

Elektrophrog



Cover Image
“Lion Holding Birdcage #3”
By Emily Wright

Back Cover Image
Detail from “Lion Holding Birdcage #3”
By Emily Wright

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The Ocean

By Alannah Friedman

The five bodies of water on Earth,
She composes most of the planet's hydrosphere,
Yet we pollute her and slowly kill her.
We do not value her strength and importance,
nor will we until she is gone,
we know what we are doing is destructive,
and we know what we do is wrong.
She holds creatures of many kinds and gives them life,
she helps keep our planet hydrated,
but all we do is hurt her with our mighty knife.
Our ocean glimmers and dances in the sun's rays
a graceful seventy-one percent of our earth
she yearns to be cleaned or kept and weeps for a change.
Maybe one day our people will realize she is in mangle.
A cold, calm, and comforting beast
with waves and whirlpools to kill any man.
She is a mighty queen holding many of the world's best
kept secrets,
older than anyone around us she is.
Wise and full of wonder in the heart of her depths.
We ourselves would not want to be considered a dump or
means of waste,
so why is it that she is just an object, a source of tourism,
or a screensaver?

She is filled with a wide array of fish, mammals, malicious
monsters, and plants.

She has more historic artifacts in her belly than we do on
land and we know so little of her.

A mother, a habitat, a safe haven, guardian and friend,
It is our job to start being her protector till the end.



“Siesta Sunset” by Alannah Friedman

It Didn't Hurt When She Cheated on Me

By Globe Foster

To catch her in the act makes the situation awkward, fucking that scum-bag, Jake. I may sound like a gossip-mongering teenager, but this was no simple highschool fantasy. Had I been a few minutes earlier, I would've seen them having coffee. Had I been a few minutes later, and he would've already jumped out the window. But no, he was on top of her, mid-coitus, and hands around her neck. She had tears streaming down her face and a dumb expression plastered over her. There was a silence in the room that froze us in time, carrying a mixed wind of feelings through the air-conditioning that mixed with the thick odors. I decided that I was too angry for much else, and immediately kicked him off of my girlfriend at the waist. Once he tumbled into the dresser, I began throwing my fist into his face over and over. I don't know what I said, but it seemed like enough to keep him on the ground.

She screamed and pleaded with me, "stop, stop, you'll kill him!" But it wasn't enough to create a pause in my violence. My fist was so bloody that the punches which weren't hitting square on were sliding across his battered and stretched cheeks and creating indents in the wood floor beneath him. Then, my girlfriend finally found the strength in her to pull me away from him. She had crossed her arms over my chest and held me as tight as she possibly could against her chest, on the other side of the bedroom. I was shouting all manner of obscenities, he weakly climbed the messy bed-side and found solid ground to stand on. Seeing him made me even more ferocious than before, but we all knew that I wasn't getting out of my girlfriend's vise hold. He glanced at me before stumbling out of the bedroom and leaving the apartment. But no matter how much I fought, she wouldn't let me go. It wasn't long before my fury transformed, I was no longer attempting to break free so I could follow Jake and make him a stain on every piece of construction in the lot. I was crying like a baby in her arms.

Some hours after the bloody encounter, I still laid with my naked girlfriend on the cheaply carpeted bedroom floor. Now I was the one with tears streaming down my face. We didn't say a word to each other for a long time. And although the hold was comforting, it felt skeletal and cold. She carried a heavy guilt inside of her, with her dishonesty burrowing into my mind.

The next morning, she made breakfast for the both of us. I was happy enough to get some food inside of me after a long night, and we enjoyed our usual goofball conversation and bickering over the miniscule ideas. But soon after, the thoughts of the prior night would return to haunt the both of us. A quiet settled down on us, thinking over the events once more in our heads. Then, as we had always agreed, I broke the silence. "Why were you fucking Jake last night?" I asked.

She looked down at her empty plate. Even though she wanted to reason with me about the events that had unfolded, all she could do was profusely apologize. She tried her best to maintain her mature manner above all, even if it wasn't working out. I then took her hands down from her face and held them tightly, tenderly. I wasn't mad at her, or maybe I was, secretly, but most of all I just wanted to know why. I already knew why, actually, I just wanted to know what her thoughts were. Her lips tensed and her eyelids pressed hard against themselves. I knew she felt horrible about this, I felt horrible about this as well, but I knew this would come back to eat us, just not this way. "Can you please tell me? Whatever it is, I will not put blame on you."

She sucked in her mouth before taking a deep breath to speak. "I... I was just lonely." She said, adjusting herself to lean on the table. "When you're away on some fantastic meet, I'm here. I don't have anyone." Her swollen, leaking eyes avoided looking back at me, thinking she would see some kind of evil incarnate. But, once she realized I didn't want to hurt her, she made eye-contact.

"It's okay, I understand, I'm sorry." I said. She looked very confused by my unarmed state. Last night I was trying

to commit murder, and now I am sitting here as if I'm consoling her rather than scolding her.

"Why aren't you mad at me? You should be furious with me." She said, gesturing in confusion and wonder. She was right, I should have been furious with her. But for the time, I didn't dare raise anything to her, physically or verbally. It was that night that I saw her being controlled by a male much stronger than me, in almost every sense of the word. He could have easily tossed me out the window and down sixty feet, but he knew better than to strike the man who loved her for everything she was. It didn't hurt when I found her in bed with another man, it hurt when I found that I wasn't the kind of man she desired.

"You and I love each other very much, I think, but... It's not me that you *really* want, is it?" I said. She covered her face and sobbed quietly for what felt like an hour. After we were done grieving, I cancelled all of my plans for the day, and spent the day doing our favorite things. We watched monster and superhero movies and played video games as if nothing was wrong, but the evening sex was spoiled by poisonous thoughts that quietly killed the soft erotica. Though we still love each other very much, we came to a painful conclusion. We weren't soulmates. It hurts when you find out that your loving partner doesn't love you in the same way.

Whispering Lies

By Emily Raber

I had been trying all week to get them to leave. Or had it been longer? I couldn't be sure. They were there when I stumbled out of bed, tripping over piles of unwashed clothes. They were right next to me as I brushed my teeth, waiting for me to make a mistake. I tried to get them to stop knocking over my toiletries, but they seemed to always be just out of reach. I tried not to think about them when I was at work, but one grabbed my stapler and thrust it down on my arm. It actually hurt. How was I supposed to ignore this? They were making my life a living hell.

"James, we love you, you know that?" They would whisper in my ear, with voices sweet and silky. Their words were sometimes tender and loving but their actions were always malicious and cruel.

"We're only trying to help you James," they whispered.

I saw Lorrie on Wednesday, thinking maybe she could help me with my situation.

"James you're late for your appointment," Lorrie said when I arrived at her office, exactly 13 minutes late. This was unlike me. I figured she would notice. My life was always so organized, and I was always put together.

"I'm sorry Lorrie, traffic was a nightmare," I said. I was now lying to my therapist. To tell you the truth, they had tried to keep me in the apartment. One of them hid my keys and the others kept telling me not to go.

"You aren't crazy James," they said. "Please stay, let's have dinner together?" I almost stayed just so they wouldn't give me so much grief. I knew they would berate me if I stayed or went.

"James, how was your week?" Lorrie said, pulling me from my thoughts.

“I’m sorry Lorrie, I’ve just been feeling a bit under the weather,” I said. I had scheduled this appointment with her last minute and I felt like I should tell her about *them*. I had to tell someone, and if anyone would believe me it had to be my therapist. The only issue was that they seemed to be visible only to me. They looked like little devil pixies, but I couldn’t be too sure. They always moved so fast and liked to stay right at my ears. They could whisper their poisonous words better than that way.

“James, you’re cooking this all wrong, no wonder a girl has never stuck around. One bite of your cooking and she’d run far away,” they whispered one night while I was making my favorite pasta dish. Their words stung but the sickly laughter that came afterwards was stuck in my mind on a loop. I felt sick.

“James, sweetie, you should know how to separate your laundry correctly,” they whispered one Sunday afternoon, on laundry day. I had only listened to them up until this point, but I decided to stand up for myself in the moment.

“My mother taught me how to separate laundry correctly and I’ve never had a problem with my clothes before,” I said. Arguing with them only made them worse. I felt a buzzing next to my ear and a prickling on my shoulder. They whispered again, only this time louder and less sickly sweet.

“James your mother abandoned you, didn’t she? She left with her new husband and forgot about you completely? She never cared to teach you the right way,” they said. This wasn’t true. My mother had not abandoned me. She married my stepfather and then moved to Montana for the fresh air. Her calls were becoming fewer and fewer though. Had she abandoned me, and I just didn’t want to see it? No this was crazy. They had a way of getting in my head.

“So, tell me James, will you work on the techniques we’ve discussed for feeling less anxious?” Lorrie asked me. Our session was already over, and I hadn’t been paying attention.

“Of course, Lorrie, thank you so much,” I said. I couldn’t hear my own thoughts over the sound of their voices.

“James, you wanted to tell her about us, why didn’t you? You really need to grow a spine,” they said.

I entered the elevator and pushed the button to close the door. I imagined them being squished between the closing doors, never able to bother me again. I had already spent hours researching these *things*. The only explanations were that I was going through some sort of psychotic break, or that I was cursed while visiting temple ruins in Peru.

I tried asking them over and over, “Why me?” They only would tell me that they loved me. They were just trying to help me. I needed advice and they were the best ones who could give it to me. Were they actually right? I continued on home, feeling more defeated by the session with Lorrie.

“James, you should know that no one likes you when you look so gloomy,” they whispered in my ear.

I decided to call my mom, just to hear her voice. I thought about all of the stories she read to me as a child. Her voice was always so pleasant and soothing.

“You’ve reached the voicemail box of Jean Mattel,” came the voice from the receiver. My pulse quickened. Why wasn’t she answering? I had this gnawing feeling that maybe she had left me, like actually left me.

“We’re all you need, love,” they said. Their words soothed my every anxiety. I hadn’t noticed how kind they could really be. When did they start calling me love?

“Why don’t you take a rest love?” they said, coaxing me to the couch.

My apartment was getting filthier by the day. My once neat home was now covered in a layer of grime. Nice suit-coats were strewn across the floor, they said I hadn’t hung them up right. Dishes with mold growing on them lined the counters like some twelve-year-old’s science experiment. They couldn’t believe how badly I was washing the dishes, so I just stopped, I guess.

I couldn't even remember all of the things I used to do. I passed by the entryway mirror on my way to the couch. Who was the scraggly stranger with a beard looking back at me? I stopped shaving when one of them hid my razor. They loved to hide things. Their favorite thing to hide was pictures. I'm not sure where they were keeping them, but I was starting to forget who lived in the photos alongside me.

"That's it, take a rest, love," they whispered. I felt so relaxed, my body was melting into the couch. I was growing fond of their voices; they were always there for me. No one else seemed to care anymore. They were my only friends and they loved me. I didn't go to work the next day, or the day after that. I didn't need anyone else, I had *them*. I nestled into my usual corner of the couch; an indent was beginning to form to my shape. I loved it here. They did too.

I woke to the ringing of my phone. I hardly recognized the number. It was work, but I didn't want to talk to them.

"Stay, rest, relax, love," they whispered. It was like a soothing melody. I felt a pressure on my chest, they were holding me down. It felt nice but it was becoming hard to breathe. I glanced back at my phone and saw that I had a new voicemail. I was getting a bit lightheaded at this point.

"Shhh it's okay," they said. Their little sing-song voices were like a walk through a garden of roses. I reached for my phone and hit play on the voicemail.

"Hello James, this is Miranda with the office. We haven't heard from you in a while and you're out of sick days. I'm sending over the new secretary to check on you and get this situation figured out," the recording said.

James? I barely recognized the name. Who was coming over? I couldn't have guests, and I didn't want them. They were riled up now, the voicemail displeased them. The pressure on my chest was lifting as they began to swarm, like an angry hive of bees. I hated that they were upset.

“Please, loves, you know I don’t want to leave,” I said. I was trying to be reassuring but I didn’t recognize my own voice.

“You can’t leave us,” they said. They were even angrier now. I could feel their fury radiating around me. I heard a knock at the door and panicked. I jumped up off the couch, my legs wobbling a bit. I started towards the door, but they were quick, oh so quick. I couldn’t believe how fast they were. I felt the singing heat around my neck. They were wrapping around my throat so tightly.

“Stay with us love, do not answer the door,” they whispered. Their voices changed to an unholy octave and fear coursed through me. They loved me, didn’t they? I knew they did. I didn’t struggle, instead, I relaxed and let them tighten their grip. My vision was becoming blurry as they continued their insidious act. I listened to their whispers, their praises, how I was being so good. I faintly heard the doorknob turning and turned towards the direction. A fuzzy outline was walking towards me. The angel of death.

She reached towards my burning throat and started yanking. The pressure was lessening bit by bit. Suddenly my neck felt cold, the heat and pressure were absent. I blinked to clear my vision and there she was, the angel of death, swatting and squishing my sweet little loves. With a final “splat!” the whispers would be gone forever. She looked at me triumphantly through her golden rimmed specs. Her cropped hair and casual clothing made her a very funny looking angel of death.

“You know, you really need to call an exterminator the next time you get an infestation this bad,” she said.

I looked at her, bewildered.

“I’m Amy, by the way. The new secretary at the office? Miranda sent me to check on you. Looks like you had a bad case of the Lies,” she said.

My world was beginning to make sense again. I suddenly wanted to clean, and my beard was incredibly itchy. Oh god, I smelled so bad. Had I heard her correctly?

“Excuse me, did you say a bad case of the *Lies*?” I asked.

“Ah yes, I’ve had them a few times before, nasty little buggers huh?” she said.

She walked to the sink to rinse off any remaining Lie goop that was on her hands. I looked at their lifeless bodies on the floor. They were truly horrible looking creatures. I grabbed a broom and dustpan while Amy scrubbed her hands and I promptly swept them up and threw them in the garbage.

“They whisper all sorts of things, you know, nothing that’s true,” she said from the kitchen. “You’ll feel much better after a nice shower and a good meal.”

I was already feeling so much better, so much more like *me*.

“I didn’t think anyone else could see them,” I said.

“Not many people can. You’re pretty lucky it was me who stopped by,” she said. She walked towards me, then paused. “A lot of people don’t survive them,” she said.

I was happy to be a lucky one. I quickly showered and found a pair of clean clothes that had been hidden away. Underneath was a pile of picture frames, holding all of the people I loved in them. I gathered them in my arms and set them in the living room, happy to see their smiling faces. Amy took her lunch break with me at the diner around the corner. Oh, how I had missed this place. Oh, how I had missed life. I had never been so happy to be James.



“The Mysterious Stallion by Juliana Courville”

Dr. Frankenstein's Diary

By Lynn Kesten

After more than 200 years, we have found a remnant of the lost diary of Dr. Frankenstein. The recent discovery of this document has caused quite a stir. Some say it is a forgery, but I can only conclude that the vulnerability and horror conveyed in the following passage is too heart-wrenching to be a fake.

August 21st, 17—

As I feel my weak body jostled in the cabin of Dr. Walton's ship, I am beginning to grasp the fact that I may no longer take a breath outside of these four meager walls. Therefore, I see fit to make a starkly honest confession of the state of my soul, if only to my journal.

Somewhere out there, my creature is roaming the earth. I can only guess that his eminence will be the cause of my infamy, and I suppose there is no use hoping for the glory that his creation should have bestowed upon me. Anticipating falling in love with my reflection, as Narcissus who looked into the lake, my dreamy myth has turned into a nightmare. I cannot love this reflection, this hideous beast. My self-loathing stares me in the face as I ruminate on the astounding success and simultaneous morose failure of my life ambition. My soul is a churned cyclone of pride and shame.

All my life, I felt that my own body was not worthy of my mind. The container was unfit to house its genius. In response, I endeavored to construct a body that was perfect in every way. I would create where the Creator had failed. I found humanity to be unsuitable for me; I needed to invent something beyond the imperfect. This has been the devotion of my life. But, alas, my careful creation ended as a monster. Fragmented. Beautiful parts that do not fit together, forming something inorganic and thus repulsive. A representation of myself. I loathe my monster as I loathe myself, as if

I am looking in a mirror. We are inhuman, unworthy of intrinsic love, obsessed with recognition and driven to hatred when affirmation is denied.

My monster and I, our hideousness concedes the frivolity of conscience. If I am a beast, I am free from the bonds of humanity. I have bitterly turned off the duty to fellow man because of the license of genius. Nay, that is not the real reason. I have turned my heart to stone because this is the way I assuage the pain of my inability to love and be loved. This is how I avoid at all costs regarding my own humanity, trusting my own heart to be flesh. This why I have created evil; this is how I have become evil. I am a horror to myself. This is my confession.



“Lion Holding Birdcage #3” by Meghan Naumburg

Failure and Freedom

By Lynn Kesten

Before the finish line I have stumbled
Falling down, down into the darkness
Nails grasping at edges, bleeding, trying to hold on

I begin to come unraveled
My work of art disintegrating, disappearing
Lost to the tangled pile of thread laying at my feet

The feeling is resentment.
It is knowing you got in my way.
It is knowing I got in my way.

The feeling is regret.
It is sensing things could have turned out well.
It is sensing I could have turned out well.

The feeling is remorse.
It is acknowledging we were using the wrong map.
It is realizing I have been asking the wrong questions.

Is it too late?
Where do I go from here?
Listen closely and courageously.

Let yourself fall.

Let yourself start from scratch.

Let yourself trust Someone Else.

Let yourself breathe the fresh air of real life

Instead of the shameful fumes of the past

Or the suffocating gases of the future.

Don't be afraid; we have plenty of time

Because transformation has no end

And this grace is as infinite as the stars.



“Touch of Green” by Emily Wright

The Kingdom of Esperia

By Bradley Tibor

The first day.

The dust blew around them in the harsh winds, almost as if it intended to cut their skin.

The group settled their things in a low section of a sandy mound, shielding them from the wind and its hellish pains. As soon as they sat down, a soft lute could be heard for some distance resonating from their camp.

“Rose, could you perhaps play your music when someone wanted it? We need rest, not noise”, a voice cracked out from inside one of the tents.

“I cannot stay my hand from the strings for the same reason the tide cannot stop, it is our nature to do just that”. Spoke Rose forcefully and with a elegant canter.

Rose was sitting on top of their boxes of supplies, playing her hand crafted lute while seemingly in a higher place of thought with how she moved her hands and head to the music.

“If you wish Macchiato, I could perhaps play you a tune that I once performed in the court of Esperia. Would this interest you my dear friend?”

“I want to focus on my studies, not parlay with you over your music Rose. If I do not study the mountain range ahead, we may never reach the Duke before the war party reaches him.” Macchiato spoke exiting his tent, scroll in one hand and wine in the other. As the group’s scholar on worldly and other worldly affairs, Macchiato carried a high respect within the group, especially with their leader for without him they would be lost. He sighed heavily as he took his seat next to rose’s feet, who was still strumming along unwavering. Rose looked down with almost pity in her eyes

towards him and smiled softly as she put down her instrument. She then pulled out her dagger and began to sharpen it with a rock, perfecting the blade.

“Why do you do such unpleasantries? We cannot solve these problems with force, only with reason and diplomacy Rose. You should take note of this next time we enter a court.” Macchiato spoke towards Rose with almost disgust, as if talking down to a rabid dog who you pity but still want to leave your presence.

“My Lord instructs me to kill, and you to speak. It will remain that simple”, Rose snapped back.

They both, as if reading each other’s thoughts, turned towards their leader behind them.

A tall man with short roughly cut dirty sandy hair, and a full beard but cut as if it was ripped out with force. He was the leader of this rag tag group, who they both believed to be the rightful lord of the land of Esperia. There was some merit to these thoughts, for his father was the previous King, but the son was forced to go into hiding following his father’s assassination at the hands of the current king, his house guard captain. The betrayal shocked not only him, and not only his friends, but the kingdom as a whole which soon was plunged into civil strife and revolts against this tyrannical rule. During his exile from the throne, he has forsaken his name, casting it into the dirt where his father now lay. He turned to them and spoke softly but with a deep lingering sorrow behind every word.

“Rose, a prayer for the journey ahead please”.

“As you wish my lord.” Rose stood up from her seat on the crate, and began to pray, but there was no comfort in her words, only fear and darkness.

“We praise thee, Itara lord of the raven and creator of darkness. May you guide thine arrow into thine heart and knock down those who oppose our path. May you bless thine staff so that it casts fire upon and burns those who oppose our path. May you sharpen thine blade and cut the throat of

those who lie and oppose our path, Amen.” Rose sat into her seat once more, picked up the lute, and began to hum a sad tone while she strums her lute.

“I wanted a prayer not a demon summoning. But perhaps you know not the difference.” Their lord shook his head in disbelief.

“You asked not what I pray, only that I do so. Our gods may not be the same, but mine carry purpose” Rose spoke softly in response.

“I am sure he meant that Rose, now please stop playing so we can rest” Macchiato snapped back, again as if talking down to a dog. The group settled down for the evening, laying down their bodies into their tents and resting until dawn arose.

The First night.

As darkness covered their camp with a cold breeze, Rose awoke to a whisper in her ear and quickly turned to see the source. Before her stood a shadow of a figure, almost as if the being was smoke drifting around only to reform itself again and again. Rose grabbed her lit torch in her tent and thrust it towards the smokey figure causing it to dissipate into the air once more, returning to the wind as quickly as it came. Rose sighed as it vanished, grabbing her bow and quiver and her hooded robe. She knew what the figure was and what the figure wanted; thus, she was compelled to answer its order. She silently left the camp and walked east until she came upon a small town. How long she walked or how far she did not know, for it did not matter to her. A town sentinel patrolling the edge of the town approached her area albeit unknowing she was there. An arrow struck his heart and he crumbled to the ground with a soft but forceful thud, the breath leaving his lungs a final time as he tried to call. No noise was made, and she continued into the town. The house on the edge nearest to her was lit, she entered through the back door. Inside the family hall was a family of five; a mother and father, and three children ranging from

what she believed to be 10 to 16. She silently drew her bow from the corner shadow and let loose an arrow that pierced through the mother's neck. She fell to the ground grasping at her neck and gasping for air. The father rose to face the direction of the arrow, but it was pointless, Rose was upon him with a dagger in a matter of moments. She then dispatched the two youngest children the same way, with her cruel and almost twisted dagger made of glass. The oldest child, a male of fair skin boy of 16, was spared.

"Who are you?" The boy cried out. "Why have you taken my family from me and left me to suffer? Have I wronged you? Has my father indebted himself to you? Please speak to me and explain your actions!". He continued to cry out, bloodied tears streaming down his face and he grasped his father's body.

But she left no reply, simply returning the bow to her back and dagger to its strap and left the way she came. Back in the sands she could hear the boys' cries as the village began to wake and guards ran towards the house in number. She had no thoughts, her golden eyes glazed over as if she was immune to feeling the boys' pain. She walked back to camp, only to see her lord standing above her tent, facing her with red in his eyes. He grabbed her hooded robe and removed her face covering, grasping her neck, blood still dripping from her hands as she placed it upon his.

"My lord, you grab me with anger and sorrow. Why is this?" She spoke softly and without emotion.

"You leave unannounced and return in your gear coated in blood that is not your own. What innocent life have you claimed in the name of your false god?" He shouted at her. Waking Macchiato from his slumber who was startled at the sight.

"By the father what has happened!" He shouted, grabbing his staff of fire and pointing it towards her.

"I do as the lord commands Macchiato. His rule shall be just and free of strife from his own hand. But blood must be

spilled, and blood will be spilled by my hand and mine alone in his holy name". She spoke, again cold and without even the slightest flinch in her eyes or face. "Please release me lord and allow me to return to my slumber, the hunt is over. Let the dead rest and let their killer rest with them".

He shook his head, carrying the same justly pity as before and threw her towards her tent. She rose from the dust and walked inside, closing it behind her to the audible sound of arrows and daggers being dropped as she readied herself for bed once more.

"Macchiato, you must forgive me waking you. Please concern yourself not with this, but with your studies and the map to our location. Rest assured I will deal with this".

"Of course, you may not even ask. I shall forget what I saw and forget what I smelt upon her flesh".

"No, you mustn't ever forget. These are the things needed to make those who wronged us pay. I am unwilling to kill as it only begets more killing. But there are some drawn to its scent almost as if they are dogs on the hunt. They cannot turn away even if they screamed inside to do so. Now please rest and let us move forward tomorrow".

Macchiato did not need to respond. He bowed and returned to his tent extinguishing his staff of fire. However, his lord did not return to his tent, but comminuted to ponder and stare into the distance of town. Bells ringing so far away yet he heard them as if they were near. He thought to himself not what must be done to correct such wrong, but when it would be best to do so. He sighed a deep sigh and returned to his tent. Laying down he thought about his former friends warning to him, and now realized what he meant.

To be continued....

The Black Sheep

By Hailey Hott

She took comfort in shelter,
From her nomadic existence.
She wanted real love in her life,
A little girl with big blue eyes.
But the shelter she created for them,
Fell apart and they were on the run.
The little girl also became a nomad,
For a few years at least in different homes.
With her mother by her side,
She was introduced to him.
He took them in and created abundance,
From then on out her mother would say,
“Blood is not love.”
She still felt incomplete even with her new family.
Sometimes they still felt like nomads,
Separate from the happiness in front of them.
The little girl started to grow up,
And when she cried her mother would just stare.
Blank eyes almost as she was disconnected from reality.
The little girl found herself trusting everyone,
As she believed in possibility,
They would leave so she blamed herself.
A new pattern of disappointment emerged,
She became numb to the world,

Looking over her shoulder so confused.
What more could she do?
The little girl now a woman,
Feeling strange about the meaning of love.
Her mother's relationship faded in the end,
Was it ever genuine?
Her mother made her angry for so long.
She did not see her, hear her, was she there?
Now a woman she sees her mother,
In a new light- resilience.
She loved her the only ways she knew how.
Still feeling the years of strained communication,
The little girl is still so confused.
Is she a black sheep too?

Much To His Chagrin

By Emilia Kelly

His eyes widened in horror as the letter opener was shoved into his chest, the pain in his ribs sharp and searing. His attacker had no remorse or pity in her eyes. If anything, she looked like she wanted to stab him again. The look of pure hatred on her face almost hurt him more than the stab wound she had inflicted upon him.

“No!” he shouted, his blood-covered hands shaking in fear. He staggered backwards, knocking into a chair and almost tripping over it in his terror. “No!”

She shouted something back at him, but he couldn't hear anything that she said over the hammering of his own heartbeat, though he didn't need to hear her words to know that she was cursing him. He fell towards her, begging for her to have mercy on him and save him. He was dying at her feet, and yet she looked upon him with nothing but hatred and disgust . . . and perhaps he deserved it. Perhaps he deserved it when she stabbed him again, and he crumpled to the floor, the world going dark around him.

That was the third time that Scarpia had been murdered by Tosca this week. While the chief of the secret police would never see the light of day again, Cesare Arcuri the opera singer got up with ease and bowed to the applauding audience, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. Nothing felt as good as a performance well done, even if it was a concert performed for the infamous Duke Anatole Massenet and his guests. As Cesare and the other opera singer stepped off the stage set up in the ballroom of the duke's estate, the soft sounds of conversation and clinking wine glasses started up once more. There was no denying that the scene was one of elegance, the grandly decorated ballroom full of music and every luxury imaginable, but the only feeling Cesare felt toward it was a great desire to get away, especially because he knew Duke Massenet was there. As he had been personally invited by the duke, he knew that he

unfortunately had to stay a while longer. Not out of any respect for the man, but out of politeness. He didn't wish to appear rude, even to a man he could not stand.

"Cesare!" a voice said behind him, and the dark-haired man turned to see Duke Massenet himself approaching, a glass of wine in each hand. Speak of the devil. He handed one glass of wine to Cesare upon drawing near to him. "That was fantastic!"

"Thank you, sir," Cesare said with a polite nod, his expression as serious as always. The duke beamed at him. Duke Massenet was a several years younger than Cesare, about twenty-five years of age while Cesare was thirty-two, and a very handsome young man, with wavy blonde hair and impeccable taste in fine suits. One wouldn't expect by looking at him that he was virtually single-handedly running the town into the ground by spending the townspeople's tax money on whatever frivolity took his fancy. Or perhaps one would expect it. That was a very nice suit he was wearing.

"Have you seen my new statue in the courtyard?" Duke Massenet said. It took a moment for Cesare to realize that he had been asked a question. He had previously been tuning out the duke's nonstop talking.

"Yes, it's wonderful," Cesare said, his voice deadpan. Whether it really was wonderful or not, he didn't know. There were so many statues of the duke in the courtyard that he had no idea which one Duke Massenet was talking about. How the duke could be so narcissistic, Cesare had no idea, and he didn't really care, either. All he cared about was getting out of there as fast as possible and away from the aggravating duke. He would do nearly anything to get out of the duke's company.

"Right?" the duke said. "It's probably my favorite statue yet!"

Before Cesare could reply, another partygoer approached and began to make conversation with the duke, much to the opera singer's relief. As discreetly as he could, he sneaked away to enjoy his drink. While he made his way through the crowd, he caught wind of snatches of strange whispers.

“It’s happening tonight,” one woman said to her friend, “and he has no idea.”

“Good riddance,” Cesare heard a man say in a low tone. “It’s about time.”

“Is everyone prepared? It should begin any moment now.”

“As soon as-” Cesare heard no more of the whispers because at that moment, a man’s voice came bellowing from across the ballroom. Everyone in the room turned their heads at once towards the sound.

“Duke Anatole Massenet!” A man stood on top of one of the many tables scattered about the room, and he held a torch in one hand - a torch that looked like it had been ripped from the wall in the hallway outside the ballroom. “The people of this town have had enough of your rule! You live like a king on *our* money while you let our town fall apart! Inviting us to your balls just to flaunt that is an insult!” A roar of agreement surged through the crowd, and Cesare couldn’t help but get caught up in it. The man’s words rang true, and the air crackled with the energy of the crowd.

“W-what?” Duke Massenet said, his voice high and scared. “But I-”

“We don’t want you here!” a woman said as chaos erupted in the ballroom. More people had armed themselves with torches and were charging at the duke who stood stock still, looking confused and terrified, before turning and bolting out of the ballroom.

“Don’t let him get away!” someone said, and Cesare found himself running along with the crowd. Their fierce energy was infectious. Where he previously felt boredom and annoyance, Cesare now felt rage burning deep in his core. The duke had wronged them so many times. He deserved this, and Cesare wanted to be the one to kill him. Politeness be damned. He finally had an excuse to no longer be forced to deal with the duke.

Cesare finally found the duke. While the rest of the townspeople searched the estate for Duke Massenet, who had seemingly disappeared into thin air, Cesare had decided

to look around the estate's gardens. Coming across a small cottage belonging to the gardener, he entered it and found the young duke hiding under the kitchen table.

"Cesare!" Duke Massenet said upon seeing the opera singer in the doorway. He jumped up, nearly banging his head on the underside of the table in the process. "Thank goodness you're here. You have to help me!" Cesare stepped closer and saw the hopeful expression on the duke's face change almost immediately to one of fear as he noticed the torch in his hand. The duke scurried backwards and bumped into the table, wildly looking about for a way to escape.

"Please don't do this," he said in a small, quiet voice. Cesare let out a laugh.

"After all you've done, I have every right to burn you alive."

"I . . . I don't know what you're talking about!" Duke Massenet said, his voice becoming high-pitched with fear. "Really, I don't! I'm really sorry if I've offended you in some way, but I really don't understand! What have I done to you?" It was those words that stopped Cesare in his tracks and doused the flame of anger in his soul. It was those words that made him realize that the duke had never been anything but friendly toward him. A bit annoying too, yes, but the duke had always been kind to him. And it was the terrified look in the duke's eyes that made Cesare realize that he was about to kill a young man hardly out of boyhood for his childish mistakes. A flame of shame now burned where the rage had been put out, and Cesare felt his torch slip from his fingers and fall to the floor. The duke yelped and hurriedly stamped it out before it could do any damage.

"Go," Cesare said, his voice void of any emotion. He had always been a rather stoic person, but now the tonelessness came from the growing shame in his heart. "Go, and don't let them find you!" Duke Massenet only nodded in response before turning and running from the cottage. Cesare fell to his knees on the floor, overcome with shame. He couldn't kill that man. He simply couldn't, no matter how much the duke had annoyed him. The fact that he had let himself get

caught up in that angry mob and had almost done something terrible because of it was something he would never forgive himself for.



“Cooper Portrait” by Meghan Naumburg

Anthony's Moment

By Lynn Kesten

The thin line between love and hate was something he had read about in books, something he had seen in outdated movies, something that happened to crazy people. But, recently, Anthony had encountered that line for himself. Now he sat in the quiet school auditorium, waiting, and remembering.

It had happened two months ago. It was a Friday night and the last football game of the season. Anthony absent-mindedly put on his uniform. All the other guys had been getting hyped for the biggest game of the year, but his mind had been somewhere else. The team ran out on the field excitedly and started the stretching routine. Anthony's eyes wandered up to the stands. Erin was there, as usual. But this time she was not here to cheer him on. Last night, after two years, she had ended their relationship.

Reaching down to his ankles, he felt physically ill and tried to focus on his coach. He joined the team in the army-style chants, marking the seconds of every stretch. Marking the seconds of his life going by. Anthony was good at football. Everyone had always assumed it was his "thing," the thing that got him up in the morning, the thing that made him tick. He did love the physical activity, but he had never really loved the sport. The efforts left him with an empty feeling, like he was giving up a lot and not getting much satisfaction in return. He wanted to have the time to pursue other interests that would bring him more meaning.

When he had told this to Erin at the end of his freshman season, she had gotten upset. "What?" she had sputtered. "The whole team depends on you!"

Looking back, Anthony knew the real reason she had wanted him to keep playing. It was a status symbol for her. And, it had become something that he did for her, not for himself, not because he enjoyed it. He did it so that she wouldn't be disappointed in him for quitting. And in those moments when he knew she was proud of him, there was

satisfaction in the feeling that he was becoming the man she wanted him to be.

All this had fallen apart that night. Robotically going through the motions of the game, he had caught a few passes and dropped a few. Now it was time for him to really come through for his team. They needed a score to win, and the pressure was on. Paulo, his quarterback, called the play and the ball was snapped. As he was running his route, Erin caught his eye. He lost his focus and his thoughts wandered. *How could she? Doesn't she know she owes me?* He became disoriented by his thoughts and his anger. The ball came zooming towards him. He reached out his hands, but it was too late. The ball slipped through his fingers. He had let down his team.

Paulo, seeing something wasn't right with his teammate, came running up to Anthony. "Hey, man, what happened?"

Something snapped in Anthony. It wasn't fair. This wasn't right. His emotions welled up in him, he tightened his fist, and before he had time to think, he had punched his friend and team leader in the face. Paulo had not been expecting it, and it knocked him off his feet. Anthony could see the blood dripping down Paulo's chin. That blood and the stunned look on Paulo's face had been his wake-up call.

Part of his discipline for this incident had been a mandatory meeting with Mr. White, the school counselor. Toward the end of their conversation, Anthony had been unable to hold back the tears. "I don't understand," he said. "My love for Erin was so strong. How could it so quickly turn into hate? How could my anger be so strong that I was out of control like that? I didn't see that coming."

That meeting had turned into a weekly appointment, and in the counselor's office, he could be open about his thoughts and feelings. Anthony discovered that Erin had not been the only one to love selfishly. His love for Erin had really been about getting her approval, not about really loving her for who she was. They had both been trapped in a cycle of getting what they needed through the other person. The moment that had been taken away from Anthony, his love had

soured into hatred. As he realized this, Anthony committed to blazing a new path for his life. He would not waste this hard lesson.

Now, sitting in the dank school auditorium, Anthony thought back on that night with gratitude. It had become the worst but most important day of his life. He glanced down at the packet in front of him. It was almost his turn to audition. Scared but excited, he was thrilled to be doing something he had always wanted to do. Instead of living life for someone else's approval, he was learning about his own aspirations and about expressing himself in new ways. Anthony let out a deep breath. Today he was grateful for second chances.

Shoelaces

By Emily Wright

“Just let me tie my shoes!” Emma said. This was the final task that she had to complete before she could start the run. “It’s just 3.1 miles today, right?” Emma asked.

“Just 3.1 miles,” Riley replied. They had run this distance many times before so it was not going to be overly difficult. This run was simply to help prepare them for their upcoming race on Saturday. Neither of them had ever won medals at a competition, so every training run mattered.

“Okay, I’m ready!” Emma said. And with that, their feet hit the trail running.

“Don’t start off too fast,” Riley said. Emma nodded and slowed her pace slightly. She often began running much faster than she should because she loved the instant rush of wind against her face. However, both of them knew that running too fast meant they would tire out too quickly and would not be able to finish the run.

“Do you remember back in 8th grade when I started sprinting and ended up tripping and falling straight into the cute guy in our math class?” Emma said.

“How could I forget that? You guys ended up dating for three months afterward.” Riley said.

“Right. He was so sweet but his mom was insane.” Emma said.

“Was she the one who tried to make you eat raw eggs?” Riley said.

“Yep, that’s the one,” Emma said. “Raw eggs were just the start. She asked me to eat her ‘special cheese sauce’ but didn’t tell me that it was made from casu marzu. And don’t forget the yogurt-flavored Pepsi.”

“Disgusting!” Riley said. Just the idea of those foods made her stomach turn. However, they both kept running.

“Wait! I have to stop real quick,” Emma said.

“Why? We just started?” Riley said.

“My shoe is untied. Give me just a second.” Emma said. Both of the girls slowed their pace until Emma came to a

complete stop. Riley continued jogging in place in order to keep her heart rate up. Emma tied her shoe, stood up, and motioned to Riley that she was good to go.

As they continued running, their smartwatches chimed with a notification letting them know they were approaching the one-mile marker of their run. "One mile done already?" Riley asked. "That went by so fast. We are a third of the way done."

"Yes! We are crushing this!" Emma said. "But I have something to tell you."

"What is it?" Riley asked.

"I have to tie my stupid shoe again," Emma said.

"Seriously?" Riley asked. "Didn't you just do that a little while ago?"

"Yes. For some reason though these shoes come untied all the time!" Emma said. The girls slowed down and Emma tied her shoe. This time she made sure the knot was as tight as she could make it. Then, she got up and they took off again.

They passed the one-mile marker and were nearing their least favorite part of the trail: the mountain pass. This part of the trail was so narrow that only one vehicle and a single person could fit on it side-by-side at the same time. There were no guardrails and the only thing preventing any cars or the runners from tumbling 4,000 feet over the edge of the cliff to their death is their own caution and common sense.

Having run the trail many times, the girls knew exactly where to run to stay safe from any oncoming cars as well as limit the risk of slipping and falling off accidentally. Still, as they approached the mountain pass, their nerves rose.

"Are you ready?" Riley asked.

"Born ready," Emma said. They both chuckled nervously and slowed their pace to accommodate the rising elevation of the pass. They were used to the thin air since they had lived in the Big Skye Country their entire lives. Yet, they always slowed down on for the mountain pass.

The girls could not hear the sound of any cars coming from either direction. Once during a prior run, the girls

came across two cars traveling through the pass at the same time. However, the cars were traveling in opposite directions. In order to help the two drivers safely navigate the treacherous pass, Riley and Emma decided to hop into the drivers' seats of each vehicle and carefully maneuvered the cars. No one was hurt in the process and the girls went on forever grateful that they were there at the perfect time to help.

Unfortunately, their timing was not so lucky today. Emma said, "I hate to tell you this, but my shoe is untied."

"Not now," Riley said. "We've got to keep going."

"I have to!" Emma said. "If I don't stop now, I could trip on our way down."

Riley grunted and slowed her pace to a gradual stop. "Make it quick," she said.

"I will," Emma replied. She kneeled down onto the cold, rough ground and tied her shoe faster than she ever had before. This was not the time or place to be doing this, she thought to herself. However, the risk of leaving it untied was just as dangerous as stopping to tie it. "There," Emma said, "I'm good now."

"Let's go," Riley said. Right at that moment, a horn blared at the girls as a driver sped past them.

"Slow down!" Emma said at the top of her voice. She turned to Riley and they both took a deep breath. Then, they started running again at a much slower pace than before. They remained silent throughout the rest of the run down the mountain pass. The girls both wondered if that driver successfully made it through the rest of the pass or if he had flown off the edge into the trees far below.

Suddenly, like a church bell ringing on a Sunday afternoon, their smartwatches chimed, "two miles completed." Although both girls were happy to have completed this much of the run, they were more relieved to finally be out of the mountain pass.

"Are you okay?" Emma asked.

"I'm fine," Riley said.

“When you say you’re fine, I know you aren’t really fine. What’s wrong?” Emma said.

“Nothing,” Riley replied.

“Don’t lie to me,” Emma said.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Riley said. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Seriously?” Emma said. “Do you even remember who you’re talking to? I’m your best friend.”

Riley sighed and gave a little shrug. Emma stopped running. Immediately Riley noticed. “Fine,” Riley said. “I’ve been wanting to talk to you about something.”

“Okay, give me just a second to tie my shoe,” Emma said.

“Are you joking?” Riley said, visibly annoyed.

“No,” Emma said.

“Double-knot it,” Riley said.

Emma looked up and saw the look of aggravation on Riley’s face. Quickly, she replied, “Okay.” Once tied, she stood up and said, “what is it you want to talk about?”

Riley closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and said, “I don’t know how to tell you this.”

“What is it?” Emma said.

“I didn’t want it to happen here or now, but that driver on the mountain pass just reminded me that life is short,” Riley said.

“Dude. Say it. What is this all about?” Emma said.

“I started dating your brother,” Riley said.

Emma stopped. Riley turned around and saw her best friend’s eyes widen as they both stared at each other. To avoid complete emotional chaos, Riley said, “It doesn’t matter. Let’s just finish this run.”

Emma didn’t move. Riley stepped closer to Emma and said, “Did you hear me? Let’s go.” Without hesitation, Emma slapped Riley’s face with as much strength as she could muster. Stunned and in immense pain, Riley stepped backward.

Emma, tears in her eyes, took off running faster than she had run up to that point. Riley took off after her, trying to catch up. Emma had always been able to run faster than

Riley, but Riley knew that Emma would tire out quickly at her current pace.

As the girls approached the 3-mile marker, Emma finally slowed down to a near walking pace. Riley quickly caught up to her but Emma refused to look her way.

“Look, you can be mad that I love your brother,” Riley said, “but that doesn’t mean you should throw away our entire friendship over it. I mean, come on. All that we have been through together and this is what breaks your precious heart?” Emma continued walking- looking straight ahead.

Riley scoured her mind for anything she could say to get Emma’s attention. Finally, it came to her. “Remember what happened when I let you borrow my red shoes back in eighth grade? You took them off and someone at the dance took them. It just happened, even though no one expected it to. Well, I feel like falling in love with your brother just happened too. I didn’t expect it, but that doesn’t mean that it is bad. I forgave you for losing my red shoes, so can’t you find it in yourself to forgive me for this?”

Emma thought to herself about all of the good times that she had with Riley. She remembered how Riley had been there throughout the hardest times in her life and the best times. Through thick or thin, Riley was there. Why would she let a boy get in between the beautifully-crafted friendship that they had?

“Okay,” Emma said.

“Okay?” Riley asked.

“Just don’t make out with him when I’m around. Okay?” Emma said.

Beaming, Riley said, “You’ve got it.” Looking down, Riley started to laugh.

“What’s so funny?” Emma said.

“My shoes are untied,” Riley replied.

Emma laughed as she turned around to look at her best friend. Then, in the blink of an eye, as she ran down the side of the road towards her favorite childhood restaurant. a red truck came rushing toward her. Before she had time to think, the truck crashed into her from the side sending her

body flying into the metal guardrails. Instantly, six of her ribs cracked and punctured her lungs. Her last moments were filled with the screams of her best friend that slowly turned into laughter and the blurry sight of a dented, rusty red truck that she recognized from somewhere. It was her brother's.

As realization spread over Emma like her blood over the ground she laid helplessly on, it was clear that she was never supposed to make it through this run. Her best friend's maniacal laughter in the distance suggested that Riley had planned for the truck to hit her on the mountain pass but that plan had failed because of her untied shoelaces. Instead, Riley waited until she slowed down near the end of the run to talk to her.

The one detail Emma questioned most at that moment was why Riley said her shoes were untied. She always ran in her custom-made slip-on sneakers. Emma knew that.

The answer was simple and terrible all at the same time: Riley wanted to see Emma get hit.

Emma's final thought was of the big oak tree that sat outside of her bedroom window as a child. She loved how strong the tree was no matter what conditions it faced. Over the years she recalled seeing an odd sort of vine growing up the tree until it finally grew so large that it engulfed the tree itself. By that time, the vine was both stealing the precious sunlight from the oak tree and soaking in nutrients from the ground. The oak tree began to fade into existence as its leaves simply stopped growing back until, one day, it was finally dead. Emma too faded knowing only then that even the strongest can be destroyed by a determined weed.

Unmasked

By Lynn Kesten

Don't believe what I told you
When I said I am what I do

Don't believe the lie that
My gift is what gives me value

Let's stop playing pantomime
And competing over who has a better mask

Let's stop playing the game
Where you and I say we're fine

Let's give up the crazy-making competition
And come let us reason together

Let's give up this unreasonable act of worship
And offer up our human bodies and souls

Forgive me for telling you the lies
Forgive me for believing yours

Have courage with me as we unmask
Revealing the image of God

Chernobyl

By Emilia Kelly

On the twenty-sixth of April,
nineteen eighty-six,
the quiet of the early morning hours
bursts into flames.
Lights flash and sirens scream a warning,
while the overseer swears
that this was none of his doing.
Now Reactor 4 lies in shambles,
and the air reeks of rancid radiation.
Wave goodbye to Pripyat
as you pack up and leave,
but they all know that
it's already too late for you.
The raining ash has already burnt
deep into your core,
and a faceless hazmat suit
will be what bids you farewell.
It's their staggering incompetence
that lead to all this;
they fed you lies
and closed their own eyes to the truth.
Now the very earth dies
and you shoot all wildlife that survived
for fear of the monstrosities
that house pets might become.



“Golden Trim” by Emily Wright

My Flowers

By Emily Wright

My eyes are a labored meadow.

Fields of bright blue tulips shine brighter when dampened
by rain from my tear ducts.

Those tears fall and slip down my baby breath-white skin.

Eventually, they fall far enough to reach my peony-pink
lips.

I muster a rosy smile
but I taste salt, not rain.

My body is a fragile flower pot.

Marigold hair that fades
to dandelion yellow near the ends,

Cracks in my shell reveal far more than sunflowers.

Poppys flow and show that

I have already been broken and glued back together before.

Even so, my heart is a floral shop.

Rows of crimson carnations and
picturesque pink dahlias wait
patiently to be given to
the next paying customer,
praying that this one is the last.

From tulips to sunflowers and carnations too,
if you want to see me blossom and bloom
then you must water them all.

I am not a bouquet that you can buy and
then cut the flowers out of that you don't like.

And if you dare try to touch me now then I'll punch you,
and watch you bleed poinsettias.

The Basement Stairwell

By Abrielle Mannino

The stairwell to the basement was dark.
It took four steps down to reach the light
and each step creaked with my weight.

I imagined monsters coming to hurt me
making the noises behind me.
I hated that basement.

Bill and Nikki were fighting more;
sometimes about doing the dishes,
or maybe about my scribbles on the couch.

Their shouts echoed everywhere through the house
and they never really left, as though the walls
whispered the hatred in their absence.

I'd taken up painting recently
splotching color onto the blank canvas
not a real one of course, but I pretended.

I noticed if you mix the wrong colors,
even if the colors are pretty on their own, it
turns that ugly gray that makes you feel sick.

People are like colors; my parents are
those colors. My colors turns the canvas
to pitch black.

The mean kids are back from suspension again
Between Nikki and Bill's fights about chores they
fought about the bruises on my arms when I came home.

I hated that basement
But came to appreciate how the mean
kids couldn't find me down there.

The sound of my parent's fighting never seemed to
carry down that far. I hated that basement,
but learned how to turn on the light.

Passing Seconds

By Emma R Paliotta

The little things we tell ourselves about our pasts stay
there

rising slightly and just out of reach

like the wave so-long from a departing sailboat

the rupture of a now invisible bubble

the elegant withering of asphodel petals

or even the melting of ice.

although time seems ample

before you know it ice parts like a zipper

eventually becoming a mosaic of a million separated pieces.

Time cannot captivate.

The gloom sets in once you realize you can never get those
seconds back

I sit there in front of the mirror

stuck in a coma

only to eventually tell myself

the ivory sheep have already hopped the fence

the long silky brunette locks have already been chopped

those seconds have passed

there are none to retrieve

the sailboat has already left the marine

Ghosts

By: RyLee Nakamura

When a star becomes a ghost
of its former self, it burns
bright and blue, before exploding in
silence or fading into the night.

The ghosts of former selves exist all around,
Drifting, floating,
Tinkling and clanking
into one another like
The shattered, sloshing edges
of an ice floe.

Like the chunks of white ice, a
puzzle pattern, loosely assembled,
a patchwork unraveling at
the seams,
bumping along, scratching at,
the sides of the ships
who pass through it.

Who glide, or soar,
Or trudge, or break
Through the old sea ice.

The crinkled, black shirt hanging
in the back of your closet,
given to you by someone you
no longer speak to,
emblazoned with the crest
of a band you no longer
hear.

The notebook pages which doubled as parchment
for the letters exchanged, signed, sincerely,
With a name you'd once considered
Getting tattooed on your left arm,
Now resting atop the pile in your
Recycling bin.

The conversations that begin and
End with "Hi", when they used to
Last for hours.

The two strangers with nothing but
The past in common who ask,
"When did we grow apart?"

All clinking together through an
inky black night. Drifting against,
clawing at, the bows of ships,
the legs of men, of women,
of child, who aimlessly
drift
past them.



“Cut Out Rose on Cardboard” by Solomiya Romarniuk

Wicked Alchemy

By Emily Raber

Hypnotized by your words that dripped with flowery perfume, your intoxicating accent.

There was never a moment between the sun and the stars that was broken.

Through the forest with bare feet and vines embracing, I wanted to be found.

The earth hummed its melodic love song, no debts were owed.

Drunk on your call and blind to the forces of night, I sat still.

The apparition of my affection took form, by some miracle, but time still passed.

Tulips sprouted with spring while the clock was groaning, but there was no deciphering what had passed.

I was lost again, in the constellations of your freckles, nature's accent.

Those self-proclaimed Mediterranean eyes watched me with an expression so steady, so hungry, so still.

You warned me about the teeth lurking in the vines because I was fragile enough to break.

Incubated in the glow of your presence and protection, I understood what I owed.

With bare feet and a melancholic weight, I heard the sun whisper its warning, don't be found.

Chased by a trail of trampled brush and withering blooms,
my tracks were easily found.

Bloody feet and lighting veins led me to the mighty ledge,
there was no passing.

Trapped between the hunter and the silent space below, I
was forced to repay what I owed.

Coaxed away from the ledge and back through the decay, I
followed your sickly accent,

The whimsically binding spell between the sun and the
moon had broken.

I saw you for the wicked alchemist that you truly were, the
earth's melody went still.

Blinded by the dance between horizons, I couldn't sense
what lay below, so silent and so still

Eyes as black as night held me imprisoned, suffocating me,
could help not be found?

The teeth in the vines you swore would hurt, but you ne-
glected to see by your hand I was broke.

Hollow shells and empty caves, hives without their queens
and earth without rain, would this pass?

Poisoned by empty promises and your wicked lies, I lay
with the worms and soil, death's accent

You took blood until it ran out, demanding what your mis-
erable skull thought I owed.

Night was my constant companion, the stars danced
around me while I served time for what I was told I
owed.

Unmoving and limp, I had time to watch. The constella-
tions in the sky a reminder of your freckles and I
couldn't lose you still.

Mushrooms began their bloom while you tried to cast an-
other spell between the sun and moon, they fell for
your hypnotic accent.

With dust falling and decay dissenting, you wiped my mar-
ble eyes clean, but the warmth wasn't found.

Your wicked alchemy created in me something new, my
once familiar self had passed.

Your wretched vines held all of my pieces together, but the
light in the cracks couldn't hide the brokenness.

Inky words leaked from your tongue now, weaving a dark
web and holding together what was still broken.

A zombie brought back to life, I stumbled with bare feet
back to you, it was you I owed.

Dark magic has its effects, my love for you would now
never ever pass.

The earth's melody played in a flatter key than before, but
I ran to you with a sick passion in my heart still.

The clock's gears groaned again, this time travelling back-
wards, repeating the agonizing pattern that was once
found.

Oh, how I had missed your words that dripped with flow-
ery perfume, your intoxicating accent.

Broken, still

I owed you yet, but I was found.

Your intoxicating accent, my love for the wicked alchemist,
I knew would never pass.

Autumn Hike

By Isaiah Illsey

High in the mountains
blankets of snow cover the tips.
Changing leaves decorate
the mountain sides
with vibrant colors.
The crisp fresh air
sends shivers
of happiness down my back.
Gazing down on the wonders of
nature from the mountains above.
Listening to the songs of
the birds resonate
over the sound of gentle waterfalls.
What a wonderful sight to see.
Only to think, soon
the leaves will be gone
and the snow
will engulf the mountains.

A Cave in a World of Blue

By Abrielle Mannino

I was pacing again, pacing in a room with treads deepened by the soles of my feet. They were dirtier than usual, becoming more and more every day. There was no defined floor; I could hear my brother sitting on the floor with his rock toy--an object for a small child to play with-- barely visible in the dark room, making it shadow my laps. I assumed he was my brother-- a male in biological or fellowship connection with another--but I couldn't know.

Today wasn't special; I did this every day. I wasn't even sure if it was a day at all. It could have been late evening--the period between noon and midnight--it could have been early morning--the period between midnight and noon. I suppose it could have been noon. Couldn't it? There was no way to tell for me. I had only read about these things on one or two occasions, and what indulgences they had been. I still remembered dawn--how rich and warm it must feel as it chases away the darkness--but dusk was my favorite when the stars wake from their slumber that sets every living thing into sleep. I wondered what time it was, or if there was time at all, in my corner before sleep. Most of my books did not contain such luxurious images, my main material was only dictionaries and theorems. I loved their company all the same, but those books of rich imagery left me wondering: *is this it?* There was little to be ungrateful for, nothing if you asked my brother: we lived a life without struggle, pain, suffering, or responsibility. We live it safely and with the potential longevity ten times that of any human. Yet, my curiosity tugged at my desire to see beyond these stone walls.

I asked my watcher about this through my little slot in the wall: "Where do you live? What do you do? Is your room like mine?"

I rarely called upon him, maybe once or twice every so often when I was hungry. He must have been taken aback because he didn't answer me--say or write something in reaction to another suggestion or point. When I next woke,

however, I found a hole large enough for me to see where shadows passed behind it. The hole was not clear but rather had a strong tarp over the opening, offering an orange glow to the room which I had never seen. The shadows passed at least once each day, speaking in strange tongues.

“There’s something in the walls,” my brother said to me.

So he can hear it too, “Is there now?”

He nodded, “Something scary--sinister, eerie, frightening.”

“How can you be sure?” I asked.

“Because I know it,” he answered.

I asked the watcher this question and he said: “Stay away from the tarp. Stay away and stay safe.”

I studied things through the tarp. I referenced my books and found them to be people (per my taxonomy tree at least)! They moved, spoke, had form, perspective, and were all varied in shape and size. Real, living people with whom I could converse if I tried. I had built up the courage one day to try to speak in their language:

“Hillo? Halloooo,” I called.

“Did ya hear that Bill?” a female asked.

“Oh, again Jen? C’mon, it’s just a damn cat growlin’.”

“Hallooooo!” I called again.

Their shadows froze in front of me as they came into view. They seemed to look at each other once before leaving once more with echoes of loud, guttural noises from them. It was a glorious encounter! I was so ecstatic I told my brother that night (I could now tell it was night when the orange light had dulled): “And they heard me. They truly heard me.”

He was quiet.

“What is it?” I asked.

“You should stop,” he said to me, his head shrouded in shadows.

“What do you mean stop?” I asked.

“Stop watching. They are bad--evil, sinister, vile.”

I was taken aback, something strange boiling in my stomach, “You cannot be honest.”

“I am,” he said firmly, his toy flashing in his palm in my vision as he went back to play.

Something strange happened to me that night; there was warm wetness on my face that was only rivaled by what the watcher named tea that he gave us on occasion. The wetness could not be stopped as it dripped down my face and neck, moistening my already moist and dirtied pile of pillows--a rectangular, cloth-covered object filled with feathers or foam--on which I slept. After that I felt something I can only describe as the inability to breathe, my intake of air becoming quick and sharp. I believed this thing was fear. I could not say what I was afraid of, but I never knew anything anyway.

I did not sleep that night. Instead, I took my brother's rock from his hand in his sleeping form and moved to the hole in the wall. I inched closer to the tarp. The orange glow was muted and my hand trembled as it clenched the rock. *This is it*, I thought to myself. My hand sliced across the fabric, tearing it in two and revealing a scene that knocked me to the dirt. My eyes burned in a way which I had never felt as more warm wetness came in streams down my face. I bit back a yelp with the pain, curling into myself on the floor as a gust of wind flooded over me. Colors danced behind my eyelids, colors which I had never seen. The pain subsided after a long moment, and when I opened my eyes, I was welcomed by a world with a fading tinge of blue.

Contributor Biographies

Globe Foster is a full-time student of psychology and writing literature, spending most of his free time finding new experiences and writing stories about them. The inspiration for these pieces comes from the normal human experience, amplifying the emotions through words on the page. His writing is almost a gateway into his mind.

My name is **Alannah Friedman**, I am a sophomore at State College of Florida Manatee-Sarasota where I will be earning my Associates Degree. I am majoring in Mass Communications and plan to be involved in marketing in the future. I enjoy writing, taking pictures, and enjoying nature in my spare time. I had not written poetry until my creative writing class this semester but have enjoyed it very much and plan to continue writing it in and out of academics. I like writing about nature and its beauty and personally feel that using figurative language helps give clarity and deeper meaning just as descriptive language would. Therefore, I use a lot of it in my writings to amplify the emotions and text itself. I would like to have my signature included on my photos, should they be chosen for publication.

Hailey Hott: This poem is very personal, but I feel like at the same time can be interpreted by different people in different perspectives. I'm originally from Connecticut but I moved to Florida my freshmen year of high school. Now after SCF I plan to transfer to USF to get my bachelors' degree. I don't have a firm sense of directions yet, however, these are my goals so far.

Emilia Kelly is a dual enrollment student who loves writing fantasy stories set in worlds inspired by history. She also loves writing about humorous characters who make bad decisions but ultimately mean well. Aside from writing, Emilia also enjoys doodling funny drawings of her characters,

watching way too much anime, and performing with the Sarasota Youth Opera.

Abrielle Mannino: I am a collegiate student at State College of Florida Venice campus and am hoping to pursue a career in communications and international relations. Writing has always been an integral part of my creative expression; I often get lost in novels or spend hours painting my emotions onto a canvas. From childhood, communication and the intricacies of expression through the arts have fascinated me. This interest in communications, combined with my innate tendency to take up leadership roles because of being the eldest of four children, has catalyzed my love of international relations and politics. In terms of separate passions, I love the natural world and find inspiration there more than anywhere for my pieces. This love was fostered in me from a young age as well, and as I have grown my love of nature has grown with me.

RyLee Nakamura: No one, from nowhere, interested in nothing, who sometimes attempts to put their lack of thought into words.

Emma r Paliotta: Passing seconds is an abstract poem describing the feeling of trying to hold onto something that cannot be brought back.

Emily Raber is a student at SCF and is pursuing a degree in English Lit. Reading and writing have always been her passion, as well as telling stories. She lives in Sarasota with her dog, cat, and many plants.

Hello, my name is **Solomiya Romarniuk**. My family of 9 and I were born in Ukraine. We have been living in the United States for the last 11 years. This year I finally became a citizen of this beautiful country. One day I hope to work for the government and make our country even better. Outside of work and school, I like to paint, painting is

more like my therapy and my getaway place. Often, I cannot express what I feel with words however, when my brush dances through the canvas I feel free the most. Many people do not understand how important art is, but those who do I greatly appreciate. I am very thankful for opportunities like these where I can share my creativity. Thank you for your time and for creating such opportunities.

Bradley Tibor: I am a student studying history as well as political science. Although at first, I was not that interested in Creative writing or the arts, I have recently begun to really appreciate its ability to teach us lessons about others and ourselves and thus hope to improve my skills within this field!

My name is **Emily Wright**. I will be graduating with my Associate in the Arts Degree at the end of the Fall 2021 semester. Following this, I plan to attend an in-state university to earn my Bachelor's Degree in either Creative Writing, Education, or Hospitality and Tourism. Technical writing has been a passion of mine since I was young; however, I have recently taken up creative writing through classes here at the State College of Florida. My goal is to become a published author regardless of what Bachelor's Degree I pursue.

Elektraphrog Staff



Adrianna Defouw is a Wildlife rehabilitator for the Wildlife center of Southwest Florida in Venice. She is a licensed animal caretaker and part-time writer. She enjoys reading, watching scary movies, and horseback riding. Her recent paper "How to live among the wildlife" has appeared in the business newsletter and some social media sites such as Facebook. She is currently reading *Archeology*.

Her Photo is with Wildlife center of southwest Florida director, Pamela Defouw



Jonathan Lallement is a Valet at Zota Beach Resort in Longboat Key. In his free time he loves watching sports and has written pieces for the up and coming World Championship Fantasy, a sports and e-sports competition app. He has recently been reading and learning about Viking history. His photo is with retired Buccaneer Center AQ Shipley.

Jordon Moran is an award-winning actor and an avid writer who has been writing and performing since 2004. Awarded *Best Supporting Actor* for his role as Selsdon in a 2006 production of “Noises Off,” Jordon had since gone on to act and write for Chicago’s premier improv company, *Second City*. His most recent performance was the role of Benjamin The Donkey in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with the production company *Quasimondo* in their original rendition of George Orwell’s, “Animal Farm.” Since then Jordon has lived in Venice, Florida working as a bartender at Pelican Alley Restaurant and writing, disc golfing, gaming and fighting in Belegarth (a medieval combat society) in his spare time. He has recently returned to college to pursue a career as an author and currently has at least six projects in the works.

Faculty Advisor

Matthew Masucci is a Professor of Language and Literature at the State College of Florida Venice Campus. He is the faculty advisor of *Elektraphrog Literary and Arts Magazine* as well as an editor for the Manatee Public Library Lit and Arts magazine, *805*. His fiction and poetry has appeared in over a dozen publications. He also presents at the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts. His chapter “Angry Eden: Hyperobjects, Planet Entelechy, and the Horror of Eco-Colonization in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Southern Reach Trilogy*” appeared in *Dark Nature: Anti-Pastoral Essays in American Literature and Culture* (2016) from Lexington Books.

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