three

I feel bad for this kingdom. They're the only Shard that still live in the original area of Kreoken's Kingdom but they know the least about who they are. This kingdom has been reduced to a village of fishers with legends of their lost companions. Most of the buildings were destroyed, and all the written records were lost in the flood. Few hundred years later, no one truly believes the stories are anything more than that. Stories. They have a poem but since things have gone so bad they take it literally. It's straight from the days following the attack but they think it references friends from the Mountain Nomads. That's too bad.

- Ilyos the Observer

Log #405231765/Continent 57023, Attempt 17

Attempt 17:

Region	God/Goddess	Visited
Mountain Kingdom	Storm	x

Desert Kingdom	Pandora	x
Sea Shard	Kreoken	x
Jungle Kingdom	Skorri	
River Shard	Kreoken	
Ocean Shard	Kreoken	
Hidden Kingdom	Onyx	

Ballad of the Jungle Kingdom

(Call) We walk beneath the giant trees

(Response) With plants and animals by our side

(Call) We dance and play as we please

(Response) All along this life-time ride

(Response) With our friends right alongside

(Call) Our jungle our great relief

(Response) Blessed with green that life provide

(Call) Gave by the goddess of the leaf

....

(Call) The wind did blow a strong breeze

(Response) The plant seed went and did flied

(Call) The gracious goddess heard our pleas

(Response) And made sure we were satisfied

(Response) Thus to her glory we abide

(Call) She ended our most horrid grief

(Response) She made us homes in to reside

(Call) Gave by the goddess of the leaf

....

(Call) Here now we live with chimpanzees

(Response) Our friendship stretches far and wide

(Call) They clean our fur of the fleas

(Response) On each other we have relied

(Response) Against all threats we are allied

(Call) We protect each other from the thief

(Response) We both help so that no young have died

(Call) Gave by the goddess of the leaf

....

(Response) The goddess is our most kind guide

(Response) This paradise she has supplied

(Call) Jungle life brought by water from the reef

(Call) Gave by the goddess of the leaf

Tigers. This time Skorri went with tigers. Let's see, it's been what, 9 attempts since she used the base model? After the sixth failure she started creating bipedal versions of animals in an attempt to give them strengths more suited to their environment. Her first attempt was...interesting. And terrifying. 6 foot tall squirrels are *not* something you expect to wake up

to in the morning. I'm fairly certain she lost her marbles for a bit...if she hasn't completely. If I recall correctly it was the thirteenth attempt that she made bipedal living trees. That. Was not the best decision, especially with them living right next to Tefu's volcano region. I think there's still one running around somewhere. She has a habit of leaving remnants about. Maybe she thinks that they'll teach her people a lesson. Maybe she can't let go.

- Ilyos the Observer

Log #405231764/Continent 57023, Attempt 17

Attempt 17:

Region	God/Goddess	Visited
Mountain Kingdom	Storm	x
Desert Kingdom	Pandora	x
Sea Shard	Kreoken	x
Jungle Kingdom	Skorri	x
River Shard	Kreoken	
Ocean Shard	Kreoken	
Hidden Kingdom	Onyx	

Poem of the River Shard

Here with the waters of the river

The waters run and they do shiver

Here we live with the restless giver

Which all we need it does deliver

River that forever roars

Bridges stretching from the shores

Boating to and from the doors

Receiving what we need from its bountiful stores

Our neighbors live on either side

Tigers who do help provide

Rabid wolves from which we hide

Will they ever be satisfied?

Wolves of dying kingdom hunt

Always looking to confront

Tigers come to take the brunt

Fight they do to protect the runt

Hard our life but this we knew

When from tragedy we flew

That dreaded creature overthrew

Our beloved kingdom of the blue

Someday yes we might return
 To rebuild that shell for this we yearn
 Where are our kin we must learn
 The murky depths we shall churn

Here with the waters of the river
 Here our hope is just a sliver
 Yet still with excitement we do quiver
 That our god shall soon deliver

This is an interesting kingdom. It's the second Shard of the shattered Sea Kingdom, yet completely isolated from their origin. They live right next to Skorri's tigers, and it appears her wolves. Course the wolves knew Skorri as Skorn, the god of marauder's. Skorri was in a...extremely...bad mood last attempt. She, well, it was he then, imbued his people with an intense urge to survive at any cost. To Skorn's credit about half the Wolf Kingdom survived that attempts trial. Though I doubt Skorri's pleased now, as the wolves went feral and raid her current kingdom and now the River Shard. The wolves' greed, their lust for all things is insatiable. That's had a very profound effect on the Jungle people and the River Shard. They both share everything throughout their communities, and the different communities work together as well. Intriguing. Storm was sure to teach his Kingdom a lesson about greed too. (Remember to look back to earlier entry for more details) It seems that they might have a bit of a plan going on. I'll be sure to keep an eye out for more evidence of the gods working together. The River Shard seems focused on waiting. That's got me confused. They tell stories, recite poems, and make plans for going back to their kingdom, but they make no attempts to get through the mountains. Granted, it would be hard, but still. I wonder. Is this related to what I heard about the 'whispering waters'? Hmm.

- Ilyos the Observer

Log #405231767/Continent 57023, Attempt 17

Attempt 17:

Region	God/Goddess	Visited
Mountain Kingdom	Storm	x
Desert Kingdom	Pandora	x
Sea Shard	Kreoken	x
Jungle Kingdom	Skorri	x
River Shard	Kreoken	x
Ocean Shard	Kreoken	
Hidden Kingdom	Onyx	

Poem of the Ocean Shard
 In the kingdom of the ocean

Here we live thanks to the potion
 Which our evolution set in motion
 And so to Kreoken we give our devotion
 Gills and fins now have do we
 Kreoken gave to set us free
 So that we live now in his sea
 In the kingdom of shattered three
 So many lives lost on that day
 When destruction came for the bay
 The sky and sea turned awful gray
 Kreoken fought so that survive we may
 Our precious land from lava flow
 With worms that did dance shine and glow
 Our land of plenty where all did go
 The monster shattered with one blow
 Explore have we down in the sea
 And found a dreadful prophecy
 On stones carved in so carefully
 What it says makes us think to flee
 We live with Kreoken close at hand
 Here beneath what was our land
 Even older artifacts in the sand
 We wonder what the gods now plan
 Our fear and hope clash ever more
 When shall we return to the shore?
 We wish to be together for
 The fight that could end all our lore

The sunken third. I don't know if the creature just got loose or if the ancient ones got impatient, but it wreaked havoc. One of the doomsday leviathans shattered Kreoken's kingdom into three, with some fleeing, some staying, and some surviving unexpectedly. Kreoken is definitely playing fast and loose with the rules. He directly intervened to change their physiology. He's lucky that he tried underwater kingdoms before, otherwise the time it would have taken for him to figure it out would have killed them. I feel even worse for Teftu. The one thing she does to interact with this attempt, destroyed, and the people presumed dead. She made a paradise for them and had to watch it be obliterated. That definitely won't help her mentality. This kingdom interests me greatly. It seems that they have found ruins from the eight attempt. I remember those poor souls. Kreoken abandoned them and was surprisingly cruel, encouraging them to record their destruction.....unless. The eighth kingdom was built on the ruins of the fifth. He did the same to them. Oh my that is clever, very very clever. This kingdom now has access to both sets of ruins...and both sets of records. They know the monsters are coming. They know the struggle they face. It was all planned. Teftu's addition was weak, it lacked a foundation. I wager if I examine the leviathan's cage I would find that Kreoken released it. Clever, clever, clever. If he outright gave his people the records the ancient one's would have wiped this entire attempt, but this is subtle enough to slip under their noses. I was wrong about Teftu. These gods are sneaky for sure.

- Ilyos the Observer

Log #405231768/Continent 57023, Attempt 17

Attempt 17:

Region	God/Goddess	Visited
Mountain Kingdom	Storm	x
Desert Kingdom	Pandora	x
Sea Shard	Kreoken	x
Jungle Kingdom	Skorri	x
River Shard	Kreoken	x
Ocean Shard	Kreoken	x
Hidden Kingdom	Onyx	

I want to do this one differently. I know that the gods are planning something, and that it revolves around teaching their people specific lessons about morals. However, there is much I don't understand. I have one Kingdom yet to observe. The tunnels of the hidden god, Onyx. Onyx likes staying out of sight, their Kingdoms are always burrowed into something, grasslands, hills, in some of Storm's mountains. Once the remaining people on the continent hid in Onyx's burrow completely safe until the ancient ones sent an asteroid and cracked the mountains open for the creature's to attack. I think that was...seven? Eight? I'd have to check the previous logs. Back to the topic at hand. I want to experience this song. The tunnel people have beautiful instruments they make from the animals they herd in from the grasslands. Used some matter to create strings and the echoes from the cave just sound gorgeous. Experiencing the song through the eyes and ears of one of the people will also allow me feel more accurately how the people feel, and give me greater insights to Onyx's mindset. Alright well. Here I go.

I find myself sharing the mind of a young child, I must remember that their wonder and imagination will affect my own feelings. We're walking to the amphitheater at the deepest part of town. This underground civilization is spectacular. The only source of light is glow worms so everything is built with being unable to see in mind. As we continue the child turns their head to look down a tunnel and I catch the glimpse of daylight. I also hear some bleating and mooing, that must be the tunnel to the plains and where they store their sheep. We continue deeper and begin to cross the main living area and I feel the temperature drop and hear a loud continuous roar as we pass the waterfall from the lake above that allows this civilization to thrive. Based on the echoes I can tell that the people have tunneled out far and wide, likely to make more housing. Due to my suspicions about the gods plans I believe this has been influenced by Onyx, as there is already enough housing for his people. Past the waterfall we go, till we are in the silent amphitheater. We are looking out at a bottomless cavern, and once everyone is seated the music starts to be played.

The strings are soft and slow, the voices barely more than whispers. They speak of the cautiousness of the first people, for some fell to their death, and the tributes they devoted to those that lost their life, building this amphitheater in memory. The pace quickens as the musicians play louder, and I find myself lost in the sound. The strings tell a tale of peace and kindness. A short while later the child fidgets bringing me back to the present. I have missed some and now the song speaks of a gift

from the Being of Stone (that will be Onyx) and one simple instruction, build for more. That shakes me out of the my daze. Onyx has specifically told his people to make a stronghold. The lake above is several hundred feet deep, a buffer to slow any meteors down so they might not break the ceiling of this kingdom. Smart thinking. Ah, I've missed the end of the song. Oh well.

Next comes the tribute to the fallen, so a large fire is lit on the edge of the cavern and I can see for the first time. The people of the Hidden Kingdom wear clawed boots and gloves to help them navigate the terrain. Funny. That one looks like a Windrider. And that one looks like a Nomad. Is that...a tiger? Do the Kingdoms have more contact then I realized? I must examine the tunnels. It appears that in this plan Onyx is the backup plan. If the gods' people cannot pass the trial then they will retreat to this stronghold. I don't know if that will work but I look forward to seeing how it pans out.

- Ilyos the Observer

Log #405231769/Continent 57023, Attempt 17

Attempt 17:

Region	God/Goddess	Visited
Mountain Kingdom	Storm	x
Desert Kingdom	Pandora	x
Sea Shard	Kreoken	x
Jungle Kingdom	Skorri	x
River Shard	Kreoken	x
Ocean Shard	Kreoken	x
Hidden Kingdom	Onyx	x

I have made a visit to each of the Kingdoms. I also explored the tunnels and it seems that Oasis, Storm's Mountain, and the jungle all are connected to the Hidden Kingdom. The gods have each influenced their people in some way to make them more capable for working with the other Kingdoms. There is still a decent amount of time before the trial but despite being the Kingdoms somewhat being connected the Ocean Shard is the only one that knows what is coming and they have yet to link up with any other Kingdoms. This is the most interesting attempt I have seen on this continent, though I am not sure if it will change anything. I shall keep observing and make note of any changes that could have major effects on the attempt, but unless anything major happens this is my last log for a few hundred years.

- Ilyos the Observer

Log #405231770/Continent 57023, Attempt 17

Kassidy Smidel

It has been an utter pleasure to work with such a talented and creative writer as Kassidy! All of her work, from her novel, to her short stories, to her essays for class, has been incredibly engaging and well-written. I was always struck by the originality of her pieces, and her prolific writing skills. Her novel already has over one hundred pages! This piece she has chosen for Wordplay had me sitting on the edge of my seat and holding my breath at her masterfully crafted suspense. I have no doubt Kassidy has a bright future in writing!

~Lindsey Bundgaard

I screamed as my body was jolted right, then left. My head pounded and my neck ached with whiplash.

When will it be over?

Suddenly I was upside down, nearly falling on my head. Then, I don't know how, I was righted into a sitting position.

I lurched forward, my body tensing. I latched onto the item nearest me, holding on for dear life. I-

The coaster bobbed forward harshly before stopping abruptly. The others around me moaned and complained at the hard stop.

I released the death grip I had on the safety straps and let out a breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding. I brushed my straight blonde hair from my face.

A deep, masculine laugh invaded my ears. I turned my head toward Jayde. His black waves glinted in the sunlight and brushed his tan forehead. His clear blue eyes smiled down at me when he finished laughing.

I flushed. "What?"

"Come on, it wasn't even that bad," he said.

I gave him an are-you-serious-look. "Pretty sure I have whiplash. Maybe a concussion," I added as we hopped off the cart.

Jayde threw an arm around my shoulder, drawing me close.

"Would ice cream make it better?"

I perked up at that as I wrapped an arm around his waist. "Um, yes."

"But after a scary movie," he prodded.

I pulled back to glare at him. "Uh, yeah, no."

I felt Jayde sigh. "Come on, Missy. You can use me as a your body pillow." He wiggled his brows as he looked down at me. "Like you always do."

I hated scary movies with a passion. Why he was so gung-ho on me watching one with him was a mystery I'd never solve. "Jayde..."

"Missy..." he copied.

"How about we just get an ice cream now, and no scary movie later," I suggested. He seemed to consider it.

"Deal." He flashed his straight white teeth before ushering us toward the soft serve stand.

It still amazed me how a handsome jock like himself had fallen for a small, doe eyed girl like me. My eyes were a plain brown, and my face was littered with freckles. Annoying, right? But I wouldn't complain. I'd had a crush on Jayde since sixth grade, and that dream had finally come true, after six years.

That afternoon, I was called to the bookstore for an emergency shift. My co-worker had went into labor and they needed someone to work until seven. I apologized to Jayde and he dropped me off at home, with a promise that we would be meeting up for a movie tonight. I warned him I wouldn't come if it was scary. He only grinned.

Bugger.

I took over Velma's shift, putting away the rest of the books and checking out customers. When there was a lull in customers, I sat in the rolling chair behind the counter, grabbed a newly returned book, and began to read the remaining hours away.

After two hours, I took a break from the book. I walked the isles of the eight-foot tall bookcases, running my fingers along the spines and humming to myself. After wandering a bit more, I returned to my position behind the counter and called Jayde.

I didn't mind being alone at the bookstore, but since it was a Thursday, I became especially antsy.

Everytime I ended up working, this guy-Ian Hawthorne-would always come in. Always. It didn't matter if I was working my schedule or picking up for someone else. He always showed up.

He was a tall, lean man with auburn hair buzzed close to the head. He was a good two years older than me, and I was pretty sure he didn't go to college. When I first started working here five months ago, I always thought he was a typical regular, being kind to everyone and cracking jokes. That was until Velma told me that he only ever came when I was around.

A few weeks ago, he started to get a little creepy. I nearly kicked him out a few times, when he came behind the counter to talk, and stood a little too close for comfort. I never really had a big issue with him. He just kind of freaked me out. He also liked to stare.

A lot.

I shook Ian from my head, but couldn't get rid of the itchy feeling I had. I called Jayde. "What's up m'lady?"

I smiled, even though he couldn't see me. Jayde, he had this way of bringing a smile to my face all the time. Even when I was mad, he'd crack a joke and boom, I was smiling. My heart thrummed happily. "Nothing. Just waiting for this shift to end. So, what are we watching tonight?"

Something rustle in the background. "I haven't decided yet."

"Nothing scary," I reminded him.

"Come on, Missy. They really aren't bad. It's not like you'll get nightmares," he replied seriously.

I played with a thread on my shorts. "Jayde, I don't know." It couldn't be that bad, could it? He was always watching stuff I wanted to. I could at least *try* to make it through. I sighed. "Fine. But not too scary," I added when he whooped, and I felt my lips twitch.

He laughed. "Alright, alright. See you soon."

I gave a tiny grin. "Bye."

I played with the phone in my hands for who knows how long until the bell above the door chimed. Looking up, I a real smile formed on my face and greeted them. "Hi-"

I froze when a tall, lanky figure sauntered to the counter. Unease rippled through me. Ian had walked in. I normally didn't have an issue with him, but tonight he was totally giving off creepy vibes. Maybe it was because I was alone tonight. But I had been alone before. Well, there had been other customers around. I hadn't felt so off balance then.

I swallowed, but kept the smile. "Hi, Ian. What can I help you with?"

He smiled big as he walked behind the counter, not missing a beat. His eyes sparked as

he locked his gaze with mine. Nervousness accompanied my unease and I shot up out of my chair.

“Missy, why are you working? You weren’t on the schedule for tonight,” he said as he slowed to a stop a foot away from me.

My heart began to gallop nervously. I slowly sidestepped the chair so it separated us. How did he know my schedule? “I’m not,” I said slowly.

He gave me a confused look. “I don’t understand.”

“Uh, Velma is having-she went into labor,” I stuttered.

“Oh. So you’ve been here all alone?” Ian stepped closer to the chair. I stepped back, my waist bumping into the counter.

“Mhm.” I gripped the counter. Ian stared at me, like he was assessing me for something. Reading my soul. I swallowed before repeating kindly, “How do you know my schedule?”

Ian tilted his head and gave me a confused look. “I took it off of your boss’s desk.”

He what? That was absolutely not okay. I felt my pulse in my ears and my hands began to shake. “How? You aren’t allowed in her office.”

He shrugged as if what he did was not a problem. “No one was around. The office was dark. It was just sitting on her desk.”

Unease turned into anger but I pushed it down, taking a deep breath. I latched onto the patience I was known for. I carefully chose my next words. I didn’t know what he was like mad, but I didn’t want to take a chance at him swinging at me. He looked like a puncher. “Ian, that’s not okay. That is private information unless I say it isn’t.”

Ian’s face fell. “I’m sorry,” he said, then repeated himself. He backed several feet away from the chair, fisting his hands in his hair. His eyes glistened with tears.

“Ian.” Now I felt bad for scolding him. I straightened myself and released my grip on the counter behind me, guilt riding me. “I-”

He launched forward, wrapping his arms around me and squeezing me tight. I gasped and tried to push away, but he had my arms pinned between us. “I’m sorry, Missy. I didn’t mean to upset you,” he said sincerely. I stuttered for something to say. I was so not comfortable with this.

“Ian,” I said softly, trying to ease my rising panic. “Please let me go.” When he didn’t move, I said it more sternly. When he still didn’t listen to me, my panic took root. I wiggled around, trying to put space between us. “Ian!” I shouted, now thrashing. “Let-”

“No!” he yelled back, startling me. I stopped struggling surprised at his outburst. My heart beat wildly in my chest.. “Just let me hold you.” He wrapped his arms around me tighter.

My pulse thundered in my ears. As much as I hated to admit, I was afraid of Ian. And I needed a distraction. Fast.

“Ian.” My voice was muffled. “Someone just walked in. I need to help them.” I felt him lift my head. He looked around.

“No one walked in. I would have heard the bell.”

I tried to shake my head. I pushed down the surge of fear. “The back door closed.”

Slowly, reluctantly, Ian released me and my breath left me in a whoosh. I hadn’t realized I was holding my breath. Without looking at him, I snatched my phone and scuttled to the back room that no one had walked into. I felt his eyes on me as I turned the corner.

With shaky fingers, I dialed Jayde. Tears nearly spilled from my eyes when he answered the third ring. “Hey. I think I found a-”

“Jayde?” My voice was a shaky whisper.

There was a pause on his side. “Missy?” His voice took on a worried edge. “What’s going on? Is everything okay?”

“No,” I whispered, glancing behind me. “I’m-” I stopped and ended the phone call when Ian appeared in the doorway.

I turned to face Ian as my phone buzzed in my hand. He glanced down at my hand, then around the empty room. “Hey, Ian,” I replied, my tone surprisingly even. The phone slipped easily into my back pocket, where it continued to buzz.

“Who walked in?” he asked.

“Oh,” I waved him off with a shaky hand. “I must have just heard something.” *Please fall for it.*

He gave me a skeptical look. “Why were you on the phone?”

“I-” what do I say? “I was checking on Velma. It was her husband.”

Ian shook his head and my heart plummeted. “No you weren’t.” He looked at me with his brown eyes, full of hurt. “It was your boss, wasn’t it?”

I almost sighed in relief. He didn’t know I had a boyfriend, and it was best to keep it that way. I’m not sure how he’d deal with it, especially after I’d declined his many attempts at asking me out. “Yeah,” I admitted.

“Did you tell on me?”

I was not expecting him to say that. “What? No. But Ian, you can’t be back here. You don’t work here...” I dared a step toward him and when he didn’t move, I gently placed a hand on his arm and ushered him to the right side of the front desk. I walked around to the other side, to put space between us, but he followed me.

My heart continued to bounce erratically.

This time, I reached behind me for a pair of small scissors I’d seen earlier. I patted the counter until I had them in my hand, which I held behind my back. “Ian...”

“I don’t want there to be trouble between us. I want to be friends. Good friends,” he added. I hope he didn’t mean what I thought he meant. “I want to do things with you. Go out to eat, watch movies, hang out. I want all of that with you, Missy.” My heart sunk. I didn’t want to break his heart, but it seemed I was always doing that to Ian. I would be fine with being friends, but he was too...invasive. Creepy. I opened my mouth to speak, but stopped when Ian stepped toward me. I held out a hand and he stopped.

He looked confused, then hurt, before it finally settled on anger. “Do you not feel the same way?” When I didn’t answer right away, Ian shouted, “Tell me.”

I jumped before answering in a shaky voice. Tears climbed up my throat. “Ian, you are such a great guy. I would love to be friends with you, but just not in that way-”

He released an angry roar before he swept an arm over the front counter, sending papers, pencils, and the keyboard flying.

A strangled scream escaped me.

Ian turned slowly toward me. “Why? What is wrong with me?” He advanced toward me and this time, I pulled the scissors out from behind my back, my hand shaking. He stopped. His gaze dropped to the scissors, then rose to my face.

His features twisted and his face became red with fury. He was shouting now, and I held the scissors with both hands. “Do I need to show you? Prove to you? If I need to force you, I will!” He let out a ragged breath and then he said softer, “Missy I love you-”

The bell above the door jingled. I swung my head toward it and my legs almost buckled with relief.

Jayde stood in the doorway, glancing between us, an almost deadly look on his face.

Him and Ian held eyes as he walked toward me. “Missy? Is he giving you trouble?” Jayde continued to stare at Ian as he easily vaulted himself over the counter and slid down beside me before he reached for the hand with the scissors, lowering it. Jayde stepped in front of me and

guided me behind him with a hand on my hip. He spared me a quick glance, the anger turning to concern for just a moment.

Then I realized I'd never answered him. I choked out, "Yes."

Jayde straightened to his full height. Him and Ian were even in stature, but Jayde was all bulky muscle. He had much broader shoulders than Ian. "I think it's time for you to leave," he said calmly. Jayde stepped toward Ian, and I noticed his hands were balled into fists at his sides.

Ian looked between the two of us, his face falling. "Are you dating him?"

I started to say no, but Jayde cut in. "That is none of your business. You can leave now." Jayde continued to stare at Ian as he slowly walked toward the door in defeat. Ian kept glancing back before he stopped at the door, his hand on the knob. He looked at me.

"I didn't mean to scare you," he said. I said nothing and lowered my gaze to the floor. I could feel his unwelcome stare. Jayde sidestepped and blocked me from his line of sight completely. I heard the bell chime, but didn't move.

Jayde spun around, tugging the scissors out of my hands and placing it on the table before he wrapped his arms around my waist. "Missy, did he hurt you? Touch you?" He just about growled, "I swear to God, if that-"

I shook my head. When I said "No," tears sprung from my eyes. Jayde tucked me against his chest, holding me tight. I sobbed away the fear, tremors coursing through me. I sniffled, and wiped my face. I pulled back to look up at Jayde. "Thank you. For coming. I don't think he would have done anything-"

"I don't care. I'm glad you called. Should we call the police?" he asked.

I shook my head. "No. Just let me call my boss." I dialed her number, and we chatted a little while before she told me I could close up early. Jayde followed me out of the parking lot as I dialed my home phone.

"Hello?" Dad answered. I began to cry all over, telling him what happened. He demanded I come home right away, and I did. After I hung up I called Jayde, telling him movie night was canceled.

It was now October, and I hugged the thin jacket against my chest as I rushed up Jayde's front steps in the dark. He lived basically in the middle of nowhere, with a big yard and an old grey granary that was half rotten. His house was nice-larger than mine.

I let myself in the front door, kicking off my shoes and hanging my coat up. "Jayde?" I called.

Footsteps thundered down the upstairs hall and then he took the steps two at a time, hitting the floor in front of me. He gave me a mischievous, handsome smirk. "Hey, cutie. Ready for a scary movie?"

I couldn't help it-a smile slipped past my lips. "No. Not really."

"Ah, come on. I'll be right there to keep you safe," he assured me, knocking my shoulder with bicep.

I was a good foot shorter than him.

I stared up at his crystal blue eyes, and he leaned down to give me a quick peck on the lips. "Hmm, okay," I found myself replying. He must have some magic in his kisses if I was agreeing that easily. But, I guess if I was wrapped in his strong arms it wouldn't be that bad. I got the shivers just from thinking of it.

Jayde sauntered to the kitchen and opened the fridge. I leaned against the wall and watched him. "Where are your parents?"

"Out for dinner," he said in the fridge.

I made a face he couldn't see. "And they trust you? Well, us?"

He shut the fridge, holding two bottles of water. Shrugging, he said, "Why not? We're adults." His lips twitched as he came to stand right in front of me, his blue eyes taking on a wicked gleam. "Well, I am, anyway."

I gave him the finger.

He laughed, and I smiled before he threw an arm around my shoulder and led us upstairs to the living room.

We settled into the couch, snuggled under a thick blanket. Jayde's parents liked their house cold-like dead-of-winter cold. I pulled the blanket up to my chin while Jayde rested it on his hips. His arm hung around my shoulders and he pulled me into the crook of his arm.

As the opening credits scrolled across the screen, I gave a little whimper.

"Ahh, come on, Missy. It didn't even start. You wuss," he teased.

I shoved him. "Shut up. The music is not helping." I didn't think the movie was that bad. Until some weird devil jumped on the screen.

I shrieked and buried my face under the blanket and into Jayde's chest. His solid mass of muscles moved under my cheek. He was laughing.

"Stop it," I whined. "That was scary." My squeals and Jayde's teasing continued throughout the movie until it was over. I sighed when the credits started. Jayde stretched his arms and draped them over the back of the couch.

"Thank God," I mumbled. I pulled away from Jayde, brushing my hair back and causing the blanket to slip off my shoulders.

"Oh, come on. It wasn't even that bad." Jayde looked down at me.

"No," I agreed. He raised his brows, surprised. The light from the tv flickered over Jayde's face, sharpening his handsome features in the blackened room. "Wanna know why?"

He turned his body toward mine. "Why?" he asked, running his hand up my arm, sending shivers through me.

My voice dropped to a whisper. "Because of you." I watched his gaze drop to my lips. He other hand delved in the hair at the nape of my neck, tipping my head back.

Jayde tipped his chin down, and our mouths met in a soft, gentle touch. I turned so I was fully facing Jayde. I shoved the blanket away, no longer cold, wrapping my arms around his warm neck.

Jayde's hands slipped down my sides and stopped on my hips, where he easily lifted me into his lap so I was straddling him. Our kissed turned more feverish, and my hands skittered down his muscled chest while his held my hips firmly.

Jayde began kissing a hot path along my jaw and down my neck. I slipped my hands under his shirt-

Jayde jumped and his hands wrapped around my wrists, pulling them from his shirt.

"Jesus," he panted. I looked at him with wild eyes. Embarrassment and humiliation bubbled up. Had I done something wrong?

Before I could say anything in response, he spun his fingers around mine and brought our joined hands to his lips. "Your hands are freezing."

I laughed the nerves away. I hadn't done anything wrong. Thank God. "Jeez, for a minute there I thought you were shoving me away," I admitted sheepishly. His lips were warm as they brushed over my knuckles on both hands.

Jayde scoffed and deposited me beside him. "More like the other way around."

I rolled my eyes and stood up, empty water bottle in hand. "I'll get us more water."

"And I'm going to the bathroom." I followed him out of the living room and headed down the stairs while he went up. I threw the bottles away and grabbed two new ones. I closed the door and turned-

The front door was open, storm door shut, but not locked. I swear I locked the storm door behind me when I came in. Jayde always told me to. And I know I closed the front door. I crept toward it. "Jayde? Jayde, is that you? If it is, I swear to God, I'll leave right-"

A shadow moved outside, and then the door was opening.

I screamed.

I ran toward the kitchen, on the other side of the island. The door closed, and a figure pulled his hood off.

Ian stood in my boyfriend's kitchen.

It was the first time in months since I'd seen Ian after the incident in the library. My parents had demanded I get a restraining order against him, and they had made me quit my job at the library immediately afterward. I hadn't seen Ian since then, and the anxiety I had whenever I worked at the library had disappeared. But it was back with a vengeance, now.

"Ian?" I whispered at the same time Jayde came tearing down the steps, yelling my name.

My eyes were glued on Ian. How had he found me? Was he stalking me? Had he forgotten the restraining order?

Ian's head whipped in the direction of Jayde, who stopped on the steps, a mere foot from Ian.

"What. The *hell* are you doing in my house?" Jayde roared.

Ian sneered at him. "What the *hell* are you doing with Missy?" he shot back snidely.

Jayde stepped off the last step, going nose to nose with Ian. His muscles bunched in his back. "That's none of your business. Why are you bothering my girl?"

I gripped the countertop, heart thundering so fast I thought I was going to pass out. I needed to do something, and fast. I-

A phone!

I patted my back pocket-

Crap.

I forgot my phone upstairs. Maybe I could sneak past them...

Suddenly, Jayde moved. He ducked as Ian threw his weight into a punch. Jayde popped up behind him and rushed him into the steps.

"Stop!" I shouted. "Both of you-"

Ian yelled and Jayde moved back from Ian, who was sprawled on the steps. "Get the fuck out-"

Ian whipped something shiny from his pocket, flying toward Jayde. My heart galloped against my ribs.

Ian had pulled a knife on Jayde.

"Ian, no!" I screamed. I rushed forward, but Jayde threw out an arm, not looking at me. He backed away from Ian, his eyes on the knife.

Tears welled up. "Jayde." I spun toward Ian, my patience vanishing. Fury boiled in my veins and my voice became deadly calm. "Stop, Ian! He-"

"Why? Why aren't I enough for you? I should have known he was your boyfriend that day in the library. Why do you love him? Why not me?" Ian interrogated. His eyes pierced mine with anger.

"Ian-"

He shook his head. "If I'm not good enough, then why is he?" He pointed the knife at Jayde.

Dread spilled into my veins, overpowering the anger. "Listen to me-"

Jayde jumped at Ian, and I screamed.

Ian didn't react fast enough. Jayde wrapped a hand around the knife, trying to pry it from Ian's grip. Ian began to yell, wrenching from side to side.

I watched from the island in horror as they fought for authority. They crashed into walls, knocking chairs over and breaking a lamp. I began crying uncontrollably, fear for Jayde eating me alive.

Someone shouted my name. I realized it was Jayde. "Go!" he shouted while he struggled to stay in power. "Missy, run!" I didn't move at first, but then I sprang into action. I turned, unlocking the patio door and ripping it open. The chilly night air rushed over my skin, raising the hairs. I stopped my advance out the door, and turned back to the two, hesitating.

I couldn't just leave Jayde. I *wouldn't*. Where would I go? What would I do? I took a shaky breath and turned back into the house. Jayde and Ian were cursing, grunting, and still thumping into things.

Just as I reached for a knife from the holder, Ian kicked free of Jayde, panting heavily. Jayde spared me a glance just as Ian dove at him, knife pulled back in his arm.

"Jayde!" I watched in horror as Ian landed into Jayde, toppling them both onto the hardwood floor by the bar stools across from me. One of them screamed, and my heart nearly broke. I flew around the side of the counter. *Please not Jayde, please.*

The knife was poised over Jayde's face. His muscles strained as he fought to keep the knife from cutting his skin. Ian snarled, using his weight to try and lower the knife into Jayde's skin.

But Jayde was stronger than Ian. Jayde rolled on top of Ian, still holding the knife. Ian's face was red with fury as they continued to struggle. I looked around the room, trying to find something I could use to stop them. I took a step away-

They were scuffling to their feet, both breathing heavily. Jayde had the knife now, holding the tip toward the ground. "Ian, we don't have to do this. Let's-"

With a roar, Ian lunged toward Jayde, and I cried out, "Ian, no!"

But he didn't listen. Jayde tensed, raising his hands to defend himself, the knife still in his hand. Ian jerked an arm back to place a blow, and I saw Jayde twitch his wrist, plunging the knife into Ian's thigh.

I slapped a hand over my mouth, awe-struck.

With a cry, Ian pulled back, his hands shaking as he stared at the knife, stumbling backward. Time seemed to slow as he looked back up to Jayde, and then down to his leg before he pulled the knife out with a painful shout. Blood trickled down his leg, spilling droplets on the floor.

With the small distraction, Jayde spun toward me, grabbing my arms in a firm, yet gentle grasp. His blue eyes were wild as he latched onto my brown ones. I could see a faint bruise blossoming by his jawline and his eye was darkening. "Missy, you need to get a phone-"

He broke off when I screamed.

Ian rose behind Jayde, the bloodied knife held high. With a split second decision, I used all my weight and pulled Jayde toward me by the fabric of his shirt. His weight lurched me backward, and Jayde grabbed one of my shoulders, then wrapped his other hand around the back of my head, pressing it into his chest.

Jayde let out a shout as I hit the floor, and he landed ontop of me. Somehow, he was able to keep his weight from crushing me. Immediately, he rolled off and stood up. I scuttled backwards out of the way.

Jayde stood between Ian and me. I stared at his back, heart pounding. The grey shirt he wore was stretched, and the fabric on one of his shoulder blades was sliced diagonally, the grey a darker than the rest. I gasped, shoving to my feet.

Ian had swiped Jayde with the knife.

Anger swelled in my chest. Ian had stabbed my baby. My *man*.

Oh *hell* no.

“Ian!” I shrieked his name, enraged. I shoved in front of Jayde protectively. “How dare you. What is wrong with you? Get it through your head; I don’t like you!” I balled my hands into fists as I faced him.

Ian’s face contorted into embarrassment before settling back on pure, black rage. The knife in his hand shook as he raised it, and I took a step back into Jayde, who jerked me behind him once more. “Then I guess you have no use of this life.”

I paled as the meaning of the statement sunk it.

Ian was going to kill me.

He was going to kill us.

“Missy, phone,” Jayde shouted as Ian dove forward. Jayde stumbled from the force and fell back, sliding across the floor as I dashed for the stairs. I picked my knees up-

My right leg straightened and my knee cracked off the edge of the step as I was jerked backward. I cried out as sparks of pain laced up my leg. I flipped around, my back hitting the steps as I looked up at Ian-

Jayde came out of nowhere, tackling Ian to the floor. I scrambled back, sitting on a step and watching in terror as the two exchanged punches. Jayde climbed to his feet and Ian followed, both of their movements clumsy with the exertion of energy. Ian still held the knife, and his pant leg nearly black. The floor was smudged with blood, so much blood.

With a growl, Ian made for Jayde. They both hit the floor again, rolling and punching. Ian stopped on the top, having the upper hand. I started to yell as he raised the knife, but then Jayde bucked, rolling himself on top. They continued to roll back and forth. The knife disappeared from my sight, and my heart dropped in fear when Ian regained the upper hand. I saw them scuffling before they both began to shout, and then stopped.

Stopping shouting, moving, and breathing.

Ian lay a top Jayde, staring down at him with shock. I choked on a sob.

Then Jayde moved, pushing Ian off of him by the shoulders. Ian easily rolled off, and then I saw it. The knife Ian had used to try and stab Jayde with was lodged in Ian’s side. Blood pooled on the floor and Ian moaned in pain, grabbing at the knife. He pulled it out with a yell and it clattered from his fingers. Ian didn’t move, he lay their, eyes closed, fingers twitching.

Jayde was next to me in an instant, wrapping his arms around my waist and hauling me back. “We need to call this in. Now,” he said. “Get your from upstairs.” Jayde shoved me toward the steps, and I stumbled into them.

I stared up at him through my tears, then glanced at Ian. He had flipped onto his stomach, and he was crawling toward the sliding door, grunting in pain. I peered back at Jayde, nodded, and darted up the steps.

My fingers were shaky as I searched for my phone in the dark. I threw the blanket aside, blindly grabbing. I cursed when I found nothing. I ran back, flipped the light switch, and searched for the device. I found it and opened mine with spasming fingers. I dialed 9-1-1.

“9-1-1, what’s your emergency?”

My voice shook as everything came out in a rush. “I-a man just attacked my boyfriend at his house. He was stabbed, and-”

I stopped when I heard glass shattering. My heart kicked my ribs.

“Ma’am? Are you alright?” the man asked calmly on the other end.

“I-” I dropped the phone when I heard another scream. I don’t remember getting down the stairs as fast as I did.

I scanned the main floor, but saw no movement. I darted toward the patio door, but slipped. I hit the floor on my side with a fleshy smack. Warmth liquid coated my hands and the front of my shirt.

I scrambled off the kitchen floor, slipping on blood.

There was so much of it.

I ran out of the back door, where the door had been ripped from its hinges. I scanned the nearly black backyard for the two men.

A darker patch of struggling black caught my eye.

I ran over, watching as Jayde landed a bone breaking blow to Ian's jaw. His head snapped back. Ian stumbled back, his auburn curls sweaty. He spit out a mouthful of blood. His shirt was darkened with blood from where Jayde had stabbed him.

"Stop!" I shouted at the two.

Ian didn't seem to hear me, but Jayde did. He paused, his arm cocked back. He glanced my way, and it cost him.

I screamed. "No!"

Somehow Ian had gotten hold of the knife again. He drove it deep into Jayde's stomach, before pulling it back. My knees buckled in the doorway and I slid down the frame. "Jayde," I whispered. Tears slipped from the corner of my eyes, unnoticed.

Ian turned, his eyes piercing into me. I scampered up, and ran into the kitchen. I grabbed the biggest knife I could find in the block before I pressed myself against the wall by the cabinets. I heard Ian's steps crunch on the grass before they thumped off the tiny deck and crossed the threshold. I held the knife in front of me, my heart beating ninety miles an hour. Ian cautiously entered the house, looking right.

He didn't look at me.

He didn't see me.

I sprung forward with a scream, knife arched toward Ian. He saw me when it was too late.

I plunged the knife deep in his midsection, twisting it before pulling out. Blood spurted from the wound and Ian gasped.

Ever so slowly, he lifted his gaze from the wound to my face. His mouth was open in horror, his eyes wide. Ian stepped back, and it was like his leg gave out. He crumpled onto his knees before thudding onto his injured side.

Ian writhed on the floor, coughing weakly. Blood smeared the floor as he agonizingly pulled himself across the floor with his hands. He grunted in pain, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth.

He tried to pull himself further, but stopped. He slumped on the floor, his head turned to the side. He stopped moving.

After a minute of him not moving, I cautiously stepped forward. I bent at the waist, looking at he alive? Still breathing?

Ian's gaze was infinitely locked on the basement door, lacking their usual life.

Ian was dead.

I stood up, breathing out. I hadn't realized I'd been holding my breath until then. I glanced down, staring at the bloody knife in my hand. I never thought I would be able to kill someone-

Oh my God.

Jayde.

I don't remember dropping the knife, or hearing it clatter next to Ian. All I remember was the porch separating us.

Jayde was slumped next to a tree.

He wasn't moving.

Shouting his name, I was at his side in an instant. I knelt down, fresh tears falling from my eyes. "Jayde," I whimpered. My eyes adjusted to the dark, surveying him. A dark pool sat over his stomach, rivers running over the hand pressed against it.

Suddenly, Jayde coughed.

"Jayde! Jayde, oh my God," I breathed. I grasped his face in my hands, kissing him deeply, like I was starved. He kissed me back just as feverently, his other hand slowly lifting to grip my wrist.

I pulled back when he grunted. "Did, I hurt you?" I cursed then, berating myself for kissing him when he was in urgent need of care. "Dammit, I shouldn't have done that."

Jayde cleared his throat. "Missy," he croaked, and his voice brought another wave of tears to my eyes. "Did you call?"

I shook my head. "Yes. Oh, God. Jayde, I'm so sorry," I choked out. My voice broke on the last word.

Jayde grinned weakly. He started to shrug, but stopped, sighing in pain. "I'll be fine," he told me. His smile faded as his baby blues stared into my brown ones. "You need to call. My back pocket," he said.

I leaned back, keeping one hand on his face. "I don't understand," I said.

"My phone is in my back pocket," he replied. This whole time? Why didn't he just give me his-

He'd been fighting. He wouldn't have been able to give me his phone.

"Jayde, I don't want to hurt-

He gave me a hard look before ordering, "Do it."

We stared at each other while I slowly reached around him. When my hand brushed the side of his hip, I looked down, blushing. Jayde helped me access his phone by leaning to the side with a groan. I slid his phone out and he slumped back, breathing heavily.

"I have it," I stated dumbly. He nodded, indicating that I call.

I stared at Jayde, who had his eyes closed, my thumb brushing blood on his cheek as I talked. The man urged me to stay on the phone, talking until help arrived.

"Is your boyfriend awake?" he asked.

Jayde's eyes were still closed. I patted his cheek gently. "Jayde?" He stirred, opening his eyes.

"I'm here," he replied.

The three of us continued to talk. I relayed messages across the phone to the operator. Sirens blared in the distance, getting louder before lights filled his driveway.

"There here," I breathed with relief. I hung up on the operator. More tears surged my eyes, and a sob escaped. "Jayde, we're okay. You're okay. Everything's okay," I cried, burying my face in his neck. I softly wrapped my arms around his shoulders, afraid to hurt him.

Jayde's hand pressed to my back as he murmured words into my ear that I'd never heard him say before. "I love you."

Collin Newton

Collin was great getting to know throughout the semester and his writing abilities developed significantly. Collin was a friendly face from our first session and was always eager to share his work with me each week. Collin started this class working on a piece that he had developed during his previous English 57' course, but I encouraged Collin to go outside of his comfort zone and try something new. The piece Collin submitted for Wordplay was inspired by the season of Halloween and something that continued past the season because it was something that he really enjoyed writing. Collin's dedication to his writing always impressed me even when he was busy with other school work, he was always willing to further develop his story. It was fun getting to experience Collin's writing style throughout the semester!

~Paige Zeratsky

Prom Night

-with Alex Diaz

Prologue

2015

It was April 18th. The sun beamed beautiful rays of light on the small, bustling town of Wausaukee, WI. The rays of the sun highlighted the bright white interior walls of the bank which was filled to the brim with hard working citizens attempting to cash in their weekly pay. Everyone was too distracted to notice another man enter the bank. He approached the line, emitting a salesman's smile, his eyes determined. The living city of Wausaukee stopped dead when the first gunshot echoed out of the bank. Screams of terror could be heard from the streets as someone shouted inaudibly from within the bank.

"Get on your stomach with your hands on the back of your heads!" He yelled waving his pistol around. The people, in complete shock, cooperated without hesitation. The man slowly searched everyone for anything of value, but progressively became frustrated when no one had anything useful. He began muttering to himself, no one quite able to comprehend him. Greater fear poured upon the victims in the bank, unknowing if they were given another command.

Suddenly, *he stopped.*

He slowly turned his head towards the bank tellers, the salesman's smile returning to his face. He took his first step towards them, lifting his gun, signaling them to meet him at the counter. Once there, he leaned against the edge, his free hand resting with the other subtly pointing the gun in their direction. He began to whisper, loud enough for the bank tellers to hear, but too quiet for anyone else to quite understand. However, everyone there knew what he was saying.

He grabbed one of the bank tellers by the collar, pulling her closer with the barrel of the gun digging into her chest as the others sprinted into the back. He began to talk casually with the hostage, joking. *Laughing.* The bank tellers came rushing back into the main lobby, carrying bags overflowing with money. They stopped in horror when they noticed the walls were no longer white. Their fellow co-worker lying lifeless in front of their feet, the others just the same. The man painted with bright, red blood on the left side of his face, with the salesman's smile, approached the bank tellers taking the bags in one hand, throwing them over his shoulder.

"Thank you for your work; you've done well," he said as he slowly stepped towards the double glass doors. One of the bank tellers, overcoming her fear, pushed the buzzer, alerting local authorities of a crime being committed. The other rushed towards the man. The bank teller couldn't look up fast enough before hearing the body of her co-worker crash to the ground, blood forever staining the carpet. The man with the salesman's smile gone, cocks his head backwards towards the only other living person inside.

“You shouldn’t have done that,” he said as he lifted the gun, pulling the trigger. The body dropped behind the counter as the door closed.

State Trooper, Trevor Casper, was the closest to the scene. He changed his course to head for the small bank. As he neared the location, a report came in of a single black car leaving the parking lot of the scene. Simultaneously, the same car passed him on the road, both of the men trading glances in what seemed to be the acknowledgement of each other’s existence. Immediately, Officer Casper sped up and pulled the e-brake, drifting into a u-turn on the very same street. He slammed his foot on the gas with every ounce of strength he had, the tires squealing, smoking up the street as the cruiser stormed for the criminal’s car. He reached for his radio, keeping one hand on the wheel, speeding straight for the criminal.

“This is Officer Trevor Casper, I am in pursuit of the criminal. I need local authorities to go to the local bank of Wausaukee. I am currently headed straight for South I-41.” Casper reported as he put down his radio and continued his pursuit. The two vehicles weaved around the road, barely avoiding the other cars. The man, now somber and a bit perturbed by the police officer, began to release rounds of ammunition from the barrel of his pistol. The bullets impacted the front bumper of the police cruiser, nearly running it off the road. However, officer Casper, stayed steadfast in his pursuit of the criminal.

“Armed and extremely dangerous,” Casper yelled as he began to lengthen distance between him and the criminal, “I repeat. Armed and extremely dangerous!”

The chase went on for two hours. The man, thinking he had enough time on his hands, took the nearest exit into a town he has never seen. The man held a stone cold expression of no emotion during the entire drive while Casper had a look of pure determination and motivation to arrest the criminal. As the drive continued, clouds began to cover the sky like a thick blanket. The light of the sun slowly faded into a dim darkness as the wind quickly picked up. Casper wasn’t far behind, using his lights and sirens to alert others of his presence and authority, avoiding putting traffic in danger while in pursuit.

The man, at high speeds, drove straight over the street curb, sidewalk, and terrace, into the Pick N Save parking lot, his car bouncing over the rough terrain. Casper was uncertain of the events coming forth, but he was able to keep his feelings under wraps to focus on the task at hand. Casper soon caught up to him in the parking lot. He made a much more civilized approach, entering through a driveway. He arrived near the man’s car and immediately got out of his cruiser with his handgun drawn. For a second, the State Trooper was frozen behind his cruiser, having trouble catching his breath. Casper quickly stood up, lifting his gun in the direction of the man’s car.

“Police! Come out with your hands up!” Casper yelled as he used his left hand to reach for his radio. “This is Officer Trevor Casper with State Patrol, I am in the Pick N Save parking lot in Fond du Lac, WI. I have cornered a bank robber from Wausaukee, WI.” Suddenly a response was heard over the radio.

“The bank robber? You mean murderer?” an Officer responded. Casper instantly froze, glancing down at his radio.

“Murderer? I thought he was just a bank robber?” He muttered to himself as a solid lead bullet flew straight past his face. Casper questioned what had happened as he slowly followed the bullet’s trail. The small hunk of lead left behind a streak of wind that usually wasn’t noticeable to the naked eye. It finally occurred to him that the killer had fired off a gunshot at him, the sound of the shot now echoing through his ears. Casper snapped out of his trance, ducking down behind his Cruiser as two more shots were fired in his direction.

“Backup is on the way, Casper,” a voice stated over the radio. The sirens of his reinforcements could be heard from a few blocks down the street. Casper knew as soon as they would arrive, they would be in direct eye sight of this psychopath. He stood back up, lifting the gun to face the man, and pulled the trigger. The action of the firearm slowly kicked back into Casper’s hands, the muzzle exploding into a fiery blast as the small bullet exited the barrel

traveling across the chilly and dark parking lot. The man fired another shot towards Casper in return as his bullet hit the man's gun. Casper saw the gun jump out of the man's hands and a SWAT vehicle and two other squad cars pulled into the parking lot. Casper signalled the newly arriving Officers towards the murderer, but was distracted for one second too long. As Casper's head faced to his left, a bullet forcefully penetrated his skull, traveling fast enough to exit through the other side. Casper stood for a second, *motionless*. He knew exactly what had happened and realized his final mistake. Light began to engulf his vision as he dropped his 9mm and fell to his knees, dark, red blood seeping onto the concrete parking lot. He then dropped to the ground, twitching as his nerves made one last attempt to stand back up and fight. He was so determined to finish the mission that he wouldn't let go of life. The light at the end of the tunnel finally overshadowed everything else, including what was a pitch black sky.

Then, *there was nothing*.

Five SWAT officers exited their vehicle, as Casper twitched on the ground. One of the Officer's raised his rifle, putting three .223 rounds into the killer's chest. Blood splattered from his back as he stumbled backwards a few steps before dropping to the ground behind his car. The Police exited their squad cars, rushing to Casper's aid, however, it was too late. Blood puddled up around his head as more filled up his mouth, overflowing. One of the Officers radioed for an ambulance, but everyone knew it was too late. The five SWAT members rushed the murderer's car in formation, all with their rifles aimed for the murderer. The SWAT members arrived at the car, expecting to see a body, but in all reality, not seeing anything at all. All that remained was the gun, not even a drop of blood. Police collected the firearm in hopes of getting some fingerprints.

The ambulance arrived and immediately put Casper on a stretcher, covering his body in a plastic sheet. After three hours of investigating, civilians were finally allowed to take their vehicles home. The detectives couldn't find anything that would explain how the murderer got away. It almost seemed as if he wasn't even here. Fond du Lac Police would continue the investigation hoping to get justice for one of their own. The investigation carried on for three years with very few results until a high school prom was held.

Grace Dahl

It has been such a pleasure getting to know Grace throughout the semester in our weekly '57 sessions. Grace's talent as a writer shines so clearly in the diverse stories she creates through her unique and creative imagination. I feel so lucky to have been a part of Grace's writing process and see her characters and storylines blossom. Her themes of morality and humanity are so apparent in her variety of writings. Throughout the semester, we worked on taking a story's shell that was inspired by everyday events and transforming it into an engaging and rich narrative. Through this process, it was a joy to see what writing she would present each week and be a part of its development. Grace's writing ability is something extraordinary and I am excited for others to get a glimpse of just one of her many stories!

~Anja Werner

My name is Jimmy. I awake to sunlight just barely peeking over the horizon. I want to go back to sleep, but the animals need feeding. I crawl out of bed and head out, greeted by the pale blue sky of early morning. Birds flit through the trees on the edges of my vision, but I focus on my tasks. There is something much bigger than a bird in the sky, and looking up I can see the bottom of a plane. I can spot the guns, and even the pilot where he sits in the cockpit. I run to sit on the railroad track, gazing up at the sky. It is flooded with planes, dark against the morning sun. I wonder what they're doing. It could be training, but there's so many! It's probably some sort of game. I watch as small black dots fall from the planes down to the boats in the bay. An explosion of lights line the coast, and black plumes drift up. I sit there, watching in awe. It seems like a very interesting game with all the lights.

My name is Joe Morgan. The day always starts with breakfast; today there's a big pan of scrambled eggs, a bit dry as we scarf them down. Washed down with cold milk, most of us light up our cigarettes before getting to work. The ash hangs heavy on my tongue as we go about the hangar, preparing for the day. There are planes approaching, but much more than we expected for today. They turn up the sea, spraying those on land in a salty mist that clings to our lips. The salt is replaced with smoke that chars my lungs. Bile rises in the back of my throat as I run for cover under an I-beam. My brothers in arms are still out on the tarmac, firing up at the enemy planes. Shame coats my mouth, and I swallow down my fear. There is blood in the air already, the coppery tang nearly making me retch, but I push past it and grab a gun of my own. I will not let this fear control me.

My name is Donald Stratton. Heat flares around me. What is happening? Fire blooms on the ship,, singeing myself and the other five with me. Our skin starts to blister, smoke stinging our eyes as we search for escape. We wave our arms, burns stretching in protest, as we catch the attention of those aboard the USS *Vestal*. A line of rope is thrown over, and we quickly secure it.

I begin to cross, the roughness of the rope digging into my palms, agitating the sears and shooting pain through my core. There is heat below me as the oil burns upon the water. Falling is certain death. I grit my teeth, moving hand over hand, inch by inch. Something stings through my side, most likely a bullet. The rope shifts and sways as we cross, suspended between safety and a sinking ship, as the skin of our hands peels away and the smoke burns through our lungs.

Just a little further. My hands burn on the rope. Just a little further.

My name is Ann Willgrube. I am a nurse aboard the USS *Solace*, stuck in an operating room until we take care of all casualties brought to us. I was awoken this morning and ordered to my station. As soon as I stepped foot outside, the acrid smell of smoke was carried to me on the wind. The USS *Arizona* was burning, the fumes from the oil nauseating me. Now I do my best to save those brought before me. 70% of the young men are severely burned, flesh sizzling and give off such putrid smells in the close quarters. The smell of burning flesh is not something you can ever forget. Antiseptic wafts through the room as we rush around, gathering supplies as chaos reigns outside. Which is worse, the stench of fire under the skin or the tang of bloody iron upon the air?

Our names were Ronald Endicott, Clifford Olds, and Louis Costin. When the USS *West Virginia* keeled over in the water, she created an air pocket. We thought we were lucky to not have perished in the attack. The silence after the explosions told us the attack had ended, but there wasn't much else we could tell. There was only the waves, gently lapping against the ship. We began banging on the hull, hoping someone outside would spread the word that we were down here. Clifford told us about his buddy Jack Miller, who he'd gotten drinks with the night before. Some lady took their picture at the bar. He hoped he'd get to see how it turned out someday. We banged again on the hull. The dark was oppressive, but we managed to find some flashlights. There was even emergency food rations and water for us, along with a clock. We marked the days as they passed, and banged on the hull so people knew we were alive. The air staled as the days wore on, silence creeping in more often. Supplies dwindled. I changed the batteries of the flashlight to keep away the darkness as we talked, trying to keep hope alive through words. We banged on the hull. We were starting to get desperate. Were the guards outside covering their ears or something? Why didn't anyone come? We banged on the hull. The air was too stale. It had been sixteen days since the attack. Tomorrow is Christmas Eve. We banged on the hull.

Martin McCurtis

I have had the pleasure of working with Martin for the past two semesters. During this time, Martin has shown the desire to improve his writing skills and develop his creativity. Among the many strengths of his writing, Martin holds the ability to bring any scene to life with dazzling textual descriptions. His ability to paint verbal pictures, combined with a growing passion for storytelling, makes Martin's writing an entertaining and engaging experience for readers. The following piece exemplifies his talent and passion for his work and I am excited for his continued growth in creative writing.

~Daniel Maatta

Primeval: Rise of The Ancients

The city of Nuvalé was formed during the fall of Egypt. It is home to refugees and travelers alike and is known as one of the last havens in northern Africa. Sitting on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, the city has ready access to resources from the European relief efforts but is also susceptible to hydra attacks. Though unusual, sift walkers creep into the city at night and claim one or two victims before they are found and eliminated. Consequently, the citizens have decided to create a night watch on the eastern wall to combat the creatures. Scha-rei knew of these watches but also knew that she had no other choice but to enter the city. It was no surprise to her that she ended up in a cell rather than in a bed. For a little less than a year, she was stuck in her dreams and trained within her mind, managing to fine tune her psychic abilities. While working for the god Anubis, she was given magical powers that had aided in her duties. When the Great Schism occurred, Scha-rei's powers were altered, becoming dark and twisted. She was able to fire bolts of miasmic power rather than the bolts of energy she had once fired. She was soon able to speak telepathically and often used it as a means of intimidation. Occasionally, she would see a guard and attempt to coerce them into letting her out, but this usually resulted in the guard retreating and running down the hallway in the other direction. Footsteps echoed in the empty hallway and Scha-rei stood, ready to bargain with the incoming guard.

“Your meal is ready.” This voice was different. Scha-rei had become acquainted with a few of the guards who had fought against the sift walkers and were not afraid of her. They were the ones that brought her food and listened to her stories of the Schism.

“Fool! I told you to give it to her without saying anything.” The second voice was feminine and harsher than the first.

“I can't just place it here and leave! We don't even know what she wants. By the way, what would you like, miss? We have salmon or we have chicken.”

“You sheeska! Now we may have to talk to the thing!”

“Will you shut up Talvera! She is not a thing she was a great warrior who fought during the Schism. She deserves our respect more than most of the people in this city. Besides, we came here to help these people, right? Do you think they would leave a monster in the prison? No! They would have killed her.”

“Fine Jakeer. I guess you're right. I'm sorry that I have been so volatile lately. I'm just homesick and I miss running heists. Do you think we could ever return?”

“I'm not sure. Hephaestus told us to redeem ourselves through trial and that's what we're doing.”

Confused, Scha-rei tried to communicate with the voices she heard. "I will have the salmon please." Though telepathic, her words struck the other two hard enough to rile a reaction.

"Who said that? Is this thi- err lady speaking to us? Are you messing with my thoughts again Jakeer!"

"No sheeska! I'm not sure where that came from. She didn't even open her mouth."

Growingly irritated, Scha-rei let out a soft growl. She tried to speak audibly to the two knowing well what their response would be. "I want the salmon." Her sinister voice rung off the molded walls of the cell and vibrated the rusted bars. The scarabs that were feeding off the scraps of food Scha-rei had left for them scurried under the bed. Like a rattlesnake's bite, the words pierced the ears of Talvera and Jakeer, sinking in like venom causing paralysis.

"S-s-she spoke to us."

"Give her the salmon quickly and be careful. We have no idea what this thing is."

Snapping at the now racially fueled words of Jakeer, Scha-rei hissed viciously at the two. "I am a woman! I am not a thing, I am not a sift walker, I am a warrior of Anubis! I will be respected as such and I will be referred to by my name. Which is Scha-rei, thanks for asking!"

"Enough!" A third voice resonated in the vacuous corridor. "That is my sister and she will be treated as a human. You, sister, should learn some manners. You can't just shout at people who are trying to help you!" Looking around, Jakeer and Talvera saw nobody else in the cells. The guards had left for the day and the only creatures in the room with them were the scarabs who had wandered out from their hiding spot and resumed their feast on last night's dinner.

"Who said that? Show yourself!" Talvera, growing anxious, pulled her shock-stick from her waist. Immediately, Jakeer snatched the stick and returned it to its holstered position. A cool breeze rushed through the dilapidated hall. Dust, crumbs, and husks of insects rose to the air and brushed the grey concrete walls. Talvera and Jakeer closed their eyes as the abrasive mixture tore at their skin. Blood running down their faces, the two retreated into the cell with Scha-rei.

"What are you doing!" Scha-rei exclaimed. "You're hurting the two guards Bastet." Talvera and Jakeer recognized the name Bastet from old books they had stolen from a library years ago.

"Your sister's name is Bastet? Was she named after the goddess? I would like to meet this woman if you would allow. There are-"

"Stop it! This woman doesn't wish to be friends with you. She just shouted the fear of Hades into us both!" Talvera harshly scolded Jakeer who ultimately returned to his state of panic. Now hearing the strange footsteps, like a cat's claws slicing into the concrete floor followed by the placement of a foot that sounded human, the two peaked into the hallway. A woman approached them. Her hair was adorned with garnet and sapphire that riddled the abyssal black braids that ran the length of her neck. Her ears were oddly pointed like the elves that they recalled seeing in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, though this woman's were softer and less harsh. She wore odd clothing that seemed to be out of ancient times. But the most peculiar feature was her eyes. When Talvera peered into the eyes of the woman, now only a few feet from her; they glared into her very being. Cat-like in nature but dark and deceptive like daggers, they seemed to slice through the solid demeanor of Talvera. The two backed into the corner of the cell awaiting what they could only imagine was the end.

"Come sister. I have gotten *permission* from the guards to let you out. We must continue our journey to the west." The woman's words were strangely soft and not nearly as demanding as the words that frightened Talvera and Jakeer earlier. "This strange thing will not bother you anymore."

“Who are you calling a thing!” Talvera shouted at the odd woman. Her words no longer had the same tone and rung more mechanically, even metallic. Scha-rei had a confused look on her face.

“What do you mean *thing*? There are two people here Bastet. Where did the other one go? Is this some kind of joke!”

“We are one. Fused together after I had lost my lower half during a heist.” Scha-rei, feeling as though she was being fooled by Jakeer, slowly raised the cloth that covered her eyes. The grim sight of a grey world and standing corpses appeared before her. She realized that the two voices, Talvera and Jakeer, were indeed a single two-headed figure. Rusted cogs and rotting flesh made it clear that the thing was a construct binding two biological creatures together with mechanical parts. Appalled by the sight of Scha-rei's eyes, Talvera and Jakeer retreated briskly. A blank, infinite stare emanated from her grey eyes. A strange reddish-green liquid excreted from her eye sockets and her pupils were massive, dark, and unnatural. This was the first time in years Scha-rei had revealed her eyes to another being. Even Bastet, who was aware of her condition, shuttered at the sight. Anubis had betrayed a loyal follower and left her with this as a parting gift. Unable to see the true form of the creature standing before her, Scha-rei approached cautiously as Jakeer and Talvera backed up at the same pace.

“Please. I won't hurt you. I can't see what you truly are, only the corpse you will become after death. I need to feel your true form to piece together the image in my head.”

Confused by Scha-rei's words the two halted their backstepping and slowly approached the ghoulish being. “Fiend! Is it not enough to frighten us with the eyes of Cerberus? Now you want to rub your skeleton hands on ou-”

“Hush you sheeskah! If she was a servant of Hades, she would not be so slow to steal the life from our body. She isn't even Greek!” Angrily, Jakeer swatted at Talvera's face in a shushing motion and the two closed their eyes as Scha-rei reached out her hands that were now glowing a deep crimson.

“Bastet, please ready to catch these two.” Curiously but without pause the cat-lady proceeded to follow the direction of her sister. Within the first second of Scha-rei placing her hand on Talvera's face, the shocked woman passed out and, following a wimpy grunt, Jakeer followed suit. Their body went limp and Scha-rei's eyes went black. Mumbling in an unknown tongue, Scha-rei began to formulate the true picture of this thing called Talvera and Jakeer. Slouching before her was no longer a rotting corpse with rusted cogs and levers, but a slender being not much shorter than herself. Small chrome plates covered the vents on their arms. A glowing eye shone bright green through the closed eyelid of Talvera, whose right eye appeared to be nothing more than human. Jakeer, or what Scha-rei assumed was the portion of the body that was Jakeer, appeared almost entirely mechanical other than his eyes and upper skull. The half that she inferred was once the body of Talvera was primarily human with no visible mechanical parts. A symbiotic transition between skin and metal marked the point where the two bodies had been fused together. On Jakeer's side was a humanoid body with a mechanical arm that could rival Robocop and a robotic leg that looked like a *Treasure Island* prop.

Waking up from their brief nightmare, Talvera and Jakeer gasped at the once dilapidated figure before them. In its place stood a young woman. Muscular, with a mid-length brunette flow of hair. Scha-rei appeared to the two as human. Her face was gaunt and cold. Her expression still appeared lifeless, but perhaps this was just her typical expression. The eyes that only minutes ago terrified them were now human and a deep shade of green. She was wearing a light suit of armor riddled with ruby and sapphire. A gold trimmed cuirass covered the scalemail that they assumed was formed from alligator hide and golden scarab husks. Talvera

asked, "How long were we asleep? Why did you appear to us so hideous if this is what you really look like?"

"Do not talk about me like a creature! What you are seeing is what I once looked like. I have given you the ability to see me as a human. In return I can now see you two as the figure you truly are. But don't worry, I'm still as 'hideous' as you describe me!" Frightened by the still unhuman tone in Scha-rei's voice the two apologized quickly and took off running down the hallway. "Where are you two going?" Scha-rei yelled but the two had already turned the corner and disappeared. Both pondering how a combined body could move with such grace, Scha-rei and Bastet began to walk toward the end of the hall and quickly collided with a large male donning a dark hooded set of armor with strange steel markings on its pauldrons.

"You there, drauger, have you seen a frail woman holding a black bag run through here?" The man's words were gruff and deep. "I am Thorgaut of Maerin. I'm a pursuer with the order of Valkyries. I'm here under contract of Freya looking for a woman known as Adilga. She is wanted for crimes against the people of Arnarnes."

Scha-rei, again wearing her wrapping over her eyes remained silent. Disgruntled, Bastet replied, "We haven't seen a woman by that description and what is this drauger you speak of?" Bastet had forgotten that she had returned to the form of a cat before she and Scha-rei took pursuit of Talvera and Jakeer. Immediately regretting her choice to speak before changing to her human form, Bastet began to get a crash course lesson on Norse mythology.

"The cat speaks! Ratataskr bless me! I have found your helping servant in this barren land! Cat, what is your name? Why has Ratataskr granted me your aid? I must call upon the tree Yggdrasil and thank the squirrel at once!" Suddenly the large man's eyes began to glow blue; the markings upon his armor, along with the tattoos that ran the entirety of his arms, shone the same tint. In an ethereal, booming voice that blew the scarabs that were climbing into their home on Scha-rei's hip into the air, Thorgaut called to the great tree. "Yggdrasil! Yggdrasil!" The entire room began to spin and the air around the three grew still as they were transported to the great tree. In the sky shone what looked like stars but were indeed planets, the largest of which lit up the purple sky as bright as the Earth's sun. The branches of the tree spanned as far as Bastet could see. Twisted and fighting to reach the top of this strange world, the branches grew before their eyes. Some grew black and fell, while others shone gold and reached further than the eye could see into the purple shroud above. "Ratataskr! I have come to thank you for your blessing of protection." Suddenly a large snake came out of the water that surrounded the tree.

"Thorgaut, why have you brought a drauger and an outsider into the sacred realm!" The large snake, that had no visible end, spoke in a thunderous and sinister voice. "You betray the gods once and are offered redemption only to bring forth disgrace once again!"

Shocked by the snake's response, Thorgaut replied, "Jörmungander, eater of worlds, I have not come to disrespect the life tree. I have come to pay respect to the god Ratataskr. I bring his helper in this cat." Suddenly, Bastet returned to her human form and began to open her mouth to speak, when a flash of lightning crashed in the distance. The lightning continued, following a strange streak in the sky. Out of nowhere, a squirrel ran down the trunk of the tree and stopped in front of the group.

"Jörmungander, leave this place at once! You do not belong in this realm and I will see to Thor that you are detained for your action!" With a piercing hiss, the large serpent swam off into the distance. "Thorgaut, why have you brought this drauger and this strange being into the sacred realm?"

Still shocked by the transformation of Bastet, Thorgaut replied, "I did not know that this cat was a woman. She spoke to me and I assumed that she had been sent by you." Being able to judge Thorgaut's words as truthful, the squirrel's expression changed to a more forgiving look.

“This action can be forgiven then. But why have you brought the drauger? Hel will not be pleased with you abducting her servants.”

Finally, having enough of the drauger speak, Scha-rei yelled, “What is a drauger!” Shocked by the demonic sound in Scha-rei's voice and the very fact that she could speak, Thorgaut and Ratataskr took up arms facing the woman. Swiftly, Scha-rei disarmed Thorgaut by whispering in a foreign tongue, convincing him to drop his weapon. Understanding that this was in fact the work of an Egyptian god, Ratataskr calmed himself and returned to his natural state.

“You three must leave now.” Ratataskr took off in the horizon again while Thorgaut chased to the edge of the shore waving his hands and pleading for the squirrel to tell him what the woman was. Reluctantly, the man chanted in the same manner as before but this time repeating the word Nuvale.

Upon return, the large man stopped glowing. His muscular tone and immense height were all that made him unique once more. He removed his hood to reveal a strong face with a braided beard running to his chest. The bald man had a strange mark on his forehead and another on his neck. Bastet recognized the mark on his forehead as the mark of Tyr, the Norse god of war and justice. The other marking remained mysterious. “You are not a drauger. So, what are you and why did Ratataskr leave when you preformed your magics?”

“I am Scha-rei. I was once a warrior in Egypt. I'm what you may call a spell sword or a warlock. To my people – what is left of my people – I'm a mystic. I was harmed and betrayed by Anubis during the great schism, and I was left with this form as a result.”

“Then you do not serve Hel?”

“No. I'm not even aware of who Hel is.”

“Hel is both a woman and the underworld. She rules over the land of the dead and takes those who falter from the path of honor and justice.”

Suddenly, a loud crash boomed outside. Not wasting any time, the three rushed out of the door of the prison. On the shoreline rose a monstrous creature. Its skin was as black as the night sky, with spines and scales protruding from its massive necks. “Hydra! We are under attack.” The voice seemed to emanate from a nearby watchtower. Thorgaut drew his axes, both of which looked like the weapons of giants.

Thorgaut's eyes began to turn red, “Are you two with me?”

Scha-rei's hands began to glow as they did with Talvera and Jakeer, but this time emitting a consuming black. Bastet drew a spear from her side and entered a cat-like stance. A strange figure came running from a cantina nearby.

“Eat the taco quickly, we don't have all day.” Swatting at Jakeer's face in a shushing motion, Talvera swallowed the rest of the taco she was eating and then drew a strange whip-like weapon that became engulfed in electricity. Jakeer pulled a piece of electronics out of a hatch on his hip and began tinkering with it before looking to Talvera once more. “We should join the prison ladies and that large man from earlier today!” Jakeer pointed at the three that were standing outside of the prison.

Scha-rei let out a demonic howl into the sky and the land around them grew grim and dark. In a more threatening voice than the others had yet heard come out of Scha-rei's mouth, she responded to Thorgaut, “Let's kill a hydra.”

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As Scha-rei lie on the ground bloodied, she asked Thorgaut, who stood next to her wielding one axe and reaching to the ground for what remained of the other, “It is over then? The hydra slain?”

As if expecting her question, Thorgaut answered immediately with a grunt and a reply, “Hmph! If only it were that easy. This hydra will live in the memories of the people who died here today will it not?”

“I suppose. But we have won a great victory for this town and its people may mourn for their loss, but they will always be aware that there are those willing to protect what they love to the end.” Scha-rei, now frustrated with Thorgaut, slowly stood up. Looking at the green liquid running the length of her palm she began to replay the events that had just transpired in her mind.

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“Let’s kill a hydra.” In response to Scha-rei, Thorgaut lurched forward digging his axes into the hydra’s scaled body. The ground that was now eerily glowing a deep green began to crack. A haze of purple-grey mist swirled like a hurricane around several large cracks that continued to widen. Scha-rei completely removed the covering from her face and let out a sharp howl that reminded Jakeer and Talvera of the banshees that they had heard of in folk tales and they promptly recoiled in fear. Out of the cracks rose what appeared to be spears of rock but were darker than the moonless sky and dripped a crimson liquid that could have been the very blood from the hydra itself. Thorgaut, now glowing in the familiar hew that he shone when at the life tree, leaped into the air and tossed his blades into one of the hydra’s heads. Like a comet striking the ground, the force of the impact caused even more cracks to form in the ground. Jakeer and Talvera recovered from their initial shock to find Scha-rei encased in a tomb of black stone. Not holding the same supernatural powers as the other two, Jakeer and Talvera began to sprint at great speeds in the other direction.

Rising from the neck of the head he just crushed, Thorgaut shouted at the two, “Cowards!” Just as he yelled out another head latched onto his right axe and, in one sweeping motion, tossed him into a nearby building. Meanwhile, Scha-rei who had been encased for almost twenty seconds punched through the front of her tomb sending the very shards that encased her into several of the remaining heads of the hydra. With a vicious shriek, the hydra retreated a few feet and the impacted heads began to deteriorate into bone and then dust within a matter of seconds.

“Talvera do you still have the ring?” Jakeer asked frantically.

“Yeah, don’t worry about that! We just need to get to the top of the watch tower.” As they ran at increasingly superhuman speeds toward the tower, bodies of guards were tossed through the air lifeless and mangled. Then they saw another, familiar, body fly into the building next to the tower. Thorgaut stood grabbing his now broken axe from the ground. “You, big man! We need your-,” Jakeer was cut off by Talvera.

“Sheeska! His name is Thorgaut!” Finishing her scolding of Jakeer, Talvera now addressed Thorgaut, “Quickly Thorgaut! We need you to toss us up to the top of that tower.

“So you can escape a fight and hide!”

“No, you dolt! We need to throw this ring onto one of the heads!” In his distress, Jakeer did not think twice before insulting Thorgaut who quickly tossed the two into the wall of the tower before lifting them once more.

“Do what you must and do it quickly.” With that Thorgaut tossed the two up the scale of the tower.

Scha-rei looked around the shoreline for any object that could be used as a weapon when she saw Bastet running towards the creature who was still recovering from the assault that it recently endured. Yelling furiously at Bastet to stop running straight at the beast, Scha-rei began running towards the cat who was now shifting back into a human. The hydra caught a glimpse of Bastet’s spear and swung all three of its tails ferociously in her direction. Bastet gulped and

braced herself for the incoming bash. Talvera and Jakeer witnessed a flying person hit Scha-rei. The person, who they had made out to be Bastet along with Scha-rei, flew into a nearby cliff and did not move.

Thorgaut had made it to the top of the building and was furious when he saw the two staring off in the distance. "I told you to hurry!" Taken by surprise, the melded siblings leaped and spun around making eye contact with an again glowing Thorgaut.

"I-it isn't ready yet. Let me finish putting it together quick." Jakeer responded shakily.

"We do not have time for thi-" Thorgaut was interrupted by a flurry of limbs and hardware. In seconds, the strange ring was fastened into a sort of lasso.

"Do you think you can get this on one of the necks?"

Still in shock by the flutter of movement he just witnessed, Thorgaut replied to Talvera, "By Odin! After witnessing that I guess I better do something to stand you two up, huh." He took the ring and the other two braced themselves on the edge of the window. Thorgaut leaped toward the hydra with a great grunt. Scha-rei still trying to understand what had just happened watched as Thorgaut landed on a head of the hydra and clamped the device around its neck. Suddenly, a bright flash took her by surprise and the hydra was gone.

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"...and he jumped right on top of it and then it made such a loud growl an-"

"You sheeska! Shut up, we have to get out of here. Thorgaut, are the other two ready to go?" Talvera was waiting for Thorgaut's response while simultaneously swatting at Jakeer to keep him quiet.

"I believe the drauger is waking up, but the cat is still unconscious. We may just have to carry her along."

"Why do you keep calling me a drauger?" Scha-rei was slowly getting to her feet and searching for her face covering. "Why are you all acting like we're in some grave danger? We've just slain a hydra. The town should be celebrating us." Meanwhile, about two blocks down the road an angry mob of villagers were approaching. There shouts were audible enough that Bastet, who was still stuck in her comatose state, began to squirm in the beach sand.

"If that is what you think celebrating looks like, I can assure you that that is only correct after three pints. We need to get moving out of the city now or by Odin we will end up in stocks in front of the tavern."

Finding Thorgaut's words hard to comprehend, Scha-rei responded with another question, "Why don't they understand? We did them a great favor and this is how they repay us!" Now focusing her attention on the mob Scha-rei let out some strange exclamation in a cryptic language followed by an English shout that was quickly interrupted, "... You ungrateful, sad, distur-"

"We don't have time for this nonsense, drauger!" Thorgaut grabbed Scha-rei in one arm and threw the unconscious Bastet over his opposite shoulder.

"I guess this is where our journey really begins, huh Talvera?"

"You know what Jakeer? That's the first thing I've heard out of your mouth today that didn't make me want to pull my arm off and hit you with it."

Lindsey Bundgaard

Lindsey has been a prolific writer throughout the semester with a penchant for mastering all things magical and mythical. Her ability to conjure true human emotion, even in god-like figures such as in her submitted story “Almost Spring,” has been proven time and time again and I would consider it to be the greatest of her many strengths as a writer. It has been a great experience working on the many stories she has brought into our sessions; from a father hallucinating his dead daughter to cloned sisters battling it out, each story delivers a new heart-wrenching experience. Knowing Lindsey’s ability to write copious amounts of quality work, I have no doubt she will continue to improve and write even greater stories in her future.

~Dillon Lehrer

Almost Spring

“How long have we been married?” Persephone murmured, as they lay in bed one night. She was tracing idle patterns on the back of her husband’s hand as it rested on her stomach, his arm draped over her side, chest flush with her back.

“Since the beginning of the world,” he answered, his breath tickling her ear and his voice vibrating from his body to hers. It was a question they often asked each other, out of habit, out of love. Always the same answer, too long to know it precisely, long enough to know this was all they needed.

The day had been a hot one, all steam engines and desk lamp lights, and Hades was a furnace of a man, but it was a different heat, and one she could be grateful for. Alone, in the darkness, she could feel the winter settle into her bones, but he was her underground summer.

“You know, you only ever ask me that when it’s almost time for spring,” he chuckled, but his gripped tightened on her stomach.

“I do not,” she playfully protested. A beat. She turned her head back to him. “It’s almost spring?” Her brow was furrowed, mouth slightly agape, but her eyes held the sorrow that no other feature could express. Hades loved all of his wife’s features, her small callused hands, her swinging hips, her expressive lips. But there was nothing like those eyes, not in the whole of creation. He knew exactly what his wife was feeling at any given moment, a window to the soul, as the poets say. He was lost in them for a moment before her question registered.

“It is.”

She sighed heavily, and pulled his arm tighter around her. Six months of every twelve was not enough for the underground queen. Six months in his bed, six months of his lips on hers, six months of work done elbow to elbow. It would never be enough. But thousands of years of strict routine did not invite change, not when lives were on the line. So six months it was, and always would be. Six months of asking each other that question, then six months asking themselves.

“If I ask it to mark the changing of seasons, you only ask it to recover my good graces,” she scoffed, trying to shake the sudden melancholy in the air.

He nipped at her ear. “As if I ever lose them.”

“Oh, lover, you’re no mighty king to me,” she warned, but he could feel the smile on her lips as she turned back to kiss him. She broke away to twist her body to face him, then dove back in.

There were no gods in this room of blues and grays, not tonight. Just two lovers in a bed, holding onto the world like they could keep it from spinning.

Their lips separated, but their foreheads rested against each other, eyes closed in as close to peace as they could manage. It didn’t last.

“Come with me,” she murmured, practically against his lips. “I won’t have to miss you then.”

“Lover, you know I can’t,” he sighed, tired of the ache that question caused. It was so easy. Just go with her topside, there’s nothing in the contract that says he can’t. Not in that contract, at least. There was another, a little less defined, a whole lot older. One that named Hades king, the one that put the scythe in his hand. Life and death were tricky, delicate things, cogs fitted and oiled just so. The machine knew when it wasn’t being watched, breaking as soon as there was no iron hand to hold it in place. Hades and Persephone, they knew their roles, knew their positions at opposite ends of the machine. They knew, but that didn’t make it any easier.

“Worth a try,” she shrugged with a lopsided grin. He couldn’t help returning it.

“Your mother would make me sleep on the porch.”

“Or across the street.”

At this they both laughed, a bright, vibrant sound, two swallows flying up and up and up and disappearing into the ceiling. But then she thought of that street, and that porch, and suddenly felt very lonely.

“Have I ever told you what it’s like, when I first go back?” she asked him, her voice barely above a whisper. He shook his head, his dark eyes serious and apologetic. She rolled onto her back, staring at the ceiling. “Walking through the darkness, I’m still alright, because it’s like you’re there, still holding my hand. But as soon as that sunlight hits me, I’m alone. It’s too bright and too hot all at once, and everything moves too fast. It takes me a week to hear Mama’s loud voice without flinching, two for the sun not to give me migraines that knock me flat on my back.”

They lay there in silence then, Persephone’s gaze on the ceiling, Hades’ gaze on her. His heart was heavy in his chest, trying to drag him through the floor. There were always small quirks she had when she came back to the Underworld, easy habits to gloss over and adjust; she always rose early in the morning and padded around barefoot for the first week or two. He barely even noticed. For that reason, he had always assumed she had a similar experience when she first went topside. So the knowledge that she struggled, that she was actually in pain, cut him deeper than he would ever be able to tell her.

She turned on her side to face him once more. Reaching over, she tucked a strand of dark hair behind his ear, her hand lingering on his face. “I hardly sleep. The bed’s too big without you, and there’s no one to keep me warm those first spring nights. I just lay on the ground, close my eyes, and tell myself I’m closer to you.”

“Persephone,” he said, but his voice trailed off before he could say more. The gentle look in her eyes told him she understood. He struggled when she was away, too. There was no mighty queen to stand by his side, to remind him to sleep and eat and comb his damn hair every once in awhile. There was no just hand to help him make a difficult decision, nor a gentle one to hold his when the day was finally over. His work consumed him, and he let it. Then he would have less time to miss his wife.

“It is not spring yet, lover,” she gently chided, watching him start to spiral. She traced down his jawline with the back of a finger, watching him lean ever so slightly up into it. “We are still together, and the work will not be any more forgiving tomorrow if we spend all night trying to delay the inevitable.”

“Right, as always, my Queen,” he teased with a peck on the lips.

“Indeed, my King,” she hummed into the next kiss.

As if the lovers let sleep take them right then. As if they didn’t whisper to each other about flowers and souls and the smell of the fall. Hours later, though, when they found that silence had more to say than words, they simply settled into each other’s arms and sank.

Kelsey Wilch

The following submission was crafted by a student creator who demonstrated a distinct knack for thematic composition throughout the previous semester. The author showed her creativity by innovating unique methods of brainstorming and adapting them to her already competent eye for detail. The following poem shines brightly with the passion of someone celebrating the lights of this world and challenging the darkness. Be sure to keep an eye out for future creative works from this illuminating writer!

~CJ Dahlman

Ommetaphobia

I once was told that the eyes are the gateways to the soul. That they tell stories of unspoken truths, mysteries untold.

If my eyes could tell a story, I wonder what they would show.

I wonder if people see my heart, the center of my universe, smiling through my eyes. There are some negative thoughts that still will come to mind. My fears, they feed on these negative vibes. Some fears are understood, like the fear of enclosed small spaces or heights. But is it possible to fear the gateway to the soul? This is a story about how something so beautiful can cause anxiety to run through my veins.

It all started back when I was ten. In grade five, we discussed the human body in science class. The lesson of the day was about the basic functions of the human body. First, we started with the skeletal and muscular system. We learned about how our muscles give us the strength to exercise and play. The lesson that fascinated me the most, however, was about the ocular system. Eyes create light images from the outside which pass through the central visual system to land upon the retina. Without eyes, we couldn't see. Without eyes, there would be two gaping holes in our heads. The more I thought about eyes, the more I needed to know about them.

As a kid, I liked to look up fun facts. Facts about celebrities, dancing, music and why the seasons change. But the facts that I was most fascinated with were about eyes. Did you know that your eyes can focus on fifty different objects every second? Eyes are better than a detective for they can distinguish between about ten million colors. Eyes are so complex, that the only organ more complicated is the brain. A fact that stood out to me the most, however, was about how eye movements might give away your next move. This made me wonder if someone would look into my eyes, could they know what I was going to do before I knew it myself?

Fast forward six years later, on my sixteenth birthday. The car of my dreams. I am finally free and in control. That driver license, mine. But what happened to my drivers' photo? Something went wrong, the picture looked dark and dim. You could barely see my eyes, especially behind the glasses that I wore. The glasses provided a bit of a glare you could say. The only bright part of the picture was my eyes. They looked like two balls of light.

As I drove home from the DMV, I wondered why I saw two balls of light. I wondered why my eyes looked so distorted, so unreal. I tried to get the image of myself like that out of my head. I turned on the radio to help calm my nerves. As I sang along to the music, I looked up at the rearview mirror to change lanes. But what I saw was a blink, a flash and CRASH...

I woke up. Glass shattered around me. The street ran red. My car smashed against someone else's car. Wait, is that? It can't be. Someone dead? My mind began to race. I don't remember what happened. My memory of the crash, gone. I pulled my door open, bolted out of the car and ran up to the body on the hard concrete. I yelled, "Sir! Sir! Are you okay?!" Only to hear the steam rushing from the engine of his car. Panic set in and before I knew it, I was running.

In a panic, I ran for help. Not sure who could help, when he was already dead. The image of his body would not escape my mind. I pulled out my phone to dial 911, but there was no service to be found. I stopped in the middle of the road. Shaking in fear. I screamed for help, but only heard the echoes of my cries. I was completely alone. I started to run again, as tears fell from my eyes. I quickly glanced at my phone to see if I had service and there it was again. The two balls of light. My eyes, completely white. As I glared back at my white eyes, my body started to lose control. I couldn't control my movements. That's when I knew something was terribly wrong.

My legs went stiff. Glued to the concrete. My arms felt numb. They reached up towards my hair. My hands grabbed at my scalp as my head jolted back. It felt as though my neck was going to snap. I tried to release my hands from my head, but they wouldn't listen. My mind said one thing, but my movements did another. The pain continued as I screeched at the top of my lungs yelling out for help. When I began my pleas, my left hand grabbed my mouth trying to contain the screams. My body collapsed to the ground all at once. As I laid on the cold concrete, my body began to shake. My movements, not mine. It felt like someone else was in the control room and I was on autopilot unable to take control. I tried to move even just my pinky, but it remained still.

Hours passed as I laid still on the pavement. Each time I tried to talk, my body rejected my words with a fist or slap. It was pointless. I wasn't in control, but I wasn't going to give up just yet. I thought about where I crashed my car and that's when a memory of the accident came back to me. I remembered driving. I remembered looking in my rearview mirror. I remembered the two balls of light. What I didn't remember was my foot pushing to go faster and faster as my arms clung onto the steering wheel refusing to stay in the correct lane. What I didn't remember was driving straight towards ongoing traffic. What I didn't remember was getting into a car crash on purpose. But why would I want to get in a crash on purpose? What if this thing controlling me now was controlling me then?

I became desperate and tried talking to my body. I tried asking why it won't listen to my thoughts. Why I couldn't be in command. But of course, there was no answer. In words at least. Suddenly, my body jolted up from the ground. My hands pushed down on the concrete to help me stand up. My legs began to move back towards the scene of the crime. I knew it was taking me back. Back to where it all started.

Back at the scene of the crash, the road was black. There were no signs of the blood I had seen earlier that same day. The man's car, gone. The dead body that laid cold on the road, disappeared. I didn't understand. Did the crash even happen? I started to doubt my own mind. Maybe this wasn't the scene of the crime. Maybe this wasn't where I had lost control. But it was. As I scanned the scene, I saw it. My car. But it wasn't shattered with steam rushing from the engine. It was parked perfectly off the side of the road. I didn't understand. Where was the blood and the cold body? Where was the broken glass from both vehicles? Whatever this thing was trying to tell me, I didn't understand. As I tried to comprehend why the scene was empty, my body continued to walk. My legs moving at a different command. Where was this thing taking me now?

As I continued to walk against my own will, I tried to talk with whatever was controlling me. I asked where the body and car went. And why was my car spotless as if nothing ever happened? But my body didn't respond. It just kept walking along the road. It felt like I had been walking for hours, when my body finally stopped. It stopped at a gas station off on the side of the road. As I looked through the window, I saw him. The man. The one that was dead! How could this be?! There was his car parked and there he was, alive.

My body took me into the gas station, right up to the undead man. When my body stopped in front of the man, he turned towards me to say hello. He asked if there was something that I needed. What I needed was answers. I asked the man if he had seen me earlier that day in which he replied with a no. He said that he had been working at the gas station for

the past several hours and not a single soul came in, except for me right now. I couldn't believe this. I needed to know more. I tried to ask about the car crash, but my body didn't like me responding to him anymore.

My body took me back outside, by the man's car. The car, which was left with no dents. When I went to grab for the man's car door handle, my hand slapped me across the cheek. It then grabbed my face to force my eyes to gaze back upon the store. Back upon the man. I tried to look away, but this thing wanted me to see that something was different. It was different indeed.

The man in the station was now covered in blood. He looked like he did before when I saw him on the concrete. When I saw him dead. I couldn't believe my eyes. His hand began to reach towards his face as his neck spun towards me. He seemed to be looking right through my soul as he placed his pointer finger over his lips. Then there was a blink, a flash and it was pitch black.

I was lost and couldn't see. There was nothing but a black and dark emptiness. I honestly thought that I may have died. That the man came back as a ghost to seek his revenge for me ending his life. That would have been simpler. If only I was dead, but I was very much alive. My legs began to move, still being controlled against their own will. My hand grabbed for what felt like the door of the gas station. I plead with my body to let me be. To let me be free. For the man, the one that I killed, was somewhere in this store. I trembled in fear as my legs carried me further.

All of sudden, time felt like it stood still. As I stood frozen in the moment, I felt a hand graze upon my face. At first, I thought it was my body communicating with me again, but then I felt my hands dangling against my sides. I screamed when I felt my glasses being pulled off of my face. When I could no longer feel the glasses grazing against my ears, my eyes saw two floating balls of light. But they were not mine. I was not alone and whatever was in here had glowing eyes, just like mine.

"Hello? Is someone there?" I had asked in the murky emptiness that was only filled with the two glowing balls of light. There was no response. I plead over and over again for an answer only to hear the echoes of my questions. I asked one more time, but this time I asked for help from my own body.

When the total darkness became full of color again, what looked back at me was myself. I stood in front of a glass door staring at my own shining eyes. In the window, my reflection began to move while my body remained still. My reflection reached into its pocket to pull out a piece of paper within. My body then motioned for my hand to follow what I had seen my reflection do. It reached into my pocket and I felt it. The piece of paper. I had no idea how it had gotten there. As my body matched up to the reflection I saw, I froze. I was holding the paper getting ready to open what secrets it may hold. But before I opened what could be my answer, my body scanned the scene. It helped me to realize that I was alone. The man, gone. His car, yet again, nowhere to be found. All I had was my thoughts, my eyes, my body, my reflection and the piece of paper I grasped in my hands.

My hands began to uncrumple the paper to see what was inside. There was a message written for only my eyes to see. My eyes that gleamed light when my body took control. Before I read the message, I wondered if I could trust what the message may be. If I could trust my thoughts or my body, which lead me to this location and this note. My body, which killed a man and then dragged me along to see him no longer dead. It was hard to tell what reality was anymore. Us humans believe we are always in control, but what if we are not? As my eyes glanced down at the paper, I finally understood.

It was all an illusion.

Kieran Kelly

Not only had Kieran been an absolute pleasure to work with during her sessions with me, but by her last session, she had shown incredible improvement in her creative writing pursuits.

Kieran's writing has such a unique personality and attention to detail that makes her stories so engaging. Beyond this, Kieran's passion for her writing shone brilliantly through her words and made her such a fun person to work with. Enjoy just a taste of her artistry!

~Theresa Yonash

TBP, (To Be Prophesied)

Andy broke his arm when he was seven years old.

A clean split in the middle of the ulna that happened so suddenly he barely had time to scream.

He had flung himself from the top of the swing's arc and thought for just a moment that he could fly, until he hit the ground flat on his chest. His last breath left a sour taste in his mouth.

A few days later he came home with a red cast, signed lovingly by his mother with hearts and smiley faces. He was the most popular kid in class for a while, and all the boys begged to hear the gory details as much as he wanted to tell them. And when he realized he couldn't play tackle football, the girls instead let him join them in little games of charades or making little houses in the dirt and rocks.

He never told anyone, not even his mom, why he had fallen, or what he had seen.

He liked having a secret, just between him and the woman in the smoke.

--

Grey, Andrew J

**TAKE 2 TABLETS BY MOUTH DAILY, NEXT PRESCRIPTION OR REFILL IS
ALLOWED ON OR AFTER:**

08/12/2006

Qty. = 168 PALIPERIDONE ER 3MG TBCR

WHITE,OBLONG,,,...

- *Prescription information on a pill bottle belonging to Andrew John Grey,
2005*

--

Andy was fifteen years old when he admitted to seeing things.

What he saw was always changing, the most common being the woman in gray.

The most terrifying being the shadows that clung to the corners of his bedroom like spiders. They all had glowing eyes and teeth the size of kitchen knives. They stared at him until he forced himself to close his eyes, and then they were gone.

The strangest being the sand that appeared in places that sand should not be. In his bathroom, or his locker at school, drifting in and spreading across the floor on the wind. But there was no beach or even a sandbox that it could have been dragged in from, and when he looked away and back again, it was gone.

The most annoying being the ones he could never tell from reality. Because more often than not, they were terrifying, panic inducing, the kind that brought Andy to his knees to start screaming or squeeze his head between his hands and hyperventilate to try and make them go away. The kind that embarrassed him.

And again, the woman in gray.

She was always looking on, totally indifferent.

His mother told him, or tried to convince him that it was more than hallucinations. That he was blank and emotionless, that he told her strange things that he couldn't ever remember saying.

He was sixteen when they medicated him.

The woman in gray was always there to watch.

He graduated high school knowing what people thought of him.

Schizo, Psycho.... All of that.

He nearly tripped over his gown when the car barreled through the audience of his peers, fire and blood, smoke and burning plastic. Altogether it wasn't the most violent thing he'd ever seen, and he had to tell his counselor that no, he was fine really, as he stepped from the stage. The blinking really was just a nervous tic, it wasn't anything to worry about, the smoke isn't real.

He took his seat and the guy next to him had blood running from his eyes and a chunk of metal in his chest.

Two years later he would read about a deadly crash in his hometown and see the same guys smiling face looking up at him from the newspaper alongside a few of his old classmates. The woman in gray looked up at him from the corner of his dorm room.

He took a pill.

When he graduated, he moved out of the midwest, done with the rain and snow and humidity. He tried New York, but not the city, then tried New Jersey, and hated every minute. Virginia

came and went and by that time he was pretty much just a drifter, he had a bag, a bank account, and his mother calling him to get him to come home.

The woman in gray met his eyes across the bus terminal.

“I’m gonna try Texas, mom, I think I’ll find something there.”

She chose to believe him, though she’d always worry.

Fort Worth was good to him until it wasn’t, and a town called Odessa earned him some money, enough money that made him think he might actually stay.

Until he had a breakdown in the middle of the day, stocking shelves full of beans and watching the mangled corpses of strangers shamble by. His hallucinations gave him headaches, they twisted his perceptions and stripped him down until there was nothing but panic in his pockets and nothing to pay it back with. His chest hurt, his heart pounded, his fingers curled. He’d hit his head on the tile floor and came back to full awareness sitting in his manager’s office, holding a pack of frozen peas to his forehead.

He was politely asked to leave.

Not fired, because that would be discriminatory, Andy guessed.

But he was referred to a few local doctors.

He quit anyway.

He found Star Canyon completely on accident, just a simple misunderstanding. He’d gotten on the bus in Odessa, had lunch in Comfort, then hitched his way to San Antonio. He thought about maybe stopping Del Rio, buying a bus ticket and taking a nap on the way.

But something woke him up, and he’d gotten off in a haze, sure he’d gotten there quicker than he’d estimated.

What he’d walked into was Star Canyon, a town pretty much on the border and then some more. Like it was spilling into Mexico and the US Government could do nothing to stop it. The streets wandered like they had nowhere to go, and the TexMex culture swirled and pushed together so forcefully until there really was no difference between the two. The nachos he’d bought from a fun little open air restaurant could be taken from the property and walked around like a pet until he’d finished them. He had to resist doubling back to get some more they were so good, real cheese and homemade chips.

The restaurant set the tone for the rest of the town.

Mixed in with all the curio shops and Mom and Pop stores were little visions of modernity; A bank here, an insurance company there, alongside a gas station and a store that sold only clocks.

Back Four Seconds! (Star Canyon's greatest place to have a great time, hands down, never a waste of time!)

The whole city seemed to cough up dust, its apartment buildings had no elevators, its single motel had a calendar from the 90's behind the front desk stuck in March. It had no Circuit City Electronics, and got its news from a few towns over. However, its pristine grocery store: Daltrey's, boasted a varied array of food from everywhere, including Kentucky. Andy familiarized himself with the Job Forms and avoided the snack aisle as best he could.

What Andy thought might have been a bit strange though: the town was impressively lived in, a comfortable and familiar place to retire if you liked the heat, but its patrons were young.

Younger than even Andy would have expected. Groups of girls chatted in the sunny park under dark umbrellas, a young couple in exercise clothes skirted around him on the sidewalk, jogging side by side. And more than that, young or adults just hitting their forties, Andy feared gentrification, but it had never seemed to hit this place.

Two girls about his age in dark clothes leered at him through dark sunglasses as he passed a boutique selling essential oils and herbs. He waved, but turned away, breaking a sweat and deciding that he liked the place.

It was quiet, and that's what he needed, more than anything he wanted to silence the noise.

The woman at the front desk of the motel had been welcoming, but otherwise occupied with the small television hanging from the corner of the lobby playing the Young and the Restless. She had instructed him to let the water in the sink run for just a second before he used it, and, in between bites of a sandwich filled with pickles, told him they had no kitchen and would not give him a continental breakfast like 'those fancy schmancy hotels.' She then tossed him the keys and he did his best to thank her.

His room faced the parking lot, looking out at the waves of heat coming up from the tar and the sun shining intensely off of the few beat up cars that meandered past. The only green Andy could see for blocks were the bushes just under his window, trying their best to stay alive in the desert climate.

Inside, he had a queen sized bed with a green comforter, a small fridge, a desk with a notepad, and a television that didn't show much except the local stations and maybe Nickelodeon. The bathroom wasn't a nightmare, he'd seen worse, but the lady had been right about the sink, which ran brown for a split second when he switched it on.

He found it in himself to not care as best he could and took a long shower, staring blankly at the wall and combing a hand through his hair. It had been getting longer in the last few weeks, and it had turned a dark brassy color after all of his time in the sun. His tattoos had faded, but that was expected, but he felt faded along with them. Haggard and thin, if his mom caught a glimpse at him then she would have locked him in his childhood bedroom and never let him leave again.

He barely met his own eyes in the mirror.

That first two weeks was just for sleep and hoofing it around town for local food and the bare minimum of groceries. The motel's rates were cheap and the staff wasn't committed to making it seem otherwise when faced with just a singular guest, so they talked to him like real people when he was around. Andy liked it that way, and tried to learn their names as best he could without seeing them on a regular basis. The lady at the front desk was called Patti, and when she wasn't watching soaps, she could point out some good local hangouts and recommend some music that was way more punk than Andy would have thought.

Mostly though, it was him alone in his room.

He hurt, everywhere, inside and out. His dreams hurt him when he closed his eyes, and it hurt to open them again. He hurt in private, staring at the TV, and he hurt in public, in the aisles of Daltrey's when he stared at the canned food. It hurt to breathe, it hurt to speak, it hurt look someone in the eye and pretend that he didn't hurt at all. It hurt that he was alone, because loneliness always hurt, but it hurt to be around people and it hurt to laugh and smile and hurt to cry but it hurt that he didn't. Maybe sex would always be sex, because that didn't hurt like everything else, and doing it with some girl he'd met at a bowling alley snack bar felt better than nothing. And consenting to another girl's advances at the local steak house and letting her lead him back to her place even felt good, because sex was supposed to feel good.

The woman in gray kept her distance, barely a dot in his eye, but she was always there.

The night he finally filled in his resume and submitted it to Daltrey's was the night he dreamed he had wings. Russet brown like a hawk's, growing from his shoulder blades and swallowing his arms. His fingers were feathers and his eyes could see clearly for miles. The blue sky never ended, night to day and the break of dawn went on forever.

Below him, the desert stretched on, glittering and beautiful and teeming with unseen life.

He wished he could stay there forever, gliding lazily over the Earth and never touching the ground, until something pierced through his shoulder faster than he could avoid it. Something dark and metal, sharper than a needle and connecting him to the ground with a thick wire. He screeched, desperate to flee himself as blood made his feathers heavy. Another rod shot lightning fast from the ground and through his other wing, pinning him like a butterfly. When he blinked, he was in a cage, his wings gone and replaced with bruised arms bound by a tight metal. Still bleeding, still screaming, the sky a thousand miles away. And in the darkness of the cell, he saw two burning blue eyes staring at him from inside his own head.

When he woke, Andy was sitting up, his back ramrod straight. His eyes stung like they were on fire and he curled into himself, his heart pounding like a drum.

The woman in gray stood at the foot of his bed, and in a moment of weakness he screamed at her: "YOU'RE NOT FUCKING REAL!" He threw his pillow through her, hitting the painting that was hanging from the wall causing it to shake. He buried himself in blankets and didn't sleep the rest of the night.

Daltrey's called him that afternoon; He had an interview.

The interview went like this:

“Have you ever been convicted of a felony or a drug-related charge?”

“No.”

“I would like to offer you a job, right now.”

“Thank you.”

He was awarded a green vest with a name tag and shown a locker in the break room. He started just four days after.

Now he could stare at canned food and get paid to do it with a smile on his face.

He took his medication with a religious devotion, and did not see the woman in gray.

That was 2003.

In January of 2004, Patti pointed him to the cheapest apartment she knew and gave him a good recommendation to the landlord, Lenny Kaye. The room looked just like the motel, but now with a kitchenette tucked into the corner and the option to decorate just how he liked. He'd managed to accumulate property and other things in the past half year, new clothes and books and trinkets. People recognized him when he stopped by, he smiled when he saw them.

He hurt less, but he still hurt.

He still stared at nothing.

And he still panicked at the sight of things that only he could see.

In February, he met Travis.

Travis was not from Texas, he specified somewhere around Vermont and didn't say much else after that. Andy wasn't really the person to pry, so he didn't.

Travis said: “I go by Travie,” So that was what it said on his new nametag. Andy liked it, and he liked Travie, he was easygoing, funny, and he had tattoos. They compared ink the second they met each other, which might have been a stupid thing to do at the time because Andy was on the clock and had no idea who Travie was at the time.

He was a real ‘front of the store’ type guy. Always smiling, a calm demeanor, almost sleepy. But so was the rest of Star Canyon.

Andy worked stock, Travie was at the register, but they ended up getting to know each other more over their lunch breaks and throughout March they had to be real friends. A real yin and yang situation, but it worked completely. Andy liked metal, Travie was more into R&B, but even that worked itself out.

Maybe he had needed something like that, someone more willing to be social and invite him out. Rather than let him be by himself in his dingy little apartment, working out and reading books to pass the time until his next shift.

Star Canyon had long surprised Andy with how much nightlife it had at the ready, or just the fact that it had nightlife at all.

It had several bars, at least two nightclubs, a strip club (which wasn't actually a big surprise), and many of its small restaurants were open until the early hours of the morning.

Star Canyon was actually established officially on paper in the 1950's. It had no high school and any kids born there were bussed over to Eagles Pass, Texas for their education. There was also no police station, and state troopers had a daily route that took them through the center of town and then out, but Star Canyon hadn't seen crime since the nineties when a group of teenagers carried out a rash of petty thefts. If Star Canyon ever had a real emergency, calls to 911 were directed, just like the high schoolers, to Eagles Pass.

The Free Clinic, the Post Office, and the Fire Department were what made Star Canyon incorporated. Never mind the strip joint and Starbucks, but the Mailman was just as high of an authority figure as a state trooper in many of the residences' eyes, and he was a damn fine paramedic.

The library, however small, was connected to the preschool, and its two librarians were both lesbians and ex-lovers, a fact that they were quick to share with anyone who might have phrased a question wrong. Andy had once thought that maybe they hated each other, but they didn't. Even if he was still confused by their near constant ribbing and back-handed compliments. And they weren't truly *that* back-handed if you sat and thought about them for a while.

Within that library, if you could dodge the librarians long enough to actually pick up a book, was a singular account of Star Canyon's brief history.

Which was also the title: *A Singular Account of Star Canyon's Brief History*.

According to the author, (unlisted), Andy noted, Star Canyon was started by a single family: The Carters.

Apparently the father, A.P. Carter, had been so fed up by the (barely there) American government that he'd dreamed of taking his whole family to Mexico and settling in the Coahuila Desert. He'd wanted to set up a farm and create an independent generation.

Well, he only made it so far.

In fact, he had settled his family within a respectable distance of the Coahuila Desert, which stood as a vast emptiness, still open to the Carter Family even if it knew they would never come. Far in the future, though, it seemed Star Canyon was ready and willing to make it there, flirting with the border and drawing the ire of the local Texas government. There were a few places in town that had lines on the ground and up the walls to match where the border was. A few places

were even in Mexico and on the rare days the state troopers swung in that side of town a few of the shops owners would tease him from the other side of the border. Andy had no qualms about crossing but thought the accented, “Bienvenido, amigo!” he got from the bike shop owner was getting annoying. Especially when the accent was a thick Texan and the fact that he used the phrase: “high-falutin” regularly and unironically.

After the Carters settled, their three daughters wrote and sold music to Texas radio stations while more and more families moved closer and closer. Andy wasn't interested in the farms and slow growth, but the more farms that opened and the more businesses that set up close to the Carters property the more likely it was to be recognized as its own community.

Star Canyon had no actual canyon to speak of, and the direct origin of the name was unknown. But there were theories, most of which were ridiculous and included extraterrestrial intervention. They made Andy roll his eyes but he read them anyway, probably out of boredom more than anything. A few other theories though, and they were Andy's favorites, recounted that a few residents of the young community had spiritual encounters. Or they were on a drug high, peyote or another psychedelic. Either way, perfectly rational and no nonsense people told stories about seeing the sky bend and the stars pulse brighter and brighter.

The way it was described led astrophysicists in the future to theorize that they could have seen a rare instance where they were seeing the creation of a black hole light years away; Or an Aurora Borealis had formed that had distorted the sky and the farmers hadn't understood what they were seeing. Psychologists cited hallucinations or hysteria, but there would be no answers, and there probably never would be. The 'Star Canyon' as they had described it had never been seen again. The name stuck with the locals and the surrounding towns until no one could remember what it had been before, and when Star Canyon was incorporated in the 50's, there was no turning back.

Andy liked the idea of a town built on delusions and mass hallucinations. He also liked that local businesses and those same night clubs that Travie liked to invite him to leaned into the gimmick. One of the two clubs was just called: 'Nebula', and was the one Travie had brought him to in that first week of them becoming friends.

Andy could remember the club not being very packed, and not even that busy. Thankfully the dance floor was never a suggestion between the two of them and Andy might have just left if it ever was. There were dancers though, more of Star Canyon's surprisingly young population. Andy had to remember that he was also still technically a part of that group, along with Travie as well now.

They'd had a few drinks, which for Andy meant a few Arnold Palmers, and talked under the music as best they could until they both realized they wouldn't be doing any classic clubbing. Then they left for a late night diner that Andy had suggested to Travie just a week ago for their vegetarian options.

They learned a lot about each other in those few hours picking at their food.

Travie was the first person in town to know about Andy's own troubled past, even if he still kept his hallucinations a secret, there was at least someone around that knew about his meds and his therapy. He was a good listener, better than most in Andy's opinion.

Andy learned that Travie was lost, as he put it: "Just lost, man, in everything, I've been looking for something that's never gonna be found." Travie had told himself that he couldn't stay that way forever and Andy nodded encouragingly.

"Star Canyon is a great place to be found in, I think."

"I like that," Travie smiled, pushing up his glasses, "You've been here longer too, if I could find all the nightclubs in my first week, what are you finding in a year?"

Andy couldn't keep his limited historical knowledge to himself if he tried. He also couldn't help but expose himself as a total dork either. But Travie nodded along excitedly to Andy's theories about the town's name and the ridiculous manifesto of A.P. Carter.

It was that chilly night in February that Star Canyon became his home.

Michael Heer

I looked forward to my sessions with Michael every week, because I knew whatever he brought in was going to be absolutely brilliant. Not only was it some of the most original work I've seen in the Writing Lab or in writing in general, I was struck by just how hilarious it was! His "Fantasy Food" show was a project we worked on over the course of the semester, and it was truly a privilege to watch it grow and evolve, and to watch Michael expand upon this universe and his ideas. I hope you enjoy this initial excerpt of his piece; I know I certainly did!

~Lindsey Bundgaard

Fantasy Food: Inaugural Episode

The screen flickers and then turns on showing a kitchen with a tall woman in a black kimono with a green coat and older woman in a fiery fuchsia blouse standing behind a counter.

"Hi, I'm Minsu," says the tall woman smiling.

"And I'm Mary," says the older woman speaking the Queen's, "and welcome to our show. We hope that this program helps you, the viewer at home, to enjoy the classic, romantic hobby of cooking."

"Of course, due to the Macroverse being readily available for everyone, ingredients from every possibility and fandom are numerous, complicated, paradoxical, and delicious. So we are hoping that we can spearhead your culinary voyage with this show and help you find what type of cooking best suits your lifestyle," Minsu adds smiling.

"Today, on our inaugural episode, we shall begin with a simple Everyberry Tart, to quench the hunger," Mary says.

"Afterwards, we move on to a Golden Apple Salad with a Cinnamon Garnish."

"And for our main course, we enjoy the ever famous Dodo-lacanth-tor- a velociraptor stuffed inside a coelacanth, stuffed inside a dodo. A simple holiday classic."

"Stick around for all these exciting recipes and a special bonus recipe!"

The opening credits begin showing a grandma baking a cake with her grandkids, a chef of a french restaurant frying scallops in hot oil, Mary with a sunhat picking grapes in a vineyard, Minsu cutting up a sushi roll with precision, and a chef stabbing at some tentacles from a pot that are strangling her.

Minsu's and Mary's Home Cooking Restaurant Style Cooking Show

The show returns to the two woman on the kitchen set.

"Hello everyone, my name is Minsu, and I am the American daughter of both Japanese and Korean immigrants, and I am currently the head chef and owner of the highest rated restaurant and consumable distribution center in the Macroverse with the rating of an impossible six Michelin Stars, three Carmichael Crystals, and 31 Globgars. I studied the art of the blade and food under my sensei and become the first person with a double black belt as a sushi samurai. But I wanted to increase my range as a cook, so I got a doctorate in biochemistry from Yale to expand the world of molecular gastronomy. Other fun facts about me is that I am a level 30 Mage, which helps with my cooking, I can speak English, Japanese, Korean and French, and I love flower arranging in my free time."

“And I’m Dame Mary Elizabeth Regan Wainscott-Carmichael III, CEO of Wainscott-Carmichael Motorelectric and Frozen Gourmet Food. I was once the personal chef of all the monarchs of the world 1940 to 1960 before I retired and began my life as a businesswoman with my food critic husband Mister Carmichael. I am the author of over 150 cooking and self-help books, because let’s face it, those are the same thing! But I enjoy the simple life with my four corgis- Rufus, Muffins, Buttons, and Boyle and my husband in our small village in Yorkshire.”

“Mary and I have been friends since I got my double black belt, for about twenty years! Both of us together enjoy gardening, powerlifting, formula one racing, antiques and of course cooking.”

“While I specialize in baking, European and Extraterrestrial dishes, Minsu has excelled at Asian, Hispanic, Magical, Genetically Engineered, and Reality Ending/Existential Horror food. But we both know our way around each other’s kitchens.”

“Well, Mary, and you ready to begin?”

“Certainly. To begin, we shall make the simple Everyberry Tart.”

“It is important that you do not need every berry in order to make this delightful dish, but a good spread goes a long way.”

“Minsu will handle the filling while I begin on the pastry. So, I’ll see you in a bit Minsu.” Minsu walks off screen. “This meal will typically make 144 servings and takes about five to six hours to make but it is a great treat, especially for the grandkids. So, to begin, we shall make a delightful pop pastry. I must clarify that this is not a puff pastry. This one is dangerous. Now, to save time, you could buy the store-bought kind that comes in those blue cylinders. Remember to refrigerate those so they do not explode. Senseless killings, honestly. However, I shall be doing an old homemade family recipe from my grandmum.

“To begin, pour four cups of flour into a large mixing bowl. I like to use the industrial grade genetically modified kind, but make sure to get the asbestos free kind. It can be quite tricky to find, but worth every penny. Afterwards, add half a cup of cornstarch, and a dash of salt-732. This is salt from universe-732A, It has the same properties of salt, but it tastes deliciously sweet, like sugar. Do not use salt-732 from universe-732B. That’s arsenic to us, and it will kill you. I once holidayed in England in universe-732B, although there they called it Barlarland and I couldn’t eat anything because of the salt.

“Grab a spatula and give the powder mixture a stir. Next add 3 cups of whole milk while stirring and then 2 cups of powdered sugar. Keep stirring. You know, I remember making this recipe with my grandmum. My brother, sister, and I would help her in her old cottage and we would mix the dough with our own hands! That was before the rubber spatula was invented, truly the Great Depression. And I always remember her screaming ‘Wash your grubby little hands, you vermin!’. Happy memories. I hope she’s at home watching. Grandmum, this is for you.

“So, that’s pretty well stirred. Now, it’s time to add the edible C4. Four cups of that. Do not make this at home. It’s too difficult. The store bought kind is great, tastes good, and is low in fat. So carefully, and I mean carefully, fold that into the mix. After, a few you can mix normally, the salt-732 neutralizes the explosive properties. Now, if you want to make a savory pop pastry, use an edible nuke instead. It gives the dough a lovely savory taste like mushrooms.

“So, we can take the dough out of the bowl and knead it a bit. Flatten it out a bit and then we add 2 kilograms of margarine on top and wrap the dough around it. I like to use Migraine brand Margarine, available on my website.” Mary smiles directly at the camera. “Why get a headache with all the different types of butter facsimiles? When the answer is Migraine’s.” She

returns to the dough. “There, now wrap in plastic and leave to cool in the fridge for a couple hours. Let’s check in on Minsu and see how the filling is coming along.”

* * * * *

“So, the filling is not so complicated, but you should decide what berries you want to use before beginning. As you can see, I have a good spread and it is important to note that it is always a cup of each type of berry with a few exceptions. Also, we will be using the Kirby 3000 Xtreme food processor to mix up these berries. Let’s begin! Pour a cup of water, and 2 cups of sugar into the food processor. Next, add the berries. It’s that simple! Do make sure to wash them first. As a culinary professional, in my kitchen, I make sure to maintain quarantine under any circumstances relating to foodborne pathogens. To remember, I live by the mantra of ‘In what way is the zombie apocalypse like baking cookies? In both, you have to maintain quarantine’. Salmonella kills, people! Wash your damn hands!

“Anyways, a cup of strawberries, cranberries, mulberries, elderberries, youngerberries, gooseberries, juniper berries, raspberries, blue raspberries, boysenberries, a BlackBerry, 1 banana (that’s scientifically a berry), a tomato, a seedless watermelon with the rinds cut off, a cup of snozzberries, blueberries, blubberries, bloodberries, blubberberries, hubba-hubbaberies, indigoberries, and everyberries. Now, note that every human is allergic to indigoberries. However, thanks to the other berries, the allergen gets canceled out. Also, you could just use 22 cups of everyberries, beautiful rainbow-colored berries that emit light, but they are \$10,000 per berry. The substitute recipe we made, tastes exactly the same and is easier on the pocketbook.

“Alright! Let’s turn on the Kirby 3000 Xtreme. Put the lid on first because I ain’t cleaning that up. Alright?” Minsu turns on the giant food processor causing a deafening noise and the whole set to shake violently. She grabs onto the machine for dear life. After a few moments, she hits the button off.

“Ok! Got everything spinning, spinning, spinning. Spun. Why does that word sound wrong? Can someone stop the world from spinning, please? Every two seconds the floor becomes the ceiling... I think my stomach swallowed my lungs. Everything just feelings wrong! Can someone just... help ... me...”

We seem to be experiencing technical difficulties, we’ll be right back after this important announcement!

Minsu and Mary are sitting on the patio of a cafe sipping coffee. Minsu puts her cup down on the table, ‘you know, a lot of fans ask me; Minsu, what do you like to do in your free time?’ And I always respond, ‘what are you doing in my house, you psycho!? You know I could decapitate you with a butter knife?’. But seriously... my response is having coffee, with old friends.”

“Oh, quite right, Minsu. That fragrant aroma, and good company; those are the best parts of life. And thanks to Vanity Coffee, good flavors, and good company are right around the corner, in your supermarket.”

“Vanity Coffee, is the only coffee brand with actually clouds in the coffee, to give you that warm, nostalgic, dreamlike, feel.”

“Thanks to Vanity Coffee, I’ve ended many bad relationships after an epiphany thanks to that first sip in the morning.”

“You and me both, Mare. So whether you’re dressed in the color apricot, having a party on a yacht, at the horse races, or watching the solar eclipse; Vanity Coffee is the choice for you.”

“And don’t forget to try some of the other flavors such as sunshine in apple cider, stars in hot chocolate, and the moon in tea. Pick it up and try it today. It may just help you leave that special someone.”

Vanity Coffee. This coffee is not about you.

“Alright! We’re back... from the hospital,” Minsu began, “my diaphragm collapsed, and I just hate it when that happens. Third time this month. Anyways, the berries are all mixed up! Look at that beautiful cyan color. That’s the indigoberries. Oh, and here’s Mary to help us finish the bake.”

“Welcome back, Minsu. How was the ER?”

“Oh, same old, same old. Saw Carol.”

“Oh, how nice, she helped with my third stomach transplant. Viewers at home never eat a revenant pepper without any milk. Almost lost the whole digestive system that day and I got sepsis.”

“Yes, I remember your Mother's Day luncheon, Mary. But we are almost done. How’s the dough?”

“I got it out of the fridge and I’ve been folding it to get those distinct layers we love.”

“Good. Good to also see you got all your fingers still. They didn’t get blown off. Alright, when you’re done, roll the dough out and cut it into 7 by 7 cm squares. And pour about 2 tablespoons of the filling into the center of the square. Then top it off with another square and crimp those sides together with a fork. Also, and this is seriously important, take a knife and cut three diagonal cuts along the pastry so they don’t explode.”

“Now to be safe you can do four cuts, right Minsu? But not five. Ever. Indigoberries react to salt-732 and can cause a change reaction if this is not done properly.”

“You can place your finished ones on a tray and put in the oven for 12 minutes at 450 K. Let cool a bit and then enjoy!”

Twelve Minutes Later

“Oh, these look so scrummy. I like to eat mine with a little dab of whipped cream or creme fraiche. But there we have it Minsu, beautiful Everyberry Tarts. Nice crispy pop pastry with that azure filling. Oh, and it truly taste like every berry. Delicious.”

“And it’s healthy, too!” Minsu and Mary smile at the camera after taking a bite out of their tarts before the screen fades to black.

Minsu’s and Mary’s Home Cooking Restaurant Style Cooking Show

“Well, those tarts were quite delightful,” Mary begins, “but I think it is time we try something a bit healthier.”

“Couldn’t agree with you more, Mary,” Minsu says, “Next, we are making Golden Apple Salad with a Cinnamon Garnish. A lot simpler than our last meal. And with the chance of making you immortal or restoring your life meter. Now, you can use either the Norse or the Greek variety of golden apples or you can craft your own with 8 gold ingots and an apple. But you need at least five. Also, do not use any Forbidden Fruit. Check that hubris at the door, honey, because we are not getting any deities angry when we cook.”

“We will be using the Greek variety of the Hesperides. I had a falling out with Idun the last time I made this recipe. That’s what Minsu means by hubris. Anyways, Heracles was able to procure an excellent batch of five delicious apples for us today,” Mary says.

“That was nice of him. How do you know him, Mary?”

“Oh, well. He’s an old flame of mind. Father of my first three kids. All warriors now.”

“Wait, what?”

“So, we should begin by chopping up the apples. Minsu, don’t look so surprised. The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. That’s how I got Kennedy, too. But you wouldn’t know, would you? Always focused on your work.”

“I’m a quadrillionaire, Mary.”

“Another way of saying you’re lonely.”

“You’re right! It’s time to cut up the apples. Solid golden apples are a bit tricky. So, I like to use my diamond-infused tungsten chef’s knife. Don’t worry about peeling the skin. It tastes just as good with it on. Also, make sure the cutting board you use is also diamond infused, you don’t want to mess up a normal cutting board. Laser cutting can also work but make sure not to burn the apples.”

“Get on with it. You’re boring our viewers, dear.” Minsu takes an apple and slices it perfectly in half and then rapidly chops the apple in cubes.

“Some people don’t know this, but you can eat the whole apple, stem and all. And I just love, cutting vegetables in the kitchen. It’s quite a stress reliever, when you just want to stab someone... or rather, something. Ignorant people who don’t know your life. Your boyfriend who left you... who never loved you...who cheated... alright the apples, are all done!”

“Great job, Minsu. We can talk more later... now let’s make the garnish! So, put the apple slices in a large bowl. Add at least three cups of whipped cream, and a tablespoon of cinnamon. A pinch of sugar. And then I like to add walnuts.” Mary pulls out a bag of walnuts still in their shells. “You could also add grapes or pecans if you’d like. Now, I like to unshell my own nuts because they taste that much fresher.” Mary grabs three in her hand and squeezes them cracking their shells. “There, fresh walnuts. After that, chop them up a bit with a knife. The smaller the better. Now, if you can’t crack them in your hands. Get to the gym. Like seriously, do you even lift, bro?”

“I like to pretend they’re my ex’s head,” Minsu says grabbing five and cracking them, “or my co-star.” She then quickly chops up the edible insides and adds them to the bowl.

“Right. Let’s put down that knife, dear. Good, thank you. I told you; we’ll have coffee and talk about it. Alright, now give the bowl a little stir. Mix up the ingredients and there! You have it! A refreshing afternoon treat.”

“You’re right, Mary. It’s very good. So damn healthy, it will make you invincible for a couple hours.”

“When we come back, a feast to surprise everyone.”

We’ll be back after this message!



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the Tutoring-Learning Center of
the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Fall 2019