



WORD PLAY

Writing the
New Normal

ENGLISH '57 SERIES

SPRING 2020

“The idea is to write it so that people hear it and it slides through the brain and goes straight to the heart.”

~Maya Angelou

Life now does not look the same way it did a year ago, or even a few months ago. It will likely not look like that for a good deal of time. Nevertheless, the world turns and life continues. Geese fly. Flowers grow. Writers write.

In difficult times, many people turn to art for solace, whether this means music, painting, film, or writing. A book or a poem can be a source of comfort, of familiarity, and offers hope in dark and scary circumstances. It truly shows how invaluable these art forms are to society; when science cannot provide answers or consolation, the humanities can.

The works of prose and poetry in this anthology provide hope for the future. Their authors and poets fought through the stress, confusion, and fear of our current times to create these pieces and share them with others. This is no small feat. While the world seems to be falling apart, these individuals kept creating. They took their hope, their fear, their knowledge, their experience, and made something entirely new. We must continue to create and share, for that is where our humanity is found. I am encouraged and inspired by what I find in these pages, and I hope you will be too.

Acknowledgments

First, to the authors and poets of the anthology: thank you for sharing your humanity. 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 our new TLC desk receptionist, Lorna Jentz, who has been a wonderful addition to our Writing Lab family. And of course, my last thank you goes to the indomitable woman who makes all of this possible, our Writing Lab Coordinator, Emily Wisinski. There are not enough words to express how wonderful she is as a boss and instructor. 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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Contents

Poetry:

Rei Goehrs	1
Holly White	4
Akilha Venzant	5
Megan Leick	6
Erin Foth	8
Viviane Adjadji	11
Mai Yang	12
Pachia Moua	15
Palang Barrow	18
Savannah Seefeldt	20
Makayla DeGrave	21
Sydney Tolppi	23
Emma Kane	25
Murron Roff	27
Heaven Bento	29
Moriah Prichard	31
Shelby Ballweg	35

Prose:

Jaime Logue	37
Jordan Hansen	43
Nichole Hougard	50
Aubrey Peters	52
Pachia Moua	53
Hannah Behling	54
Shannon Lagore	55
Hayley Williams	60
Kyann Herzog	64
Jacob Shocinski	66
Kieran Kelly	67
Brianna Stumpner	75
Abbi Wasielewski	79
Jadzia Harrell	83
Diana Heineck	85
Michael Heer	87

Poetry:

Rei Goehrs

I had a great time getting to know Rei this semester, learning about what inspires her writing, and discovering how much we had in common! She started out strong right away in our sessions and brought in a new poem almost every week. I was always excited to see what she had brought for the day! Rei has a unique personal style of poetry and she uses that style to convey a message to her readers. In our sessions we worked a lot on word choice, rhyming schemes, and working through new ideas she had. I witnessed her passion for writing and the passion she had for the subjects she wrote about. She used personal experience for most of her pieces and you can really feel the emotion she felt when she was writing them. I can tell Rei has grown a lot in her writing skills and I hope that she continues writing poetry in the future.

~Kassidy Spees

Sensory overload

The speeding cars
The blasting telly
The loudest bars
Turning my eardrums to jelly

I just want to read
Alone in my bed
It all gains speed
Taking over my head

The speeding headlights
The signals flashing
Too many bright sights
Too many sounds clashing

I can't hit any mute
It's way too bright
The sounds too brute
In my head they fight

Every footstep, every radio
Every engine, every conversation
Every crinkle, every show
Every pain causing damnation

I hear it all, all at once
Everything at Max volume
Every sound in abundance
I just want to go to my room

Away from people, away from noise
Away from sounds, away from lights
To a place without any voice
And everything is alright

I want to stay all alone
Alone in a dimly lit room
Solitude has a gentle tone
Solitude has no doom

Insomnia's Memory

Sometimes I lay in wonder
There's much I've long forgotten
Happiness and memories asunder
So many battles I've fought in

What of the memories of curiosity and joy?
If I find the cure, will they resurface?
Could they have been destroyed?
Will the cure even have a purpose?

Will the memories of joy return?
Or will I remain in the dark?
Has my happiness come to burn?
Or has it yet to spark?

I can recall trails of blood
The bruises and the crying
The worst ones have come to flood
If only they were the ones dying

Will I recall a smile or a laugh?
Or are those memories gone forever?
Will one recall on my behalf?
Or will I have my delight never?

Only time can tell this answer
Can the cure and its aftermath be embraced?
Or will it yet be a cancer?
What's been scarred, and what's been erased?

Snow and Cat

The snow was falling
I'd received a letter
I'd thought I'd found my calling
I should have known better

The moon lit the faded sky
The snow shimmered in the light
And I began to cry
I no longer had any fight

Images raced through my head
Dangling from the rooftop
Saffron and meadowsweet on the bed
Michaelmas-daisy to drop

"My best days are past"
"Uselessness" and "goodbye"
Those messages left to last
In the flowers that cry why

Then in the shadow, two eyes appear
A figure lays at the door
To me he is dear
He came in this war

He stood guard in my room
As if to keep something away
Suddenly I didn't feel doom
And I saw the next day

He purred and lay beside
In me something revives
I began to feel relief inside
He gave me one of his lives

Holly White

While we have all been met with changes and challenges this semester, Holly has not missed a beat in her dedication to her writing and storytelling. As you can see in the fantastic poem "Soy Mariposa," Holly wrote detailed, interesting, dramatic, and unique writing each week. Whether that be a poem about a butterfly, a short story about a Russian woman, or academic paper about a novel, I was very fortunate to have seen the diverse themes and storylines that Holly has created on a weekly basis. I have no doubt that she will continue to develop her unique literary voice in the future.

~Klaire Brault

Soy Mariposa

I am born fat and hungry
 I crawl around growing bigger
 Unaware of dangers, I live in bliss
 Then a time comes, and I change

I shed my old life and begin anew
 I struggle fluttering in the wind
 I soar to new heights
 The world is much bigger from here and scarier
 Something whispers to me in the wind "Fly South"

I listen and flutter with grace for miles and miles
 I have made friends on my journey
 I wander aimlessly for some time until I feel homesick
 We all flutter separate paths, home, together.

Akilha Venzant

It has been such a joy to work with Akilha this semester. Beginning with our first session, I have been impressed with how focused Akilha is to improve her writing and how much thought she puts into even the shortest poems. Throughout the semester Akilha and I worked on various pieces of writing in genres ranging from poetry, to resumes, to play scripts. I think the piece of poetry which Akilha has selected for publication does a great job at displaying her ability to make every word in a piece of writing hold an important meaning. I am honored to have worked with her for this past semester.

~Sierra Maatta

Letter to an Activist

Oh, you sweet activist with your kind, kind heart.
 Standing up for me when my days are dark.
 Hearing gun sounds, tripping through the night
 My dreams I see me crawling
 The space is so, so tight.
 Thank you, sweet activist, for standing up for me
 I bless the lord everyday mostly on bended knee.

Yes, my dear activist I hear you on the news.
 "Dejar ir a mis personas." I cry for us too!
 Yes, my dear activist mi mama is crying
 Yes, my dear activist for my papa he is dying!
 Oh yes, my sweet activist. Tell them what they are doing!
 Sending us home where everything is doming!
 I have no security; I have no bed.
 I want to come to America where everything is said!

You are my voice dear activist.
 The voice of us all
 The voice that can help us leave here once and for all!
 Please keep speaking out for us sweet activist
 You are our only hope
 The hope of the people who hung by string ropes.
 We hear you dear activist
 Loud and very clear.
 Let's get it through their heads!
 "Bring my people here!"

Megan Leick

Megan is one of the best poets I've had the pleasure to interact with during my tenure at the Writing Lab. Every week, she produced descriptive, thought-provoking, and inspiring works that were a joy to read and discuss. Megan's poetry embodies to true sense of poetry as an art form by taking the reader into the piece and inviting them on a journey between the lines. Each one of her poems holds a special place in her heart; below are a few of her very best. As you ponder the following words, allow yourself to be transported into the poem so that you can experience the same senses that we have. Never stop penning poetry, Megan!

~Noah Langenfeld

tar bubbles from the blacktop,
 sizing up worn-down soles -
 sticking and slurping,
 bus stop blues.
 lips
 blowing cigarette
 smoke (he probably needs),
 eyes to the floor
 to the floor
 the floor
 floor of the bus.
 blown up knuckles
 have a stern talk with the seat,
 during bumps and
 turns and
 stops.
 step off,
 step careful,
 set time aside to
 suspiciously elude
 cracks in the concrete...
 dirty weeds dominating there.
POP,
 monday's
 sale beer, a cough,
 grey bubbles settle
 in their host: seven more,
 seven thousand more
 bubbles.
 dirtied
 fingernails
 drag jerky and blind
 down the dim-lit hallway,
 delivering him to
 a bed.

// laborious + lonely, a man from the city //

a pair of peppermint lungs
cracked open - crackling
flames taking it out on
obituaries,
testimonies...
unbutton that jacket of ribs,
pull apart muscles
who exist to keep the bones from
bursting open
and exposing the lungs shivering
beneath.
bribe the body
to lay down
(in a parasympathetic way)
in front of the flames,
to unpack
bags inside
bags under eyes.
looking unfamiliar,
blue
 bluer
 bluest...
what has the cold done with the people?

// perpetual chill //

i'm in the place i have
been to the most -
but with you here,
it's a shade more yellow,
a size thicker,
trees stand on their heads
for fun
and animals slink near
our side:
anomalous
alive...
not a change of scenery
but fresh eyes to see it with.

i could get used to this
rosy retina life

// you open my eyes //

Erin Foth

It has been a pleasure both getting to know Erin and having the opportunity to work together on fine tuning some already excellent pieces of poetry. Much of Erin's poetry has important themes pertaining to the struggles of people suffering from depression and other forms of mental illness. Consequently, Erin's work is often deeply poignant and frequently wonderfully well put. One element we discussed over the course of the term was specificity in the language of the poems which could help enhance the reader's understanding of what was being described in the writing. *Love* exemplifies this concept and is among my favorite works of Erin's from our time working together. I enjoyed *Silence* even more and it was in part a product of sessions in which we talked about playing with formatting in order to enhance the meaning of the piece beyond word choices. The direction Erin chose to take this suggestion resulted in what I feel to be an excellent demonstration of poetic creativity. Overall, I have been deeply impressed by Erin's work and am hopeful that what has been submitted to Wordplay will be some of the earlier published work in a long career.

~Henry Bleifuss

Love

What is love?
 We use that word so often.
 I love this, I love that.
 But what is love?
 Is it the thing we adore?
 Is it the thing we treasure the most?
 What do we consider is love?

Love is powerful,
 Yet we use that word too much,
 It loses its power.
 It is a word we can use to heal,
 To feel important,
 To feel we belong somewhere.

Why do we overuse the word?
 Can't we use other words to describe things?
 I don't want to lose the meaning.
 When I say I love you,
 I want it to be strong and meaningful,
 Not as if I am just saying them because I can.

Love,
 You tender and beautiful being.
 My heart dances in sync with you.
 Your warmth heals wounds.
 Your beauty and true form is more powerful than people know.
 I hate that you have been lowered.
 You have been used so much,
 That your own meaning is destroyed.

Love,
You are my lover.
I hold you in my arms,
Knowing that you are perfect.
You are strong.
You are beautiful.
You are greater than how people use you.
I wish they could understand that you are worth so much.
There are other ways to describe their feelings,
Other than using you.
I admire people.
I enjoy movies.
I fascinate over books,
But love.
You are my love.
The sunshine that you bring,
Gives me peace.
You bring passion into my life.
You are what I fight for.

When I am in love,
I pour my being into it.
It isn't something I just take for granted.
Love is precious.
Love is more valuable than any material thing.
It isn't something you can hold in your hands,
But I can feel it when I hold onto your hand.
I can feel love when I rest my head on your chest.
When I hear your heartbeat,
That is love.
That synchronized beating of our hearts is love.

But love does not need to be romantic,
I can be between a parent and child,
Taking care of each other through their life.
It can be between friends,
The friendship that holds for years.
It can be between you and a higher power,
That eternal love that we wish to have.
Love comes in many forms.

Love is important.
Love is strong.
Love is healing.
Let's use the word only when we mean it.
Keep the strength in the word.
Love is love.
And I want love to stay.
I will use it only when I feel it.

Silence

Sometimes words are challenging.
 Trying to find the right words to say,
 Trying to express my thoughts and emotions.

Sometimes I feel as if I am drowning in words.
 What are the right words to say?
 I am not sure.
 I either speak too much or not at all.
 There is no balance.

I get too **passionate**,
 I will babble on for hours,
Like is why is the world the way it is? Are we able to ever focus and understand the world? Why are there so many things that I want to understand but can't? I mean there is a lot that i can learn but am I going to be able to learn all of...
 I am babbling aren't i.

If I have so much to say but *afraid to speak*

I will stay silent

Not letting a word slip through my lips.

Sometimes silence is better than words.

The words float
 In head.
 my
 I want to say the right words. (correct, meaningful, exact, proper)
 I want to make sure that they are right.
 I don't want to stutter or repeat myself.

I don't want to hurt others.
 I don't want to hurt others.
I don't want to hurt others.
I-i d-don't w-w-want t-t-t-to h-h-hurt m-m-myself.

S-s-so I'll stay quiet.

I'll speak

When I am ready.

Viviane Adjadji

I always looked forward to my sessions with Viviane because of her enthusiasm for her work. During this semester Viviane constantly sought to improve her poetry and was consistently stepping out of her comfort zone. I enjoyed getting to know Viviane through her writing and our sessions together. The poem Viviane submitted to Wordplay is one of the first poems we worked on together during our sessions. I am happy I had the opportunity to work with Viviane on personalizing her poetry throughout this semester, then seeing her revise one of her first poems to get the final product "Internal Friend". I have enjoyed reading Viviane's work and seeing her grow this semester. I know she will continue to flourish in both her personal and professional writing endeavors.

~Taryn Wield

Internal Friendship

Remember when I first met you
 You suddenly came
 Out of the blue
 I let you in
 Without realizing
 Your aim was to destroy me
 Little by little the brighter side of my life became unknown to me
 Like a shattered broken glass
 I can't seem to piece myself back together
 You take reign of my body and my mind
 I want to scream
 I want to cry
 And I hate to admit it
 But I want to die
 I want to stop this constant hurt
 I became an outcast to my friends and Families
 In public, you make me an introvert
 I want to fly high like a bird
 But I fear my wings are broken
 I make excuses to change my focus
 I hate my conditions, so I try not to let anyone notice
 I hide it inside like there's nothing wrong with me
 You make me question everything around me
 Like a shadow following me in a dark
 Everything I do is a mistake for you
 I want to let someone knows
 But who Can I trust
 As you make me not to trust anyone
 I am lost
 I want someone to save me from you
 But how can they save me If I don't talk
 I want to talk
 But you make me mute
 I want to give up
 But I don't want to give up
 I want to blame it on you
 But I can't as I was the one who let you in
 I can't as sometimes you make me happy
 I can't as you are just a shadow living inside me

Mai Yang

Working with Mai this semester has been an absolute delight! Our first half of the semester was spent working on a collection of poems, some of which you are about to read. From the first time we sat down in a booth together and dug into them, I knew it was going to be something special. The story that Mai weaved into these short, but jam packed pieces is unique, creative, and keeps you on the edge of your seat. I found myself fully invested in the characters and their perspectives, and I always wanted to know more. While these poems are only a few of the many that Mai brought into the lab, I know they'll tell a great story that will leave you wanting to hear from even the most insignificant perspectives.

~Shannon Lagore

THE TYRANT'S LOVE Collections

EVIL in the CASTLE!

News of the king's passing made its way to the villages
 The only child of the king will be crowned Queen by the spring
 We, your citizens' offerings can't be worth as much as the others
 Yet, please be a wise queen and bring salvation to this country
 Our pleas never answered
 Our happiness never resounded
 As we, your ever-growing citizens wait patiently
 Each day a person dying from the rule of the Queen
 All the wealth citizens circulated for years flow to the castle
 Yet, we received nothing in return
 Fields of produce wither away with the wind
 The days draw longer as the castle grow apart from us
 Nobles flowed down from your castle
 Bearing words of cursed and terror befall
 Unmarried women and men are taken away from household
 Yet, as another day draws near, they are seen with slashes covering their body
 Their eyes drop freezing cold with an unmoving body
 All can say nothing of your evil rule...
 For fear of punishment

In LOVE with the DREADFUL YOU!

As my noble citizens have described, you are frightening
 With battle scars covering your whole body
 With shining armor and a sword by your side
 Trails of blood always follow your footsteps
 Yet, I have fallen for you
 You might not remember but I was the girl you saved
 Thriving citizens call you their nightmare
 Yet to me, you are my dream
 You are the revolutionary while I am the rebellious ruler

To my prosperous citizens, you are the death god
 To me, you are a bringer of hope for this dying country
 Nobles and lords around criticize me for loving you
 Throwing their criticisms aside, I have been infatuated by you
 To save this country, killing me is a must
 As I am the tyrant that has this country in my hands
 You can kill me but even so, know...
 I love you

YOU the CRUEL SOVEREIGN RULER!

Born with a silver spoon, you have it all
 Riches and wealth were all in your hands
 Your sight never befall the poor, only the wealthy
 I, by your side, saw nothing and knows everything
 Your love for me is your selfish claim
 Yet, I have already given my heart to you
 As your knight and as your love
 I must put a stop to your rule
 Even if it means shedding blood in your beloved country
 With armor and a sword, I slay my way to you
 Your diligent, hardworking citizens admire me as their war god
 While your noble aristocrats fear me as a demon
 Praises are brought to me while criticisms are pushed to you
 My oath of protecting you will be put to the test
 To let you sleep or not to
 Regardless, my love for you is...
 Eternal

TEA PARTY of a LIFETIME!

Come! Come! Come! I, the Queen will be throwing a tea party
 A tea party that will last a lifetime
 Sit in this beautiful garden with me as we enjoy our luxury
 There's nothing to be afraid off
 The guards and knights will guard this place productively
 Since it's the place where their Queen resides
 You, the nobles and wealthy have been with me through thick and thin
 I will certainly protect my own subjects
 Pour and pour
 Drink and drink
 Until you can't anymore
 This will be a tea party that will last a lifetime
 Poison filled cups of tea for each to gulp down
 Down with the sins everyone commits
 This is my way of protecting you, the nobles and wealthy
 To sleep in your ruler's hands or to sleep in the hands of the rebels
 Sleep and sleep as we drink tea for the last time

PUPPET RULER!

My whole life is dedicated to serving you, my princess
 As the passing of the king, the throne became yours
 You lived a life full of protection and innocence
 Suddenly thrown into ruling, your dreadful life started
 As your maid, I watch and watch you getting manipulated without saying a word
 I know your wrongs yet I have no courage to stop you
 For I am as guilty as everyone, for I am only a lowly slave
 Unable to help, unable to speak up for you
 Evil creeps to your side, whispering words of praise
 You sit on the throne as only a doll obeying those below you
 The radiance in your eyes dimmed as seasons change
 Even so, he was always able to bring the glamour into your eyes
 Yet, he leads a revolution against you
 The last thing I saw was a smile on your face as his sword pierce your soul
 It was like you predestined this to happen

OUTSIDE PROSPECTIVE

A lady barely in her twenties sitting with a cup of tea in hand
 A dress ditching with glory and a crown sits on her blonde hair
 She is the Queen, who ruined her country
 A gentleman barely in his thirties standing with a sword in hand
 A shining armor and sword drain in others blood
 He is the rebel knight who will save the country
 Conversation after conversation could be heard in the flourishing garden
 The Queen is as calm as the sea before a storm
 The knight is frustrated at her calmness
 Yet, he can't seem to be angry with her even after what she brought her country to
 The Queen stands up with determination in her eyes
 She inches towards the knight with a loving smile
 Holding the knight's hand, her determination seems to stagger
 Yet, she directs his sword at her soul
 The soul that has been consumed with evil
 Hesitation waver in the knight's eyes
 Yet, his sword already pierce through her
 Tears trail from the knight's eyes
 The Queen touches his face, gently wiping those tears away
 In her last breath, her only words were...
 I love you...

...The Queen finally got her eternal sleep

...The knight crowned as King brought the country wealth and prosperity

Pachia Moua

I had a fantastic time working with Pachia over the course of the semester! The biggest thing that stood out to me about her as a writer was how well she was able to convey raw emotion into everything she wrote. She was able to channel her feelings about very personal matters into both poetry and prose, and though I know this was an especially difficult semester for her, she handled it all with grace and a smile. I loved reading her work each week, because it always surprised me and taught me something new. Pachia is a talented writer, and I only hope that she continues to write stories and poems in the way only she can!

~Lindsey Bundgaard

Fated to Love You

Here you lie next to me as you sleep peacefully with your soft snores and face so relaxed. I stare at you, hoping you don't disappear from me because it honestly feels almost too unreal.

I'm still confused as to how things began this way as the days and hours go by like the stars in the night sky. I sometimes wonder if fate decided to joke around and left you with me.

I feel as though you'll change your mind and leave me be, yet at the same time I feel like you wouldn't think about leaving me at all. I always doubt our relationship, and I'm lost.

I feel like you're too good to be true. Like a mist or a fog just temporarily staying and then leaving after you feel like moving on. I doubt everything because I want my heart to be safe.

I want to be able to prepare for anything coming my way, even if it's a break-up that's going to break my heart. I want to just be ready for the world, and yet, I'm still scared.

But when I'm with you, I feel as though there are no worries left for me to remember. No stresses that will ruin my moments with you. Nothing that stops our world from moving.

As time continues to spin and the world starts to become worse, I feel as though I can rule the day with you. If I'm fated to love you, I'm willing to do so until my very last breath.

Is it wrong of me to feel this way and be prepared in case you break my heart? I just want to know if you're meant to love me as much as I have come to love you now.

If fate is true to its words, and you continue to love me as much, I'm prepared to let fate take me along for the ride. Because if it's with you, and only you, I'll feel at ease in this life.

Spring Blooms

It was snowing the night before. White, soft, thick snow covered the earth. I could feel the cold seep into my bones as I sigh in sadness, reminiscing the old days. I remember the laughs and smiles. I remember almost everything.

The snow lands on my head and melts away like you did but we can't control that in any means because it would mean we're trying to control fate and destiny altogether, and that's bad. Being human means there's an end waiting for us the moment we let go.

I stand there taking deep breaths to calm myself before the tears fall. The world gave you to us and took you back because you were only temporary. And it reminds me that anything living are only temporary. That *I* am only temporary.

When the sun rose the next morning, we all left and followed you to your new home. It was something new and I honestly felt sad but relieved because your suffering ended. I still wish I could hold your hands in mine, but they're cold now like the snow.

The sun does nothing to warm your already cold body, but it warmed us all. Our bodies naturally absorbing any warmth to stay alive. You're gone but nature still continued to thrive on without you, like you were never there. I feel like you're still here.

I think it's ironic because it was such a sad day but it was so sunny the snow melted just a little for small puddles to form and the snow to lose its fluffiness. It was the perfect day for a casual stroll, but you're in your new home and we came to say our final good-byes.

That day signified a new day for us all. Time and memories will never be the same, nor will it feel the same. Yet, the sun rose to make room for spring to bloom. Maybe, just maybe, this is your final gift to us all. A gift to remind us that you are finally happy and free.

It's Been a While

It's been a while since I've last seen you. Before we buried you in the ground forever, I tried engraving your every feature in my mind. Your face slowly becoming just a memory. It has been a month since you've passed.

A month of time passing without you had been a struggle because I have been losing motivation to do anything. It's like you took that part of me with you when you passed, and now I'm left searching for myself again.

To find my identity because I feel lost and confused on what to do with my life. Maybe I'm supposed to be doing something useful for once but I can't bring myself to even do the littlest things that should be of concern. I'm sorry if it seems like I'm failing you.

I didn't mean for things to happen like this, but it did and the only thing I can do now is to slowly rebuild everything. I really want to be able to have a good future as to what you would want for me. I'm still holding and fighting on.

I'm sorry if I haven't visited you in a long while. I've been trying to catch up on life because it continues on and it doesn't wait on anyone. When I visit, I'll be sure to tell you what I've been up to lately. It's been a while since I've last seen you, and I've missed you dearly, Aunty.

Palang Barrow

Throughout the semester, I have been able to see Palang grow as a writer during our '57 sessions. After taking a break from writing in high school, he chose to explore poetry again, and he excelled. Many of his poems like those featured in this book analyzed themes of love, loss, family, perseverance, and a sense of belonging. Overall, he his writing has improved as we focused on word choice, tone, mood development through expanding strong, reoccurring images and symbols that appeared in his poems. This semester has proved to be successful as he showed his dedication and determination to improve his writing from session to session. The final products in this publication are representative of his beliefs and values, and I hope he will continue writing in the future.

~Brilyn Brecka

No title needed

I have become the dry gloomy storm that moves through the Sahara Desert
 Calling for your lips to breathe me back to life
 Am that one deserted snack you threw in the trash; you never finish eating
 Replacing me you didn't think twice
 Placing me down the packing order that was shady by your standards
 Am the simple liquid molecule that breaks along the billion atoms of sea waves
 Crushing on your shores when you said "hey" with your utterly perfect lips
 That magnificently shaped each vowel to fly words to my ears
 I wanted to be that skydiver with no parachute that wanted to land in your heart
 Am that one dry grass that's catches fire the quickest every time you threw my hopes away
 Creating these large flames of hurt and torture on the ground and be that endless hymn
 Am that pillow that drowns in your tears that you have poured every night when you felt low

 Am that wet paper on which you wrote down your dreams and we know how that ended

Dinner

The table is set, the red cloth spread across
 As we sit with the day's loss
 Our dinner table is made of hard-working hours inscribed by the four towers
 Root onto the floor, into the silence there was love
 And these four towers represent four unique symbols dearly held
 As mom is about to bring the prepared food, as the aroma unintentionally opens mouths
 The cold is far out of site despite the rush of blood into the bowl of soups for starters
 Dinner is served on the red-clothed table surface held by these leg towers
 The first leg tower represents prayers, as angles shoulders us when gratitude is made
 The second leg tower represent family, the circle capsule that seeds loyalty and majesty
 The third leg tower represent stability, the solid firm core that keeps each afloat
 The fourth leg tower represent kindness, as mom said spitefulness is blindness to your hearts

Am build this way

Am born in a Nation where joy is a description for the fine individuals
Am born in a Nation where its generation stay on the streets lines
Trying to sell headlines depressed by poverty outraged by the upper society
The unfolds of cuts trying to believe that maybe there might be a place for me
And for my dreams, inspiration, and hopes for a better future
These walls framing me and this anger holding me
But I will not let this step over me and my goals
So, I persevere through all just to tell my side of the story
Engraved on me are the poverty-stricken marks
However, it's a beauty in disguise that many can't see or understand
As am of one tiny particle amongst billions of tiny dots spread across the skies over the ocean of
death as am build this way

Savannah Seefeldt

Throughout the semester, I had the pleasure of working with Savannah and watching her grow as an independent writer. She always put so much thought and emotions into her writing which drew on her attention to detail. I had the opportunity of working with her to help develop this series of poems. These pieces in particular show her passion for writing and ability to relate to audiences with word choices that touch the heart. As a '57 learner, Savannah always brought in work that spoke of her true character: honest, kind, and humble. I am pleased to have worked with her and know that writing is a talent she will continue to grow.

~Rachel Hansen

This is Hello

You sparked a fire in me
 You sparked the joy
 You let me shine
 You let me soar
 You had my hand
 You had my heart
 You loved me
 I loved you

This is Us

I kept thinking we were it
 I kept hoping you wouldn't quit
 I slowly felt you slip
 I slowly moved away
 I wanted you to stay
 I wanted to be okay
 I needed to feel alive
 I needed to just survive

This is Goodbye

You died in my mind
 You died in my heart
 You are no longer with me
 You no longer need me
 You made me free
 You made me fly
 You have no power
 You have no control

Makayla DeGrave

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Makayla this semester during our '57 sessions. She has such a passion for poetry and portrays such poignant emotions through her poetry, portraying a balance of tragedy and hope throughout her pieces. I was overjoyed when I finally got to see her finished poetry submission in Wordplay. She spent weeks developing and changing it so that it was just perfect. One of the main focuses that we worked on during this semester was portraying tone through figurative language and imagery. This was an especial focus in "The Inner Whore," and I think she did an excellent job transitioning from a deeply devastating beginning to an uplifting ending. Throughout the semester, Makayla has shown great willingness to experiment in her pieces and incredible dedication to developing even the smallest details into concrete and powerful images.

~Kim Bronk

The Inner Whore

Starting out young and vulnerable
 Learning how to love and trust
 For it to be ripped out of her small hands
 Crying for attention by putting herself in harm
 Just wanted someone to say it will be okay
 Looking for a warm touch instead of a cold slap
 Giving up on her parents she went to bad boys
 These immature men using her then throwing her aside
 Moving from boy to boy diving further into her sexuality
 Losing her virginity to a boy she loved
 That boy left her the next day
 She hit rock bottom after that
 Turning herself and her body into a door mat
 For everyone to walk on and use
 Letting this happen for quite some time
 Dragging her deeper and deeper into depression
 Reaching out for a light and finding drugs
 Being consumed by her new addiction
 She believes that it makes her feel better
 When really it is a cement brick tied to her leg bring her down deeper
 Starting harder drugs and mixing pills
 Until she had the right combination of pills and alcohol
 She woke up with bright warm lights shining at her
 People were running around and talking
 She could not make out what they were saying
 A tall, thin man walked up close to her
 He says that she is in a hospital and that she had overdosed
 He said that she had two choices
 she could either go get help or
 she could walk out those doors

but next time come back in a body bag
She started to tear up and started to have a flash back
Of what she had done throughout her life
She thought to herself enough is enough
She said that she wanted to go get help
The doctor gave her pamphlets to drug abuse facilities
She chose one that was the furthest away from her home
To make sure that she couldn't go back to her old ways
The doctor and she worked out all the expenses
Also set up a way to get there
The flight to the facility was one of the scariest things she has ever had to do
She was full of anxiety and fear
But most importantly hope
As she walked into the facility
She had a clear sensation that she had never felt before
As she worked through her programs
Finding out that she isn't the only one in this boat
Struggling to stay afloat
Slowly but steadily making her way to making herself a stronger and healthier person
After a couple of months of her hard work and dedication
She came to her last day at the facility
As she started to walk out the doors
The same feeling came back to her that she felt when she first walked in
But this time she knew what it was
She was proud of herself

Sydney Tolppi

I always looked forward to sessions with Sydney this semester. I was never quite sure what she was going to bring in, and she always surprised me. We worked on poetry, self-help pieces, and even more formal article format pieces. Sydney really enjoys nature, meditation, and philosophy, and so much of that comes through in her writing. I loved watching her grow as a writer and really find a style that she felt comfortable in. The pieces she's written for Wordplay really showcase her talent and passion for the subjects we've discussed so consistently this semester!

~Shannon Lagore

The Dandelion Has My Smile

If we really know how to live, what better way to start the day than a smile? Being aware of our source of happiness is key to commencing awareness. As we go about our initial routines, trying to integrate smiling as a high note will be a beneficial practice. There are little reminders everywhere. Nature especially can be used in this manifestation of efflorescing blossoms. Whenever feeling glum or forgetful in this flustering world the dandelion has your smile. The yellow flower so soft, small, and sweet grows bright everywhere. We are this flower intertwining with the winds of life. In the breeze we forget to advocate keeping a blissful mind. Trekking down the pathway of prying open our senses, it can be done with the most simplistic things.

Refuge rises as dawn approaches
 Innate senses naturally are awoken
 Daily zest is evoked
 Little reminders reside
 The dandelion expressed friendliness
 For I have not lost my smile
 Walking with gratitude
 A flower smiles back
 Dandelion

Are You All My Personal Dream?

Feeling the external world
 Is this merely my mind projecting?
 Infested with creation
 Symptom of the universe
 Behavior is outside the skin
 Moving in the room
 Being here now
 Dreaming

Visions

Regular crowd stumbles in
 Awaiting her next drink
 Bound to the one sip
 Blinding
 Slipping down
 A darkness veils over
 Suppressing these emotions
 No turning back
 One glass turns into a bottle
 trouble in her eyes
 Tears fall
 Like crashing waves

Its 2:30am
 The crowd comes home
 Where is safety
 Blackout visions creep
 Morning
 She slips again
 Lost in the liquor
 Visions fade
 There she goes again..

Skinny Love

Falling through the ashes
 Not one will admit
 Singeing through perilous fire
 Both won't quit

terrors are committed
 She whispers soft sweet lies
 He's a resolute terror
 Unwritten vacillations
 Foreign truths

Whom have fallen behind
 Entered into the bitter void
 Destruction follows
 Truth prevails
 Lost in translation
 Transpires affliction
 Falling endlessly
 Oblivion
 waiting
 Dying
 Together
 But she loved him more

Mid-Day Thicket

As the mind wanders
 Feet trek
 Ridged path
 Coarse rock
 Uneven ground
 Leaves half sprung
 Slight cool whiff of air
 Sun shone burnished
 Among the dancing waters
 Composed in observance
 Rumination of grace
 Seeps in her descent
 Burrowing softly
 River follows
 Moving with her
 Solidarity is formed

Emma Kane

Weekly sessions with Emma quickly became something I looked forward to. She constantly surprised and delighted me with her creativity and willingness to share. One of my favorite things about Emma is her openness as she was never afraid to speak from her heart and tell me what she thought. She was also very open to suggestions, and this led to many wonderful conversations between the two of us. Her piece "*The Flight*" is a fantastic representation of Emma's journey through the course as it started as a "word spew" and turned into a beautiful poem. Throughout her time in the course, Emma has developed the ability to turn her deepest thoughts into mature pieces of writing. She brought in this piece at the beginning of the semester, and then it sort of got pushed aside. I am thrilled that she decided to take another look and submit it to Wordplay. My hope is that no matter what Emma ends up doing, she never stops writing.

~Bridget Kauzlaric

The Flight

In the delicacy of life, nothing is guaranteed
 Not even the prospect of taking joy in the fleeting time of one's mortality.
 Throughout it all, moments of happiness flutter in and out
 Being something one desperately grabs for but can never keep a grip on
 Once you have hold of it, it is almost as if you've become a bird.
 Soaring through the clouds, not quite able to see, but not really caring to
 This flight you're on is one of pure bliss.
 All your problems are below you, and nothing can reach you in the sky
 The vivid white of the clouds brings a warmth to your heart no commodity ever could.
 Warm, free, blissfully blind
 Flying through the clouds creates a sensation so far beyond euphoria
 No words can capture it, capture you
 It's a beautiful thing

A temporary thing.

This grasp on happiness is such as your talons unto the clouds
 As lovely as it is, there is nothing concrete in your grip.
 It starts with a gentle decline, as you slowly descend out of the clouds.
 The white begins to fade, and the blue of the sky becomes much more clear,
 Much more blue;
 Your fall rapidly develops, morphing into a plummeting spiral
 As you look up, you become estranged from the clouds.
 Thrashing and turning in desperation
 Everything you had in your grasp, now barely in your sight.
 You are falling and every second pierces like a stab
 With every gust of wind, the warmth is ripped from you.
 Spinning, reaching, praying for it to stop
 To fly once again to the clouds.

You hit the ground.
The frigid dirt is beneath you
And the earth is still
And you are still.
Everything is loud
but you can't hear it.
Cold as the ground is
you can't feel it.
Your heart seems empty
and you can't fill it.
And finally, looking up to the sky
your sight is clear.
In this chaotic calm
The thought of everything you lost
Is just a hollow ring in your head.
A ring, a ring of desperation

How many times must I fall?

A ring, a ring of longing

Is it worth it?

A ring of need.
Finally, you can see, and you notice the clouds.
They are passing gently overhead, welcoming
Ringing hello.
Rising to your feet, you remember the warmth of the clouds around you
The kindness it brings to your heart, a sensation beyond words.
You rise from your imprint in the hard earth,
And you take flight again.

Murron Roff

Working with Murron through her final '57 course has been a wonderful experience. She holds a great passion for creative expression and is wonderfully well-practiced in poetry. Her poems are equally insightful, expressive, and incredibly unique. They place the reader in another realm of experience, equipped with all the passions and confusions of human feeling.

~Jeremy Wolfe

Holiday

I spent my holidays away.
 At some guest house on the seaside
 Full of food and wine, flowers and fish,
 Fresh linens and teatime,
 Old friends from once upon a time
 At another guest house on the sea.
 These distant friends; and strangers.
 I would watch the rain from my
 Second floor window and
 Listen to the melody of a
 Fully constant house.
 I would lay on the sandy beach in the radiant sun
 Reading novels of mystery and romance.
 My face and eyes hidden beneath my hat
 Shielding the sun and my own furtive glances.
 Everyone's business was mine.
 I waded through the dusty library and
 Laughed gaily as we supped.
 Strangers. Friends. Lovers. Curiosities.
 Affairs abounded and
 The land was full and lush and green
 As lust.
 The people full of stories and the kind of secrets that can't be kept.
 I spent my holidays away,
 Under the sun,
 Under my hat,
 From my window,
 Over tea;
 Observing.
 Watching.
 My holidays were full
 Of drink and drug,
 Late nights on the patio,
 Listening,

Evenings in the garden,
Neatly tucked away behind some shrubbery.
I conversed with people from all over the world.
I watched and I listened, and I laughed.
My holidays were full
Of strangers and secrets and
Me; knowing them all.
My holidays were full
Of revenge and recourse and murder.
But clever murder, no doubt.
The kind where you hope they
Pull it off,
Purely for genius sake,
And slip through the cracks into the
Blur and brilliance of the
Hot, white sun and
The fragments left are washed out as wave after wave
Douses the sand.

Heaven Bento

It has been wonderful getting to know Heaven throughout the semester in English 157. She writes some of the most amazing poetry I have ever read—they are deep, emotional, and personal. Although her poems are laconic, one can see her talents shine through and can recognize the powerful meaning behind them. The language she uses and the way she is able to captivate and enrich the reader is remarkable, allowing one to make their own personal connections to the poems. I am very fortunate to have worked with Heaven and am proud to see her submitted work on Wordplay—I believe that her poems deserve to be seen by everyone. I am confident Heaven will continue to be a successful writer, and I am thankful for the opportunity to have helped watch her grow in her writing skills and as a person.

~Hayley Bird

Night

Sometimes the sunshine just doesn't do its job
 Sometimes it's the moon that makes you feel complete
 Looking up and seeing the vibrant yet calm light of the stars
 I realize that this night is my serenity
 The sound of the light breeze is a delight to my ears
 The unmowed grass tickling my arm
 I think I see a shooting star
 I make a wish
 I wish that I could always feel the way I do right now

Heartache

I'm heartbroken
 Lying on my bedroom floor
 I feel a warm tear drop onto my fluffy blanket I am using as a pillow
 Why did he leave me
 Why didn't he choose me to get over the pain and the trauma
 Why did he have to choose the thing that is going to slowly kill him
 I get it, I do
 I just wish I was what you needed
 I wish I were enough
 I wish I were stronger
 I wish I could be your drug

Unconcerned

pain, is temporary they say
darkness is short term
and suicide
is
stupid

but they only care
When I'm prepared
Prepared
To pull the trigger

they sit

and watch
as my demons haunt
me
they sit

and watch
as a I slowly die inside

but they only care
when I'm about
to pull the trigger

Moriah Prichard

Moriah was truly a joy to work with each week! I was repeatedly astounded by her poetry, and I'm pretty sure the first comment I made after reading every one of them was "Wow, this is amazing!" Not only was her poetry consistently full of beautiful imagery and poignant emotion, but she also managed to make much of it rhyme in a very organic way. That is no easy task! Moriah continually challenged herself with new styles of poetry, from sonnets to villanelles to songs to free verse. I never knew what to expect, but I always knew it would be beautiful. She has so much talent as a poet, and all I hope for her is that she continues to challenge herself, and of course, continues to write. I will certainly miss reading her poems each week!

~Lindsey Bundgaard

I Love Thee Best

I love thee best on starlit summer nights
 When diamonds fill the alabaster sky
 And ancient moons caress us with their light
 While secret longings pool within your eyes.
 I love thee best on golden summer days
 Where carefree moments find us young and wild.
 As sun streams down to kiss us with its rays
 Our hearts, so pure, are easily beguiled.
 I love thee still in autumn's boding chill.
 Though summer's last warm breath has left the air
 And of my love your soul has drunk its fill
 Where'er you go just know, you'll find me there.
 For winter's trials may put us to the test
 But know, my dear, I'll always love thee best.

Love's Touch

Oh Love, what sweet villain art thou
 that I might deny all ties but to thee?
 How swiftly turned to fool am I
 with one true glance from thine own eyes!

Did not mine words once flow freely
 with unassuming grace and ease
 as the winter river thawed in spring?

But let my heart be touched for one
 piercing moment
 by the ecstasy of thine presence
 and I am reduced to but a glazen statue
 with frozen lips
 devoid of words.

Real Truth

I have no words to say
 Only feelings to feel.
 Because, some days,
 That's all that feels real.

But,
 Real can be deceptive
 For its cause be not objective
 And though it be real to you
 Does by no means make it true.
 So, if words seem to evade you
 Let not your fickle heart persuade you
 That the thoughts you think are permanent
 Lest your time be wasted in lament
 Of far too fleeting feelings
 When you really should be healing
 And discovering the truth.
 Instead of
 very
 real
 lies.

The Lily

Oh sweet lily,
 Adorned in lovely white
 You lift your head each morning,
 And raise it to the light.

With arms so strong and slender
 Your stem so long and slim
 Your scent so sweet and tender
 When carried on the wind.

Petals soft and dewy,
 Surround a smiling face
 You gift us with your beauty,
 Delight us with your grace.

Oh gentle little flower,
 So young, so sweet, so fair,
 You give us all such pleasure
 Just knowing you are there.

The Storm

I ran into a rainbow, as I made my way one morn,
It filled the sky with color, as a penance for the storm.
For the storm was strong and dark
Like a midnight without stars
Nor a moon to light the pathway
Though I'd journeyed long and far.
Its swirling winds surrounded
As they tossed me to and fro,
If a brighter dawn was coming
Of its hope I did not know.

Lightning split the sky, and thunder rumbled all around,
The air, thick and dreadful, nearly brought me to the ground.
The freezing rain was blinding, and it soaked me head to toe
As I pressed on ever harder, knowing not which way to go.
The wicked winds that found me
Whispered, sinister and strange,
Songs of woe and hopelessness
That fueled my pain and rage.

"I didn't ask to be here, didn't sign up for this plight!"
Despair crept up inside me as I yelled into the night,
But storms are sure to come, just as darkness falls each evening,
Yet, surer still, the sun must rise,
Its morning light, revealing.
And so, this storm had come to pass,
Though how or when I could not tell,
With naught but hope, in desperation,
On my knees I fell.

It's funny, for I don't quite know,
What happened next that night,
But when I finally raised my head
I saw a brilliant light.
From whence it came, I cannot say,
Nor where it went thereafter,
But this I know, it saved my soul
From imminent disaster.

Fading

We are souls in the night
swimming, swirling in the light
of a dim and distant star,
fading slowly out of sight.

And in the dying light of stars
we forget who we are
and all we've loved and all we've lost
and who we've been in others' arms.

Though in the echoes of the deep
where dreams have died and secrets sleep,
there's a cold unsettled longing
for a heart that we may keep.

But we are not those souls of stories
who will revel in their glories
when the tides of night have turned
into the shining light of morning.

For we are souls of the night
ever sinking from the light
into long, unending, depths
fading,
 slowly
 out of
 sight.

Shelby Ballweg

Shelby is such a unique poet. One of the most interesting parts with Shelby was that I never knew what was coming in each week. A personal poem? Funny? Reality based? Relationship? It was always something so different and special. The goals Shelby had for the semester were to work on titles and different formats for her poems. Originally, titles were labeled as the time they were written. A lot of the poems could easily get away with being labeled the time or date they were written and it seemed to fit and work most of the time, but Shelby challenged herself to continue to come up with titles to add to the meaning of her poems. She also managed to break away from traditional stanza formats when it fits with the poem. She has more than met her goals in my mind. I will miss being able to work with Shelby and witness her creativity bloom and word choice that is clearly, solely unique to her.

~Heidi Propson

Thaw

We only had the time between sun-soaked evenings
 Enough time to steal a kiss from July fireworks.
 Not enough time for us to see September

Time enough to fall in love.

May winter be kind to our summer
 It's best not to freeze two souls.
 Only snow knows what's next

Even that must melt.

2:05 AM [Speakeasy Affair]

I think I saw you at the discotheque
Flashing lights and flashing smiles
I didn't have a chance to dance
Much less catch your name
Your body told me what I needed to know
Urging me to run far away
I ran away with you into the night

Or was it away from you,

I could never tell

What's in a name that I must know
I know yours starts with "T"
Perhaps that's not enough,
Maybe it's entirely too much
Strangers in a foreign place
Blinded by the time of night
We couldn't hide behind alcohol forever

Yet we tried to build a home in it

The music still beats rhythm in my ears
Running away is what ran me into your arms
But they're not quite my size
And they're too cold to be inviting
The lights make you look ill
As if maybe you're sick of this place
Like I'm sick of this act I put on
But it's what attracted you, after all

I think I saw you at the discotheque
Your smile turned to fangs
While we danced without making eye contact
Our home burned in neon pink flames

Prose:

Jaime Logue

It has been an adventure getting to work with Jaime this semester. Jaime is such a creative person and I learned from her as well. She introduced me to the idea of using Pinterest to build clearer images of characters, their styles, likes/dislikes, and more. I really hope that Jaime continues to write this story. Every week, I was constantly left on a cliffhanger and desperate for more. Jaime's submission will leave you wondering where this is all going and wanting more as well! Although I know the direction Jaime intends to take the story, we all know that those plans can change and I hope I get to see the final version of it with all of the twists, turns, and cheesy parts throughout. Keep writing Jaime!

~Heidi Propson

Salem Daisies

Meeting the Mathers

Walking up to the place I will be living in for the foreseeable future is intimidating. This is in no way just a house, this is a mansion, and an old one at that. You can almost taste its history. There is a fresh rain smell in the air, it's calming, soothing to my tense nerves. This house is gorgeous, with a wrap-around porch that has one bay window, as well as another on the floor above it. I can just imagine benches attached to them, internally I groan thinking about how that would be a perfect place to sit down and read or draw.

"Huh. This place is bigger than I thought it would be" Timothy says as we walk up to the Mather's mansion.

"Yeah, maybe I'll get to live here, and they'll forget I exist. I'll be left alone, at least until I'm 18 and maybe even after that." Timothy and I both snicker. We trudge up the steps of the Victorian mansion. Timothy is about to knock on the old oak door, when suddenly it opens. Standing behind the door is a handsome boy who is probably 16 or 17. He has piercing sky blue eyes, his hair looks soft and is a honey blonde color.

"Oh, you're here. We weren't expecting you until noon" The boy's voice is gruff. He hasn't seemed to notice me yet, maybe that is a good thing.

"We got in late last night, I called Mr. Mather this morning he said it was alright that we come by early this morning, these things don't usually work this fast." Timothy has confidence in his voice. The boy looks over at me. Damn, he has definitely noticed me now.

"Okay, come in." The boy huffs, rolling his eyes and turning away from the door. I probably just interfered with his plans. Crap. This, is not a good way to start.

"I'm Sawyer." Sawyer growls over his shoulder. Oh great, my new foster brother is one of those really moody boys. I am terrified, but I can't let that show. *I am the strong & tough Daisy.*

"WAIT!!! WAIT!!! WAIT!!!" I hear someone shouting, stealing a glance to my right I see a boy with a beautiful golden skin tone, prancing out the door of the house next to the Mathers'. The shouting causes Sawyer to turn back around.

"I'm D.J. Corey. Not like wika wika wika," he makes a motion with his hands as if he is holding a headphone to his ear and moving a record on a turntable.

"but as in Dean Jacob D.J." Dang this boy is chipper, *I don't know how to feel about this.*

“Yeah D.J. she probably got that without you having to explain it to her” Sawyer snaps at D.J. and I feel really bad. What the hell is wrong with Sawyer? *If he is going to act this way, I don't think this living situation is going to work, just like all of the others.*

“It's ok, I would have made a joke about it anyway. D.J. is way cooler than Daisy Marie. I mean what is more basic than having the middle name Marie?”

“Thanks” D.J. mutters eyeing Sawyer.

“Whatever” Sawyer grunts. I look to Timothy and he gives me a “Just give it a shot.” look. Sawyer turns and trudges into the house. Timothy and I follow him inside.

“Dad!!!” Sawyer yells up the stairs for his father. The inside is way more beautiful than the outside. The floors are a beautiful dark wood and the walls are an eggshell white. Clearly this house has been renovated.

A tall man descends the stairs, as he gets closer, I can see that he has a scruffy face just like Timothy does. His hair is slightly greying, but it looks good on him. He looks like he might be muscular, but I can't tell.

“I like this house a lot.” I blurt, *dammit why do I have to be so awkward?*

“Thank You! It has been in the family for generations. I'm Christopher Mather, but you can just call me Chris. Sawyer and I are actually descendants of the Cotton Mather, who played a trivial role in the Salem Witch Trials.” I can't believe this! I am actually going to be living with someone who is a descendant of the mortal who quite possibly caused the Salem Witch Trials.

“You must be the lovely Daisy Marie Martin.”

“Huh? You're a Martin? You might wanna watch out or they'll end up doing experiments on you.” Sawyer's tone is devious, something tells me he's not kidding.

“Experiments? They? What are you talking about?”

“Don't worry, Sawyer is just kidding. It's always weird when first coming to Salem for those with a last name that is connected to the witch trials, but something tells me that you are tough enough to handle whatever is thrown at you.”

“What gave it away?” I smile and Chris chuckles as Sawyer storms out the door. My smile disappears and I tense up, my reaction is probably excruciatingly visible.

“Don't worry about him, he just found out summer school is in his future if he doesn't get his grades up.” What Chris says relieves me. *I just hope he is right.*

“What is he having trouble in? I could probably help him.” *I have certainly spent enough time in libraries.*

“Well, just about everything, but you are welcome to try.” Chris looks at me with a smirk.

“But, let's not focus on that now. Let me show you to your room. It's up the stairs, I hope that's okay.” Chris looks worried, but what is *he* worried for?

“Yeah, that is completely fine.” Chris's shoulders sag in relief, *it's weird that he is trying so hard to please me.*

“Oh good, follow me.” Chris turns to lead up the stairs. Following him up I notice how gorgeous the banister is, carved vines cover the railing, it is absolutely breathtaking. I run my fingers over the grooves and curves. When we reach the top of the stairs Chris leads us down a long hallway. From what I can see, there are 10 rooms.

“Your room is the fourth room on the right.” Chris opens the door to my new room and steps aside so I can see inside.

The room will be the biggest I have ever lived in. It is a soft yellow color, My shoulders sag and my teeth unclench, this room is relaxing too. Looking to the left I see a big bed and by big, I mean HUGE. It’s insane, it’s probably only a king size but when you have been living on single beds, futons, and air mattresses, a king size is ginormous, and boy does it look comfy. Next to the bed is a desk, a big desk, on top of which is a simple lamp that doesn’t take up too much space. It’s beautiful. To the right of the room there is a vanity that is absolutely stunning, the carving around the mirror makes me think that this could be an antique. Which doesn’t surprise me at all since the house has been in the Mather family for ages. Up at the top of the mirror there is a carving of a flower and what looks to be a clover, but I can’t be sure it looks kind of funky. Next to the vanity there is a dresser that doesn’t look nearly as old as its neighbor, but it still has some age to it. Then I see it, the thing I was hoping for most, a bay window that does indeed have a bench seat.

“Do you like it?” Chris seems to shrink in his spot which you would think is impossible because he is not a small man.

“Like it? I love it! It is the nicest room I have ever stayed in.” The smile Chris rewards me with is blinding.

Taking in a deep whiff of the room expecting it to smell like old books, instead I smell a sort of bitter scent.

“Is something burning?” I scrunch up my nose

“Oh shit, I was attempting to make you cookies.” I barely hear the end of the sentence as Chris dashes out of the room. Then pretty soon after I hear a muffled 'Dad! I told you this was a bad idea,' I look to Timothy who is just grinning.

“You’re gonna enjoy it here kiddo, I can already tell.” My eyes sting, it’s always hard to say goodbye to him. I know I’ll see him again, but it’s still sad. I can say with great confidence that he is the only person in this world that I love.

“I’m gonna miss you, you know that right?” my voice cracks and Timothy carefully pulls me into a hug.

“I’ll miss you too, but you’ll be okay Daisy. I have to go now but I will see you in a couple weeks. Be Good!” Timothy exits the room, leaving nothing but the quiet surrounding me. I can hear his footsteps as they pound on the staircase, getting quieter as they go. His faint rumbling voice is the last thing I hear before the front door closes shutting him out and me in. Sitting on the bench by the window I can’t help but miss him already. Looking through the window I can see him walking out towards the street. I put my hand up to the glass as my eyes brim with tears. I let one fall, Timothy deserves at least that for all he has done for me, he deserves to have at least that one piece of physical evidence that I love him. He is at his car door now, before he gets in he glances up at my window, with that one passing glance he shares so much. He loves me too.

The Children of Salem

Deciding that I need to be social I leave my room to head down the stairs, slowly descending the staircase. I stop short when I hear Chris’ voice in the kitchen.

“Sawyer, please take Daisy and show her around town and introduce her to some of the locals.” Chris emphasizes the word please, like maybe they have been in this conversation for a while and he is getting tired of it.

“Dad, do I really have to, I do have my own life you know.”

“Yes, you do, it will be good for you to get to know her and it will be good for her to get to know you as well as your friends. Listen Sawyer, I really need you to help me show her that she is welcome here and that we won’t just get rid of her, that we want her to stay.”

“Fine but I don’t know how my friends will react to a new person being introduced to the group, especially since she isn’t a Child of Salem.” I lean over the banister trying to hear them better, but instead of being quiet like a good little banister it creaks alerting them to my presence. Chris smiles while Sawyer glares, his glare doesn’t last long though because a hand comes up from behind the glaring boy, whacking him in the back of the head.

“Fine” Sawyer grumbles heading towards me. Nearly missing my shoulder as he walks by.

“Let’s go!” My eyes widen, I turn to Chris thinking he can’t possibly expect me to go with Sawyer.

“Go on he’s harmless.” Chris’ words do nothing to reassure me but I relent, hurrying to catch up to Sawyer who is already out the door and halfway across the sidewalk. Behind me I can hear Chris chuckle, finding the whole situation funny. I do not find this funny this is terrifying. By the time I get to Sawyer’s car he is already seated with the car running. His car looks nice, old, but nice. It has the word 'Boss' on it followed by the number 429. The car reminds me of one from a TV show although not quite.

“Well are you gonna get in or are you going to stand there all day?” My hand shakes reaching for the car handle. I open the car door slowly and slide into the seat trying to hold back my wince as I do. I keep my head down, this is going to be like every other placement I’ve been in. I’m going to be tortured here, just like before, just like when I lived with the Garcias. Or when the Evans boy would find me on the playground at recess, they never did figure out why I came back with bruises every day. Maybe this will even be like the placement I was just in. My eyes start to sting but I refuse to cry, not now, not here in this car. *Crying is a weakness, one that I cannot afford to show.*



I notice that the car has stopped moving I peer over at Sawyer only to see him staring at me and I can’t read any emotion on his face. Did I make a noise, did I shed a tear? I reach up to touch my face, my action causing Sawyer to break out of whatever kind of trance he was in.

“We are here.” Sawyer get out of the car and heads to a small coffee shop across the street, not looking back once. I sit there for another second steeling myself and preparing for what might as well be a living hell.

Getting out of the car I see a beautiful girl standing next to Sawyer in front of the coffee shop, her hair is a gorgeous golden caramel color that falls into loose curls. Her eyes strike me as familiar, though I am almost positive that I have never seen her or her green eyes before.

“Sarah, this is Daisy Martin, Daisy this is Sarah Martin.” Sawyer waves his arm between me and the girl. Our eyes lock and there is a buzz that passes through me, *weird.*

“Sarah is the descendant of Susannah Martin.” Sawyer mumbles.

“Wow, that is amazing, what is it like? Being a descendant I mean.” *I hate when I blurt things out.*

“Well there are a lot of us descendants here and we all go to the same school and we’re more or less the same age. So, it is just kind of normal for us, although it gets weird around Halloween because that is when a lot of tourists come out.” Sarah responds.

“Of course! That was probably a dumb question that you get asked all the time.” My cheeks heat up, *why did I have to geek out like that?*

“Don’t worry it is completely ok. You are most likely going to get asked if you are a descendant all of the time because you have the last name Martin.” She smiles and it is striking because it is a genuine one. *It wasn’t what I was expecting.*

“Yeah, yeah, blah blah, can we go inside now?” Sawyer is back to his aggravated self.

“Yes we can, chill.” Sarah smacks Sawyer while rolling her eyes, then she turns to me.

“Come on Daisy let’s get you introduced to the others.” Sarah places her arm around my shoulder as we walk into the café. As soon as we are through the doors the aroma that hits me is one of coffee, pastries, and pumpkin spice.

Sarah steers me toward a group of teenagers all around the same age as me. Although, one of them is huge and kind of scares me, the rest of the group seems pretty tame. In fact, I see one familiar person, at the far end of the table stuffing his face, there’s D.J.

“Everyone? This is Daisy Martin.” Sarah flourishes her hands as if to say “Ta-da! Here is some fresh meat, let’s tear her apart’. *Okay, maybe not the ‘fresh meat let’s tear her apart’ but that is how I feel right now.*

“Daisy, I’m sure you already know DJ since he is your new neighbor, so this here is Abby Baron, she is the only one of us whose ancestor was an accuser and not an accused. Well Sawyer isn’t a descendant of an accused, but he doesn’t count.” The name Baron sounds slightly familiar, but I can’t quite place it at first, but then I do.

“Does that make you the descendant of Elizabeth Parris?”

“Yup! That’s me descendant of good ole Betty. It is so nice to meet you.” The smile on Abby’s face is blinding and her voice is cheerful. I can hear Sawyer grumble something that I can’t make out. Then Sarah whacks him upside the head and I can’t help but smirk just a little. Abby is a tiny thing, her hair is a buttery blonde that frames her pale face perfectly.

“It is nice to meet you too.” I smile back at Abby knowing my smile isn’t nearly as bright as hers.

“This is Maddie Proctor, girl genius. Honestly smartest girl on the planet, top of our class.” Maddie’s chocolate brown hair sways as she shakes her head, her cheeks turning a deep crimson.

“Stop Sarah, I am not that smart. It’s nice to meet you Daisy.” Maddie’s smile is timid, and not nearly as bright as Abby’s but I know it is genuine all the same. Sarah rolls her eyes and moves on to the next person.

“Ok Daisy this here is Marshall Bishop, but we call him Mars.” Sarah leans over and whispers not so quietly in my ear,

“Don’t let his size fool you, he is actually a big teddy bear.” I giggle at the way Sarah whispers even though it clearly wasn’t meant to be a secret.

Mars has eyes that are a kind blue, soft and caring. His hair is black which makes his eyes stand out more than if it was any other color. After the introduction Mars takes my hand enclosing it in his gigantic ones, then he kisses the back of my hand. He winks at me and then flashes me what I’m sure is the best panty melting smile he’s got.

“OH! YOU HAVE GOT TO BE FUCKING KIDDING ME!!! Why is everybody treating her like she is already one of us? She’s not!” In the midst of Sawyer’s outburst Mars had pulled me behind him shielding me from Sawyer’s view. I find myself clutching on to the back of his shirt.

“What the hell man? What did she ever do to you?” DJ is next to Mars now. Instead of responding Sawyer just grunts and storms out of the shop. Looking around I can see the wide eyes of all the other patrons of the coffee shop. I’m shaking and I don’t even realize it until Mars turns around and wraps his arms tightly around me. I wince into his chest, he just hurt me, *but he didn’t do it on purpose, so I guess it’s ok.*

“Don’t worry we’ll get you back to the house.” His chest rumbles, I look up at him and he must see in my eyes that I am terrified and don’t want to go back.

“Not right now though, just because Sawyer is an ass doesn’t mean it should ruin our time with Daisy.” Rubbing my back Mars gives me another wink. Wrapping my arms around Mars I try so hard not to close in on myself because I know that these people have done nothing wrong and they seem to want to get to know me, but knowing that I’ll eventually have to go back has me shaking. *I’ve done it before, I can do it again.*

“Alright! I called Mr. Mather and begged him to let you stay over tonight. Maddie and Abby were staying over anyway, and I think you should bond with us girls first. Right girls?” Abby and Maddie nod along with Sarah’s sentiment. My shoulders relax, I appreciate that she acts as if this was her plan after all and not that Sawyer hates me so much that he doesn’t want me there. After I’ve calmed down some more, Mars lets me go and I do the same but I kind of miss his warmth. After I have sat down in the booth next to Mars. DJ hands me a chocolate muffin, *that looks so good I could die.*

“For me?”

“Uh, Yeah I didn’t know what you liked so I just got you chocolate.” DJ scratches the back of his neck.

“It’s perfect, thank you!” I look down at my muffin and start picking pieces of it off. I don’t speak much after that but it’s not because they don’t try to get me to talk, they do, I just don’t feel like I have anything to talk about.

After an hour or so the girls decide it is time to leave. Sarah grabs my elbow.

“Do you need to grab anything from the house? A phone charger? Laptop? I can cover you on the clothing front.” I look down at the ground.

“I only have clothes and a journal, I have my journal with me, so I am good.” Luckily, I have bandages in my purse. I look up at Sarah and can see the pity in her eyes, I don’t want her pity, it makes me feel weak.

“Ok, then let’s have the best slumber party of our lives.” It’s my *only* slumber party.

Jordan Hansen

I have had the pleasure of getting to know Jordan this semester through our '57 sessions. Jordan's creativity and passion for writing made him a great writer to work with. I am so happy that I had the opportunity to work with him. One thing we focused a lot on was character development. We worked on different aspects of these characters to give them qualities that made them relatable. In this first chapter of "Watch Your Wish" Jordan did an amazing job at introducing these characters. Every week Jordan's dedication to his work impressed me, and I look forward to reading his future pieces and continuing to watch him grow as a writer.

~Paige Allemann

Watch Your Wish

Chapter 1

"Come on, Jacob!" Caitlyn called back to her boyfriend, stopping in the middle of the trail and waving at him, her aquamarine eyes sparkling with excitement. "You're gonna miss the most *awesome* view!"

"It's not like it's going anywhere," Jacob puffed, clearly not used to the exertion that comes from backpacking around Devil's Lake. Then again, Caitlyn didn't start dating him because of his athleticism – or lack thereof, "Why are you in such a hurry to see a big rock?"

"The Devil's Doorway is not *just* a rock," Caitlyn huffed, adjusting her backpack. "It's a wonder of nature! Can you even imagine the kinds of forces that went into creating something like that?"

"So it's a really fancy rock, big deal," Jacob finally caught up with her and dug out the water bottle from his pack for a drink. "What I wanna know is why you're not outta breath. You're short, for Christ's sake – *and* a girl. *You* should be the one struggling, not me!"

"*Excuse me?*" she crossed her arms and jutted her chin up at him, "Do you know how sexist that is? This is the twenty-first century! Women can be as athletic as they want to be, regardless of their size. Also, I'm not *that* short!"

"You kind of are," Jacob shoved his bottle back into his bag and stalked past her, but not before she saw his ears turn red. "Anyway, I don't care as long as you're hot. Why do you care about this Demon Gate thing anyway?"

"Devil's *Doorway*," Caitlyn muttered under her breath before adding out loud. "I've told you before; my parents always take me camping and hiking for a weekend in the Fall here at Devil's Lake. It's kind of our family tradition. It's so beautiful out here, especially once all the leaves start turning color! And the view from the Devil's Doorway cliff is *amazing!*"

"If it's your family's tradition then why'd you drag me out here alone?"

"Because," Caitlyn blushed, quickly catching up to him. "I wanted to share this place with you since, y'know, you're my boyfriend."

She smiled up at him, hoping to catch one of his rare lopsided smiles that made her heart flutter, but he was busy casting a critical eye around their surroundings.

"I guess this place is okay, in a nature-y kinda way. Not really any trees turning colors yet," he shrugged.

"It's still summertime," Caitlyn ducked her head, fighting back her disappointment. "Although it's technically autumn now, since today is the equinox."

The dirt path turned to stone as they neared the cliffs surrounding the valley's edge. They took one last bend and came to a cliff overlooking a valley carved by glaciers and filled with a sea of green trees stretching off to the horizon with only a single red tree to draw the eye. A small placid lake sat off to the right, surrounded by cliffs on all sides – the Devil's Lake. Also on the right, resting on the same ledge that Caitlyn and Jacob stood on, was the Devil's Doorway.

The Devil's Doorway was a natural rock formation that formed a boxy rectangular arch leading only to empty air and a perilous drop to the valley floor below. Its top was disrupted by a small boulder perched between the two vertical columns of stone.

"That's it?" Jacob said, making Caitlyn's heart fall to her toes, "Seriously? It looks ready to fall in at any moment."

"I," Caitlyn wanted to find some way defend the Doorway, but words failed her. Frustrated, she ran a hand along her braid of gleaming copper hair, "Its better when you're standing inside."

Jacob looked doubtful, but he followed her lead and climbed up a series of shelves to stand inside the Doorway. Wind blew into their faces, rippling their clothes and ruffling Jacob's sepia toned hair. Caitlyn looked out on the valley below, awed by the beauty of nature, but when she glanced over at Jacob she found him looking at something on his phone.

Yet again she wondered if Jacob was worth being around anymore. She'd first met him when he needed a tutor to help him with Trigonometry last year. As she helped walk him through the equations Jacob would often display a blunt honesty that she found oddly charming, especially after he called Brandon, Caitlyn's jerky ex-boyfriend, Weasel Face – to his face, naturally. This resulted in a broken nose – for Jacob – and a scuffle that sent both of them to the office.

When she asked him about why he'd called Brandon Weasel Face he'd replied, "Cause he looks like a weasel and acts like one too. Nobody should treat a cute girl like crap."

This statement melted her heart, and once he finished serving detention they began seeing each other outside of their tutoring sessions. Something fluttered in the corner of her eye, snapping her out of her reverie. She quickly turned to look at it, but saw nothing besides shadows shifting inside the Devil's Doorway as the sun moved directly above them. Shadows formed inside the arch and filled it. Before Caitlyn and Jacob knew what was happening they were engulfed in inky darkness. When the darkness lifted they found themselves standing on an unfamiliar shoreline that smelled of saltwater and fish. Waves thrust themselves upon the shore with a dull roar. A line of granite cliffs marked the boundary between the beach and a lush forest.

"Where are we?" Caitlyn asked, looking around at their surroundings.

"Don't you know?" Jacob sneered, "I thought you were supposed to be the nature expert."

"I wish you'd stop saying things like that," Caitlyn pulled at her braid, sighing heavily through her nose. "Yes, I like hiking and camping, but that doesn't mean I know everything."

"Just sayin'," Jacob shrugged. "Is this what usually happens when you get inside that Gate thing?"

Caitlyn turned toward Jacob, preparing to lay into him about how *no, this isn't even remotely normal*, when she noticed something. A triangular cliff with an ancient stone tower perched on it jutted out from the forest farther down the beach. A strange, almost unearthly blue light issued from the tower's topmost level, where the beacon would be in a lighthouse.

"Someone's here," she pointed over Jacob's shoulder. "Maybe they know where we are!"

"We don't need them," Jacob held up his phone and wiggled it in the air. "Technology can solve anything." He powered it up and began tapping at it, but it wasn't long before he

swore, “What the hell? No wifi?! What kinda backwards place is this? Don’t tell me we’re in Amish country!”

“Don’t be so clueless, Jacob,” Caitlyn crossed her arms, crinkling the fabric of her T-shirt. “Lots of places don’t have wifi.”

“Yeah, as if,” Jacob scoffed, shoving his phone back into his pocket and walking toward the tower. “Everybody has internet these days – except for these losers, apparently. Looks like we’ll do things your way this time.”

“*My way?*” Caitlyn repeated incredulously, stalking after him. Sand crunched beneath her sneakers, “We’re supposed to be a team – boyfriend and girlfriend. We have no idea where we are and that tower looks like someone might be inside!”

“Yeah, so follow me and we won’t get lost.”

“Since when have I ever gotten lost?” Caitlyn demanded.

Jacob wisely decided not to answer and they trudged on through the sand in relative silence. They found a small well-worn path leading through a break in the cliffs to their top. It briefly led them through the forest, where they were finally able to grasp the scope of its size. The trees were ancient and massive, like the trees in Sequoia National Park. Standing among them made Caitlyn feel miniscule, like she had shrunk down to the size of an ant, and even Jacob seemed affected when she glanced at him.

They emerged from the forest and onto the cliff. Before them the tower jutted almost forty feet into the sky with a dull glow emanating through an open door at its base to match the brighter one at its peak. A statue stood a few feet away from the trees, made from solid gold and sculpted in perfect detail to resemble a man screaming and staring at his hands, a look of alarmed horror frozen on his face. Seeing this gave Caitlyn pause, but Jacob continued to push onward. She hurried after him, suddenly afraid of being left behind. Upon entering the tower they found a worn spiral staircase leading upward.

Each step up made the light grow brighter and brighter until they had to shield their eyes to keep from being blinded. They finally reached the top, and through the glare they could barely make out anything.

“Hello?” Jacob called, “Anyone here? You forgot to turn off your goddamn light!”

“*Jacob,*” Caitlyn hissed at him. “Don’t be rude, especially since we didn’t even bother to knock on the door.”

“Hate to break it to ya babe,” Jacob said. “But I think we’re the only ones here.”

Caitlyn looked around as best she could and realized he might be right. There were no movements or signs of life except those generated by her and Jacob.

“Let’s look for a way to turn off this light,” she suggested. “Then maybe we can find some clues about this place.”

“No shit Sherlock,” Jacob growled before moving away.

Caitlyn blindly felt her way around the room, moving carefully to avoid tripping over anything since her eyes were closed against the glare. She kept to the wall at first, hoping to find some sort of light switch, but stopped when a thought occurred to her. This tower was *ancient*, meaning that whatever was producing this light probably wasn’t electrical. She put her back to the wall and moved toward the center of the room where the light was strongest. Pretty soon something hard and round bumped into her hips.

Bending forward, she waved her arms back and forth. After a few fruitless swipes her fingers made contact with something hovering in the air. Smiling at her accomplishment she grabbed it and the blinding light went out. Now that the danger had passed she opened her eyes and looked at her prize; a gold pendant with a large teardrop-shaped sapphire in the middle and a gold chain strung through a loop at the top.

With nowhere else to put it she clipped it around her neck. Now that she could see again, Caitlyn glanced down to see what she had bumped into.

“Hey, come take a look at this,” she said to Jacob, who was busy blinking spots from his eyes.

“What is it?” he asked, coming over to stand opposite her.

“It’s some sort of diorama,” she looked down at a three dimensional map of a skull-shaped island carved into the top of a wide, waist-high circular stone dais. “Look, there’s the tower on the north side! I think this is a map of where we are.”

“This would make a great D&D board,” Jacob mused, bending forward to get a better look. “But how does this help us get back to civilization?”

As if it were responding to him a glowing golden line snaked from the tower, across the island, through a mountain range, to a cliff on the south side overlooking another beach. It was hard to tell from where Caitlyn stood, but it looked like there was a stone arch on that cliff.

“I think we’re meant to go there,” she pointed at the arch.

“Why doesn’t it try leading us to a boat?” Jacob asked.

“What if,” Caitlyn paused, knowing that what she was about to suggest sounded crazy, but it was the only thing that made sense to her at this point. “What if this whole island is magical, and that arch is some sort of portal back to where we were?”

“Don’t be stupid,” Jacob shook his head. “Magic doesn’t exist.”

“Then how do you explain all this?” Caitlyn spread her arms wide, indicating the entire tower.

“Easy,” Jacob said. “Someone’s pranking us. We’re probably on some sort of hidden camera show.”

With that he walked back to the stairs. Caitlyn started to follow, but her attention caught on some gold lettering forming in the air above the relief:

Resist the urge

Watch your wish

Shaken, she hurried down the stairs after Jacob. As soon as she stepped outside she was seized by a compulsion to do something – *say* something. Jacob was off walking in a circle, shouting threats and insults into the air, demanding for the people responsible to send them back home.

“There’s nobody here but us,” Caitlyn said distractedly, still trying to figure out what it was she wanted – no, *needed* – to do.

“Shut the frick up, Cait,” Jacob snapped at her. “So far all you’ve done is get your hands on some fancy new jewelry – yeah, I noticed. Just go off somewhere to work on your tan and paint your nails, or whatever it is girls do without their boyfriends. It’s time for a man to step up and get things done!”

“*Excuse me?*” Caitlyn raised an eyebrow, “Is *that* what you think the world’s like?”

“Well yeah,” Jacob shrugged. “Guys are better than girls. Hell, the only reason I *came* on this trip was because I thought it’d finally get you in the mood!”

“Get me in the mood for *what?*!” Caitlyn shrieked, walking up to Jacob and jabbing a finger into his chest, “Do you really think I’m just a walking sex toy?”

“Why else do you think I’d want to date someone like you?” Jacob rubbed the spot on his chest where she’d jabbed him.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Caitlyn shoved him. “How about finding someone to spend the rest of your life with? True love and all that?”

“True love’s just a story people tell so they don’t feel guilty while screwing each other.”

Jacob shoved her back with enough force to knock her to the ground, but she quickly got back to her feet. She tried to think of something to say that would hurt him, but was too mad to think straight. Caitlyn glared up at him, wishing she could make him feel every bit as small as he'd made her feel.

Wish... that word echoed in her mind. Yes, *that's* what she needed to do, but what should she wish for? A thought occurred to her, something that forced its way to the front of her mind and wouldn't leave until she said it.

She tilted her head back and glared up at him, "I wish you wouldn't look down on me anymore!"

Light flashed, blinding her as the necklace vanished from around her neck and the wind rushed around her. She felt a curious pressure building inside her body, like she was taking a deep breath to inflate a balloon. The pressure kept increasing until she felt ready to *burst*. Just when it seemed like she couldn't possibly hold anymore pressure there was a sense of sudden release, like she'd finally exhaled into the balloon. At the same time she *was* the balloon, and felt herself expanding.

These sensations repeated themselves again and again, making her dizzy and lightheaded. By the time everything finally stopped she felt nauseous and ready to pass out. The wind stopped blowing and the light faded, though it took almost a full minute of continuous blinking before her eyes were clear of the remaining after-images. She tried shaking her head to clear the dizziness, but that just made it worse.

Caitlyn's stomach lurched and she had just enough time to stumble into the forest before the contents of her stomach were heaved up and out. Her throat burned and tears ran down her face, but there was nothing she could do but hold onto a nearby tree for support and wait for things to settle. After what seemed like forever Caitlyn's stomach finally ran out of things to eject, leaving her panting and coughing and tasting bile. Wiping a shaky hand across her mouth she coughed and spat on the ground, setting off a round of dry heaving.

She foolishly expected Jacob to lay a comforting hand on her trembling back – and maybe offer her a drink from his bottle – but of course he did neither of these things. Caitlyn glanced back over her shoulder to glare at him, but he was nowhere in sight. All she could see was the tower, but something was wrong. It looked...smaller, somehow.

Thinking that maybe – just maybe – she might have traveled farther away than she'd thought, she moved toward it. One, two, three steps. Each time it drew closer and a little bit bigger, but not nearly big enough. On the fourth step she was standing right beside it, but it was still too small. Its top level, which had lit up once more with that unearthly, blinding light, was barely level with her chest. She stepped around it, trying to figure out what was going on, how it could have gotten so small.

She heard distant shouting and looked around for its source. Eventually she realized it was coming from down by her feet. Looking down she saw a small figure that was barely taller than her shoes running to keep up with her strides and waving their arms to catch her attention.

"Hello?" She crouched to get a better look at them.

"Cait!" The person shouted up at her, "Hey, Cait! It's me!"

"*Ohmygod!*" She gasped, collapsing to her knees, "Jacob?! How did you get so small?"

"I'm not small," he shouted back. "You're a giant! You hear me? A GIANT!"

"I'm a giant?" Caitlyn shook her head, refusing to believe something so ridiculous, "No, giants don't exist! Even if they did, then how can I be one? I'm a normal teenage girl!"

"You grew!" Jacob shouted at her, "There was this light, and then you started growing!"

Caitlyn wanted to protest, but then she thought of what she'd just gone through. Could that have been the growth Jacob was talking about? She looked at the tower, which had loomed

over her not that long ago, and then at Jacob standing between her knees, utterly dwarfed by them.

"I'm...I'm a giant," she said faintly, aware for the first time of how loud her voice was even when speaking softly.

Caitlyn stood and started pacing from one side of the cliff to the other, running her hands along her braid. Each step thundered against the ground, making it shudder beneath her feet. A few boulders dislodged from the cliff and fell to the beach below, startling her.

"What am I going to do? How am I going to live? I-I'll need tons of food everyday just to survive. Literal tons! How will I find shelter from the weather?"

These and countless other questions swirled around her mind.

"How did this happen?" Jacob dashed out of her path to avoid getting stepped on.

"I-I made a wish," she started out slowly. "And then the necklace flashed and..."

OHMYGODTHENECKLACE!

Her outburst came out so loud that it echoed throughout the landscape and scared hundreds of birds from their nests.

"Easy there, loudmouth," Jacob shouted, clapping his hands over his ears. "You're not small anymore!"

"Sorry," Caitlyn whispered, covering her mouth and kneeling in front of him. "I need you to go back inside the tower. There was a necklace floating above the diorama. That's the source of the light, and I think it also granted my wish."

"Why don't you use it again?" Jacob asked

"It's gone," Caitlyn gestured at her chest, where the pendant used to rest. "I think it's back inside the tower. I'm too big to fit, but you can still get to it."

"Are you sure it'll work?"

"Positive."

Jacob stared at her for a few seconds before going inside the tower. While she waited Caitlyn used the water from her bottle to wash the lingering taste of bile from her mouth. She was just putting it away when the tower went dark. After that she began to anxiously pace about once more, careful to step lightly to avoid dislodging anymore rocks. There were no windows for her to peek into except for at the very top, so she had no way of tracking Jacob's progress. When he finally came out she was ready to scoop him up and demand to know where the pendant was.

"Here it is," he held it up by its chain, letting it swing loose.

Excited, Caitlyn knelt and reached for it with her forefinger and thumb. At the last second Jacob stuffed the pendant into one of his pockets.

"I've been thinking," he patted his pocket and lazily stared at the top of Caitlyn's T-shirt. "You're pretty damn cute and all, but you're not what I'd call pinup material."

"What are you talking about?" Caitlyn sat back and crossed her arms over her chest to hide it from Jacob's gaze, "Just give me the necklace."

"Here's the thing," Jacob shoved both hands into his pockets. "I think I know how to turn you into a total bombshell; all it'll take is a little magic."

"Wait," Caitlyn reached out, realizing what he was about to do. "Stop! Don't do it!"

Jacob ignored her and took the pendant out of his pocket, "I wish you had a really curvy – no, I wish you had a really *voluptuous* figure!"

Light flashed, the wind howled, and Caitlyn felt herself *change*. Looking down she saw her body filling out and shaping her T-shirt and Capri's in all the right ways. She ran her hands over her chest and down her sides, gasping each time she discovered a set of newly endowed curves.

“It worked,” Jacob said when everything finally settled, staring at her torso. “It worked!” He let out an excited whoop that had her blood boiling.

“WHAT THE HELL?” She thundered, not caring how loud she was or how many birds she scared.

“Calm down,” Jacob raised his hands, trying to placate her. “It’s no big deal.”

“No big DEAL?!” Caitlyn repeated incredulously, gesturing at herself, “You can’t just *do* this to someone. EVER!”

“I don’t see what the big deal is,” Jacob shrugged. “You’re totally gorgeous now! How can you not be excited about that?”

“Shut up, Jacob,” Caitlyn growled. “Just shut up and get that necklace again. *I’m* going to make a wish this time even if I have to break your arms to get it.”

Jacob flinched and turned pale, but quickly recovered and shot her a resentful look. Beyond that he didn’t dare argue. Under Caitlyn’s furious glare he approached the tower again. At the last second the door slammed shut in his face. He staggered back, holding his nose and swearing up a storm. When he got far enough away the door opened again, but when he moved closer it slammed shut once more. Growling, he grabbed the handle, but no matter how much he rattled, jerked, and pounded the door remained stubbornly shut.

“Wait a sec, Jacob,” Caitlyn pinched his backpack and hauled him off to the side. “Let me take a crack at it. I feel like breaking something.”

“By all means, break away,” Jacob moved to stand beside the screaming gold statue, leaning against it and staring appreciatively at her shapely backside. “I’ll just stay back here and enjoy the sights.”

Caitlyn didn’t bother to even glare at him. He could stare at her butt all day for all she cared. As soon as she got that pendant she’d undo the effects of *both* wishes – and arrange a little payback for Jacob – but first she had to get through that door. At first she tried to simply push it open with her fingers. When that didn’t work she tried flicking it open, but it didn’t budge. Finally, in an act of sheer frustration and desperation, she rose to her full height and tried punching through one of the tower’s windows.

“ARGH! MOTHER F...” She screamed and stamped, holding her hand and biting her lip to keep from swearing.

“Is everything okay up there?” Jacob called from down below. “What’s taking so long?”

“I can’t...it won’t,” Caitlyn shook her throbbing hand. *Why wouldn’t the tower break?* When the answer came to her she let out a stream of words that would have gotten her grounded.

“What was *that* about?” Jacob asked.

“The tower must be enchanted to keep out people who’ve made a wish using the necklace,” she rounded on Jacob, her eyes prickling with tears. “You IDIOT! You wasted our only chance to fix this mess!”

“Come on, babe,” Jacob raised his arms again, as if he could calm her. “We can work this out! We’re a team, remember?”

“No, Jacob,” she swiped at her stinging eyes, refusing to cry in front of him. “We’re not.” She stepped over him and into the giant forest, which didn’t seem quite as big or wondrous anymore. Jacob watched her disappear into the trees with a pang of regret.

“Caitlyn,” he whispered, letting his arms drop. “I’m sorry.”

Nichole Hougard

It's been a great semester getting to work with Nichole. From our first session together I recognized that she was a talented and dedicated writer with a story to tell and the skills to tell it. "Revival" is the opening to a much longer story that we worked on over the course of our sessions that focuses on a fantastical, ancient world filled with magic and danger. This long-lost world crosses over into our modern age through the protagonist Rider and his centuries-old quest for vengeance. Nichole's writing brought her characters vividly to life on the page, giving them complexities and traits that made them feel very real and interesting to follow. I always enjoy exploring the worlds learners will build in fantasy writing, since each learner brings such different ideas, concepts, and rules to magical elements. With Nichole it was no exception, and I greatly enjoyed reading about the incredible variations and new concepts she brought to fantasy fiction through this story. I truly hope that Nichole continues to hone her skills as a writer and keeps working hard on her craft. I know that her stories will continue to be enjoyed by many others, and I wish her the best not only in writing, but in all future endeavors.

~Cannon Van Handel

Revival

Light poured in through the small cracks in remnants of the stone walls. Within the lichen covered basement, filled with must and mold, stood a stone table meant for the dead. And on top of the ancient table laid a casket. Old runes swirled the sides, and almost seemed to contain a faint glow if one looked close enough. A large window pane allowed a crystal clear view of the figure within it. A living tomb for the being that slept within. Glass crackled and popped, spraying shards amongst the mossy stone floor beneath the intricately carved oak casket. Light specks gilded his serene face, before his eyes snapped open. Turning his expression from peaceful to vengeful. Within the coffer a hand reached out and gripped the edge of shattered glass, what used to be the window pane of the casket.

His hand crushed the broken crystals as he lifted himself from the ruins. Blood ran down the side of the old panels, but the man didn't seem to care. He forced himself up, only to slam back down into small pieces of glass that had slipped beneath him. He grunted from the pain. He sat up carefully this time. *No need to rush things, she's already gone*, the man thought. A twinge of pain struck him, fast and cold like a silent arrow through his heart. After all this time here, he had no one to wake up too, because she and everyone else that he had loved were all dead and gone. Buried nearby, in the family cemetery he was certain or in Fayette's case probably burned. Fayette. He could still picture her face. Always smiling, with flowers entwined in her long locks swept back to reveal her drawn out Fae ears and high cheekbones. A slight blush nearly always tinted her cheeks when he pushed away those frosty white locks. She was so beautiful, and so happy when she was with him.

His eyes burned. Solemn tears dropped from his eyes, raining on his broken heart beneath. Everyone he had ever known in life was gone. Moved on to the after life without him. Even she had. He didn't realize how much he missed her, and *needed* Fayette until now. The one person in life that could make all his pain melt away with a peck on the cheek or a caress to his face with her soft, delicate hands. And she had vanished, so much so that even the spirit she promised would protect him after she went had moved on. He was alone in the world. He didn't have to be though. No one could stop him from ending himself here and now. *No*, he thought. *Then*

they'd have the upper hand. Then they decided my fate, like they thought they did before they shut me in this box.

A snarl came to his lips just remembering why he was here. One of the incisors came down on his bottom lip, and blood trickled down his chin. Dripping onto his shirt, spreading within the fabric. He felt the blood seeping into his skin, making the fabric stick to him uncomfortably. At that moment he knew what he had to do. He glanced around the room, the small prison cell of his own. Light crept in through broken bricks that never used to be so worn down. The smell of rot and decay of plants and possibly a dead mouse filled his nose. Candles were melted to the stone table that held up his deathbed, the drippings that ran down the sides now frozen. Water dripped somewhere in one of the unlit corners, while small feet scuttled in the background. Creating a symphony that only the dead in the mausoleum must listen to now. His head spun, as all the memories swirled back. The image of what this room used to look like before it was overtook flashed before him. Everything he used to know came back to him, haunted him. All the good and bad memories encompassed him, as he began to remember what life was like before that imprisonment in the living coffin, the Eternity Casket. Its sole purpose: to contain any powerful enchanted being within its thick wooden wall. It wasn't made for this man though; it wasn't made for Rider.

His old life seemed to hover in the very room with him as he began to lift himself from the ancient casket. The glass crushed underneath his worn leather heels as he stood. The door in the corner awaited him. He wobbled towards the old, and rusted iron door, teaching himself how to walk again. It had been so long since he had stretched his legs, ran up the expansive hills and gardens that used to grow off the back of the mansion he was now trapped in. The door, he assumed, used to be menacing. Now all that was left was a deteriorated bolt and a couple rusted out locks, that surely had lost their keys centuries ago. It didn't take much for him to bust through the door, and lucky for him didn't burn all too much. He strutted out of the hallway, leaving a blood trail behind him, and headed for the only thing he believed could help him. Shuffling through the darkened halls, feeling the sides as his only guide through the pitch black that surrounded him. He knew this cellar like the back of his hand, after all he used to play in these halls and adjoining rooms all the time as a child. Wispy ghosts of small children seemed to dance in the obscure shadows of the hallway around him. Then shook the memory, *No I have to find it.* He set himself straight again. There would be time to think about all his good memories later.

He crept further, always keeping his fingertips pressed close to the walls. Mortar crumbled under his hand and he knew he had found the spot. He wedged his finger tips underneath the old mortar that used to hold the few bricks in place before his brother and him ripped out the bricks. Shifting and quiet grinding of slabs against each other echoed throughout the hollow hallway until the block hit the ground. Rider reached in, and slowly pulled out a browned, and dried up leather satchel.

He reached within pulling out an ordinary looking compass. The arrows refused to move on the ancient dial. Seamlessly he flicked the top that should have been held by a chain, and twisted the small clasp to face him. Ever so gently he pushed down the button in the middle, and a small vial raised to the surface from within the plain compass. He took the vial out, and using what little light he had around him, inspected to make sure the vial was clean. After which, he spit into the little glass, and carefully slid it down into the compass once again. The small mechanics within began to shudder and spin, faltering lights began to flicker on the face as well. The arrow snapped up, pointing north. Rider smirked, *Finally after all this time we shall meet again Carston.* And with that, he began to walk towards the only known way out of this ruined cellar. Into the sunlight, and into a whole new world.

Aubrey Peters

Aubrey was an absolute pleasure to work with this semester! I appreciated her positivity and willingness to share her personal experiences with me each week so much. Many of the pieces Aubrey brought in to work on addressed her real-life experiences and feelings, and I applaud her for being so open and willing to share that writing with me. The piece she has chosen for this publication is one which we spent a lot of time on, sorting out what was going on in the world, and Aubrey's personal experiences with it. The emotions and experiences expressed in this piece are something I think we can all relate to in this crazy time and truly captures this moment in time spectacularly. I hope Aubrey continues to write about the things she is experiencing, as not only are they enjoyable to read in the current moment, but will be a great time capsule of her life!

~Mattea Schlender

There once was a virus that took over the world, it was known as the Coronavirus. It started in China but came to the United States around January in the year 2020. The U.S. started to taking precautions around the fifteenth of March. Ever since then the precautions became even more strict, as the cases increase.

The college students got sent home for spring break to find out from an email they were home for the rest of the semester. After just a week of being home, the students would have to pack up their dorm rooms for the year. They would not return until the fall semester if the virus had cleared up by then. The transition to living at home was difficult at first, due to life being so different than just a week prior. The college students had many freedoms that being home had taken away from them by parents or the government. Whether that was hanging out with friends whenever, staying up or out as late as they wanted, or going out to eat without asking. When the businesses started to close to prevent the spread of the virus, quarantine became more real. This was due to the "Safer at Home" order in Wisconsin. Although it is not what businesses wanted to do, it was to benefit everyone. Many restaurants are still providing curb-side pickup for customers. It is not what many Americans are used to, but they are adapted during this trying time. Communication has adapted as well whether that is through talking to friends on social media or using facetime to interact with others not in one's house. Everyone's lives had changed but for college students, their whole environment changed faster than they expected.

One of the aspects that was very different for college students was the new "online learning". While many classes used Zoom, which is an online group meeting application, others used prerecorded videos and online tasks through Canvas. This meant that "lecture" could be done at any time rather than a specific time on campus. Now students could not see their classmates and interact with them weekly anymore. Online learning would continue to take time to adapt to but prevents students from being exposed to the Coronavirus.

Personally, I have found an internal struggle with quarantine due to the change of environment. Being home was already a struggle but being "trapped" at home was worse. Typically, when I am home, I find myself going out for late night runs to the grocery store instead of sitting at my house. I could no longer do this due to the limited time in the grocery stores and the Stay at Home order. As the two weeks continued to progress, the pressure was on to get more people to stay inside. I was doing pretty good even though my life had been changed drastically before my eyes.

During the two weeks of spring break, I caught up or worked ahead on classwork. I hung out with my family by going on walks and we organized the house. Then after two weeks of the extended spring break, online classes began. The first day I was not motivated after catching up on past work. Once Tuesday rolled around, I got a little better but knew that Wednesday I would have to work even harder. As the week progressed, I got more motivated to do schoolwork and work ahead on some classes if possible. Online learning has changed the dynamic of college but was done for the precaution of students from the Coronavirus.

During this quarantine time, everyone has goals for what they would like to accomplish. Personally, I want to work on working out more than I did at college which was already four days a week. I have been trying to go for daily walks with my sister on top of my daily workouts to get outside more. Another goal of mine is to continue to excel in my classes and stay on top of my education, even with being home during this time. No matter the goals, this is a great time to set or accomplish goals while having the time available. Taking advantage of the time with family is a great experience to come from having to quarantine this spring. Although, it is not ideal to be "locked" up in our houses, this is a time in history that will never be forgotten.

Pachia Moua

I had a fantastic time working with Pachia over the course of the semester! The biggest thing that stood out to me about her as a writer was how well she was able to convey raw emotion into everything she wrote. She was able to channel her feelings about very personal matters into both poetry and prose, and though I know this was an especially difficult semester for her, she handled it all with grace and a smile. I loved reading her work each week, because it always surprised me and taught me something new. Pachia is a talented writer, and I only hope that she continues to write stories and poems in the way only she can!

~Lindsey Bundgaard

Dear Phauj,

How are you doing? We've been prepping for the funeral and everything is havoc. It's been about four days since the world stopped for a moment to see that you've lived such a long life with our family for over fifty years. I don't know if you remember, but the last few words you said to me were somewhere along the lines of, "Study hard at school and don't let fun get in the way. I'll miss you a lot and I love you." I sometimes wish I could go back to hear you say it again to the point where I remember every word you said that day. Where I engrave everything in my heart. Just the fact that you were sad I had to leave for college again makes me feel regret and sadness. Regret because I could've chosen to stay with you another two days before school started but I let my selfishness get in the way of my decisions. I'm sad because I didn't get to see you one last time before you took your last breath that day.

I remember that day so vividly. I was finally done with my three classes that were practically back-to-back and I remember being so stressed the night before. I had four mini assignments due for English 250, a reading quiz to prepare for English 284, and an essay on a film we were assigned to watch for Foreign Language 381. After all of that I was finally able to relax. I've been stressed all week because of you and school altogether but it was just that moment where I finally felt some peace in mind. Where I was caught so off-guard. I called my boyfriend, and while we were on call, I received a notification from my eldest sister and she said, "Grandma's gone everyone." I almost didn't believe it for a second because you were doing well the night before, so what changed? I went on the Facebook messenger app for clarification and it became my worst nightmare of the year. You were gone, phauj. Just like that. Like a snap of the fingers, you left us all behind and entered the netherworld.

I cried hard after hearing the news because the one person I cared and loved the most in this entire world is gone. Forever. Never to be seen or heard from again. I cried so hard that day, my boyfriend came see me. He knew how much I cared about you, so he skipped his only class of the day to be with me, to comfort me. Even he cried as we all grieved over your dead body at the hospital. He understood the pain we were all going through. His grandma had passed a few years ago, and it was obvious the pain was still there. The empty void that will never be filled again because they're gone. That's me right now. When I see a photo of you, sadness just resonates within because I wish I could just hear your voice again. Hold your hand in mine and see the wrinkles of time in your hands. It always fascinated me that you were so old of age, yet you have lived this long of a life. Everything you've seen just reflected off your pale brown eyes every time I looked at them. I only wish I asked you how your life has been these past years.

I miss you, phauj. I wish you were my age so we can talk like good old friends, but of course, it's just a wish. I know you would want us all to be happy instead of sad because of your death. I'm trying. I really am. I've been distracting myself and trying to focus more on school, but nothing seems to have an affect anymore. My mind is so muddled with so many thoughts, I'm afraid things will become too much. Maybe when we finish burying you, I'll come visit and tell you about what's going on in life. Something I wish I had done before it was too late. Before I close this letter, I hope you're doing well. I don't know what happens in the afterlife, but I honestly hope you're getting everything you deserve. Regardless of what you've done in this lifetime. Thank you for everything and know you've impacted my life greatly. Kuv hlub koj tiag mus zoo koj os, phauj.

Sincerely your great-niece,
Paj Zoo

Hannah Behling

Hannah was my first '57 learner to have worked on a novel with me. It was a huge project that took up the majority of the semester and a great experience. Hannah has shown a great ability to form and create this massively in-depth and large-scale world. We worked so much on this novel that when she brought in the micro-fiction she submitted, it was a drastic change of pace and style. The story hits some real emotional notes and leaves an uncomfortably real feeling of being consumed by this issue, but not wanting to address it. Overall, I have really enjoyed this semester working with Hannah and wish her the best on her future writing endeavors.

~Dillon Lehrer

The Day I Won't Forget

Standing there in the old dim building, the stained-glass windows adding nothing due to the storm brewing outside. Everyone I stood around dressed in dark tones; black, gray, blue. I could hear the whispers all around me and everyone's eyes staring holes into my back. I sit in the front row, sitting at attention my back not touching the pews. The slow tune of the organ playing in the background. No one dared to look me in the eyes and when I would look at them, I would receive a small smile, which meant nothing to me anymore, it was all fake, how could anyone smile today? They put a hand on my shoulder, not knowing what to say to me. Quiet sniffles filled the room as everyone's attention shifted to the small shiny casket in the front of the room. Everyone wished for this to be done, to wake up from this nightmare that we are living through.

Do they feel the emptiness in their chest like I do? Do they know that I will go home to a now empty house and wake up the next day living in the exact same nightmare? The room that was once filled with light, laughter and life now void of it all. Now the fridge, empty of all childish drawings that once filled its surface.

The house that will now remain quiet, no more squealing laughter, only the hum of the furnace, or even the sound of the rain on the roof. The sky crying the tears that I am now unable to shed. The small flower wilting, life leaving its body as I do the same.

Shannon Lagore

It's always a fun time tutoring a fellow tutor, and my sessions with Shannon were certainly no exception. I looked forward to our meetings each week, knowing that we would be reading through and discussing an exciting new excerpt of her novel or exploring the world that became more and more real. Shannon is an impeccable storyteller, and her nuanced and relatable characters are what truly set her apart. It's hard not to love Catherine and Nic, the narrators of the novel featured below, and it is truly enjoyable to watch their relationship progress. I cannot wait to read the novel in full when she one day publishes it, because I know that it will be an unquestionable success. Working with Shannon has been one of the highlights of my semester; she is extremely talented and I loved every word she wrote. My only regret is that I never got to be her learner in return!

~Lindsey Bundgaard

Author's note: The following piece is comprised of two parts of the novel I've been working on in 357 this semester. So far, I'm about six and a half chapters into the novel, and the first section of my *Wordplay* piece is the fourth chapter. The second section comes from a much later part of the book, that I haven't actually gotten to yet. I get a bit impatient when it comes to writing the exciting scenes ☺. I decided to include both parts in my submission because they showcase two very different stages in the relationship between my two protagonists. Chapter Four is one of the first times Catherine and Nic really get to have a conversation, while the second section is their first kiss. Lots of time passes between the two sections, there's a significant amount of character development that I have yet to write, and things are bound to change by the time the novel hits shelves, but I hope you enjoy getting a peek into their relationship!

Part One (Chapter Four)

Nic

I don my armor quietly, listening to the chatter of the men on my shift. Every so often I catch them as they sneak wary glances at me. Word spread about Marke. How that word frames me, I'm not sure yet. They don't appear to be extra afraid of me, but they don't seem all that angry either. Marke isn't here in the cellars, as he should have been. Likely, he's nursing his injured hand like the— I shake my head. There's no need to get worked up about him, especially if he's not here. Instead, I strap on my belt, sheathe my sword and set off for my station for the day. Gate duty, arguably the worst station in all of the castle and no doubt Marke's doing. The captain would give him just about anything to keep him from complaining.

There's a thick fog and a light rain dampens my hair. I take my position near the gate and stand there. Waiting. Watching. Hoping to the gods that *something* happens, or *someone* interesting walks into the castle grounds. Otherwise, today is going to last for years.

Yesterday would have been a good day to be on gate duty, what with the queen and princess coming home, and everyone visiting for the funeral of the late prince. But today? Today the weather was somber, and the people stayed home. There isn't much business to be done in a castle after a funeral, as officials, both local and foreign, are giving the family time to grieve. Regardless of the lack of necessity, I stand by the gates loyally. For hours.

“There you are!” I vaguely hear behind me, but remain uninterested. I’m not often accosted by people with such posh accents, so there’s no need to turn around.

“Hello? Nic?”

I suppose that is worth my attention. I turn to see Princess Catherine stalking towards me. She’s lost her 32 skirts and wears trousers. Is that even allowed for a royal? They’re very... form fitting, I notice. “Yes, your highness?”

“You’re a very hard person to find. I’ve been all over the castle looking for you,” she says.

I look around. “I’ve been right here all day. As I was stationed. It’s the most... stationary of stations.”

“Oh.” She bites her lip, embarrassed. “I don’t know how being a King’s Guard works. Didn’t think to ask anyone. Sorry.”

“There’s no need to apologize to me, it’s not as though I was waiting on you to come find me,” I say, trying to relieve her stress a little. I know she’s not helpless, but sometimes the way she carries herself begs me to help her.

“Right, well I have a proposal for you.”

This should be interesting. “Oh?”

“Um, well, I never thought that I’d be Queen. Neither did my parents, or my brother, or Charles, or really anyone in their right mind. Which means that I haven’t been trained for... well anything other than being married off to some foreign prince, most likely. But now I’ll have to take responsibility for this country. *My* country. And I don’t even know how to protect myself. I don’t know *a lot* of things, but that seems to be one of the most important. But I also know for a fact that it’s something my mother wouldn’t believe to be even remotely important. ‘That’s what the King’s Guard is for,’ she would say.” She stops and waits for a response from me. However, I don’t know *how* to respond, so I wait for her to continue.

“Anyway, I suppose what I’m asking of you is to teach me to defend myself. In secret. It’s something my brother always told me he’d teach me, but...”

She trails off and we’re both quiet for a moment. I don’t know what to say, she doesn’t know what to do. It’s all very awkward.

In my silence, she forges on, speaking quickly, almost stumbling over her words.

“Anyway, I just really admire how confident you are, especially as a woman, and I’d really like to gain a sort of confidence like that myself, and I think you’d be a good person to teach me, you know, because you’re a woman too, right?”

“Are you clarifying that I’m a woman?”

“What? No! I... Listen. You impressed me in the woods when you took Marke on. I want that. I want to be able to intimidate the—pardon my language—balls off a man, and I don’t think a man would be able to teach me quite that type of confidence. But you could. You taught me how to hold a dagger better, and I’m sure you could teach me how to hold a sword, and then even fight with one, and I’d be really, very grateful if you did, and there would certainly be some reward in it for you, and I could see to it that you wouldn’t be stuck at this station, as you look very bored here, so... why not?”

Why not indeed.

“I feel as though this is something that will certainly get me in trouble if we get caught,” I say.

“Oh, likely,” Catherine confirms. “But I didn’t expect that to be a problem for you. You broke Marke’s finger yesterday. You don’t care about trouble.”

I smirk. “Getting in trouble for something everyone wants to do is very different from getting in trouble with her majesty, Queen Cassandra of Endreau.”

“Fair point, she says, looking disappointed. “I can handle my mother though. I won’t let her do anything, I promise.”

If she was willing to go up against the queen, she was serious. When news broke of Prince Percival’s death and the royal women, rumors flew of the relationship between the queen and the princess. In fact, their relationship was so bad, bets were placed on whether or not they would both make it back from the sea.

“And how do you propose pulling me out of the regular stations to be with you?”

She looks at me like I’m stupid, which I do not like. “I’m the heir to the throne,” she says. “It isn’t hard to get what I want.”

I raise an eyebrow. Yesterday I at least slightly appreciated her acknowledgement of her privilege. Today her nonchalance about it irks me.

She can tell, following up with, “Listen, I don’t normally pull the ‘I’m the princess, do what I say’ card, but when I *really* want something? Or *need* something... I just know how to use my position to my advantage, what’s so wrong with that?”

“I didn’t mean to offend, your highness.” I can’t tell how offended she is. I can’t tell what she might do if I genuinely offend her to a more serious level. I can’t tell much about her at all other than the fact that she knows what she wants and she’s used to getting what she wants. I can’t even tell if I actually like her. As a person. Sure she’s stunning, and strong in her own right, but she’s also... a lot to handle.

Rubbing her temple, Catherine looks annoyed with me—with me! “Don’t do that,” she says, sighing. “You’re supposed to be the confident one.”

“How does my wish to avoid offending a princess make me less confident?”

“I guess it doesn’t, I just... I thought you were different. I didn’t expect you to be like everyone else who fears offending me. You’re the type of person on whom the ‘I’m a princess, do what I say’ line doesn’t work.” She huffs. “Now I’m the one being offensive.”

Now I rub my own temples. This girl is more all over the place than anyone I’ve ever met, it’s exhausting and infuriating. And somehow, despite the growing feeling of annoyance, it’s endearing. Of course, that’s maddening on its own. How on earth does one person incite so many emotions?

I start off cautiously. “You haven’t offended,” I say, though really what I mean is ‘you haven’t offended, you just make me want to strangle you.’ Instead, I continue, “I’m confident, yes. I’m not afraid of authority. But that doesn’t mean I don’t know my own place. When you grow up outside of these gates, you learn that those who live them are... more than you will ever be. AS long as they continue to treat you fairly, they are deserving of your respect. For most people, that translates to fear in a sort of gods-fearing way. For others, like me, it means you—royals—are doing your part to keep this country together, afloat, prosperous, what have you. So when I said I didn’t mean to offend, I was genuine. I appreciate that you know you have this privilege, even if I don’t think you should use it quite as often as you do.”

She blinks. It’s the most I’ve ever spoken to someone within the castle walls. It’s the most honest I’ve been as well, and I find myself wondering why I shared so much of myself with this girl I barely know.

“It’s all I have, my privilege,” she whispers, almost like she doesn’t want to tell me. “I don’t have your confidence, my father’s intelligence, my mother’s intimidation... Percy’s all around perfection. Without my title, I’d be very average, I think.”

I want to tell her there’s nothing average about her. But I feel that it’s not my place. I don’t know her well enough yet.

“A-anyway. The proposition. What do you think?”

“Catherine, dear, I’ve been looking for you.”

I snap to attention as King Edwin appears behind the princess in my field of vision. “Your majesty,” I say, bowing. Catherine curtsies, which looks odd sans skirts.

The king nods to me as Catherine says, “Father, how can I help you?”

“Let’s walk and talk, shall we? And leave Nicola to do her job.”

My jaw tenses at the use of my full name, but at the same time, the king knows my name. Something I never would have imagined before I joined the Guard.

To my surprise, Catherine says, “Nic. She prefers Nic.”

“Nic, of course, I’m so sorry,” King Edwin says, bowing his head respectfully to me. I’m blown away.

“It’s no problem at all, your majesty.” I bow again. “Enjoy your walk.”

“We will, thank you.” The king turns away and before she follows, Catherine raises her eyebrows at me.

“So?” she barely whispers.

With a laborious sigh and a roll of my eyes, I nod. “Okay.” Why not indeed.

She beams and pivots swiftly to keep pace with her father, almost skipping. I can’t help but watch her go, baffled by her... excessiveness. Before I return to my station, she looks back and me over her shoulder. And she winks. I shake my head. She’s a windstorm, the princess. Sweeps you up in an absurd conversation with crazy ideas and plans, and then your hair is fucked up as she leaves in a whirlwind.

Part Two

Nic

I go easy on her. Not absurdly so, she is getting better compared to our first lessons. She hasn’t had time to change into trousers, though, and I don’t want to disadvantage her and her 48 skirts. Can’t have the princess getting hurt because I’ve tripped her. Gods, the queen would likely have me beheaded. Besides, she needs a confidence boost after their screaming match. So I go easy on her.

As it turns out, I don’t need to.

“Who?” She strikes. “Does she think?” Another swipe to my legs. “She is?!” A spin and an overhanded swing to my head that I barely have time to block. She is fueled by rage as her bright red skirts bloom around her legs during the spin. I can see the fury in her eyes as she makes another series of swipes at me, each punctuated by a cry of anger.

“Good,” I say as she forces me back. “Use it. Use your frustration to annihilate your enemies.”

“I don’t want to annihilate my mother,” she says, stepping back and wiping sweat from her brow. She swivels her sword in her hand as we circle each other. Her footsteps are silent, but the linens of her dress swish as she moves. Who’s going to attack first? “I just want to shove my foot up her *fucking ass!*” she yells, rushing at me in a flurry of blows, sparks flying.

We fight hard for a few moments. The dense steel of our weapons clang, the sound vibrating loudly in my ears. We don’t worry about anyone hearing. She’s sweating hard as she backs up again, wiping it away from her forehead. It must be unbearable in all 53 of her skirts. I’m in simple trousers and a long sleeved tunic, and I want to strip layers of clothing. However, she’ll take advantage of that and go off on a rant about how I don’t understand what it’s like to be a royal. “Don’t let the feelings overwhelm you,” I say calmly when I notice she’s visibly shaking. “That’s one of the worst mistakes you can make.”

“Believe me,” she starts, taking another run at me. “If there’s one thing I learned before Percy died, it was to not let emotions take control.” She holds her sword as if to take an overhead swing, fakes me out, and kicks the back of my knee. Impressive. I falter, but not enough for her to gain dominance.

I can see the anger she holds against her mother, the stress of learning how to weave her way through politics weighing on her shoulders. She uses it, rather than letting it hinder her. Each stressor in her life charges the strikes she throws at me. I block most of them, but not without difficulty, and one even grazes my shoulder as I duck. The swings she takes are rapid, disjointed, but intense and almost violent. Technique and precision aren’t there, but the power is. Where I’m quick, she’s aggressive. Where she’s got strength, I’ve got strategy. I wonder how hard her muscles burn. My own shoulders ache from the vibration of each time our weapons connect. I can see in her eyes the pain, but can’t discern physical from emotional. Pain has always been weakness to me. Something I ignore. If I don’t let pain in, no one can hurt me. But Catherine has every reason to feel it. She has every reason to let it consume her. And instead she uses it. Her pain drives her forward, pushing her to do better. It entices others and tricks them into feeling pity, where they should feel fear.

I thought that I was above that. That being privy to her private thoughts during these sessions, that I’d grown immune to the manipulation she has such a command over. Until I’m all of a sudden stripped of my weapon and Catherine’s blade is at my throat.

We breathe hard, frozen in time, sweating. My eyes meet hers and I see her dull the flames in them. The walls come down, and her hunched shoulders relax.

“I’m just so tired of feeling like I’m not in control of my own life,” she says, the slightest hint of a quiver to her voice. I can see everything. Everything she’s feeling, everything she’s taking on, everything she wants to but can’t say. Her sword stays steady.

“Well--”

And then the weapon clatters to the ground, her hand grips the back of my neck, and her lips are on mine.

Catherine

I don’t know why I did it. It was probably inappropriate. But it felt so very right. So I did it. And now we’re kissing. Hard.

But gods, it’s *so good*. All the anger, the frustration drains from the tips of my fingers. My fingers entwined in Nic’s cropped hair. Like her hair was made for me to grip and twist and cling to.

Nic

Finally. *Gods* finally. Every time her hand brushed mine, every time she pushed my hair out of my eyes, every time she winked at me from across the castle as if she didn’t know how it fucked me all up. It was all leading to this kiss. I hold her close, the stiffness of her corset pressed against my stomach. She pushes me against the cold stone wall effortlessly and I realize how stupidly weak I am for this girl. Strength is security, is survival, and here I am letting her move me at her will.

There’s an ache in my stomach that I’ve been ignoring for weeks. An aching pain for her, to be whatever she needs me to be. Pain is weakness.

But fuck it if I’m not okay with being weak for her in this moment.

Hayley Williams

Working with Hayley this past semester has been such a pleasure! I am so grateful that I had the chance to see Hayley's story develop from the very beginning to what it is today. Every session that we had, Hayley brought something new to the table and I was always pleasantly surprised by the plot twists and excitement that she added to her work! Throughout this semester, we specifically worked on dialogue, characterization, and detailing for the story. Her finished work is a beautiful piece of art that turned out to be quite exemplary! I am so grateful that I had this opportunity to work with Hayley over the course of the semester and I am certain that she will continue to write exciting and captivating literature in her future!

~Hannah Jackson

Chapter Six

An Unfortunate Sighting

"Nope, nope, *nope!* There is absolutely *no way* I'm going down there." Milton is holding onto the banister of the basement stairs in a death grip and resisting the pushes and pulls of his friends. Juniper and Imogene attempt to do their very best to pry Milton from his spot on the stairs but decided it's best to leave him be for the time being. They know that the moment they get the trapdoor open, Milton will come speeding after them, not wanting to be left alone in the house.

Joining Parker by the trapdoor Juniper says, "We're getting absolutely nowhere with Milton. Any luck on your guys' end?" Parker shakes their head and swings down a wrench they found onto the padlock. It, unfortunately, refuses to break. Atticus is somewhere amongst the boxes returning, occasionally, with a new tool for Parker to try and use on the lock. This time, he returns with an old pipe he must have torn down from the ceiling. He is covered in cobwebs and who knows what else, but he still has that enormous god-killing smile on from when he discovered the basement.

Atticus hands Parker the pipe and walks past the girls saying, "I'll try talking to Milton, you guys stay here with Parker." He makes his way to Milton and sits on the steps next to him, still smiling, and begins to talk quietly with him. Only Milton can hear what Atticus is saying to him, but it looks like whatever he is saying is effectively calming Milton down. Atticus' eyes and smile softened when Milton begins to nod his head, stand up, and walk over to the others. Milton still looks nervous and frightened, but he is making no sudden moves to bolt back to the first floor.

Juniper is about to ask him what Atticus was saying to him when, in a flash, Parker brings down the pipe and brakes the padlock in one fatal blow. This time, coming up against another unknown piece to this puzzle, no one freezes or hesitates to move. The group scrambles to get the door open and peer into it, knocking over boxes and jars in the process. They all knock heads with one another in their excitement to look in, and then that feeling quickly draws to confusion.

The guesses at to what might be underneath the trapdoor came to several different ideas. Some are guessing that there is the possibility of some kind of treasure, some hope that there is nothing down there and they can leave (cough, cough *Milton*), and some begin to prepare themselves for being let down at the sight of nothing. What they do not think they might see is a

ladder leading down into a dark, extensive tunnel. Faint sounds come from the end of said tunnel and that makes Milton start to slowly turn around and try to make a break for the basement stairs. He doesn't get very far because Parker snatches their hand out and grabs onto the back of Milton's shirt, dragging him back over to the trapdoor. Atticus lays a hand on Milton's back and tries to get him to calm down once more.

Juniper is starting to feel the unease from the child's room creep up into her again and make her head start to pound. She wants to go down into the tunnel to see where it leads, but a better part of herself is telling her to turn tail and get the hell out of dodge. But if she leaves, she will never know the final truth behind this house and all those who supposedly died because of it. Juniper is arguing with her conscience so hard that she almost doesn't notice Imogene settling herself upon the ladder and beginning to descend.

"Imogene! What the hell are you doing?" Juniper calls out to her. Seeing that Imogene is making no move to stop, Juniper begins to head down the ladder after, with the others following suit. Jumping from the ladder, the group can barely see two feet in front of them, and so, it is hard for them to discern exactly how long this tunnel is. The sound they heard earlier echoes off the walls and wraps around the group, entrancing them and showing them the way, further and further from the safety of the ladder. They all grab onto the backs of each other's shirts and make a sort of train so that no one will be left behind in the black.

Finally, after a long, careful trek, the tunnel spits them out of the shadow onto a ledge overlooking a luminously filled cavern. Upon the walls of the cavern are sconces with fires blazing and casting shadows upon the floor. Ancient stones covered in moss and hard to read carvings litter the cave, some set up in patterns, and some fallen over onto their sides. In the middle of the cave, lies a stone unmarred by carvings and looks to be smooth to the touch. Flowers and other types of herbs surround the stone in intricate patterns and are spread upon the center stone. This cave and its contents only add more to the mystery of the house and to Juniper and her companions' confusion.

They hear the sound once more, and this time it comes from below the ledge they are standing on. Ducking back into the entrance of the tunnel, the group looks down and sees a small gathering of people in bright hooded robes. They are all chanting in a language unknown to Juniper and are slowly making their way to the center of the cave. Two figures, who's robes are considerably brighter, step up to the center stone and lay something large upon it. Juniper wants to see what it is that they put on the stone, so she lies on the floor and crawls towards the end of the ledge. Her friends are not happy that she is peering over the edge and try to get her to come back, but Juniper just ignores them and squints to get a better look. What she sees has her clambering back to her friends and covering her mouth, breathing deeply.

On the stone, lies a young boy who appears to be no older than thirteen. He is dressed in clothes from a bygone era and is unconsciously unaware of the robed figures surrounding him chanting louder and louder. The robed figures each hold out a hand and brings down upon them silver blades that make a clean cut on their palms. They raise their hands and shout one last chant, and then they place their hands upon the boy's body. Their blood is smeared onto his clothes, his hair, and his face. Still, the boy does not wake and for that Juniper is grateful that he does not see what goes on around him. She does not want to hear his screams or see what they would do to him if he was conscious. The figures step back from the boy and kneel on the ground, whispering amongst themselves.

Fear is gripping tight to Juniper's heart. Fear for herself, for her friends, and for the poor boy on the stone. She cannot bring herself to look upon the faces of her companions, for she would not be able to handle the emotions that lie there. Her brain is telling her to grab her friends fast and make an escape back to the house, back to the boat and the beach. To go home and try to forget what they are seeing. But her heart is what is stopping her from going. She needs to see, to learn, and to remember all that is transpiring here so she can tell someone in a

higher and more important position the horrors that are taking place. How they are going to do that exactly? They'll cross that bridge when they get to it.

From the opposite end of the cavern an intense light bursts in from an arched stone doorway leading out to the lake. The figures shield their eyes and cease their whisperings in favor of quivering in fervid adoration. The light promptly dims and takes on the form of a translucent woman. The woman glides towards the center stone and does not acknowledge the people kneeling before her. She raises her flaming hand and places it upon the child's cheek. The instant the woman touches the boy the cavern begins to shake, causing rocks to fall from the ceiling and for Juniper and her friends to lose their footing. The two brighter robed figures begin to chant in English, and from what Juniper can hear it sounds like:

“Oh, Mistress of All,
Let this body be yours,
Use their hand to create as you will,
You shall walk among us on this Earth,
And bring about the age of the gods once more!”

The shaking ends and the atmosphere in the cavern is thick with dread and wonderment. The woman removes her hand from the boy and looks disappointedly at the two brightly robed figures. She says something harsh and ugly to the pair in that strange language, and they sidestep out of her path in embarrassment. Drifting back to the arched doorway, the woman slips through and dissolves back into the lake.

The paired figures turn their attention back to the boy and shake their robed heads. One snaps their fingers and one of the kneelers presents them with their ceremonial knife. Sensing what is about to happen, Juniper turns her head away and shuts her eyes as tightly as she can. A pair of arms wrap themselves around her and pulls her towards them in a protective embrace. After a sickening minute, she opens her eyes and moves away from whoever held her. She doesn't look back to see who it was; her focus is entirely on the boy.

He is still lying upon the center stone unconscious, but now his throat is slit and glinting red. The blood drips down onto the stone and off its edge, landing on the flowers and the herbs placed around him and the stone. His skin has paled due to the quick loss of his blood and his breathing has now fully stopped. The boy is dead and somehow, Juniper felt that it's her fault. If she left when her brain was telling her to and gotten the police, this might not have happened. If she had an ounce of courage, she might have gone down there and somehow saved him. If she never even came here in the first place, would it still be her fault? But since the deed has already been done, there isn't much she could do for the boy now.

“Juniper, we need to go. *Now.*” Juniper turns to look at her friends and finds that they are all staring at her, anxious to leave. Imogene looks like she is on the verge of crying, Milton is quietly hyperventilating, and Atticus is trying to soothe him. Parker holds out their hand and Juniper grasps it, hoisting herself up onto her feet. As she stands up, however, she stumbles a bit and hits a rock with her shoe, sending it off the ledge and landing on the floor of the cave.

All eyes are on them in an instant. The figures are crying out and charging towards the ledge, but the friends are already rushing back towards the beginning of the tunnel. They can hear the rustling of the robes behind them as they soar to the top of the ladder and return to the basement. At the top, they close the trapdoor and remember that they broke the lock and would have to find a substitute to keep the door in place. Parker takes the pipe that they used earlier places it through where the lock would have gone. Then they knock over one of the towers of rotting boxes onto the trapdoor and break for the basement door and lock it behind them.

Back in the kitchen, they don't stop to listen if the robed figures make it through. Running through the house they notice that it is convulsing, and the ground is threatening to come out from below them. Windows are shattering, paintings are falling to the floor, and the ceiling is beginning to cave in behind them. It is almost as if the house is trying to keep them from fleeing and telling all its secrets.

Finally, they are back in the foyer, and Juniper reaches for the doorknob and turns it. The doorknob turns but does not open the door. This is when Juniper remembers that when they first came into the house the same thing happened. She pulls and pulls on the door, but it will not budge. Atticus steps forward and moves her out of the way and begins to pull on the door harder. The door continues to stay in its frame, and the group can hear from the foyer the trapdoor crashing open in the basement. Now Atticus is frantically pulling and cursing at the door to open. Just as they can hear the basement door slam, the door finally gives away and opens for their flight into the yard and out to the boat.

The water of the lake is crashing down in thunderous waves upon the shore of the island. It makes it very difficult for them to get the rowboat into the water and to start rowing. They push off from the island and brace themselves against the waves and hope they will survive the ride and make it to the mainland. Water hits them in their faces and wets their hair and clothes, causing them to feel heavy and making it hard to see. Juniper turns to look behind her at the house and the island and sees the two brighter colored figures standing and staring out at them. She feels as if they are staring more at her than at her friends. But now is not the time to question why, it is a time to survive this treacherous boat ride.

Somehow, as if by the mercy of some higher being, they safely make it to shore right when the boat is starting to fill with water. They all scramble out of the boat and turn to look at the house. The waves still crash, and dark clouds hang in the sky over the house, but instead of the robed figures, the glowing woman stands on the shore of the island staring at them and then is gone in the wink of an eye. They all release the breaths they refused to let out until the woman left...and then Milton passes out.

Kyann Herzog

Throughout this semester, Kye has been a joy to work with. From our first session together, Kye's enthusiasm and passion for writing was evident and it made every session so pleasant. Kye is able to convey emotions through writing so easily and naturally, having the ability to write down exactly how the emotions come to mind. Over the course of the semester Kye and I worked solely on a book which was in its beginning stages. The book is a document of memories from various parts of life, and Kye's dream is to one day publish the book compiled of all different memories, happy and sad. I hope you enjoy reading a section of said book as much as I enjoyed working on it with Kye all semester.

~Sierra Maatta

Introduction

Not sure how to start this off but here goes nothing. My life has not been easy by any means; I usually explain that I have had a bad good childhood. You will read all the ups and downs, I have been through just like a roller coaster. This is my story, from the first memories I can remember to the present day.

WARNING THIS BOOK CONTAINS:
 happiness, loving family, smiles, best friends
 self-harm, depression, lost, suicide, anorexia, cancer
 high school drama, college stresses, the cringe middle school stage
 relationship issues, accepting my gender, questioning my sexuality
 finding faith, believing in something, praying often
 and having hope.

Anyways, this was written for all the humans who are going through a tough time right now. To help everyone and anyone who might need advice, guidance, or inspiration. So please just hold on, the pain will end.

Chapter 04

Onwards, Towards Some Direction

While I sit on the right side of a two-seater reclining couch, with my MacBook Pro sitting upon my lap and Netflix playing on the flat screen. I, once again, find myself contemplating life thus far; wondering and searching some sort of sign? I guess, I don't know what I am after, just the thing to explain all things, lol.

The days are occupied by boring course lectures with endless note taking, followed by either slow moving work shifts or an uncountable amount of hours binge watching Netflix, Thoughts of all kinds, constantly have my mind in a fog.

quick phone break

side note: I have not been officially diagnosed with ADD or ADHD, but it is a fact that I cannot concentrate on one thing for more than 20-30 minutes at a time. At least, when it comes to things such as studying, writing, and certain reading materials.

My mind never stops running; relentlessly overthinking, over worrying, reminiscing about the past, while stressing over the future. It never halts, yet never fails to amaze me. The world that's been created in my own head has the power to bring me to my knees with dismay but also euphoric. In other words, my brain has the power to not only cause me to fall apart, collapse in depressive thoughts, but also built me up, soaring as high as Mt. Everest. Going from the height of the stars to the bottom of an underground cave can occur in a matter of minutes. Derived from an emotionally and stability point of speaking. My thought process is sporadic, unpredictable, with a huge amount of uncertainty, which is practically uncontrollable. Not quite sure why this is the case, but the week I've had definitely didn't contribute a helping hand to altering the places my mind takes me. Rather, the possibility of worsening it has come to mind, but of course it did.

I will finish that topic later, hopefully, just at this time, I have more pressing things to get off my chest. After the last few weeks, I was finally able to crawl my way out, with a little lifting assistance, out of the numb depression coma that overtook my mind. This past weekend, btw it's a Monday, has had two incidents that could have thrown me back into a sad comfy hole, but instead that didn't happen. I feel great and don't want to jeopardize it by trying to relive the events of a few weeks ago. Knowing from experience that this un-drugged high won't last for long, living while savoring in these present moments is what I'll try to accomplish before the past catches up.

It's funny how depression works, isn't it? Sometimes you feel like you are on top of the world but fall into the street when someone leaves you on read. Or you're lying on the ground and end up winning the lottery, in terms of all great events happening in a short amount of time, yet you are stuck. You want nothing more than to stand up and celebrate, but the invisible chains of depression are stronger than almost anything.

Jacob Shocinski

It has been a wonderful experience getting to work with Jacob on each of the pieces he has brought into our '57 sessions. His ability to find intriguing topics that remained within his interests made me look forward to the piece he brought in every week. Jacob did a great job on his research for all of his writings and some of his research can be seen in the piece he has submitted to Wordplay. Along with improving his research on his topics, we also focused on word choice, grammar, and being concise. Jacob's piece, "Moon Trees," demonstrates his progress as a writer and the substantial improvements he has made this semester. Jacob has grown immensely as a writer and I am confident that he will continue to improve his skills.

~Haley Steines

Moon Trees

January 31, 1971, Apollo 14 takes off on its trip to the moon with astronauts Alan Shepard, Edgar Mitchell and Stuart Roosa. Stuart Roosa is a former U.S. forest service smokejumper who would jump from a plane into wildfire areas to fight and extinguish the flames. Being a member of the forest service he decided that he would bring 500 tree seeds with him to the moon. He selected a wide variety of seeds such as loblolly pine, redwoods, sycamore, douglas fir and many more. He planned to plant them when he got back to Earth to understand how being in zero gravity for a few days will affect the seeds. When reentering Earth the container broke open when in decontamination and the seeds were thought to no longer be viable. The seeds were then sent to Mississippi and California to attempt to grow them and 420 to 450 seeds were grown successfully. After a few years and seeing no changes to the seeds in any way from being in zero-gravity they were then given away to many states as gifts where they planted them at forestry organizations such as DNR and forest service offices as well as college universities as a celebration of forestry. Many more were given to important people such as senators and representatives, one was given to a mayor in Louisiana only because his name was Mr. Moon. The trees that displayed desirable qualities such as straight growth, bright fall colors, and strong root growth were sent to world leaders including Brazil, Switzerland, Japan and many more. One loblolly pine was planted at the White House and still stands to this day. Many of these trees can still be found where they were planted with a plack underneath it to inform visitors of its importance.

William, David R. "The Moon Trees." *NASA*, NASA, 20 Sept. 2019, [Nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/planetary/lunar/moon_tree.html](https://nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/planetary/lunar/moon_tree.html).

Kieran Kelly

Every time Kieran and I sat down in the booth together, I knew we were going to have a blast. Working together was always one of the highlights of my week. She came into the lab already a talented writer who knew how to work her craft and style. Our conversations were always based in “what’s next?” and “how do we make this even better?” This particular piece was one that we worked on throughout the semester, and I was always excited when it was the one she pulled up. Kieran’s intricate worldbuilding and detailed character creation was always so fun to discuss and help develop. I’m only disappointed I won’t be working with her as she continues to work on the piece!

~Shannon Lagore

Travis, while not bound to the search that had ruled the majority of his life, fully enjoyed his time in Texas as best he could. He liked the culture, the food, and even a great many of the people, which usually wasn’t the case when it came down to it. He had a reputation for enjoying himself in places many others didn’t. Minnesota, as one example, and Florida as another, far more confusing example.

To be totally honest he isn’t exactly sure how he came across Star Canyon in the first place. However, he felt that it was a place with history, far more than he could have imagined. There was an energy to it, something that grabbed hold of him from the inside out. It settled over the town like a rough blanket, warm but scratchy in places, like something was trying to break through underneath. For the longest time, Travis kept to himself, haunting the place and keeping his head down.

Only, he couldn’t do that forever. He couldn’t just live among the clubgoers and drink booze on the curb for years and years until he choked to death on vomit. He could laugh just thinking about it, remembering that that very situation had been a threat by his mother to deter him from leaving home in the first place.

But the thing was, clubbing and booze was warm and familiar, it was where he had lived since he had entered Texas all those years ago. Saloons and barn dances and drunken St. Patrick’s day and slightly offensive Cinco de Mayo celebrations. He’d tried it all and he’d drank it all, met every vampire, lycan, witch and warlock, every nymph and spirit and straight up monster he could find and drank what they drank. Enchanted mead and homebrew moonshine that he swore made his hair fall out. He knew every girly drink on every menu, he knew how to look sober, play sober, and how to tell when a bartender wanted to cut him off for the night.

He’d learned how to make the drunk stumble fun back in Washington state, singing a little song alongside some friends. But it was Texas that had made him realize how lonely it was. And then it was Star Canyon that made him hate it again.

But before that, by at least four years, he’d met the Demonologist.

He’d told her, over a bottle of scotch alongside a robust wine paired with cheese and a martini colored blue, all about his quest. His never-ending quest.

Never-ending, always stuck at the back of mind, persisting, insisting, enough to get him drunk all over again.

The Demonologist said: "You are on a spiritual journey... of self-discovery... *bitch*."

She'd been drunk, of course.

He really liked her, maybe because she knew his world, and told him his business to his face.

"My father told me a few years back that it was a lost cause," Travis had spoken into his glass, like the wine would absorb his self-doubt like it absorbed his inhibitions. "That I was looking for something that had disappeared a long time ago."

"If I know anything in my line of work-" The Demonologist had burped, surprising herself, "Nothing... *ever*... dies." She sat back like it was some sort of revelation from the Almighty. Travis had leaned into it, because she was hot and they were both drunk, but before anything could happen, they'd both passed out in her bed.

He'd woken up first, because he always did, smoothed the hair out of her mouth, and watched the night sky as it faded to dawn.

They parted ways a week later.

Though Travis feared that she didn't even notice, having opened a bottle of cheap champagne with a few nymphs and a loud group of vampires that had seemed to have taken over her apartment. He might have been out of his head when they moved in, and totally okay with it. But by the time he'd sobered, he couldn't stand them.

He wouldn't see the Demonologist, or participate in her rituals or spells, for a while.

Truthfully he almost forgot about her, ever on his endless quest.

Maybe Texas was a way to give up, just a little. He let alcohol guide him the most in those days, and the streets he stumbled down led him in that direction. Down south, farther and farther as the weeks dragged on. If he stopped to breathe in between bars he could usually latch himself onto some group or another, experiment, try new substances.

He'd never really blacked out before, one of his many talents, dreams kept him awake or they kept him sleeping. He'd never just lost them. But he'd started waking up in new places, throwing up or jerking awake with a new mystery under his belt that would never get solved. Who knows how long it went on, time wasn't real if you weren't trying to experience it. Somewhere down the line he'd met a satyr. They were rare these days, but could drink anyone under the table if they didn't die of alcohol poisoning first.

Maybe without the dreams that he was so used to, the temptation to win that challenge was more than he could ask for to soothe that empty shadow.

There was no sleep, there couldn't be sleep.

There was wine, at least.

His first night ever in Eagles Pass was spent in total ignorance. He had no idea how he'd gotten there, or when he'd ever decided to come. Long before he'd ever even considered the job at the grocery store in Star Canyon or had ever come to know Andy. He was alone.

Alone with people. Higher than high.

He woke up sober, somehow, stretched out on dirty concrete. The remnants of a party strewn around him. He struggled to remember what he'd done, why he'd done it. Some birthday party or celebration or something.

He'd heard his father's voice then, looking up at the high warehouse ceiling, even though he hadn't heard it for several years. It was clear as day and rang through his head like he'd been screaming in his ear.

Travis couldn't understand the words. No matter how hard he tried to separate the yell from the fuzz in his brain, the message was indecipherable.

That hurt.

His legs were shaking as he pulled himself up, looking around at the destruction of last night. He swayed, pitched forward, then caught himself with another step. His foot caught on a body, some guy from last night, just like everything else, they were all stuck in last night.

"Oh, sorry," Travis murmured.

The man didn't wake, his face covered by someone else's shirt.

Travis bent down, shook his shoulder, and grabbed the shirt.

Panic struck through him like lightning.

His own face, eyes open and cloudy and his mouth lined with dried spit, stared back at him. His skin was pale and his lips were blue, left for dead with a bottle in hand. He stumbled back and onto his butt, his heart pounding. His father had said something, it ate at him inside and out to not know had been said. His father had said something and his body had been left to rot on the cold warehouse floor.

With a shaking breath he tried to stand, tried to run as the floor beneath him opened up to pitch darkness and let him fall.

And fall.

And fall.

Falling until he collided with solid ground, the polished wood floors of a house party in progress. He gasped awake to the chorus of Everybody Wants to Rule the World and the sound of laughter. Partying.

His father had spoken, in his dream he'd said something, something.... Travis pounded his fists against his forehead desperate to remember-

He held a bottle in his hand.

He bent away from it in horror before regaining his senses, dropping it to the floor in horror. Then, he scrambled back, away from the rapidly growing puddle. Panic ate at his stomach and then his throat and he only realized he was throwing up when he was being grabbed by the back of the shirt by a guy who looked like the owner, he couldn't remember.

“Dude, on my couch?! What the fuck?!”

He ended up on the front porch, overlooking a dark and chilly Texas night.

“Get the fuck out!”

He stumbled, fell to the ground, and ate grass when he collapsed. His vision swam with clouds and vibrated with the pounding music.

He woke up the next morning still on the lawn, blinking as he watched hungover students and young adults stumble to their cars holding their shoes. Taking a moment to gather his thoughts from last night.

He can't do it anymore. It. This.

It was 2003, he was alone, truly, and completely.

He tried to stand, suddenly and irrevocably sad. He felt dirty. He felt trapped inside his own body, inside its limited space.

He crawled before he could walk, and stumbled before he could find his car. Instead of driving off, however, he could only sit and stare straight ahead. The road in front of him stretched on endlessly. It made him want to throw up.

And he did, leaning out of the driver's side window.

He almost could have cried if he hadn't been so dehydrated.

He'd failed, more than anything, he'd failed. He hadn't completed his search, and he was certain he'd never find what he was looking for. He was lost, and so was everything else.

Underneath it all, he'd become nothing, and he'd be nothing.

He left Eagles Pass, back to the north where it was safe, where no dreams could find him. He passed up through Uvalde, through a place called Utopia, and resisted the safety of San Antonio. He could feel it, not calling to him, because places could not call, but it was there as an offering. He could settle down in San Antonio, put down something and own it, he wouldn't have to search in San Antonio because nothing needed to be found there that wasn't already available.

He didn't deserve that, not yet, or maybe ever.

Waco was his first real stop, and he spent just under a week there. The energy it had was thick, heavy with anger and resentment that festered under his skin and made him irritable. He left it behind as soon as he could.

Fort Worth was there at the end of the line, when he felt he could travel no more. His car had become a cell, sealing him off from the rest of the world. The radio was broken, and one of the little vents wouldn't stay open. Seeing it closed made Travis see red, if he had a gun he would have shot at it until there was no vent to open anymore.

The Motel Six he finally stopped at looked like all others before it, but better because it wasn't his car.

Fort Worth was an old friend, having spent some time there not two years ago high out of his mind.

He didn't remember much of it.

Now, he moved around the city in a slight haze, gaining new memories that never seemed to match. It was nightfall by the time he found the Walmart.

By nine, it was governed by the old gods, and there were more choices in the types of products being sold. The spice aisle was miraculously stocked with more herbs, the meat section displayed the animals bones alongside their premium cuts, and the blood from pigs, cows, or any other meat was stored and displayed in the refrigerator aisle. There were frozen meals too, from a brand called 'Witch's Brew' (proudly made in Massachusetts!), that the blank-faced cashier pointed him to after he asked. They were marketed as having the right balance of human and supernatural health benefits, keeping anybody who ate them fresh.

He put a batch of them in his basket and ignored the Dryad that was staring at him with dry, yellow eyes.

It wasn't until he was drowsily perusing the yogurt that he got his true welcome to Fort Worth.

A quick tap on the shoulder sent his heart racing and as he scrambled back laughter erupted from the source. A boy much younger than Travis was smiling wide at him, recognition evident in his eyes, eyes that Travis noticed were mismatched. One was brown, and the other a bright blue. The boy leaned in, friendly, "Hey man!"

Travis blinked.

"I didn't know you were back in town," The boy continued, "It's been a minute!"

Drunken memories swam to the surface of his mind. He knew this man, from parties, or rituals, probably both.

The boy caught on to his dilemma and snapped his fingers, "Dude, I get it, we met at a hellfire summoning for the demon Daeva-"

Something in Travis's brain clicked because he was suddenly smiling, "Sean!"

Sean spread his arms, triumphant, and he clapped Travis on the shoulder. "I saw you and I was like 'Whoa! I haven't seen him in forever!' How've you been, man?"

Travis nodded along, "I've been... You know, in between things."

Sean nodded, obviously in good-spirits, "I get that... Hey! Matt's gonna want to know you're in town, you remember him? Vampire pirate?"

Travis's mind raced, imagining for a moment a ridiculous dracula-esque figure in a tricorn hat, shaking a hook at some dirty crew member while a pirate balanced on his shoulder. He frowned, "Sort of?"

Sean pressed, "He played the drums at that house show we went to? Whatever man, he'll know you, he's kind of where you're at too, we've been working jobs together since his dealers started jacking the price on donor blood, says they've been working under new management and shit."

Travis pulled a face, "That's bullshit."

"Right?" Sean affirmed, "It's like that for his whole group, they've been tryna buy all this cheap animal blood from here right? But it doesn't satisfy like human stuff, so they gotta buy more of it," He gestured by waving his hands in a wheeling motion, "So he's gotta get a fix every like, three days, instead of two weeks." The two of them had started to walk, slowly meandering past shelves on the way to the checkout. Out of the drunken fog of his mind, Travis could picture a face that he thought must be Matt.

Sean continued: "He headed down to San Antonio a few weeks ago, they got a nice church blood-drive type thing set up, but he can't go down there every time he need a fix, you need gas money for that."

"When'd all this shit start?" Travis asked.

"Late last year," Sean said, "We were totally fine until September '02, kind of before you showed up, it was one dealer though, then it was all of 'em, *new management* they said... I'm tellin' you, by 2004 this asshole's gonna have every blood bank up to NYC in their pocket, it's gonna be like any other gang, you pay their price or you starve."

Travis shook his head, "What's the Guild been doing?"

"Like I know anything about the Guild," Sean scoffed, "What could they do? A couple of banks in Texas raise their prices? Not like the vampires are gonna complain, they keep secrets like they've been programmed too."

Travis was caught silent for a moment, his stomach churning with empathy while his mind paused on a blank canvas. He wished he could help, but there was no way he could. Past rubbing a shoulder with sympathy, he was helpless to their helplessness.

"But you and him, you're uh," Travis waved his hand, "You're working jobs, is that helping?"

Sean shrugged, "Much as it can, always somebody that needs my skills, less so for him though," He examined a few options in the soup aisle, "But we get lucky sometimes, we been working a few jobs with this Exorcist, goes by Nick, registered with the Guild and the Vatican, so you know

that shit's legit," He smiled, "Hey, if you're looking for something to do, I could introduce?" He pointed at Travis, "He just started a case, you could do your little-" He waved his hand in the air, wiggling his fingers in a twitchy wave-like pattern, "-Thing?"

Travis gave him a breathy laugh, surprised Sean even remembered that.

"Not like it's the most reliable superpower, Sean," He insisted, "It's not built into my DNA like you have, it's like some recessive trait."

"Still, might be a good thing to mention," Sean led him into the checkout lane, handing the black-eyed cashier what looked like a gold doubloon to pay for his items. Travis had to pay modern, a fact that made the cashier hum sadly.

Sean handed him a business card for an insurance company, "My number's on the back, you call when you're low on funds, I got your back."

Travis knew it, but no matter how long he stared at the number, something ugly and anxious made him stop before he could call it.

He wouldn't be held hostage for long though, because just two weeks later, the price of rent for his motel room started to enter his nightmares.

The phone rang just three times before it was picked up, someone's tired voice, masked by a yawn, responded: "Hello?"

"Hey," Travis stood, wrapping the phone cord around his hand. "Sean gave me this number-" There was a sharp intake of breath on the other end and the voice said:

"Travis! He told me you'd call," They then whispered something to someone else before continuing: "Dude, it's so great to hear from you, Sean told me you'd be around."

This must be Matt, "Hey," He said, "Yeah, I got into town a minute ago."

"That's great!" Matt exclaimed, "Nick wants to meet you! Sean told him about the thing you can do, says it could be helpful."

"That's what I'm hoping," Travis sighed, falling to the couch, "I need some money."

"Hey you'll get it," Matt assured, "He'll hire you, no doubt, and he's legit, Vatican and Guild approved, he's got some cash to throw around."

"No doubt you're taking advantage," Travis smiled, a sudden familiarity striking him as he spoke to Matt, the joking kind of friendship that lasted through drunken meetings and managed to live on.

Even if Travis could barely remember meeting Matt in the first place.

"So," Travis finally went in to ask, "When does he want to meet?"

"Oh," Matt paused, maybe to check a schedule or something, "He can meet today."

“Today?” Travis tried to keep the panic out of his voice. “As in, today, today?”

“Yeah,” Matt chuckled, “Today, for dinner, I’m pretty sure, there’s a diner called Betty Lou’s, out near that Rec center, you remember?”

Thankfully, he did.

“Great!” Matt exclaimed, “You should meet him there around 6:30, after the dinner rush.”

Travis stood, anxious again, “Should I bring anything?”

“No, just dress nice,” Matt said, “Don’t let him intimidate you, he’s a nice guy.”

Travis stared at his open suitcase, pondering the jeans and crappy t-shirts stacked inside. “Sure, anything else?”

“Uh, I don’t know, be yourself, don’t sell yourself short?” Matt paused, “Show him that thing you can do.”

“That thing I can do,” Travis repeated, having been previously unaware that Matt knew anything about his ‘thing’ in the first place, “I guess.”

“Hey man, I gotta go, but listen, Nick is gonna love you,” He insisted, “Good luck!”

Travis had barely any time to thank Matt before he hung up, leaving Travis with nothing to wear to the second job interview he’d ever had. “Alright,” He tried cracking his knuckles to seem cool, “Something nice.”

Brianna Stumpner

It has been an absolute pleasure working with and getting to know Brianna in our English '57 sessions. Since day one of the class, Brianna has demonstrated a passion for writing. She has been working on many different concepts and stories over the semester, making each session a delightful surprise. Many of Brianna's works have been focused on different elements of fantasy, magic, and mythology, and the following excerpt is certainly no exception. Taken from her extended story about fey and trolls, this passage focuses on the growing relationship of two characters from these two different worlds. The creative word choice, vivid descriptions, and focused character-building makes this a pleasant read. Through our sessions, Brianna has shown continued excitement for her stories, and I know she will continue to develop and grow this passion in the future.

~Allie Mazurkiewicz

Sollix - First Kiss - Age 17

I wander away from the fire, the laughter of my friends clouding my mind. Making it into the Scouts is certainly cause for celebration. The handful that were brave enough to try for the position are overjoyed to find they got in. I am less so.

Yes, I'm happy for my friends. Their dreams are coming true. They have succeeded in what they have been training for years. However, this is the kind of reminder I don't need tonight. That the king is still out there. And while he may not know where we are, he would gladly wipe us off the map if he could find us.

And now some of my dearest friends have sworn to lay down their lives to prevent just such a future. Lives that are going to be in vain. I've seen his army, watched his soldiers train. There's no way our band of scouts are going to make more than a dent in their armor. I can't help but think that I'm just celebrating their funeral early.

One thing the fey have that my step-father doesn't, is a slice of paradise on Earth. The forests they call home are the most beautiful places I've ever seen and a nice walk through the towering trees is the best way to clear my mind. Maybe it's just my ancestors bloodline taking peace in the greenery, or maybe it's all me, I'm not sure. It's the one place I don't mind being alone with my thoughts.

I run a hand down an oak tree, the rough bark scraping at my fingers. Everything here has a history. This tree, and many of its siblings, are the ones providing the bows that the scouts train with, before they move on to the mighty yew tree in the center of the forest. It's been there longer than any fey here, and it's always given the best bows to those who earn it. Tomorrow the new scouts will go and take a limb. Then they'll get to work crafting their bows to their own style and desires.

"Hey, Sollix," a voice calls from somewhere above my head.

I look up and over, already knowing the identity of the summons. Aria looks back down at me, and the elven scout waves her hand to encourage me to climb up to her. Walking over to the neighboring tree, I try and find the best way up. That branch is the lowest, but it's weak. The one just above it will be a stretch, but -

"By Cernunnos, just climb the damn tree, troll boy," she groans when I take too long planning my ascent. Shaking my head at her impatience, I grab hold of a branch and haul myself up.

Aria is much more of a doer than a thinker, but that doesn't mean she can't come up with some wicked plans. However, it makes her mighty impatient. I pause a moment, wondering how Aria had gotten up, as she is so much shorter than I. There's only one way to find out, I guess. Scurrying up through the branches, I pop up beside the small fey.

"How did you –?" I stop when I notice that her eyes are red, and there are tear tracks going down her face. "What's wrong? I thought you were supposed to be celebrating?"

I climb onto a neighboring limb, not daring to look away in case she tries to escape. There's a reason she's the best in her class, she's nearly silent when she wants to get away. And the one thing she's renowned for running from is herself. Or more specifically, her emotions.

"Nothing. Just had a talk with Britta. I'll be fine." She quickly wipes at her face. "That's not why I asked you up here."

That piques my curiosity. For the barest of a second, I debate between asking her about her rocky relationship with her half-sister, or about why she really asked me up here. However, I hesitate too long, and she decides for me. Yet again.

Climbing on to my branch, she effectively pins me against the tree trunk with how very close she's sitting to me. A flicker of childish hope springs up in my chest, that maybe she's moving closer because she might actually like me.

"Uh, Aria... What're you doing?" I manage to ask from a parched throat.

"I wanted to thank you, Sollix. Maybe I didn't get around to using it, but the amulet was a really thoughtful gift. It means a lot to me." She smiles as her fingers go to spin the oaken coin at her throat. It's an invisibility amulet I'd finished last week, in preparation for her application to the Scouts.

Immediately I'm flushing a dark red. I go to rub at the back of my neck, but the branch above me is too low and I end up smacking it. I hiss in pain, and Aria has to stifle a laugh at my clumsiness.

"Uh, how did you know it was me? I mean, I didn't –" I ask, rubbing at my arm.

"It wasn't hard to figure out, Sollix. I know you've been training with Olivia the hardest, of all her students. There are only so many powerful witches in the village with the skills to make something like this," she muses, her gray eyes seeming to glow in the dark. "And you're the most infatuated with me."

My heart stops in my chest.

"What? Me, infatuated?" I squeak, jolting on my perch. I almost lose my seat, but manage to recover. "No, no you've got the wrong –"

"Damn it, Sollix. Just admit it. Everyone knows. You've been in love with me for years." Before I can admit to anything, she decides to carry out with that thank you. Leaning forward, she cups my jaw and pulls me closer. I follow obediently, heart thundering in my chest. Is she...? No, she wouldn't. Not with *me*.

And then she's kissing me. For a long second, I don't know what to do, or how to react. Where do I put my hands? They're just floating out in the air. How do I move my mouth? Could I accidentally scratch her with my tusks? Oh, Goddess, I'm messing it up – what if she never kisses me again?

Aria moves to pull away, starting to mumble a sorry against my lips.

Screw it, I finally decide. You'll never know if you never try, as Aria always says. Grabbing hold of her hands, I put them back on my face. And then I kiss her right back.

I have no idea what I'm doing, so I just try to mimic what she'd been doing. My fingers knot in her hair, just as hers had run through mine. I nip at her bottom lip in imitation of what she'd done not a moment before – if a bit clumsier.

Apparently I've done something right, because in a moment she's melting in my arms. Though when she moves to lead I gratefully let her take over. Her fingers trace up my jaw, skimming along the long shell of my ears.

Suddenly a piercing whistle breaks the connection. Aria startles, almost falling, and it's only because she's wrapped in my arms that I'm able to catch her. A string of inventive curses stream from her mouth.

Fawna and Haeley's voices serenade us with a bawdy song about nymphs and satyrs kissing in a tree. They're quick to flee when Aria manages to launch a pinecone in their direction. The crack of its impact is followed quickly by a squeal that marks their exit.

"I'm going to kill you two, I swear!" Aria shouts after them as they go running away, probably to tell the others that they'd managed to sneak up on the infamous Aria 'Long-Ears.'

"Are you alright?" I ask, struggling to haul the wriggling scout back onto the branch.

"Of course I'm alright, why wouldn't I be?" She asks, when she finally gets her seat again. However, she only has to take one look at me, and she gets the answer to her question.

"Oh, you sweet idiot. I don't care that they saw us together. If it weren't for those two, I'd have remained oblivious that you even liked me." Aria admits, a lopsided grin on her face. She reaches over to run her fingers through my hair, probably to straighten it.

"So you didn't notice?" I ask, meekly. The warrior shakes her head at me, before placing a kiss on my forehead.

"No, Sollix. I didn't notice. Your dignity is safe, I swear it," she teases, lightly. I nod, unsure of what to do now. Thankfully, Aria, the master planner that she is, has a solution.

"Huckleberry? They're fresh from Olivia's. I took some while I was spying on you two this morning. When you thanked her for teaching you how to do... whatever it was you did to it."

"Uh, thank you. But why did you bring them? Up a tree no less?" I ask, eyeing what is obviously her headscarf stuffed full of berries.

"Because I know they're your favorite, and I figured if I chickened out on kissing you, I could give you these instead," she admits, not meeting my eyes.

"So... you were planning this?" I reach out, taking a berry from the pile and slipping it between my lips.

"Well, yes – and no. I was planning on kissing you tonight – to thank you, of course. I had this whole plan where I was going to use the coin to sneak up on you and I'd kiss you. But then I got into a fight with my sister, and then you were walking by... I kinda just asked you to join me, I guess." The story comes out in one big mess, and she almost manages to say it all in one breath.

"You mentioned you got into a fight with your sister..." I hint, eating another berry. She looks over at me, gray eyes losing their shine.

Everyone knows Britta and Aria never got along. Maybe it was because they were half-siblings. Maybe it was their opposite personalities. But the pair just rub each other the wrong way. Every time they're left alone together, another fight arises from something that one of them had done. Usually Britta picking at some perceived mistake that Aria had committed.

"Yeah. She was unhappy that I made it into the scouts. She's always disapproved of me training for it. The best I can figure, she never thought that I'd actually make it in. She hates that I'm following in her father's footsteps. Or maybe not. I don't know. I never know what she's really thinking. Everything she says has a double or even triple meaning. Damn silver tongue," Aria growls, grabbing a handful of huckleberries and shoving them into her mouth. She pulls a face at the tart taste, but she continues chewing them angrily.

"I didn't know her – um, your father was a scout." I admit, mostly to try to get her to keep talking. Of course I'd known. Everyone knows where the grave-trees from the Scourge are, and his name is one of the most prominent, as he was a commander.

"He was my dad, too, Sollix. Maybe Mom didn't sleep with him the night I was conceived, but he raised me just the same. He was as much of a father as I got." A tear escapes, and she hurriedly wipes it away, leaving a trail of dark red juice across her face.

Maybe it's because we're speaking of the dead, but it suddenly reminds me of blood. My stomach becomes heavy with all the berries I've eaten, and I sheepishly return the handful I'd been about to eat.

"And yeah, maybe I joined the scouts to honor him. But I did it for me, too. I'm not good with people. I'm not good with art or plants or magic. I'm too impatient to smith, and while I can weave, I don't have Fawna's eye for matching colors and designs... what I'm good at is being quiet and remaining unseen. If I can serve the Fey best as a scout, then that's what I'm going to do, no matter what she thinks."

The familiar storm clouds gather in her eyes, a sure sign that she's made up her mind, and that nothing is going to change it. Fear for her ties my stomach into knots. But I can already see that I won't get anywhere tonight, trying to convince her to take up a safer career.

She looks over at me, her gaze as sharp as one of her arrows.

"You're proof of that Sollix. That someone's origins don't define who they become. If that were so, you'd have crushed my skull the day we met." She tells me, a grim smile carving its way across her face.

A shudder races down my spine at the thought.

"Or, at least, you would have tried," she teases, with a wink.

Abbi Wasielewski

Abbi is a wonderful writer of fairy tales. We had so much fun this semester working on "Knight of the Cows", and I think she taught me just as much as I taught her. We focused a lot on character development, creating interesting conflict, and the concept of "Chekhov's Gun", which means if something is brought up at the beginning of the story, it better come back around in the end with meaning or relevance. She did a wonderful job taking my notes and stepping outside of the box when creating this story. I am very proud of her and this wonderful story!

~Emily Holland

Knight of the Cows

There once lived a boy named Flidge who wanted nothing more than to become a knight. He was the son of a merchant however, so it was expected that he would inherit the family business one day. The trade of a merchant offered very little time for knighthood. He had often been told when he was younger that it was impossible for him to become a knight. But when he wasn't busy learning his father's trade, Flidge could be found in his backyard practicing with the wooden sword his uncle David gave him before he disappeared. These were the times Flidge could really imagine himself as a knight, swooping in to save the day.

Now there came a time shortly after Flidge turned twelve years old when some of the lords of his home country started squabbling over some missing cattle. All over the country, nobles and common folk alike would wake in the morning to find a cow or two had vanished in the night. As such, every noble blamed his neighbor for the disappearing cattle; and every merchant in their territory would back them up.

The noble who controlled Flidge's village, Burrowsburg, gave orders to all the townsfolk to create extra protection for their cattle, and to set guards to watch the cows at night. Because of these orders, Burrowsburg seemed well protected against vanishing cattle; until the night those on watch fell asleep. However, that also happened to be a night when Flidge had trouble falling asleep.

Flidge rolled over in bed with a sigh as he looked at the night sky out his window. He began counting stars in an attempt to bore himself to sleep. Not that he expected that to work. He had already tried counting sheep, counting his breaths, and counting backwards from five hundred. Sleep just did not want to come to Flidge.

He broke off counting stars as he strained his ears to listen. He thought he had heard something outside... There it was again! A muffled thud followed by a tinkling sound somewhere nearby. Flidge jumped up out of bed and ran over to the window to peer outside. There he saw one of his father's cows collapsed in the middle of its pen with a shadowed figure hunched over it. As Flidge watched, the figure held a small coin over the cow before the collapsed creature dissipated in a cloud of smoke.

With a cry, Flidge grabbed his sword from where it lay against the wall and launched himself out his window. The shadowed figure flinched at the sound of Flidge's shout and turned to see the boy charging towards them. As they had been caught, the figure spun on their heel and began running towards the woods near the edge of the village. Flidge called for them to stop as he continued to pursue the person who had made a cow disappear. When they reached the road that ran through the center of Burrowsburg, the figure picked up speed, making it difficult for

Flidge to keep up. However, the boy was determined to catch the thief. Determination driving him, he chose to ignore the burning sensation creeping into his lungs and pressed on.

Soon enough, the two reached the edge of the woods and the figure continued their attempt to lose Flidge by running around bushes and trees. More than once, Flidge had to duck as a branch flew back in his direction, almost hitting him in the face. The boy thought he was finally gaining on his target when he ducked under a toppled tree to find the person gone. The shadowed figure Flidge had been chasing had seemed to vanish just like the cow.

Looking around, Flidge tried to locate where his target had disappeared to. There were no signs of them anywhere; not even footprints or snapped twigs. He couldn't hear movement anywhere around him either. Flidge gripped the wooden sword in his hand with white knuckles as he turned around himself searching. He had let the shadowy figure get away. Now they would be able to snatch more cows from whomever they pleased.

As the thought crossed Flidge's mind, his eyes landed on a pile of boulders nearby. They had weeping willow branches draped over them like a blanket. He noticed however, that something seemed off about the branches. Sure enough, as Flidge approached the stones, he found a hole that appeared to be the entrance to a cave or burrow hidden behind the leaves. From a distance, the weeping willow branches had hidden the hole perfectly from passers-by.

Flidge hesitated for only a moment before lifting his sword in front of him. With a deep breath, Flidge shoved aside the willow branches and plunged into the hole hidden beyond. Inside he was met with the sudden darkness of stone and dirt completely surrounding him. Outside it had been dark, but there were at least the moon and stars to lessen the darkness. Inside the hole, there was nothing. Just the blackness beyond.

As Flidge's eyes began to adjust to the darkness inside the hole, he could faintly make out the slight decline in the dirt. This in turn seemed to lead into a dark cave. He continued to hold his sword out in front of him as he took a few steps farther forward into the cave. Here, Flidge had to make a decision. Should he continue forward, or head back to Burrowsburg to get help?

Lowering his sword a little, Flidge swallowed the lump in his throat. He told himself to be brave. A proper knight would be brave and press on. So Flidge would do just that. After all, if he continued on, he might just be able to discover what had happened to the figure he had been pursuing.

Carefully, Flidge began to slowly make his way down the slope. He felt his way along by dragging one hand along the rock wall beside him. He tried not to think about what kinds of creatures could easily hide in the blackness of the cave.

Said cave seemed to go on forever. Flidge had assumed that he would have reached the back of it by now. But minutes had passed, and still Flidge was going down. He was beginning to wonder if he was wrong and it was just a natural cave going on for miles. Or if it was the den of some wild animal.

Out of the corner of his eye, Flidge thought he saw movement in the darkness. When he turned his head to look, he found nothing. Just his imagination. But when he returned his gaze to the emptiness in front of him, Flidge was surprised to discover it seemed less dim than before. As if there was...

A light was indeed ahead of Flidge in the cave. While it was still a way off, there was no doubt that there was something ahead trying to cut through the darkness. Flidge could feel his heart pounding faster in his chest as he thought about what he might find ahead. He could feel both fear and excitement bubbling up inside of him as he imagined what lay beyond.

Once again, Flidge tightened his grip on his wooden sword as he brought it up in front of him. He began to creep his way towards the growing light ahead of him. Soon he was able to identify a pinprick of direct light. As Flidge got closer yet, he saw that it was a single torch stuck into the wall. Beside the torch, there was a crack running from the floor to the ceiling. Coming closer to the flame to use its light, Flidge discovered the crack was actually a narrow doorway.

Flidge stepped up to the doorway to peek inside and discovered it led into a large open chamber. Although he couldn't see much, it appeared to be lit by more torches high on the walls. The light filtering down from above illuminated bulky structures Flidge couldn't identify.

Curiosity beat out caution as Flidge made the decision to enter the chamber. His eyes were drawn to the mystery structures in full view. Now that he was closer, he could tell they were cages. And inside these cages, something was moving.

Flidge gasped and nearly dropped his sword in shock when he identified the creatures inside. They were cows! The missing cows were here. Now he could return to Burrowsburg and show the people where the cows had gone.

His thoughts were interrupted when a bang reverberated off the chamber walls. All his muscles tensed as Flidge tried to identify where the sound came from. His eyes landed on a hooded figure stalking towards him from one of the cages. The one he had chased through the woods.

The figure declared Flidge should never have come. They never wanted to hurt him. As they spoke, they tipped their hood back revealing the face of his lost uncle. Although older and with a new scar on his cheek, there was no doubt it was his uncle David. Flidge felt his blood grow hot. He had never been particularly close to his uncle, but he was still family. He began to demand answers. Where had he been? Why had he left? And most importantly, why was he stealing and hoarding cows?

His uncle frowned and answered the boy's questions. A noble of a nearby territory had wrongly accused him of thievery. Hence, he owed a debt he should never have to pay. He had chosen to hoard cows so he could sell them to pay off this debt. Then he had decided to gather enough cows to earn the money to overthrow the noble he owed.

To keep track of his cows, David had collected seven magic coins he could tie the souls of the cows to. As he explained, he held one up to show Flidge. The coins were imbued with strong magic, giving him the power to make a cow vanish in thin air. As long as he held even one of these coins, he would be the only one who could control his cows.

Hearing the challenge in his voice, Flidge brought his sword up to point it at his uncle's chest. He may have been family, but a proper knight would bring any bad man to justice, no matter who he was. Uncle David chuckled as he drew a rapier from within his cloak. He batted Flidge's sword away from his chest and dared the boy to face him. Flidge swung his sword in a wide arc; hitting his uncle in the hand holding up the coin. A small cry left Uncle David's lips as the bit of metal was knocked from his fingers. He followed up with a growl as he finally engaged the boy in combat.

While Flidge had never had any formal sword training, it became apparent his uncle hadn't either. Flidge was able to match the older man almost blow for blow. Neither of them was able to land even one hit on the other. David however, had alternate methods to fend off his nephew.

Still blocking Flidge's attacks with his rapier, Uncle David reached into the small satchel tied to his belt. As he pulled his fingers back out of the bag, Flidge took another swing with his sword. This time, he managed to tangle the wood in the cord tying the satchel to his uncle's belt. He yanked his sword to the side causing the cord to snap and the bag to fly across the room.

David growled as he swung at the boy again before shoving him to throw off his balance. He took that opportunity to retreat from Flidge. He held up what he had retrieved from his bag. As it began to give off a magical glow, Flidge realized it was one of his uncle's coins. His last coin, since Flidge had tossed away the bag. He barely had time to dodge out of the way as the charged coin sent a bolt of energy towards him.

Flidge rolled on the floor to right himself before standing to face his uncle once more. The man was already charging the coin for another bolt of magic. Without thinking, Flidge lifted his wooden sword over his head and threw it as hard as he could. The sword spun through the air until it made contact with his uncle's arm. Uncle David cried out in both pain and shock as he

was knocked down. In his surprise, he dropped both the last coin and his rapier. Flidge took the opportunity to dash forward and scoop both into his hands.

He was upon his uncle in an instant; staring him down along the edge of the rapier. His other hand held up the coin to show his uncle he had won. The man stared at his nephew before slowly raising his hands in surrender. Flidge moved to retrieve the dropped satchel and the seventh coin while his uncle sat defeated. When he returned to the older man's side, he took the cord from the bag and tied David's hands behind his back.

Giving his uncle a sad smile, Flidge began to lead him out of the cave and back to Burrowsburg. He felt sorry, in a way. He had never expected his uncle to end up like this. When they reached the end of the cave, he was surprised to discover it was almost daybreak outside. The growing light made it much easier to lead his uncle to town.

The two reached the edge of town just as the sun began to peek over the horizon. Flidge led Uncle David straight to the sheriff's home to turn him in. Never had the sheriff been so surprised to see someone.

By mid-morning, word of Flidge's heroics had spread throughout Burrowsburg and beyond. Flidge was in the middle of describing the cave to his father when the two heard hoof beats approaching. They turned to see the noble of the village coming towards them before getting off his horse. He had come to thank Flidge for his bravery, but also to give him an invitation.

The young man offered to make Flidge his official squire and to train him to become a proper knight. Flidge was awestruck as he thanked the noble and looked to his father for permission. He sighed before giving a single nod and a proud smile to his son. Flidge hugged his father in thanks before turning back to the noble. He accepted. He was finally on his way to becoming a real knight.

Jadzia Harrell

I have enjoyed working with Jadzia this semester so much! Jadzia's unique voice in her pieces and style of storytelling made me excited to work with her each week. She has a way of taking personal experiences and characterizing them in a way which blurs the line between reality and fiction. Her writing is relatable and real, and I appreciate the rawness and vulnerability she exhibits in her writing. I hope Jadzia continues to write stories like the one you see before you, which is all in one a portrait of struggle, strength, and resilience. This piece exhibits the outstanding writing ability I got to experience every week with Jadzia, and I know she will continue to be a successful writer in the future!

~Mattea Schlender

I killed them.

I killed them all.

I poisoned them.

I did not want to kill them, but I did it anyway.

I was sick and no one could help me, for no one knew I was sick. Then they found out. My sickness became too much; I could not hide it anymore.

It was then that I killed them.

I started slowly. Only one at a time every few weeks.

The first to go was very violent to me. She would hurt me with her words constantly. She would say things like "I will never be good enough", "You ruined everything", "Your family doesn't even love you", and "You should just die". I ignored her words, but then she made me bleed. The wounds still rest on my skin as a constant reminder of days long gone. It was very simple. Just slip the poison into her drink and she would be gone. She fought for her life. When the poison kicked in she was thrashing about and spitting curses at me as I watched the life fade from her eyes. I hate to admit it, but I do not feel remorse for her. I cannot find it within me to regret her death.

The next to go went more quietly. They never hurt me to the same extent as she did, but they harmed me emotionally. They would show me pictures of my past that still haunt me to this day. They only showed me things that I regret, sort of like blackmail. I wanted them to go away. I just had to use the medicine. Their death was more quiet. More slow. I watched as they slowly withered away into nothing. I felt better. I have mixed emotions about their demise. But, I just wished they had went more quickly. They did not deserve such a slow death.

The others had no significant importance to me. They left this world in various ways. Some left quietly. Some left kicking and screaming. Some left in groups. Some simply disappeared.

Most did not mean anything to me, so I feel very little about their deaths. But one meant the most to me.

Words cannot begin to describe how important he was to me... Why did he have to die? I still cannot answer that question. He was so dear to me. He was there to comfort me on my worst days. He was my confidante. He always held me in his arms. He was so warm. He was my everything. But I still took his life.

I remember our last moments vividly. It was late at night and I had just taken my medicine. I laid down beside him in bed. Like every night he wrapped me in his arms, kissed me on the forehead, and started humming a lullaby. The next morning he was not there. He was gone. I miss him. I wonder if he knew that I killed everyone, that I was going to kill him without even realizing it?

Yes, I had poisoned them all in the end. All with the medicine that was supposed to help me.

Now it is quiet.

So quiet.

I am alone.

So alone.

It hurts. This feeling in my chest.

People say everything is okay and that I am better now. I disagree. This medicine took away the only one who cared for me. All in the name of making me better. All to quiet my thoughts. All to silence the voices in my head.

I blame myself for their deaths. I took the medicine that killed them after all.

There is nothing I can do now. They are all dead. Gone forever. I will never hear her hurtful words or see his loving smile.

I make my confession.

I killed them all.

I killed them.

Now there is only silence.

Diana Heineck

It has been great getting to know Diana throughout the semester! She brings a wonderful cultural perspective to her writing and I always look forward to learning something new each session. As tutors, we can learn so much through what our students write. Diana's pieces often reflected a common theme of togetherness, which inspired her work for this Wordplay edition.

Through her writings that she submitted throughout the semester, I was able to learn more about what our campus has to offer in terms of inclusivity. I was also able to learn more about the Spanish culture. Diana's fun and upbeat personality shows through her work!

~Paige Zeratsky

Staying United During Difficult Times

During the month of March 2020, all of a sudden our University announced something unexpected: 2 weeks of Spring break and face to face class cancellations for the semester, due to the coronavirus pandemic. All events were cancelled and graduation had to be postponed. Students were encouraged to pack and move back home. Suddenly, there was not enough time to say good-bye to everybody. We were told to wait for our Professors to send us emails with instructions on how to finish our classes online. A big change was happening.

Trying to accept that many opportunities are being lost, students went back home. Currently, some students are working and studying online, some just studying, others are parents who are also busy with their children. In Wisconsin, we are told to try to stay at home and only go out when it is necessary, to get food and medicine. Furthermore, we are supposed to keep a social distance (around 6 feet) between people, as a safety precaution. There are people that have lost their jobs and in other states and countries, people are not allowed to drive. Some places have a curfew. By the time I am submitting this writing for my English 357 course, we are still in quarantine. Governor Evers has extended the quarantine until the end of May. However, we don't know what will happen afterwards yet.

Today is Friday, April 24, 2020, and it is still a cold month. Our University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point is being missed. It is being missed from face to face classes, to sports, extra-curricular activities, organizations, other UWSP activities, jobs, events, meetings with our professors, students, etc. But we know that good memories can stay with us. Many good memories of all the students we met, professors, advisors and staff who are our role models and have helped us in their unique ways, encouraging us in this road that has not finished yet. For some it is our last semester, some students might not come back because of new jobs, new plans, etc. So, we might not be able to see some of our friends again. Therefore, this whole situation can make us sad.

Suddenly, we are more apart than ever. What to do during these troubling times?

Trying to adjust to a new situation can be difficult, but we don't have any other choice than try to stay at home. Fortunately, it is great that in Wisconsin we are still allowed to go for a walk, to the park, drive, go to some libraries that are open, go to a church to pray, and drive to get groceries

and things we need. Also, we can go to the drive through of some restaurants to get something to eat, golfing, and a few other places.

On the academic side, we have the choice of online learning which is good. Our professors, advisors and staff are always ready to help us.

Trying to see the positive side of the problem is important. Students that are back at their family's home can recharge and reunite with their families. We don't have to drive to class or walk in sometimes dangerous ice to get to classes. Some people can have some extra time to do different things that could not be done before, like having more time to cook or learn to cook, work more on a college assignment, a hobby, or something else.

To keep communicating with our friends which is much needed: Zoom, What's App, Face time and other social media applications have been the solution. Although, communicating online is not the same as communicating in person. Also, Internet is not perfect so sometimes communications get interrupted or cut, and we miss important communications. But we forget these issues and keep trying to use it even if it does not work sometimes. I am glad the internet is available.

Thanks to our university, we have our UWSP Technology Department that provides us with information on the latest tools and advice needed to keep communicating during this time, when we are separated from our friends and University. Just calling them or sending them a message, the IT department staff is doing a great job helping us.

Communicating via social and internet applications as if we lived in different countries has saved our friendships. How would things have been if we did not have the internet? Would we do everything by regular mail or fax? There would be so many letters for the post office to send, hopefully some letters would not get lost. Landline phones would always be busy and the telephone bills expensive.

Thanks to Zoom, we are able to talk with our professors and keep talking with our university friends. Moreover, we can still participate in the UWSP organizations we love and try some new organizations we could not try before due to schedule conflict.

According to one UWSP student, Zoom helps them to keep connections with their classmates and professors that they had developed during in person classes.

Completing our classes is our main goal now. We are all in the same boat and we have to keep rowing. Sometimes, it seems that the quarantine is too long. Therefore, we are looking forward to go back to the way it was before this quarantine. But for now, the health and safety for everybody is more important and we still need to stay at home. We can always find ways to enjoy our time at home with our families or on our own, knowing that we can still communicate with our friends and university in different ways, Together, we will make it during these difficult times.

Michael Heer

What can I say about Michael, other than he was absolutely wonderful to work with over the course of two semesters! Our meetings were often the highlight of my week, because I knew that I would get to read more of his brilliant writing. He continued his “Fantasy Food” project from last semester, adding a second and even third episode, with plans for many more. Never have I read a piece, published or unpublished, more original and inventive than this one. Drawing from both science and fantasy, Michael packs many “easter eggs” into his work. His creativity is matched only by his humor, which he expertly weaves into the writing; there were many times during our sessions that he had to stop because I was laughing so hard. I hope you love his writing as much as I do. I know that Michael will succeed in his writing career, and I cannot wait until you can read his published work in full. I honestly cannot say enough good things about him!

~Lindsey Bundgaard

“Fantasy Food: On a Budget”

The screen flickers and then turns on showing a kitchen with a tall woman in a brown kimono and her long waist length black hair in a ponytail as well as an older woman in a sky-blue blouse with a pearl necklace standing behind a counter.

“Hi, I’m Minsu,” says the ponytail.

“And I’m Mary,” says the pearls.

“And welcome to the second episode of our show! Due to how successful our first episode was, we have a bigger budget now, yikes!” Minsu says.

“That’s right Minsu, however, last time, we got a few complaints that the food we made is a little too difficult, and too expensive,” Mary chimes in, “so today, we will be making delicious food for those who are...”

“On a budget!” the two shout together.

The opening credits begin showing an elderly man sipping wine next to a giant wooden cask, a chef throwing spices on a paella being grilled over a fireplace on a beach, Mary mixing batter with a wooden spoon smiling, Minsu adding exotic orchids to a vase, and a raw chicken picking up a knife and beginning to fence a chef with a frying pan.

Minsu’s and Mary’s Home Cooking Restaurant Style Cooking Show

The show returns to the two women on the kitchen set.

“Hello everyone, I’m chef Minsu PhD, and I’m the head chef and owner of the highest rated restaurant and consumable distribution center in the Macroverse. You may have seen that my restaurant has recently won best centerpieces in Diner-Mite Magazine’s poll. I designed those myself! I love flower arranging, but more on that later.”

“And I’m Dame Mary Elizabeth Regan Wainscott-Carmichael III, grandmaster of quilting and recorder of two studio R & B albums and I...I can’t do this. Everyone has seen the tabloids. I’m being audited by the IRS. All my accounts are frozen. My company voted me and my husband, Mister Carmichael, off the executive board. And I’m under house arrest,” Mary lifts her leg above the counter showing the tracker on her right leg, “while they investigate our company for insider trading, money laundering, conspiracy to commit bioterrorism, health code violations, conspiracy to commit genocide, and conspiracy to end the world.”

“That’s right, Mary! Which is why we recreated the studio stage in the Summer Ballroom of Wainscott-Carmichael Estates in Yorkshire,” Minsu smiles.

“Shut up! You love this don’t you.”

“You know it!” Minsu responds. “Well, we are introducing a few new segments thanks to our bigger budget. For now, we’ll start by making a fun sandwich spread, but after a word from our sponsor.”

We’ll be back after this message!

A mom walks into a kitchen and sees her young son and daughter covered in pasta sauce as well as it all over her once pristine white kitchen and their golden retriever.

“Has this ever happened to you?” a male announcer says.

“What the hell is going on?” she shouts. The kids stop covering the dog with the sauce as he whimpers. “That was my grandma’s marinara sauce!”

“Don’t you just hate it when your sauces get dirty?” the announcer says, “well, now you can get them clean with the new *Insanity Sponge* by *KitchenTech*.” A random hand from offscreen gives the mom a blue sponge. She begins wiping down the counters, walls, floor, children and dog. “With the *Insanity Sponge*, suck up sauces, soups, and stews without getting any dirt, dust, hair or dog in it,” the announcer says.

“With the *Insanity Sponge*, my grandma’s sauce still tastes delicious,” the mom holds the sponge over her head, wrings it, and drinks the sauce that falls out of it.

“Other sponges, keep the germs and fungal spores in, but with our secret recipe, everything not edible is left on the surfaces,” the announcer says.

“I love the new *Insanity Sponge* by *KitchenTech*,” the mom says in front of a clean kitchen.

“Remember, you can’t spell kitchen without tech,” the dog says and the mom, children, announcer, and hand join in laughing.

KitchenTech

Minsu’s and Mary’s Home Cooking Restaurant Style Cooking Show

The two women stand behind the counter with a large spread of ingredients in front of them. “Now, sandwiches may be considered a *third-class* food, but they’re cheap, so quite complaining,” Mary says, “you asked for this. So, this is what you get!”

“Agreed. No bitchin’ in the kitchen,” Minsu says, “but we have a nice spread of different breads and ingredients. As you can see, we have some ham, salami, halibut, eel, swordfish, fugu fish, bear, beluga whale, mastodon, kraken, phoenix, and carpenter ant, just to name a few delicious delicatessen meats. We also have a huge selection of garnishes for sandwiches like dijon mustard, honey mustard, colonel mustard, peanut butter, cashew butter, blueberry jelly, hubba-hubbaberry jam, sushi, and even some marshmallow fluff.”

“Well, this is a substitute, if you can’t afford marshmallow fluff...like me. So, it’s wetlandmallow fluff...” Mary says.

“Yuck...Let’s look at our selection of breads!” Minsu says, “we got some good wheat slices. Oak nut, rye, sourdough, bagels, some tortillas, waffles, cornbread, anpan, banana and oh, even a nice French baguette. That shit’s expensive out of Europe.”

“For those on a budget, we have white bread,” Mary says, “gray bread, I-Can’t-Believe-It’s-Not-Bread, and Ripley’s Believe It or Not Bread. Yeah...”

“So, Mary, why don’t we both make a couple of sandwiches,” Minsu says, “I’m starting with a sweet sandwich. I’m going to take 2 waffles. Spread a little hubba-hubbaberry jam on that, a little walrus butter too. Then a scoop of wetlandmallow fluff.” She rolls her eyes at Mary. “Then, add some piñata meat and jelly beans. I use non-GMO grown jelly beans and free-range piñata meat. Both are locally sourced. Put the 2 waffles together, and voila! It’s so sweet it’ll give you cavities if you don’t use mouthwash after eating it. Beat that!” She takes a carnivorous bite and jellybeans fly everywhere,

“Ok, even though I’m on a budget. I can make something ten times more tasty,” Mary begins, “take 2 slices of imitation banana bread. Next, add a couple of cold cuts of unicorn meat and then...”

“What the hell, Mary!?” Minsu shouts, “you cannot eat that. It’s a grave sin to kill such a benevolent creature. You monster! You [Bleep] monster! Shame on you! Shame! Shame! Shame! How could you!? You had some morals at least! Shame! Shame on you! What’s next? Are you going to eat a dragon? Or a hobbit? I’m sure leprechauns are magically delicious! But we have rules! Damn you! You incompetent [Bleep] [Bleep] [Bleep] bitch!”

“Wow...,” Mary says looking at Minsu. She puts her hand on her shoulder. “It’s okay. I obey the laws of cooking. This meat came from a unicorn who committed suicide.”

“What!? What are you talking about!?”

“Yeah, it flew into oncoming traffic.” The two stare at each other for a few moments.

“That doesn’t make it right,” Minsu says.

“Too bad. I’m on a budget! So, put the cold cuts on one of the imitation banana bread slices. Aren’t they lovely! Nice and rainbow colored.” She stops suddenly as Minsu is still looking at her. “Is there a problem?”

“Did you,” Minsu whispers harshly, “did you push it?”

“What?”

“Did you push the unicorn into oncoming traffic?” Minsu says trying not to yell.

“Heavens, no. It is suicide unicorn meat. Unicorn bipolar disorder is rampant nowadays. I personally blame social media. Now, if you’re done badgering me, let me get back to my sandwich. Add a little honey and then a little cloud cotton candy and some Skittles!” She puts the other slice of bread on top and takes a bite. “Tastes like happiness!”

Minsu’s mouth remains agape. She begins to speak in a trembling voice, “how did you even get unicorn meat on a budget? Yes, okay, suicide meat is messed up. It is still, for some reason, moral. But unicorn meat is expensive. I’ve never even cooked with it. So, how did you get these choice cuts? Especially on a budget?”

“Oh, I know a guy.”

“You know a guy?”

“Yeah, he works for the Department of Sanitation,” Mary says.

“He...? You ate roadkill meat!?”

“Yeah, I’m on a budget,” Mary says, turning to the camera, “viewers at home, don’t be afraid to try some dishes from the side of the road. They could be magical!” She lifts up her sandwich.

“Oh, my goodness...”

“Minsu, you should really try this. It’s so good. No? Okay, then make your next sandwich.”

“Gladly! I’m sorry I just need a moment.”

“Take your time,” Mary says, taking another bite.

“For my second sandwich, I will be using the greatest ingredient ever made by man,” Minsu’s voice begins trembling again. “As a kid, I would come home and my mom would give me a sandwich with this important ingredient on it. This is in honor of her and a new take on that sandwich.” Her eyes begin tearing up. “I’m sorry, this ingredient is so important. Wars have been waged over it. People have killed for it. It’s my favorite condiment. I’m sorry... I just can’t.” She starts crying.

“It’s okay, Minsu. It’s a very important ingredient!”

“You have no idea, Mary!” Minsu takes a deep breath, “the secret, amazing, heart stopping, blood pumping, kill-your-spouse-over, ingredient is...mayo!”

“Mercy,” Mary says fanning herself.

“But not just any mayo! Imported mayo! From Venezuela!”

“Oh, the good stuff!”

“So,” Misnu says wiping the tears from her eyes, “take the French baguette, slice it down its side like you would a bass.”

“Or unicorn,” Mary says between bites.

“...anyways, add a few slices of ham from flying pigs. Not a lot of people have had this meat and I don’t know why. Tastes like ham and chicken. Add a couple of blue pickles and orange onions. A few purple tomato slices. And then some Gorille cheese. This is gorilla cheese from the Brittany region in France. And now we are going to fold that and put it in the toaster for a few seconds.” Minsu grabs the sub and puts it into a Kirby 430 PsychoStorm Toaster behind her on the back counter. She closes the door and pushes a button. Three seconds later, the toaster dings and Minsu uses a spatula to put it on a plate. The sandwich is steaming and is nice and toasted.

“Beautiful,” Minsu says setting it down on the front counter. She opens it revealing melted cheese. “Now, add the mayo.” Minsu opens the Venezuelan mayo jar and then peels off the seal. She takes it and dumps the whole thing onto her sandwich. “More! More!” She reaches under the counter and grabs three more jars, takes off their lids and their peels, and dumps them on her sub. “More!!” She keeps grabbing jars and dumping the contents onto her sandwich. Mary cowers in fear. She laughs manically. “I am the Queen of the Mayo!”

“Enough, woman!” Mary yells. This shakes Minsu out of her mania. “Minsu,” she says quietly, “no good work of art is ever truly done. You just find a good place to stop. So, please! Find that place! You’re scaring me.”

“I’m...I’m sorry, Mary. I don’t know what came over me.”

“I know what did.” Mary eyes the pile of 20 jars of mayo on the counter.

“You want some?” Minsu asks timidly after calming down.

“Sure, that’s actually a good tip for the audience. If you’re on a budget, mooch of your richer friends.”

Minsu cuts the sandwich in half with her katana and the two devour the mayo with the sandwich.

“Alright,” Mary says moments later, “time for my second sandwich. Hold on. What’s going on?” Mary begins levitating. She floats up until only her legs can be seen on camera. “What on earth?”

“Mary, I think your wish is coming true from the unicorn meat!” Minsu shouts up to her.

“I didn’t make a wish...yet, I feel strangely powerful!” The camera pans up to her. Mary begins glowing rainbow colors that radiate from her skin. She starts laughing maniacally. “Foolish mortals!” she growls in a deeper than her natural voice. “You thought you could trap little old Mary in her house! Your doom will come! Noone is safe from the wrath of Dame Mary Elizabeth Regan Wainscott-Carmichael III! I will destroy those who accused me! Those you voted me out of my own company! And the IRS better watch out!” She starts laughing maniacally again and her skin and eyes begin glowing more intensely. Then, the light explodes out of her blinding the studio and camera. People scream in horror.

We seem to be experiencing technical difficulties, we’ll be right back after this important announcement!

A cartoon kangaroo breaks down the front door of a suburban family’s home while they are eating a hearty breakfast of omelettes, bacon, toast, oatmeal, and orange juice.

“Why you all eating this crap?” The kangaroo says. It does this cool side jump where it jumps into the table and does a backflip causing the table’s legs to break and crash to the floor, taking all of the breakfast with it.

“What the hell?” The dad yells putting down his newspaper after spilling coffee on his white shirt and the tie his son gave him for a disappointing Father’s Day present.

“I spent three goddamn hours making this breakfast for my kids to get up at the last minute, grab a bite, and run out the door to catch the bus!” The mom yells holding a plate full of pancakes, but she also somehow had time to do her makeup and wear a nice green suit for her

job downtown as a paralegal. She throws the plate of pancakes on the floor. "Get out of my house!" Outside, the school bus honks its horn. "Damn it!"

"Looks like you kids need a quick easy meal for breakfast," the kangaroo says to the brother and sister.

"Are you going to hurt us?" the sister asks.

"Not if you try this! My new cereal-Kanga Puffs. Chocolate, peanut butter and ham flavored corn puffs!" The kangaroo says pouring a bowl for the kids and adding skim milk and a spoon to each.

The kids each take a spoonful, "awesome!" they say in unison.

"Yeah, kids, Kanga Puffs are part of this complete breakfast!" the kangaroo says and omelettes, bacon, toast, oatmeal, orange juice, pancakes, a multivitamin, and bourbon are shown besides a bowl of Kanga Puffs.

"Then why did you destroy my breakfast!" The mom says, "and now my kids missed the bus, so I have to drive them! My husband can't because his boss is a hardass if he's late, and he doesn't even have time to change! So, he's going to go to work with that disgusting coffee on his shirt and that awful tie. So, he probably won't get that promotion he desperately needs and deserves. So, now we can't pay off the mortgage, or fix the door or table! And I don't have time to clean up this mess! So, our sheep dog Mitzi is going to get into it and probably eat some of the ceramic and then we'll have to put her down! I'm calling the police!"

"What do you mean awful tie?" the son says feeling hurt.

"You kids stay rocking!" the kangaroo says and bounces out of the house.

"Get back here, you homewrecker!" The dad shouts out the door as the mom cries into the phone and the kids try to keep Mitzi away from eating any dishes.

Colonel Harvey's Kanga Puffs. They Roole!

Minsu's and Mary's Home Cooking Restaurant Style Cooking Show

"Ok, we are just about ready to continue with the sandwich section. The fire chief gave us the okay. Everyone feeling okay?" their producer Regina says from behind the camera. Minsu sits on a stool behind the burnt counter drinking from a bottle of water as someone does her hair. She looks up to the pair of legs floating.

"I can't believe you didn't know you get to make a wish after you eat unicorn," she says.

"Well, who eats unicorn?" Mary's legs say back.

"Exactly! You're not supposed to! So, all its power went to you... and your head. Like you could take on the IRS."

"I shiver to think I said that on TV. What can they do to me?"

"Let our lawyers figure it out," Minsu says.

"Alright! Get some weights on Mary, I want to get rolling in 15 minutes," Regina says.

"What a hardass," Minsu says.

"No doubt. Will weights actually help?" asked the legs.

"I think. The random power will go away within an hour. Sorry, you can't take over the world."

"Yeah, I'd need at least two hours."

Minsu's and Mary's Home Cooking Restaurant Style Cooking Show



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