

Talking Leaves

Volume 18

TALKING LEAVES

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POLICY AND PURPOSE

Talking Leaves accepts original works of prose, poetry, and artwork from students at Indiana University-Purdue University Columbus. Each anonymous submission is reviewed by the IUPUC Division of Liberal Arts Talking Leaves Design Team and judged solely on artistic merit.

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Letter from the Managing Editor

I am beyond thrilled to present IUPUC's 2015-2016 edition of Talking Leaves. I must start by thanking the incredible individuals who helped make this publication possible. Alicca Rice, who not only volunteered her time as Editorial Assistant, became a source of comfort and joy when the stress of deadlines loomed near. Her dedication to positivity and creativity helped make our time developing the magazine all the more valuable and gratifying. Clara Villalon, whose kind heart took on her role as graphic designer with full commitment, became our savior when it came down to publication. Without her bomb talent and vision, we could have never created something so beautiful. I also thank Dr. Lisa Siefker Bailey for her patience, commitment, and acute eyes. Her faith in our team and dedication to the talent at IUPUC made the seemingly impossible, possible.

Together, we made this publication conceivable.

With a heavy heart, I can't help but say how lucky I feel to have helped design this publication. Reading the student submissions and seeing the raw, immense talent shining off the screen, made my job as Managing Editor more meaningful than I could ever express. As you read through each individual piece, pay close attention to the emotions woven within the words. There are some dark sentiments at play within this publication. As a student body, we can share in the difficult times and feel less alone in the world.

I would like to express my deepest condolences to the friends and family of Eric Manning. Eric was an immensely talented writer, and an even greater beautiful soul. He is dearly missed. My hope is that by sharing his work with the world, more people can see how wonderful a person he was.

All IUPUC students are encouraged to submit creative work for our next publication! I look forward to seeing what Volume 19 of Talking Leaves has in store.

Bailey Burnett
Managing Editor

From the Faculty Sponsor

It's always exciting to help students express themselves in their writing and artwork, and I'm thrilled to have had the honor of shepherding the magazine again this year. After a January call for submissions, an enthusiastic team of student editors met in April to work on the selection process and to begin to make the magazine take shape. Editorial work continued over the summer, and the staff welcomed a new graphic designer to the project last fall. We remind our readers that *Talking Leaves* is a student literary magazine which encourages IUPUC students to find empowerment through self-expression. We have kept copyediting to a minimum in order to preserve unique voices, personae, and ideas.

Student production of the magazine would not be possible without a great many contributors to its development. We thank Dr. George Towers and the Division of Liberal Arts for supporting the Talking Leaves mission by contributing resources for editors and by offering students this venue to express themselves creatively. We are indebted to every instructor who encourages students to submit work, especially those who teach creative writing and art. Special thanks goes to adjunct instructor Mark Miller, who helped recruit art students for graphic design. We are perennially grateful that the English Club continues to make the development of the magazine part of its purpose. We appreciate the helpful work of University Information Technology Services' Adam Frazier, who improved our online submission tool, and for the work of DLA's Senior Administrative Secretary Vicki Kruse, who continued her role as manager of submissions to ensure anonymity in our blind review process. We are thrilled to thank Ryan Wooley in Marketing for resizing the magazine in-house this spring; his expertise in design and his willingness to create a template for students to use in future editions bring our magazine to a new production level. We are also especially grateful for the support of our new Vice Chancellor and Dean, Dr. Reinhold Hill, who has generously provided funds to publish this work in print form, showcasing the credibility and value of our campus literary journal.

During the process of developing this magazine, IUPUC grieved with deep sadness at the loss of one of our students. Eric Manning was a full-time IUPUC student studying English, and the Division of Liberal Arts is honored that his family agreed to the posthumous publication of his work in this volume. We offer the publication of some of his poems and one of his short stories, lovingly selected by his writing instructor, Dr. Katherine Tsiopos Wills, in a special memorial section as a lasting remembrance.

Lisa Siefker-Bailey, Ph.D.

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Love Unfolded

To weave through peals of time
And misty shades of light
Where shallow holds the darkness
And deep retains the bright

The taste of fragrant lilacs—
Its swollen threads of hope
Left mourning by the backwards
In strands of foggy slope

By pain, it touches cheerful
And creases there to lie
In majesty, it crumbles
And slacks to keenly die

Lori
Haggard

This is What Happens When You Write Poems in Pieces

Cigarette moon swollen
Womb in neon sky
Let me put my heart
To your ear
Like a seashell castle
So you can tell me love,
Lover, souls cannot cling to paper
They cannot, no
Cling to words
On blank sheets, on blank slates
No matter how your fingers bleed
Red stains
Into shooting stars
And I pull at the chains
Wrapped, gripping tight
Tight around my neck
Like hands, so much like hands,
Like yours
And I beg for the clocks
Behind my lids to let go
For those glass dolls
With their gleaming dead eyes
For all those
Breaking things in my
Back burning mind
To run,
Run

Cheyenne
Tyler

The Watering Tree

I wait, fraught and hidden
On a wild spring night
Shivering in the breath of the tempest carried
On the darkening, denimed sky
Far past the valley-
The valley where the orchard hums until
The sun slams into the mountains
I steal away!
Barefoot through lashing lambertia
Where ignorant wettlebirds noisily nestle
The burrowed wombat wakens, keen
And scuttering rodents flee the owl-
The stoic owl, steadfast and silent
Eyes amber and omniscient
Stealthy god of night
In the Watering Tree
To whom I bow,
Offering my secrets and torments
Beneath clanging branches
The sky tears open, a bright scream
Fury and fervency spew forth
Offering my secrets and torments
And blood
Joins the rushing roar of the deluge
To water the scars and seep into the ground
My gift is received,
My life traded for hers
I lie down into dreams.

Lori
Haggard

The Virgin Walk

How do I look now?
Now
Is there something different?
Now
In the way I move my hips
When I walk passed you
Victoria's Secret whispering
Over my breasts—lace
Hushed
And my skinny jeans, skin tight
Too tight, designed just right
To hug my ass like hands
Gripping
Do feel yourself stir?
You exude lust straight
In my direction
And yes, I did say stir
With that erotic discomfort
When I reach
Down, slowly
To pull a cigarette
From the pack crushed
In your pants pocket
Do you want me now?
Now
That my legs have spread
For another, for another
For another, other
Than yourself?
Can you hear the way
Your heart beats?
Like music on the stage
In the backroom of a strip club
It is dusted in glitter
In cocaine
When I say, "Fuck it, you only live
once."
The way that girl
The one you knew once, never
Never would have
The words would have burned
Her never-kissed lips
I implore of you,
Of the wisdom lurking,
In your storm-blue irises,

Am I too serious now?
Am I begging for love when I bend
Over, just enough, in my short skirts
In my tight dresses?
With only thin strips of lace
Of fabric
Guarding all of those places
Of which you, once
Fantasized
What am I asking for then?
When I do it on purpose, when
I laugh
At your pathetic breed and the way
You pretty boys dream
Of being poets, of being men
Beg, yes, I said—beg
For me to bend further, tell me
How does your crown of thorns
Feel
When you remove it from your skull,
Savior?
I will tell you something,
Darling
Those bleeding palms will never
Touch this canvas
No matter how many stars
You wish to paint
Upon my pale body
I have become, my own
Constellation,
My own
But still—
I will shoot you
A smile, a devilish grin, if ever
I see you preaching poems
On the streets of our raising
I will
As if to say,
I knew you once, too

Cheyenne
Tyler

For want of coffee and time

Strain on the tabletop, weight of my stress
Books papers folders in one heaping mess

Labor and toil never lessens the pile
Rubrics will motivate, at least for awhile

Put off, my peripheral problems amass
Demands from the children and two unfed cats

Promises pending I'll likely forget
Obligations, the many I've come to regret

House plants that thrive on chaotic attention
Broken appliances add to the tension

Forgotten commitments that once were entrusted.
Social debts owed and the cobwebs undusted

I manage the muddle with measured reserve
Longingly seeking the rest I deserve

My soft empty bed, satin pillow unclaimed
Lies cold now for days with its tonic restrained

I fight to stay focused as deadlines loom closer—
I'll muck out the mess when the semester is over.

Lori
Haggard

A Penny

I pick you up from the street
Tarnished and weathered
You take me back to a lifetime
of summers and sweat bees and sunburns,
dirty jeans and grasshoppers,
mud cakes and doodlebugs in the yard
Daddy on the porch swing, laughing
and grilled cheese sandwiches,
the best he had to offer with a cold pop,
a story, and
a pocketful of change I would sift through,
looking for wheat pennies
while Daddy fixed my bike chain,
and I was rich.
Not nickels and dimes and quarters—
spent on Screwballs and ice pops
and walks to the dime store with my hero—
but one, dull, grubby copperhead
same year as my birth, so I kept it
carried it around and it aged—
dull before its time from life
in my Tonka truck, pocket
lunchbox, locker
dresser, car
jewelry box, then lost—
one summer after the drought
like Dad, tarnished and weathered
from life...
like you.
I brush you off, and squint at your date.
You're only 2012.
"I guess you've had a full life," I tell you,
And I carry you home in my locket with Dad.

Lori
Haggard

Alone

It tingles softly
The burning of cinnamon
And cloves

Hot cocoa simmering on the stove
Fire crackling
He should be home soon, out of the cold

The clock ticks
He is late coming home, as always
His favorite cup sits

Empty. He was going to bring presents.
Lonely Christmas
I'll never drink hot chocolate with him again

Cloves simmer
In hot chocolate, just as he always made
I drink alone.

I feel the wind whisper
Shifting behind me
Reminding me of you

Always beside me
The cloves are choking
The chocolate too sweet

My heart stops

Alicca
Rice

Heartbreak Coming Around

Long distance is the way to go
If you want to get your heart broken.
You can call me a million times
And just end up with a silent fight.
Oh, yeah!

It's the time you try to take things slow.
When that happens, you sell your heart and soul.
You act like you don't know
Where everything's gonna go.
Hey, hey, hey!

Hey, listen to me,
You better take your heart and leave
'Cause this so-called love is a mystery.
Hey, you better leave now.
Because there's a heartbreak coming around.

Run, run, run!
'Cause, let me tell you, it's no fun.
Chasing, hoping, waiting;
All it leads to is...
A heartbreak coming around.

It's the time you try to take things slow.
When that happens, you sell your heart and soul.
You act like you don't know
Where everything's gonna go.
Hey!

Before it's too late, listen to me
You better take your heart and leave
'Cause this so-called love is a mystery.
You better leave now.
Because there's a heartbreak coming around.

You better know how to walk out that door.
Before you have a heartbreak coming around.
Oh, whoa, yeah!

Before you have a heartbreak coming around,
You better run now,
You better know how...

Clayton
Ham

Take My Chance

Whoa, my heart clutched to you
When I laid my eyes on you
I'm a sucker for blondes.
I know I may be wrong
But I take my chances with you.

You're a no name to me
When you asked me,
"How was the weather today?"
I've got no one to blame.
When I say, you've got a voice
Dreamier than Michael Bublé.

Now, I've got a master plan
A way to make you my man,
I wear somethin' sexy, somethin' classy
Even though you're a no name,
My heart can't help but go insane!

I didn't realize it then,
My oh my, you were flirting with me.
Fantasies keep on creepin' in my mind.
I try to deny,
Scared to take my chances.

One day, I'll have courage
To come up and say
What I want and,
What I want is you.
As I take my chances with you, no name.

Am I dead?
Because you knocked the breath
Out of me.
I'm speechless
Heart racing
It's a dream in reality.

Breath, touch; so softly
Like a breeze on a leaf.
In a daydream
One day, no name,
I'll take my chances as you my flame.

Clayton Ham

Outcast

Life is like a storm.
I never know
When the next lightning strike will show.
The thunder shatters
Any hopes of me getting better.
Light turns to dark,
Shadowing my heart.

Spit on my face,
Feel like a disgrace.
Total isolation,
Absolute dissatisfaction.

Never feel positive,
Wish I could be normative.
To be normal in this world,
Have the urge to kiss a girl.

Now I got blood on my face.
Gone without a trace,
Still feel like a disgrace.
Never gonna find love,
Never gonna be enough.
'Cause now, ever since I came out
I've been nothing but an outcast.

Now I'm tripping on this road.
Realizing how much I'm alone,
They their love,
Gifted me with a life of shun.

Now I sit on the side
Begging someone to comply.
When I think I have a chance,
They learn about my secret.

Now I got blood on my face.
Gone without a trace,
Still feel like a disgrace.
Never gonna find love,
Never gonna be enough.
'Cause now, ever since I came out
I've been nothing but an outcast.

Swimming, fishing, drowning;
For someone that will love me now.
Everyone like me wants to fool around,
We'll wake up with an STD.
Damn it, will I ever be free?

'Cause I still got blood on my face.
Still gone without a trace,
Feeling like a disgrace.
Never gonna find love,
Never gonna be enough.
'Cause now, ever since I came out
I've been nothing but a screw up.
Ever since I came out,
I've been nothing,
I've been nothing but an outcast.

Hills that I fall off,
Crashing to the ground.
One day I may find peace,
If my life is unleashed
By the chains of ridicule.

Clayton
Ham

My Life

The wind's blowing through my hair
No one seems to care.
I've gone blind,
I can't find,
My life.

Like a burning wire
My honor's been set on fire.
I had to sacrifice
Everything including,
My life.

Walking through the storm,
I smell sweet corn.
It has gone bad
And something else to add,
My life.

I know I can't
Keep moving on.
But my legs keep moving,
No matter how many times I try to stop
My life.

A dagger
Is more useful
Than a dart,
Being jabbed into my heart, and
My life.

The rain begins to fall.
I hear a crow calling,
My name
My soul
My life.

The wind's blowing through my hair.
No one seems to care.
I've gone blind,
I can't find,
My...life.

Clayton Ham

Portrait

I saw a portrait the other day
In a downtown art museum
A woman carried a large vessel on her head
A pot filled with water, balanced on her underfed
Silhouette. Etched from stone her wearied eyes,
Dead opal pits filled with lead
Her lips, carved sandstone and flayed
Pinched close to her nose, holding tightly back
A pain that consumed her soul

Had she always been this way?

A jagged skeleton supporting her precious cache,
Of water for her family, or a friend
Tough as steel, but would she bend
And snap like brittle metals do, fragment
Into pieces less than human. A fraction.
Maybe she was, frail as that clay pot
Waiting to spill forth and
Empty out a soul of color that
Hid beneath all that sullen ache.

Chase
Schneider

Oftentimes

I'd stare at the stars when I could
I used to hope one day I would
Reach out and touch them
Roll them about in my palm like marbles
Collect them in my drawstring sack
Tied to my belt I'd hear to them clack.
I run to show all my friends
Shimmering spherical treasures
Regretful are the lost dreams
Of wild eyes and gleeful screams.
As I age, I've learned to be content
For faint glimmers of the big dipper
And maybe the small one too
On any warm summer night

Chase
Schneider

Reflections of Home

Home dyes the distant hills
With rustling sepia leaves
On forgiving breezes
The vast sea of verdures
Trade their summer tones
For the untapped flavors of fall.

Home is the long road between towns
Swift blur of running legs
And the delighted faces of friends.
Home is Slide by the Goo Goo Dolls,
Playing off a distant boom box,
The receding echo of an ice cream truck.

Autumn hills fold over themselves
Into a golden valley of wheat and corn
Cut through by a lazy rippling river.
People gathered, behind a palisade wall,
Sharing fruits of harvest and memories
I dream of pumpkin pie.

Chase
Schneider

Amber

Sitting on a sidewalk somewhere
Eating greasy fast food, admiring the evening sky
Locked out of a house and laughing at our luck
We relish our informal feast.
Try hard as I may to stop time and freeze
The precise moment you sigh
That singular twinkling second. Halt
The docile breeze and savor the taste
Of love growing ever strong. While two people
Sit on a sidewalk beneath an amber sky

Chase
Schneider

The Spiral Stair

Like a clinched fist
It rises high above
Stair after stair
Far out of sight

The first step is a flower petal
Blooming into a color
Akin to brisk spring mornings
Dispatching the cold of winter

The second step is life
Forming from the stem
Soft leaves opening up
To greet the morning breeze

Each step a pedal
Each stair a stage
From which stories are told
The stories of all creation

Fibonacci's indigo stairway
Leading up where no one knows
Spiraling out from itself
Blossoming into blue roses

Many stories rise on above
Many more rest serene below
I find myself somewhere in the middle
Yet, I've not even begun to climb

Chase
Schneider

Indiana State of Mind

Along the harvested fields, glacial plains flat as a disc moon
Clouds hang thick over an Indiana mind
Squirring light catches in the underbelly of
Overcast skies and hangs halo-like
The epicenters of human private passion

Towns and cities stretch out endlessly beneath the mists
Connected by the ever churning vascular system
Of interstates, and highways, and county roads,
Almost barren save for a select population of
Erythrocyte taillights and leukocyte headlights

A quiet world, a simple Indiana, which on the surface appears
Placid as Lake Monroe, Patoka, Mississinewa, or Wawasee
Yet, beneath the surface stirs with the inexhaustible
Proclivity of desire. The gentle quakes and rumblings
Of an Indiana mind stir below steel-toed feet.

In the early dawn, hour of the wolf, men groggily tie their laces
Preparing to escape to fluorescent industrial floors
Where nothing exists, but a clock, a counter, and a bell
Sitting on lunchboxes, they contemplate philosophy
Of the sound of torque wrenches and the smell of hot steel

Indianapolis wakes sullen, a molten iron heart beating fumes,
Mists, exuding out from manholes and drains.
Below, Rotwang himself, laughs maniacally as he resurrects
The terrible Machinenmensch from the heart of desire
Beginning the apocalypse of modern man, city, Metropolis

The Circle City spins itself around and around on the winds of culture
Cultural subjugation, she pays fealty to the Windy City
The thrum of Metropolis acts a baseline of brass, and hard drugs,
Cigarette smoke, and vapors of alcohol. Rising over the lip
Of singing glass, between concrete monoliths, into Form and Void

Rising, rising indistinguishable as a mass of septic overgrowth
The soul of city intermingles with poisonous gases floating
Above the heads of oblivious passers-byes. As above, so below
The soul of the city is as indistinguishable as translucent toxins
That floats over the heads of her lethargic people.

There is nowhere for the smoke to go; behind the bar, behind the stock
Accumulating on the dingy judgmental ceiling. Looking down
On patrons who find solitude in whiskey and amity in tequila
Empty bottles fill the table booths like empty friends
Who sing songs of smiling women behind enamored glasses

Outside the city, the pale sun rises over the crests of barren trees
On soft brown dirt, tufted and tilled, frozen by permafrost
A bleak landscape gnarled by the winter winds. Yet changed,
A pale-golden dawn hangs its hat upon lone pines and old oaks
The yawning winter leaves the fields crystalline, numinous

To the south flat fields yield to grey, wintry knolls that roll lazily
Clasping together like the folded hands of Southern Baptists
In sunny, stained glass lit churches on Sunday mornings.

A callous state of mind, terse and hardened by dirt, and rock, and time
Glacial plains, fertile soil, limestone knobs; forest and field.
A meandering mind, chasing cats to and fro down the Wabash
In and out of steel mills and harvest seasons. Sterilized needles
Injecting serenity above and below Friday night football games.
A Sporadic Indiana mind.

Chase
Schneider

Suicide

Suicide is a horrible thing
And it is hard to explain
There are many different ways it is seen
There are those who see it as being in vain
Some people see it as being weak
Others see it as taking the easy way out
Some who believe it takes a courage that is unique
However, what is it really about?
Is it because you did something wrong?
Or is it just about being weak or strong?

It is about the pain
When you seem to have lost all hope
When all you want is to get rid of the pain
When the pain is stronger than the ability to cope
It is not about being weak or strong
It is when you feel completely alone
Not because you did something wrong
It's because nothing makes sense anymore
When you feel that's the only way out
When there's no other way to let it out

Oscar
Jimenez

The Monster

He didn't mean to do it. It was out of his control. He was there one moment yelling and screaming, and the next she was gone. It was as if he had disappeared and had never been there before. As if it was someone else who had been there before. He tried to retrace what happened but he wouldn't dare to look deep inside to find the answer to his despair. He was afraid, of the monster he had become. Once a lovable, likable young man, now a waste of a man. He could never apologize enough for what he had done, but he could make the responsible man pay.

Uncle Henry created this man; it was time for him to pay. He raised this man so it was time for him to see the monster he had made. Dorian looked him in the eyes with dismay, wondering if this was the man who once told him not to obey any rules or morals. To his surprise Uncle Henry had changed. He wasn't the evil man he remembered from the old days. He was old, and decayed. Feeling bad for himself, what a pitiful man.

The rage Dorian felt had changed. He was still enraged, but the reason had changed. This man was not the man that raised him. The one who taught him to be a different man. It was all lies and deceptions. The rage Dorian thought he once had, wasn't even a fraction of what he now felt. Now the real fury came from within. And he was out of control once again. It was time for Uncle Henry to pay for all the mistakes he made. It was time for him to meet the real monster he made.

Oscar
Jimenez

Whose Mistake?

The man sat in the chair waiting for them. He fought his eyelids, trying to stay awake for three days. His wrists and ankles scabbed from the steel rubbing against his skin, but that was not the biggest problem he faced. Sleep deprived, he lost himself for hours. How could he forget he was there? Everything was starting to blend in. Nothing was making sense. The chair in front of him couldn't be moving by itself.

He lost the fight with his eyelids—they closed. He had to get control before they figure out the mistake he had made. Again he lost a few seconds. He passed out. Liquid started running from his hair, down his face. They splashed water, flooding his mouth and nose. He was awake again. Exasperated, he looked away, trying to catch his breath. They were treating this as if it was a game. At this point it was too hard to think. He took a deep breath and sat up straight. He looked up and right into four dark eyes.

That's when he realized that he was doomed. It didn't matter if he was guilty or innocent; the decision had been made. He wasn't going to make it out of there. He never had a chance to repent. He cried and pleaded, but that only fueled their rage. A right fist to the cheek, and he was out again. Then he was awake again, with blood running down his face. He tasted the bitterness, and accepted his fate. He only wished that he could explain. He wasn't the murderer he was just at the wrong place, at the wrong time.

Oscar
Jimenez

Innocence

The sun has set and the city of London is cast in a huge shadow. A little girl, eight, is hurrying down the streets of abandoned downtown London with her dirty, tangled chestnut hair blowing in the breeze. The girl is keeping her shawl close to her neck to keep her body warm. She has little body heat against chilly nights like this. Her tiny hands keep the handkerchief like shawl securely on her thin shoulders as she walks.

Only her footsteps can be heard in the cobble street. Many lampposts light her path and she is grateful. Her body contracts as it cries out in hunger loudly; she stops to bend over slightly from the pain. The girl's round small face is transparent where you can see the bone through thin skin.

Continuing down the path, the girl looks at the many houses surrounding her on both sides; all of them are locked up for the night. All of them bigger than the house she had occupied before her mother died. They would reach the sky and turn into cold black stone at night. The girl comes to rest at a lamppost at the corner, wheezing as she takes in a breath. All around her the houses look more twisted and abandoned as she goes deeper into the square. She can remember the times she came here with her mother. They both would sit at the corner while people of all kinds walked by. Merchants would yell out and try to coax people to buy their goods. Her mother would stand while the little girl sat by her feet begging for coins. Usually the people who passed would not give her mother anything but pitying looks. Men would eye her with disgust and women upturned their noses when in range of her mother. The little girl had held her knees to her chest praying someone would drop a coin into her mother's hand so they may eat. No one seemed to take pity on either of them. Except for when death came for the girl's mother who died from hunger.

The girl would cry every time she thought of her mother dying. She could see her mother's cheekbones clearly, like how she could see the joints of her knuckles under her skin. Tears stung the girl's eyes suddenly and she had to wipe them away roughly with the back of her hand.

At the time of her mother's death, her mother held the little girl's hand as the sun went down slowly. Just like the sun, her mother's life was drained from her hazel eyes leaving them cold and blank. The little girl's body shook in anger and sadness. A haunting lullaby just outside their cardboard box sized home came to the girl's ears from the children playing in the crowded streets.

*“London Bridge is falling down,
Falling down, falling down,
London Bridge is falling down,
My fair Lady!”*

“Hello there,” a scratchy voice catches the attention of the girl.

Innocence (continued)

She turns around and comes face to face with the stranger's brass buttons half way up his cloak. Slowly her eyes glide up his form till they land on a unique feature. This man's left eye is completely made of glass. His posture is hunched over and it unnerves the girl to have him stare at her with that eye. The man is wearing a large black cloak with brass buttons all the way down the front, and his face is covered in many scars. The main scar goes down from his eyebrow, across his glass eye, and down the side of his face. She swallows the saliva she had building in her throat with a loud gulp.

"Lost are we?" he taunts showing his crooked yellow teeth behind thin lips.

"Food," the girl is able to squeak out, as she fiddles with the hem of her murky brown dress.

"Ah! An orphan!" His tone draws out in sinister glee: "Perhaps I can help."

Her hands clench together tightly as if in prayer and they shake violently. He reaches into a pouch in the front of his coat and reveals a large gold coin. The girl's eyes light up instantly at seeing such a shiny new coin, worth enough to give her a loaf of bread.

"I have many other gold coins," he continues holding the coin between two fingers showing it to the girl. "I can give you more if you come with me."

Inside she is conflicted; that coin can get her a loaf of bread and ease the pains in her stomach. The girl also isn't dumb and knows that her mother told her not to talk to strangers, especially men.

Her stomach lets out a roar and her body reacts; again she is bent over in pain. The contractions in her stomach make it harder to breathe and she starts to wheeze again. Quickly she sneaks a peek up at the man from her bent over position to see the same unnerving stare from the glass eye on her. She felt as if it were branding itself into her soul.

The man is waiting patiently with his crooked smile staying plastered on his face. He again waves the coin in the girl's face to tempt her. Could she run even if she denied this man? She remembers the way her joints would rub together in agony as she ran and that sealed the deal.

"Yes," the girl replies, reaching a small hand for the coin. "I will go with you."

His smile grows, if possible, twisting his already scarred face into something the girl would surely have nightmares about for years." Great! Let's go!" He says as he reaches his long, slim fingers out to grab the girl's hand.

The girl closes her eyes, accepting her fate, waiting for his fingers to encase her own. A loud crack startles the girl and she immediately opens her eyes. The man who would take her away is now on the ground. The sound of the crack is his skull hitting the pavement. Behind the man is a mysterious figure concealed in a white robe with long flowing blonde hair peeking behind

Innocence (continued)

the hood. In the person's hand is a bloody mallet poised above the person's head. The spikes are covered thickly in blood. A feminine hand reaches up and pushes away the robe revealing a woman. The woman's smile is gentle while staring down at the girl, but turns hard once staring at the man at her feet. This woman saves the girl. Could she possibly be an angel?

"Come," the woman beckons. "It's not safe for you to be out at night."

She stares at the woman's hand but makes no motion to take it.

"I will help you," the woman continues. "Don't you want food and for this suffering to end?"

Tears pool in her eyes before small droplets spill over onto the ground. The girl eagerly embraces the woman. The woman kneels down to the girl's height wrapping her in warmth and rubbing her back.

"Don't worry, you won't have to suffer any longer. I will help," the woman whispers.

"How will you do that?" The girl sniffs loudly, wiping the liquid from her eyes and nose on her shawl.

"Come with me," the woman sticks her hand out to the girl. "And I'll show you."

The girl accepts the hand with a big smile showing her gratitude to the woman.

The girl's hand is warm in the woman's larger ones. It gives the girl reassurance. Just like when her mother would lead her down the busy streets of London to beg. She starts to notice where they were walking toward and shivers slightly. The London Bridge is hidden in a shroud of darkness like everything else. The wires connecting to the bridge twist and bend in gruesome ways that make the little girl squeeze the woman's hand tighter. The nursery rhyme sung outside her home by little girls and boys rings in the girl's head once again.

"Take the key and lock her up!

Lock her up, lock her up!

Take the key and lock her up!

My fair lady!"

"Do not be afraid little one, it is only the London Bridge," she assures the girl. "You've seen it before, haven't you?"

How could she not? The bridge is what everyone talks about as they go through their daily lives, as her mother and the girl would starve. She hears good and bad things. Apparently, despite it being big and convenient, it takes a long time to cross. Many noblemen complain about how many times it had to be torn down and needed a new design.

"Yes," the girl answers. "I have seen it and heard of it while begging with my mother in the middle of town."

In the morning the bridge looks normal, but at night it looked different.

Innocence (continued)

The bridge looks worn and twisted in the night. The cracks in the stone wall are easily seen, and vines scale down the wall looking from an angle like hands reaching toward the river below.

They draw nearer and nearer to the bridge. The woman's strides are longer than the girl's, so the girl has to hurry to keep up. She is led not onto the flat slab on the bridge to cross it but down stone steps towards the underbelly of the bridge. Now the girl is weary and takes her time going down the steps. The woman's hand firmly grasp her own is the only thing keeping the girl from running away.

The girl peeks over the edge at the soft, calm, black waters and hears the soft slap of the waves against the stone. As she looks deeper into the water something starts to appear on the surface. Her eyes are locked as she waits for the image to become clearer, but she wishes she hadn't. A ghostly face appears within the water with eyes wide and a mouth open in a silent scream. The girl lets out a terrified scream as she clutches the woman's robe out of fear.

"Don't worry, we don't have far to go now," the woman assures her.

The girl's heart thumps painfully in her small chest and her stomach starts to turn. If she had eaten beforehand she surely would have thrown it up. Now her stomach just makes angry gurgling and whistling sounds. Her nausea crawls up from her stomach to her throat and she bends over to the side. Retching sounds come from her mouth, but there is nothing to throw up.

"Just a little farther." The woman takes the girl by the shoulders, guiding her.

The tunnel is deep and loud as they continue to walk. The sound of waves is amplified by the stone walls, and there is no light to guide them. She keeps clutching the woman's hand so she won't be lost in the darkness. Her imagination runs wild, and she can see through the image of the man standing in the darkness smiling evilly down at her with his glassy eye.

Her tiny body comes into contact with something hard and she is almost knocked to the ground. Peeking through the darkness, she sees a single flicker of light and gives a sigh of relief. Again they move forward, toward the light with the girl clutching the robes with a deathlike grip.

When they come closer to the flame, the girl can make out two other figures both in white robes, although she can tell these two have dirtied robes. The woman stops and she stays close behind, waiting to hear them speak. The two robed figures see them approaching.

"Ah, you found another?" a man's voice comes from the one holding the torch.

"Indeed, it is terrible isn't it?" the woman sighs sadly.

"Indeed," he agrees, "Would you like some food little one?"

She nods to the unknown man, unable to speak to him.

Innocence (continued)

He laughs cheerfully, "Then come here." He gestures her forward with the wave of his hand.

Slowly she peels her hands away from the white robes and walk forward toward the man. The girl shivers from the coldness of the small tunnel they are in and rubs her arms for warmth. He places a hand carefully onto her shoulder, kneeling forward; she cannot see his face because of the hood.

"No more will you have to go out every night in search of food," he starts clutching her shoulder a little tighter, "We will save you."

"How?" her small voice echoes in the tunnel.

"You have a much bigger fate than this," he continues. "You will be an eternal guardian."

"Guardian?"

"You will be saved," he repeats and takes a step back. He nods to someone behind the girl.

She is slowly turned around and someone hands her a large loaf of French bread. Her mouth waters immediately and she takes the bread, breaking off small pieces to savor it. It is like heaven in her mouth as she chews; it is soft and smooth when it goes down her throat. Her body then is positioned before the wall beside them and she stares into an abyss.

Stone bricks are placed from the floor and rise to halfway up the current wall. The light from the torch flickers over the cold stone making it seem even more eerie. Darkness seems to ooze from this very hole, blending into the darkness around them.

"I don't understand," the girl says.

Hands grip the girl's armpits, making her scream, and hoist her into the air. She kicks the air as she is pushed towards the newly made stone wall, small bits of cement squeeze from between the cracks. Her body comes in contact with the hard floor when her body is flung over the wall. She cries out in pain, losing her loaf of bread.

Her vision is fuzzy and her arms shake when she tries to rise up. Once she is on her feet she stands on her tippytoes, her eyes just barely able to look over the stone wall.

"Why are you doing this? You said you were going to help me!" she cries.

"We are helping you."

"You will be an eternal guardian like I said," the man answers.

The silent, robed figure begins to place cement down and build bricks up from where they left off.

"Help! Someone help!" she cries.

"No one can hear you," the woman says. "You will rest here forever, guarding the London Bridge."

Slowly one by one the light from the torch disappears and the girl cries out in fear.

Innocence (continued)

“Don’t be afraid,” she continues, “You do not have much longer to live. Then you will be part of this place just like the other innocents who are forced to go hungry. You will rest here.”

The light disappears to a small flicker as the final pieces of the stone are being put into place. The girl weakly bangs her fists against the wall, but it only hurts her small hands. Her calloused feet are in so much pain from constantly walking that she has to sit down. She is out of energy completely. So she watches as the light is gone and the last stone is in place. She can hear the woman’s voice echoing through the bridge as the girl is left in the dark. Her sweet honey voice does not bring comfort to the girl, even though it is a lullaby to put children to sleep.

*“London
Bridge is falling down,
Falling down, falling down
London Bridge is falling down
My fair lady!
Take the key and lock her up
Lock her up, lock her up
Take the key and lock her up
My fair lady.”*

Kylee
Laudick

Live Again

The day you die will be the day I live again. This kept running through her mind as she drove past every car on the road. She couldn't believe she ever told him that. And now that could be the last thing she ever said to him. Tears were running down her cheeks. Cars kept honking at her, but nothing was going to stop her from getting to him.

She kept looking back to her phone hoping there was another text from him. Please, please, please call me or text me anything, please! She couldn't lose him, not like this. She hated him for what he did to her, but she knew she couldn't live without him. She still loved him as much as she did since the day they met. She needed him. The speedometer hit 90 mph and there was no sign of slowing down. The light turned red but she didn't care. She didn't have time to go by the law. She had to get to him.

She grabbed her phone and dialed 911. "Hello, please send help to 2215 Central Avenue...My fiancée...I. . . I think he just killed himself...Please hurry!" She hung up the phone.

She couldn't stop thinking, Why? Why did I tell him that? I didn't mean any of it! If she didn't make it in time to him she would never forgive herself. The car was nearing its max speed and the engine was roaring loudly. The smell of burnt metal and oil was starting to come in through the vents. What happened to the car didn't matter as long as it got her there on time. She grabbed her phone again and dialed Mike's phone number, "Please answer, please! Damn it!" She threw her phone on the passenger seat and hit the steering wheel as hard as she could. "God, please let the paramedics get to him on time, please!" She couldn't contain the frustration that kept building up within her.

She couldn't hold it in any longer. Mascara smeared all over her face, tears dripping onto her hoodie. Her vision was blurry and she was starting to lose control of the car. She didn't know what else she could do. She grabbed her phone and started texting Mike:

Baby please answer me u know i love u and can't live without...

She invaded the left lane and never saw the lights or heard the sound of the ambulance coming.

The garage door flew open as Hope raced to her car bawling. Mike followed her closely behind, desperately trying to stop her.

"Hope, please wait! I can explain!"

Hope ignored him. She unlocked the car and opened the door, but before she could get in Mike grabbed her arm and pulled her away as he closed the car's door, "Just listen to me for a minute, please."

Hope slapped Mike, "Your whore explained it all already, didn't she? Those pictures were more than enough 'explaining' and never touch me again!" She pushed his hand off her arm.

Live Again (continued)

Mike rubbed his red, sweaty cheek. "It was a stupid mistake, I'm sorry. The guys just wanted to take me to celebrate our engagement."

"Well you certainly had a hell of a time celebrating." Hope tried to open the door but Mike didn't let her. Let me go."

"I can't, not like this. Let's talk for a minute, I can fix this."

"It's too late now. I can't believe you just threw away ten years! Ten years and you just threw it all away! Half our lives! All gone over some random slut!"

"I had too many drinks. I didn't know what I was doing. The guys kept buying me drinks and after a certain point, I didn't know what I was doing anymore. You know that in my right state I would've never done anything to hurt you. I would've never put our relationship in danger, what we have is too great to risk."

"Had! And what difference does that make? You still did it."

"I don't even remember how it happened. It's all so blurry. I remember drinking at the bar, and then she walked in and next thing I know I'm waking up next to her."

"Well, that's fantastic. You can't even remember how you screwed everything up."

"Exactly, it was just one meaningless, stupid night. We can't throw everything we have away over one stupid thing. Ten years, every single day has been better than the last since we met that day in school. Remember how I was too nervous to even say hi? And you didn't care you just started talking to me like we had known each other for years. You were so nice and sweet, and it's been the same for ten years, you're amazing and I don't wanna lose you. I can't lose you."

Hope takes off her engagement ring. "Yes, it was an amazing ten years, but it's too late now. You've already lost me." She threw the ring at him, got into the car, and turned it on.

Mike ran in front of the car and wouldn't move.

"Michael! Get out of the way!"

"No, I can't!"

Hope got out of the car and slammed the door shut while the car was still running. "Let me go!"

"I can't lose you! I'll die without you!"

"I'm already dead inside. You did this to me. The day you die will be the day I live again," Hope cried. Only something that strong would make him let her go.

Mike stepped to the side in shock of what she said, and sat on the ground with his hands on his face. Hope got in her car and drove away.

I can't do this anymore! I betrayed her! I don't deserve her! This was all he could think about. She was his world and he lost it all just like that. It seemed unreal,

Live Again (continued)

he couldn't handle it anymore. She was the only thing he could think about. All he did was hope he would hear from her. A text, a call, anything—he needed to hear from her.

He paced back and forth with a bottle of whiskey in his hand. His eyes bloodshot from the lack of sleep. He was breathing heavily and kept punching the hood of the car. His cold sweat kept getting worse, and he was shaking. He took a big drink from the bottle and groaned, "Fuck this shit! I can't do this anymore!" He drank what was left in the bottle and threw it to the wall, shattering the bottle.

He walked over to the other side of the garage and grabbed a flex pipe. She deserves better. She deserves a good life. I will make sure she has a good life. He hooked one side of the pipe to the exhaust and stuck the other side in the car through the window, using the window to keep it in place. This is what's best for everybody. He walked to the driver's side door and opened it. He took a big breath and got into the car. He sat there for a few seconds taking deep breaths. He put on his seatbelt and pulled out his phone from his pocket. He looked in his phone for Hope and called her, but she didn't pick up. He started writing a text:

Hey... I just wanted to talk to u one more time. I wanted to let u know that i love u always have and always will. I still dont know why i did that and i cant tell u how sorry i am. I dont understand how i could be so stupid. I could never say it enough and i wanted to say it one more time. U know she never meant anything to me. You were always the only person i cared about... She was nobody u r my everything. I dont remember much of that night i just know that it ruined my life i was so drunk i dont remember doing anything its not an excuse though and i know that but i needed u to know. I will never forget the last thing u said to me... the day you die will be the day i live again... i never thought i'd hear something like that from u but now i understand and i am so sorry but im gonna fix it. Please remember that i always loved you and always will. Now i will let you live again

He pressed send and put his phone back in his pocket. He leaned back and began to think about her beautiful smile. Every time she smiled, nothing else seemed to matter. He took a deep breath. He put the keys in the ignition and looked up. "Please forgive me," he said, and then started the car.

The garage door slowly opened, it was late at night and all the lights were off. Hope was blindfolded and Mike guided her through the steps. They were dressed up, she was wearing a beautiful red dress, and he was wearing a black suit. She kept giggling, it was clear that she had had a couple of glasses of wine. "Where are you taking me?" she asked.

"You'll see soon enough," he answered as he turned the lights on. "You stay here," he said, placing her in front of the stairs. "And wait for me to tell you

Live Again (continued)

to take off the blindfold.” Mike moved in front of her and got down on one knee. “You can take off the blindfold now.”

Hope took off the blindfold and there he was. Kneeling down in front of her with a beautiful engagement ring. There were rose petals everywhere. The petals spelled Mike & Hope with a heart around it, and he was kneeling down in the center. She gasped and her eyes started to water. Her smile grew bigger and brighter than ever before, the most beautiful, perfect smile he had ever seen.

“Hope Daniels, today marks the ten year anniversary of that one day, when as a kid I made the best decision of my life. In this very spot, out of nowhere, somehow I managed to finally summon the courage to ask you to go out with me. It wasn’t romantic, I was a mess and I could barely say it. Yet, for some odd reason you said yes. I know that the garage is not the most romantic place in the world. But to me, to me it is. It’s where the best thing of my life started. And here I kneel, as nervous as I was as a kid, and hoping you’ll say yes again, I want to ask you something. Will you marry me?”

Hope started crying and exclaimed, “Yes!”

Mike got up and put the ring on her finger. He hugged her and kissed her.

Mike started opening his eyes, everything was blurry and he couldn’t see much. Everything was too loud, there were red and blue colors everywhere. He tried to get up but he was strapped to the stretcher. There was a young man on the floor. He was wearing a white uniform and was bleeding.

After struggling for a few seconds, Mike was able to free his arm and unstrapped himself. He sat up but he was extremely dizzy. The medical equipment was all over the floor. He leaned down and tried to help the man on the floor. “Hey man, are you ok? What happened? Where are we?” But the man was unresponsive.

He opened the back door of the ambulance and stepped out. He was trying to find help for the man in the ambulance; however, the noise got louder and the colors were brighter than before. It was a cloudy day, yet the small glare from the sunrays peaked through the clouds and kept his sight blurry and confused. He looked to the side of the ambulance where there were a few people huddled next to a wrecked car. He walked over to them and touched a guy on the shoulder. “Hey man, what’s going on? What happened?”

“Didn’t you see it? The car drove into the left lane and hit the side of the ambulance. It was terrible, the car flipped like twice before it landed there. I hope they make it, but I don’t know, it doesn’t look good,” the man responded anxiously and pointed to the body in the driver’s side.

“I didn’t see anything. I don’t know what’s going on. I can’t remember how I got here or what happened.” He stumbled toward the car and looked in through the shattered window. He saw the body of a woman. Her body twisted

Live Again (continued)

out of place.

He got closer and leaned down to see her face. He recognized her hoodie. It was the hoodie Hope's dad gave her before he died. He fell on his knees when he recognized that it was Hope. He pulled himself up and struggled to open the door. Her lifeless body fell onto his arms. The perfect smile was gone. Teeth were missing and her lips were cut and bloody. She was wearing her dad's hoodie. Once it was blue, now everything was red. What happened to her beautiful, perfect smile? He sat back and just kept looking at her face. He couldn't process what was happening. He looked at her body lying in his arms and started sobbing uncontrollably. Her arm and leg were bent backward at the elbow and knee. Her skull had cracked, and her neck was bent at a ninetydegree angle. There was a lake of blood around her.

He desperately tried to put her limbs back in place, but he couldn't. He couldn't accept the fact that she was gone. He kept thinking, she doesn't deserves this! She deserves better! This can't be it! I can't live without her! She's my life!

He screamed at her lifeless twisted body. "What happened? What happened damn it! Anyone please! Help me!" He held her as close to himself as he could and kept repeating, "What happened? Why?" He couldn't stop crying.

His phone started ringing and he recognized that it was Hope's ringtone. The ringtone he had set up only for her. He let go of her with one hand and pulled his phone out of his pocket. He couldn't read what it said because the screen was soaked, covered with blood. He gently sat her down and cleaned the blood off his phone with his shirt. The phone read:

Hope <3

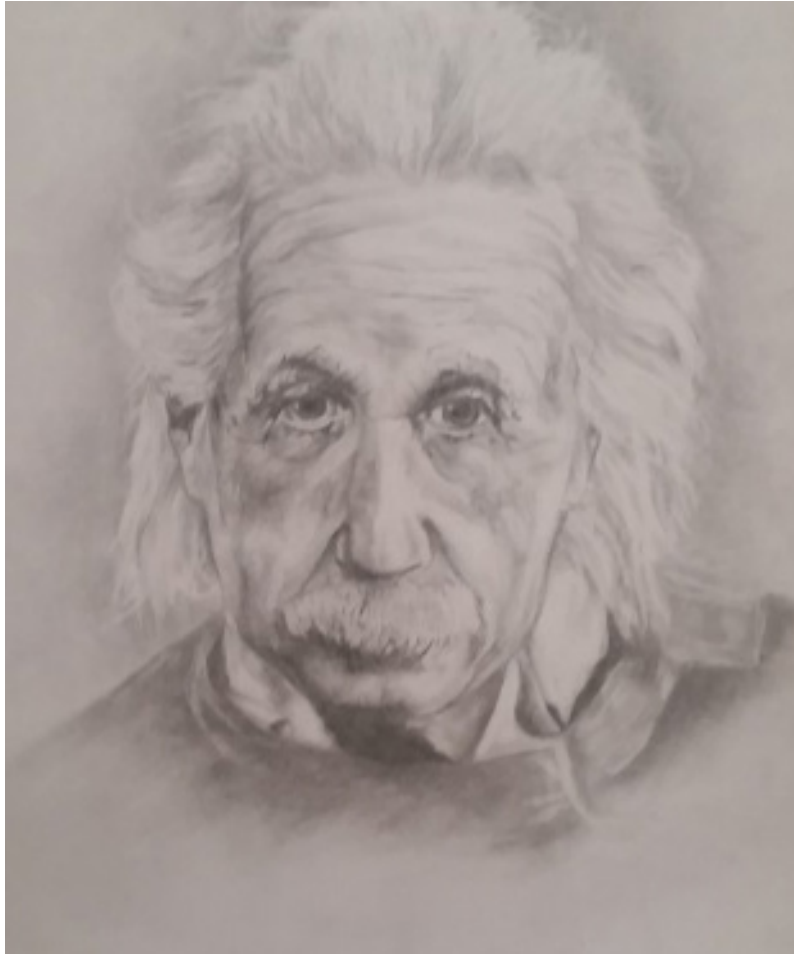
1 New Message

He started breathing heavily as he unlocked the phone. He clicked on the text and it said:

Baby please answer me u know i love u and can't live without...

Oscar
Jimenez

Einstein



Mikala
Greenlee

Elizabeth



**Mikala
Greenlee**

Eric Manning

Six Haikus

The bleak winter sky
Cast with clouds of rain and sleet
We shall not soon meet

Smelling meadow grass
I never knew what question to ask
The answer came anyway

Filling empty black seas
A leviathan
It consumes all life

Happy as dancing vines
We never seem to find the time
Making that great climb

Autumn tree swaying
Cold winds howling from the north
Soon winter will come

Tiger fears nothing
Prowling though the night swiftly
Radiating strength

Great Green Dragon

In the west I beheld a great green dragon
Vast were the shadows cast by its five pointed wings
From jaws pored a smoke thick and white
And soon men began to dream
Of things that could perhaps be
Madness or genius we cannot yet tell
Others and brothers soon began to fall
But some men are convinced that this beast must come from hell
So they threaten to chain their brothers to help them from their selves
But men love to set lose their souls
To unlock their minds to what they had feared to find
So despite the chains that they may find locked about arms and thigh
Men do seem to seek out and find
That great green dragon soaring high across the sky

Broken World

What if the sky were as green as an eye?
That seas boiled yellow and red filled with monsters from under our beds
That forest float and fly whimsy and white as a winter sky
Filled with birds afraid to fly that can tell only lies
Whispering in the ears of men born to create
Black sand castles with stony black knights that dance though the black of
night
That the bright blue moon sings a tune along with it all
And this song tells it all from the end to the start
Reveling what is hidden in a women's heart
If there is even one to start
That all people crave in there heart
To make the world one

Blue and His Flute

Have you seen my friend dressed up in blue?
Or better yet heard the singing of his silver flute
The song is pure as white but sings about the about the blackest of nights
If you hear it you would never forget
You simply cannot get it out of your head
So have you seen that boy in blue?
I have looked and searched all the land following the note that lag behind
That most enrapturing of guys
Dressed in a suit of blue that marks him as the owner of that silver flute
I promise that will not try to make it mine
Neither the flute nor the boy in blue
So please tell me, true, where is the boy with his silver flute?
In which meadow or marsh does he reside
Making music that enraptures the mind

Falling Man

Man never learns with either his eyes, nor does he often use his mind
To find what he needs to survive
He would rather deny than giving that same thing a try
And deny his fellow man his chance to deny
So man falls dragged down by a thousand hand attached to thousands men
Falling as well most like to some deep dank hell
But we are not sure and neither are they
For none bother to look down at that which pulls them down
Could this be a cool dark lake, refreshing waters in which we will soon lie
I think it unlikely that this is the end
And if a lake is really our end
Then it must be fire and steam and soon we will scream

Monster

Sometimes I wish I were a monster that feared nothing
Unbound by chains of morality of society or my own creation
That I could lash out and break all those that I hate
I would be strong, swift, and free
Inspiring fear in all those that did see me
I would have claws that could rip and rend
My fangs are vast, many, and sharp
With a particular talent for eating the hearts of men
Eyes, nose, and ears are sharp that miss nothing aimed at my heart
I would reap a terrible vengeance on all that would do me harm
But not only those who start the fight but also those that I want to make mine
By taking all that makes them themselves and devouring it down
Till no one is left but me and my bed
That I may at last dream with fear.

The World Ends

Just one click is all it takes for all the world to unmake
What will you do when the bombs begin to fall?
When little children become shadows on the wall
Is there any one you would call?
For one last for to tell how much they mean
And dread together what you have seen
What would you make of this new world that men did create?
To see the world fall and break
Before the might of manmade atomic bombs
What songs would there be in the end
To be the theme song for this apocalyptical end

Untitled

The sounds of men cursing and the scent of sizzling sausage woke Gram. Sunlight had begun to leak through the canopy of leaves, and the woods was alive with the chirp of birds and buzz of insects. Gram rubbed the sleep from his eyes as he threw his blanket off of himself. Even sleeping, Gram wore his clothes. Wool, leather, and sheep skin sown by his mother; all green, grey, and brown to better go unnoticed in the forest. Over by the fire, Old Watt tended to breakfast. Sausage on wooden spits and, week old bread frying in a pan. Gil had begun breaking down the camp, and his brother Daron and Black Ben Stave sat together sharpening their weapons. Daron with his bearded ax and Black Ben his sword. Daron was bigger than Gram and nearly ten years older, an experienced raider.

This was Gram's first time being brought along. His first raid. His other brother, Jeffery, had been wroth when he had been left behind. Jeffery may have been a year older, but he was two hand spans shorter than Gram and had half his skill at fighting. Their mother liked to say that Jeffery had half the robustness of her other sons and twice the temper. Gram may not be as big as Daron, not yet, but he was faster and strong for his age. When practicing with wooden swords, no one, not even tested raiders, could shame him. His brother had seen to that. Gram had no sword nor the coin to buy one. If he wished to own a sword he would need to steal one or the coin to buy one. His skill with a bow was the reason Daron had brought him. No one Gram knew could match him with a bow. Daron once bragged in his cup that Gram could slip a shaft into a rabbit's eye at five hundred paces. Gram did not know about that, but making a man sprout a few feathers should be simple enough.

Daron shouted at Gram, "Get your gear together and help Gil with breaking down the camp. You're lucky you woke when you did, I was about to have Ben piss on your face for fear you would sleep the day away." Not that Daron would really do that. Gram knew that for all Daron's bluster, he loved his brothers. Once when Gram was about ten, Jeffery and Gram had gotten into a fight with an older lad. When Daron saw the bruises, he forced the name from them. Daron beat the lad to death with his bare hands the next day. Men, women, and gods knew not to fuck with Daron's little brothers.

Watt had finished with the food by the time Gil and Gram had finished with the camp. They all sat together crouched around the fire, eating. The bread was hot and crisp and the sausage greasy but good. Made with pork and goat then spiced with salt, garlic, and even a little pepper. As they ate, they spoke of the day to come and the plans they had made.

Daron said, "We will meet with the others at Yellow Wood Meadow. From there we will go to the ambush site that Will Greenrock found. Once we are finished, we will split up the plunder and head home."

Black Ben smirked, "I bet you a silver Gram that the Gotters are late."

Gram smiled, "I don't have a silver to pay you and even if I did I would not waste it. Everyone knows that no one from Clan Gotter arrives on time."

Black ben laughed and Old Watt said, "Don't you worry about silver Gramy, you will have more than you know what to do with soon."

After they finished breaking their fast, Daron kicked the fire apart and Old Watt proceeded to piss on the coals, sending up white clouds of steam. They started moving through the woods, till they came to a trail. They followed that for a ways before leaving the trail into the woods once more. No one spoke, better not seen or heard until within striking distance when it was too late. Not them or the poor bastards who found them. They were all surefooted. The forest and hills were a second home to them and they made good time, stopping only two times at streams to drink and fill their water skins.

They had reached the meadow a little after midday. The Beckly men had beaten them there. Stout, young men, the oldest could only have been thirty. They were armed with clubs and staffs. The Beckly men all wore wool that was undyed, stained, and worn from hard use. Most of Clan Beckly lived in the high hills making a living raising and shearing sheep. That spiced with stealing and killing.

Daron had made a wise decision when he told everyone to meet at Yellow Wood meadow. It was a modest sized clearing in the woods. The meadow's name came from the yellow the leaves turned in the fall. A brook babbled not far from the meadow giving them sweet, clear, cold water to drink as they waited. The meadow was carpeted by soft green grass and dotted here and there with wild flowers.

Gram laid in the grass and rested while the others talked with the Beckly men. Gil and Old Watt started a game of dice with one of the Beckly men. The Gotter men were late as expected, but not as late as they could have been. The Beckly men and the Gotter men gave each other a few sullen glances.

Back before Old King Henry defeated the Clans and forced them to bend a knee, they had feuded with and raided each other. It had practically been the Clan's past time. Now, most raided richer pickings outside of the Clan lands, but some old feuds ran deep. Clan Gotter and Clan Beckly had bad blood between them, but they were willing to put profit before their feud. All the same it was really Daron who they were working with, not each other. So besides the nodes of greetings, few words were spoken between the Gotter and Beckly men.

Three men had come from Clan Gotter. One was a grey beard, lean, and short man with a hard weatherworn face filled with wrinkles and crow's feet. His beard was grey as smoke and shot through here and there with snow. His clothes were leather and fur. All very worn and battered except a fine and rich beaver pelt vest. Across his back was a quiver full of arrows with black and white fletching and an unstrung bow.

The two younger men looked enough like him to be his kin, maybe even his grandsons. When Daron went over to them to talk, the old man pulled out one of the arrows and handed it to Daron as if for him to inspect the arrow.

Gram got up from where he was laying and began walking to where the group was standing. When he got closer, he was able to see what the Grey beard was showing Daron. It was much the same as any other arrow.

A slender wooden shaft fletched with black and white feathers. But the tip was what made the difference. Where a hunting arrow may be tipped with a blunt for rabbits and bird, or a razor sharp broad head, this was tipped with a bodkin. Where a broad head is triangular with razor sharp edge, a bodkin is a narrow spike. This one was made of good steel tapering to a razor shape point. Like a miniature war hammer spike flies though the air. Bodkins would fly further and penetrate armor better than the broad heads that Gram used.

Gram had not had the chance to say anything when Daron began to haggle with the Grey beard from Clan Gotter. Back and forth they went till finally they settled on a fair trade. Daron gave the Grey beard an iron knife and a few silvers and in return, Daron was given four bodkins. Daron probably got the better of the deal; bodkins were not cheap if one could get one at all. The only way this Gotter man had come by them was by stealing them. But he had a whole quiver full so he was willing to part with a few.

Daron clasped Gram on the shoulder saying, "Think of it as an investment on my part. With all the men you will bring down with them, I'll see my money back in no time." He walked away to speak with Black Ben.

Now they were waiting on their last companion, Will of Greenrock. Will of Greenrock was acting as their spotter and tracker for their prey. Daron and Will had heard about this merchant man Symonds Stump hand. With civil war in the south and the west, the merchant thought that it would be safer to move though the Clan land than risk the soldiers. But to his folly, the merchant pressed a little too hard haggling out a deal. Symonds had taken upon himself to teach him a lesson. And he did that by getting in touch with Will and Daron. Will had picked a likely place on their path to set an ambush and followed them to make sure they stayed on course. Daron rounded up the raiders.

When Will of Greenrock finely arrived, it was as if he appeared from nowhere. One moment there was nothing, the next Will was walking out of the tree line. Will was a man of middling height and thin build, dressed in grey and green leather and a molted green cloak. His hood was down so you could see his golden hair and comely face. Will of Greenrock was not a man you feared on sight like Daron, but Will was deadly with a bow and moved through the forest like a wraith. No one knew the woods and hills like Will of Greenrock did, and there was not a man or animal he could not track. Rather than his customary smirk or smile, Will's face was bleak, even a little grim, as he spoke. "We may have a problem Daron."

"What sort of problem Will?" asked Daron.

"Knights," said Will.

All at once, men began to speak. One of the Beckly men say, "Knights? Daron you said nothin' about fighting no knights." Daron's call for quiet cut though all of the men's voices, and suddenly there was silence.

Daron gestured at Will, "Explain what happened."

Will elaborated, "After Symonds gave us the tip in Bernton and we split up, I went looking for the merchant like we planned. I caught up with their party two days later near Duren's Lake. I followed them from a distance like we planned. Making sure they would stay to the right paths, I was able to get close enough to count their party and see some of the good they have. Our plan would have been perfect, Daron, but for those knights. Three of them. One is old but the other two are young and looked formidable. All were dressed in good chain-mail, with helm and shield too. No plate, thank god, but they have swords and lances and are mounted. They met with the merchant party close to the ruins of Twisted Tower. The merchant must have asked for them to share the road with him because they stayed with the group since. Never more than two ride off at once, and I crept close one night and heard them talking over wine. They mean to go as far as Blue Falls together; we can't wait that long."

Daron asked, "You said you counted their party, how many men besides the knights?"

Will answered, "Five men besides the knights. Two serving men with daggers and clubs and two guards in the merchant's hire with axes and mounted on garrons. The merchant keeps a crossbow loaded in the wagon with him."

The Grey Beard from Clan Gotter said, "Maybe we should rethink this raid, Daron. Is it really worth risking our skins fighting knights for some trinkets? Your Brother Gram there has never raided before, right? And my boys are almost as green? Is this really how we want to test them?" Daron's jaw was clenched, his eyes slitted like they got when he was thinking hard about something.

Daron looked at Will, "You got a look at the good they had?"

Will answered, "Yes. Dye, wool, and a fortune in silk. The merchant spoke of buying wine in Povus. He would need silver or gold to do that. I think we should risk it. These men carry no trinkets."

Daron smiled at that, "Yes, I think we will risk these knights for such reward."

The others still looked uneasy, even his brother's men. It was not that the raiders lacked courage, but they were raiders. They risked life and limb for profit and selfgain, not honor or loyalty. Knights in armor from head to heel were dangerous and hard to kill, but all the same, they would fight. The loot was simply too tempting give up. Gram felt uneasy as well, and he would face less danger than most of the others. He would be using his bow; only Will and the Grey Beard had bows, so the rest would need to do their work up close.

Twelve men left the clearing moving quickly through the woods. They talked and planned as they walked. Finally, they decided that Gram would signal the attack. As their best archer, he would have the best chance of being able to kill one of the knights with his first shot before they were aware of the danger. After Gram took his shot the others would go to work as well. Black Ben promised Gram he would beat him bloody if he missed his shot and Daron laughed

saying, "And I'll hold him still for you Ben, or Gram might beat you bloody."

As they walked, Daron fell behind the other and gently grasped Gram to slow him. After they had fallen behind enough not to be heard, Daron said in a low voice, "I want you to hang back Gram. Don't look at me like that. I know you are brave, but these are knights we are dealing with and I will not have you getting yourself killed on your first raid. Stay back and pick them off with arrows. And if things go badly, I want you to run."

Gram turned to him, "I would not leave you, Daron."

Daron said, "You will fucking leave me, Gram, whether I'm dead or wounded. If it goes bad, you run and leave the others to die. You hear me little brother?"

"I hear you."

The spot that Will Greenrock had picked for the ambush was a good one. The road snaked around the base of a rocky hill. The hill on one side with cover for hiding and thick forest on the other side with the road inbetween. Daron, Will, and his men take the hill and hide among the rocks. Daron wanted Gram close to him, but the rocky hills cover was further from the road and would be hard to aim from undetected. So Gram went to the forest instead. The Beckly men were hidden about thirty feet to Gram's right; the Gotters men the same distance to his left. All that was left was for them to wait for the merchant party to come.

They had waited for about two hours before the merchant came around the hill. The knights rode in front of the wagons. All wore their mail and surcoats, but their shields and helms were slung from their saddles. The old one had nine stars, white on a field of dark blue. The other two were younger, like Will had said. The older of the two had a mace and flail crossed black on a field of yellow, and the younger was dark of hair and could only be a few years older than Gram. On his surcoat he bore three red Ravens on a field of black. The merchant rode in the wagon, and the guards rode their garrons beside the wagon. The servants walked behind.

Gram picked his target carefully. He hoped the old knight would be weaker and slower than the others, and that Red Ravens would be less experienced and skilled. So he settled on Mace and Flail. From his cover, Gram slid one of his new bodkins from his quiver, knocked the arrow, and drew the arrow back to his right cheek. He must not miss his first shot, and this would be the best chance to put one of the knights down early before they knew what was happening. Gram's target was the man's unprotected head. Without his helm on, that was where he was most vulnerable. Gram let his arrow fly.

A heart beat later, the arrow punched through skull and brain. The knight with the crossed mace and flail slumped and fell from his horse. After that, all hell broke loose. Daron and his men came pouring down the hill screaming. At the same time, the Beckly and Gotter men broke cover and attacked.

The nine star knight and the guards wheeled to the first threat going from the hill. The Beckly men attacked the red raven knight and the Gotter men

swarmed the serving men. The merchant swung his crossbow around and put a quarrel in the chest of one of the Gotters. So Gram stepped out of the forest and put an arrow in the chest of the merchant before he could reload. Will put two arrows into one guard before he finally died. Black Ben ducked low under the ax of the second guards, slashing low at the leg of the garron. His sword bit deep and the animal fell, its screams laced with terror. Ben and Gil were on the guard before he could gain his feet. Ben held him down as Gil slit his throat with his dagger, red pouring from the wound. Daron and the nine star knight danced a deadly dance on the rocky hill. The knight wheeled his horse around trying to keep his seat as he hacked at Daron with his sword. Afoot, Daron moved more nimbly on the uneven ground, hammering the knight with his ax. Gram had knocked and drew back an arrow intending to shoot the nine star knight, but a cry drew his attention away.

The red raven knight had cut down two of the Beckly men and broken though. He had seen Gram when he had broken cover and was riding hard at him. Gram pivoted, aimed, and let loose. Gram had aimed at the knight's chest rather than risk a head shot on a moving target. He put his trust in bodkin and close range, and hoped the arrow would penetrate the armor. But in battle, all too often the unexpected happens. Grams' shot had been on target, but the horse got in the way. Instead of taking the rider in the chest as Gram had intended the arrow slammed into the horse's eye. As the horse fell, somehow the knight managed to jump from the saddle and roll to his feet; unhurt, and with some god's blessing, his sword still in hand. He was so close Gram had no time to use his bow, so he dropped it and drew his knife, backing up.

The knights slashed out trying to gut Gram. Gram leapt back barely missing the sword. The knight never missed a beat, swinging his sword around and up for an overhead slash. This time Gram fell to his right, falling to one knee. Gram probably would have died after that if not for the intervention of chance. When the overhead slash missed Gram, it instead landed on a thick tree limb. If Gram had been slower or less nimble, the red raven Knight might have freed his sword and killed Gram. But Gram was nimble, and as the sword sunk into the tree limb, Gram gathered himself and bulled into the knight. The knight lost his grip on the sword and went tumbling back.

Gram landed on top and tried to stab at the knight's face, but the knight caught Gram's hand and managed to knock the knife away. Then they were rolling, the knight struggling to free his own knife. As they struggled, Gram could see the knight's face so clearly. His bright blue eyes filled with fear, and his comely face warped in violence.

Then like a gift from the gods, Gram's hand felt a rock. Gram grasped it and slammed it into the knight's unprotected head. The knight weakened enough after that for Gram to flip the knight on his back and bash the knight's head again, and again, and again. Gram kept smashing the knight's face and head long after his struggles stopped. When Gram did stop, the knight was so battered, his own mother would not know him. His face pulverized, his skull

cracked and leaking blood and worse. The rock fell red and slick from Gram's hand. Gram sucked in a breath, then another. His hands were wet and sticky. Blood and sweat ran into his eyes. As Gram looked up, he feared the worst: his bother would be slain or dying.

Gram needed not worry. Daron stood over the dead nine star knight trying to calm his horse. The two Beckly men laid on the ground the other wounded, one of the Gotters had died, and poor Old Watt. Gram had not even seen him die, but there he lay. Gram turned around and pulled the sword loose from the limb. It was a fine steel blade. Gram finally had himself a sword. No one talked as they stripped the dead and dragged their corpses into the woods, and only minimally when they split the trader's gold and coin. The red raven knight had been close to Gram's size so he wanted his armor. He had trouble getting the armor off, so Daron came and helped him undress the corpse. Gram put the armor on then and there with Daron's help.

Daron got the nine star knight's horse and Gram took one of the garrons. The group split up after that so if someone found the carnage they would all be heading different ways. As Gram rode off with Daron mounted on his own horse, a sword on his hip, and fortune in gold, silver, and silk, he felt as good as he had ever felt. A boy no longer. In his place, a man and raider.

BIOGRAPHIES

Kylee Laudick

Kylee Laudick is a senior at IUPUC. Her major is English with a concentration in Creative Writing. She lives in Greensburg, Indiana, with her family. She enjoys writing mostly fiction. She wants her writing to be unique. Her inspiration comes from folklore, superstitions, and nature itself.

Oscar Jimenez

Oscar Jimenez (AKA O.J. Lopez) is a student at IUPUC who will be graduating in the spring of 2016 with a bachelor's degree in Creative Writing. After graduating, he plans on obtaining a Master's degree in Theater. Ultimately, he will pursue a career in three different aspects of theater: writing, acting, and directing. He has been acting since high school. He's currently directing his first play which will be produced in March 2016. And the play he wrote, Dorian Gray, will go into production in November 2016.

Clayton Ham

Clayton Ham is an English major at IUPUC that wants to make a difference in the world through not just actions but words. He is a human rights activist and is involved with Gay-Straight Alliance, Feminism Club, and English Club at IUPUC. He enjoys photography and writing songs/poetry.

Chase Schneider

Chase Schneider is a recent graduate from IUPUC holding a degree in Psychology. His goal for the future includes furthering his education by obtaining a master's degree in Psychiatry. When he was twelve he had a short story published in the Anthology of Short Stories and a poem in the Anthology of Poetry. In high school he became editor of the sports section in his high school's newspaper, The Owl.

Mikala Greenlee

Mikala Greenlee's artistic interests include drawing as well as painting. She enjoys capturing portraits when sketching because they require large amounts of detail. She especially enjoys trying to depict past or current idols or celebrities. Her drawing of Elizabeth Taylor is one of her favorites that she has completed. She enjoys trying to capture the likeliness of the individual she is drawing by adding as much detail and personality as possible.

Alicca Rice

Alicca Rice is a junior at IUPUC studying Creative Writing and is the president of English Club. She has been previously published in Pen It! Magazine and Talking Leaves. She is studying to become an editor for science fiction and fantasy novels.

Lori Haggard

Lori Haggard is a non-traditional student studying English and Psychology. "The best achievements in life are often made on the way to another." ~LH

Cheyenne Tyler

Cheyenne Tyler has been writing since she first learned to hold a pencil in her hand. She is majoring in both Creative Writing and Sociology at IUPUC, as well as minoring in Women's Studies and Literature. She is an avid reader, a video game enthusiast, and, naturally, a dedicated writer. You will find her in Bloomington, Indiana, with her partner and her beautiful son, Atlas

Eric Manning

Eric Manning began as a gifted Creative Writing major at IUPUC in fall 2015. His sister, too, attended IUPUC. He loved reading and writing, as well as helping classmates with their writing ideas.



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