



Jongleur

2019

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The *Jongleur* is an annual publication of student work that is formatted and edited by a student staff. It is created for both the benefit of Louisiana State University at Alexandria and the distinctive voice of its students.

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Jongleur

Louisiana State University at Alexandria

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Editor's Letter and Acknowledgements:

When I began looking at student submissions at the beginning of this school year, it quickly became apparent how intensely creative and diverse our student population is. I have always believed in the potential of LSUA students, but seeing so much work by our students in one place is aweinspiring. We received more submissions this year than in any previous before, and unfortunately, we had to make some difficult decisions about what to keep. Thank you so much to all students who submitted. You all deserve recognition, and please never stop being the brilliant, artistic student body that we love!

Big thanks are in order for the following:

- Eric Alai and Bernard Gallagher: without your guidance and passion, we would never make it to print each year. Thank you for trusting us to do this correctly
- The Jongleur Staff: Morgan Primeaux, Victoria Bloodworth, and Jo-Ann Smith—thank you for the tireless work you have each put in on making this book happen
- AEH for providing the prize money for contest winners
- Dr. Rowan and LSUA administration for funding a student led journal and supporting the creativity of our students
- Bernard Gallagher, Elizabeth Beard, Holly Wilson, and Chartwells for hosting the awards ceremony for contest winners
- Lisa Mayeux for printing certificates, answering endless questions, and a miscellany of other reasons

The list of people who deserve credit for helping us get the *Jongleur* is much longer than I can cover here. To anyone I have overlooked, please know that we appreciate your contributions. The continued success of the *Jongleur* rests upon the shoulders of giants, and we hope to see many years of publication in the future.

On a personal level, I want to thank Morgan Primeaux—my greatest cheerleader and the only girl for whom I have ever been moved to write poetry. You have held my hand through my worst days, and somehow I have not scared you away yet. Thank you for everything you do, my love.

Always,

Carli Smith
Editor, 2019

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1st Place in Poetry

“Crusade”

I stood in Rome in my mind's eye and saw
The fires that brought down that great city's wall
And in a museum King David stands naked
In his humanity for all the world to see
Is anybody really that way at all
Or are there really too many layers to pick apart
I've read every story and the tragedy I find
Is that Icarus was just a boy who thought he could fly

I've seen you when you're drunk
And I have seen you when you're strong
And I have seen you in self-righteousness,
I've seen you when you're wrong
Call me back when you feel better
Next time we will go together
Well, I'm not a saint
And you're not an angel
Do you think God will bless a sinner's crusade
Just to make themselves feel better,
Call me back when you feel better

The gatekeeper gets tired of wondering which door
You can't go on pilgrimage
And then give nothing more
Ghosts live in every bottle on your shelf
But you still wear a lion's tail as your belt
Jerusalem is a little bit colder than I thought it would be
We had our banners held high as we sailed across the sea
But we might drown if the waters get too high
And Icarus was just a boy who thought he could fly

Grown people playing make believe
Tell us we're the king and queen
But all of them ate the very same apple
And everyone tainted the paradise that fell
But I'm in love with all your imperfections
And every wrong turn in some odd direction
And there's that little whisper from inside
That Icarus was just a boy who thought he could fly

2nd Place in Poetry

“No. 6”

My love wears sunlight dusted
across her nose Brushed over a
cheek,
In the soft flex of her wrist,
Dappled in collarbones that catch my breath

But it's her brightest sunspot eyes that
pull me deeper and make my lungs
ache with the pressure of her
knowing.

“No. 10”

If I never love you loudly, I'll love you
in the silence.
If I can never love you in the open, I'll love
you in the deep.
I'll love you in the patience and the waiting,
But if I go and do not tell you,
Never doubt I have loved you and
love you still.

“No. 12”

If I had but one love to give,
Still I would give it all to you. In
truth, the choice was never mine;
My love was always meant for you.
I have loved you as fiercely as I know how,
Giving up pieces of myself in the loving,
But I would give it to you again and
Again unreturned because I give
it Without need or expectation
and I love you without waste.

“No. 26”

How strange that hope should die—
Not in a violent tearing from the soul,
But a slow death-rattle— With
fits and starts as it slips away in
the night, Gone before it is ever
noticed.

Carli Alyece Smith

3rd Place in Poetry

“Eulogy for Olympus”

The old gods of Olympus
We talk of them still
I give you their Eulogy
For no one else will
Zeus, the father of heroes
The king of the sky
He punished us severely
But never said why
Hera, matron of marriage
With her king she fought
Though he had earned her fury
His children did not
Hades, pale lord of the dead
Who judged with no scorn
The living did not praise him
Neither will they mourn
Demeter, she of the grain
Lover her daughter so
When Persephone left her
We died in the snow
Poseidon, the sea’s master
The cause of all quakes
He is also the reason
For Medusa’s snakes
Hestia, the hearth keeper
Loved kin not glory
All of her quiet kindness
Made a dull story
Ares, bringer of battles
Quite sad to mention
The wars he fought could not win
Father’s attention
Athena, some call Pallas
Birthed democracy

Though her wisdom could not note
Her hypocrisy
Hephaestus, lord of the forge
He gave the gods much
When they gave him not a thing
But bride and a crutch
Aphrodite, most gorgeous
Though pride made her cold Why
help Paris start a war?
An apple of gold
Apollo, who drove the sun
Sweet Daphne’s debtor
Would kill any bard who dared
Think themselves better
Artemis, the lithe huntress
Always a girl rather
Showed Actaeon no mercy
For he saw her bathe
Hermes, paragon of thieves
Was quite the kind youth
Though he was quite the trickster
He only spoke truth
Dionysus, the drunkard
With blush on their face
Always welcome at parties
But no other place
There are no worthwhile tales left
The gods are all dead
But before we leave this mount
A truth must be said
The gods’ lives were dramatic
Each day a scrimmage
Because they belonged to us
Made in our image

Matthew Force

Honorable Mention in Poetry

“We are the Dreamers”

We stand on the sidewalks
We peer over the fences
We sing on the balconies
We play songs on benches
Our heads are in the clouds
Strong cores, fragile hearts
We believe in young love
We still wish on stars

We are the dreamers
We are the singers
We wear our hearts on our sleeves
And don't hold back anything We're
soft but we have callouses on our
fingers 'Cause we're the
dreamers

We sit on the windowsills
Dreaming of knights in armor
We shout in the public square
Daring hearts to beat harder
We cry in the bathroom
And write sad songs sometimes
We dance in our bedrooms
And read between the lines

We are the dreamers
We are the singers
We wear our hearts on our sleeves
And don't hold back anything We're
soft but we have callouses on our
fingers 'Cause we're the
dreamers

We're not practical
We think dancing in the rain is magical
We count the costs
And give our hopes up
And never say I can't happen at all

We are the dreamers
We are the singers
We wear our hearts on our sleeves
And don't hold back anything We're
soft but we have callouses on our
fingers
'Cause we're the dreamers

Our heads are in the clouds
Strong cores, fragile hearts
We believe in young love
We still wish on stars

Kennis Gremillion

“Young Lover”

A fascination with infatuation
Heart fluttering love like wings on dove
Pure bliss with innocence's sweet kiss
Constant fling in eternal spring

Open only, no wilting
Only Pureness, no guilty
All truth, no filthy
Heart not bleeding but spilling

Deep connections, only with the
self Entire absorption in
wholeness. Elevated to surpassion
of Asphodel, Herculean strength
and boldness. Bacchus' giddiness
of Zinfandel And with that, all of
his drollness. In the end, wish you
well On a warm winter solstice.

Dearest friend of Aphrodite, I
delivered my heart from hiding.
A place of love that was our home.
I am of the sea, she's of the foam.

Light shining from my chest like
Apollo, With warmth radiant from my
soul And the wisdom that I dole.
Others might see and follow.
Blindly love those who hate,
Not with a threat of a fate,
But to fill a place of hollow.
As a lover, have no fear;
Your intentions always clear,
Keep preemptively geared for the gallow.

“Soul of an Angel”

Genuine hearts comply with the soul of an angel.

Amplifying an angelic spirit of hope into the broken tune of a reckless melody.

Inside this tormented but wrenched tune holds the key to endless possibilities.

On the outside displays a doubt of confusion and lack of direction.

Abruptly, it sought out to regain its dauntless ways by listening to the gentle whispers of hope, actions of liability, and the reassurance of faithfulness.

The discovery has been acquired, and the judgment made into something so abundant that could never be replaced.

Look within the eyes but listen to the soul. It will take you very far more than you could ever know.

Time can only tell, but it's all up to you. Will you be in control of it all, or will it be in control of you?

Crystal Montgomery

“Untitled”

There was a young man who worked a bookstore,
Where checking and selling was his chore.
Once at ten past seven,
Checked out a boy of eleven
With a book called “Sixty-nine tips to score”.

Surprised he’d even try it,
Told him he couldn’t buy it.
Then just the same day,
Checked out a girl of eight
Who asked for a book to diet.

He thought he was surprised as possible,
Until a man of forty, his next
obstacle Who claimed himself a
brony And asked for my little pony.
The man crossed a line uncrossable.

Last was a woman so
perverse Old enough to be in
a hearse. She stole a bible
And bought a sible.
What a twisted universe.

The boy grew tired of his occupation,
Quit his job and changed location,
To live among the trees,
Enjoying to gentle breeze,
Encompassed in nature and imagination.

John Marino

“Untitled”

We Enter The Void
Day is bright with strong hold.
Day by day, hour by hour
We march forward filled with power. A
cloud comes forth bringing darkened light
We continue through with all our might. A
boom summons rain, causing sorrow We
trudge through the weather till morrow. We
Enter The Void
Part of the day is destroyed.
Through dirt and mud
We keep going with a mighty thud.
With mockery and despair
We crawl on, the darkness starts to stare.
A hefty blow brought with force
We lay unmoving, the darkness with no remorse.
We Enter The Void
The day is destroyed.

Peyton Paul

Why won't you let me be?
You won't allow me to breathe
I'm trapped!
Let me out!
I want to escape this nightmare you've created
You're smothering me, hurting me painfully!
What do you want from me?

“Untitled”

You're holding on too tightly
I'm suffocating in your grasp
Minutes turn to hours
Time has passed
Colors fading to black and
white My breath leaving my
body I am an angel now.

Nikita Billups

“

Spiderweb in the Evening”

Tired was I, as the evening grew old
My beautiful distraction, took its toll
And by fate glanced I with weariness Out
into the dim summer night's blackness
And lo, what did see but a cricket!
Who wandered into the spider's thicket
Transfixed I was, in morbid spell
My dark obsession could not be quelled
Still did he strive to make himself free
That poor cricket, such a pitiful thing
And who am I to delight in tragedy So
long as it happens not to me? What
well of madness, vanity, and vice
Have I disturbed, to darken my eyes?
Sunken they be! Recessed in their sockets
Staring outward like a fiend undead
Futile mind of mine, scurrying round and round
Crawling on the skull's ceiling, not yet touching ground
Nonsense do I speak? Nonsense do I see!
For death is coming for both you and me!
Nay! Some shall not sleep, blessed are they
Those gifted Children of the Day
Such a terrible comprehension
Now I seek my vain distraction

Jonathan Stanford

“

My Lovely Rusalka”

There, my spirit, no, my heart and my mind
Were present in the forests of the East
Far from the waters of the German Rhine
Wandering a wood no living eye had seen

The mystic wood had called to my savage blood
Exciting my heart to quiet madness
My ankles were swallowed and grabbed by the mud
Yet I pressed onward, with silent madness

My feet lead me to a pond
Hidden away from the presence of man
Where I saw skin so fair and hair so blonde
And I was paralyzed for lo, I am but man

There, emerging from the blissful waves, was she
Her skin as pallid as the snow of Warsaw
Her eyes glowed the most brilliant green

She made no efforts to hide her breasts
Indeed, she saw my eyes and smiled brightly
Her appearance—robbed me of breath

She beckoned me closer with her finger
And Heaven forgive me, I stepped closer
Closer to that lovely, slender figure

“

Jonathan Stanford

My Last Goodbye”

You mumble my name, I whisper yours back.
You hold my hands, and I hold yours tight.
You told me... how you loved our lives,
and I cried... when you closed your eyes.
The sound of the beep, lets me know you're free.
No longer hurting, in this devastating world of
uncertainty. I take a breath in, and say goodbye
to you, and both of our lives too.
I get in bed crying myself to sleep. I dream about all our adventures each week.
Oh. How I used to hold your hand, but I can't because you've left this land.
The day we were wed, was the happiest of many. I'll miss you... and all
the days we spent together plenty. You will never leave my mind, because
I will think about you all the time.
The day you left my side, I found out amazingly shocking news.
I know you will watch over me, and our unborn child too.

Kalli Parker

“The Circadian Rhythm of Nocturnal Hearts”

The smiles surround, as the flesh calls and beckons a world of pain and power masked as joy
The wilds' sound, filled with such succulence to remind of forgotten salvation, at least that ploy
Heartbeats intertwined, Minds universes apart- as broken bonds fortify the walls that divide
The lover's laughter anchors the mind to reality deep within the silent night, “sleep well” is said
The shapes of expectation where the precipice of disappointment and things arbitrated are wed
“Nevermore” said the Raven, “ For I never saw true beauty ‘till this night” said Romeo

Logan Duff

“The Saison Tango”

Petals fall in the age of dead trees
With sweet scents of lilac and lavender
withering. Camellias draw and put to sleep
remaining bees While snowy peaks plot
shivering. Branches fall with the weight of
snow, And icicles drop and melt away.
Light, erupting, casts a newfound glow.
Flowers emerge in radiant day.
Honeysuckle is engulfed in rain While
Boreas plays with Iris in delight.
He dances, stomps, and chains a hurricane.
Helios joins too, chasing it out of sight.
Poppies bloom and sing in sweltering heat.
The saisons dance and rejoice in repeat.

Cailey Scadlock

“Binge (Ch)eating”

Put your hands on my swollen hips
Where I have visibly injured my body,
Destroying myself.

Put your eyes on my strayed lips
Where I have emotionally binged,
Indulging myself.

Put your kiss on my leaking heart
Where I have lost all association,
With myself.

Put your mind on my distant innocence
Where I had tender loving meaning,
Surrendering myself.

Put a tear on my overgrown appetite
Where I have tainted a vision,
Failing myself.

Anonymous

“The Ballad of the Sailor and the Siren”

The sailor was from a poor line
Of sailors before him
His father warned him of the songs
Used to lure sailors in

He told him of the siren’s voice
Intoxicating, sweet
That she would wield against a man
To lure him to the deep

And so, when he became a man
And sailed for the first time
He took great caution when he heard
The siren’s lovely rhyme

But found himself, in spite of this,
Entranced by her sweet song
But never did she drag him in
Though he stayed all day long

And then that night when he came home
He told his father this:
“The siren sang to me but ne’er
Dragged me to the abyss”

“Because she’s crafty,” said his sire
“And part of her cruel plan
Is first she wins a sailor’s trust
Then takes him whilst she can”

But the young man was enchanted
And the next day, again
He sailed away in hopes that he
Might hear her sweet refrain

Again, the siren came to him
With gentle words and tune
And the sailor lingered there
Till sun became the moon

Again, he never was pulled in

And told his father so
But the old sailor warned his son
This just foreshadowed woe

Frustrated, the young sailor left
Onto his boat once more
And waited for the siren’s call
While anchored near the shore

The siren met him once again
With loving, tender song
Then disappeared into the waves
Not dragging him along

The sailor began catching fish
Profiting from the trade
His father tried to deter him
But now his mind was made

The sailor finally made enough
To buy a diamond ring
And sat there on the rocks, waiting
To hear his siren sing

The siren came up from the deep
But did not sing this day
Instead, she joined him on the rocks
And, holding him, did say:

“So long I’ve waited for a chance
To live on land above
And I have sung so many years
To find a man I love”

She wore the ring, the sailor boy
Then caught more fish to sell
And shopped around until he found
A place for them to dwell

Then to the siren he was wed
And fasted at the hand
The sailor set sail as a boy
But she’d made him a man

Kennis Gremillion

“Winter Bares Fruit”

Special apples that grow for an hour
During the cold winter’s power “It
happens every 50 years...”said the
grandfather
He also told me to never sell this land never
This tree will stay forever and ever
Many years have passed later Am
married with a wife that will soon be a
mother
We then had a child together
But then she pass on soon after
Grown depress; thought it was all over
But then developed a son like no other
More years pasted later
My son grew older
But then his body contaminated with cancer
Eventually sent to a hospital care Lost my
wife and now losing my child, this is not
fair
Doctors told me he wasn’t going to live as
shared
I brought him back home then count my
hairs
Couldn’t abandon him; I wouldn’t dare
Two months later back at the lair

“Forever Alone but Never Alone”

With. Fur silky as worm thread Eyes
clear as water flows who shall love
me instead I walk through the streets
as time goes

Please notice my purrs
As also my dances
I need a resting place for my sorrows
As no one wants me not even borrow

My son’s old smile is now a cold stare
Winter is now and starts to tare
Was thinking about what to wear My
son started to bleed; this I could not
bare
Started to cry and ran into the midnight air
Then notice an apple off a tree which was
quite rare
Picked it because I didn’t care
Came back to see my son acting weird
Feed him the apple off the tree
Suddenly he got up and fell on his knees
He said, “Believe in me....please....”
He then drop dead which I couldn’t believe
Thinking was it the apple that did the deed?
Asked myself, “Is my son free?”
Putted him back to bed as if nothing
had
happened
Later that night I prayed
Wishing my son will stay Today was a
new day; realized everything was okay
My son came into the room asking if I
wanted to play

Matthew Signater

I need food I’m starving But no one sees
me so my heart aching from
the painful carving

I mourn for someone to love me
Let me lean on their lap
Have them touch my head with a rub or a
tap

As my heart continues to anguish
A little teen female came to me with
a cooked fish

Smile to me as she whisper," Here take
it..."

"No need to be a stray
Come home with me and forever stay."

I lost the hope I was given eons ago
But now it reincarnated
As a Phoenix glow

We walked home together

The future became the present and the
present became the past My life went
from dread to having a warm
bed

Me and the woman all grown
We made life fullest as its shown

We shared all emotions with each other
I knew we be together

But I assumed
My owner day by day was slowly losing
her
body She was
bedridden
As was her emotions hidden

I couldn't accept fate As I
seen her slowly die which is
something I hate

There nothing I can do as I'm only a cat
But the least I could is be here for her
Like she did with me as she breaths her
final breath

She looked at me grinning and said
"Don't lose your heart"
"Even if I perish from this earth" "You
will still roam the world but with a
melody of a harp" "It's only temporary"
"I'll be watching you as angel or a
holy fairy"
"I know we will be together again for
eternity"
"Till then live life as u did after then"

Her hand on my whiskers slowly faded to
the bed

Her whole body went silent. And
motionless, including her head

I couldn't mourn
Because I know she wasn't forever dead

Matthew Signater

"Rings & Waves"

Love came in the form of her eyes that enveloped me into a wave that crashed onto the shore
I was a mess and she was a pressed flower into a book
Beautiful but kept treasured forever through a life that kept her on her knees before God to keep
her mind safe
Beauty came in the form of the small of her back and the smell of her hair
My eyes shut tight as the galaxies flew by and the wind carried my every ambition
As my voice cried out she heard the same in the crevice of eternity through the wall
of insecurities and painful integrity

My casket was filled with the thoughts of being set free
And I was buried at sea
Not knowing if I were to resurface with the face of agony and the torture of not knowing
what came next
She told me stories every night of the hills and the glamor of other worlds
But she never knew I found them in her smile
Her sunshine came in waves beating harder than the storm that sank the ship that held my heart
Peace came in the form of every thought that crosses her mind as she crosses her heart and hopes
that she'll never have to lie alone again
Laughter and prevalence filled the house and warmth in the summer was never more welcome
when she held the door open for my arms to escape the pressures of containing my own fears
And waking up caused me to not sleep for eight days
Because now I trace the sidewalk with the flower I'll press in every book I find lying
on my nightstand but fades when the blue moons come by to take them away
The smile that held me and sang me to sleep caused a tremble in my lips and an ache in my side
Every shadow is a new fear wrapped in a blanket of more insecurity and dealing with the demons
I found in my sheets when I was to be washed ashore
Hope came in the form of searching for a new way to cope with the temporal ideas of searching
for a new way to cope with the negative blinds shutting off my vision and my passion
It came in waves and it came in rings
Gold and silver seemed never so empty in comparison to my nights of tearing into my skin
beneath the doubt I had when I knew it was time to keep these secrets in a box behind my
throat
Before one day I reach the shore line

Cortland Casto

“Untitled, April 6”

I stare alone in the dark past the roadway
Echoes of sighs drift through the trees and pick up my limbs as if one of them
I close my eyes and I feel only the light existence
I float above the ground in silence
There is an earthquake beneath my head
And as my legs begin to tremble
I see it
The building is ablaze in a beautiful vibrant display
The people emerge in panic
One by one they approach me
Each screaming my name in a different key
My every movement is seen by those who haunt me

I turn my head slightly and watch in amazement as the towers of water collapse as if in slow motion
In the floodwaters I am consumed, filling my body to its brim as I awake
I am now aware of the things creeping outside of my window
I reach for the bible on my nightstand and fear for my own as I creep outside my bedroom
I was born to run and never look back

Cortland Casto

“Omaha Dreams”

We talked well into the night,
Under the veil of twilight-
Waiting for our feelings to ignite. I joined the working class. Oh, what a
marvelous sight! She had a degree
A few years passed,
But I couldn't get one for me.

Soon the mood began to eclipse
Until she made a move with the lock of our
lips
This love was genuine
No chains or whips
I fell below her standards,
She took a page from *Moll Flanders*-
By having an affair,
Leaving me in utter despair.

She made a convincing plea, As she left with her new lover, “To Omaha we shall
flee, I made a plea through a tearful stutter:
To live our dreams
-Just you and me!”
“From Omaha we shall flee,
To live our dreams
-Just you and me!”

Omaha?

I needed time to convince She just laughed in my face, As our arguments
became tense. Oh, what a disgrace!
It was her white picket fence,
No minor expense.
Omaha! Why did I come to this place?

Another Midwest town,
Devoid of “awe.”
Deep down, In order to get that degree, Another blah! That always evaded me.
A few years passed,
I left the working class;

Soon there was a marriage
And a couple miscarriages. Who shared the same views. From the look of my
impression, A genuine love,
She could tell I was stressing.
Accepted by few.

Once again, she made the plea:
“To Omaha we shall flee,
To live our dreams
-Just you and me!”

Omaha?

I didn't know what Omaha offered, For the things God intends, But perhaps there
we will prosper, My scars began to mend.
So we left the South
With a feeling of doubt.
The one thing I could not believe:

“In Omaha I am finally free,

As time went by,
I gave things another try;
With the trust we built
I learned to let go of the guilt.

Once reserved,
I found what I deserved.

I finally did not make the plea,
To live my life the way I see!”
While holding his hand, I realized I
was living my own *Omaha Dreams*.

Rowan Elwood

“The Perfect Son”

A wintry day, a bitter cold,
A great little town, so I've been told.
Remote in the hills, you'll find a home,
Filled with problems like you wouldn't know.
There, a father lives with his only son, But
he makes him feel as if he is no one. Deep
inside he was falling apart,
Filled with grief from a broken heart. This
built anger like you wouldn't believe, For
in the end it was used on me.
It was impossible for love to exist here
Because in his words, "I was a queer."
He wanted the perfect son, a grand misconception,
Since I never was from my inception. He told me
this as he grabbed my throat, I gasped for air to
remain afloat.
Then I sought shelter through his brother,
A father figure I needed from another.
This built jealousy and increased his rage,
Furthering my pain while at teenage.
Many times, I tried to be brave,
From the treatment I endured, I felt like a slave. At
my lowest, I contemplated suicide,
But what would I accomplish if I died?
With every hit and every scar,
I told myself I would raise the bar, For
I'm not him, nor he is I,
The perfect son I'll never be.

Rowan Elwood

1st Place in Prose

ECHOES OF THE

VALE

NORA MILES

The clock was ticking. With every stroke of the minute hand, Nora knew her time was coming to an end. There was no avoiding her fate, for it was sealed when she took action. If it wasn't her, then who else? Nobody else knew of the horrors committed by Nathaniel, he made sure no one else was alive to tell. She was one of the very few individuals to survive the events of the Vale, to know what truly happened. She knew it changed everyone.

“The Vale” was a codename designed by LOTUS to hide Nathaniel’s discovery. How he discovered it was shrouded in secrecy, known only to the company’s highest-ranking members. At the beginning, the only information Nora knew was from the briefing on the helicopter. The group in attendance was small, each person selected for their specific knowledge and high regard in their respected profession. Being the top biopharmaceutical company in the world, LOTUS was thoroughly impressed with Nora’s background as a Botanist, thus it was only natural for them to send her the invite. Nora was particularly thrilled at the sense of an adventure, and it wasn’t every day that a prominent company extended a welcome of the sort. The compensation for her services was rather generous, and she knew only a fool would decline such an offer, so she thought at the time...

She imagined everyone else in attendance had to sign the same mountains of nondisclosure agreements and liability waivers before coming. Once all the proper security clearances were made would they learn what the expedition entailed. Nathaniel explained about “the discovery of a lifetime,” a miracle fruit whose healing properties cured the most dangerous and complex diseases known to man. The purpose of the expedition was to bring samples back to synthetically replicate the fruit, since it grew nowhere else in the world. If they could patent

their findings and mass produce the results, they knew they could charge whatever they wanted for the product. The highest bidders could pay top dollar for immortality and Nathaniel would have the power of God in his hands.

The whole thing sounded like a joke to Nora, but if LOTUS was this secretive about it, then she knew they may have found something interesting. To make things further unusual, there were a few individuals in the roster Nathaniel enlisted to help him on his endeavor. Besides the other scientists and a security detail, there was a priest by the name of Daniel Morrison and the pilot of the chopper was Nathaniel's half-brother, Kyle Monroe. The purpose of a priest on a scientific pursuit was rather cliché, but most of all, unknown: something Nathaniel kept closely guarded. Nora caught wind that the priest was Kyle Monroe's brother and that the history behind the family was rather complicated...

What they found at the Vale and the events that transpired were catastrophic. It was a place they were never meant to find, a place our ancestors were banished from since the beginning of time. The greatness that it once endowed became corrupt by the greed of mankind and the actions of the expedition further desecrated the little sanctity that remained. What was once paradise, now served as a prison to an ancient evil. Their conquest for eternal life awoken something truly unspeakable and now they would become the harbingers of death. When it was all said and done, the purpose of the priest became quite clear.

Knowing that time was of the essence, Nora concluded the last entry in the journal. She quickly skimmed through the words to make sure she didn't miss a single detail, for these would be her final instructions:

Larry,

I wish I could've seen you one last time little brother, but by the time you find this journal, it will be too late for me. You must finish our work, so our cause will not be in vain. The road ahead won't be easy...There are those like Nathaniel White who wish to see our demise but know that you won't be alone on your journey. You will be the voice for those who have none and you will guide those who have lost their way back onto the righteous path and bring us back into the favor of our maker's eyes. If we can persevere, we can undo the mistakes of our past, so future generations to come won't have to suffer from our original sins.

She closed the journal in haste and turned around to face the open door of the study. With her fingers firmly in her mouth, she produced a loud whistle that echoed throughout the house. In response to her call, Nora could hear the patter of footsteps coming up the staircase. Through the door came her Australian Shepard, Ruby, wagging her tail in delight at the sight of her owner.

“Ruby, sit!” commanded Nora. She immediately sat down but looked puzzled by Nora’s frustration. Sensing the distress in her tone, Ruby began to whine.

“It’s going to be okay, Ruby,” said Nora as she bent down to reassure her loyal companion. She slid her fingers through Ruby’s fur, slightly ruffling it in the process. Then without hesitation, she fully embraced her dog for what would be the last time.

“I’m going to miss you, girl!” The situation made it hard for her to keep her composure. Overwhelmed, she gave into her emotions and the onslaught of tears began to pour down her face. Nora cried uncontrollably, but before her tears could depart her face, they were collected by the wet kisses of Ruby. It was her way of saying goodbye. Caught in the moment, Nora didn’t realize the stream of headlights reflecting through the window of the study.

They’re here, she thought to herself. She quickly grabbed the journal and put it in front of Ruby. “Okay, Ruby! You see this? I need you to take this to Uncle Larry. It’s really, really important that he gets.” Ruby got excited as if they were about to play a game of fetch, but she knew the routine. Like she was trained to do, Ruby understood the command and grabbed the journal. With a dash, she ran out of the room, down the stairs towards the doggy door in the kitchen. As the front door was kicked, Nora looked out the window one last time to see her dog disappear into the darkness.

Nora sat down in her chair satisfied. It was done. Now the only thing she could do was wait patiently for her intruders to find her. She heard a multitude of footsteps ascending the stairs and before long, she could make out the outline of several men advancing towards her. They entered the study slowly, armed to the teeth, with their weapons pointed to kill. She chuckled a bit, amused at their daunting demeanor.

“Aren’t you guys overreacting a bit? Did you expect this to be some big shootout?” The men sneered at her remark, but she didn’t care. If she was going to die, then it was going to be on her terms.

“I see you haven’t lost your charm Nora…” said a man as emerged into the room. The others stepped aside to make space for his entrance.

“I see you’re still doing Nathaniel’s dirty work, Eric.” she said in response. He walked towards her slowly and kneeled to her level. Their gazes met, and she could see the sinister look in his eyes. His glare was filled with hatred and traces of the man she once knew were gone, a shell of his former glory.

“You weren’t hard to find, which means you’re getting sloppy or you’re eager to die. Either way, it makes my job easier.”

“Look. If you’re going to kill me, will you please do it already? I don’t have all day.” Out of frustration, he unsheathed his katana and held it up to her throat.

“I’d be more than obliged to grant your wish, but we have some unfinished business to attend to. Now…” He budged the sword deeper to her throat. “Where are the artifacts?” The sword was so close to her skin that she started to bleed as she smiled.

“You think your little butter knife scares me? I thought you’d get with the times by now and use something more intimidating.” she stated mockingly. “If you think for a second that I’ll tell you where they are, then you’re a damn fool!” Eric eased the tension of the sword from her throat.

“You’re right. Which means we need to be more drastic!” He snapped his fingers, signaling his men to act. They hauled in a large, heavy object and dropped it on the floor besides them. Only when Eric moved, did she realize what the object was. A cross.

“Nathaniel told me how deeply you admire Saint Peter. After doing a little research, it got me thinking…” Nora put two and two together. Her smile quickly disappeared, and for once, she was scared. Noticing her dismay gave Eric satisfaction.

“What a horrible way to die, especially upside down!”

“You’re sick!”

“Quite Possibly.” Eric watched as Nora tried to fight off his men, but to no avail. They slammed her on the ground, restraining her hands and feet tight enough to the cross so she couldn’t budge. With a man positioned at each end of the cross, a spike was placed in the center of her hands and feet.

“By the end of the night, I’ll have the answers I seek.” he said in a cold tone.

“Do your worst!”

On Eric's command, the hammer struck the first nail, driving it deep into her flesh. The screams of agony persisted into the night.

Zachary Walleser

2nd Place in Prose

“Book #9: UNFINISHED”

“Turn left at the next exit.” The automated female voice from my phone has become a part of the background noise throughout my long drive and I almost don’t hear it, but Saoirse digs her nails onto my arm.

Her voice, *much* more alive, shrieks, “WILLIAM!” and I nearly slam on the brakes reflexively before snapping back into reality. I make a hard left at exit 85, sending some of the coffee in the cupholder between us spilling onto my leg.

“Dammit!” Of course, it burns like hell, but I suck it up and keep driving. I recognize this stretch of road; just past the Rally’s, I make my right and grab my leaky thermos, taking another gulp of coffee as I maneuver down the hilly street. Fifteen houses down, in the cul-de-sac, a twostoried house of light tan brick with a stone walkway leading to a small porch stands out and I pull into the driveway.

Connor, of course, is already there, because of *course* he is. My brother is efficiently, annoyingly early, his dark auburn hair slicked back because it doesn’t fall in his face like mine does, because he takes after Dad. I park and turn off the car, grabbing my coffee and then opening the door for Saoirse. She eyes me quizzically. “That must be your fourth coffee today.”

“I have a problem,” I acknowledge. “But it did get us here.”

“That’s the first step, admitting you have a problem.” Connor, apparently overhearing me, walks up and gives me a clap on the shoulder. “How’s it going, Will?”

“We’re making it.” I give him a tired smile accompanied by an eye roll. “Thanks for the psychiatric help, Freud.” Twenty-four now, my brother is nearly done with his master’s in psychology and takes any opportunity he can to tell me how I need to meditate or that I’m an ENF-P or how coffee is technically a psychoactive drug, or something like that. Now, of course, he’s not about to tell me what to do with the *real* issue at hand, because he knows where to draw the line.

Mom opens the door and greets Saoirse and me first, then Connor, with tight hugs and tighter smiles. When I walk inside and look around, setting down my coffee on the kitchen counter, I feel something sink inside me, and I can’t tell if it’s my heart sinking to my stomach or

my stomach sinking into itself. All Mom's photographs and little signs that used to decorate the walls are packed away in heavy boxes with books and clothes and furniture and the little trinkets she's always liked to collect. Dad never was much of a decorator, but I know that his pool table is packed up amongst the cargo somewhere.

"There's no use staying in this big old house all by myself," Mom explained at Dad's funeral. "My babies are both grown now and with Alan gone there'd be no one there but me and the bird." She refers, of course, to Patrick, the parakeet she acquired from a rescue shelter six or seven years ago. Honestly, I'm glad she got a bird instead of a cat or a dog, because at least she has something to *talk* to, even if it doesn't really know what it's saying.

And so today we return to 368 Marigold Street to help Mom get everything into the UHaul vans to bring to her new apartment. She has Dad's retirement and the money from selling the house, so even with going from having paid off the mortgage to paying a monthly rent, it's more cost-efficient in the long run. Besides, she has that job at the VA, which should cover any extra expenses and keep her from being too alone with her thoughts.

Connor helps me get a particularly heavy box onto the dolly and Saoirse offers to help but I shake my head. "We've got it, honey. Stick to the lighter stuff, remember?"

Normally, she would insist, but considering the circumstances, she nods and helps Mom carry a fairly lightweight end-table into the truck. "You know, Will's father loved coffee, too," I hear Mom tell her as Connor and I follow with the dolly. "So as soon as Will was old enough, the two would sit on the porch and Alan would give him a cup of half-caf and they'd talk for hours. Will didn't need anything to get him going, of course, he always had a story for his father whether it was true or not."

Saoirse laughs. "Oh, I'll believe that. You should hear the poems he wrote to me before we ever started going out. The lovesick boy sure had a way with words."

They maneuver the end table into a corner on top of a tight stack of boxes. "He likes to write to me in French. Say something in French to me, William."

"*Je n'ai pas des haricots vert, mais j'ai beaucoup du fromage,*" I croon, kicking the dolly to an angle so we can push it up the ramp. *I do not have the green beans, but I do have a lot of cheese.*

My wife, who still doesn't know a word of French (and I think that's intentional) gushes, "It's just so romantic!" I chuckle, because all I've ever used my six college credits of French for is impressing this woman.

But as jovial as we try to keep things, it's hard going back into that house when we've packed everything away and all that's left are bare, white walls with the ghosts of picture frames, and the stairway to sit on and talk. I sit with an arm around Saoirse, holding her lower back in hopes that it makes her at least a little more comfortable.

"Are you still writing, Will?" Mom queries, sitting a few steps back beside Connor.

I shrug, sipping my coffee. "I'm a journalist, Mom. I write for a living."

She gives me a reproving glance that makes me feel like I'm in the eleventh grade again and she got another complaint from the teacher about me being a smartass. "You *know* what I mean, William."

I'd been avoiding the question because it's just so *hard*. I can't talk about writing without my mind conjuring up images of sitting in a boat with Dad on the lake, fishing without knowing that those trips were never *about* that. We would get up at five in the morning and drink our coffee together, and we'd stay out there for hours, just *talking*, workshoping, baiting our hooks and shooting the breeze. I can't talk about writing without thinking about all those notebooks Dad bought me, or that book of Shakespeare's complete works that he'd annotated all over when he was in school, or the eight novel's he'd written.

"Some," I finally reply, and when I speak my throat hurts. Saoirse takes my hand and gives it a gentle squeeze.

No one speaks for a long moment. It's the loudest damn silence I've ever heard. Finally, Connor speaks up again. "I'd better head home soon," he says after clearing his throat. "I've got a dissertation to work on."

"Be careful, darling," Mom sighs, kissing him on the cheek. "Thank you all so much for helping me out today."

"You know I'm just a phone call away." Connor helps her up and pulls her into a hug. "And a couple of blocks. I'll be at your new townhouse tomorrow to help unpack."

"I love you, baby." Mom walks with him to the door and I whisper to Saoirse I'll be right back, walking up the stairs. I run my hand along the banister, the one I used to slide on, no matter

how many times Connor ratted on me, until I broke my arm in two places and couldn't write for a summer. There are fourteen steps; I used to count them all the time when I was a kid.

The first room I walk into is my old bedroom; I sat there writing at a desk for hours when I was a teenager and had the time. I wrote songs on guitar and recorded them sitting on my bed there. There's a darker, off-white mark where I punched a hole in the wall once while fighting with Connor and had to fill it in. And somewhere on the floor, there's a skid mark from where I tried to move my toddler bed around when I was three. And there are countless little pinholes in the wall from where I put up posters of my favorite bands and football teams.

At one end up the upstairs hallway, there's a window looking down at the backyard, a window that I had to work mowing lawns to replace when I was twelve because I accidentally sent a baseball flying through. In Connor's room, in his closet, there's a little door just big enough for two boys, nine and six, to crawl through, leading to a small storage room that we converted into our "secret lair". I remember the day we found that thing, clear as ever.

"Maybe we're not supposed to be in here," Connor says cautiously, lispng through the gap in his mouth where the first tooth he lost used to be. We're on our hands and knees, halfway in his closet, halfway in the "secret" room. "We could get in trouble."

"Only if we get caught," I point out, "so don't squeal." We make it into the room, not tall enough for a grown man to stand in, but just right for two little boys and some toy cars and comic books.

Mom and Dad let us think, of course, that the room really was our secret, and we hung out there for as long as we could fit. I smile at the memory, and squeezing through the little door, crouch down in the room, now devoid of any artifacts from our childhood except "Will and Connor were here" written on the wall in blue crayon, spelling "were" without the e at the end. I sit for a good ten minutes, thinking about this house and the day I decided to get the hell out.

The moment I finished my bachelor's in English and left my college dorm, I took the rest of my stuff out of the house and left the country. I moved to Ireland, working at a pub in Queenstown and spending my free time sightseeing and writing. I was sick of the suburbs, sick of being under my parents' thumbs, and sick of having to live under their roof, by their rules. I always had a good relationship with them, but as I got older, I started to fight with them more, I guess in desperation to become my own man and be considered one. My Mom described me as a restless spirit, a dog chasing its own tail without knowing what it would do if it ever caught it. I

was searching for *something*, but I think I was also a little scared of finding it and then having nothing to look for.

I finally started self-publishing publishing books of poetry and my first novel, and of course my parents were thrilled even though none of my work really became famous. But I didn't come back for good until I met Saoirse, three years ago. She was a tour guide at the time and started coming to the pub where I worked. One night "Don't Stop Believing" came on, and she pulled me from behind the counter and made me dance with her.

We danced for hours, until my feet felt like they were full of arrowheads, and she took me to her place and made me a cup of Irish coffee. I passed out and woke up hungover the next day on her couch, and we started dating pretty soon afterward. I would write her poems and sing to her until I would lose my voice, and she'd take me on free tours all around the country in exchange for long nights of dancing.

We got engaged a year later, and we moved back to the US for the wedding, settling down in a little apartment a few hours away from my parents. Dad cried that day, and he cried again just a couple short months ago, when Saoirse and I broke the news about a grandchild he didn't make it long enough to meet. Fifty-eight may not be young, but it's too young to go, whether you've smoked your whole life or not.

I feel the stinging heat behind my eyes, and I've been crying for a minute before I even realize it. Sniffling, I crawl out of the secret room, out of Connor's room, and make it down the hall to the one last room I haven't dared enter yet. My parents' room is one that I've knocked on the door of plenty of nights as a little boy, though maybe not as little as I would have once cared to admit. It was natural that I'd have an overactive imagination, and there was nowhere in the dark I'd ever felt safer as a kid than snuggled between Mom and Dad. It was where I'd spend the day when I was home sick from school, watching reruns of old shows and reading all the books Dad had on his shelf.

And now, it's empty, completely empty except something poking out from beneath the blinds on the windowsill. Edging closer, I pick up a binder full of hole-punched printer paper, titled, "THE LADY OF THE LAKE, by ALAN DOUGLAS". It's a story concept Dad mentioned years ago in passing that I'd completely forgotten about. My throat tightening, I open the manuscript and skim through it, instantly recognizing my father's writing style amongst the

countless others I've read. There are twelve chapters, and then a note. When I read what my Dad had to say, I sink to the floor against the wall, my sniffles turning into sobs.

“William,

You work so hard, and I'm proud of you. I've read some of your articles and they're amazing, but not nearly as good as any poem or story you've written. I know you're busy and trying to make ends meet, but if you don't make time to do what you really love, what quality of life is that? So, I'm throwing you this gauntlet: Read the first half of the book, and *you* decide how the story should end. I've always wanted to write something with you, and maybe now is the time. It's something you and Saoirse could show your child someday, something they could know me by. I love you, and I know you can do it. Make me proud, son.

Your Dad”

Looking down at the date at the bottom, I realize he wrote this just a week before he died. And Mom had to know, because she left it on the windowsill for me to find, never mentioning it on the phone when we talked about me coming over to help her move. And maybe that's the reason she even asked me to come in the first place. A funeral is a nice observance to bring people together in their grief, but *this* is what brings me genuine closure, ironically because, in a way, it keeps him alive to me.

Finally, I stand up and walk downstairs with the book, drying off my tears. Mom and Saoirse are standing there, concerned looks on their faces, probably wondering what happened to me up there. But when Mom sees the book, a knowing smile graces her features.

“As soon as your father got the diagnosis,” she tells me, pulling me into a hug, “he began working on that story, because you'd always wanted to read it, but he never wrote it down. ‘I *have* to write it for Will,’ he said, but when he realized he was running out of time, he had the idea to let you finish it.”

I hug Mom close, and over my shoulder I see Saoirse go wide-eyed. “That's your father's story?” she asks, and releasing Mom of the hug, I walk over to my wife and hold her from behind, feeling the baby move just slightly.

“No,” I reply, looking down at the book, and then at her growing belly, “it's *our* story.”

Kennis Gremillion

3rd Place in Prose

“AN EXCERPT FROM ‘THE REALITY GAMES’”

PROLOGUE

Charlie Fenwick had never been murdered before. He did not intend to end that streak today. He glanced nervously around at two in the morning, shivering in the biting north Georgia winter as he fumbled with the door lock of his ancient Buick LeSabre. At last, he succeeded in unlocking the sedan, and he climbed into the driver’s seat as fast as he could, inserting the key into the ignition and twisting it to start the car up.

The engine sputtered. Charlie’s heart sank. But on the second try, the old machine roared to life, and he breathed a silent prayer of thanks. He suddenly realized the door was still open, and he yanked it shut. He fastened his seat belt as he put the car in gear, and he pulled out of the driveway, looking back at his house one last time as he drove away.

Charlie kept checking his rearview mirror as he navigated the suburban streets of Duluth, Georgia, eventually taking the on-ramp to I-85 and merging with the other poor souls who were up at this ungodly hour. Once on the interstate, he became even more nervous, knowing that any of the cars in his mirror could be *them*. He struggled to keep control of the steering wheel as he began shaking uncontrollably.

Soon, Charlie left I-85 and turned south on the I-285 loop, speeding around the east side of Atlanta toward Hartsfield-Jackson Airport. Out his window, the lights of the city shone brightly, even at two a.m., making the sky and the night somehow seem even darker. He felt the warmth of the car’s heater spreading through his body, and he normally would have enjoyed the feeling, but this was no time to enjoy anything. His only goal was to survive.

Why had he done it? He wanted to slap himself. Why had he gotten into all this? Why had he let them take over his life? Couldn’t he have done something different? Wasn’t there some other way?

But he knew the truth: there was no other way. He had no choice. He had not wanted this to happen, but here he was, and now it was up to him to get out of this situation.

Charlie didn't know if they knew where he was, or what he was doing. He didn't know if they knew he would go to the airport. He didn't know if they had people already there, waiting for him to walk into their trap. He did know that they would be able to find out what flight he had taken if they thought to check. And sooner or later, they would. But he was gambling that he could get far away and find a way to disappear before they ever got to that point.

He saw the exit to Hartsfield-Jackson and took it. Hands trembling, he parked his car and stepped out into the cold, holding only his suitcase with extra clothes and *that* item inside as he walked quickly to the terminal. The clerk at the Delta desk looked at him strangely as he approached. "Can I help you?" she asked.

"When's your next available flight?" Charlie responded.

"We have a flight to New York-La Guardia departing in two hours. Five seats left."

"Book me." Charlie fumbled for his credit card, finally producing it and handing it to the clerk. "I should have enough on there."

"Do you have any bags to check?" she asked.

Charlie shook his head. "Just a carry-on."

The woman looked like she did not trust him one ounce. But she didn't ask questions, and she gave Charlie his boarding pass. He could barely stand the tension as he waited in the security line, paranoid- no, not paranoid; rightly terrified- that one of the people in the airport would pull out a gun and shoot him dead where he stood.

But no one assassinated Charlie. He passed through the TSA checkpoint without incident, mustering all the false calm he had to avoid making the agents suspicious. He began shivering uncontrollably after he passed through, and he had to steady himself against a wall before putting his shoes back on.

He ran to catch the airport subway to take him to his concourse. After a long and stressful journey, he arrived at the correct gate, where he paced around, unable to make himself sit, until the boarding call at last came over the loudspeaker.

Charlie didn't look the gate agent in the eye or thank him, worried that he was actually one of *them*- the same thing he worried about every single person in the world's busiest airport. The walk down the jetway suddenly felt like an eternity, and Charlie was terrified to think that he might never get off that plane. If they were on the flight, he would have no escape. He would be trapped in a flying metal tube traveling at over five hundred miles per hour, a sitting duck for any one of

them on the flight. But it was his only chance to survive, and he had to take it. He couldn't stay at his home; that was for sure. They knew where he lived. Duluth was not safe. Atlanta was not safe. New York would not be safe, either, but it was a step toward anonymity, and right now, that was all he could ask for.

Charlie found his seat and buckled himself in. Soon enough, the plane took off into the black winter sky, and Charlie found himself staring out the window, looking back at his childhood home of Georgia for what, for all he knew, could be the last time. The whine of the jet engines almost put him to sleep, but he was too worried to sleep. For the duration of the flight, he looked out the window, thought about his life, and hoped *they* weren't on the plane with him.

CHAPTER ONE

2 YEARS LATER

I cruised happily through the streets of Atlanta, nodding my head up and down to the beat as I sang along to A-ha's *Take On Me* on the radio. I took a sharp right turn a little bit faster than I should have, and I felt the centrifugal force try to move me toward the door of my black 2002 Dodge Intrepid. Zipping through a straightaway, I decelerated as I approached a run-down, threestory building that was home to several local businesses, bringing the car to a somewhat jolting stop in the first of the parallel parking spaces next to the sidewalk.

I got out of my car and walked around to the sidewalk, entering the front door of the building. I took the ancient elevator to the second floor and unlocked the door marked LEVINE INVESTIGATIONS, LLC. My office was decent-sized, with a wooden desk that was falling apart and whose surface was completely obscured by piles of paper. Two flags, American and Israeli, hung on the wall behind it. A black swivel chair sat behind the desk, a pair of wooden chairs on the other side, a file cabinet stood in the corner, and a trash can in the other corner was overflowing with food wrappers and more papers. There were also several wrappers on the floor next to it, from times when my basketball skills had failed me.

I sat down at my desk, moved some papers out of the way, and placed my laptop in front of me, powering it up and connecting it to a charging cord. I sat back and placed my hands behind my head, trying to think about the various cases I was currently working on. After what must have been a good five minutes, I decided a break was in order, so I went out to the vending machine in the hallway to get a Sprite. I returned to my desk and took a well-deserved reprieve from a hard

day's work, but when at last I finished my drink, it was time to return to the unending toil that we call life.

Looking through all my papers, I had no idea where to start. Before me was a jumbled pile of information from different cases I was currently working on, all mixed into one indecipherable mess. I began separating documents from different cases into stacks, trying to obtain some semblance of organization. At least it was a start to something productive.

And then something weird happened. When I had organized all the papers on the table, I opened my desk drawer to see if there were any more papers in there. There weren't, but beneath a pile of junk at the bottom of the drawer, there was a single file folder, the only one I kept in my desk and not with my other files, very thin and simply marked "Charlie" in black Sharpie.

I hadn't opened that folder in a year. Not since the blackout. Not since Caroline died. But for some reason, I don't know why, I felt like I should open the folder.

I held it in my hands, its manila surface covered in dust, and just looked at it for a strangely long time. There were a lot of painful memories attached to this folder- and many more things I didn't remember. I didn't want to revisit any of it, but a part of me was saying I should. But finally I shook my head and put the folder back in the bottom of my drawer, covering it back up with office supplies and random junk.

Suddenly there was a knock on my door. Slightly startled, I said, "Come in."

The door opened and a man walked in. He was middle-aged, with dark hair in a buzz-cut and rough Italian features. "I'm Ronald Vito," he introduced himself in a New York accent.

I recognized the name. I'd completely forgotten about the call I'd gotten yesterday. "Dan Levine. How can I help you, Mr. Vito?" I asked, standing up and shaking his hand.

"Like I told you on the phone, I've got a cold case for you." Vito spoke very gruffly, and I couldn't tell if he was hostile or just a New Yorker. But whatever he was, he apparently knew something about me. While I do a lot of the work that any other private investigator would do- civil matters, background checks- my reputation is centered around the type of work I specialize in. Any case that the police have given up on; any rumor, conspiracy theory, or urban legend that might have a basis in truth; anything with so little evidence that no one else will investigate it- that's what I'm known for in the crime-solving community.

I gestured to one of the guest chairs across the desk from my own, and Vito took a seat. Sitting in my swivel chair, I asked, "Whatcha got?"

“Not so fast. I wanna know who I’m dealing with here. Tell me about yourself, Mr. Levine. Why should I trust you with my case?”

“Good question,” I replied. “For one, I spent four years as a military police officer, and I’ve got a bachelor’s in criminal justice from UGA.” “Army?”

Vito asked.

“Yeah. E-4, stationed at Fort Bragg. You?”

For the first time, a slight smile crept across Vito’s face. “I was at Fort Bragg, too. I was an E-8 with the 82nd Airborne.”

“The 82nd Airborne, huh?” I said. “That’s a fine group of people. Insane, but good guys.”

Vito laughed. “I think I can trust you. Even if you are an MP.”

I sat back in my chair. “So what’s your case?”

Vito’s face became very serious again. “I want you to find the man who killed my daughter.”

His words caught me by surprise. “The man who killed your daughter?” I repeated, sitting up straight.

Vito nodded somberly. “Murdered. Brutally. Awfully. And the cops never found the scum who did it.”

Taking out a piece of paper and a pen, I said, “Tell me what happened. Everything you know- the who, what, when, where, how.”

Vito took out his wallet and extracted a picture of a happy, smiling teenage girl. “This is Lyla. She was seventeen.”

My heart immediately filled with sorrow when I saw the picture. Then the sorrow turned into hate when I thought about some monster ending that bright, vibrant life.

“One day about five years ago, Lyla went to school,” Vito told me, pain and anger in his voice. “She never came home.”

“I’m sorry,” I said respectfully, and I immediately felt like an idiot, because words always, always come up short.

“There was never a good lead for the police to work on,” Vito said. “No one saw anything. No traffic cameras, nothing. A few days later, they found her in the woods near Suwanee. They kept looking for the guy, but there was nothing to trace him by. Eventually they labeled it a cold case and moved on.”

“Would you mind telling me what Lyla’s official cause of death was?” I asked.

“Stabbing,” Vito replied. “Tons and tons of stab wounds in the stomach.” He looked like he was about to break down and cry, but he shook his head and calmed himself.

“Where do you live?” I asked. “I need to know what law enforcement agencies to talk to.”

“Here in Atlanta. She went to Grady High. You know where that is?”

I nodded. “Yeah. So you contacted APD?”

“Yes.”

“And her body was found outside Suwanee, so I’m guessing Gwinnett County Police was on that. Now, where’s your house in relation to Grady High?”

“7th Street. You realize how close that is? About a block away. Somewhere in that tiny little area, she went missing. And yet no one knows anything.”

“Do you know if anyone was stalking her?” I asked. “Anyone at school she might have felt uncomfortable around?”

Vito shook his head. “I can’t think of anybody. She was acting completely normal and happy.”

“What about the neighborhood?” I tried. “Does anyone in the area seem suspicious or sketchy in any way?”

He once again replied to the negative. “I don’t know all of my neighbors that well, but I don’t have any reason to suspect any of the ones I do know.”

“And she was walking home from school, right?”

“Right.”

“How do you know she left the school or ever got there?”

“The police interviewed her friends. They said they’d seen her leave on her normal route after school let out.”

I continued to ask questions, gathering all the details I could about people, timing, and location. But the police didn’t know much, so Vito didn’t know much, so I didn’t know much. So I decided to do two things: contact my friend in the Atlanta Police Department to try to get as much information as possible, and ask around Vito’s neighborhood to try and find a killer.

Ben Gremillion

Honorable Mention in Prose

“White Flowers”

“Mama, I want flowers in my hair!”

Evie followed Carolyn *everywhere*. Her little shadow, she called her, because everything her mama did, there was her hyperactive three-year-old, skipping along behind her. She swung her arms back and forth as she spoke, rocking on her little feet.

“Let’s get rid of all those tangles first, okay?” Carolyn sat her daughter down on her bed, grabbing a comb from the top of her dresser and beginning to run it through Evie’s dark, thick, easily-mangled curls.

“It hurts, Mama!” Evie insisted, even when Carolyn wasn’t really touching her with the comb. Carolyn had a brief flashback to all the times her own mother brushed her hair, and how she insisted the same things.

“I’ll be as gentle as I can, okay, baby?” Carolyn combed as lightly as she could, although she knew that no matter how tender she was, Evie would complain until the job was done.

Evie was always a very vocal child. Thinking back fondly to the day she was born, Carolyn could still hear that loud, healthy scream as clearly as if she were right back in that maternity ward. She remembered the emotion the sound filled her with, more flooding her at once than she’d ever thought possible. When the doctor handed her the tiny, delicate creature in her fuzzy pink bundle, Carolyn began to sob as she took her into her arms, because she didn’t know what she’d ever done to deserve to hold an angel. And when she stared down into her firstborn’s big eyes for the very first time, she was surprised that something so small could blow her away like that. She was so new, so pure and perfect, innocent and uncorrupted, that she couldn’t possibly think of a better name for her baby than Eve.

“Mommy, you’re the prettiest lady in the whole world,” Evie stated in a confident, matter-of-fact tone that brought Carolyn out of her silent reverie.

“Thank you, angel.” Carolyn chuckled slightly. “I doubt that, though.”

“No, you are!” Evie turned around and threw her little arms around her mother’s torso. “You look like a queen! ‘Specially in that picture.” She thrust her pointer finger in the direction of one of Carolyn’s wedding pictures, displayed on top of her dresser in a silver frame. “I want to look like you!”

Carolyn felt flattered tears glisten in the corners of her eyes when she remembered the headpiece she'd worn on her wedding day. Evie wanted to wear flowers to look like her mama. Maybe it shouldn't come as a surprise, since children often mimicked their parents at this age. But every tiny milestone seemed like a medal-winning achievement to Carolyn, and nothing went unnoticed in a mother's eyes.

"You already are a queen, my little one." Carolyn pressed a loving kiss to the top of Evie's head and began weaving little white, plastic flowers through her daughter's hair. Evie swung her feet as she waited, growing restless but having enough self-control to wait for the desired look. Finally, Carolyn pinned the last flower in place and brought a handheld mirror from the bathroom. "Do you want to see yourself?"

Evie nodded vigorously, and Carolyn handed her the mirror, showing her how to hold it to the side of her face and appreciate each intricate twist that went into the hairstyle. "I *do* look like a queen," Evie breathed, her eyes wide.

"You sure do." Carolyn felt another flood of tears attack her unexpectedly. Ever since she became a mother, she cried more easily over things she wouldn't have thought should evoke that much emotion before. Every day, her baby got a little bit older.

Suddenly, she had the impulse to take her daughter's tiny hand, never wanting to let go. "You've just grown up so fast," she whispered, blinking as a loose tear found its way down her cheek.

But Evie was impatient to get to the next activity. "You can let go now, mommy," she said softly, but Carolyn didn't budge. Everything felt like it was frozen in a suspended state for a moment, each movement like a mixer going through cement that was nearly dry.

"You can let go now," the gentle voice repeated itself, and Carolyn blinked again. Eve had just gotten the last pin on her veil secured into place. Clutching her daughter's hand, Carolyn could feel the ring now, but another one would join it in a few minutes.

Carolyn paused for another moment before dropping Eve's hand, kissing her daughter on the cheek. "You look beautiful," she told her, admiring the white flowers she had laced into her hair. "You look like a queen."

Eve turned back and smiled, the same silly, sunny smile she'd had since she was a baby. *You're still so young, and you don't even realize it*, Carolyn thought. Eve's eyes were bright and hopeful.

“Do I look like you?”

Kennis Gremillion

“Looking Back”

New York, 1928

Every day when the bell rang, and the children were let out for a short recess, Ricky Hopkins would find her amongst the crowd of girls playing hopscotch and jumping rope. Jenny Caldwell was easy to spot, her soft waves always tied up in that bright blue ribbon. And when he spotted her, he would chase her, and she would outrun him and laugh at him every time until that killjoy bell rang again, and they were forced to go inside and sit. But he sat in the desk behind her, and he would watch her ribbon bounce with the movement of her head as she took her notes.

Ricky always walked home from school with Billy Sullivan, who would somehow end up carrying both their books to give his friend room for the wild gestures he made when he spoke. “Someday,” he swore, “I am going to marry her. Just watch, I will.”

Billy would always laugh, his freckles dancing on his cheeks in an almost taunting manner. “Sure you will! You keep looking at her, but she never looks back.”

“But she will someday.” The boy with the wild dark curls and yearning eyes was certain. “I know it.”

New York, 1938

Some quiet, familiar melody woke Jenny in the dark, the strings of a lone guitar moaning, longing, desperate but somehow confident in eventually obtaining what they desired. A young man’s voice began to croon, not steady and strong but letting itself crack and overflow with emotion. He sang well, just not formally. Pushing her blanket aside, Jenny stepped into her slippers and walked out to her balcony, the cool air further waking her as she blinked the sleep from her eyes. Nearby, on the strong branch of an oak, Ricky sat there playing his worn old guitar, his dark, tangled curls pouring over his forehead. Ten years of chasing her in the schoolyard and he still hadn’t given up.

Indignance rose in Jenny’s cheeks at the knowledge that she’d risen from her slumber just for this. “What do you think you’re doing here?” she demanded. “If my father saw you-“

Ricky pushed the guitar to his side, secure on its colorful strap. “Relax.” His grin was toothy and cocky. “I’m playin’ your song.”

“You just learned that was my favorite song yesterday,” Jenny protested, wrapping her arms around herself against the chill of the night.

Ricky shrugged, flashing her his best half-smile. “I learned it fast.”

In that moment, Jenny considered telling him to leave, but she did not. She told herself it was simply because she was tired. Retreating to bed, she let sleep overcome her until the light of day slanted in from her window and brushed her face. Throwing on a robe and slippers, she was about to head downstairs to make coffee when she saw a small piece of paper carefully wedged between the window and its sill. Sliding it out, she picked it up and began to read.

“Your eyes are the deepest ocean I have ever swum, and I want to go diving. I don’t think I’d really care if I drowned, if that particular ocean embraced me for eternity.”

“Silver tongued imp,” she mumbled, but she never threw the note away.

New York, 1942

“Latest news from the troops in Germany!” A small boy shouted in a busy square, handing out newspapers to anyone who would pick them up. People were anxious to read the news these days, and would forget about it once again once the war was over. Mundanity would return, and the news would once more become a makeshift coaster, and perhaps read only for the crossword puzzle on Sunday. Writers might as well milk something exciting while they could.

Jenny grabbed a paper, just as she always did, but she would read it later. She ran in her sparkling red tap shoes, nearly late for a show. She almost tripped when a hand grabbed her. Turning around, she locked eyes with the unfamiliar face of a man much older, a dangerous glint in his eye. Dropping the newspaper, she struggled to get away as he pulled her toward an alley. She heard a shrill scream, and realized it was her own, almost unrecognizable amidst her loud pulse in her head. “What’s a pretty thing like you doin’ in a slum like this, huh? Seems like you’re asking for trouble,” he drawled, alcohol on his breath.

A fist slammed into his cheek.

His grip loosened, and Jenny backed up against a wall, wanting to bolt but her feet freezing her to the spot in fear as she watched the drunk and her mysterious defender punch and kick. Finally, the would-be assailant fell to the ground in a heap, beaten unconscious. She waited for a full minute until she was sure he wouldn’t get back up again, and only then did she dare let herself breathe again. Looking down the empty, almost lifeless alley, she felt sick at the realization that if her defender had not been around, no one would have heard her cries for help.

“Thank you,” she finally managed to choke out, and met the dark, wild eyes of the man who saved her. Of *course* it would be him.

Ricky just ran a sleeve across his bloody, swelling lip and smiled. “I was heading to your show. Would you like me to escort you?”

New York, 1943

“If you die, I’ll kill you.” It was a ridiculous statement, but Jenny didn’t feel logical at the time. The thought of what Ricky would face overseas consumed her every waking moment, which now included far too many nighttime hours staring at the ceiling and offering up a desperate prayer for his safety.

Ricky chuckled at this, gripping her hand, which was as white as his after gripping the deck for so long. It was summer, and they found the ocean refreshing, listening to the soothing sound of the waves lapping the dock. And besides, it reminded him of Jenny, and those deep eyes she had. Somewhere down the line in the past year, she got tired of averting her gaze, turning her head away when she didn’t really want to, and she looked back at the boy who’d been playing tag with her since kindergarten.

“I’ll make you a promise.” Ricky withdrew a small knife from his pocket, bending down and carving their initials, encased in a heart, into the wooden deck. “There...now we’re engraved here, just like so many others.” He took Jenny hand and rubbed a thumb over it gently. “Have you ever thought about all the sailors who’ve written their names here when they returned home after a voyage that seemed endless? Or maybe a couple of kids who came here for the summer? God, there’s so many *stories* etched into this little pier. And I want us to be one of them.”

And after fifteen years of fearlessly shouting his feelings for her from the rooftop, he got nervous, truly nervous, for the very first time. And instead of standing before her as he once did, boldly professing his unending love, he got on his knee, and humbly begged.

New York, 1945

Ricky returned home not to one, but two pairs of ocean eyes. A boy with his dark curls, newly walking, stumbled his way as he ran onto the dock. When he picked up his child, something changed. He could feel it instantly. Because while there was pride, and adoration,

there was something so much more profound, because this tiny person he'd just met, new and helpless and completely unassuming, had all the power in the world over his heart.

He clutched the boy to his chest, and held his wife close, so they could both be right at his heart.

Present Day

The little boy has gray hair now. Jenny lives for the moments when a nurse informs her that he has come to visit, and she gently reminds Ricky that their son is not a little boy anymore. She sits beside him on their little sofa, looking out the window at the ocean. Sighing, she reaches for his hand, and he squeezes hers gently, giving her a small assurance that he hasn't forgotten everything yet. He does not remember the blue ribbon, or the note he left on her windowsill, or her red tap shoes she wore in the USO shows...he doesn't even remember the knife he used to carve their initials into the pier.

But he remembers the girl he watched at school each day, and he remembers the day she finally looked back.

Kennis Gremillion

“A Fool at Ease”

The bitterness of winter crept its way into the boy's room, sending a chill up his spine. The trailer's thin layer of insulation was no match for Mother Nature, as her influence couldn't be deterred. The only defense the boy had from the cold was a hole infested quilt his aunt made for him out of pity. She knew his living arrangements were dire especially under the care of her younger brother, the boy's father.

The father had a reputation that preceded him, being referred to as the “devil in the flesh” by the townsfolk. They knew how much pain the boy endured under his father's treatment, yet they never took action to aid him in his distress. Even with visible bruising from the beatings, their “help” consisted of further gossiping and the occasional words of encouragement. They would say, “Keep your head up Clark!” or “What doesn't kill you makes you stronger!” Clark would dismiss their bullshit entirely.

He accepted the simple truth that they didn't care. Why bother to help another trailertrash child? They'll always end up like their parents, the town drunks who drown in their regrets every night at the bar. If the matter didn't serve a purpose in their "perfect" lives, then what's the point of getting involved? When all else failed, Clark resorted to the last thing he could think of: prayer. No matter how much he begged the Lord for help, his pleas always went unanswered. He finally came to the conclusion that God was either deaf or just another fairytale to give people a false sense of hope...

Clark curled into a fetal position to stay as warm as possible, to the extent his defective quilt allowed. As his body shivered in reaction to the cold's embrace, Clark slowly looked up at his alarm clock, which lied adjacent to the bed on his night stand. It read 7:02 a.m. *Damn it! I overslept again!* thought Clark to himself. It didn't matter if he was cold at this point for he knew there were greater consequences at stake for his error. He darted out of bed and began to get dressed as quickly as possible. He knew there wasn't enough time to shower or brush his teeth; let alone to eat breakfast either. Maybe if he was lucky, he could slip out the door before anyone noticed...

Clark grabbed his school bag and proceeded out his bedroom with caution. Clark's bedroom served as a tactical vantage point, as it allowed him a downwards visual of the whole trailer. He studied his environment for any discrepancies that would hinder his ability to quietly sneak out. As he looked, nothing seemed to be out the ordinary which raised a red-flag in his mind. It was too quiet for his comfort and if his suspicions were correct, then he knew why. As the intensity of the situation reached a fever pitched high from within, Clark's natural instinct stepped in to overrule his logical reasoning.

He stopped assessing and began to run, like a gazelle evading the capture of a ravenous carnivore. His fear put him into overdrive mode as he ran towards the front door and before he knew it, the brass knob was in his grip. The turn of the handle triggered the internal mechanisms within to life and the bolts began to retract in order to free the door. Seconds felt like hours before the door opened, but it didn't lead to the freedom Clark hoped for. As if some sick joke fate had intended just for him, towering over Clark in the doorway stood his father.

"Where the fuck are you going?" stated Randy. He could smell the alcohol on his breath, the pungent smell like a warning. His words were slurred, tone wavering as he stood to his feet. Instinctively, Clark took a step back. Panic was evident in his eyes. He felt the fear inside him

like a thread about to snap. Time seemed to freeze in that moment. There was nothing but his father, a barrier between himself and the door—freedom.

“Well,” Randy quipped, his tone low. “Don’t make me repeat myself, boy.”

Clark couldn’t find the words to respond. He could only feel a paralyzing fear that kept his feet locked in place. His gaze flickered to the window that overlooked the front yard. The glass had yellowed with age. It was covered in a thick layer of grime and was cracked in several places; but he could still see the snow.

Outside, it was like a different world. Snow fell in a rhythmic fashion. It was a song that coated the ground in a blanket of white. The usual grittiness of his yard was disguised in its sweet melody. The unkempt garden had frosted over and his father’s old truck was buried in it. It coated the fence post and mailbox. For once it nearly looked peaceful. The snow made it seem as if the area was untouched, white and crisp like a fresh piece of parchment. Clark could lose himself in that facade.

But the sound of his father’s disrupted his thoughts. Reality roped him back into the cold living room of his trailer.

Randy’s eyes narrowed as he advanced further into the home. “I asked you a question boy,” he slurred, shoulders squared threateningly.

“School,” he answered, finally finding his words. Clark shoved his hands in the pocket of his coat, a nervous habit. Randy tore his gaze away, looking at the clock that hung above the couch. His gaze darkened as he took note of the time.

“You’re late,” he growled lowly, fist clenching at his sides. Clark said nothing as his father stalked towards him, danger in his eyes. It was no use. Nothing he could say would stop it. He learned that years ago.

Randy slammed the door behind him, but it didn’t muffle the screams.

It was nearly second hour by the time Clark made it to school. He had to trudge through nearly two miles of deep snow. Randy had kept him for nearly half an hour. His neck was throbbing as a result. He attempted to hide the bruises, but a scarf could only do so much. He supposed it didn’t matter much. His lips were swollen. A nasty gash cut above his right eye and the lower part of his jaw was tinted purple. Despite this, no one seemed to notice. Clark avoided eye contact and kept to himself as he hastily headed to class.

Rusted lockers lined the hallways as he walked through. It was apparent that the school was as rundown as the town he lived in. The paint on the wall was chipped and colored a shade of yellow that reminded him of urine. The upkeep of the building was nonexistent; floor tiles were cracked, desks were broken, and the fire alarms hadn't worked properly for years. It was far too small, a place where everyone knew one another. The students here were just as narrowminded as his family. No matter where he went, he couldn't escape prejudice.

The day passed without incident. Clark flocked back and forth from one class to another. No one asked about his bruises, but he knew they'd be a raging subject at the dinner table. Students tended to turn problems into gossip instead of fixing them. He knew this. When he was younger, he had hoped someone would say something, that they might help him. He often imagined different scenarios in how he would escape. Clark frequently pictured a handsome knight with dark hair and a tall stature would whisk him away to a place where no one knew his name. They'd leave on a horse before dusk and when they'd arrive at their destination, he would find happiness. But that was nothing but fantasy. He quickly learned such daydreams were useless.

No one was coming to help him.

Classes were all but a blur. He kept to himself and his thoughts. Clark found it difficult to concentrate, but occasionally tended to his school work. He couldn't help but stress over what was awaiting him when he returned home. Randy was likely awaiting his return, his wrath waiting in anticipation. He wondered what new injuries he'd sport tomorrow.

As the lunch bell rang, Clark shoved his things in his bag and stood up from his desk in relief. Earlier, he had attempted the same math problem with no successes and lunch felt like a welcomed interruption.

The lunchroom was buzzing with conversation when he arrived. Students were loud with their chatter. Many kids joked and laughter was exchanged. Clark said nothing. He grabbed a spot in the lunch line behind a large boy. Up ahead, he spotted the food they were serving today. Although he wasn't picky, the smell of the suspicion looking meat was very unpleasant. Regardless of that, it was a meal. He took a plate and ventured off to find a place to eat.

It was packed.

Nearly every seat was filled, even his usual spot at the back. A group of freshmen girls occupied the table he sat in for situations like these. Clark huffed in annoyance, his gaze falling on the only two tables with available seats. They weren't pleasant options. One table housed a

group of arrogant kids considered “popular” by the student body. The other housed a bunch of farmer’s kids.

Clark groaned, knowing he wouldn’t be welcomed at the either. He had no desire to sit with a group of hicks, so he chose the former. Clark attempted for a seat at the far end of the table, away from the students. He had barely made it within ten feet of the table when a cheerleader's steely eyes locked with his.

“Trailer trash isn’t wanted here,” she stated, “or anywhere for that matter.” A few of her friends looked up to him, laughing at her jab. He narrowed his eyes at her, opening his mouth to respond.

“Aye Clark!” called a familiar voice. He paused, cut off by the voice. Clark turned to see Mason, a boy who lived close to him. “We’ve got an empty seat.”

The cheerleader grinned mockingly at him. “Better join your friend over there.”

Clark made his way over the table before he said something he truly regretted. Before he could set his tray down, the cheerleader cleared her throat in order to get his attention.

“Hey loser!” she stated with her squeaky voice.

“What?” he said in frustration. He knew she was going to say something to piss him off. The cheerleader walked towards him and extended out her hand to reveal an envelope. The first thing he noticed was the seal had been torn open.

“I was told to give this to you...” Clark took the letter from her and looked at her in confusion.

“Who is it from?”

“Maybe If you read it, you’ll find out,” she said in a smart-ass tone. “By the way, we all knew the rumors were true...” She turned and walked back to her table, laughing the whole way there.

In anticipation, Clark opened the letter because he knew exactly what rumors she was talking about. They were the ones that have been making his life a living hell since he began high school...

Clark,

Late nights and restless hours...That's how it's been for the longest time. With everything happening at this very moment, I contemplate even writing this letter to you.

Is it really necessary? What will it accomplish? You feel like a stranger to me, but in some ways, I feel as if I've known you for a long time. A part of me is looking for a reason—even a damn sign—not to write this, but something is compelling me to do so.

For the sake of anonymity, I'm not going to say my name. Just know, that you are very special to me and you don't have to look too far in order to find the answer you seek...It's not very often when someone has the ability to inspire me, but I'm starting to feel things that I shouldn't. I've told myself countless times that these feelings aren't real, but I've betrayed myself. The feelings I've suppressed for so long are clawing their way back and this time, I can't deny their existence.

I've always wondered if God hated me. Out of all the people in the world, why me? My family already views me as a burden. In their perfect world, I don't exist so I didn't need another reason for them to hate me. How am I supposed to tell them, or anybody for that matter? My family is filled with racist bigots and religious hypocrites, so I would just be adding fuel to the fire...

I'm Gay. I don't know why it's so hard to say it, but it doesn't feel natural. For years, I've kept this secret locked in the deepest part of myself. I didn't want to admit these feelings were real, so I put on a mask and built a persona around a lie. I listened quietly in the shadows to the ones I cared about most, hoping there could be a hint of acceptance someday in the future. Nothing ever came of it. Everyone I know shares the same opinion and, in those moments, I knew it wouldn't be possible to reveal the truth.

I don't think it's an accident that I found you. I believe certain things happen for a reason and maybe I was always meant to tell someone the true nature of my feelings, even if it was someone I didn't speak to very much. The best part of this whole thing is that now I don't have to live with the burden of this secret anymore. You know that this not an affliction, that I'm not a freak, nor is it a disease. It's love.

I'm so happy you've decided to take that huge step forward to live your life in way that your happy, despite the oppression and hate the LGBTQ community receives. Its people like you who will be the voice for those who have none, and who will inspire future generations to come.

Going forward, I'm not going to put these feelings aside. I'm done suffering in silence because I can't continue to have that guilt on my conscious.

This purpose of this letter is to thank you for saving me from myself. You embody everything I wish I could be, and from the bottom of my heart, thank you. And if this isn't to straight forward, I'd like to ask you to the prom...if you'd take me as I am.

Sincerely,

A Fool at Ease

Rowan Elwood & K. S. Stroud

“The Case of Curiosity”

Sun shines on my face as I lay on my back watching the clouds. The clouds move swiftly today forming pictures, which is peculiar. The days here finish in a blink of an eye, society doesn't seem to care as our world knows no trepidation. Everything is ordinary, everyone is equal, and the world is pristine.

Each day we wake up knowing what the day has in store. There is never anything new in this world, it's very one-sided, and humdrum. However, there are extremely rare cases that pop up involving members of the society who went rogue. Those people are quickly picked up and taken care of as if they never existed by our government. *How can they vanish without a trace? I believe the only way is to die, but our world knows no death.* If an individual shows signs of uniqueness the rest of the society will shun that person, until they are dealt with.

A siren sounds letting everyone know to return to their homes. People leave their jobs to go home to their families and friends with a smile upon their faces. I stand up, stretch out my arms and legs, then I glance down at the freshly smooshed green grass where my body laid. Instead of returning to my family's apartment, I stay out in the pasture a little longer.

I've always had this cloud of wonder hanging over my head. But because of society I ignored it, I didn't think twice until now. As I sit in the pasture I ruminate over the unknown. *What is out there I wonder?* At the edge of the pasture is an illicit forest. No one ventures in the forest unless given instructions to by the government or if it is your job, like being a lumberjack.

I walk over to the edge of the forest, but as everyone knows nobody can enter because of the magical force field intercepting the two different environments at the point in which they meet.

As nightfall swallows up the sun like it was a mouth, darkness conquers the skies, coercing nature to dissemble its true purpose, allowing it to be a mystery. I hold out my right hand and hold it up to the edge of the force field then begin to push through it as if it was rubber. I see a fissure, but don't think anything of it, as I am only a weak seventeen year old girl thrusting her right hand into a powerful shield like fence that has been lucratively keeping humans outside the forest for eons. All of a sudden the force field shatters into a million pieces.

I'm astonished that I above all people could penetrate the magical barrier. An alarm erupts like a volcano across the skies into the village. As people wake up they wonder what happened. They gather in group heading over to the pasture. A line of people stand on the hill with their mouths gaping, not only because the barrier is destroyed, but that I am the one who caused it. I glance and meet my parent's eyes. Their faces show no emotion, as none of the others do either.

The government appears in the mists of the crowd pointing at me to enter the forest. Without hesitation I step forward and walk about a quarter mile in. I stop in wonder as a portal appears in front me. The portal is like a bubble, floating above the ground. I gasp as I view another world inside the portal as it gives a rippling effect. Right before I willing go into the unknown, I turn my head around and watch as other cases join me. *I never thought anyone was like me. I believe that it is good to be different, to stand out from the crowd, and to have individuality.* I give a slight smile to the people who surround me and the portal. Among the people, I notice my parents and a few of the government officials.

As I turn around the portal changes color. It was originally light blue, like the sky, however, now it's a bright yellow. It invites us into the unknown, *and I have to say that I'm intrigued on what we'll find.* I step my right foot inside the threshold, as I glance back in the distance the portal's consistency expands outwards conquering everything in its path. *It's not destroying my world, but changing it.*

Kalli Parker

“Christmas Cheer”

Millie thought she had heard it all by this point. She had heard child after child tell the store Santa that they wish for whatever new toys, new electronics, new hunting equipment, and new books that they had seen off of the many television commercials that ran almost non-stop nowadays. Each child was concerned with getting a shiny new toy for themselves. She heard this constant stream of demands each and every time Christmas rolled around on the calendar.

To her, Christmas meant two things. Having to dress up in, in her completely honest opinion, the most stupid elf costume that her store had to acquire for the holiday season, and the constant influx of kids who wanted present after present after present. Millie had come to loathe the holiday season. She always tried to request time off so she didn't have to deal with it all, but she was constantly turned down and forced to work the holidays.

So when the last child of the day made his way onto Santa's lap, Millie inwardly groaned. *'Oh, great.'* She thought to herself as she put on her best customer smile. *'Another child who wants something just for themselves.'*

“Ho, ho, ho, sonny! What would you like for Christmas from Santa Claus this year?” the store Santa asked the little kid. “Come on, don't be shy.”

Millie tuned out the rest of the conversation. She had gotten the formula of kids' Christmas wishes down pat. A constant string of “I want”, “I want”, “I want”, and followed by several more “I want”, typically followed by whatever had been drilled into their brains.

The store Santa and the new kid chatted for a while about what new Christmas gifts the kid was getting, and Millie thought that it would never end. However, when she heard the store Santa say “I'm sorry, sonny. Would you mind repeating that?” Millie tuned back into the conversation.

“Can you please let my brother get better? He's really sick and in the hospital.” Millie snuck a glance at the kid. She guessed he was only about six or seven years old, judging from his size. The kid was so bundled up in a blue coat, blue scarf, blue hat, blue pants, blue gloves, and blue boots to the point where he more looked like a blue snowball. His eyes were puffy and red from crying, and there was a thin line of snot dripping from his nose. He was really sad and concerned about his brother.

“What’s wrong with your brother?” Millie asked, before she had realized what she had said.

“My older brother, Daniel. Mommy told me that he had to go to the hospital because he’s been attacked by a bad man, and I want you to get something that will make my brother feel better.” the kid answered, taking a moment to wipe the snot line from his face on the back of one of his gloves. “If you could do that, I know my brother will like it.”

Millie and the store Santa exchanged a quick glance. This was something that neither of them had expected to hear. It was a daunting quest that the kid wanted fulfilled, but the concern and the emotion in the kid’s face steeled in both their hearts to come up with some plan to cheer up Daniel.

“Tell you what.” Millie continued the conversation as she placed her hand on the kid’s shoulder. “We’ll come up with something that will cheer him up. What’s your name, kid?”

“Robert.” the kid replied.

“Well, Robert, just you wait. We’ll come up with something amazing.” the store Santa said, smiling a sincere smile at the kid.

Robert’s face instantly lit up like the star atop a Christmas tree. “You will? Thank you! Mommy will be so happy!” And with those words, he rushed off to tell his mom the wonderful news.

As soon as Robert and his mom left, Millie and the store Santa went off to collect as many toys as the two of them could possibly carry and deposited them inside one of the sacks near Santa’s chair. The two of them repeated this for several hours, until the sack was completely full. They then dragged the sack up to the registers to pay for it. The store Santa started to fish his credit card out of his wallet before Millie stopped him. “No, let me pay for this. You just handle the delivery.”

After purchasing the gifts, the store Santa turned to Millie and asked her to come help with the delivery, to which she heartily accepted. Once the two of them had reached the hospital and asked what room Daniel was in and explaining the plan to the receptionist, the two of them made their way up to the room and Millie knocked on the door. There was a shuffle of feet for a few seconds before the mother answered the door.

“Hello?” she asked, tiredness and worry evident in her voice.

“Is Robert in?” the store Santa asked. “We’ve come to fulfill his wish.”

As soon as he heard his name, Robert leaped off the room's couch and hugged them both. Tears were streaming down his face. "Thank you! Thank you!" he repeated over and over as the mother gestured the two inside.

"Lookit, Daniel! Lookit! We've got presents!" Robert chimed.

Daniel looked up from the hospital bed. "Really?"

"Really!" Robert replied.

As if that was their signal cue, Millie, the store Santa, and Daniel and Robert's mom set about on bringing the gifts out of the sack and handing them to the two boys. The two boys instantly set about to play with the toys almost as soon as they were brought out. The bedsheets became an impromptu race track for some dye-cast cars; the two boys tossed a small ball back and forth; the whole scene put a smile on Millie's face.

When all the toys were unwrapped, Daniel and Robert's mom turned towards the store Santa and Millie. "How much do I owe you for this?"

"Nothing, ma'am." the store Santa replied.

This put a smile to the mother's face. "Thank you so much for this. You see, Daniel got hit by a car and the doctors told us that his legs are now fully paralyzed. Robert refuses to believe that he and Daniel can't play together anymore. To see them like this...." she trailed off, the sentence not needing its conclusion.

"Think nothing of it." Millie said. "We just did what Robert asked us to do. You should thank him also."

"I will." the mother promised, wiping her own tears from her eyes. "Please stay with us for a while."

As Millie and the store Santa stopped and chatted with the family, a thought ran through Millie's mind. *I guess Christmas is not all about "me, me, me." Christmas is about sharing happiness and looking out for others. Thank you, Robert. You've taught me a valuable lesson'.*

Benjamin Sanson

1st Place in Essays

“How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects!”

Frankenstein’s Monster from Mary Shelley’s Novel to the Modern Film Interpretations

Frankenstein’s monster is perhaps one of the most recognizable monsters in today’s horror movie genre. The first Frankenstein movie came out in 1910, which launched Frankenstein’s monster into the minds of the American populace. One of the most famous of these Frankenstein movies is the one released in 1931, called *Frankenstein*, which starred actors Boris Karloff as the monster and Colin Clive as Victor Frankenstein. This movie was the birth of the famous scene where Victor Frankenstein electrifies his creation into life with the well-known “It’s alive!” quote. However, in the Frankenstein movies, there seems to be a few constants that differ from Mary Shelley’s approach in the novel. Victor is most often portrayed as a mad scientist type of character, and the monster is often pictured as having green skin with two bolts sticking out of his neck. The monster is mostly mute or inarticulate in the movies, often speaking in some sort of grunts. This varies extremely differently from Shelley’s *Frankenstein* novel, where Victor is not quite the mad scientist, and the monster, after having to learn the complexities of the human language as he learns it from the poor cottagers, speaks fluently and deeply about the wondrous joys and harsh disasters of life itself. Mary Shelley also never fully describes what the monster even looks like. There have been many adaptations of Frankenstein and his monster over the years, but why would they be different from Mary Shelley’s own novel? Different interpretations can be drawn on that answer.

The 1831 edition of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, tells the dangerous story of what happens when the boundaries of science set out to reach the power of God. Victor warns Captain Robert Walton, who picked up Frankenstein while out exploring new boundaries of the north, to “learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town is the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow” (Shelley 54). Victor then relates to Walton how the creature was brought forth into this world

and the horrors that came with reanimating the dead. Throughout the novel, Victor sets out to destroy the monster once and for all after it murders William, Victor's youngest brother, and indirectly murders Justine, the Frankensteins' new housekeeper who the Frankensteins' added after Victor went off to study at Ingolstadt (Justine was the one who was accused of murdering William after the former was found with a picture of the latter's mother in a locket in her possession, the same picture that was missing from William's body the night of his murder). The death count does not stop there, as other victims including Henry Clerval, Victor's friend, Elizabeth, Victor's cousin/wife, Victor's father, Victor himself, and the monster all perish throughout the events of *Frankenstein*. The novel ends with Robert Walton's desire, upon hearing Victor's tale and the demands of his crew to prematurely end this "treacherous mission" (Elmore paragraph 1), to leave the frigid unexplored territory of the arctic north and to return home to sunny England. In Walton's last letter, he encounters the monster one last time, where the monster acknowledges that he still harbors a grudge against Victor and that the monster wants to kill himself by igniting himself to his own funeral pyre. As the monster says this, Walton writes that "he sprung from the cabin window...upon the ice-raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance" (Shelley 225). This is the last time the monster makes an appearance in this book.

After being shunned away by Victor in Volume 1, Chapter 5, the monster makes his way across the land, exploring each and every new sight that greets his eyes. Some of those sights are good, and some turn the monster towards destruction. The monster tells Victor what he learns as he makes his way to find his creator. The monster learns about multiple things in nature, such as the moon: "I...beheld a radiant form rise from among the trees. I gazed with a kind of wonder. It moved slowly, but it enlightened my path" (Shelley 106), fire: "I found a fire which had been left by some wandering beggars, and was overcome with delight at the warmth I experienced from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects" (Shelley 107), kindness: "[The cottagers] often, I believe, suffered the pangs of hunger very poignantly, especially the two young cottagers; for several times they placed food before the old man when they reserved none for themselves" (Shelley 114), and the complexities of human language: "I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words they spoke sometimes produced

pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of hearers. This was indeed a godlike science” (Shelley 114-115). Owen Elmore describes this learning of how nature works in his Frankenstein study guide as “the possibility of spiritual renewal” (para. 2). Both Victor and the monster feel refreshed some as they learn and travel across the land, although it seems to hurt Victor more towards the end of the novel. When situated with times of trials and tribulations, human beings of any size and stature will seek out the calming aura of nature to ensure happiness in their lives. However, not all sorrows can be cured by nature as Victor gives in to his anger against himself and the monster as the monster “gives in to his wrath, turns to his violent side, and gets blinded by vengeance” (Tsai 35). Hsin-Yun Tsai also writes that the monster “might be the victimizer but he is also the victim in the novel, the victim of society, the result of a pathetic, unloved, unwanted, underdeveloped character” (35). Within these examples, Mary Shelley is creating a character in the monster that we humans can sympathize with.

In writing *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, Mary Shelley has created a character who human beings can relate with. The monster is just like a human being one might meet while walking down the street. The monster wants to be loved and seeks out human warmth and comfort in a parental figure, a figure the monster sees in Victor. Victor says, upon hearing the monster’s tale and the desire to build a female companion for the monster, that “I was moved. I shuddered when I thought of the possible consequences of my consent, but I felt that there was some justice in his argument. His tale, and the feelings he now expressed, proved him to be a creature of fine sensations; and did I not as his maker, owe him all the portion of happiness that it was in my power to bestow” (Shelley 148). The monster seeks out companionship like humans do in their time of need. Tsai writes that this is “the reason why we find it effortless and guiltless to offer our sympathy to the Creature; his actions come from reasons we can easily comprehend. In contrast, we put all the blame and responsibilities on Victor, simply because his evilness is hard for us to grasp and interpret” (59). Within this approach, Frankenstein’s monster is akin to a person who human beings would want to help out if they are willing to overlook the monster’s surprising appearance. The monster’s eloquence, persuasiveness, and determination help him out multiple times throughout the novel by allowing the monster to acquire some of the trust and compassion of others who are not like him. Even readers today have sympathy towards the harsh struggles that the monster has taken across his life journey. He is like a human being in every shape and form.

However, most of the film adaptations of the novel put Frankenstein's monster as a mute or inarticulate monster who awkwardly stumbles about. This is often presented with Victor Frankenstein as a mad scientist and having a servant named Igor. The two of them proceed to shock the monster into life. Most interpretations of the silenced monster might be because producers love to mess with the human psyche and to create fear and horror from things human beings cannot understand and comprehend. By essentially reversing Frankenstein's monster, producers are sending a message that human beings do and should fear others who are not like us. This trend of essentially rebuilding Frankenstein's monster into an inarticulate being in the film industry started with the play production of *Frankenstein*, titled *Presumption! or, The Fate of Frankenstein*. This play was directed by Richard Brinsley Peake, who also "reimagined the monster as mute (Shelley's creation speaks with eloquence)" which "would be repeated in many subsequent adaptations, becoming accepted as "authentic" elements of the *Frankenstein* story" (Veysey para. 2). These ideals have stuck around for about two hundred years, and audiences are still enthralled by the bumbling and silent creature that gets a jumpstart (literally and figuratively) into life.

Another idea that most movies portray Frankenstein's monster as mute and inarticulate might be the movie industry's way of satirically poking fun at others who are different from us. Besides the horror genre, Frankenstein's monster has also been a part of several comedy films, dating back to the 1948 film *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, which starred actor Glenn Strange as Frankenstein's monster. This would proceed to launch a series of comedic Frankenstein movies that poked fun at the basic premise of Victor Frankenstein being obsessed to create life itself in an inanimate being. The film industry sends a message that people who are different than us are the ones that we need to mock. The movie business shows Frankenstein's monster as a bumbling maladroit who either strikes fear or laughter out of the audience, which is drastically different than the compassionate and eloquent soul from Mary Shelley's novel. Veysey defines these changes as a reflection of "the novel's own mutative life. Even if [the films] do skew Shelley's original vision, they are certainly testament to the enduring power and popular appeal of her story" (para. 16). While no one can deny the power that Frankenstein's monster has created in movies and plays, they branch off into an entirely different direction and send an entirely different message than what Mary Shelley wrote in *Frankenstein*.

In conclusion, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* has had quite the legacy since its original publication date in 1818. The monster is a character who human beings can relate to, even if the film industry shows the complete opposite. The best summary is the monster's own words on discovering fire for the first time. "How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects" (Shelley 107) declares the monster. Owen Elmore adds to this by saying in his study guide on *Frankenstein* that "the monster's first experience with a stillsmoldering flame reveals the dual nature of fire: he discovers excitedly that it creates light in the darkness of the night, but also that it harms him when he touches it" (para. 8). The fire can be compared to the dual personalities of the monster that made its origins in *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*. The light side is the caring and compassionate monster that Shelley writes about in the novel and creates a character who we all can relate to in our times of trouble, while the harm comes from the shunting away of those who are different from us and the dangers that come with it (which the film industry depicts in the Frankenstein movies). The monster has come a long way to gain sympathy and love, and readers today can easily be persuaded by the monster to help him out in the end. Both interpretations do unite at one point, though. They both show what happens when scientific boundaries are pushed beyond their limits.

Benjamin Sanson

2nd Place in Essays

An Analysis of the Characters of Zeke and Jimmy in Randall Kenan's *A Visitation of Spirits*

The past can come back to haunt people in various ways, whether it be directly or indirectly. Sometimes, those actions that occurred in the past can shape our own thoughts and actions into the present and the future. One piece of literature to examine this phenomenon of how the ghosts of the past can come back to haunt people in the present is Randall Kenan's novel *A Visitation of Spirits*, most notably with the characters of Ezekiel Cross (or Zeke Cross) and James Greene. These two individuals struggle to live in Tim's Creek, North Carolina in the 1980's in the aftermath of Horace Cross' suicide to escape the metaphorical cage of people attempting to deadlock the present as the past. Zeke feels that he has let people down around him to the point where he cannot even recognize himself. Jimmy feels remorse since he metaphorically pushed Horace away as the outlier to the normal standards that were expected of both families. Although the world has changed some in the thirty years since *A Visitation of Spirits* was written, its lesson of the dangers of holding on to the past is just as important as it was back then.

The character of Zeke Cross is presented as a member of the older generation. Being the grandfather of Horace and the uncle of Jimmy, Zeke is the person who is chosen to groom Horace and Jimmy into the already well-established roles that tradition assigned to them. Zeke is somebody who wanted to continue the trend of essentially morphing the growing male identity to match the already established formula without having a chance to construct completely who he wants to be, and he will make sure that the present and the future do not alter the past. Having already grown up in the strict rules of the father figure, Zeke wanted to continue that trend. He winds up failing with the sense of "anxiety regarding his familial duties, some of which he was

unable to fulfill...[Zeke] feels haunted by his dead family members and fears their revenge for a past in which he wronged many of them by betraying them or their personal values” (Tettenborn 254). Zeke feels haunted by all the wrongdoings he feels he has done, which, in turn, causes him to try to fix his past mistakes by raising Horace and Jimmy to complete Zeke’s shattered images of how the past should have been. Zeke does this without thinking about how that locks up Horace and Jimmy into a metaphorical cage of not being able to explore and construct their own identities.

As a member of the older generation in a rapidly changing world, Zeke is trying to recapture the ghost of an idea on how others would view him as someone who changes with the times, even if his outward appearance does not completely reflect that change. This change is discussed in the scene in the December 8, 1985 section in the chapter entitled “Black Necromancy,” when Zeke dreams of his own funeral from the perspective of somebody who is amongst the crowd of the grieving people, not from the perspective of a dead corpse. Kenan describes Zeke’s funeral dream as:

I see a coffin, it’s new and pretty, a brassy copper-brown color, shiny, with silver rails, shiny, and the cushions and cloth and pillows and veils are a mellow light brown that match the coffin nice, I see me, there, in the coffin, my face is drawn and dark and old, I look black as coal, I’m chalky about the face, my lips are too drawn, too tight, my eyes seem to bulge behind those lids, my cheekbones they stick out too much, too much, like an Indian’s, I’m in the coffin looking out, out. (58)

By describing Zeke’s appearance as so, Kenan is portraying how easy it is for humans to change their own appearance without thinking about how it would look to everybody else, whether it be somebody from our past or our future. Zeke’s main feeling is one of disgust, as he does not appear to recognize his own changed self. His fear of being unrecognizable soon starts to manifest itself into a physical being as Zeke describes it as “a rat, a great big red-eyed hungrylooking thing, moves at my feet, and I try to holler, but nobody hears me, or nobody pays attention” (Kenan 59). The idea that nobody else can see the invading rat or hear Zeke’s screams of fear play into the idea of him being so fascinated with the past that he threw his own identity away. Zeke also fears about how he is being judged for his failures during the funeral dream. Zeke describes this fear as:

Sammy and Horace come to close the lid, stop, boys, stop, let me out of here, now, I ain't playing, can't you see the rat? You're both dead anyway, you're dead Sammy, and you're dead Horace, and you're dead too, Retha, don't let me be dead too, not yet, not with these two preachers who don't know what's what, they look at me, but they don't hear me, they lower the lid, dead men burying a live man, the lid coming down, please Lord, don't, click. Nothing but water and gurgling and that damn rat crawling up, up. (Kenan 59)

Within the last passage, Sammy is Zeke's son and Horace's father. Sammy was known as the rebel child of the Cross family, and Zeke felt disappointed because he could not raise Sammy up to be exactly how Zeke was raised. Retha is Zeke's wife who passed away. Zeke still feels afraid of not being able to continue the process of raising their son and grandson to be among the outstanding, respectable citizens of Tim's Creek, North Carolina. As the reader can piece together, Zeke is firmly set in the older generation to the point that he focuses more on trying to form the past that changed him as much as he expects that past to change others. In fact, Zeke is recollecting about "the past and how much things have changed" (Teutsch, para. 5). Zeke still holds on to how he expected the past to be, and he does not want too much of it to change at one time.

The character James Malachai Greene (or Jimmy Greene, for short), is quite the stark contrast when compared to Zeke. Jimmy is the central preacher figure of Tim's Creek. Originally, Jimmy perfectly fit into the older generation's mold, but after Horace's suicide, Jimmy indirectly vows that he should change as well. Jimmy does this through his confessions sections that are put at the start of each chapter. In them, Jimmy recounts his own past and how he plans to avoid completely conforming into what is expected of him. In his second recollection, Jimmy states:

How could I communicate that I was not, did not want to be the holy and pious dictator of a pastor they had been used to for all their lives, that my very presence had nothing to do with my condemnation of their way of life, that I couldn't give a flying fuck about the still [Mrs. Viola Honeyblue's] husband Lucius had out in the woods behind the house, or how she, he, and her mother sold all sorts of regulated beverages illegally from their kitchen, or that the last time they had been to church was to funeralize Margurette's husband twenty years ago. There was no way to say: I have not come here to judge you. To say: I want to introduce a new way of approaching Christian faith, a way of caring for

people. I don't want to be a watchdog of sin, an inquisitor who binds his people with rules and regulations and thou shalt and thou shalt not. But looking at those eyes so full of past hurt and past rejection and past accusation, I could only smile and let be what was. (Kenan 110)

Within this passage, the reader gets the idea that the character of Jimmy is facing an existential crisis about where his identity lies. Does Jimmy continue to stay in the utopian ideals of the past, or does he seek to alter himself to transform into a new leader of Tim's Creek? Over the course of the novel, Jimmy begins to shift gradually from his rooted tradition into unstable territory.

Jimmy originally stayed rooted firmly in the past. Since Horace fails to continue the Cross' legacy, the expectation shifts over to Jimmy. Jimmy accepts the already chosen role that was expected of him to fulfill, and he begins to adopt the same mindset of the older generation. Most of the older generation will not stand for Horace's homosexual tendencies, and Jimmy begins to think that way as well. When Horace confronts Jimmy about Horace's experiments with lovers of the same sex, Jimmy responds by ways that attempt to swing Horace towards the heterosexual norm of the older generation. Kenan writes, in Jimmy's recollection in the "Holy Science" section, that Jimmy dismisses Horace's quest for advice on what to do. When Horace tells Jimmy that he has experimented with homosexuality, Jimmy's responses are "Horace, we've all done a little. . . you know. . . experimenting. It's a part of growing up" (113). This continues on into several more lines, with a culmination of Jimmy pushing Horace away. Kenan writes:

HORACE: What if I can't change?

JIMMY (*impatiently, voice rising slightly*): Horace, you'll cha-Change? Well, there's nothing to change. You're normal. Trust me. These . . . feelings . . . will go away. Just don't give in to them. Pray. Ask God to give you strength and in no time. . .

(*Someone calls [Jimmy] from across the yard.*)

HORACE: But what if I can't change?

JIMMY (*sternly*): You'll change. (*He starts toward the front of the churchyard.*)

HORACE: But if I can't?

(*JIMMY stops and looks at HORACE, narrowing his eyes.*)

JIMMY: Horace, you do realize that in the end this is a very serious matter, don't you? Search your heart. Take it to the Lord. But don't dwell on it too much. You'll be fine.

Believe me.

(JIMMY *turns and walks away*. HORACE *stands beneath the tree, his hands in his pockets, looking up at the tree.*) (113-114)

Within this scene, the reader is presented with the idea that Jimmy has begun fulfilling what is expected of him by the older generation. Horace, being the confused teenager that he is, sees Jimmy's dismissal as a sign that even someone who is in the same dilemma is of no help. This causes Horace to think that "[Jimmy's] stunned and firm utterances signify that Horace cannot expect support for his sexual identity from his church, nor can he turn to his family to help him in his quest" (Tettenborn 260). Jimmy has aligned with the older generation in terms of their thinking and acting patterns. The older generation sees homosexuality as a strong sin, and Jimmy picks up on this where he says that Horace should "take it to the Lord" (Kenan 114). To Jimmy, Horace needs to repent his ways so that he can be welcomed back to the family if he abandons his homosexual past. Horace continues to fight back with all he can, which inadvertently causes Jimmy to do the same thing, although Jimmy does not fight back with such extreme measures as Horace did.

After Horace's suicide, Jimmy begins to abandon his past ideology in favor of one that is drastically different in order to escape the mold. To begin this process, Jimmy thinks about the past and how he wants to go back and alter it to get a better ending. Jimmy describes this thinking as, "It's as if I were a mathematician contemplating the equation of eternal life. Why? How" (Kenan 36). Jimmy's thoughts begin to swing the most towards loving others, no matter what their background may be. In his first confession, Jimmy recounts hearing a lecture from a seminary teacher named Schnider. Schnider remarks, "People need a certain amount of somebody else. And if you're not getting it from one place, you get it from another" (Kenan 31-32). This is what Jimmy realizes he should have done to Horace when they were talking about Horace's experiments into same sex relationships. Jimmy is a man who wants an entirely different outcome, but he cannot travel back in time to go do that. He is stuck in the present moment with his actions. Jimmy does perform some love towards Horace during the Thanksgiving dinner scene in the "Old Demonology" chapter. Jimmy is the main voice of reason who comments on Horace's pierced ear in a positive light. Jimmy mentions, "It's really not that big a deal. Boys pierce their ears nowadays all the time. It's not thought of as-" (Kenan 184), before he gets cut off by the negative vibe of the other family members. Even if he was

outspoken, Jimmy loves Horace and understands that Horace is branching out into new territory to construct both their identities.

In the present, though, Jimmy is slowly trotting down that path of love with heavy footsteps. The haunting images of Horace's suicide will continue to lay a burden on Jimmy's heart. Jimmy cannot fully express the remorse and sorrow that he feels for the battered Horace, or as the scholar Lucy R. Littler puts it, "Jimmy cannot verbalize within [the Tim's Creek] community a Christianity that is more inclusive and more supportive of its members" (50). Jimmy is still unsure how to break completely away from the chains of the past and support his fellow churchgoers, even if one is radically different from the next. Jimmy regrets how he joined in on excluding Horace from accepting the traditional Christian definition of love and he seeks to change it so that the same mistakes will not happen again. This thread is picked up during the scene one year later after Horace's suicide where Jimmy, Zeke, and Ruth (one of Horace's aunts) are going to go see a dying relative in the hospital. The day is plagued by squabbles, but there are two highlights throughout it that show Jimmy how to love the present. The first comes when Jimmy and Zeke watch Ruth play a game of Pac-Man with a little girl. As the scholar Brandon Costello states, "After their grueling day, Jimmy expects Ruth to 'be vexed' by the game's noise and bother" (144), but Jimmy discovers that Ruth's expressions are of pleasure than irritation or annoyance. Jimmy sees this transformation of hatred into love before his very eyes as Ruth abandons her aggressive feelings into ones of intense joy, which causes Jimmy to question if he was intentionally raised in the metaphorical cloudiness, to which he never fully gets an answer (206-207). The second example Jimmy gets occurs just a little while after the game of Pac-Man where Jimmy sees Zeke and Ruth standing and watching the rainy weather. Kenan writes: [Ruth] stood at the wide door before the water that fell like a curtain between her and the world. Jimmy stood in the arch of the inside door, listening. Zeke walked out to her. She had to have heard him, his feet shuffling so, but she did not turn around.

"Raining hard, ain't it?"

"Oh, yeah. But I bet it'll turn into snow soon."

"Snow?"

"Yeah."

"You may be right."

They stood there. Silent. Jimmy expected quiet, soft conciliatory words. Then he realized he had already heard them, as pure and as honest as the rain. (207)

Within this scene, Jimmy sees how love can be transferred from two different individuals to create an outcome that unites them both. Jimmy wants to do the same for Horace, but Jimmy realizes that he will never get a chance to do the exact same thing.

In conclusion, the characters of Zeke and Jimmy in Kenan's novel *A Visitation of Spirits* are quite the fascinating characters to study. Even if they come from opposite ends of the worldchanging spectrum, they act just as regular human beings would. Whether it be from Zeke's disappearing reluctance of trying to hang on to the past, or Jimmy's desire to change it for the better, these two characters are the best representations of complex human beings. In writing these characters, Kenan has created a way that can help the reader get into the characters' minds and examine why they would do a certain action. There is much to learn about how different humans can react to change, as evidenced by the changes that affect both Zeke and Jimmy. That is what Kenan is challenging his readers to do as well. Kenan wants to examine how the changes in our own lives impact the world around us.

Benjamin Sanson

3rd Place in Essays

“If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that the terror is not of Germany, but of the soul.” The Psychological Horror of Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe is a man of mystery in the literary world. Poe writes about stories that seem to invoke different methods of horror into his readers, but there is a deep psychological mine present in his short stories. Two of his most famous short stories that delve into the depths of this psychological mine are “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat”, both of which show how easily it is for the human mind to be cracked and broken into like a safe. This fragmentation of the human mind is very prevalent in some of Poe’s work. Poe writes more about the psychological side of horror than the supernatural side. He is showing and detailing how the mind can easily bend and twist under madness and insanity, as well as the resulting actions that come about from this fracturing of one of the most important parts of the human body.

Edgar Allan Poe is famous for two of his styles of story-telling. They are his “melodramatic tales of gothic terror, symbolic psychological fiction that became the source of the modern horror story” and “stories of intellect and reason, analytic tales that were precursors of the modern detective story” (Charters 1108). After being accused of copying the feelings of German Romantic writers, Poe writes in the preface of his first story collection, “If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that the terror is not of Germany, but of the soul” (Charters 1108). His short stories of “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat” show this inward psychological terror that strikes at both the heart and mind, both inside and out. Being published in 1843, Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories of “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat” detail mental breakdowns of the human psyche. “The Tell-Tale Heart” tells a story about the narrator who is living with an old man whom the narrator loves deeply, but that love has one major flaw in the narrator’s opinion. “[The old man] had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so, by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever” (Poe 715). This leads the narrator to kill the old man by dragging the old man’s bed on top of him. The narrator then hides the body underneath the floorboards with the strongest of care. Police officers soon arrive, after receiving a call that “a shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged

at the police-office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises” (Poe 717). The narrator, with a smile upon his face, welcomes the officers into the house and, after seemingly finding no signs of foul play, proceed to sit and chat amiably for a while (with the narrator placing a chair right on top of where he buried the old man) before the narrator hears the beating of the old man’s heart in his ears, which he details as “*a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*” (Poe 717-718). After being subjected to this ungodly noise and his belief that the police officers are “making a mockery of my horror” (Poe 718), the narrator finally reveals the true nature of his crime. “Villains!’ I shrieked, ‘dissemble no more! I admit the deed!tear up the planks!-here, here!-it is the beating of his hideous heart” (Poe 718).

“The Black Cat” has, for the most part, the same narrative structure of “The Tell-Tale Heart”. In “The Black Cat”, the narrator is locked away in a prison cell and is going to be executed in the morning. The narrator then retells his story of events that led to his arrest. Starting as a young lad, the narrator mentions how much he was a docile soul and how he loved animals. After wedding his wife early, he and the wife soon acquire a number of pets. The one that the narrator loves the most is a black cat going by the name of Pluto. However, some years later, the narrator begins to despise his pets; Pluto is soon included in the narrator’s distrust of what used to bring him pleasure. After coming home with alcohol in his system, the narrator thinks that Pluto is actively hiding from the narrator. Once he finds Pluto and the cat sinks its fangs into his flesh, the narrator “took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket” (Poe 719). After sleeping off the alcohol, the narrator feels remorse for his actions, but soon drowns that remorse with more alcoholic beverages. In response to his mistreatment of his pets and his alcohol addiction, the narrator then decides to hang Pluto from a tree with a noose around its neck. Within the same day of Pluto’s hanging, the narrator’s house catches fire, and the narrator and his wife escape. Going back to the house, the narrator sees a mysterious imprint of a black cat embedded in the last standing wall. This imprint of the cat is embedded in the wall where the narrator’s bed was, and it seems to have an imprint of a rope around its neck. The narrator deduces that someone threw Pluto’s dead body through the window in order to wake him and his wife up and to alert them to the fire. Sometime later, the narrator stumbles upon a cat that bears a striking resemblance to Pluto, even down to the missing eyeball. The only difference between the two cats is that the new cat has a strip of white fur around the belly region. After making

friends with the cat and finding out that no one had ever seen this cat before, the narrator takes it home with him “occasionally stooping and patting it as I proceeded” (Poe 721). However, this friendship between the narrator and the new cat doesn’t last long as the same feelings that the narrator had for Pluto start to come back up again. The narrator decides to end the new cat’s life. As the three descend into their basement to do some household chore, the narrator picks up an axe and starts to swing it towards the cat, but the narrator is stopped by the wife. In a fit of a rage, the narrator swings the axe into his wife’s brain, killing her in the process. The narrator then buries his wife into a wall of the basement, as he claims that the monks in the Middle Ages did, carefully reconstructing the wall as to show that no signs of foul play had been involved. The narrator then decides to continue with his attempted murder of the cat, only to find that it has fled. Police officers arrive to investigate multiple times, with the narrator showing that there is nothing suspicious at all to be found. However, on the fourth time, the humans hear sounds coming from inside the makeshift tomb after the narrator raps his cane against the wall. Upon tearing down the wall, the officers are greeted with the image of the dead wife and the cat, who is mysteriously alive. The narrator remarks that “upon [the corpse’s] head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb” (Poe 724). The narrator then is arrested for his crime and awaits his execution.

The psychological horror that Poe writes is very prevalent in these two short stories. While some might argue that there is more a focus on the supernatural side, Poe’s stories more reverberates with the horrors that the raw and new nation that was North America was facing in the 1800s. Several of Poe’s themes of horrific divisions are horrors that the people of early North America were facing as the country established its identity. “Poe writes about violence and cruelty, madness and irrationality, existential doubt and dread. He wanted Americans to understand what was strange about their own culture. He saw that strangeness, the strangeness that most people didn’t see” states J. Gerald Kennedy in “The Tell-Tale Heart” section in the documentary titled *Edgar Allan Poe: Buried Alive* (00:01:54-00:02:15). This strangeness in the new nation of North America was captured in the shocking horror stories of Edgar Allan Poe. Poe channels what he observed in the mental illnesses of war, alcohol, jealousy, murder, and various other illnesses that plagued the 1800s North America in his stories of “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat.” Most Americans tried to go a different path in their lives, but their

illnesses drove them back to what they were doing, effectively splitting themselves in two. Poe captures this extremely well in the first paragraph of “The Tell-Tale Heart:”

True!-nervous-very, very dreadfully nervous I had been, and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease has sharpened my senses-not destroyed-not dulled them.

Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Harken! and observe how healthily-how calmly I can tell you the whole story. (Poe 715)

The narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” encapsulates how people felt about their own psychological divisions that struck the nation. The Poe biographer Jeffrey Meyers in the *Edgar Allan Poe: Buried Alive* documentary describes it as “The narrator grabs you right in the first sentence. He said something like, ‘Mad? You think I am mad?’ You know? ‘People say I’m mad. I’m not mad!’ And then he’s clearly mad, and yet he’s telling you this story that’s mad and sane at the same time” (00:00:34-00:00:46). Poe is capturing the schizophrenic thought process that Americans were experiencing in the raw nation. Poe is writing down the schizophrenia that the early America experienced. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, schizophrenia is “a chronic and severe mental disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves” (para. 1). Both the narrators of “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat” show evidence of suffering through this schizophrenia. The narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” details how he loves the old man very much, but the narrator wishes to kill the old man in order to be relieved of his vulture-like eyeball. The narrator of “The Black Cat” felt an extreme friendship from his pets but turns to utter despair as he comes to loathe his cats. Both narrators mentally twist their own behaviors as well. The narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” goes mad during his conversation with the police officers, since he is the only one who can still hear the beating of the dead man’s heart, and the narrator of “The Black Cat” feels mentally tormented by the cats, even if he used to love them, which leads him to attempt to or succeed at killing them. Another psychological illness that these two narrators might have is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (or OCD, for short), judging from how craftily they described the hiding of the corpses. The narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” describes his handiwork in two operations. The first one is that, leading up to the week before he kills the old man, the narrator has to perform the same steps and precautions in order to spy on the evil eye. The second sign of OCD is where he carefully reconstructs the floorboards to hide the old man’s body:

If still, you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye-not even *his*-could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out-no stain of any kind-no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all-ha! ha! (Poe 717)

With this level of description of his concealment of the old man's body, the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" perfectly captures his OCD with his level of detail. The narrator of "The Black Cat" also shows this attention to detail with his own signs of OCD. He extremely carefully removes the plaster from the wall, inserts the body of his dead wife behind the wall, and reseals the wall back up to the point where "no eye could detect any thing suspicious...The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed...I looked around triumphantly, and said to myself-'Here at least, my labor has not been in vain" (Poe 723). Both narrators went to great lengths to hide a corpse that would be found eventually, but the attention to the detail really strikes as a sign of OCD.

There is one mental illness that strikes the narrator of "The Black Cat" alone, and that one is the mental disease known as alcoholism. While the reader is never fully told why the narrator has decided to take up the bottle, it could be because he is trying to drown his own sorrowful past away. The first time this happens, the narrator decides to carve Pluto's eye with a "quill pen" (Parfitt 47). In remorse the next morning, the narrator drowns away that sorrow of the removal of Pluto's eye with more alcohol, which leads him to hang Pluto to a tree. The narrator blames it on his perverseness as to why he hung the cat in the first place. "Perverseness provides the rationale for otherwise unjustifiable acts, such as killing the first cat or rapping with his cane upon the plastered-up wall behind which stood his wife's corpse" (Womack para. 33). This perverseness mixed with the alcohol leads the narrator nonverbally confessing his guilt of killing his wife by way of an axe to her brain.

The last piece of psychological evidence can best be described as the feeling of guilt that both narrators experience. Poe is saying that even our actions are slowly ticking away at our own guilt clock before we wind up being caught like the criminals that we are. Our own foul deeds

will come back and haunt us eventually. Our own psychological horrors, much like those of the two narrators, sounds like, in the words of the narrator from “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “*a low dull, quick sound-much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*” (Poe 717-718). Our own guilty feelings mess with our own mind as they slowly become increasingly louder in volume. They may start quiet, but they grow louder and louder until they sound like the strikes of a grandfather clock once an hour has passed. It’s only a matter of time until we suffer our own guilt and remorse for our actions. The narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” exclaims, while in the old man’s bedroom with the police officers, “Villains!’ I shrieked, ‘dissemble no more! I admit the deed!-tear up the planks!-here, here!-it is the beating of his hideous heart” (Poe 718), acknowledging his guilt for killing the old man. The narrator of “The Black Cat” also feels this guilt when he sees that he has accidentally buried the cat alive into the makeshift grave, the one who “had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman” (Poe 724). Our own guilt will come to slice at us like a pendulum. Both slowly swing back and forth as they descend closer and closer, until the inevitable moment arrives where they both slice humans open.

In conclusion, Poe’s writings lean more towards the psychological side than the supernatural. Each and every action in “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Black Cat” can be explained through purely logical definitions. There is no supernatural, ghostly element at play here. Poe writes about the madness that strikes people everywhere, no matter what their location may be. Poe’s stories “did not give a large role to supernatural agents in his gothic tales”, and instead they were written “with such stupendous plasticity that you cannot but believe in the reality or possibility of a fact which actually never has occurred” (Charters 1109). There is no ghost to capture in Poe’s tales. Poe is showing that the greatest enemy is not some supernatural agent from the grave that has come back to life. Instead, Poe is showing that the enemy we need to fear the most is ourselves.

Benjamin Sanson

Honorable Mention in Essays

Coveted Passions: Revelations of Freedom in Oppressed Artists

A common theme that weaves throughout the context of our novels, is self versus society. When an individual's personal integrity is compromised, they explore other avenues to fill the void brought by suppression. In the case of our protagonists, their self-desires and fantasies are cast upon items or other fictional characters. Exploring the meaning behind these items will not only open a window into their world, but also reveal the elements that make these characters truly unique.

More often than not, one does not have to dig too deep in order to discover the answers they seek. Take fossils for example. They are a blueprint to the past, allowing scientists to decipher the secrets of an extinct ecosystem. The smallest clues can reveal a plethora of information and can be used as key to unlock further knowledge. The information discovered this way paints a clearer picture of these ancient leviathans and it has the ability to transcend the boundaries of the imagination. Ideas, that are dismissed as purely fictional in the mainstream media, have the opportunity to become a reality in the next decade. While challenges will present themselves, it is a chance for the past to flourish in the presence of the future.

While some aspects of the past can be exciting, it also serves as a painful reminder of the mistakes we have made. Some wounds have the opportunity to heal themselves, while others dissipate the scars of old. These battles continue to fight on and at times, no end appears in sight. One such conflict that rages on to this day holds a looming presence in our narratives, one that casts a shadow over innocence. Two characters shine a light through these shadows, allowing their stories to sprout to life.

Laura Deen is character looking for solace in a society of oppression but does not succumb to the dogmatic views of southern ideology. Her mother, Alma Deen, serves as Laura's biggest antagonist, someone who embodies conservative values to the core. Laura sculpts a clay model, a vessel of hidden truths, that represents the love she has for Jane. It epitomizes a reality for which Laura cannot partake in and its very existence intimidates Alma. By destroying the bust, Alma believes she is destroying the impurities of her daughter in order to conform to the

narrative she wants. The clay model concretizes the purity of Laura and Jane's romance while its destruction is a result of moral authoritarianism woven into southern tradition.

Several points can be taken from this passage:

1. Family and societal values had an overbearing reach into Laura's personal affairs, often dictating self-liberties. This encroachment is another burden in an already stressful situation, given that homosexuality tendencies were shunned during the time.
2. Laura's feelings for Jane adds an extra layer of surreal complexity to the story, showcasing another dynamic angle to taboo relationships.
3. The clay statue and letters to Jane reveal a level of intimacy that is guarded in secrecy. This methodology allows her to explore her sexuality in a state of well-being without the fear of repercussion. In CNN's article, *Hidden in Plain Sight: How Gay Artists Expressed Forbidden Desire in Code*, they state that "Queer artists use the aesthetic as both a secret language and a means of escape. It inspires marginalized voices to build their own artistic shields, and challenges those who attempt to suppress them" (Al-Kahdi 2017).
4. The greatest challenge to overcome is Alma, who clearly indicates her displeasure with Laura. In Alma's mind, Laura has an affliction and the unnaturalness of her behavior warrants further investigation. She states: "There're women, Laura, who aren't safe for young girls to be with... . They're women who are- unnatural. There're like vultures- women like that. They do- terrible things to young girls" (Smith 243). And when Alan reaches her tipping point, she destroys the clay bust by "Pounding it with slow deliberateness until it was reduced to a shapeless wad and... dropped it in the garbage can" (Smith 73).
5. Laura lost a piece of herself and it was evident that she wanted to confront her mother but held back knowingly as the repercussions would be dire.

Fast forward the clock a few decades and the problems that plagued Laura find a different home amongst a new generation. Anyone has the ability to consult this source, it is the bestselling book in history and poses a huge hurdle in the life of the next subject in question. Let us choose a poison: "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will

inherit the kingdom of God” (Corinthians 6: 9-10). Now let us find a remedy: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrong. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

It is easy to see how this book can be paraphrased and when doing so, it becomes nothing more than a loaded weapon. The original message being conveyed becomes muddled in hypocrisy. With a lack of transparency, Horace consults an unlikely source in his struggle of self-identity. Turn this image 180 degrees, and the direction will guide one along a path of desecration. With a demon taking the place of a guardian angel, chaos ensued in Horace’s endeavors. The impulse to defy expectations was the battle waging inside Horace. Ultimately, he lost the war with himself, inflicted by the transition of old-world ideology into modern day progressiveness. He tried to maintain a balance between the two, but they both tore him apart.

The word of the Lord condemned the nature of Horace’s feeling, which further ensnared him into the darkness. Besides the temptations of mingling with demons, Horace had a fascination for fictional superheroes. Taking one drink of this fantasy and it was enough for him to drown out the reality he so deeply dreaded:

On the white walls of his room hung his many friends. Over the bed was the SorcererThe Conjuror, the Supreme Magician. On the other walls hung a huge green monster man so muscled he appeared to be a green lump, a woman whirling a golden lasso, and a Viking with long yellow hair swinging a hammer as large as he. (Kenan 17)

This passage indicates that Horace had idols and teen angst just like every young adult, but in retrospect, it was as if a quack gave him a placebo to numb the pain. *Smithsonian Magazine* did an article on the Psychology of Superhero Stories and states, “At their best, superhero origin stories inspire us and provide models of coping with adversity, finding meaning in loss and trauma, discovering our strengths and using them for good purpose” (Rosenberg 2013). Maybe not so much in this instance. Unfortunately, this story is not a fairytale and no masked crusader was able to fly in and save the day. They provided just enough nostalgia to hold him at bay, until his true intentions were revealed. The inspiration he took from his heroes propelled his ascension to summon the demon and his eventual downfall.

To escape the confines of society's ignorance, Horace and Laura delve into the comforts they know to keep their heads above water. These endeavors allow them to evaluate their existence and make sense of the world's faults from their own safe harbor. When they are in the center of their own universe, they can truly shine and achieve that sense of self-fulfillment that has always eluded them.

Zachary Walleser

The Lost and Found Traditions of “This Is What It Means To Say Phoenix, Arizona”

Sherman Alexie’s “This Is What It Means To Say Phoenix, Arizona” holds many truths, some of which are harsh, and some of which are gentle. However, the overall message reigns clear over these smaller lessons that lie within. The traditions and culture of Native Americans are slowly fading to the background, when they need them most. There is a constant struggle within those like Thomas and Victor in this era between the ways that run in their veins, and the ways that are impressed upon them as normal American culture. No two tribes or individuals find their balance between the new and old in the same way. We see the two weighted sides of the coin in Thomas and Victor, though.

The story follows Thomas Builds-the-Fire and Victor as they travel to Phoenix, Arizona to retrieve the ashes of Victor’s father and the resulting events that occur on the journey, as well as flashbacks that are seen through Victor’s eyes. The flashbacks also provide a secondary setting back to their earlier lives. Throughout their travels, Thomas tells many smaller stories that bring both comfort and morals to Victor in this time of need, whether Victor realizes it or not. In the end, despite Victor’s realizations of the way he has strayed from his sense of community and tradition, they mutually decide to once again go their separate ways leaving only the promise of Victor to stop and listen to one of Thomas’s stories and the two containers of ashes split between them.

The first major clue as to the importance of the strong traditional Native values that Thomas holds to is at the beginning of the rising action in the plot when he tells Victor that, “I knew you’d call me” (9). Thomas continues to prove his crucial role as Shaman in the Native Tradition throughout the story with his own stories and consistent reliability. He helps Victor to pay for the travel costs to pick up his father’s ashes (9), assists Victor as he searches his father’s home for anything worth keeping (11), comforts Victor on the ride back to the reservation in the present day of the story (15), not to mention the time in the past when he saved Victor’s life from wasps (11). These events alone cement the sentiment that Thomas is a pillar in his community when they need him, even if they don’t realize they do. He always tells his stories to anyone who will listen as Victor points out, “Thomas was the storyteller nobody wanted to listen to” (7). This observation also lends the imagery that Thomas has become outcast by his tribe as they stray farther from tradition as time goes on. This does not deter Thomas, though, and he continues to

fill the role of Shaman to his tribe whether they acknowledge it or not, and often they do not. Thomas even acknowledges and comments to Victor, "I know how it is, I know you ain't going to treat me any better than you did before. I know your friends would give you too much shit about it." (15), showing that he recognizes and almost seems at peace with his outcasted role as Shaman. To him, this is his life and what he's meant for as he says to Victor, "They are all I have. It's all I can do." (14). On the other side of the coin, we have Victor.

Victor is one of the many in his tribe and friend group who has strayed almost entirely from his Native tradition in his search to fit in. In this sense, he's almost the polar opposite of Thomas. Over the course of the story, this is something Victor comes to realize as he recalls memories of Thomas from their past and examines Thomas's role in his life again, realizing how he really does need Thomas now more than ever. At first Victor is very reluctant to accept Thomas's help and views him through a lens put on upon him by his peers as he says, "All the other Indians stared, surprised that Victor was even talking to Thomas. Nobody talked to Thomas," (7), and that, "Victor was embarrassed," (7). Yet, in that moment, something in him clicks as he realizes and thinks to himself, "-but he thought Thomas might be able to help him. Victor felt a sudden need for tradition." (7). This is a very telling sign that despite Victor's stray from the native traditions of his people, he has an instinctual want for the familiarity and comfort of it in this vulnerable time. Victor even laments near the end of the story that he now, instead of the embarrassment he first felt over associating with Thomas, feels ashamed of himself and how he's left this part of himself behind, even saying to himself, "Whatever happened to the tribal ties, the sense of community?" (15). Even in spite of his acknowledgment to this lost part of him, though, Victor does not change much. He does at least, however, give into a small favor to Thomas to finally stop someday and listen to one of his stories.

Sherman Alexie's story is about many stories, but also about only one. This is a story about the lost art of stories. It is a story about losing a part of oneself in the struggle to be both what one wants to be and what others think one should be. It is a story about a man looking for that missing part of himself in his time of grief and finding it in a person who had become lost to him because of the expectations of others. Alexie's story is a lesson and a reminder above all else. No matter how far one strays from the tradition of one's people, it will still be there for you when you need it most. Unless we leave it to lie forgotten in the times in between when that tradition may not be crucial. This story is a reminder that the role of the shaman and many other

traditions are slowly disappearing, and it is up to the younger generations to remember those traditions and keep them alive for years to come.

Maeve Ladd

Ongoing Division

It is written in our Star-Spangled Banner, “Land of the free and the home of the brave,” but is America truly the land of the free? Many times, people of color, whether they are Latino, Mexican, African-American, Asian, etc. have experienced racism in America. The sad truth about America is that we claim to be the “Land of the Free;” however, we degrade anyone with differences and make the white majority seem superior. What some racists seem to forget is that these individuals are people too, just with different cultural or ethnic backgrounds. As I have gotten older, I have noticed how unaccepting some white Americans can be to other non-white Americans and just how hard it is for people of color to live their day to day lives.

I never really knew the depth of racism until I was in high school. I can remember when I was little and first learned about slavery. I cried. My brain couldn’t process why anyone would do such a thing to another human. Although slavery is no longer legal in America, non-white American still deal with racial comments and altercations every day. Just this past year, during our school’s “spirit week,” we held a Mr. Macho pageant. Two of the contestants were kids portraying Donald and Melania Trump. Their “talent” was building a wall. These two kids dumped Lego blocks out and played Mexican music as they built this fake wall in front of hundreds of students. Just when things could not get more uncomfortable, another student comes running from the side and crashes into the structure that is portraying the wall. As the “wall” comes crashing down, the student dressed as Melania Trump says, “Even this wall can’t keep *them* out”. The entire senior section stared in disbelief. Why is the administration allowing this to happen? We have students who are Mexican, and this act hurt their feelings. One girl went home in tears. The fact that these students think that this skit is okay to portray is completely disgusting to me. What is more disheartening is the fact that the administration did nothing to stop it. A whole culture is mocked while building this “wall,” and they refer to a whole race as a *them*.

Joke or not, this is not okay. They are people, just like us.

This is not the only time I have witnessed something like this in my own school. I have heard multiple teachers make comments to my black female friends about how their hair is a “different length each week” or how their natural curly hair is “nappy and maybe a brush would help”. Someone could easily say that I am being a little sensitive; however, whenever white girls wear

extensions, hardly anyone says anything about the extra length to her hair. As a matter of fact, most black women wear their hair braided so their real hair can grow. Things like these comments are commonly overlooked because statements like this have been the norm for so long. However, black women do not have to answer for the length of their hair nor the style. What is also offensive is to tell someone to use a brush upon their own natural hair. It would be considered rude to anyone else, so why is it any different?

One incident really has opened my eyes as to how some white people really view people of color. This past year in a half, I lost a really good friend of mine to ignorance. Bishop was shot in the head. Police officers and the boys that were with him claim to not know who shot him. The whole thing is still a big mystery, but had a proper investigation been initiated, we might now know what happened. The boys that my friend Bishop was with were still driving the car he got shot in the next day. Two days later, the police call the boys in for questioning. The news channel does not announce anything until a week later. It seems like everything was prolonged, and nothing was taken seriously. It is unfair, but what is more unfair is the fact that people started questioning Bishop's actions. There is proof of Bishop's clothes being dirty as if he was dragged, and there is only one bullet hole in the car. The boys claimed someone shot up the car, but science proves there is no way that happened. Instead of Bishop being the victim, I would get asked, "Did someone shoot him because he owed money? Was it a drug deal gone wrong? How do you know he didn't threaten them?" People were profiling him, blaming him. When did a victim start becoming the accused? None of these people knew anything about his personality, who he was as a person, his morals, none of that. They just assumed because he was black and got shot in the head that he was in the wrong. He was with his "friends" going to a party...none of us saw this happening... so, instead of asking me about a drug deal gone wrong, ask me if I am okay with losing a friend.

These are just a few examples of racism that I have witnessed. However, racism will always be a never-ending cycle until everyone learns how to accept one another. Racism comes from not understanding one another cultures and blaming the other for not doing it the way they think is the correct way. In order for us to grow as a country, we have to accept that each of us are different. We all come from different backgrounds and cultures, but we all have one thing in common and that is being human. We will not prosper until everyone accepts that we bleed the same blood and go through the same thing called life. Until then, we will continue to have this ongoing war between different cultural groups.

Rubi Smith

Dying From The Inside Out: A Woman's Thoughts On Betrayal And Divorce

I Undulation

Betrayal is a curious feeling. It is the moment when you realize that the one person in this world that you thought- *believed*- would always be your constant, your devout friend and lover, is really a turncoat. A liar, a defector who fled and left you lying on the floor shattered into a million pieces. Betrayal is a feeling that is felt from deep within your soul, from a place that is the very core of your being, and it rises to meet you like the ocean waves on a night where the moon is full, and the tide is high. It is a feeling that can only be described as dying from the inside out; you *are* dying, it is a genuine death of your marriage, of your senses. It is a death of an inclusive world that you had grown to count on, he and you had built it together. It is the death of a bond that you felt so deeply with that person for what felt like eons. It is the death of your marriage vows that you still hold dear, but he did not, and perhaps never did. You suddenly find yourself as a woman and a wife disavowed, and then the rest of your world starts to crumble around you as you struggle to find anyone and anything to cling to.

Perhaps you are lucky enough to have a family or friends who support you, or perhaps those who were your family and friends are gone. While you are in free fall and reach for a hand, there is nothing but cold, dead air. The lies, the anger, the utter betrayal and disrespect that fills your heart now follows you even to your bed, and you lie in the dark while it all swirls around in your head and the ache follows you to the depths of your heart and seeps into the crevices of your mind. You even dream about it, over and over, that moment when your life melted into a dirty pile of lies onto the floor. That moment when he took your love and your marriage vows, murdering them in front of you like a mercenary who murders a mother's child in front of her, and drags the bloody carcass down the hall.

In the beginning, there was a light in his eyes that radiated his warmth and love for you then suddenly, one day that light was gone, vanishing seemingly overnight. Oh, my

darling, here is the rub. It was not overnight. It was weeks and months, maybe even years, piece-by-piece, moment by moment, he disengaged. It was so subtle, even the most attuned woman could not have noticed. The tree of life that you devoutly nurtured has died. The branches of trust, faith, friendship, fidelity and solidarity have withered in the winter of his discontent, and there will never be another spring.

II *Disconsolation*

It is not your fault.

You see, his mind began to wander and with it, his heart. While your heart was focused on him, his head began to swivel a little more each day, as if he were possessed by a demon. The small abnormalities that seemed like a casual Tuesday night have now become a handful of red flags. His heart began to pull away while yours was still very much devoted to him because suddenly, you were not enough for him. The colors of your resplendent matrimony faded to muted colors, then grey, then... black. In a terrifying moment, you look into his once warm eyes and see nothing but the darkness inside him, a bone chilling moment that is the new reality.

III *Calamity vs. Résurrection*

At this point you have two choices. You can grieve for however long you feel is necessary, wipe away the tears, and pick yourself up off the floor. Or, you can let yourself stay in free fall, allowing yourself to be consumed by the darkness that is composed of the hate, anger, betrayal and pain he has given you. It is a dark gift, but you do not have to accept it. You can choose to get up, with a bloody and bruised soul, and clean yourself up, sweep up the ashes of your former life, because that part of you, the Mrs. homemaker/lover/friend/support system/devoted woman you were to him is now dead. She does not exist anymore, and you must rise again and recreate yourself. You cannot let him continue this hold over you; it would mean a certain death for you as a person. This is a war, and you have no choice but to be the victor. Failure would result in you

becoming an angry, bitter person with a bleeding heart that never heals. Such a retrograde in your character would be a dire misstep. I found the disaster presented to me as a challenge, a test in my character, but only after I could think straight, eat a meal, and sleep more than three or four hours a night. After all, a disaster of this magnitude affects every part of your being, inside and out.

The pain will seep from the inside out, from the core of your soul, the tips of your fingers, and you will feel as if you are dripping in grief and pain. I needed to realize that I was stronger than I knew. To suffer such a blatant, disastrous loss and survive, you must channel the tsunami of emotions into fuel. You are in the fire pit, and you can either allow yourself to be baptized by the fire or allow it to consume you and finish you off. It is crucial that you understand how *imperative* it is that your next steps are taken with great measure.

The divorce itself can get ugly. It is far too easy to strike back with as much underhandedness as he has dealt you, but to some degree you must realize that this will solve nothing. The question you must ask yourself is this: what is your end game? If you do something, what will it result in, and how will it *help* you, not hurt you? The feelings of this betrayal should be used as fuel for your bonfire of resurrection.

A divorce is a time for a woman to renew, rebuild, and be born again. It is a terrifying chapter, but it can end well, if you remember to take each step with care like a queen sorting out her battle plan. You are a great woman, and you must realize this quickly. There is too much ground to cover and too little time because he is not losing any sleep over you. He has left and is not coming back; he has moved on while you were still married. That night you were cooking him dinner and washing his clothes, he was dreaming about what his freedom would taste like. There were nights he would go out without you, and he would remove his wedding band, but you hated taking yours off to wash the dishes. You have got catching up to do, my lovely. I decided that my spine is made of steel because I had work to do and miles to go before I slept.

Lacey Thornhill

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Zach Walleser—Coveted Passions

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1st Place in Artwork

"Eden"



Alexa Chambley

3rd Place in Artwork

“Untitled”



Emily Sanders

Honorable Mention in Artwork

"Untitled"



“Untitled”

Jonathan Stanford



Jonathan Stanford

“Untitled”



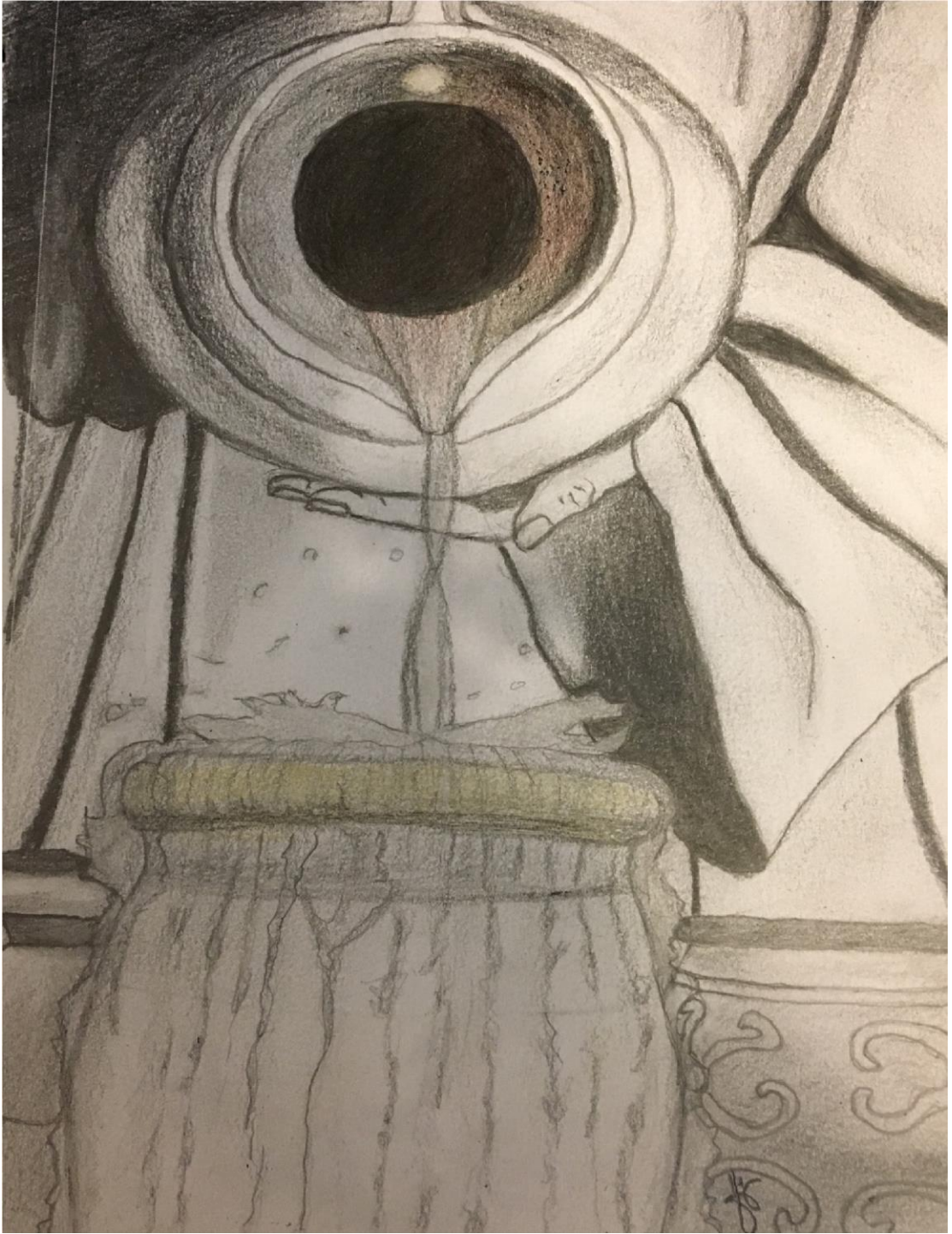
Jonathan Stanford

"Bennet the Sea Turtle"



Molly Leonards

“Untitled”



Fannietta Johnson



Charmaine Josephine Garin



Charmaine Josephine Garin



Romia Jamalledin



“Free Palestine”

Romia Jamalledin

“Crab”



Maddie Bordelon

“Clown Town”



Alexa Chambley

“Séance”



Alexa Chambley

“Making Contact”



“Static”



Alexa Chambley

“Untitled”



Maddison Floyd

“Alchematric Conduit”



Soul Breaker
Woman Maker.
Her Flaming Majesty,
Of multi-dimension
Seeking those
Who have sought ascension.
I was reborn
I am moonlit
A quenching Alchematric Conduit.
11:11

Chelsie Rachal

“Lo-Fi Dreaming 1”

“Lo-Fi Dreaming 2”



“Untitled”



“Untitled”



“Untitled”



Cortland Casto

“Since 1958”



“I Am Now Them”



Cortland Casto

