

Belles Lettres



Issue 3



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Poetry

Hannah Lynch

Summit

I stand at the foot of the pinnacle
Lungs burning as I breathe the frigid pain
Air piercing my skin like icicles
But alone in its shadow I must remain

Eyes straining against the howling gale
Skin bleeding against the subzero cold
My feet slip as I tread upon scree and shale
Longing for the security of the path of old

I turn and stare at the path traveled, knowing that only waste remains there
Gritting my teeth, I strive up that slope steepening
For I have traversed too far to escape the mountain's hypnotically thin air
I pay no mind to the aches and pains deepening
Although each step reminds me that I am alone in this perpetual Nowhere
But I am still striving for the rarity I pray I am reaching

Slipping, I press myself flush against the unyielding behemoth
Heaving and praying to the god within it that it will not let me fall
Just so I may, for one moment, peer over its mysterious zenith
And upon its unconquerable pinnacle I may stand victoriously tall

Xavier Nazzal

States of Mind

To delve the silent oceans deep
In search of wake in restless sleep
Is fact not fit for one to keep
And contributes not to what one should find.

To feel the sun beat down like flames
And count the desert sands to grains
In hopes of wise and tranquil gains
Will only make one scorched and burnt and blind.

I feel as though we may be sane
To think there is no one to reign
As we are here on this dark plain
Amidst isolation in humankind.

But still there is some sort of way
In which to stop this deadly fray
It is just as you always say
That reality is your states of mind.

Jordan Salazar

Introduction to poetry collection:

I wrote my poems about my everyday thoughts while in quarantine. Some of them are about me imagining how others feel during this time, while some are the daydreams I've had put into words. I think recording our day to day thoughts and musings is extremely important, because they become an overlooked yet very insightful piece of history. When I look back on these poems one day who knows how I'll feel? Maybe I'll think about what a strange and isolating time this was, and how my writing reflected that. Maybe I'll reflect on how different my thoughts were after quarantine. Or maybe I'll notice how even though a lot of things have changed, a lot of things haven't. Regardless of what I'll think when I reflect back on these poems they are a part of history now, musings of a time that will never again be.

Jogging

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!
I hear and sense the vibrations,
Starting at the ground like lightning
Reaching, branching up through my legs
And into my ribcage, rattling past the four chambers,
Up, Up, Up to my ears and into my brain.

I am lightning.

Thud! Thud! Pit! Pat! Pit! Pat!
Cement changes to gravel,
fluid as river to ocean; flowing, flowing,
Over my earbuds I hear song transition to song;
River waters swirling into ocean currents
Who would have thought, who would have known
How seamless music can make jogging feel.
Minutes ripple by, marked only by currents of rhythm and tempo.

Time flows.

Up ahead. People? No. Yes! People. Masks.
A couple. Their dog beside them, sniffing grass;

A barrier that blocks off the sidewalk,
Promising an awkward acknowledgement, a shuffling of feet
In order for me to pass.
But wait! There is another way. The bike lane.
I swerve into position, blurring past the barrier,
The world unspooling before me.

Bike lanes and masks.

At home, never alone; here, quit,
Only tempo and vibrations break the calm,
Like the stone that ripples the ponds surface.
The world has stopped, but I have not; forward,
Onward I travel, feet flowing, knowing,
Soon, the flowing, it must end, must stop,
For lightning flashes once, and then: darkness.

Yet the song keeps flowing.

Grow th

Three sprouts sit on my desk,
Each one reaching for the light.
Pristine and green, effortlessly
Stretching with all their might.

They began when all this began,
They turned on when everything else shut off.
Their growth, like a timer, keeps track
Will they still be here growing
When we go back?

They started out that first day
not sage but grey,
Back when we thought we'd be gone just a little while,
They began their stay.

As time has passed so have they flourished,
They are great for studying, for analyzing;
A green garnish to my room.
To the keenest eye entertainment,
When bored on Zoom.

Outside spring leaps, blissfully unaware,
while humans stay indoors all day, sheltered away,

though not for the wrong reasons; despite this,
Some still admire the verdant day.

And so as spring has sprung so have you,
tiny, slender bean plants; who knew, who thought
that as the days grew short and blurred,
as quarantine became one week, turned into one month, turned into the rest of the
year,
you would reach toward the sky, undeterred.

I applaud you, I sing your praise,
I have watched your peaceful, sun-soaked days.
Your persistence, a motif,
through this isolated haze.

And so with heavy heart, with slurry eyes I accept
That I must soon bid you farewell.
For now your leaves are turning rust;
Though you gave my desk a purpose other than
Simply collecting dust.

Someone Told a Lie

Someone told a lie, a simple one,
They said they weren't sick, and maybe they weren't,
But they made the mistake of going "Achoo!"
So their lesson they should have learnt,
Cuz now everyone's going bonkers, and the office is shutting down
And I'm just over here, aware that my WiFi is trash,
Wondering if I should head into town,
And grab some extra toilet paper for my stash.

Ode to the School Counselors

Oh Bellarmine counselors, you are like a warm summer's day,
Warm and comforting in this time of toil.
Your insightful musings and playful banter,
Captured forever by the watchful gaze of your video cameras,
An archive of inspiration and determination, a repast,
A cool drink of water to quench the flames of fear.

Oh Bellarmine counselors, your smiles are wide and toothy,
Enduring as the rest of the world embraces the grimace,
Your eyes dance with laughter and light, watching,

Observing the toil and strife of those around you,
And even as others build barriers and divides to shield themselves,
You open up your hearts; You are transparent.

Oh Bellarmine counselors, how sage are your words,
They are the single shaft of sunlight,
As the rest of the world howls and churns, a wild tempest,
Your ideals and advice break through, assuring in calm,
Those who shelter from the wind hear your call; sense your presence,
They flock to your compassion, like sheep to a shepherd.

Oh Bellarmine counselors, thank you for constant presence,
You stand beside us even as the chasm between us looms.
There are few constants governing these times; separation, quiet,
The permanence of location, hardly fluctuating,
Yet your sweet callings also mark these days; joyful, silly, calming.
Oh Bellarmine counselors, you are immortalized in my heart.

Quiet Neighborhood

The night is quiet, pierced here and there with distant calls,
Silence lays afoot, a blanket of snow covering a mountain meadow,
For months the streets have held their breath, the eaves were mute,
The world's artery's devoid of their lifeblood; commuters, pedestrians,
Only homes shine with an inner life, a comic glimmer,
For they are now wardens of solitude, beacons of welcome no more.

I look out at these homes, stare at these wardens, analyzing;
Their shutters open and close, a dance neverending,
I watch their chimneys spew steam and smoke like a fat cigar,
Lungs destined to forever exhale.

Vehicles enter and exit driveways, rhythmic as ocean tides,
Controlled not by the moon's velvety gaze, but by people,
People who dance with the shutters, exhale with the chimneys,
People who cram rooms full of Knick-knacks and memories.

Gardens burst with flora, teem with fauna; overflow, overgrow,
A plot of lands equivalent to a wide grin,
A grin that is sometimes dusty, sometimes rusty,
When freshly sprinkled by a sun shower, becomes musty.

Tamed oaks and birches anchor the yards, the megastructures of ants,

Twisting and stretching and streaming, lifting their arms up to the sky,
A sky that clutches dark, heavy clouds with azure hands,
A heavenly visage that howls, transforming into a gale.

As I watch the storm begins, howling louder still,
Heaven's tears, falling down, crying out at our folly,
Rainwater streams and rivulets down rooftops, coming down from on high,
I suppose even the stratosphere experiences melancholy.

The Rhythm of Quarantine

The days are longer now, yet feel so brief,
The sun dances overhead, day in and day out,
And I sit at this desk, working away,
This rhyme is unchanging, day after day,
Wake-up, work, relax, play,
Such is the constant of this new type of day.

Daffadowndilly

Today I learned a new word, (tee hee hee),
Today I learned a new word, (how intuitive of me!)
I was browsing around, having a romp (stomp!),
When suddenly my mind went chomp!
For I learned a new word, that I did today,
A crawling, jumping, rambunctious word that invited me to play!
For this new word was bright as day, fluffy, airy, frilly,
This new word was all that, (plus silly!)
Somehow, somehow, this shining, golden flower of a word,
Made me feel like the chirpiest songbird!
Now I'm exhausted (sigh!), don't think I can lift my feet one-inch high,
I'm tired, expired, anchored to the ground, not making a sound,
I'm thoroughly wore out (Yes sireee, there is no doubt!),
This new babble has me wanting to pout.
For today I learned a new word, isn't that swell!
Today I learned a new word, which, I suppose, is just as well,
I learned a new word today; light, airy, frilly,
I learned a new word today (Oh, how willy!)
I learned a new word today! (Isn't that silly!)
I learned a new word today: daffadowndilly!

People-watching at the Airport

Look at all these people!
I'd forgotten there are so many faces,
Heading to so many new places.
I'd begun to think I imagined the world outside,
Since all we do these days is hide.
Since I'm sitting here, nothing to do,
I may as well attempt to understand you.

Hello, mother and toddler!
Why are you flying today?
Do you feel safe and sound?
(Will the toddler frighten, when leaving the ground?)

I see you there, Ms Barista,
Standing at the teeny cafe.
Are you satisfied with your pay?
Do you like standing there all day?
Do you even like coffee?

Hey Mr policeman, standing at the stair.
You have the most unusual hair!
But the strangest thing about you
Is your dazzling, brilliant smile.
Could you stay for a while?

Greetings, TSA officer.
Do I look suspicious to you?
Does each day bring something new?
Do you like to people-watch to?
Am I a nuisance to you?

Excuse me, man not wearing a mask,
Why didn't you perform this simple task?
Do you hate being told what to do?
(I get it, sometimes I do too.)
Are you a rebel? A troublemaker?
Do you live under a rock?
They're watching you like a hawk.

Hey there, woman with rose hair.
What's that? Oh, hello Blair.
Are you from here? New here?
You work at a skating rink!
Well, tell me, is that the reason
Your hair is pink?

Hi guy! You seem nervous to fly!
What's the matter? First time!
Let me sooth you with this rhyme;
"Flying is fun,
Flying is easy!
Flyings no trouble
(Unless you get queasy!)"
There, feeling better yet? No!
You're afraid we'll encounter snow?!
Well, these pilots are trained, you know.

Hello, military Vet.
Is that your service pet?
Do you ever feel regret?
Do you feel all your needs are met?

Oh Mr pilot, I wish you were someone new.
Don't get me wrong, I'm excited to fly,
And you seem like a nice guy.
But just once, when I hear your flight announcements
I wish I heard a woman's voice.

Oh my, an hour has passed? Good Lord,
It will soon be time to bored!
I must grab my things, quickly!
But I wonder...
What do these people think of me?

Toni Spellacy

Avoiding the Void - A Collection of Poems-

Introduction:

I wrote these poems in the hope and belief that many people would relate to these same feelings. Although many of these feelings are bleak, the fact that we all share them brings me comfort and happiness in community. We are together in this isolation, even if it doesn't always feel like it.

A Busy Mind is a Clear Mind

I have so much work to be done,
But my thoughts are on the run.
How can I focus,
While feeling so hopeless.

Study groups are long gone,
But I must continue on.
I'd rather think about sine graph bends,
Than how much I miss my friends.

Daydreaming used to cause procrastination
But now it's just causation for frustration.

So I'd rather put my head down and wonder
About the behaviors of hunters
and gatherers, than let my mind wander
And land on what it was like when I was younger,

When time to do everything I wanted was unfound,
Not the other way around,
But now everything has turned upside-down.

Necessities become Activities

Mom, Can I cook tonight?
Or at least help?
Or just set the table?
Or even sit here and watch you cook?

You cooked last night, dear.
Wouldn't you like to take a break?
Relax?
Cooking is such a chore.

At least it makes me feel something,
The warmth of the oven,
The heat of the stove.

At least it makes me smell something,
The garlic becoming fragrant,
The tomato sauce, sweet with time.

At least it makes me hear something,
The sizzle of chicken placed in a hot pan.
The boiling water waiting for pasta to be tossed in.

At least it gives me something to do
That isn't staring at a screen.

Alright honey,
Have at it.
I will clean up after dinner.

Could I do that too, please?

So Close, So Far

Plants are beautiful,
Vibrant,
Life-giving,
Green and fruitful.

But plants are not people.
They cannot carry a meaningful conversation
With someone who misses human interaction
Outside of her house.

A shout comes from somewhere in the vicinity,
A young girl calling her dog.
I'm sure this child has lived here for years,
And I never had the urge to have any relationship with her.

But now, with my circle of acquaintances so small,
I wish she would come over and say,
Hi! This is my dog, Charlie
In the squeaky voice of toddlers
that used to pierce my ears,
But now would sound like music.

But I'm stuck here with my plants,
Small,
Silent,
Withering.

One Life, Two Life

"Dinner!" My mom shouts from the kitchen,
Something aromatic, maybe onions?
Has wafted into my room through the vents.

My stomach growls,
But I yell, "One minute!"
From my den of imagination.

The food can wait,
But I must know if Harry, Ron, and Hermione,
Are going to escape the giant troll in the Dungeon.

The chapter ends, and I run out to the waiting warm pot of soup
In my own house, not Hogwarts.
My dad greets me, "How was school?"
And I tell him about my own adventures,
Evading scary recess ladies on the playground.

But now, when he asks me this,
I look up from my book,
And mutter, "Fine,"
I scour my thoughts for any anecdote about my
Virtual day,
But I cannot think of any.

So I return to the story,
An escape from my now dull existence.
I used to have two lives,
And now it seems I have only one.

Freedom Becomes Monotony

My mom never listened to music
When we went to run
Saturday mornings at Chambers Bay.
She liked to people-watch instead.

I preferred pushing play,
On a podcast, or new playlist.
Breathing in the fresh air.

We were never bored,
Free to do whatever we wanted,
Run wherever we pleased.

"I'm getting on the treadmill at four."
I now inform my mom,
So we won't run into each other on the
Thin, short, track that spins around and around
And around
And around again.

What used to make me feel so free,
Makes me feel so confined.
Did you know,
That treadmills were invented to be
A punishment for prisoners?

It's All Just Stimulation

What is the point of all these news stories
Recounting the same stories
Over and over again?

There is no new information,
And yet people are glued to their televisions.
As if there is going to be some new
Life-changing tidbit of change
If they miss just a second.

Whatever.
I'll just put on my headphones
Drown the world out.
Scroll endlessly on one app
Until I get bored.
And decide to switch to another.

My screen time is so high,
Maybe I should take a break,
And go outside.

But it is simply so entertaining,

I can't put it down.

Catharsis

Day 1

Dear Diary,
Maybe this isn't so bad.
I got to make cookies.
It was so relaxing.

Day 2

Dear Diary,
Today I was bored.
I can only make so many cookies.
My mom says we need to save flour anyways,
The grocery stores are bare.

Day 7

Dear Diary,
The littlest things make me light up.
I got to go outside on a walk with my mom.
Maybe I will learn to appreciate the small stuff.

Day 24

Dear Diary,
The house is not big enough
For my whole family.
We argue and yell.
We all just want some space
But a house only has so many rooms.

Day 35

Dear Diary,
I've been thinking for ages
But I cannot recall a single thing
That happened today.

Day 41

Dear Diary,
Can you hear me?
This seems endless.
I wish I could be
Anywhere but here.

Julia Baldwin

A Collection of Poems from the Places I've Lived

Phoenix

she crouched like a bird on a perch
her eyes were sharp like a hawk
she hovered over her land
it was hers and hers alone

but still she hovered too close
afraid of what might be next
she coveted her valleys and groves
but cherished her beautiful water most of all

it shined with the power of a thousand suns
glowed deep into the night
to the people it was a sign of rebirth
a sign of passion
a place to wash away spite

but the water couldn't handle her consistent, watching eyes
nor the pressure of her wings
it was tired and needed reprieve

so just one day,
it upped and walked away,
taking her glory with it

and all she was left was a canyon,
an everlasting hole in her heart
the thing she tried so hard to protect had failed her,
Leaving only that indelible mark

Berlin

when they were young, the twins were inseparable
through peace,
love,
war,
they always seemed to band together

until one day,

a man came to stay
not knowing what he would find
welcomed by the twins with open arms
but only one he seemed to mind

he picked his favorite and told the other lies
until one day, the twin replied
"this is my home, you are not welcome here,
take my brother and say goodbye"

but the other twin was upset at his brother's disgrace
of the first friend he was to find
so he declared war
brother against brother
man against man
land versus land

by the end of the war, their home was in shambles
both of the twins were traumatized
the only remaining sense of sanity,
the wall that brought more demise

San Antonio

there once was a man with cowboy spurs
pacing in his place in the sky
he was proud of his little city
proud of the culture, the food, the fiesta

so he decided he was too good for everyone else
he wanted to be one and his own
so he disgraced his compadres
and declared himself independent

but the rest of the sky was proud of the city as well,
missed their friend,
wanted them back,
so they waged a war against the man with the spurs,
only hoping to regain some intel

and so they fought
night after night
right on the man's home ground
until one day, this reached his most cherished place
and one by one, destroyed his men

victory was lost
hope was tarnished
and all he had to say was this
"remember the Alamo"

Boise

there once was a man in the mountains,
a family man of sorts,
who spent his days on his farm
and his nights on his overlook

he provided his people with potatoes,
smiling at them as they passed,
wanting only to be happy
and to bring his love to others

soon, the word spread of this benevolent king
a man who could get you what you wanted,
a man who cared
so the people came in flocks

with them, they brought an elixir,
which turned to magic in your mouth
at first taste, the king was addicted,
always demanding more

until one day, he stopped his days in the field,
his nights on the overlook,
bringing no more potatoes to his people,
only sitting at home with his magic elixir

this man was no longer a family man
or benevolent
or kind
he was putrid and gluttonous
leaving his people high and dry

Los Angeles

her hair glows in the sun,
a beautiful honey blonde,
forming a halo around her head,
the perfect picture of innocence

but is she so innocent after all?
poverty, rape, murder, harassment, corruption,
it all lies beneath the surface;
she doesn't try to hide it

but still, she lures you in,
sitting regal upon her throne,
the scent of orange groves wafting from her skin

she can make you a star
you could glow high in the sky,
not a care in the world,
kiss your problems goodbye

or she could break you apart,
attacking your weaknesses until you fall,
turning you into a facet of her
just another name in the hall of broken hearts

you like to think you have a choice
but don't you realize?
it's no longer up to you,
in her hands lays your demise

Szczecin

there once was a little, shy girl
timid and naive
but though she was little, she was anything but innocent

the ghosts of her ancestors haunted her life,
an everlasting sign of familiar despair,
of the trauma she would never shake

for although she brought her own life,
it was forever tainted with the past,
of the horrors she allowed to happen,
of the pain she once felt
and so everyday, she sat in the corner,
slowly rocking to herself

through the lens of her eyes,
she could only see grey,
in herself,

in her town,
in the sky,
painting life with an ominous, dreary hue

Gig Harbor

an old fisherman sits in the sky looking over his land,
he watches the people stream by as he lounges back,
yet the winter makes him sad
and he can't help but cry.

down pours his tears all over the land,
on the sound,
the trees,
the trails,
soaking and drowning the things he's supposed to love
feeling ever lonely, sitting above.

until one day, he finds a friend,
"cheer up," she says, "don't cry"
pulling him in close
brightening the sky
and to the people, bringing joy

but the man doesn't know how to handle this love
wouldn't even if he tried
so he pushes her away,
fending off her generosity
until one day she stops pushing back
and the man can't help but cry

Luke Connelly

The War at Hand- A Collection of Poems

Introduction:

The following poems represent the anguish and sadness of looking back at history to see other times of turmoil. This collection of poems is meant to represent that we are in this together, and although we haven't fought any enemy quite like this, we can do it. The poems represent the connection while in isolation that we have seen and achieved in this time of struggle.

My Father's Son

I stood there on the steps of my home,
As my father stared me in the eyes
I wore tattered clothes and boots too high
My mother wailing as I said goodbye
And yet my father said nothing
I wasn't even seventeen
the lanterns were lit in the corner of my eye
Up in the tower of the old North church
I said goodbye to my sister Jean
And again I said farewell to my father to no avail

We knew this day would eventually come
When I would have to walk the blood soaked path of a soldier
Step after step yard after yard
I couldn't understand why this was so hard
I looked back when I got to the rickety gate,
but I didn't see a hateful face
Just a man standing in place

And as I kept walking on, I remembered when I was so young
My father had given me a wooden gun
It was a gift from him to me
But it seemed like so much more
Was it merely just a toy
I thought as I marched over the stone bridge
I realized something I hadn't before
I remembered George Washington at Valley Forge
and I knew I must fight

But what about that lonesome night
when I was delivered the beating, I so much deserved

When I hated my father with every nerve
When I thought that he was so weak.
When I saw the tear running down his cheek,
But now I realize as I walk this fateful path
That tear was for me, not out of wrath

And as I saw the light of the camp
I turned heel and ran back to my old farm
and as I entered the gate, he embraced me
all the courage and bravery in the world couldn't make me fight
with my whole world in sight
and as I looked in my family's eye
my mother so worried my father awry
my brother and sister asleep with the soundless night
I left again with a purpose to fight

The War of Brothers

The dawn broke clear
a hot new day
over a regiment of Jackson's best in tattered gray
they gazed with apprehension over a cottonfield
hoping beyond hope their opponents would yield

One of them a Georgia lad
woke up that morning feeling particularly bad
for his greatest fear would soon be realized
his little brother was fighting on the other side
brother against brother the papers had initially claimed
but the war had lost its lust for the dead and maimed
he loved his little brother and feared for his life
if only he could protect him and miss all this strife

Then they came the bluecoats marching in, the bugles blowing,
the cannons firing, the thousands of men
marching up the hill
shooting as they came
aiming to kill he looked down the sight of his father's gun
given to him as the eldest son
when suddenly he gave the startled shout
for in his sight was the boy he most cared about

It seemed impossible to reach out to him
he needed to do something, but the chances were slim
he dropped the gun and rushed over the fence

his comrades gaped as he sped towards the union defense
his brother started to raise his weapon
then suddenly stopped with a look of recognition
amidst the war the blood and gore
the two brothers towards each other tore
in no man's land, they both would race
the two meeting each other in a strong embrace
the two boys connected in an unusual way
their love for each other above the fray

The battle raged in the August heat
neither side wanting to admit defeat
Until later in the day the union withdrew
leaving a field covered with gray and blue
and there in the middle of no man's land
lay two young men connected hand to hand
brotherly love had won the day
the two brothers died, together they lay

Lucy

This war will never end
Daniel thought as he rounded the bend
and he marched into the dark black of night
he thought about his family his beautiful Lucy White
how he loved her so
and yet he left Lucy to fight long ago
he thought about his actions
about the war and the slaughtered and murdered factions
there she was running, no sprinting ever near
he could see the deep blue in her eyes filled with fear
"Daniel," she cried
"Daniel..."

She vanished as the rain turned into a harsh pour
he ran through the night during this Great War, and as he marched to his certain
death, all he thought was the expression she bore, he looked to his right to see a
blood-ridden grimace
a man on the ground so beaten and finished
with every gust came a new note of Lucy's beautiful yet lonely song
suddenly he wasn't in western Italy in the heart of the war
he was on his parent's creaky porch swing
in the swimming hole listening to the bird's sing
he was snuggled up to the fire in his West Virginia home
listening to his mother rock back and forth in her wooden chair

he was in her arms no feeling of fear

Just as sleep was about to snatch him away
the sound of gunfire rang out
he didn't know which way to turn
in every direction, men were falling
more shots rang out he thought he should run
men were slamming into each other
looking for cover where there was none
all he saw was Lucy

he felt like he was punched in the shoulder
he hit the stone cold ground as blood soaked his uniform
Lucy was still echoing throughout the walls of the canyon
as he took his final breath choking with blood
a tear fell from his eye and into the mud
for Lucy.

My little girl

A car exploded to my right a person shot to my left
I was in the middle of a one-sided fight
surrounded by chaos and death
I ran for cover from the enemy above
the fire came from everywhere

I stared out into the street
and saw a little girl with a tattered dress
a familiar face in all this stress
coming down the road a Japanese fighter
a fifty caliber machine gun mounted to its breast
but it wouldn't stop me from doing what I should

I ran to grab her
I sprinted her way
not caring about the fight on this terrible day
I snatched her up in my arms
as blood started soaking my uniform
the place I took shelter minutes before
was ash and rubble and nothing more

I ran in a house nearby as I saw a tear running down her eye
she pointed at my chest
as a bloody red enveloped my uniformed breast
we started crying as I sat her down

it was my daughter that I had found
I hugged her with all my might
as I sat there waiting to pass
I told her I loved her with every breath until the last

Battle of the Bulge

On the field, I am crying
well I lay here dying
and I think about my time at war
but I hear the voice of my mate Dan

"Dan," I called, and this way he ran
not three-hundred yards off before it got him
one in his breastplate, one in his hand,
but he kept on running over this forbidden land
over holes and craters, bullets and mortars

Dan was coming to my side
only two-hundred yards away
and I started to pray
that I see my friend Dan again
he was coming ever near
when I realized my fear
something blew him off his feet
screaming his name
I had myself to blame
but I saw him emerge from the crater

blood on his face and a tear in his eye
he crawled his way to my side
and blood oozed from every crack and crevice
"I knew that I would die
but I had to say goodbye
I knew I had to come when you called me."
Dan said as his spit turned a bloody red
and we smiled from ear to ear as we met our deaths out there,
but it wasn't sad to die
because I knew the man at my side
and I knew I'd see him soon
not in the sand and dunes
but in a warless paradise

The Shelter

He lay in the rice paddy in Vietnam
watching the villagers struck with napalm
bitterly hating this ugly war
not understanding what they were fighting it for
he had no way of getting to his hut
soldiers surrounded, and his feet were cut,
but his family was inside hidden away
he felt so helpless as in the patty he lay

as darkness approached he decided to take a chance
if he could just go to the house over the backyard fence
and with bleeding feet he stealthily tread
grimacing with pain he moved ahead
the searchlight flashed as he climbed over
soldiers yelled as he dashed for cover
across the yard and into the house
muzzles flashed, but he ignored the shouts
the bottom of the hut concealed the door
that led to the tunnel under the floor
here he dove in quickly and turned the key
the confusion above revealed that they could not see
and down in the shelter at the end of the hall

he found his baby, so tender and small
in the arms of his wife scared but strong
and there was his son four years along
he breathed a sigh of tearful relief
the reunion had seemed impossible in this napalmed grief
he thanked his father for his foresight
in building the shelter that saved his family that night.

Epidemic

We sit here in our homes so far away from who we love.
and we wait for the day in history when we can leave our couch.
the sickness spreads, and so many are dead, and yet we help by doing nothing.

It seems unjust, and we sit here and watch.
Some people are helping, some people giving, but I'm not a nurse, or a doctor, or an
EMT, or firefighter,
and I put a flimsy sign in the window, and yet I congratulate myself!

Oh, how I love the ones who help,
the ones who do what I cannot,
the ones who put others before themselves
for the common good.

This battle that we fight has taken so many lives.
More than 9/11, more than Vietnam. This invisible enemy is hiding.
He hides not in the hills, canyons, or jungles. He hides in the homeland,
he hides in our homes in our supermarkets!

We must fight this invisible enemy with our Netflix subscriptions and comfortable sofas.
We will succeed by ordering from home, and pulling the trigger on the enemy. The
trigger of our Lysol spray cans,
the Agent Orange of our battle.

If we do these things: stay at home, order online, stay armed with our Lysol cans and
Purell dispensers, we will prevail.
I make this announcement to you from the fortress of my home because I too am
fighting against the enemy.
Even though this invisible enemy is greater
and more widespread than ever before, we will succeed.

I know we will prevail because we have shown our strength on fields before: the fields
of Concord and Lexington, the fields of Antietam and Gettysburg, the hills and
canyons and roads and villages of Western Europe, the rice paddies and jungles of
Vietnam.
Now we fight on the fields of our couches, we barricade ourselves with Amazon
packages and toilet paper stashes, we fight, we will succeed.
We have been training all our lives for this exact form of battle.
With a TV remote in hand I say we will be victorious!

Nolan Mikkelson

A collection of poems about the bonds people forge and break

Explanation for all these poems: These are all characters for a story that I have been writing in my head for quite awhile now. The main story is that all of these characters play a game called Xworld that results in the destruction of Earth's surface because of a meteor shower. The players of Xworld manage to escape this by entering the game that separates them into groups of three out of the twelve people playing the game. The game puts each team on a separate planet that has a set of challenges and companions that the team has to work together to complete. Though before they do that they all have to face each other's personal, psychological problems that are made manifest through this game. If they win the game then they will earn the ultimate reward of becoming the gods of the universe though they can only do that by gaining access to the final planet by each team using the keys they

gained from completing their respective planet to unlock the barrier surrounding the final planet. Though it may sound simple, the player's issues the game throws at them are not. Aria is dealing with her emotional fallout from losing a close friend of hers that she inadvertently caused. Gretos is trying to become a better person for those around them in mentoring Aria and Leonardo when it comes to their issues while also dealing with their paraplegic status and her missing an arm. They also have to deal with a loss of her parental figure in life that Sallamis directly caused to them before the Xworld. Leonardo is suffering from a massive culture shock after becoming the first hybrid troll and human because of a blood-transfusion he received from a troll. Leo also has to deal with mild agoraphobia that he suffered from during his childhood. Sallamis has to deal with the mental abuse his family dealt him in making him paralyze what used to be his best friend Gretos. Chloe has to question the morality of her actions in emotionally manipulating others into completing the morally dubious action of overthrowing a global empire that resides on her team's planet as an objective to gain a key to the final planet. FerzriKate on the other hand has to come to terms with her species' brutal coming of age ritual that involves the domination of the other personality which is the equivalent of Fratricide in our human society. Mostly because their species' offspring have the unique quirk of being born with two personalities that are like brother and sister to the other. Plus, once the domination happens, the other personality is gone forever and that's only half the cast of characters! This story is meant to be about broken people trying to rise above their flaws and faults to get it together long enough to win Xworld in order to be granted the privilege of becoming the rulers of a new universe. They can then bring back trolls and humans in a more well-rounded universe compared to the previous one from before.

World-building: Trolls are basically grey-skinned humans with candy-corn colored horns that have a penchant for violence. The trolls are divided up into 12 blood castes but you only really need to know 3 of them. Greto is a jade-blood troll that is really good at taking care of people. Sallamis is a violet blood which means he's really good at being a prince in a monarchy. Leo is now a magenta blood but because of his mixed blood he just has faded horns and light-grey skin with no real special features.

If you are wondering why the first two poems, Aria and Leonardo, were similar to the other in tone and word choice it is because they were not written by those people. They were in fact written by one person who was knowledgeable in their background but didn't know them very personally. Simply because Aria and Leo never had the time to write them. Though Aria did write the third stanza but that was it. I, the author, have an idea of who wrote them. I'll give you a hint, their name begins with a G.

Leonardo

To you Aria, in a world that had long passed me by
In a world where everyone I once knew is now part of the spectral crowd
You showed me kindness, when no one would even try.
You treated me like a normal person when no one else could.

You saw beyond my faded horns and ugly face.
Most importantly, you taught me what it was like to feel affection for someone.
You paved the way for everyone's success in the world.
Thank you, Aria for being my friend.

To you Greto, you helped me to see life in a different way.
You taught me to look beyond appearances.
You helped me to understand the responsibilities of my life.
You gave me a way out of my twisted mind.
You taught me the ways of human interaction.
Most importantly, you saved my life.
Thank you Greto, for being my mentor on what it means to be kind.

To you Izumi Lee Curtis, thank you for being my protector.
You were always there for me when nobody else could.
You gave me the strength needed to protect my loved ones.
You believed in my potential when no else would.
You taught me how to throw the ultimate curveball in softball.
Most importantly, you are my godmother who helped me save my friends.

Aria

Thanks Leo, for being like a little brother to me.
Even if you were emotionally draining to deal with,
you had a smile that always comforted me.
At the end of the day, you are like my albino Shiba Inu who would greet me
with a warm, happy smile even if it was raining or if I had a bad day.

Thanks Greto, for leading me to greater heights.
Even if you were a bit harsh to me at times, I forgive you for everything that
happened.
After all, no one could've made the choices you made, and that's why I say thanks.
At the end of the day, you helped get out of the rut my mind was in
with you always lending a hand to get me out of that dark place.

Thanks Minato, my birth father.
Even if it may seem strange or weird for me to say this as
I never really got to meet you sadly.
I only really got to know you from the stories
Mom and my brothers would tell me.
At the end of the day, they say you could always
calm the family down, despite your despondent early life.
According to Mom anyway.
By the way, did you know she never remarried?
She still has your photo framed up in her workshop.

Sorry for sounding like a broken record, I'll stop writing now.
This is just making me sad.

Greto

Hello Aria, I apologize for being so tough on you.
The time and place we were all in was...stressful
to say the very least.
We both went through a lot of changes during that time,
and I just wanted us to survive.
We both had to make some difficult choices,
choices that not many other people could make.
I'm sorry for the things I had to put you and Leonardo through.
I hope you can forgive me for the things I had to do.

Hello Sallamis, did you miss me and my crippled ass?
I still haven't forgotten you know.
That FLARP session.
You know the rest of the story, but I have news for you.
After considering your side of why you did it and your numerous apologies,
I forgive you.
Because the other day somebody taught me a little thing about forgiveness,
they taught me that you have to move on at some point and not let it chew you up.
However, don't think I'll forget what you did to me
Because every time I struggle moving in my crappy wheelchair and my one arm,
I will be reminded of that game.

Hello Leonardo, I am happy to see that you've grown up.
The time and place where we first met was,
unorthodox to say the very least.
We have both come so far during our time together,
and I hope to work with you again to continue our mutual training.

Sallamis

Dear Lady Chloe, I hope to impress succinctly upon you just how much you mean to
me.
Your sharp wit and our conversations with each other will leave an
Indelible mark on the deep waters of my subconsciousness.
That said, could you please rescue me and FerzriKate from the McDonald's play area?
We have been stuck here for several hours and we can't find a way out, please help.
Sincerely yours, Sallamis.

Dear Kate, I do not appreciate your foul-mouthed tongue disgracing thine own mouth with such language.

Your parents raised you better than that, and I hope for you to sincerely follow in the virtuous examples set about by your ancestors. Therefore I ask of you to behave yourself!

Dear Ferzri, please talk to your sister about her nasty habit of using such foul language.

Sincerely yours, Sallamis.

Hello Greto, I admit I rewrote this small poem about five times before settling on a proper apology so here you go.

I still remember your Jade blood running down your skin like the juices of freshly-bitten watermelon.

I lay awake at night 'til the witching hour thinking about what I did to you and I'm sorry.

I'm sorry for the actions I rung out against your body like the evening bell tolls.

I'm sorry for orphaning you in a careless world that would sooner topple a skyscraper then crack the egg of an unborn chick.

If you wish to know why dear Greto, then read on. My Violet blood family never liked that I was friends with you.

They were a spiteful, evil family to all except their own and I was no exception.

They wished to make enemies of both of us so they schemed to...

Make me hurt you. They decided to make me choose between you and my own familial loyalty.

You know the choice I made, and I've paid for it in money ever since that FLARP session.

Chloe

Dear Sallamis, thank you for your kind words because,

You also mean a lot to me as well.

Even if it may not seem like it, all those jokes I've made

at your expense all come from a sense of mutual friendship.

By the way, you can escape from the play area by retracing your steps with Kate.

Yours truly, Lady Chloe.

P.S: If you can't reason with Kate, try to approach her from a different angle with your words.

Dear FerzriKate, please try to get along better with Sallamis.

There's only so many arguments I can listen to that discuss cursing.

You both have the freedom to speak your mind in this world.

To Ferzri: Please try to act as the mediator between those two as it would be great practice for you.

To Kate: If you really want to grind Sallamis' gears try getting creative with your cursing beyond just the obvious ones.

Dear Brandon, are you getting along well in your group?
I've heard you've gotten hurt during one of your moonlit spars with Kherit from Rineas. Please be careful for me, okay? I may not show it but I do actually care for my darling half-brother.

By the way, can you ask Donald how he's doing, for me?

He hasn't been answering my letters in a while now...

Anyway, I hope you're resting well at your home. Write to you later!

P.S: Oh and please try responding more to my letters every now and then It's not that difficult.

FerzriKate

Hey Leonardo, both Ferzri and I haven't written to you in a while and well...

Ah f*** it man we're sorry for leaving you in the equivalent of a spider's nest.

I didn't want to leave you after the s*** we went through together.

I was venomous as a python is to its progeny for leaving you like that.

Prickly as a cactus am I for talking to others like that and the lonelier I am for it.

Like you, the Icarus to my Sun, you got too close and burned because of it.

Leaving you crashing down in the craggy rocks of loneliness once more.

Hi Sallamis, it's Ferzri, I just wanted to say that I appreciate what you've done, for both Kate and I. You know exactly how to lighten up the mood for both of us. I know she is as guarded as a house cat with you, and feisty as a honey badger. However, the reason why is she is like a wolf separated from it's pack, and the only ones she would obey is her own parental wolf figures. So thanks for being as patient as a snapping turtle with us.

Hi Chloe, Kate wanted me to write this for her.

Kate's affections for you are of that a shy wolf inching closer to the flames of warmth and patience

that so radiates from your being.

Our gratitude for your patience and care for us is as like a dove preening the feathers of their loved one.

So thanks Chloe, for being there for us.

Ryan Stagliano

Poem Collection

The Maple Tree

How delightful and forceful you are.
As your enormity
Of the woods you are full
Of brightness, how your
Brilliantly shaded leaves fills my heart
With the best substance gracious I do cherish
All the various shades of Ruby, Emerald, Gold, Bronze,
What's more, ensures me. You are a glad and respectable watchman
What's more, loaded up with vitality like the spring
Your dropped leaves crunch emphatically
Underneath my feet as I walk
Around you respecting your greatness
Your astounding aroma is better than a rose
On a late spring's day when your sap
Is made to maple syrup its incredibleness
Melts in my mouth it is better than
Any taste sugar could make all alone
You are life itself for without you
There is no oxygen without you
Miracle and riddle, are no longer in presence.

The Old Pine Tree

Where the Sound and the Ocean stream
In the home of the osprey, and the white-tailed deer
I review the tune of the goldfinch in May
It's charming woodwind like notes are with me today
In extravagant I hear it in a removed sky
Over the tree line it pipes as it flies
In extravagant the tune of the scoop I hear
The waterway it sings in to me appears to be very close
The light earthy colored squirrel with breasts as white as snow
One of Nature's tree abiding rodents that I used to know.
That old pine tree has brought me extremely far,
With that sweet aroma of delight
I will always remember, even from afar.

Seattle

Today around evening time I picked a way, followed to its end and it was cut off
Continued driving not far off, to discover another way
Night air consumed sweet as incense over the green water,
Clear and cold snow run-off, up in the mountains
Where otters made their play
A hummingbird came to make proper acquaintance, singing in my hair as I
Shook my head around to see it, withdrawing and returning
My vehicle passed on, I simply lay in the sand
Putting my toes in
That stream running down, on the off chance that I could just bear it
I'd slip into its current, develop rough blades,
Gracious I'd never return, however for the memory
Over the way, overwhelming with trees and a stone face
Burned by flames of voyagers cruised by
There are tusks, elk and such, oft in the timberland
Their hoofprints in the sea shore I walk
My toes trailing over the stones, fingers trailing wind
A little stone, got up to speed from the water, shining emerald, Taken
I wish you'd come dream here with me
For I dread everything only a fantasy inside my head

Yakima Canyon

In evening play of light and shadow
over the gully, the light green flush
of early grass, quieted blue
of new developed sage, and yellow blaze
of balsamroot are examined
in the vigilant eye of bighorn sheep.
Sure-footed, jumping through the scree,
extinguish their thirst at a mountain spring.
This scene ought to be interminable, yet it's definitely not,
despite the fact that its history is composed on the rocks
in ocher, dark and gold, for anybody who cares to gain proficiency with the language.
There's fact if not excellence in the information
that nothing turns out a remarkable way we thought.

The Bald Eagle

A seal of our local land;
With unbleached front and honorable temple,
Among the countries bound to stand;
Pleased, similar to your relentless mountain woods;
Like your own waterways meandering free;
Furthermore, sending forward from slopes and floods
The glad yell of freedom!
Like thee, superb fledgling! like thee,
You remain in unbought grandness,
With spreading wings, untired and solid,
That challenges a taking off far and long,
You take a gander at the fish beneath pondering,
Which of you will be supper
The adoration of earth,
In terrific straightforwardness you stand;
Like thee, the tempests viewed her introduction to the world,
Be that as it may, stuck the wild and irate war,
To look for the safe house of your wings.
Relentless as Rome, all the more respectably free.

The Fish Hunting Osprey

Before long as the sun, incredible leader of the year,
Curves to our northern clime his brilliant profession,
Also, from the caverns of sea calls from rest
The finny shores and hordes of the profound;
When frigid whirlwinds back to Greenland ride,
Furthermore, day and night the equivalent hours isolate;
Consistent with the season, o'er our ocean beat shore,
The cruising osprey high apparently soars,
With expansive unmoving wing, and, revolving around moderate,
Denotes each free stray in the far beneath;
Ranges down like lightning! plunges with a thunder!
Also, bears his battling casualty to the shore.
The since quite a while ago housed angler views with delight
The notable signs of his unpleasant utilize;
What's more, as he bears his nets and paddles along,

In this manner hails the welcome season with a melody.

Ode to an Oak Tree

Structure of common excellence and effortlessness,
I could follow the shapes of your branches
throughout the day.
At the point when summer comes in its brilliance,
You welcome me outside.
Looking as I have some good times and appreciate the day.
Crows groom themselves and caw out to the normal world
From your covering.
Crows home inside your marvelous statues
Furthermore, worms jab their heads through your fallen leaves
After a pre-winter shower.

Julia Giese

A collection of poems representing major events in my life.

Fourth of July

Red, white and blue,
Three colors as bright as they could be.
A small tricycle,
A little girl that was as vibrant as a firework.

The neighborhood was full of laughter,
A fond memory that will never be lost.
Family and friends gather,
To celebrate great accomplishments.

Nighttime was the best,
The neighborhood was never going to rest.
The sky was filled with vibrant colors,
Sparklers never went dull.

The loud noises was something new,
But it seemed to bring a lot of joy.
This holiday was foreign,
But little did I know it would create so many memories.

The First Day

A little girl in a plaid uniform,
Running in to see the magic.
Tons of kids playing in the courtyard,
Holding mom's hand as I walk in.

The sweetest lady smiling down,
I immediately felt comfortable.
Sitting on the colorful carpet,
I knew that I was sitting next to my future friends.

Mom walked out the door,
I felt scared and unsure.
The day was starting,
I didn't know what to expect.

The day flew by,
Arts and crafts was the activity of the day.
The bell rang and time was up,
I knew it would be good.

The Last Day

Fifth grade was coming to an end,
I knew that it was my last.
All the friends that I had made,
Were as close as a distant memory.

The time spent was full of emotion,
Some bad, some good.
My friends were supportive,
They knew what had to be done.

I was leaving behind a home,
A place that was known.
All good things come to an end,
She said, "you'll always have your friends."

I walked out the door,
Never looked back.
Sometimes I wonder,
Would things have been different if I had stayed?

The New

Middle school is tough,
A new school was going to be rough.
I didn't know what to expect,
All I knew was that I had to open up.

Everyone was vibrant and full of life,
I felt a sense of home.
It was a new home for me,
But I wasn't scared to be free.

The girls were sweet,
They treated me as their own.
A group of them took me under their wing,
I knew this was my new home.

Reassurance was always good,
None of them were ever rude.
One girl I disliked,
Ended up being my best friend for life.

Moving On

The day was finally here,
I didn't know what to feel.
My class was growing up,
We were ready for the buildup.

Gathered in the parish center,
All dressed up for the end.
Alphabetical order we got in line,
That's when I realized we had lost the time.

Walking into the church seeing all my friends,
I was filled with joy to see them again.
Names got called up we each grabbed our paper,
Stating that we were moving on to something greater.

It was over,
I walked out the door and never looked back.
I miss the memories,
Sometimes I drive by for a remedy.

Freshman

First day of freshman year,
I saw I had a lot of peers.
It was something new and exciting,
Little did I know what I was in store for.

I stood with my friends in the gym,
That's when I was him.
The first upperclassmen guy,
I wanted to talk to him but I was too shy.

My sister was a junior,
So she always had my back.
I never felt alone,
Since the day I was born.

It was full of laughs and cries,
I had seen the signs.
Bellarmine was my home,
Through the highs and lows.

Virginia Muriithi

Asking Unanswered Questions

These are questions she asks herself from day to day.
How can she pretend life is okay?
How much longer till she breaks?
How much longer till they see her smile is fake?
Can you relate?
Let me elaborate:
She's talked to a dozen people about this and she's still right where she started.
Confused.
Hurt.
Brokenhearted.
Now I'm not saying all this because it rhymes,
This is what really goes down in my mind.
I been cowering behind this 3rd person POV
Because the thought of being truthful is too much for me

I put on a show for everyone else to see
But that ain't really me
And they ain't never gonna see the real me
Because I'm hiding behind this mask but I want to be set free
Set free from all the emotion and turmoil you caused inside of me
And I'm telling it to you straight, Satan
Father of Catastrophe
They wanna tell me it gets better?
That imma be okay?
They be telling us that to keep us from running
Truth is they need us here so they can keep running
Running towards their future while I'm running from my past
Each heartbreak be worse than the last so I must not be running that fast
But how am I gonna be here for you if you ain't gonna be here for me?
Exactly.
Those are the questions we all should be asking
But where the answers at?
Ask that.

goodbye.

farewell.
The second coming to suicide
You hide under my pride
In stride with my temper
Which rises and falls like the tide
I plead the fifth
There is power in silence
No need for violence just careful guidance
As I try to figure out why I can't stop crying
Depression captures my soul
Satan plays his role as the oppressor
He achieves his goal and I fall into his hole
The migraine takes a toll
Anything to numb the pain and I'm sold
Be bold
Prescribe what you desire
Anything, throw my body into the fire
And at my funeral, have David play the lyre.

good, Night

Demons, do not wake her
Let her have peace in her slumber
Do you ever wonder
When you scream, it's like lightning and thunder
Where is her refuge in the storm
Sad to say that this is the norm
They say they mean no harm
But why are there bruises running down her arm?
Why the look of rage on your face?
Why so terrified to catch a case?
Why the sudden grace?
This change of pace will not erase
The damage that has been done
She hides from the sun
A child of the dark
All your hurtful remarks were the spark
To the fire within that burns and tears her apart
It starts with her heart
The very core of her existence
Maybe for once if you would just listen
For she cannot withstand
The blows from your bare hands
Maybe, just maybe, it will end
In Night, she has made a friend

Harrison Lyons

A beach adventure

The wind brushed across my hair
Sun was falling all was fair
The waves sweep across my ankles
As I admire the silence of all that is near
My head feels clear

I walk up the path
Continue through the dancing trees

Until I find my hut of a house
A fire already burning
I notice I'm hungry my stomach churning
I wonder through the large hut yearning
To find what I am looking for

I come to a cupboard
Of canned foods
Eagerly picking apart at the peaches
Thinking of my day on the beaches
And then it hits me...

My name

My name
I do not know it
I do not know how I came to be here
I let out a slight tear

I was here and I wasn't here
But how was I here?
I recounted my steps
My mind in confusion
I started my day at the beach
Then ended with a peach

What was before the beach?
I could not remember
Did I have a family?
The thoughts came across my mind
As my gears began to grind
I thought extensively about the time

I must have a name
But what could it be
As I began wondering the island
It was dark but a torch led my way
I moved past the bay into the trees
The island looked so peaceful
Suddenly I saw an idol

Eagle

An eagle
Why was there an Eagle?
It stood proudly on a rock
I look at it and begin to walk
I examine the eagle
It's plain with barely a ridge
But yet in my eyes it symbolizes a bridge

A bridge to my name
Maybe to from where I came
The eagle feels too light
Almost hallow
But what could it be hiding?
I smashed it against a nearby rock
My name
My name
Was John
Or so said the paper of the eagle
One single word
John

Wondering

I ponder the word
Who am I
I stare at the sky
I wonder
The thoughts roll across my head like thunder
I do wonder

Wondering the plain

I travel across the beach
My memories just out of reach
I have yet to hear speech
Where is everybody?

Lost in my thoughts the sun has risen
I feel trapped in a mental prison
No way to escape
Nobody to talk to
I am lost

The future

Days go by
I begin to hunt
I see it
I catch it
I've become like a machine
Nothing to intervene
My life is stuck in a boring routine

I constantly wonder where I must be until it hits me
I see a boat
I must get it's attention
I feel the tension
Building as it might miss me
I start a fire
Burning like my fears
It notices me
I feel my tears

Atlast I will be home
But only where is home?
I have no memories

The ship sends out a small boat
The man hands me a coat
I forgot about clothes
The island has made me savage

The boat

The men aboard the boat
Give me food to keep me afloat
I eat three consistent meals
Of bread and beer and soup

I have decided to stay as a fisherman
To start my life over
The men tell my stories of life
Of the war
In Between each pour
Of beer
I find the war interesting
I do not know why
As I stare at the sky

I think of the sky
Blue like her eyes

Wait, her!
I remember my wife
The memories come back to me...

Afterwards

I was a pilot
In the war
I was on tour
My plane was hit

I fell to the ocean
I must've made it to an island
That was 5 years ago
There's no way I was on an island for 5 years
But yet I was...

Interview with John Englehardt B '05



John Englehardt graduated from Bellarmine in 2005. He was kind enough to join the creative writing class via Zoom to talk about writing his novel *Bloomland* (Dzanc), which has made the shortlist for the Virginia Commonwealth University Cabell First Novelist Award (2020). Connor Burk conducted the interview.

Connor Burk: When writing Bloomland, what were some of the obstacles in the way of pulling off the second-person perspective?

John Englehardt: Early on, I noticed writing in second person gave the narrative a propulsive quality, allowing me to speed through large swaths of time. This appealed to me because I wanted the novel to cover twenty years of each character's life. But this speed created all sorts of problems. Those who read my first drafts often said they felt far away from the characters, that the narrator was kind of speeding down the freeway, turning the story into a blurred landscape, leaving little room for the reader to form their own opinions. In revision, I tried to combat this by slowing down and writing scenes, but I didn't want to totally undercut the momentum. So, I tried to make sure every paragraph of summary contained an internal struggle, a moral or emotional ambiguity that filled the blurred landscape with tension.

On the sentence-level, though, I feel like writing in second person was definitely a challenge, if only to see how many ways I could avoid saying "you." It got very repetitive, saying "you" all the time. Descriptions of nature were fun, because they offered an easy way to take a break from invoking the "you."

Connor: Bloomland deals with a touchy subject matter and heavy themes. During the writing process how do you ensure that you deal with these issues in a sensitive and thoughtful way?

There are so many myths surrounding the phenomenon of gun violence and male rage—like the idea that mental illness is a precursor, or the whole "good guy versus bad guy" trope—and my goal was to write against these myths. It would have been dangerous, however, for me to initially assume I knew what these myths were. So, I relied heavily on advice from my peers and interdisciplinary research. I read a ton sociological studies, like Katherine Newman's *Rampage: The Social Roots of School shootings*, as well as survivor memoirs, like Gregory Gibson's *Gone Boy*. I sought out criticism and advice from my peers, and tried to receive those comments with humility.

Outside of workshop and research, though, it was really important for me to write from a place of shared responsibility. If I was going to write about the issue of male aggression, it was important to think about the ways in which I might be part of the problem. Are there times when I felt rage was an easy way back to feeling? Was I taught that, to become a "man" was to value stoicism, control, and disconnection? And what kind of allowances do I give to young men who avoid expressing any kind of vulnerability? Exploring these questions was how I tried to create characters who were relatable but also deeply flawed.

Connor: When a story is heavily inspired by real-world events, how do you draw a distinction between your story and those events?

John: Though I conducted a lot of research in order to write *Bloomland*, I also needed to put a large part of myself in each character, to draw heavily on the raw material of

my life. As a fiction writer, I feel like I'm creating something new when I combine personal experience with research, but I think it's important to use personal experience as a foundation. It felt irresponsible to make *Bloomland* closely resemble any historical act of violence or real place, because we are already living in enough fear. Creating the fictional town of Ozarka was one way I tried to emphasize this.

Connor: When working on a longer project such as a novel, how do you plan out the project? Are things such as scope and length taken into account early on, and is the story written chronologically or are certain parts written before others out of sequence?

John: The longer I write, the more I realize I am not a plot-oriented storyteller. The first thing that usually inspires me to write a story is a character and a setting. I look for someone whose inner identity is at odds with the world around them. Take Rose, for example. I was drawn to her because she arrives at college hoping to become a new person, but the sorority she joins puts her in a very ill fitting box. For me, this tension is what gives a story life. After I have a character and setting, I usually think hard about the story's political or emotional backdrop, and read a lot of books related to those themes. Only after considering all this, and drafting early parts of the story, do I really think that much about plot. For me, having a specific plan is dangerous, because it doesn't allow me to wander and discover, and if I don't wander I'll bore myself, and probably the reader, as well.

Connor: Lastly, what are some books you recommend to people who enjoyed Bloomland? What about those stories speaks to you?

John: There are so many books that paved the way for me to write *Bloomland*. *The Association of Small Bombs* by Karan Mahajan and *The Ever After* of Ashwin Rao by Padma Viswanathan are two novels that tackle the phenomenon of mass violence, that disrupt our traditional notions of individual and communal grief. Mahajan explores the aftermath of a terrorist bombing in New Delhi that kills two boys, using a prismatic point of view that enters the minds of grieving parents, survivors, and terrorists. Viswanathan, on the other hand, focuses on a psychologist who is conducting a "study of comparative grief" twenty years after the 1985 Air India Bombing. These books are amazing, and I can't recommend them enough.

Finally, I think anyone interested in the issue of toxic masculinity should read bell hooks' *The Will to Change*. It's such a thorough examination of the way young men are taught that to become an adult is to be stoic, controlling, and invulnerable. She shows how this process of male socialization hurts everyone, including the men it promises to empower.

Nonfiction

Charlie Jones

Pocock

George Pocock is a British boat maker who revolutionized the boat making process and helped lead the 1936 Washington men's crew to gold at the summer Olympics in Germany and made several other Olympic boats for America in his lifetime. George Pocock was a famous boat maker who moved from England to Washington to build shells for America's rowing venue. Pocock was born in Teddington, Middlesex, England, United Kingdom, or, more simply, a town about 40 minutes away from London. He and his brother, Dick, learned how to make boats from their father, who was an accomplished sculler and who provided boats for Eton college. George was also a very good sculler, and his victories in the single on the Thames River. This river is a significant location for rowing in Britain, many colleges and clubs practice on it and it is host to one of the oldest and famous regattas in rowing history, The Henley Regatta) provided him enough money to travel to Vancouver, British Columbia with his brother in search of better business prospects.

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History: Rowing never really became a sport until the early 18th century, where ferrymen would race in their small taxi boats. This evolved into what rowing is known as today; boat makers started to make slimmer and longer boats for Cambridge and Oxford colleges (these two colleges raced each other every year in a race called "the boat race," it still takes place today).

Terminology: At a current regatta (a rowing race), one could find a variety of six different boat classes.

- Single (1x) one person with two oars
- Double (2x) two people with two oars
- Pair (2-) two people, one oar each
- Four (4+) five people, one is a coxswain, and four rowers with one oar each
- Quad (4x) four people, two oars each
- Eight (8+) nine people, one coxswain, eight rowers, one oar each.

The boats that have two oars per person are sculling boats, and the ones with one oar each are called sweep boats.

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George's Rowing career in Britain was challenging, and not because he was a bad rower. Pocock's family moved from the small town of Teddington to another one in the more sophisticated Thames area. The equivalent of this move in America would be like moving from a small rural farming town to an upper-crust Ivy league college neighborhood. Pocock wasn't taken seriously because of his different accent and ways of life. This only drove him to become a better rower, and eventually, he got the respect he deserved. This same preserving attitude helped George and Dick in their endeavors in America.

In 1911, the brothers found a boathouse that they could use to live and make boats in. The boathouse was cold and wet, and in low tide it would sit on the mudflats, and when the tide came in, the lower floor would often flood. The brothers work for nearly a year without much luck in the way of recognition or money, but salvation came on a cold and rainy day as Hiram Conibear, Washington crew head coach, rowed out to the brothers' boathouse and offered to buy twelve new eight-man shells. The brothers were ecstatic. They immediately headed down to Seattle to get to work, but they were sorely disappointed. The Washington crew program was underdeveloped and only had enough funds for one of the twelve eight man boats that the Pococks were promised.

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History: Eventually, rowing grew into a popular sport in England. Rowing moved across the puddle into America, where it took hold in New England Ivy League colleges such as Yale, Princeton, and Cornell. From there it migrated over to the west coast, particularly Washington and California. Rowing grew to such popularity that at its peak, it was comparable with today's NFL. The boats that the ferry-men in England rowed in were wide and ungainly, something that you would see someone fishing out of. Fortunately, once rowing became a popular sport, boat makers developed sleeker and longer shells, using thin planks of wood molded around a skeleton, usually made of a stiff wood like ash. This style of boat making prevailed until George Pocock transformed the way shells were made.

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Despite the initial let down in Washington, the shell Pocock made for the crew won the Pacific Coast Championship against Cal university and went on to win the Washington crew third at the National Championship on the east coast. Boat orders started to roll in from teams around the country, until 1916 when America began to get involved in WWI. The brothers shifted to making and designing plans for Boeing until 1922, when new technology began to make wood planes obsolete. Dick took a job offer from Yale university as a boat maker, where he would remain for the rest of his life. Eventually, George returned to boat making but unlike his brother, he sold his boats all across the country.

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Most sweeping boats (except the pair) have a coxswain, who is incharge of steering and calling race plan moves. When rowing, a person would sit on a seat that rolls on a track facing the stern of the boat. Using legs, body, and arms one propelled themselves backward with the oar(s). For sweep rowers, steering is more difficult, hence the coxswain, but for scullers, the two oars allow for easier maneuverability. A sculling oar is about 9.5 feet, with a six inch handle and a blade that looks like a cutting board (sort of). A sweep blade is about 12 feet long, with a handle that is about a foot long so it can be gripped by both hands. The two main seasons are spring and fall, spring being the more serious of the two. Boat lengths range from 23 feet (singles) to 62 feet (eights). Fall is long distance (about 4-5 kilometers), and spring is a 2 kilometer sprint.

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Being based in Washington, Washington's crew got the best of Pocock. Pocock's boats were excellent, possibly the best in the nation at the time, but his rowing knowledge was of much greater use to Washington head coach, Al Ulbrickson. Ulbrickson was an extremely strict and stoic coach. He had been an accomplished rowing himself and had helped Washington win the Pacific Championship against Cal. Pocock would often give Ulbrickson and Bolles (the freshman coach) advice on how to perfect their rowers. George would often row up to the eights in his single to give them up close advice. This along with all the other perks of having Pocock working on top of the Washington boathouse made Ky Ebright, the Cal crew head coach extremely jealous. Pocock however, always made a point of giving Ebright coaching tips whenever he saw him at regattas. During the couple of years leading up to the 1936 summer olympics, Pocock and Ulbrickson worked non stop to create the perfect crew. Months of cold, wet, hard training, and a combination of wins and losses in America produced a crew that had a chance to win on the international stage. To learn more about the 1936 olympic crew, read The Boys in the Boat, by Daniel Brown. Pocock remained in Washington for the rest of his life, making boats and teaching rowers. He had developed a better way to make faster boats, the boats that became so desired by colleges across America. Boats made by other producers weren't as streamline in the water, mainly because the shell was made from individual planks connected to the skeleton inside the boat. Pocock's boats were made from one extremely thin piece of cedar, which was steamed to make it more malleable. Pocock would form and attach the cedar around the skeleton. This design was lighter, more streamlined, and added more life to the boat. Over time, the cedar would tighten, giving the boat more camber, and a more lively feel. George's boats went on to win several more national championships and Olympic events, even today his boats are used in clubs, high schools, and colleges. Today's shells are made from fiberglass and extra light carbon honeycomb. The Pocock boat company sells all over America and even has a large club called Pocock Rowing Club that is based in Seattle.

Pocock's contributions to the rowing world are some of the most important and influential of the past century. He transformed the University of Washington's rowing program into one of the best in the world and his boat making method, along with other advancements on rowing technology, have lasted ever since. George's life is an example on how we should live our lives. Not of course as boat makers, but as fighters. George was thrown into adversity and challenged at every step in his life. His move to Thames brought a distinct change in his life, as for the first time, he had to cope with what so many feel today, the stigmas towards foreigners. Even though Pocock was from Britain, spoke the same language, played the same sport, learned the same things at school, his different accent was enough to set him apart. Instead of giving up and falling into place, as the Thames boys would have wanted, George became one of the best rowers in the area, showing that despite his differences, he could still be great.

Next George and his brother travel to North America in search of better business prospects. The adversity they faced there is one that most people face at least one time in their life. Having to pick up and move, creating a new life in an unknown environment can be scary, especially when work isn't a guaranteed thing. The Pococks lived in an awful house in an awful location, and yet they still carried on doing what

they loved, making boats. Their hard work eventually paid off, when Conibear recruited them to build Washington 12 boats. This brief respite in their difficulties was broken when Washington could only pay for one boat. The disappointment the brothers must have felt is felt by people all the time.; the expectation of something great or some redeeming event that is stripped away. What should one do in this case? The Pocock brothers stayed in Washington, and eventually, their efforts paid off. They became nationally recognized and boat orders began to pour in. Unfortunately, good things don't last forever, and in 1918, when World War 1 was in full swing and the market for rowing shells was greatly depleted, the Pococks had to find new sources of income. They left the boat industry to work for Boeing when they had to find a job that would provide enough money. However, once the war was over, the brothers returned to boat making, and George in particular became world famous once again when he built the boat that would win the 1936 Olympics.

George did not only build boats, he built a legacy that remains to this day in boat houses, coaches, and regattas.

Fiction

Chris Carpenter

Was A Dream

Day One

"You're dead," the screen that had kept Katy captivated for hours is now the same screen that is implying that she should get up and go do something. She exits the app, Relatives 2, a game in which you try to escape your crazy grandparents' cabin in the woods by finding keys to the front door.

Katy sets her phone on the charger and goes downstairs to have dinner with her mom, Brandy. Ever since Katy's father left for unknown reasons, her and her mom have had dinner with each other every Thursday night as a sort of compensation for his absence. Most Thursday night dinner conversations consist of how bad of a person Preston was for leaving us, this and that, and occasionally Brandy will ask how Katy's day was. Today was one of those days.

"How was your day, Katy?"

"It was normal." Katy replied blandly. "How was yours?"

"Different. It started last night when I had a dream about Preston coming back. At that point I woke up but was able to fall back asleep. Then in my second half of my dream there were a lot of people in an amphitheater and I was sitting next to Travis Scott. We ended up becoming good friends and he said I would be on the next album, even though I have never even considered rapping as a career. That part of the dream must have been inspired by Preston's failing 'rap career'."

"Wow Mom, that's a very quirky dream. You are very lucky that you remember your dreams. I hardly ever remember my dreams, and when I do remember them, it's always the weird ones. I never get to remember the dreams where I get to go on a cruise with Zach Efron, or something like that. Well anyways, dinner was good, but I am very full. I'm going to go to my room for the night. Bye mom." As Katy walked upstairs, she thought of how that Thursday night dinner was different from all the other ones. Mom seemed open to talk, yet nervous to actually say something. As if she wanted to hide something but didn't want to show she had something to hide.

Katy opened the door to her room and saw the picture of her family when they were a family of three instead of a family of two, if you want to even call it that. The picture was taken when Katy was six years old and they were all in front of the Eiffel Tower. She didn't remember much, but she remembered how happy her mom and dad were. She also remembered how Preston said he would never leave the family no matter the situation.

"I guess that was some bullshit," Katy thought to herself, "I wish he could see the state of this family right now. How bad my mom needs him. How bad she is now without his love." Katy decided to stop thinking so negative. She normally isn't a pessimist but tonight was... off. The dinner had seemed to mess with her mood a little bit. She decided to get some sleep to try to get out of the funk she was in.

Day Two

Katy woke up late in the afternoon due to the fact she had a hard time sleeping the night before. She had a dream about how her mom had killed her Dad and as soon as she turned around to kill her, Katy woke up. Katy went downstairs to get some late afternoon breakfast, and her mom was coincidentally making pancakes and bacon, the exact meal Katy was thinking of as she walked downstairs.

"Good morning Katy, khdgvjllhscphhh hjpsdfo?" Brandy said. The last part of her sentence sounded like gibberish as the facial expression on her face stayed the same. It's almost as if the writer's cat walked on the keyboard as he was writing that sentence.

"Excuse me mom? Can you repeat the last part of that sentence?"

"Could you not hear me? Idjvpozj89dugj. I said how did you sleep?"

"Uhhhh... Good. What about you?"

"Kjsoihefdfsfiu ldsh80eoisnejds.

Ue8fy8ce0iohfnuyas89ihdsfilkh79ciujba;ode=0uwdobsmsbziyshlsa c7a9stgblfjas ksaapknsois." Katy's head was spinning at this point. She had no idea what reality she was in. She took the food and went back to her room speechless. The minute she finished eating, Katy passed out in her bean bag chair that is in her room.

She woke up to a door creeping open and footsteps slowly getting closer and closer. When she opened her eyes, her mom was standing over her with a balled up t-shirt in her hand.

"Hey mom, what's up?" Katy said startled. She waited for a reply but all she saw was a blank expression in her mom's face and a mouth cracked open just enough to see her tongue.

"Um, Mom? You good?"

"I'm so sorry Katy. I'm so, so sorry for this." Brandy mumbled. The sky was dark, so that meant it was official that Katy had slept through the whole day five days in a row now.

Brandy, without moving any other part of her body, turned around and walked out the door. Katy was spooked by this. So to cope with this experience, she decided to hop on Relatives 2 to ease her mind. She played this all the way until two am when she finally passed out.

Day three

Katy woke up early with a splitting headache. She stumbled downstairs to get some headache meds and go back to lay in bed. She took the pills then went back to her room. As she rounded the turn to go down the hallway into her room, she saw a shadowy figure standing in Brandy and Preston's old room. It didn't look like Brandy

though, it was a tall, bulky man with no hair. Katy rubbed her eyes and the figure had disappeared. She went in her room to play Relatives 2 for the remainder of the day.

She was on level three, which meant she had been caught three times by the grandparents already. One more and she would have to restart all her progress. Moments later, she died again and she entered a cutscene in which both of the grandparents were setting her up for a beheading. Moments later, her head was rolling on the floor in front of the grandparents. They both look at the head, and then simultaneously look at the camera, then it goes black. Katy tried and tried again all day until she couldn't do it anymore and she went to bed early.

Day four

Katy woke up and dragged herself out of bed at a ripe time of 10:00 am. She peeked in Brandy's room to find her laying face down on her bed with no blanket on, in full clothes. She gently closed the door and started walking down the hallway. She thought to herself, "Who in their right mind sleeps like that? She has been acting really weird lately." About three seconds later she heard distant screaming coming from her mother's room along with fiery lights coming out from the bottom.

"Oh hell naw. I have seen this in the movies before. This part is when the main character dies over some stupid stuff. I'm out of here." Katy said as she went downstairs to make herself some breakfast.

She was feeling like some pancakes and bacon, but her mom wasn't awake and she always made them the best. So she decided to pour herself some cereal. She really liked the Oreo bites cereal with milk. That were the best option when pancakes and bacon weren't an option. So she poured a bowl of that and went back to her room to watch Netflix. She really enjoys horror movies, her favorite one right now is called Family. It's about a family that gets possessed by a demon and goes crazy and kills each other.

As soon as this happens in the movie, she hears a loud bang from outside her room and looks up from her laptop. The previously closed door is wide open and has that T-shirt Mom had been holding the other day in the door frame. Katy got up to see the balled up shirt and felt something inside it. She picked up the shirt and a bloodied knife fell out of it. Along with that, there was a note on the shirt that read, "He dead, she dead. In your future, you will experience a behead."

Katy did not like the sound of that at all, but also did not want to ask her mom about it because of the way she had been acting lately. She knows from the movies that when weird stuff starts happening, they are normally possessed by a demon, or Mom is secretly a robot and is short circuiting. She resumed her movie to try to take her mind off of what had just happened. By the end of the day, she had completed the movie for the seventh time. After a long day off doing nothing and talking to nobody, she was exhausted and needed a good night's sleep. As she dozed off, she heard in the back of her head what sounded to be like the screams of hell. Not enough to keep her from falling asleep though, as she was out like a light in about 15 minutes.

Day Five

Katy woke up as the sun was barely up, her phone clock reading 4:55 am. As she adjusts to the current light, she sees her mom floating in the doorway with the same knife from yesterday. It took Katy a minute to process the situation before being able to say anything or even being able to scream.

"I killed him and I will kill you too." Brandy said in Preston's voice.

"Ahhh.. I'm dead aren't I?" Katy said to the reader. "This some demon shit from the movies."

Katy's demon- infused mom dashed over to where Katy was laying down and swiftly beheaded her with the steak knife, then proceeded to disappear. The house was left empty. Not a rat in the walls or a pet wandering the halls. The only thing left in the house was the memories of Katy and Brandy of Thursday night dinner.

Ava Herman

The Car Disaster

The engine purred. The car rumbled to life while butterflies jumped in Kate's stomach. Was she really going to do this? What if she crashed? What if her parents found out? No! They were the ones who were holding her back. They didn't realize how big this party was or how much it meant to her. This was going to be the best party of the year!

With a determined look on her face, she put the silver Tahoe into reverse, and backed the car carefully out of the garage, pressing the button on the remote to close the doors. She had never driven a car before, but she had seen her parents do it enough times. She knew the brake and the gas pedals, how to turn on the blinkers, and the windshield wipers. She even knew how to put it in reverse which she had just proven. What else did she need to know?

With a fresh boost of confidence, Kate took the car further down the driveway. She decided it would be easier to keep it in reverse. The driveway went down a steep hill and led to the road, but her older sister had had no trouble navigating it for the first time when she was driving. With a burst of speed Kate started down the hill. The car hummed even louder, and she could feel its energy coursing through her fingers. A smile lit up Kate's face. This was way easier than she had thought. She gently eased off the gas when she was half way down, but the car didn't stop. Her heartbeat quickened. Kate grabbed the steering wheel and tried pushing on the break, but her foot missed the pedal, and she accidentally turned the steering wheel as she tried to slam on the break again. Kate braced herself as the car swerved off the driveway. She could feel the tires slipping out of control. Only one thought was on her mind. Taking the car had been a *very* bad idea.

Ka-thump!!

"Please!"

"No!"

"Why?"

"I already told you why! Your grades are terrible and you know it!" Kate's mom fumbled with the car keys.

"No they're not! Angelina is going and she is failing three classes!"

"We are not going to use Angelina as an example. You know what she's like! I want all your homework done before we get home. Understood?"

"But mom!" Glaring, Kate crossed her arms.

"Kate don't give me attitude!"

"This is so unfair! All I want to do is go for an hour! Just an hour!"

"Well you're not, so stop asking!"

"Aaarrgh!" Kate stomped over to her desk and put her face in her hands.

"We will be back in three hours!" Kate's dad hollered. "Text us if you need anything."

The sound of the front door closing and the lock clicking into place echoed around the house. A silence only interrupted by the hum of appliances and Kate's frustrated breathing soon followed. She waited until she could no longer hear the car.

How could they just leave her?

The whole family including moody, twelve year old Bradley had left for dinner and a movie. Kate supposed that this was her mom's way of pressuring her to care more about school. It's not that she didn't care; she just wasn't interested. She had more important things to worry about like going to Marina Traver's party. Over half the school was going. Marina had even personally invited Kate. This was Kate's only chance to be noticed by the popular crowd. She had been hanging out with Marina for months hoping that she might get an invitation to her party. After all her hard work, she was not going to miss it.

If only she could get a ride. Sadly all her friends were either already at Marina's house or they weren't going. Just then a thought struck Kate. Her parents had taken the Pilot which meant that the Tahoe was still in the garage. If Kate left now she could have an hour at the party and still make it back in time to do her homework before her parents got home.

Kate quickly switched out her sweatpants and T-shirt for a cute sweater and some jeans. She then grabbed her phone and slipped the car keys off the hook in the entryway, making sure to lock the door behind her. She jogged the short distance to the garage, trying to avoid the drizzle of rain that was starting to turn into a downpour, and unlocked the car. She slid into the cool leather front seat. She looked around the car reviewing where and what all the buttons, switches, and pedals were. Closing the door carefully so that she didn't dent it, Kate grabbed the steering wheel, looked in the rear view mirror and tucked her curly brown hair behind her ears.

"How bad could this go?" She whispered to herself.

Little did Kate know, it was going to go very bad.

Kate forced herself to open her eyes. She was holding on to the steering wheel so tight that it hurt, but other than the pain in her fingers she was unharmed. Cautiously, she looked out the window.

The car was tipped up at an angle. The trees around her all had broken branches and there were tire tracks in the grass. Kate realized that she must have driven the car right into the drainage ditch that ran along the road. Kate carefully opened her door and jumped on to the wet grass. She turned around and saw that both of the back tires were stuck in the drainage ditch and the front tires were hovering a few inches above the ground. Kate walked a circle around the car making sure there was no damage. Other than the fact that it was now soaked, the car was miraculously still in pristine condition. That was one weight off of Kate's shoulders, but she still had to get the Tahoe out of the ditch and all the way up the driveway before her family came home. Kate tried to Google how to do it, but she didn't understand what the instructions were telling her to do. She decided she should try and push it out.

Kate pushed her shoulder against the back of the car. She leaned all her weight into it, but the car didn't move an inch. Thirty minutes later the car was still in the same

position. The only thing that had changed was that now Kate was drenched with water. She stared at the hard unyielding metal of the car and realized there was no way she could do this alone. With rain pouring down her face, she decided it might be time to call her friends for help. Emma and Matthew lived just down the road from her and so did Alexis and Hazel. None of them had been invited to the party and she was sure they would help her. Kate sent some quick texts and in a few minutes they showed up to help.

Together they tried to push the car. The friends managed to move the Tahoe a few feet out of the trench. The front tires were touching the ground again, but the car was still stuck. Kate tried to drive it out, but she only managed to wedge the tires even deeper into the ditch. The rain was coming down harder now and Kate could see that the drainage ditch was starting to fill with water. Her sweater was ruined and her shoes would probably take a week to dry out. Kate quietly promised herself that she would never try to sneak out of the house again.

After another unsuccessful half hour of pushing and trying to make the car move, a deep voice called out behind them.

"Do you need a hand?" A young man in a huge truck had pulled up alongside them.

"Hey, Sawyer," Emma called.

Kate recognized the man as Emma's older brother.

"Yeah that would be great," Kate responded.

Very carefully they navigated the bright red truck so that it was right in front of the Tahoe. Sawyer had brought a towing line and they connected it to the front of the Tahoe. Sawyer got back in his truck and started to pull while Kate, Alexis, Hazel, Matthew and Emma pushed the back. Little by little the car came out of the ditch then with a sudden lurch the car was pulled back up onto the driveway. Mud sprayed out from the back tires hitting everyone behind the car in the face. Kate had never been more wet or muddy in her life.

She couldn't believe her friends had stuck around so long to help her. Kate realized that none of the people at Marina's party would have stuck around as long. Not even Marina would have. Kate was grateful to all her true friends who had helped her. She suddenly felt foolish for wanting to be popular. She was already cared for enough by her own friends. Kate thanked everyone and promised to never try and drive the Tahoe down the hill again. The friends waved goodbye and Sawyer offered to drive everyone home. Kate stood and watched them drive off before she remembered that she still had to get the car back up the driveway.

Kate had to hurry if she wanted to be back in the house before her parents got home. She got into the Tahoe and drove it up the hill and into the garage with much more caution than she had when she drove it down the hill earlier. She pulled to a stop and jumped out. The car was wet and the tires were muddy, but Kate was sure her parents wouldn't notice. Kate locked up the car and headed to the house.

She changed back into her sweatpants and T-shirt and hid her wet clothes in the bottom of her closet. Next she dried her hair, wiped the mud off of her face, and sat back down at her desk. Kate glanced apprehensively at the pile of unfinished homework. She was able to finish her math worksheet before she heard the sound of

her parents car rolling into the driveway. Kate tried to look like she was busy. The sound of her family's noisy footsteps drowned out the sound of Kate's calm breathing. There was no way they would have found out what she had done.

"So you decided to take the car for a test drive?" Her father and mother were standing in her bedroom doorway both with identical looks of disapproval.

Rhys Carleton

The Worlds Dying

"Time for dinner" my mom called out. Tonight's dinner was the usual, a potato. For dinner, we either each got a potato, a tomato, or some lettuce. That was all we had growing in our yard, and such a small amount survived that we could only eat in portions of one for meals. This was the same for most families in the world. If you had a decent sized yard, you could plant enough food to live on. Not comfortably, but you would survive. If you didn't have any yard space, then you're probably already dead. People aren't into sharing food nowadays.

The year is 2060, 2 years after the world started dying. At least, that's what we think is happening. In early 2058, stories began floating around about farmers not being able to grow food very well, and that most of it would die before harvest. As the year went on, this problem grew worse. Plants, and trees began dying all over the world. Anyone growing food, from farmers to regular people with some tomatoes in their yard, watched as their plants died. Watering them didn't do anything so there really was nothing they could do. This all started happening right in the middle of another crisis. Years of consumption lead to shortages in almost every major resource. And on top of that, climate change was at its worst. So the year 2058 wasn't a great one, but it's gotten worse. Since farmers couldn't produce enough food, they couldn't supply stores, and couldn't make any kind of food that required food from the farmers. So after all the food had been consumed, everyone had to turn to farming. Like a said, if you had a decent sized yard, enough food would survive that you could live on it, but if you had no space to grow food then you would have to walk around your town and city begging for food which you would rarely receive. We are expecting things to get worse. At this point we're just waiting until growing food is impossible. Inhabiting another planet was an idea we had but were pretty much out of anything that could fuel something to get us to space, so that's out of the picture.

"Thank you mom" I yelled as I ran downstairs. I jumped in my bed and turned on the tv. We still have electricity so all I do all day is watch tv and play xbox. I live on an island just off of Seattle called Nash Island. If you live in a big city, most things you own have probably been stolen by the Reckers. Reckers roam the streets of big cities and the surrounding areas in large groups, raiding houses and stealing anything they can get their hands on, killing anyone who fights back. They set up camps where

they keep all their stolen items, and keep it heavily guarded. Many people have been killed by the recker, or died of starvation after having all their food stolen. Luckily, since I live on an island, we don't have to deal with them.

Life isn't so bad for people like me, other than constantly having an empty stomach. My friends and I still hang out and do everything we did before this started. We're just trying to forget any of this is actually happening and make the most of our lives while we still have it.

"Kody, come on" my friends shouted to me from the water.

"Sorry guys" I said as I jumped off my bike and into the water. The water isn't too cold in the summer, but you would be crazy to swim without a wetsuit or something in the winter.

"What took you so long?" Hayden asked.

"My mom was making me do math stuff" I replied.

"Your parents are still making you do schoolwork?" Kareena said.

"Ya, and they're making me do work for every class. They're confident that this will end at some point and want to make sure I'm still ready for school or something. It's so stupid."

"Ya that sucks" Kayden said.

"Who wants to go to the cliffs?" Said Isha.

The cliffs were a top secret spot only we knew about. It was a pair of rocks placed perfectly for cliff jumping, and they were well hidden. It was a long swim from the beach but it was always worth it.

"Sure, let's go" I replied.

"Hey Kody, wanna race?" Asked Hayden. "I got a Milky Way at home that's all yours if you win."

"Might as well just give it to me now, have you ever beaten me in a race" I said.

"Ya, remember that time last year on Karen's birthday" he replied

"My name isn't Karen" Kareena called out. She had already started swimming to the cliffs.

"That was when I had a sprained wrist. And you still barely beat me" I said.

"Still counts doesn't it, anyways are we racing or not?"said Hayden.

"Of course. I'll even give you a five second head start" I said.

I've had the same friends for most of my life. Hayden, Kareena, and Isha. I have had other friends before but not like them. We all met at a wedding a long time ago, and we've been best friends ever since. We do everything together and never leave someone out of something. We're all very different but fit perfectly together. Hayden is very crazy. He just lives life to have fun. He's never backed down from a dare, no matter how wild it is. Isha is incredibly smart. She's definitely got the brightest future out of all of us. When we were in 7th grade, before all of this began, Isha was taking some of her classes with the 9th and 10th graders. I don't really know how to describe Kareena other than that she's very outgoing and doesn't care much about what other people think. She always says what's on her mind, even if it's weird and dumb. And then there's me. I've never really been the kind of person to describe myself, so I just leave it to other people to form their own opinions on me.

"Just give up, you're never gonna beat me" I said to Hayden as he climbed out of the water onto the rocks.

"Shut up" Hayden replied.

"Where's Isha?" I asked.

"I don't know, probably just fell behind, like always" said Hayden.

Isha has always been the slowest swimmer in the group.

"Heads up" Kareena yelled as she jumped off the cliff and into the water.

"That never gets old" she said as she resurfaced.

We began climbing up the rocks to the jumping spot. The climb isn't too bad, but there's one sketchy part as you're climbing onto the jumping rock. There isn't any good place to put your hands. All of us have almost fallen off it multiple times.

"Now this never gets old" Kareena said as we climbed up onto the jumping rocks. The view from the rocks was incredible. The glistening water and view of nearby Seattle made it worth the climb every time.

2 Weeks Later

People are going crazy. All across the world people are slowly losing their sanity. Last week people began noticing that even more of their food was dying than ever before. The world went into the frenzy. People began realizing that there really was no hope. The situation was going to continue to get worse and worse.

"Knock, Knock." I opened my door and saw Hayden, Isha, and Kareena on their bikes.

"Want to go for a ride in the trails?" Asked Hayden.

"Sure" I replied. "Just let me ask my parents."

On our way up the big hill out of my neighborhood, we talked about how much we missed our favorite foods. It had been years since anyone had enjoyed a burger or pizza.

"Can we stop talking about this?" I said. "I haven't eaten all day and this isn't helping"

When we arrived at the trails, they were packed as usual. This seemed to be a lot of people's favorite way to escape from what was happening.

The reekers are growing in numbers as people aren't able to grow enough food. They started out as groups of bad people who didn't want to work for food. But now, good people who are just desperate are joining in hopes that they will be able to get some food in their stomach. I'm afraid that people might start forming groups of reekers on Nash that are big enough to actually cause problems. If it gets to that point then we're all going to have to stay inside which would kinda ruin my life. But for now I'm spending as much time with my friends as possible, and making the most of it.

I heard screams further down the trail.

"Ahhhhh, Guys get down here." I sped down the trail and found Hayden on the ground, clutching his arm.

"I think it's broken" he whimpered.

"Oh my god are you ok?" Asked Kareena.

"Does it look like he's ok" I said. "I think I have a cast at home, I guess I'll just carry you there."

"Mom, Dad, where is the cast we had, I need it right now" I said.

"Why, what happened?" My mom asked.

"Hayden broke his arm" I replied.

My dad came running into the kitchen with the cast.

"Are you going to be ok?" I asked him as he walked out the door.

"Ya I'll be fine, thanks for all your help" he said.

"Ya no problem" I said. "Just don't come out with us for a while, let your arm heal."

"Ya I will, see ya" he said.

It's been 3 weeks since Hayden broke his arm, and things have gotten worse. Reckers now roam the streets in town, stealing everything from the nearby houses. His arm is doing a lot better, and will probably be healed by next week. He texted me that he's coming over to talk to me about something really important which is weird. He would normally just text whatever it is.

When he came inside, we went down to my room.

"I think I hit the jackpot on this one" he said.

"Oh no, what is it?" I asked.

"So I was taking a walk around the block right, and I heard these two guys talking about Mr. Radlif."

"Ok, and?" I said.

"Well apparently, he's sitting on a huge stash of food. No one knows where he got it but they said he's got all the good stuff, I'm talking canned food, drinks, everything" he said, smiling from ear to ear.

"Ok, and I'm guessing you want to steal it" I said.

"Exactly" he said.

"I don't know, that guy is crazy, if we get caught he'll kill us" I said. "It's also his stash, He's an old man we shouldn't steal from him."

I sighed. "If things get worse, then maybe, I mean we don't know that the stash is even there, but until then just rest your arm" I said.

"Ok fine, but let me know if you want to do it" he said.

"Ya I will, now go home, I have some stuff to do."

"So what's the plan?" Asked Kareena. We all decided that if there was a stash then it was worth the risk. But we still hadn't actually heard a plan from Hayden.

"Simple. Mr. Radlif should be passed out upstairs in his bedroom, and the stash should be in the basement. So we sneak in, find the stash, quickly load the food into our bags, and get out of there."

"That is a terrible plan, but I'm tired of eating almost nothing everyday, lets go" said Kareena.

As we walked through the cold, dark forest, we talked about what kind of food we thought was going to be in the stash. Juice boxes, soup, mac n cheese. My mouth

watered to the distant memories of mac n cheese. As the house came into view, I stopped the group.

"Are we sure we want to do this, it's a big risk and there might not be a stash" I said.

"It's a risk worth taking" Hayden said. Kareena and Isha nodded their heads in agreement.

When we got to the house, we looked through all the windows to make sure he wasn't sleeping on the couch. He was an old man and it was three in the morning, he had to be asleep, and it was either in his bed or in the living room. After making sure the middle floor was clear we quietly entered the house. Kareena and Isha were going to look for the stash on the middle floor while Hayden and I checked the basement. We crept down the stairs, opened the door, and turned on the lights. No stash. It was just filled with a bunch of random stuff. We searched around for a secret door or something, but there was nothing. All of a sudden, there was a big "crash" from upstairs. Hayden and I ran back upstairs. We heard the low, creaky voice of Mr. Radlif upstairs.

"Hey, who's there" he yelled. "What are you doing in my house."

We heard footsteps walking down the stairs.

"Run" I yelled.

I ran as fast as I could. I looked behind and saw my three friends, and a figure in the door. Then I heard a loud "bang" as a bullet whizzed past me. "Bang, bang, bang." Three more shots flew by. I turned right on the trail. I was safe but I didn't stop running until I made it back home. I snuck in through the back door and went to my room. I immediately called my friends to make sure they were ok. Thankfully they all picked up and told me they made it home. Kareena and Isha told me that they found nothing, and they were about to leave and text Hayden and I, but Kareena knocked over some shelves.

That went about as bad as you could possibly imagine. There was no stash, and we almost got killed. With the Earth still dying, and the growing number of reckers, our only hope at this point is the Earth to randomly stop dying. But honestly, I don't think that's going to happen.

Gabe Torres-Ramirez

First Day

I grab my bag and leave my house to go to school, when I arrived I hear some small talk from my peers,

"Did you hear we're getting out of school for a month? Thank you coronavirus!" In a happy tone.

I'd heard some rumors that we would be getting out of school for a while, but nothing had been confirmed yet. We all knew we were going to get out eventually and we all were just waiting for that announcement over the intercom, by the time we reached our last class my peers and I felt like we were losing hope of it ever getting cancelled.

I heard one of my friends say,

"I can't believe they haven't announced it yet, there's a virus killing thousands and they wanna keep us in school! I don't know about you guys, but I don't think we should even be here now." He stated.

Everyone agreed with him and were disappointed with the school. Class was pretty much over with two minutes left and we were all packed up and ready to leave in despair, until a beep came over the intercom.

"Dear Tacoma Tigers, I, principal Williams, am announcing the closure of Tacoma Highschool, from today, March 12th until April 27th, I advise you all to follow orders from the governor, stay safe, and God bless." He stated on the intercom.

As the intercom went off you could hear excitement from all of the nearby classes and I assume the whole school. As my classmates and I were walking out of school I heard someone say to me,

"Hey Josh, thanks to one of you guys eating a bat we don't school for a month!" He said in an excited voice.

"You guys?" I stopped and said to him.

I couldn't believe what I had just heard, I usually don't take offense to comments like that, but now from a virus that started in Asia it felt like things would be different. Now we're all stuck in quarantine in our homes, while that phrase sticks in my mind.

Robbery

I wake up in my ski lodge and go to get my kids ready for their day on the slopes and I shout,

"Jackson! Crystal! Wake up you're gonna make dad mad if you don't hurry!"

"Coming mom!" They both say in sync.

It was the first time they would go skiing together since last winter, now that we were all stuck in quarantine we decided to isolate in style and go to our lodge. Eventually Jackson, Crystal and my husband leave the lodge and I finally get some me time. I go to take a shower and in the middle of it all of the light shut off. I didn't think much of it as it usually happens up on these slopes, I went downstairs to check the power box, and when I went to flip the switch I noticed that the wires had been cut. I intended to go back to my room, but when I went to go to the staircase I noticed the front door was open, and the lock was broken. From the looks of it I could tell immediately what this was, a robbery. Whoever was doing this planned this out well, they knew to cut the electricity so the cameras would shut off and that it would just be me, I heard from upstairs,

"Jessica, I know you're in here." He said in a creepy voice,

"Who are you?" I question the man,

"You know who I am." He stated,

All of the people that I could think of ran through my head until I realized who it was, my brother.

Riot

In our world today after being quarantined for at least a year now our world and communities have gone mad. Riots are spreading and our world seems to be from the movie "Mad Max", my family and I are sheltered in our home avoiding contact with the outside world. Today my brother decided to come home from university, we told him he didn't have to come, due to it being so dangerous outside from the rioters, but he insisted. My name is Arthur and the world has gone mad, I spoke with my sister Magaly,

"I'm glad Fernando's finally coming home, I know it's dangerous but I think he'll make it." I said to my sister,

"Yeah I just hope he makes it home safe." She responded.

About three hours later I received a phone call while I eagerly waited for my brother to arrive, I looked at my phone and it was him, I was worried something happened, but he was just letting me know that he arrived safely and was entering from the gate at our neighborhood and to ring him in, when he came inside I asked him so many questions because I hadn't seen him since the virus first broke out.

"How was the trip, did you see any gangs on your way here?" I asked.

"No, there actually wasn't anything bad out there. It looked just like the old days I was kinda confused that everything seemed normal." He said,

"Well I'm just glad you're here, we should go out together with Magaly if it's not bad out in the public anymore." I said in an excited voice.

"That sounds like a good idea, we can take my car!" My sister chimed in,

"Sounds like a plan!" My brother exclaimed.

Later that day my siblings and I went on our way to go do something outside of our sheltered home, "Where should we go?" My sister asked,

"Let's go get snacks at the gas station!" My brother said,

We went on our way to the our closest 7/11 gas station and when we got there something shocked us,

"Fernando, that looks like a gang right there maybe we should turn around." My sister said in a scared tone,

"Yeah, maybe that's not the best idea right now." I said to my brother.

"No, it's fine they're just sitting there." He said confidently.

He walked up to the door and the group of gang members were staring at us in the car, casually one the members looked at us and came closer to our window,

"That's a nice car you got." He said with intention.

"Thanks," My sister said.

"Give me the car!" He yelled.

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

My sister acted out of instinct and put the car in reverse and tried to go to the front of the gas station to pick up my brother, he came in and we were about to finally leave, but my sister forgot to lock the doors.

"Not so fast." The member said as he tried to grab my sister out of the car,
"Gun it!" I shouted to my sister,

As soon as I said that my sister closed the door, slammed on the gas and sped off away from that horrendous gas station.

"How did we get out of that?" My sister asked,

"I have no idea! I thought you said it was safe!" I screamed,

After that we drove as fast as we could back to our home, we were all scared for our lives and didn't know if we would ever make it back home. When we arrived we vowed to not tell anyone ever of what had just happened, I feel like all hope is lost in our world ever restoring, we should've listened to the stay at home orders.

Connor Burk

Pizza Delivery

The call came in at a quarter to midnight: a large cheese pizza, no sauces, no drinks, and no sides. Nobody would've minded either, if the location wasn't an hour out of town, but we were in a nowhere town in a nowhere county and making distant deliveries was part of the job.

We were running a skeleton crew of five that night. It was Sunday, so business slowed down quickly as people went to bed to catch some sleep before trudging off to work tomorrow. Once the pizza was placed in the oven we had something to resolve.

"So are we drawing straws or what?" asked Charles, an older man and current shift manager.

"If we are I call dibs on the long one." quipped Jen.

"Very funny, but in all seriousness how are we doing this?"

"However you guys do this, count me out," chimed Paul. "I don't even like driving home from here at night and that's only a ten minute drive."

"I'll go," their heads all turn to me. "It's fine, I like to think when I drive anyways."

"If you say so," Charles says hesitantly.

Not long after I've volunteered, the oven's timer dinged. It was a short walk through the parking lot to the 2002 Civic; the air inside was warm and musty, the telltale sign of a graveyard shift in Kansas. The key clicked a half dozen times before flame filled the cylinders and the engine roared to life. After a few minutes I'd left town and entered the barren plains outside Scott City.

I don't normally like driving at night, and I'm not sure what exactly came over me when I volunteered for the task. Perhaps I wanted to get away from everyone; my shift started with some snide remarks from Jen about stains on my shirt. What did she know anyways? It's not like she's the one working two jobs on her weekends.

There are very few cell towers in Scott County, and even fewer radio signals coming our way, so it wasn't long before I was left with nothing but the purr of the engine and the sound of tires gripping asphalt. I watched the road intently because it was the only thing I could do. My mind drifted, and I began to think about the raised markers that caught the reflection of my headlights. I thought of how uniform their distribution was and what a pain it must be to install them. When I regained focus on the road I was in disbelief. The road was gone, the outlying brush off the side of the highway was nowhere to be seen. I felt like I was traveling impossibly fast, careening

through the void with my only anchor to the real world being the yellow reflective bumps. My knuckles turned ghastly pale as I exerted my death grip on the wheel, trying my hardest to stay on a course I couldn't see. My windows were rolled up, but I could distinctly feel the whipping of wind on my face. The intensity of the wind increased as I continued to gain speed. The yellow dots began to blur together into two parallel lines, and as quickly as I had left it, I had returned to the lucid world. I was back on the road in southern Kansas, and I was speeding down the highway at twice the limit.

In a panic I slammed my foot on the brake, and miraculously the car held together, despite the whiplash. I continued my journey at a cautious 30 mph, arriving at my destination only a few minutes later. I'm not sure how long I was in that trance-like state, my car's clock says I arrived at the house about an hour after I left the kitchen, but there's a 30 minute block of time in my brain that I still feel is unaccounted for. I found my exit from the highway and was promptly funneled down a backroad to a driveway.

This house was not correct. I cannot explain this feeling in any empirical way, but I know that on some primal level there was something wrong with this building. It was a red tumor sprouting from the land, taking the form of a turn of the century farmhouse. There was a gaunt iron windmill that shot out like a needle behind the red growth. I saw two lights, one came from a small shed attached to the house, the other from the lone upstairs window. As I rolled to a stop on the gravel driveway my gut told me not to get out of the car. My lizard brain was sending me every signal and red flag it could to tell me to get the hell out of here. Fear was tearing me in two directions, every instinct was telling me that I shouldn't be here, but some unknown force compelled me to stay. That force won, and I shut off the car.

I got out, cold pizza in hand, and approached the door. From my periphery I caught a glimpse of a figure upstairs, a backlit silhouette leering from the window. The door was upon me now, I passed the event horizon and now I had to finish what I started. I knocked on the door and was met with complete silence. Against my better judgment I knocked again, this time I heard faint noises on the other side of the door. What sounded like the clutter of furniture being moved and hushed whispers. Before I could knock one last time the door swung open. Standing beyond the threshold was a middle aged woman. Her hair was thin with streaks of gray and she wore a tattered apron over a faded checkered dress,

"Oh you must be here for the dinner party," she exclaimed. "I'm so sorry that you had to come here so late, please come in and take a seat. Behind her I could see the dining room, a modest table flanked by several empty chairs.

"I'm just here to deliver the pizza ma'am," I say gesturing with the pizza, "if you could just sign here." I began to rummage through my pockets for the receipt.

"Oh, that's not important, please you really must come in, we're starving here." As she continued to pester me into entering the house I heard what sounded like the shifting of gravel somewhere to my right. I looked over and saw a large shadowy figure regaining its balance. We locked eyes before it launched into a charge. I couldn't make out any detail beyond the glint of metal in its hand, and I finally let my lizard brain take full control, I dropped the pizza and made a mad dash to the car and jumped in, immediately locking the doors. The woman in the door had disappeared but the other person was now trying to pull up my hood, the metal in his hand was a knife and it seemed as if he was trying to disable my car. The key was still clicking uselessly when he finally jimmied the hood open with his knife. Meanwhile, the woman had reappeared in the doorway, gun in hand. She raised the rifle to take aim and just as she shot, the car came to life and I floored it in reverse. Her shot went wide and the force of motion was enough to slam the hood shut. Once I had put some yard between myself and the knife-wielder I started to maneuver back onto the driveway and started gunning it back towards the main road. When I was back on the highway I began to speed as fast as I had on my way to the farmhouse. What was an hour long trip one way had been halved going the other.

When I finally got back to Scott City I was going 80 mph on a city street. I caught my breath when I saw my first traffic light in hours and slowed to a halt at the red light. When I finally made it back to the parking lot at the kitchen I saw Charles intently looking through the window. I walked through the door and was greeted by a hug.

"We were getting worried about you, you've been gone for hours in who knows where," he said, exhausted. Jen was notably absent from the reception.

"Did Jen take off early?" I asked.

"Oh that's right, we sent her to go look for you about an hour ago, she should be arriving at the house any minute now."

Science Fiction

Xavier Nazzal

Lobby 7

The building shot so high in the air it interrupted the flow of a cloud which passed by overhead precisely at the time in which I entered the golden revolving doors, finalizing my long awaited journey. My interview was scheduled for 12:00 PM sharp. To come all this way and miss the opportunity of a lifetime was by no means on my tightly-packed agenda. I stepped into the lobby which panned out around me, displaying itself in a grandiose fashion. The elevators were made of a gold-like material while the remainder of the wall, chiseled from what appeared to be the finest marble available, was covered in a detailed stretch of patterns made primarily from the same material as the elevator. The floor was configured of large, white tiles separated by shiny silver borders. The ceiling of the lobby was a non-distracting white and contained gold-colored sprinklers in the case of a fire.

I stepped casually onto the row of carpet, leading directly and definitely to the polished marble desk of the lobbyist.

"Hello," I said smiling and introduced myself as an interviewee, "I was wondering where the interview will be held?"

"Lobby 7," the lobbyist replied, motioning to the elevator.

I thanked her and continued on my journey, straying away from the desk and the carpet and heading in the direction of the elevator.

I stood patiently, watching the dial circulate until finally a "ding!" rang out from the machine and the golden doors of the elevator opened wide, revealing my method of transportation for the next few seconds.

Smiling softly to myself, I stepped into the elevator which contained an arrangement of mirrors, brushed my suit, straightened my tie, and watched the heavy, golden doors close in automatic, industrial harmony. Fixating my attention on the button pad, my eyes began to scan the surface of the contraption, searching with a growing haste for the coveted Lobby 7. After what seemed like an absurd amount of time, my eyes finally found what they had been looking for. I pressed the button marked "L7" and immediately felt a rising sensation, indicating that the elevator was working its job. I began to think to myself about the nature of the room in which my interview would be held. Would it be a large room? Would it be a small room? Would my interviewer be tall, short, or something in the middle? Would the room have a view down to the street below? I get dreadfully scared when heights are present you know. I chuckled to myself at the thought.

The elevator was yanked to a halt with the usual gravity sensation, finalizing my journey into what I hoped to be predetermined glory. I put my hat atop my head and straightened it. The golden doors hissed open.

Jungle trees engulfed my vision of the room. I was immediately hit by a wafting tropical mist. The faint screaming of monkeys could be heard from the trees and the sounds of what appeared to be Amazonian wildlife enveloped the rainforest scenery.

I stood in absolute disbelief, nearly dropping my coat and briefcase. A spider monkey stared back at me.

Instantly intrigued, I stepped cautiously into the forest. I turned and found that the elevator was nowhere to be seen. This was far from ideal. However, the forest floor upon which I stood was cleared of any undergrowth, indicating that this dirt stretch of botanical absence may indeed be a path leading to a village or some other place of hopeful refuge. Straightening up, I began to walk down the path, ducking occasionally to avoid the presence of unidentified tree animals leaping from branch to branch. Presently, I found myself bathed in midafternoon sunlight. The canopy had gradually been reduced to nothingness, resulting in the exposure of an overcast sky shrouded in gray monotony. The sun, a pale orb in the sky, offered just enough sunlight to prove sufficient to the trees, which, I could've guessed, were used to a more favorable forecast. However, the gray, overcast weather reminded me of the country's usual weather. A weather that had been present at times of great joy, great friendship and great family. A reconnection with family and friends may soon be impossible given the circumstances of my situation. However, happy and cheerful thoughts such as these needed to wait. At this point in time, the interview was first and foremost. *That* was my sole priority.

I looked down from the sky, checked my wrist watch, and realized with a sudden horror that the time was precisely 11:57 AM. Terrified, I bolted down the path, smashing through low-hanging branches and waving away tree creatures with my suitcase. I plunged through the thickening jungle, shot up a fern-laden incline, and nearly fell into a massive river canyon, opposed only by a dilapidated hanging bridge, comprised of rotting planks and stringy ropes. Some of the planks were missing.

The river, about thirty feet below me, roared with an insane, natural fury, smashing against gargantuan boulders and sending sprays into the air which rocked the bridge at a worrying intensity. My eyes shot to my wrist watch. 11:59. It was now or never.

As if in slow motion, I staggered to the bridge, completely out of breath from my long jungle run. I gripped the stringy rope which was soggy as a result of the river spray. I surveyed my stretch of bridge, searching for the nearest intact plank. Finding it, I inched myself forward, extending my leg while simultaneously gripping the rope with an insane intensity. The rope creaked and the bridge dipped dangerously, receiving a massive splash of spray. It remained there for a second and shot up again

with an unstoppable magnitude. I was thrown into the air and landed on my back right where I had started.

By now, I had no choice. I turned and ran backwards a few paces, stopped, turned, and faced the bridge. I glanced at my watch. Fifteen more seconds to go. I braced myself and bolted full speed at the bridge. I leaped into the air and grabbed the rope with both hands as my feet smashed through the planks in the middle of the bridge. The bridge began to dip at a furious speed. Hurling the prospect of death from my mind, I hugged the left rope railing to my chest as my feet met the bottom part of the material, used to hold up the planks and give the bridge a form of structure. Frantically, I pulled myself as hard as I could up the railing rope while kicking to no avail at the bottom rope. At the last second, I gained footing and ran as fast as I could up the rope just as the center of the bridge smashed violently into a gargantuan boulder below. Breathing heavily, I clawed my way onto the forest floor. Sighing, I looked at my watch. It was 12:00 PM sharp.

I wasn't late yet. Wasting no time, I picked myself up and ran at lightning speed down the remainder of the path. I ran as fast as I could and saw a door in the distance. I ran the last few lengths of the path, stopped to catch my breath, calmly opened the door and stopped.

A man was sitting at a desk, his arms folded calmly atop it, smiling. He glanced at a clock on the wall which read 12:00 and turned his attention back to me. Without changing his expression the man stared straight at me and said the two words I had most desired to hear: "You're hired".

Simeon Cady

Beach life

It was a pleasant summer evening, the perfect kind only summer could believe. My family and I had finally moved to our beach house down to a small beach town called Folly beach, which is about 45 minutes east from Charleston, South Carolina. I had been expelled from two other schools for "disruptive behavior". I just have ADHD, and my school refuses to work around me. My parents are hoping that this is our last move, and that island life will help me calm down. I wasn't used to the extreme heat and humidity as I grew up in Colorado which was quite the opposite. I decided that I would miss the snow, but not the freezing temperatures all the time. I could bike around and surf whenever I felt the desire and I had a strong feeling that nothing could go wrong this summer, I would be immortal. For a little bit anyways.

"Adam can you and John go grab us the pizza we just ordered?" Yelled my dad from across the hall.

"Yup, we'll head out in a sec." I yelled back. "C'mon John lets go."

As we set out on our bikes our mother ran behind us holding up our helmets crying out that we had forgotten them.

"We'll be fine mom, we won't die!" John and I both sped up and made it to the pizza place in about 10 mins. As we were approaching I told John to watch our bikes and I went in to grab the pizza. I instantly noticed a shady character drinking a beer in the far corner of the room. A chill went down my spine as I looked at him. He slowly stood up and moved towards me and I decided to hurry up and get the pizza.

Another man stood up and hurried towards me. I was starting to get very scared, as anyone would in my place. A third man with a long beard and hair to match it stepped up and pulled me over by the arm. I let out a little surprised yelp but it was lost to the loud music. "Watch it bub" the man next to me said. The scary man had disappeared and only been a part of my imagination. I head over to the waiter;

"Hi, I'm here to pick up an order for Adam."

The waiter loudly pops her chewing gum bubble in my face and replies "You gonna go bear hug anymore strangers I suggest you go outside for that" then walks away to get my order. I searched my memory but I definitely remember the men with black clothes and long hair.

"Excuse me miss, were there any men with black clothes and long beards here a little bit ago?" The waiter looks at me and just pops her bubble in my face again, then goes "nope". I just smiled and nodded at her then took my pizza and walked out. As I got outside I saw one of them walking towards John at a fast pace.

I ran at John yelling " John move, there's someone behind you!" As I looked over to make sure I wouldn't get run over by a car and then hurriedly crossed the street, the man was gone. John just looked at me funny and said we should go home. I saw the men at least three more times on the way home, each time just standing on the sidewalks, staring at me. I was so creeped out that I didn't even notice when I got home.

As I was setting down my bike, John walks over to me and asks, "You've been acting a little strange lately, what's up?" I knew he would just laugh at me if I told him about the men so I shakily responded

"Oh I'm just getting used to our new home, I guess. I'll be fine." I was telling John and myself that I'll be fine, and I tried hard to mean it. John shrugs and we both walked up to our house so we could eat. That was another thing I would have to get used to, since we lived so close to the beach, all the houses had to be at least 17 feet above ground in case of a hurricane or a king tide. The pizza was delicious, and I forgot all about my worries after a funny movie, then some time in my hammock. Once I had adjusted to the humidity, I would try to spend some nights sleeping on the porch, being able to hear the crashing waves not too far away, was an offer I couldn't pass up. Also when we had set up the bug screen around the deck of course. A couple weeks later at the beach, As I was playing in the waves, I got some water in my ear. I went back over to our mini station on the beach to get it out, and grab a little snack too. When I turned around, a frightening sight arose. A girl about my age was frantically running around, and whimpering. It was not a pretty sight, but you could tell she was truly scared. I ran over to her and asked what was going on.

"They're here. They're here. They're here. They're here." She couldn't stop saying this phrase.

"Who's here?" I questioned. I had a dawning sense upon me and I instantly remembered the men. "Do you see the men too?"

She flashed her eyes up to mine and said, "Oh more than just see them."

"Why don't we get out of here and talk about it?" I had completely forgotten about the

men, and was annoyed that they were back in my head, but I couldn't just leave this girl. As we walked over a visible shiver went down her back. "Are they here now?"

She just responded with a quick "Let's get out of here." As we were walking back, she

told me her name was Lily and she was 16, just like me. Turns out our houses were quite close to each other so by the time I was dressed and made it over to her house she let me in. We sat at the counter, and she looked at me with a questioning glare in her eyes.

"How much exactly have you seen them?"

"Well I saw the men-"

"Just say them. It makes me feel better."

"Okay, I saw them the first time we arrived here, which was a week or two back.

We

were biking to get pizza and they were in the pizza place and kept walking towards me then disappearing. Then, on the ride home, they would be just standing across the street from me, completely motionless. After that I completely forgot about them."

"That happened to me too, when we first moved down here. Like the same thing that

happened to you. Except they came back for me."

"Will they come back for me?"

"I don't know. We should go ask my grandfather, he's been on this island, for a long, long time." When we walked over, Lily told me about how for some time she thought someone was just playing a prank on her. Maybe they do this to all the people who come here, to try and scare them away. But when they got in her dreams, then she knew something was up. We arrived at her grandfather's house to the sight of about ten cats walking around the garage area.

"That's odd he hates cats." Lily said.

"Well maybe that's why they're not inside. C'mon let's go."

Lily's grandfather was fast asleep when we let ourselves in and when she woke him up, he was a little disoriented but after a couple of seconds he was fine.

"Lily, how nice of you to stop by. Who's this fine gentleman?"

"This is Adam, and he helped me out on the beach when I was having an episode."

"Nice to meet you, mister. Well you woke me up from my nap so this better be worth it."

"Granddad, this time they were in the process of picking me up, when Adam came over.

They were literally grabbing me and picking me up but ran away when Adam came."

"Well you did a fine job son. They must be getting ready to do whatever they're planning

on doing quite soon if they got that close to you.'

"My dreams have been getting worse too."

"Sorry to interrupt, but what are they doing?"

"Well Adam, Lily and I have this disorder called ADHD, and as far as we can tell, only people with our problem can see these men."

"I have ADHD too, that's why we moved here. Oh my god, that's why my brother couldn't see them." Lily's grandfather stood up as quickly as a 70 year old could, and looked around.

"They're here. Up to the bunker."

We ran upstairs and behind a dresser in a closet was a secret door. As we got in we could hear something moving around outside. There was lots of space up here, and we got comfy as we might be here for a while. We looked at the cameras that were throughout the house.

"These cameras are about the size of a fly, impossible to see them."

Right as Granddad spoke, one of the men looked right up at the camera then the picture

went fuzzy and disappeared. Suddenly I was taken by a deep sleep and woke up in Lily's living room with my family surrounding me.

"Where are they?!" I jumped up and looked around.

"Where's who, honey? Why don't you lay back down and get some rest. You hit your

head pretty hard." My mom helped me sit down on the couch again. I looked at Lily questioningly, and she just smiled back.

“Yes, Mrs. Smith, I found him at the beach and he looked like he was concussed so I took him back here.”

“What no, what about-“

“He’s probably having some crazy thoughts right now, due to the concussion,” Lily’s granddad butted in. As I looked over at Lily, her body changed into one of the men and then quickly changed back into her own body. As I realized my nightmare was just beginning and it might never end, I fainted into my mom’s arms. Or was it even my own mother? Who knows.

Jacob Eitzen

Escape

Andy watched after the final bomb had dropped the world was quiet and still. A war that had started on the internet had ended with catastrophe. The two most powerful nations in the world, Russia and the United States, had been at odds for years. Their war was still going on but was now at a standstill. The surface was unsafe so to survive, mankind moved to the underground.

They live in underground cities made up of the bunkers they used to escape the dangers of the war. Each city was named after the place where the people used to live. The largest bunker city was in Chicago which is where Andy lived. He was just 17 and had lost everything including his family in the war. Andy’s father was a hacker during the war. Rumor had it that just before he was killed that he had stolen the data from Russia about the locations for the nuclear launch platforms. Someone with information like that was too dangerous to live though and he was quickly taken out in what was made to look like a car accident. Little to anyone’s knowledge though, before his death Andy’s father had passed the information to him with the instructions to keep it a secret until it was safe enough to get it out of the city and to the right people

Andy worked at a butcher shop with Leon where they would mostly just relax and talk until they had the occasional customer. Things recently had been strict as the Underground Government of Chicago had tightened stay at home orders after a protest against the oppression. The leaders of Chicago had grabbed all the power in the area while America was in chaos. They knew that if the people left if the war ended that they would lose control and be locked up for the terror they inflicted on their citizens.

“Bro, we gotta get out of here while we still can,” said Leon

"While we still can?" said Andy, "It's already too late dude there's no way out now."

"Maybe we can escape," said Katrina.

"No, too risky, if we get caught they are gonna turn us into martyrs."

Andy didn't really think that but he needed to follow his father's instructions. It was too dangerous and risky to try to get out right now. If he was caught with the data his father passed along it would be destroyed and there would be no permanent end to the war.

"Better than staying here and having the same thing eventually happen, at least if we try we got a shot," mocked Leon.

"Where we gonna go though?" asked Andy, "Next closest city is Detroit, no I say we stay here and we just stay low."

At that moment a customer finally came in. It was a welcome break, the tension between Andy and Leon had been growing. Leon dreamed of being free in a smaller city like Detroit. Andy was tired of living in the crowded, dark, and filthy neighborhood that he had spent the last three years of his life in. Andy on the other hand did not want to be risking getting caught. He had seen what happened to other people and knew that his fate would be the same, either kill or be killed. Either way they both knew that this could not go on for much longer.

After work they returned to their little apartment with Katrina. She, like Leon, wanted to leave.

"Andy we got something to tell you," Katrina hesitated, "we're leaving."

"I can't believe you guys would do this and leave me here!" Andy protested.

"You don't give us much of a choice, we are all gonna end up dead here if we don't get out soon. We've got a shot to leave tomorrow and you can come with us, but there's nothing for us here. You're a fighter and with your help we should be able to escape to the surface and get a ride to Detroit," said Leon.

"And how are you supposed to get out with everything on lockdown? You can't just walk to the surface," Andy questioned.

"The smugglers are going to get us there. They are taking us and a few others to get to the surface. They've been doing this for weeks now to free people," said Leon.

"I won't go and I can't help you anymore from here right now, you guys are on your own. After tomorrow I'll see you guys if this ever ends but I can't risk getting caught escaping." Andy stated.

"I don't understand, you hate it just as much as we do here, you can't make a difference by staying here so just come with us!" Katrina exclaimed.

Andy looked at her and then back at Leon before turning around and going to his room. He did want to leave but he knew that if he left he would be putting others

in danger. Staying here and trying to help was a cross that he knew he had to bear to give his friends their best chance to escape.

The next morning Katrina and Leon gathered their belongings quietly and snuck out the door while no one was in the usually crowded streets. Into a back alley they headed where they met with the smugglers who were tasked with getting them out. Together, them and other dreamers started the dangerous journey of escaping the underground. Few had done it and many had tried, but the price of freedom was great and some could not pay.

"Alright I'm here to take y'all to the surface. This is one of the only ways out so don't blow it for all of us," said the smuggler, "You can call me Jesse."

"Do you think we'll make it?" Katrina asked.

"Depends on what you are willing to do to get out. The climb isn't the hard part is gettin there that's the problem. The gate is heavily guarded and if someone see's or suspects us then we're toast."

"Words of confidence," Leon sarcastically whispered in Katrina's ear.

They tiptoed across the empty streets and alleys to get to the front checkpoint. Just beyond that was their freedom. They could almost see the gate that would get them out of the hell hole that they had been living in for the last few years.

"No!" they heard Jesse scream.

Just then appeared a wave of Chicago Police. There was no escape, they were done for and no one could stop what was coming. Quickly they surrounded all of the potential escapees and put an end to their plot of escaping. The commanders came in and took in the smugglers while leaving the others still standing in the open. Then they went up to Katrina and looked her in the eyes.

"Now, what do you think you were doing? Trying to escape? No why would anyone ever want to do that?" the commander said boastfully, "Do you think that somewhere else will be better? You will stay here with the rest of us but now instead you are going to spend your time in a cell."

They swept them away and into vans to go to prison. The commander was right and there was no possible way to escape from where they were at.

As they were sitting in the back of the van driving they felt a sudden jolt, shouting, and then heard a boom. The first one seemed far away. Then the second one which seemed closer and finally a third which flipped the van over. With their ears ringing they looked around the war zone that they had entered. Jesse got up first and opened the door.

"Come on this is our chance!" Jesse screamed.

Katrina slid open the door to the van to be hit by a wave of smoke. She felt someone take her hand and guide her through the chaos. Looking to see her saviors face all she would see is a mask on his face and a flare in his other hand.

The next thing she knew she had Leon guiding her to the checkpoint. The man in the mask was gone, but in her hand that he had grabbed she felt something there. With a worried look she opened her hand to see a flash drive with Andy's name on it. On the back there were instructions.

"Later," she told herself.

"Almost there!" Leon yelled triumphantly.

"Did you see who that was?" asked Katrina.

"Didn't see anyone now keep going," said Leon panting.

She passed the checkpoint with Leon and let go a sigh of relief. But her mind was still moving as fast as she had been running away. She drew all her thoughts toward the drive in her hand and the note taped to the side. She began to read it with a tear in her eye.

Dear Katrina,

I can only hope that you made it. I did everything I could to help you get across that line. It was my Father's dream that I would be able to go with you but I realized that you would need help to get there and that I would have to be the one to stay behind to give it to you. In your hand I put the flash drive that my father gave me. On it is all the locations that the Russians have their rockets at. Get this to the right people, if you can end the war we can go back to what the world used to be without the detailed control we live under right now. I trust you and Leon to do everything in your power to make things right which is why I trusted you with such an important task.

Do what needs to be done,

Andy

Katrina did not know whether to be filled with anger or rage. This was a sacrifice that her best friend had made without her approval. She pondered if there was another way to do it where they could have all made it out. But quickly deduced that even though it was the hard call to make, Andy had done the heroic thing to put himself at risk by saving them to give everyone the same opportunity to be saved. Now they needed to do the right thing so that they would be able to save everyone, including their friend.

She did not know what adventure was ahead of her, only that it would test her. For a split second she also thought about just ignoring it and just leaving it all behind, but quickly realized how selfish that would be of her. There was no escaping the challenges ahead, but the reward at the end of saving her friend would be worth it.

Gabriann Doeurk

Longing for Sunlight

The young miss and sir held the hand of her father, intertwining their fingers slowly; first the index, then the middle, ring, pinkie, and thumb. It had been days since they've gone outside, if their pale complexion was anything to say about it. If asked why the Master of the house suddenly stopped appearing, the answer would be he had become ill. On the other hand, if one asked the whereabouts of the Master's children...

They, too, did not venture out their door.

The young miss stayed beside her father, and the young sir, from what their mother tells them, spends his days wandering through the house.

Worried neighbors asked why they don't go outside. The answer is as followed: They didn't want to leave their dying father alone.

Were it his wish to see the two smile, it is without saying that all the Master wanted was their happiness. Sadly, the Master was too ill from his disease, too ill to go outside where he beloved children loved to be.

In turn, they followed their father and shut themselves away in their house.

As the neighbors walk past their house through the streets, many swear they can see the wistful gaze of the daughter in the living room, watching; not at them, but at the sky. Others saw the son do the same as well, but he was more discreet, more quieter, like a cat. Even rarer was both siblings looking outside.

Everyone assumes that they take turns looking after the Master of the house. Such good kids, they thought to themselves, good kids who care for their parents.

Maybe that's why a young group of boys and girls, suddenly came to their door everyday just so they could play.

Everyday, a ridiculous amount of knocking ensues: lightly at first, until it progresses to aggressive banging, and only stopped when either the young miss or sir tells them to stop. Most days their patience would run thin, thus they shoo them away

not as kindly as they would do to normal neighbors. Rarely did they have the patience to listen to what the instigator of the knocking wanted.

Today was one of those days.

"Oho!" A cheshire grin came to the face of the one who knocked. She was fairly tanned, wearing overalls clearly one size too large. "Just as I thought! Hullo missus!"

The young mistress frowned, but it seemed much more livelier than it did in the many weeks after the Master became sick. "Donna, I've told you once, I'll say it again," she inhaled and puffed her chest outward, "I do not want to leave the house. Good day." She gently closed the door and turned the lock.

From the outside, the three winked as though things were according to plan.

The next day, the boy in the large top hat of his father knocked. Unlike Donna, he handled the knocking more gently, and the reception from the young sir was appreciated. "Seems a man and woman with sense came today," he joked. "Perhaps she is simply one too fiery to handle."

"You aren't wrong, friend." He chuckled inwardly, ruffling his matted hair from work. "The lady can't help herself."

"No harm no foul," The young sir dismissed, "but best not to anger the daughter."

"May I inquire why?"

"She is just the little devil who bottles it all in until she can't take it anymore." He rubbed his fingers on the bridge of his nose. "The house cat's the only saving grace at that point." The two are shaken from the loud gong of the grandfather clock in the living room. "Adam, you should go. I hear you have glasswork classes again. Cheers friend."

"Cheers to you as well."

Day two ends without a hitch.

Day three is quiet. Young Adam, Donna, and the third miss do not come. The young miss and sir resort to playing a quiet game of chess, and though they don't know the rules of chess, they were willing to improvise.

Their mother comes to offer them cookies, green tea, and coffee.

The family of three are at peace in the stillness of their house.

Day four comes around, and their father takes a turn for the better. His condition is stable, and he begins to look healthier by the day. The mother hugs both of her children in relief, and she urges them to go outside.

She can see their eyes light up in excitement. They turn their head to the sleeping Master on his bed, so they shake their head.

They weren't stepping outside until their father was in prime condition as before.

Too tired to track the quiet days gone by, it had been around three week since the young trio came to visit. Today, the young miss has turned a year older. Her birthday was in mid-May, and it was around the same time the flowers in their yard bloomed.

A quiet knock came from the other side of the door. The young miss peered out the window while the young sir checked through the door.

A quiet young girl wrapped in a black shawl stood awkwardly on her lonesome, a basket of flowers and sweets in her slim hands.

"For you, sir Michel." She mumbles nervously as her bangs began to cover her eyes. "A birthday present for lady Ave." She arched her back and gently placed the gift into his hand.

He smiled at the offering and took it to his sister, then returned. "Thank you miss... Erm..."

"Lady," she corrected gently, "Lady Swan. I am a year older than Lady Ave. Good day to you both." She curtsied then headed towards the horizon, to her home across the way.

Following the generous gift offering from Lady Swan, Sir Michel and Lady Ave shared the many macarons inside, saving half for their mother and father to share as a couple together.

They also went to their small library in the room near the grandfather clock and produced many cookbooks from within. Their mother was delighted with the two's

desire to cook, and under her watchful gaze and patient teachings, weeks went by as the family cooked together.

Once again, the trio came together all at once. Donna banged the door loudly, so loudly that the Mistress quickly invited them inside for tea.

"My word..." The Mistress chuckled as she watched Donna try to mimic how Lady Swan and Sir Adam respectfully eat the cookies offered to them. Eventually she gave up, resorting to just grabbing them one by one and stuffing them in her mouth. "For a young miss from the country-folk, your enthusiasm surprises even myself."

"Why thank ye, ma'am," she chuckled bashfully, "truth be told, I was just a tad bit nervous 'bout bein' in da city', but it ain't so bad!" She hooked an arm around Adam and Swan. "The two 'ere showed me da ropes! As the sayin' in ma hometown goes: you treat someone with kindness, they pay ye back in return!"

The Mistress chuckled at how close the three of them were. "I see." She says quietly, the Mistress does not wish to seem rude to her guests, so she sips her tea.

As quickly as they came, the trio left with smiles on their faces as they waved goodbye. Those kids were very sweet children, and they would make great friends of her daughter and son. *'I suppose,'* she thought to herself with a sweet smile, *'they would do my children some good influence if I let them be.'*

The days following, the Master's condition varied on the weather, and it would seem, from the autopsy of the doctor, that it would be quite a while until his body adapted to the quickly changing weather of spring.

There was no decisive conclusion that the Master was going to make it through the illness, but considering how young he was, he still had a small sliver of hope. They prayed that he would continue the uphill road to recovery.

Lady Ave and Sir Michel patiently awaited the day to pass. It was a beautiful day, but they couldn't bear to go outside. It seemed unfair their father couldn't go with them, so they were determined to stay inside.

A definitive knock of the door, and the two knew better than any other as to who they were. The young tomboy, glass worker, and noblewoman's daughter stood beyond expectantly.

"Do ye want to come outside?" Donna asked with wide eyes. "Purdy nice if I say so myself." She offered a hand to both of them, patiently awaiting their answer, but her feet bubbled with the urge to move.

Michel and Ave glanced towards each other in surprise. How often had they told them that they couldn't? The two of them couldn't leave, they had to wait until Father got better. They guessed that it would probably take years until it was confirmed by the doctor, but still!

But... Seeing a hand offered to them now, beckoning them to follow them to the sunlight, was tempting. Perhaps sensing the uncertainty in their decision, Lady Swan offered a piece of advice. "Perhaps it is not my place to say," she began slowly, "but it would be wise to acknowledge the child from within, no? A child acting the role of an adult is still a child, after all. Which, I suppose, is what the both of you are right now."

A moment of silence followed, but as it grew, two smiles were returned in kind. They supposed she was right in some aspect. Pretending to be like Mother by holding it all in started to become a chore in the past two months already. "I suppose." They both voiced in unison.

"I suppose it's alright. Just this once." Michel told Ave.

She nodded in understanding. "Just this once." She echoed his words.

Both longed for the sunlight outside, to feel it on their skin. So for now, it was alright. They had a feeling their Father was proud that they finally made a step towards the outdoors.

Logan Seals

A Trip to Earth

Luke reached for the small crowbar in his pack, struggling with the zipper against the caked sand that lined the edges of the opening. It took him an abnormal amount of time to find it with all of the other supplies he had brought hooking on the curve of the crowbar every time he pulled. Not to mention the new gravity he still was having trouble adjusting to. He finally was able to get it free from his pack, nearly knocking himself over in the process. The goggles over his eyes started to fog, and the bearing heat from the sun beat down on him like falling rocks. The sand whipped up into his face as he reached under his goggles to wipe the fog away. Annoyed, Luke complained to his companion Leon, who had made him come all this way for something he had no interest in. Leon was pretty much the head honcho in the trading business back on Mars. He had quite a reputation for getting his way with people, whether it be through force or through his quick wit. Either way he was considered to be the guy in charge. And Luke was lucky enough to be his best friend.

"Ya know we left this planet for a reason, right?" Luke complained.

"Shut up and help me open this. This could be a huge find and it would be worth a lot."

"Let's just go back! It will only take a second. Besides we aren't going to find anything." He pleaded, pointing back at the ship.

"Yes we will. I got these coordinates from a reliable source, now come on."

Earth had been abandoned by humans many years ago. The only thing left on the barren planet now was old relics, dust, and sand dunes. Occasionally, people had encountered the natives. That is who you don't want to see on a trip to Earth. They are cannibals, wild and deformed, they weren't allowed on the last transport out to Mars. They have been known to go so far as to raise humans like livestock just to eat, or they will just eat the occasional traveler. Other than that, Earth was nothing but an empty wasteland. Even on the way in Luke was able to spot what he thought looked like remains of New York City. The only other people you would find on earth were scavengers and black market traders. Which, is who they happened to be. Luke looked down at what they had stumbled upon. A small metal square lay on the ground at the bottom of the large dune they had come to investigate in the first place. Leon eagerly used his brush to wipe away the sand that was covering the top, mumbling to himself about how many units he was going to make from whatever was in this hole. After brushing it all off, the two could now see that it had a handle over the top, and could barely make out the wording that crossed the top: 'THE MUSIC HOLE,' in extravagant letters, which didn't really seem to fit on what looked like some

sort of bunker. Luke had absolutely no clue who's bunker it might have been, but Leon sure was in quite a hurry to get the small door open.

"This is it! This is what we've been looking for! Hurry lets get this open!"

Leon pulled vigorously at the handle, but to no avail. After trying to pull the door open for some time, reluctantly, Luke jammed the crowbar underneath the crack in the metal door, and pried until it was launched off nearly taking a chunk out of Luke's head. The two then cautiously peered down the hole into a dark and cobwebbed corridor. A rusty ladder hung down from the edge of the hole upon which they were standing. Leon immediately began his decent into the dark room, motioning for Luke to follow him. Luke again struggled with the zipper on his pack trying to find his flashlight, then he climbed down the ladder after his boss. Once he was inside, he pointed the flashlight around. They seemed to be in some kind of hallway, though it didn't seem like a hallway that a shelter or a bunker would have. There was a musty smell, as if no one had been inside for a long time. There was a door at each end of the hallway. The walls were lined with pictures of various musicians, from which time period Luke didn't know. Each picture had something under it, some kind of disc. They were each labeled with a name. One of them said: 'Back in Black,' and another was labeled: 'Don't Stop Believing.' Luke shined his light around until he found a lever with an electrical label next to the ladder they had climbed in on. He pulled down on it, and with a mechanical whirr, lights flickered on along the corridor.

"This is nuts" Leon exclaimed. He had a bigger smile on his face than Luke had ever seen. "Let's split up. You go through that door, ill go through this one."

Luke nodded, they split and proceeded down their separate hallways. The door at the end of it was large and made of metal, but it was cracked open slightly, which worried Luke that someone had already looted this place. He grabbed the door and pulled, throwing his weight into it. It slowly squeaked open, just enough for Luke to squeeze through. Once he entered the room, more lights came on, illuminating where he was, and he realized that no one had been here in a long time. It was a square room, probably 15 feet across. There were a few old couches, a really old refrigerator, and a dinner table in the middle. The wall to his right had a fake painting that covered the whole of the wall, it seemed to portray a concert, a man was singing, with long dark hair and a spangly outfit. However, the thing that caught Luke's eye was what was sitting in the far corner of the room. He couldn't tell what it was, but it was what the man in the painting was holding. It was bright red, in an odd shape. It had what looked like electrical wires that moved up a long shaft, which ended with another odd shape with knobs that were connected to the wires. Just the shine that it was giving off told Luke that he should bring it back with them to Mars.

"Leon! Come here!" Luke yelled.

Leon came running into the other room.

"I didn't find what I was- That's it! That's what I came for! We're gonna be rich man! This is going to make us famous, trust me."

"Well what is it?"

"It's a guitar!" Leon exclaimed, as if Luke was supposed to know what that was.

"Oh...Ok."

Confused, Luke just went along with what he was saying. If Leon said it would make money, it probably would, so he grabbed the guitar, and a couple of old action figures he found on a shelf, along with a small pocket knife, and set out back to the ship. At this point it had become dark, and the lights from the ship were distant in the desert landscape. As the two of them walked along in the night, Leon started to play a song on this 'guitar.' Luke was amazed. He would never had guessed that to be an instrument of music. Leon strummed the chords and plucked the wires and made a sound so wholesome, one that Luke had never heard before.

"Where did you learn to do that?" Luke asked.

"I learned when I was-"

Just then he was cut off by a loud squeal, and the two of them were out cold without warning. When Luke awoke, he had a massive headache. He looked around through blurry vision, and saw that he was in some sort of tent, laying on the sand, with his hands and feet tied up. He squirmed around as he came more to his senses, and saw that Leon was next to him, still not conscious. Luke looked around the tent for anything that might help him escape the situation, but to no avail. Suddenly, the tent opened, and there stood a very large man, at least 7 feet tall. His face was covered and he was wearing clothes that were torn and dirty, and sandals with rope. He was holding a large wooded staff in one hand, and the guitar that they had found in the other. Luke thought for a moment he saw six fingers gripping the staff. He saw Luke squirming around and screeched.

"OOH BABA BOSO"

He hit Luke square in the chest with the staff, knocking the wind out of him. The large man closed the door with another yell and Luke could hear others yelling the same outside of the tent. It was at this point that Luke realized he was in a native camp. Of course the one time he came to earth with Leon this would happen. He rolled over to Leon.

"Hey...Hey" he said in an urgent whisper

Leon rolled over, revealing the large bump on his head. He only managed to get out a grunt before he rolled back over and passed out. Luke sat there for a moment trying to figure out what to do. Just then near his head he saw the small pocket knife he had grabbed from the bunker. It was half buried in the sand, which he could only guess was why the natives hadn't seen it. He shimmied his way up to the knife, and grabbed it with his hands which were tied behind his back. After a couple

of minutes, he got it open and cut the rope around his wrists. His ankles were tied up as well, so he bent down and cut that rope too. Luke now had to decide his next plan of action. He decided he was going to cut Leon out of his bonds, then try to escape without anyone noticing. He waited until it sounded like every resident of the camp was far from their tent, then he quietly opened the tent door, dragging Leon behind him. Once he was out in the open, he looked to his right and saw rows of tents. At the end of his row, probably 100 yards away from where they were, was a large gathering of people around a fire. They were dancing, and eating, what they were eating Luke preferred not to think about. Off to his left, he could still see the lights from his ship, though they were considerably farther away this time. Just as he was about to sneak away, he saw the guitar.

It was leaned up against the tent across from them. Entranced by the shine of the paint, he gently set Leon down and walked over to it, paying no attention to the natives who at this point had seen him. He grabbed the guitar, sat down, and began to play. To his surprise, he wasn't that bad. Actually he was quite good. The music seemed to flow through him, as if he had been playing the guitar his whole life. He closed his eyes and allowed the music to do the work for him. He played a beautiful melody, one that he had heard back on Mars when he was a child. He could hear every note and see where to put his fingers before he even played. Then he finished, and opened his eyes. He nearly jumped out of his body when he saw a crowd of natives standing around him. His fear crept up his spine like spiders on a tree limb. Tensing up, he prepared to make a last mad dash for his life. Suddenly, they began to bow down. They began to worship him as some sort of god!

"OOH AHHH OOH AHHH"

Even Leon had woken up and was in awe, sitting down behind the group of natives.

They let Luke and Leon go after this amazing display of natural talent, as long as they left the guitar. On the way back to the ship Leon asked,

"Where did you learn how to do that?"

To which Luke replied,

"From you I guess."

After this strange experience, Luke left Earth and never returned again.

The boy struggled against the rough hold of the back-clothed men. They clenched their jaws at the high pitched screams of the boy. His fear and the rush of adrenaline made it so it was harder for the older men to restrain him.

"M-Mom!" The boy cried, looking towards the figures of his parents. They stood in the dark hallway, silent and emotionless. The boy's face fell. He stopped struggling and the tall men led the limp figure through the rain and into the back of the dark blue automobile. They slammed the door and ordered that he put on the seat belt. His numb hands fumbled with the cord; he clenched his jaw against the tears welling up in the corners of his eyes. The boy finally heard the familiar click as the seatbelt finally snapped into place. He melted into his seat and closed his hazel eyes, letting two identical tears slide down his cheeks.

"Damien Rosebrooke, your ID number is 67119." One of the men ordered. "I suggest you remember that." Damien got up out of his relaxed state and gazed out the window. He swept his black hair out of his eyes. And let out an affirmative 'hmpf'. He started to repeat the numbers under his breath, tracing them onto the frost of the window. This was not how he assumed his eleventh birthday would go. Of course, his parents had warned him this day would arrive, but he hoped they were playing a joke on him. The scratches on his arm from his struggle with the men assured him that this was not a joke. His eyes darted around the completely black car. What were they trying to hide? Damien thought as the fear and adrenaline started to wear off, and he felt a wave of exhaustion. His head fell against the window, letting the rain lull him to sleep.

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"67119!" The man shouted; his deep voice ate away at Damien's dream world until he returned to reality.

"Wha-" he was barely able to make out as he was pushed out of the car. He fell to his hands and knees on the wet cement. "Hey!" Damien yelled. One of the men grabbed Damien by his forearm and forced him to his feet, leaving yet more red marks on the poor boy's body. He clenched his jaw and quickly wiped the tears from his eyes with his sweatshirt sleeve. His sweatshirt still smelled like home.

"You will be staying in province number 7" the man firmly ordered. "With 82992". Damien could almost see a smirk on both the men's faces as he said that. A worried expression fell over Damien's face. The man manually turned the boy's head with his strong hand. The boy gaped. The landscape was much like the one he was torn away from, but for the most part, people were children and teens. There were no stores, just apartment buildings and schools.

"67119, there" the man pointed to a building in the distance, "room 67." He gave a slight push to the boy. Which, in his weakened state, almost caused Damien to fall to the ground again. The fear rose in his chest as he slowly started walking, his head felt light, and his heart hurt.

"Wait!" He called, spinning around to where the men stood. They had already gone. Damien felt like wailing to the sky, he wanted his mom, he wanted his home. He

cried, as he sat against a light pole, covering his face with his hands. His tears didn't seem so big against the rain.

Six Years Later.

"Eh, Damien, you got any more o' that?" Damien let out a laugh,

"You know I do, man" He handed the other boy the dark glass bottle he was sipping from.

"Attaboy" the blond boy said as he touched the bottle to his lips and let the dark liquid sit in his mouth for a minute before swallowing. He coughed slightly, squinting at the slight burn. "Hell yeah" he managed to stutter out. "Where'd you even get this stuff?" He asked in between coughs. Damien laughed and took another drink easily from the bottle.

"Don't worry bout' it, Mason." Damien looked to the right as Mason mumbled something about legalization of alcohol.

"Well well well. 67119 and 82992." The man sighed as he stepped into the darkness of the alley. Damien jumped and rushed to hide the bottles and stuttered a greeting.

"General Rose! This isn't what it looks like."

"Eh, Rose. Want some?" Mason said in a drunk state and held out an empty bottle to the man. Damien shot a look at the other boy.

"67119. Four fights this week and now I catch you drinking?" General Rose said roughly. Damien looked to the ground. "At this rate you'd never have a chance to see your parents again."

"Stop using that stupid line on us, Rose. We know you guys probably killed 'em. Damien, you believe in parents?" Mason said in a drunken high pitched tone. Damien snorted in reply. General Rose stepped forward and took Damien by the shirt sleeve and forced him to his feet.

"Get some water, Mason." General Rose said as he led the other boy out of the alley.

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"General I-" Damien stuttered out as the older man loosened his grip on the poor boy's arm.

"Damien, I expect better of you." Damien widened his eyes at hearing his name being spoken by an adult. "You're a smart boy." The general went on without notice. "As I've said before, you're almost eighteen. Your dad has been working very hard throughout these years-

"What about my mom?" Damien interrupted. The general looked down, and the boy swore he heard a tint of sadness in his voice.

"We weren't going to tell you yet, but, your mom." He sighed. "She didn't follow protocol."

"Well, what's that supposed to mean??" Damien almost yelled, becoming more anxious and desperate by the second.

"Once our-their children are taken away, they must work ceaselessly with the government to, well, restore the climate. Those who can't focus are eliminated. They are

not needed here." Damien choked on his own breath. He could feel the sting of tears that he hadn't felt since the final day he was with his parents. He quickly stood up straight, although the lump in his throat made his voice give his despair away.

"So does that mean you're just gonna kill us all?" General Rose began a reply but had nothing to say. "What's the point of even being here if we're all just going to die??" Damien said, choking on the tears that finally slipped from his eyes. He quickly wiped them away and clenched his jaw before speaking again, "what's the point." He said in a barely audible high pitched voice. General Rose cleared his breath.

"You have a chance to...survive. Join the ranks of your father." Damien looked into the man's eyes, fury giving them a red tint. "The top ten in your province by the month of December after you turn eighteen have the chance to be with their parents again-" the General sputtered out. Damien spat on the ground.

"Good bye, General Rose." He said before stepping around the corner.

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Damien spent days in his bed, only arising for needs. Sometimes, he was screaming into his pillow, other times, he mirrored that of his parents as they watched him be taken away, emotionless. Eventually, he thought about his mom. How disappointed she would be if she saw him now, but at least she'd see him again soon, as he only had two more months until December. Rank 121 out of 176, he would never be in the final ten.

Suddenly, Mason burst through the door, shooting Damien into a sitting up position.

"Damien Rosebrook, my man!" He yelled. "Get up, we're gonna snag some chicks tonight!" Damien sighed.

"I'm not in the mood tonight, bro." Mason gave the other boy an annoyed glance.

"Stop moping, get up and get drunk or something." He said before slamming the door behind him. Damien hmphed and slammed his head back down on his pillow.

"Mason was in the final rank, 176, there was no chance for him. So why was the general so aggressive in wanting me to be in the final ten? It's not like I'd have any chance either." Damien thought. He was sure General Rose knew that as well, and just wanted to tempt him with false hope. Damien became angry at the thought. He wanted to prove the general wrong, and make his mom proud. He wiped away the wetness from his cheeks and slowly got to his feet, ignoring the dizzy feeling. He limped from his messy room to his desk, where he cautiously opened his laptop. A holographic image of the province logo appeared amidst the inky black screen. Irritated, he clicked rapidly in hopes that the loading process would go faster. Suddenly the home screen appeared and Damien quickly went to his school's website with ease. His stomach dropped as he read the requirements to get ranked in the top ten. 'A 3.8 to 4.0 gpa, a clean record for at least one and a half months, a good reputation around the province, etc.' he read. He furiously threw himself out of his chair, knocking it over. He paced around his small messy room, his hands going from his face, and back down at his hips again, panic setting in. Crumpling to the ground, he had never felt so isolated and small in that room before.

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Finally, he got to his feet. He was weak, he never wanted to feel so powerless again. He wanted to be in control of himself again, make his own rules, decide when he felt emotions. He turned his attention to his desk, the idle computer, still open to the school's website. He begrudgingly walked and placed his chair back up, sitting down slowly. He became more determined than ever. The small clicks of his keyboard assured him of his work being completed.

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As the days went on, the teachers took notice of Damien, his grades began to rise, and his clear interest in becoming one of the final ten was apparent. His rank slowly rose as well. 121 slowly became 116, and jumped swiftly to 109. Damien's determination finally made an impact for the good as two months later, he finally made it.

"Rank 10; Damien Rosebrook #67119." General Rose read the title with pride. Damien was beaming. The general shook the boy's hand.

"So where's my dad?" Damien questioned. General Rose smiled and put his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Right here, I'm proud of you son."