

Edition 1

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THE LAUREL



ST.
BONAVENTURE
UNIVERSITY

MICHIGAN VS. LOSER

LEAH MCELHENY

My fork scraped the top of the porkchop, slowly dragging what little seasoning was on it across the surface. It was drier than usual, but I understood that Mom probably had a really long night. She only woke up thirty minutes ago and was scrambling to get dinner ready for me. She had to leave in 10 minutes if she wanted to make it to the hospital in time for her overnight, but she wanted to make sure I got ample nutrition for my “big day” tomorrow as she has so infamously dubbed it. It was sweet and I appreciated it, mostly because I was able to escape the “What did you learn at school today” conversation she normally sprung on me before she left. I had become an expert in dodging those and quickly diverting the conversation, however it didn’t always work and sometimes I got the, “Alex, you have so much potential that you’re wasting” lecture. I knew she wasn’t trying to nag, and I tried to not resent her for it because of how hard she worked to get where she is in her career and with me, but sometimes I do resent her for it, and for that, I resent myself as well.

I’m jolted out of my thoughts when the smoke alarm starts going off because she somehow managed to burn mac and cheese. She flaps a handmade potholder from my grandma in desperate attempts to clear the smoke away from the blaring alarm as my dog Stella runs around barking frantically. The mac and cheese, though a bit crispy, is finally delivered to the table. Mom sits down in a huff while pulling her hair into a ponytail as I fix her a small plate because I know she’ll have to eat fast. “Are you excited? Tomorrow is the big day Alex” she asks, making nervous eye contact at me, trying to gauge my response.

I’m also struggling to gauge my response.

“Yeah, I’m excited” escapes my lips in a definitely less than convincing way. Mom doesn’t have enough time to divulge into this with me, so she throws me the typical, “I’m proud of you, you’ll do great” and in the same motion whisks herself out the door with a definitive slam.

MICHIGAN VS. LOSER

LEAH MCELHENY

It's weird to have a feeling of giving a shit about academics. I never had to try, so I didn't. I wasn't excited or nervous to take the test. Most people would kill to be me, I know. I know I'll do well on the test; I think I'm just more nervous about what the test signifies. I haven't really thought about it until this point because my dream was always to go to Michigan, but it wasn't like it was for most, for me. I didn't have to focus on keeping my grades up. I didn't have to do my work because my ridiculously high test scores compensated.

Michigan merch is plastered on almost every single wall of my house. Every time I look at it, I can't decide whether to feel overwhelmed by love and pride or wince from pain. This dream was not created, it was inherited. Handed down. Everyone is silently holding their breaths, waiting for me to get my acceptance letter for them to exhale. They need me to continue that journey. He needs me to continue that journey.

I scoop up the last bit of charred Kraft Mac and Cheese off the white plate that I'm convinced every house in white suburbia has, and then lightly place it in the sink. I shove my hands in the pockets of my Michigan colored flannel pajama pants and walk over into the living room, coming to a stop at the fireplace. My eyes settle on the photo of my mom, my dad, and I, him in his blue graduation gown, me on his shoulders holding his cap, my mom laughing at the both of us.

I smile and feel the tears prick in my eyes. A small glint of gold hits my eye and my attention is pulled away from his photo to the urn placed carefully on the end of the mantle. Mom always fusses about its placement, moving it a whole one millimeter away from the edge. I turn on my heel as my smile fades and I force my eyes to dry up. I climb up the stairs and pull my bedroom door shut behind me.

I have to wade through the clutter covering the worn gray carpet of my bedroom floor. Once I make my way through the empty Taco Bell cups that once contained the best beverage ever, Baja Blast, and the blank homework for the AP classes I'm taking that got treated like a neglected toy, tossed away and forgotten, I flop down on my bed, pulling my shabby blanket that is too small to cover my whole body over top of me. I fumble around, searching for my remote to turn on *Adventure Time*, my one and only comfort show. I glance at the clock. 8:30 p.m. *Ugh*. I let my head flop against the pillow while my hand searches underneath the blanket, blindly feeling for my LED light remote. My palm finally finds the small rectangle and I turn them to white.

MICHIGAN VS. LOSER

LEAH MCELHENY

I can't get over this. I need to read it. I haven't read it in years because it reminds me of how much of a coward he is and maybe it's selfish to see it like that but, considering the only thing he left me with was a dream and now it's all on the line, I think I'm entitled to feel this way. I begrudgingly roll over to pull out the drawer of my side table. I lift up the fake wood panel at the bottom and pull out the letter. I stole the wood scrap from shop class in seventh grade a few days after it happened so that I could hide the letter, that way, mom would never know. He hid it under my pillow where he knew mom would never find it because she gave up on making my bed when I was around 10. I turn the familiar paper envelope over in my hands thinking over the consequence of reading this. I hold it for an unnatural amount of time and the longer I hold it, the angrier I get. I want to be me when I get to Michigan, not the dead guy's son who receives eons of pity and insufficient memories that don't involve me. He left me a coward with this letter. My dream for Michigan may have come from him, but it's not about him anymore, it's about me.

I take one last look at the once stark white envelope now stained with little Alex's tears. I run my thumb over the familiar handwriting. The tears prick in my eyes once more and I haphazardly throw the letter back in my drawer and slam it shut, immediately averting my eyes to the ceiling. The Michigan pennant tacked on my ceiling immediately brings me back to what I was trying to avoid. *Damn it, it's everywhere.* I look back at the clock. 8:37. *How has it only been 7 minutes?* I try to shut everything off and just focus on Jake the Dog and Finn the Human.

Groggily, I remember that I should probably set an alarm because I need to drive to the school and be there by 9:00 a.m. I check the clock again. 10:45. I turn off my LED's. The all-consuming blackness swallows me whole and leaves me entirely vulnerable to the night, which I am.

The room was very bright and surprisingly cold. My hands are clammy, clenching around my allotted few numbers 2 pencils, precisely sharpened to a point for the first time since they exited the box. I stroll around the room with a not so even keel, scanning each answer sheet with an alarming number of empty bubbles until I finally arrive at the one that displays in bold, future determining letters, **HUTCHINSON, ALEX B.**

I sit down and place my pencils on my desk, subconsciously wiping my hands on my dark denim jeans to get all the sweat off. Yeah, I lied when I said I wasn't nervous. I mean, I wasn't before, but I am now. Me going to Michigan, the one thing that I've had drive for in this life, is entirely dependent on the next three hours. *Shake it off Alex. You're better than some test. I couldn't. You have to. You don't have a choice. Do you want to be a coward like Dad and chicken out of your dream?*

MICHIGAN VS. LOSER

LEAH MCELHENY

I zoned out of it. I went blank. I told myself I had no stakes in this even though this was the first, last, and only opportunity I'd given myself to take the test so whatever I got, what was I got. Michigan vs Loser.

I couldn't think like that. This was just another test to black out during. I already knew whatever questions could possibly be on here and I have since the 9th grade. The proctor walks up to the front of the room, her heels delivering an anxiety-inducing "click clack" as she begins the most important three hours of my life. *Shit, here we go.* The pull-down screen behind her displays the start and end time, as well as a running clock. *Two minutes till start.* I have filled out all of the annoying information and have my pencil in hand, ready to go, slightly wobbling with an anxiousness between my pointer finger and thumb. Then she says the word. Begin. I flip open the test booklet with a speed that would imply ferocity, however I could not be more blank, solely analytical. I fly through section after section with a flow that shows no hiccups, bumps, or setbacks. I know every question. I'm doing well and I know it, but I don't let myself think it. Or, at least I try not to, as a small smirk sneaks across my lips and vanishes as quickly as it arrived. Faster than I realize, I finish the last section which happens to be math with a calculator. The test booklet closes, and I'm not surprised to see I have taken only 1 of the 3 hours to complete the entire test. I let out a heavy sigh that lasts so long some might've been concerned. I watch the clock for the next two hours, glancing back down at my test booklet every once in a while, yet refusing to reopen it. The time ticks by slow but also ridiculously fast. The proctor finally calls time and starts to collect everything. When she finally grabs my booklet and scantron, I stand up, take one big stretch, and prepare to collect my things to leave the testing room when I'm greeted by the familiar sound of Stella's bark. I'm greeted by the sound of Stella's bark?

I'm greeted by the sound of Stella's bark. My eyes peel open with horror to see my bedroom door open. Stella is standing in my doorway barking at the side of mom who is standing there in her baby blue scrubs with keys in the hand that's covering her mouth. Silent tears are streaming down her face. Only then do I hear the haunting sound of my alarm. My hands fly to search for my phone. I grasp it and pull it close to my chest. I remove it, wincing at what I'm about to see. 10:12 a.m. In the battle of Michigan vs Loser, I am the loser.

ALPHABET SOUP

LEAH MCELHENY

Although autonomous actions allowed for
Being behind bars in a brick building
Chaos cautiously and carelessly creeping in ceased. Crumbling
Don't be deceived; dark, dingy dungeons do deny decisions
Every event is extra excruciating
Force-feeding flames to free the fire
Gunshot gashes grow gargantuan
Holding the hurting and hushed hearts
Inking the interior iridescent ibis
Just jabs from jaded Jekylls
Kind kids know knuckles and knives
Lesions lacking luster or love
Many moans of madness make men melancholy
No need to name nobodies
Our own obscenities
Perpetrate that painful philosophy
Quite quiet or
Rather ravenous to redo...restart
Some start seeking solitude or solace
Then the trek takes turns too treacherous
Under united uniforms, upheaval is upon us
Very vocal and vehemently violated
Wall to wall, whitewashed while withering
You yell and yowl yet still, you yearn.

GLASS HALF EMPTY

LEAH MCELHENY

I am a glass-half-full
looking around
in a world of empty glasses
Not even halfway there
liquid spilled
or carelessly dumped out by owner
silly flaws
turn into
detrimental traits
A receipt fluttering softly to the ground
carelessly discarded
I shake my head
I pour out some liquid from their glass
Didn't show up
No call
No show
Liquid out
I show up punctually at nine a.m.
Liquid in
Liquid out
Liquid in
Liquid out Liquid out
Liquid in, in, in
In.
I am a glass full to the brim.
I sit high on my self-proclaimed pedestal
A peer over the edge
Reveals millions of shattered glasses
shimmering shards
sparkle, saddened by sunlight
I feel the weight of my hands
Look down...
Why are they stained red?

DEAR DAD

MOLLY MILLER

Not your little girl anymore

Both have I grown

And I have known

LOVE

HATE

FEAR

EXCITEMENT

All of the feelings.

Not your little girl anymore Don't

need to

Hold your hand

Or have you

Buckle me in

No need to

Tuckme in

Anymore.

Not your little girl anymore Don't

need to turn on my Nightlight.

No need to pick me up

Or do my laundry

DEAR DAD

MOLLY MILLER

I got it, Dad

Not your little girl anymore,

I say again.

I am independent

I don't need help navigating the world

Anymore.

Dear Dad,

I want you to know

That I love you

And I

Appreciate you

But I am not your little girl anymore

No more playing catch outside

Or helping me with

My homework

No more after school snacks

Or pre-school breakfast

No more milk and cookies out for Santa.

But I'm not your little girl anymore.

DEAR DAD

MOLLY MILLER

Not your little girl anymore
No more drives to look at
The water
Or
Going to the drive in together
Anymore

I have grown up
Into a strong and independent
Woman.
I love you Dad,
but I am not your little girl anymore

EXPRESSIONISM

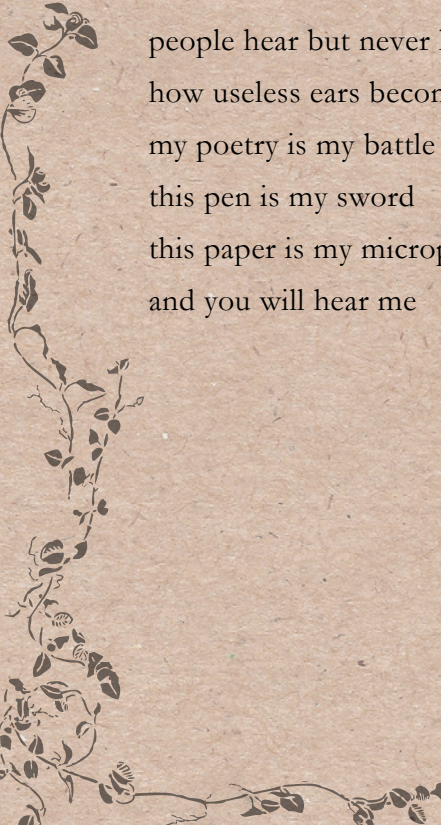
DEMARI SHINNERY

I am not a writer I am an expressionist
I don't spit out poems when you give me words
but I every word and metaphor I utter is stained with my own blood sweat and tears

Before I even knew how to write I had feelings
feelings that felt destined to be ignored
emotions that were ignored
and when the hand that fed me became the same one who tried to silence me
I tortured this canvas and carved in my voice into his skin with this pen as my knife and savior

I think poetry was my first friend
Maybe its because my expressions were never returned with fluoride stares or medication suggestions
My feelings would never beat me or send me to the psych ward
You see my art stayed

people hear but never listen
how useless ears become without a mind
my poetry is my battle cry
this pen is my sword
this paper is my microphone
and you will hear me



EXPRESSIONISM

DEMARI SHINNERY

can you hear me?
this imagery and these similes
They way certain words scream when I read
Do you hear me
wailing my trauma into your ears
waiting for you to wake up

I said can you hear me
fuck it it don't even matter
with these words ima make sure you feel me

you feel me

With this pen and paper I feel like a God
taking you from your seat and out you in a bed
With nothing but my voice I make tears drop and your body hot

i may not have touched you but I hope you feel violated
I hope your safe space is destroyed
and u resonate with feelings you weren't even knowledgeable you had

so come on be in sync with me
let me bring you into my mind and show you a story
my history
then after hand you a tissue and hopefully hear how much you adore me
come with me on a journey and try not to fear me
Cuz with the power of my words I hope to make even a deaf person feel me

FACE

JACK HARLOW

I was lain in bed
When I forgot my face
I looked at my picture
I saw only a blur

I was in disbelief first
then the panic set in
I frantically call my friends
To help find my face

They were confused and said
"It's on the front of your head"
but when I looked in the mirror
my face wasn't there either

ODE TO MY HEART

KENDRA JEFFREY

When life hits
You stand
Sheltered in the storm
Strung along for the
Plot of my life

Overflowed with
ALL.

The care.
The love.
The blood.
Constantly
 Pumping
Through me

Dependent upon you
For you could take.
My
Breath away
One beat at a time
You spare me your grace

Sliced thin of
Hate
But
Swallowed in imperfections
My most marvelous
Mystic
Mine alone

ODE TO MY HEART

KENDRA JEFFREY

Hindered once,
Plunged deep inside
Striking the soul
With your cries for help,
Running
Along My face

Mistreated.
Yet you don't desert me.
Again
You place your trust

In me.
Your constant
Invasive
Grasp

Enticing to the brain
A mystery
To be solved
You spin wheels in the minds
You reveal yourself to

You have
Grounded me.
Risen me.
Led me astray.
Yet never abandoned

From the hospital to
The garden of
Remembrance
You shall lie
With me
At all times
My Heart.

ROOM 335

ROSE PFEIFFER

Dust recoils as light seeps back in, disturbed from its many years of slumber.

"Check this out, Zayn."

A flashlight passes over faded numbers "335... I thought most of the rooms were inaccessible. This one's wide open..." Zayn raised an eyebrow, scanning over what was visible so far.

Dean glances back at him, smiling. "Wanna check it out?"

"I guess..." Zayn nudges Dean. "You go first," Dean scoffed and went ahead.

"Hey, I can see my breath..." Dean raises the hand unoccupied by a flashlight, in the path of breath visible.

His foot falls on a worn wooden floorboard, which replies with a squeak.

"Don't be ridiculous, it's September, Dean. In California, it's 78 freakin' degrees!"

"I'm serious! Come in here!" Zayn rolls his eyes and joins him.

"What the hell—" Zayn rubs the goosebumps welling up on his arms, unprotected by his worn graphic tee. David Bowie's face droops on his shirt. The floorboards creak more, groaning in displeasure at the two invaders.

A lone table greets Zayn and Dean as they enter. "Told ya," Dean crosses his arms and smirks. The flashlight's beam shifts away with his hand. Zayn gives him the finger. Dean puts a hand on his chest and dramatically gasps. "How could you!"

"If anything happens, it's on you. This was your idea."

ROOM 335

ROSE PFEIFFER

“Nothing’s going to happen. What’s exploring an abandoned hotel ever done to you?”

Live a little, Zayn,” Dean waves the flashlight across the room.

“A lot could happen, Dean.”

“*Psh*, yeah, okay.”

A floorboard creaks on the other side of the room. “Like that!” Zayn darts back, eyes wide. They both whip around in the direction of the sound. A dark shape bolts away from the light.

“Probably just a raccoon, right?” Dean nervously smiles.

“A raccoon, Dean?! A seven-foot-tall raccoon? Did you not see that shadow!” Zayn motions, eyes flicking rapidly about the room.

Whoosh!

Dean catches a dark shape from the corner of his eye.

“Zayn... don’t look now—” Dean’s face had gone white; sight having followed the shape.

Zayn gasps and turns where Dean had been facing. Of course, he looked— and boy, did he regret it. Red eyes, seven feet up, resting on a mass of black. It was dark as midnight, even illuminated by both flashlights. The height was lengthened by what looked like horns or antlers.

Zayn and Dean were speechless.

Frozen dead in their tracks.

A single word departed from one of their mouths— Zayn couldn’t discern whether it was his word, Dean’s, or even the dark beast before them.

“**RUN—!**”

CAUGHT RED-HANDED

SYDNEY HAYWARD

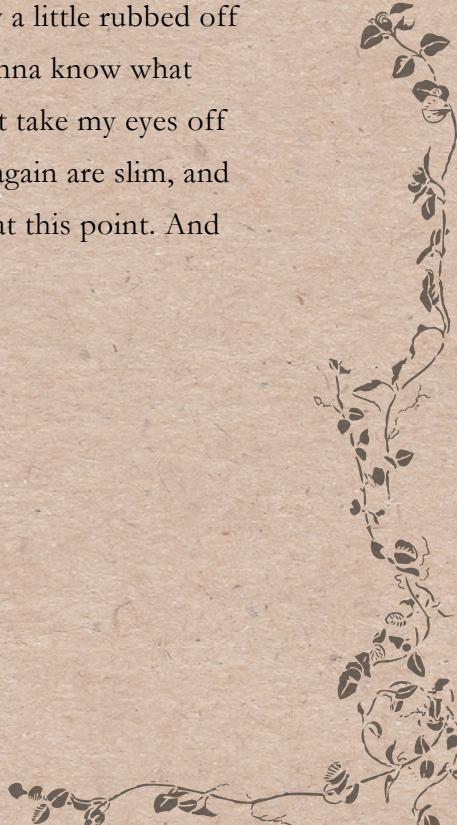
My *God* she is beautiful. I'm not usually into redheads, but that rose is a doll. And if it weren't for that suit and tie she's rubbing elbows with, I'd be asking what her favorite cocktail is right now.

For the time being, I guess I'll keep admiring from across the counter. It isn't so bad though—the last couple hours I've spent watching this ugly mustard paint chip off the walls while I lose track of how many drinks I've downed. At this point, I make eye contact with the bartender and he brings me a fresh one. I don't even have to ask.

I think I have a problem, but she doesn't have to know that.

Hell, I'd quit cold turkey to get next to the likes of her.

I just wish she'd drop Mr. Ralph Lauren over there, who's not even paying attention to her by the way. He's too busy talking politics and business with the bartender while he mixes their drinks, what a bunch of nonsense. How can you have that kind of a woman and *not* pay attention to her? I'll tell you what I'm paying attention to—the lipstick she's wearing and how a little rubbed off on the glass she just took a sip out of. I'd give anything to be that glass. I wanna know what flavor her lipstick is. And I don't want to find out by reading the label. I can't take my eyes off her. I mean, I'm probably being creepy, but I don't care. The odds I see her again are slim, and I'm at least six Manhattan's deep, so I can't fully control my wandering eyes at this point. And coincidentally, I really don't want to.



CAUGHT RED-HANDED

SYDNEY HAYWARD

Oh God, she caught me staring at her. Dammit. I quickly look down for the first time since she walked in. With my finger, I trace the water ring my half empty glass left on the bar top. I'm nervous to look back up. I keep my head down until I hear Mr. Ralph Lauren ask the bartender for their receipt. I tilt my head up to get my last glimpse of her. She glances back at me over her shoulder as she walks out the door. Seeing no point in staying here any longer, I take the last gulp of my drink and wave down the bartender.

"I think I'm done here sir, thank you."

The bartender takes my glass and returns with a receipt as I dig for my wallet. There's a second receipt in his hand. Lord, how much did I drink here?

"I think this is for you."

The bartender hands me both receipts. One is a pricey bill and one has curvy, cursive writing on it.

"To the man across the bar— stop staring.

(967) 732-3509"


THE WALK

CODY ROGERS

As far as I can remember, a nice long walk has always soothed my mind. Getting lost in the sounds of music that bring me back to times of happiness. Taking in the fall scenery with the beautiful leaves changing, and the smell of warm apple cider penetrating my nose. Now that is my happy place. I walked for hours throughout my quiet town. It is a simple town, almost like a town out of a movie where nothing ever bad seems to happen.

I remember the first walk where I saw it. It was an oddly dark day; one of those days when you want to hide underneath your blanket and watch a movie. I went on an unfamiliar path, I wanted to try something new as an album from one of my favorite artists had released. Looking back on it I wish that album never came out. I suffer from severe anxiety and my mind can often play tricks on me. I tend to get myself all worked up over nothing. This is an issue I have been trying to combat with for years now. So, when I see something out of the ordinary or get triggered by an event, I try not to let it bother me. My inner thoughts are screaming to me "BE A MAN" or "IT IS ALL IN YOUR HEAD". Still to this day I am unsure if what I am about to tell you was indeed a figment of my wild imagination, but I have a feeling it was real and it was looking for me.

I continued down the long dark dreary road, admiring the houses. I peered over near the backyard of this old vintage home. That is when I first saw this figure. It was a man no bigger than me, but his face was plagued with this blank emotionless expression. I felt as if with every step I took his eyes followed me. My heart sank to my stomach I had felt like I lost all control over what was real. The eyes kept a dead aim on my terrified silhouette. I continued to walk frantically, looking for a place to hide, someone to run to. The shape was getting closer now. But no matter how close it was I could not see a face. I wondered if this would ever end, was this all just one big nightmare, was it the anxiety? Then suddenly, the world went black. When I opened my eyes, I was in my backyard, lying on the wet soil. I was completely puzzled as to what had just occurred. I could have sworn I was on my peaceful walk, my happy place - what some would call my comfort zone - and then a man just followed me but that was not reality now. For the next few hours, I trudged through my math homework alone in my room, I asked myself if I was dreaming - it felt so real. He looked so human-like yet so distant. It was a Tuesday and I had school the next day, so I went inside to get some rest as I had a test the next day.



THE WALK

CODY ROGERS

Wednesday rolls around and it starts like every other day. I drove my banged-up Chevy to school just to sit in classes I couldn't care less about it stare at the clock and pray that time passed. I went to my Algebra class. I hated math with all my heart. I had the back window seat in the classroom. I often dozed off in that class, but I am not a napper, so I never fell asleep during the day. I left one earbud in to block out the boring dialogue of my teacher. Our classroom had a street view of a nearby neighborhood that has an elementary school near it. I noticed the kids getting let out for recess. Like my music, it brought me back to a better time. Every young boy could not wait to head outside for recess it was the best part of the whole day. I watched as the kids played basketball, but something was off. I felt as if the eyes I had seen from the night before were back.

As my eyes moved down the bench of the basketball court, I noticed what appeared to be a kid sitting down all by himself. I had worked the afterschool program there and had known a lot of the kids who went to the school there, especially the kids who played basketball. But this kid was different. I could not make out his face he was so far away, but I felt him locked in on my every move. I started to get nervous again as I did last time. Although I knew this child could have done nothing to me, I still have that feeling of being watched. None of the kids seemed to notice him. I asked myself, Is the real? I still do not know the answer like the man from the day before.

Class ended and I went through my day. I went home and tried to forget about all of this. I am someone who never goes out of their comfort zone, and I am also an extreme creature of habit. Every day when I get home from school I go out and play with my dog. It is like a reward for getting through the day. We went out back and threw the ball around. We have a big wooden fence with a hole in the bottom. But it wasn't an issue because behind the fence was an abandoned house that hadn't been utilized in a while. I gave a strong toss, and the ball went underneath the fence. Usually, my dog would trot over to the other yard and retrieve the ball, but she had stopped at the fence today. I asked, "What is it, girl?" and she came running back to me.

THE WALK

CODY ROGERS

Confused, I quickly walked over to the fence and to my surprise there they were. The man and the boy, looking through an old, smashed window in the house. *I have had enough of this!* I exclaimed to myself. I went underneath the fence and headed over. As I got closer to the pair, they did not feel as intimidating anymore. They felt familiar like I had known them my whole life. As I approached the door to confront them. The world went black. I woke up in my backyard dumbfounded. Just like my first encounter I had with the shape.

Later on that night, I thought to myself really long and hard on if this was all real. Or was it a message? I believe today I know what the message was. Do not run away from what you fear, and do not get too comfortable with your everyday norms. Face challenges and branch out because sometimes the heaviest, most judgmental and intimidating eyes come from the shape that you create. Still to this day, I see the faces every now and again, but I know they cannot hurt me. They will always follow.

ODE TO MY COLLEGE BEST FRIEND - A GOOD FRIEND, I LUV U

ALICIA MAXWELL, EDITOR

Solemn shall I try
to not stare at your lovely eyes
Handsome as a portrait
Brown Beautiful Brown eyes
Most worthy of an auction
hang in a museum you shall
rich in color and authenticity
next to St. Sebastian
Although more eyes--
immense eyes--
will shine upon you
drift
 drift
 drifting
towards you
As i do —
Oh my lover
my wife
my friend
the memories of 3
turn to 4?
Us kiki-ing
Us speaking truths

and gossips

and truths!

ODE TO MY COLLEGE BEST FRIEND - A GOOD FRIEND, I LUV U
ALICIA MAXWELL, EDITOR

The secrecy we shared shall stay
between
us.
No spectacles no goggles no telescope
I am honored to have had
had have
have
have
have you in my life
in view of my horizon
North & South
West & East
all all about
You are part of the colorful
endless coloring
portrait of my life
I shall continue to drift
drift
 drifting
drift
 in
and

of memory lane
Thinking of you
In our past. Our present. Our Future.



THE TALE OF LADY MORGANA

ROBIN LANE, EDITOR

Come gather children, lend an ear,
I'll tell a tale of dread and fear.
Long ago, when dragons high,
Ruled over with watchful eye.
Among them dwelled a dragon grand,
They called Morgana 'cross the land.
Pitch-black scales, blood-red eyes,
Ruler of the ancient skies,
With hatred, she looked down upon,
Pathetic mortals, filthy spawn!
Darkness shrouded every breath,
Her world entwined in pain and death!
If not for noble Pendragon,
Born of dragon and of man,
Who knows what fate would lie in store,
Morgana's reign forevermore?

Though while the beast is good and gone,
Her darkened spirit lingers on,
Within the hearts of wicked man,
Of bird, and fish, and dragon clan.
Should wicked thoughts consume your mind,
Morgana's very close behind.
Her whispers linger in the air,
To catch her prey, within her snare!
Empty are the vows she makes,
Your soul she claims as hers to take!
Beware, my dears, her beck'ning call,
For once you heed it, you may fall
Under her spell so vile and vain,
You'll ne'er be the same again.
Fear not, my dears, so sweet and pure,
For you are much too good, I'm sure.
But should darkness lead you astray,
Pray She won't call you away.

PERSPECTIVE 47

(SUPERSTAR TO SUSPECT)

TYLER EVERETT, EDITOR

The ringing of glasses gracing the deteriorated bar filled the airspace of the Sellton-Parker Cigar Lounge. Waiting for such a sound to stop was a promising way to waste a dreadful and dismal existence.

The hustle of the lounge saw a businessman creep toward the bar with insidious intentions. He then sat adjacent to the “superstar” and watched. The conversation carried on by asking for the time and offering him a drink. The “superstar” grinned and accepted by dropping an, “I thought you’d never ask.” Without any windows or clocks, the environment of the Sellton-Parker stood still.

Hours later, the “superstar” found himself face to face with reality as a Colt 45 pistol lay in his right hand. The blood of the so-called victim covered his clothes, and to his left stood the businessman. Waiting for an explanation, the bright glare of police lights grew stronger.

Officer Ryan Case, badge number 5151, forcefully placed the “suspect” into his car and closed the door. As salty tears fell from his face, the “suspect” wished he could wake up from the nightmare awaiting him. Once in the holding center, the “suspect” made his phone call. His mother’s heart dropped when she heard the verdict come out. With a life sentence waiting, he was no longer super or a star of any kind.

One week later.

As the famed cigar smoke of the Sellton-Parker Lounge billowed in the rafters, the businessman’s timely routine started. He took his seat for his Friday night exhibition.

SATURN STARLIGHT

TYLER EVERETT, EDITOR

After dragging a fresh razor across his neck, pint-sized blood spots appeared on his freshly cut skin. Using a new styptic pencil, he blocked out the sting. By flinching his face in an upward and downward motion, he looked like a mentally ill person facing the wall of a crazy house in the 1920s. He tied his Winsor knot and placed a freshly pressed jacket over his shoulders. His slip-on shoes squeaked as he pushed them into the hardwood floor. The slam of the oak and hazel-green front door ended his daily ritual.

Cinching her brown leather belt over a steamed cherry red skirt, she moved to select a top. She found a wrinkled white dress shirt. She had worn it days before. Once on her, the outline of her jet-black bra peeked through the faded white display. Grabbing her go-to Pierre Cardin jacket, she leapt down the decrepit stairs of her apartment. With a purple Susan Gail handbag on her person, she fled the building in a rush.

As tears fell from above, he walked with determination to arrive on time at the office. The overwhelming feeling of self-pity took over as he realized the internal loop of his life lacked luster. Like a record spinning around a turntable, he followed the motions. His reality embodied a vampire bat caught in the gaze of a scarlet sun at midday. Moving with traffic, he found himself at the corner of Ashley and 51st Street. The tall buildings made him feel little.

The dank street corner didn't provide justice to her beauty as she fought to bum cigarettes from wealthy businessmen. However, at the next glance, she saw him. Thinking fast, she pulled a lime green lipstick and eyeshadow from her bag and started to apply. Her fizzed blonde hair spoke in stanzas. With each line of her poem, her power seemed to grow.

SATURN STARLIGHT

TYLER EVERETT, EDITOR

He locked eyes with the woman. She appeared to be the type that most wouldn't try for. Her stance seemed to carry lost young love, and he felt it. Coming upon her position, she spoke.

“Pourrais-je vous déranger pour fumer,” she said.

“Ouais ma chère,” he responded.

The two then began to walk together. The pair went puff for puff and carried a conversation.

“Quel est votre nom?” he asked.

“Grâce Tremblay. Et la vôtre,” she said.

“Martin Anouilh,” he said.

“D’où êtes-vous,” he said.

“Lyon,” she said with a giggle.

Like a romantic comedy, the two began to touch hands and walked on. If love is the cure, they'd found it. A simple question at the intersection of Ashley and 51st Street led them both to find their Saturn starlight.

A SERIES OF SIX MINI-SAGAS

BROOKE JOHNPIER, EDITOR

The Race

The cars lined up two-by-two and kicked up dust as the green flag fell. Paint was traded, rubber was laid down, the yellow flag was thrown, but it came down to two. On the last lap number 5 took the lead and took home the prize of money and fame.

A Life

A second mistake was taken in and was considered a problem. The beauty queen made an impact, and had her own business, while making a name for herself in organizations. She had a baby who was successful and told everyone that her mother was the kindest and most talented person.

The Trucker

The little boy dreamed of driving truck one day. He went to school to learn to fix them and drove them a little. He worked as a freelance trucker, never living his dream...until he retired. The little boy, now man, was living his childhood dream of driving truck every day.

Love

Everyone thought it was wrong, but he made her happy. They met online through an app. All throughout her college years their love never wavered; it only grew stronger. They stuck with each other and helped out whenever possible. Their children told everyone they had never seen a stronger love.

Memories

“Grandpa?”, the little boy asked. “What’s that?”

He pointed to an old car that was covered up. The grandpa looked at it and remembered all the quarter miles, trophies, checks, media, friends made, lessons learned, fights that had happened, and the girl who became his wife.

“Memories,” the grandpa said.

The Medal

A purple ribbon with a metal heart gleamed. The old woman coughed as she picked it up from the mantle. She sat down and remembered how he had gone unwillingly but received the award because he cared. Claspng it to her chest, she prayed that her family would also care.

ON AMERICAN ACCEPTANCE OF NESCIENCE AND THE MIDDLE EAST

EMMA GAVAZZI, EDITOR

an American coffee shop
fireplace lit
iced oatmilk shaken espresso
private university
5 minute break to scroll
courtesy of the Pomodoro Technique
glance at an infographic
on an Instagram story
a nuanced generational conflict
but all you cognize from the marquee
is terrorists vs. innocent women and children
a tragedy on all accounts
you see not
the open-air prison
half of a population under 18 years old
a father carrying his son's body out of rubble in a plastic bag
the tears of triage doctors
imperialism
colonialism
oppression
war crimes

ON AMERICAN ACCEPTANCE OF NESCIENCE AND THE MIDDLE EAST

EMMA GAVAZZI, EDITOR

national best interest of foreign powers
equate the criticism of the laws and policies
of a veiled far-right theocratic ethnostate
with bigotry
because it's much quicker than consuming scholarly articles
because it's condensed into 100 words
for the attention and understanding of the viewer
no insult is taken
by the fact that the content is reduced beyond recognition
the utmost accessible empathy
it's easier to digest that way
to declare an apologist stance
within the 2 minutes it takes to read and repost
why didn't they ever consider just being born white and rich in the West?
now you've proved what a good person you are
so that you're inculpable
and enjoy a weightless mind
as you read medieval English literature
and decide if you'll dress as
flight attendant Britney or school girl Britney
for Halloween
and sneak a peek at his snapscore
which increased while you were studying

EPITAPH OF A CHILDHOOD

EMMA GAVAZZI, EDITOR

October campfires to finish out the season
flannel brushing
embers kissing blankets on our laps
too many s'mores until our stomachs ached
ghost stories
catalyzing a sprinting exodus up the dewy hill
fumbling and twisting ankles quick to recover
to reach the inside
holding hands because darkness is frightening
and twist lanterns swinging with abandonment in our clutches
flickered only so far

grandma's gone
and so are the cats named after generals
and the shelter dog
who laid between the stools and the kitchen island
gone too is the girl
who thought the hardest thing in life would be mathematical inequalities

EPITAPH OF A CHILDHOOD

EMMA GAVAZZI, EDITOR

there must have been a last time
all the mothers called the neighborhood kids in
and one rang the cow bell
no one realizing it was the end
that from that point forward
we'd text happy birthday
ask how school's going
and call it a day
see each other exiting cars on holiday breaks
the porch being an insurmountable distance
from which to say hello
and forget how every day
used to be spent playing in the backyard

when I was six years old
I jumped into a leaf pile
and came out the other side
nineteen and treacherous
princess costumes traded for
a sequined mini dress and a barefoot walk home
a dearth of warmth
once achieved by hot chocolate
coupled with a yearning for real compassion
hereto counterfeit and sold as a hoodie reading
"you matter"

GRETCHEN MY DOG GRETCHEN

EMMA GAVAZZI, EDITOR

they say that no man is an island
thank God I am not a man
as I am a solitary unit without her
she left me 607 days ago
and her memory has occupied
this lonesome heart ever since
gardens and empires once flourishing
under her watchful eye
lay desolate
having crumbled just as I have

on that day
after saying our goodbyes at Golgotha
eyes puffed shut
a silent drive to an empty house
her print in a cardboard box
to be set upon my desk
and studied unlike any other artifact

rereading a well-loved book
in the mid-morning hours
far from the home we once shared
I open to page 222
where a black strand of hair
is gently frozen in time upon the paper
one of the last remaining pieces of her
I hold it but for a moment
before laying it to rest again
knowing that she is no longer mine
to keep in this lifetime
and I don't believe in angel numbers or the like
or particularly in signs of any sort
but nevertheless
I look to the stars
because I know that she's above them

UNTITLED

RYLIE HEFFERNAN, EDITOR



UNTITLED

RYLIE HEFFERNAN, EDITOR



UNTITLED

KENDALL RICHARDS



UNTITLED

RYAN PHILIPS



OL' RUSTY RED

FRANKIE SUZANNE GARR, CLASS OF 1984



TATTERED SOLE

FRANKIE SUZANNE GARR, CLASS OF 1984



UNTITLED

SAMUEL GIORDANO, CLASS OF 2011



UNTITLED

SAMUEL GIORDANO, CLASS OF 2011



UNTITLED

LINDA BOYD, CLASS OF 1981



UNTITLED

LINDA BOYD, CLASS OF 1981



OUR EUROPEAN BACKPACKING ADVENTURE, FORTY-FIVE YEARS LATE

TERRY HURLEY, CLASS OF 1976

We never got a chance to backpack across Europe after college, but 45 years later we made up for it by walking in the footsteps of pilgrims.

My wife and I recently walked the Camino de Santiago (Way of St. James), a 500-mile, centuries-old pilgrimage across northern Spain, in 30 days. The Camino is probably one of the most famous pilgrimages in the world and is becoming more popular in the U.S. thanks to the 2010 movie "The Way" with Martin Sheen who walks it carrying his son's ashes.

I retired a few years ago and we were looking for an adventure, something we've never done before now that we had the time. After all, isn't that what retirement is supposed to be? Try new things, create interesting experiences, get out of your comfort zone.

So we bought our first-ever backpacks and good walking shoes and took off for Spain.

Five-hundred miles is a long walk so we traveled light, a change of clothes, toiletries and a few other basics (backpacks still weighed about 13 pounds each) and stayed at albergues (those are hostels, not hotels), sharing bathrooms, sleeping quarters and meals with fellow pilgrims. Communal living at its finest.

Our daily routine seldom varied: wake up, get dressed quickly and quietly and hit the road at dawn. We'd stop for breakfast after an hour or two (dos cafe con leches and tortilla de patatas por favor) and walk until lunch. After lunch, we'd continue until we found an albergue with available beds, then shower, hand wash our clothes for the next day, share simple meals and conversation with fellow pilgrims, go to bed by 9:00 and start over again in the morning.

**OUR EUROPEAN BACKPACKING ADVENTURE, FORTY-
FIVE YEARS LATE**

TERRY HURLEY, CLASS OF 1976

We walked about 17 miles a day on dirt and gravel paths, stoney and paved roads and cobblestone streets. We walked through farm lands, pastures, wheat fields, vineyards, small medieval towns and big cities in the rain, mud, fog, dark and heat. We shared paths with sheep, goats, cows, donkeys, horses and pigs.

We crossed the Pyrenees, climbed up and down mountains and visited dozens of century-old churches and magnificent gothic-style cathedrals in Burgos, Leon and Santiago. We walked alone (I found out things about my wife that I never knew) and sometimes with others. Some walked for religious reasons, some for the adventure or challenge. We made friends with young, middle-age and seniors like us from North America, South America, Europe, Asia and Australia.

And it was all glorious. We required only a few possessions, lived frugally and unplugged from the bustle of modern-day life. Our daily goal was simple: get to our next destination no matter the obstacles of weather, terrain, fatigue or injury while marveling at the magnificent landscape and rich history surrounding us.

Our European backpacking trip came late in life but it would have been hard to top it 45 years ago. We discovered that it's never too late for a new adventure.

OUR EUROPEAN BACKPACKING ADVENTURE, FORTY-FIVE YEARS LATE

TERRY HURLEY, CLASS OF 1976



IS IT SNOWING YET IN ST. PETERSBURG

JOHN POLICASTRO, CLASS OF 1996

FORMER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE LAUREL

The leaves were mostly brown now, crumpled, curled and the colors muted. They lay in wispy rows along the gravel shoulder, but the lack of any resting on top of the body, or drifted up along the outstretched right arm or the wrongly twisted leg belied how recently it had come to lay there.

Sam Persing looked past the leaves, his trained eyes studying the curled fingers and the brushed silver wedding band, searching the folds of the long-sleeved dress shirt, the faint stains in the arm pits, the wide blood stain across the chest. His years as a homicide detective had taught him to not dwell right away on the obvious fatal wounds, but to use those first precious moments to see everything else. It had less to do with training than instinct, his natural curiosity and organized mind filing away details such as the exact off-white color of the shirt, the way the late autumn breeze only ruffled the grayish hair that stuck up from the victim's forehead but seemed to blow right past the thicker sideburns. Sam mentally noted the one brown eye still open, and even in death, he could detect the permanent resignation etched there. The victim knew his killer.

Sam looked around again, taking in the deep woods extending east and west of the gravel roadway, and the small cabin sitting alone in the clearing to the west. A half mile or so behind him down the road was a rusty white 2007 Chrysler Sebring, and the Department's 2021 Chevy Tahoe that he'd driven here and parked directly behind the Sebring.

Sam's phone buzzed in his pocket but he didn't reach for it. He knew it was his wife Miranda. She and their 6-year old son Colton were still on vacation in St. Petersburg, Russia. The 7-hour time difference made it somewhere around 8 p.m. for them, and he knew she was making her daily check-in. Yesterday they had talked for around 30 minutes, and then Colton had come on the line to excitedly claim the first snowstorm of the winter was headed their way and that the whole city was supposed to be snowed in.

IS IT SNOWING YET IN ST. PETERSBURG

JOHN POLICASTRO, CLASS OF 1996

FORMER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE LAUREL

But Sam needed to focus right now. For more than 20 years, the residents of New Battlesford, NY had lived in the shadow of a serial killer, and two of Sam's predecessors had worked the case and retired without ever finding the killer. Nine known victims between 2003 and 2019 before they abruptly stopped. For the last 5 years there had been nothing. The multiple leads they'd had over the years had always come up empty, and by the time Sam made detective in 2017, it was widely accepted outside the department itself, that the killer would never be caught. But a new victim in 2019, only a few months before COVID would cripple the nation, brought the fear back to the residents of the upstate New York town and a renewed sense of hope for its beleaguered detectives that they might finally get the break they needed.

The 2019 victim was named Anderson Wabold, and like all the others, was a white male in his early 40s. They were all killed by a single stab wound to the chest, and always with a hand carved bone knife that was left in the wound. The victims included a teacher, a stained-glass painter, a volunteer fireman, a pharmaceutical rep. But there was nothing to connect them. A few of the victims had just been passing through town, while the majority were residents.

The department had spent countless hours talking with knife enthusiasts, attending conventions, scouring online sales, all in the hopes that the unique knives might show up somewhere or be recognized by someone in the field.

Sam had put together his own file, his own ideas on the killer. Though he couldn't prove anything, he felt certain his killer was a lone male, someone with the skillset of a woodsman but the benefit of an advanced education. He was likely passed over in the business world, or wanted revenge on what it stood for. There was nothing sexual in his targeting professional males, but there was certainly something vengeful and hateful.

IS IT SNOWING YET IN ST. PETERSBURG

JOHN POLICASTRO, CLASS OF 1996

FORMER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE LAUREL

Besides the bone knives, the one other clue that tied all the victims together was a strange symbol written on or near each body. On the first few victims it had been drawn using blood from the wound, but on the rest it had been scrawled with charcoal. The symbol itself could not be identified. The drawings were too crude, the blood too smeared, the charcoal not easy to draw with on the victim's shirt or the ground. It seemed clear to Sam that the killer had the vision and desire for what he wanted to draw, but lacked the artistic ability to accurately do it. It seemed in such stark contrast to the artistic skill in carving the knives.

Charcoal. Bone knives. A symbol that couldn't be identified. It was all so eclectic, so specialized. In the hours Sam spent trying to visualize himself in the mind of the killer, he truly believed he could picture the man himself. An intelligent loner who undoubtedly thought he was smarter than the victims he chose and the law enforcement always several steps behind.

Sam's phone buzzed again but he still ignored it. He felt a pang of regret picturing his son's saddened face that his dad wouldn't answer. No doubt the snowstorm was underway and Colton was eager to share. He and his mother, a retired diplomat who had spent her early career traveling throughout Europe, would be nestled into the hotel suite, making the most of the unique vacation. But Sam could not allow the distraction yet.

They knew his job kept him busy at all sorts of strange hours and through many situations that were never discussed at the dinner table. Sam's potential big break in this serial killer case had come unexpectedly only 8 hours earlier.

New Battlesford wasn't big enough to have detectives who only worked on homicides, so he was the first one called in by the responding officers when a fire at the local consignment shop looked suspiciously like arson. The owner claimed the fire was set to kill him and he babbled on incessantly about everyone who would like to do him harm. But what caught Sam's eye in the partially burned shop, was a collection of crude charcoal drawings stacked in the corner. There were four framed pieces of different sizes and they each featured silhouettes of a human figure, mostly filled in with short, sweeping lines and lacking any features whatsoever against the white background. If they were hanging on a wall in a high school, he might have easily considered them the work of a teenager who watched too many horror movies.

IS IT SNOWING YET IN ST. PETERSBURG

JOHN POLICASTRO, CLASS OF 1996

FORMER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE LAUREL

The owner couldn't understand Sam's interest in the drawings and he offered that they had been brought in several months ago to sell but that not a single person had cast so much as a look at them since. Who had brought them in? The owner couldn't remember exactly. A "Peter something or other..." Unfortunately, the paper records on all the consignments had been destroyed in the fire.

As Sam had prepared to leave, the owner blurted a curious memory. "Peter" had driven an older white 2007 Chrysler Sebring. How did he remember such a specific thing? Turns out it was the exact same car he had looked at on Craigslist to buy for his daughter. It had the same worn off paint on the hood and a partially worn off bumper sticker. The store owner had made a joke to "Peter" about it, but Pete hadn't seemed particularly interested and had left shortly after.

Sam immediately returned to the office and began searching DMV records for residents in the area who owned mid-2000s white Chrysler Sebrings. There were 9 registered to residents of New Battlesford alone, but only 1 to a "Peter". Peter McElroy. 51 years old. Address listed on Butternut Brook Road. That was out off of County Route 26, up past the lake. Secluded.

Sam grabbed the keys to the Tahoe and took off. His phone buzzed in his pocket as he sped along Route 26 and he fished it out. It was his wife. He reached out to click the "answer" button on the Tahoe's screen, but then thought better of it. He hadn't told anyone at the station of this hunch and he sure didn't want to try and explain to his wife why he was racing off toward a possible serial killer with no backup plan and with only a hunch to guide him.

He had turned off Butternut Brook Road at the signpost for #4651 and wound his way slowly up a long gravel driveway through the nearly bare autumn trees until he arrived suddenly at the white Sebring just sitting there. Adrenaline kicked in and his pulse quickened as he pulled in behind it. Exiting quickly, he could see nobody was in the car as he approached. His eyes scanned the surrounding area but there was no clear reason why it was parked there.

IS IT SNOWING YET IN ST. PETERSBURG

JOHN POLICASTRO, CLASS OF 1996

FORMER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE LAUREL

His hands instinctively reaching periodically to the small of his back where he kept his service piece, he began walking up the gravel roadway. About a quarter of a mile further on, at about the point he considered going back for his vehicle, he crested a hill and saw a cabin at the far side of a clearing. Instinctively he crouched down as if he was spotted. After a few quiet moments, he stood warily back up. Even from this distance he could see numerous animal skulls hanging from the porch of the cabin. Bones.

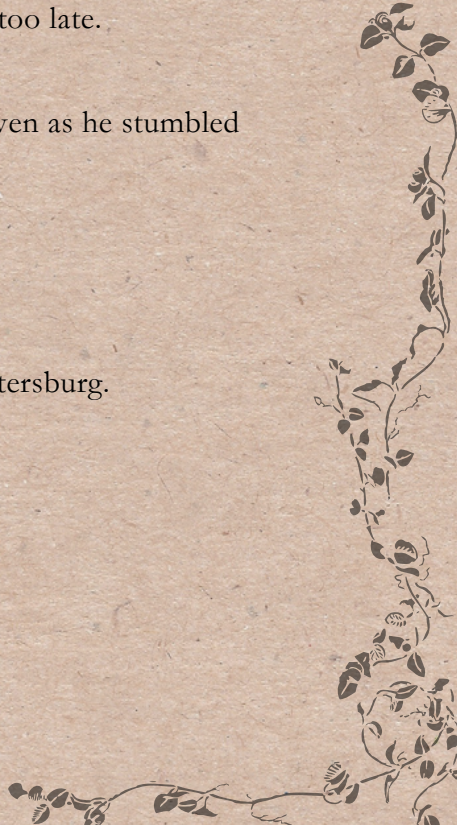
Every fiber of his being knew he had found the right place. This was the home of the serial killer. Somehow, some way he had stumbled on the answer after all this time. He had to be careful, be cautious, be deliberate. Find enough probable cause to get a warrant and search this entire property. It would bring so much buried emotion from two decades of terror back to the surface, but it could also potentially bring closure to so many victim's families and perhaps peace to the souls of the victims themselves. And end the fear that still gripped the entire region.

Sam needed his gear from the Tahoe. He turned and saw the blur a moment too late.

The bone knife went roughly between two of his ribs and pierced his heart even as he stumbled backward and fell to the ground.

His phone buzzed in his pocket but he did not reach for it.

It was unseasonably warm here but he was sure it was snowing now in St. Petersburg.



THE FALLEN MORNING STAR

RACHEL PANEK, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Whoever had the idea that angels cannot be killed – that they are some untouchable entities – was entirely wrong. Immortal, yes. Invincible? Infinite? Nothing but God is as such.

On that cursed day, their beautiful and Holy bodies were stained with iridescent ichor, their Heavenly blood that shone with all colors comprehensible to the human mind and those beyond.

As a creation of God, they were alive, truly alive – not quite that different from human beings. They lived and loved, blissfully ignorant of the evil spreading amongst them.

How twisted that one of Heaven's most respected angels, the Cherub known as Lucifer, should be the one leading the host of angels in rebellion against God. The most beautiful and powerful of them all, he was not satisfied with his position within the Heavenly hosts. Why, he was not even a Seraph! How could he be expected to answer to the leader of the Seraphim, the prince Barachiel, when he *knew* that Lucifer had powers far beyond that of Barachiel? Who else amongst the Heavenly hosts was blessed with the power of creation? Who else could cleave a soul from a body? Besides Lucifer, none but God Himself.

Being below *God* was not quite the issue for Lucifer. He was quite content with his Father. Lucifer was too clever and pragmatic to believe that he, as perfect as he was, could surpass the Creator.

No, rather, it was Lucifer being cast aside, stuck as the leader of the Cherubim, while God's other son, the one known to us as Jesus, should be the one to sit at His right hand, and to rule over all that exists.

How deeply, deeply offensive that was for Lucifer. But this is not a tale of sympathy for the adversary – the one we have come to know as Satan. This is the beginning of the war that would plague Heaven and Earth for centuries to come.

It was quite easy for Lucifer to gather forces. Many of his fellow angels had similar sentiments. Many were the lesser angels of lower rank, but there were some Cherubim and Seraphim as well. However, unlike Lucifer, they were filled with hubris. They foolishly believed they could best God. Lucifer, cunning as can be, had no issue with allowing them to challenge God. To him, they were just fodder. Pawns in his game. All that mattered to this Heavenly son was restoring his position at God's side.

THE FALLEN MORNING STAR

RACHEL PANEK, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In his mind, all that stood between Lucifer and domination over Heaven was the allyship of the most powerful angels. If he could gather them behind him, God would simply have to accept that Lucifer was beyond the ordinary angels. But as cunning as Lucifer was, he could not have anticipated the outcome.

On that day, that decisive battle in Heaven, the angels turned on each other. Mercilessly, Lucifer's forces attacked, unrelenting in their attempt of conquest. Neither side had ever fought in a true battle before. They had trained to fight since the beginning of time itself, but none had ever truly imagined that such a day would come where they would have to fight, and kill, their fellow angels.

What a horrid sight it was! Heavenly bodies strewn about the ichor-stained battlefield, their physical forms disintegrating and leaving only the pure energy of their souls behind. This is how the angels die. Their bodies harmed beyond repair, they retreat with their souls, either to seek refuge elsewhere in Heaven, or to be stolen away by Lucifer's forces. The only way to reform into a physical body is to bathe their soul in the Holy waters of Heaven, but those doomed souls stolen by Lucifer would never get the chance. And poor Raphael of the Archangels, the strongest healer in Heaven, flew frantically about, utterly exhausted, in an attempt to heal as many angels as he could.

As the battle reached its climax, the strongest warrior in Heaven tore through Lucifer's forces, racing to reach their leader. The commander of the Archangels, Michael, sorrowfully rebuked the twisted angels with his divine sword of justice. He desperately cut through the crowds of angels, hoping to reach his longtime friend – his most trusted ally – before it was too late.

And so the two of them stood, amidst the surging tides of battle, facing each other with pain and longing in their eyes. Michael stood strong, alit with his Holy flame, and silent tears running down his face – his face as perfect as if it were carved from marble. The betrayal of Lucifer cut deeper and more personal to him than any of the other angels had felt.

Lucifer extended a hand. "Join me. Together, we could conquer all. I *need* you – the unbeaten warrior that bows to no other and flinches in the face of none. Think of all that we could do together. Join me."

THE FALLEN MORNING STAR

RACHEL PANEK, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It would be a lie to say that Michael, though righteous and unflinching, was not tempted by Lucifer's offer. His closest friend since the very beginning of all time, he wanted so desperately for him to stay in Heaven. Michael pondered the offer for but a moment, and felt guilt and shame for even considering it.

"I could never do that. My loyalty is to God and God alone."

"You don't sound too certain."

"How could you do this?" Michael implored. "We all trusted you – we looked up to you! We loved you, Lucifer. I loved you! We are like brothers. You cannot do this. Stop this, now!"

Ignoring his plea, Lucifer pressed on. "Join me. We would be unstoppable."

Before Michael could reply, a blinding, divine light shone from above. Growing in strength, the light culminated in a pure beam of Holy energy, rupturing the ground. A strike from God Himself, the light severed the ground underneath each member of Lucifer's forces, causing them to fall from Heaven.

In a moment that seemed to last an eternity, Lucifer fell backwards, flung from the divine kingdom. As he fell through the sky, he reached out for Michael – and Michael, for a brief instant, reached out to meet his friend's hand. But before Lucifer could take it, Michael retracted his offered hand, stopping himself from betraying God.

And so, Lucifer fell from Heaven. Inky black seeped into his and his angels' pure, white wings, changing them into different beings altogether. The Fallen Angels.

Falling through time and space, the Fallen Angels landed in the darkest shadow of the universe. There, Lucifer established his own kingdom, known as Hell. Thereafter, Heaven and Hell would forever be locked in battle – the fight between the good and the evil – until the final day of Earth, when Hell will be razed and Heaven will come crashing down.

**THANK YOU TO EVERYONE
WHO MADE THIS FIRST
DIGITAL EDITION OF THE
LAUREL POSSIBLE.**

**A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR
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AND ALL WHO SUBMITTED
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