

SPRING 2024

# THE LAUREL

ST. BONAVENTURE UNIVERSITY





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# THE LAUREL

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University.

Cover photo by Ethan Schwandt,  
*Armoire, a Pictured Winter*

Back cover photo by Ethan  
Schwandt,  
*One, 2; Four.*

Inspired by my best friend.

Home is Where the Duck is

HOP

You don't or skippidy BOP

instead the HEADS of your foot

o rec

Point in opp site di tions

like a compass

Your feet are flat,

No a<sup>rc</sup> he<sub>s</sub> no limps or pick-me-<sup>up</sup> whimps

Just quack quack quack like the waddle

waddle Duck toy

wander—<sup>1</sup>

Your HEAD up in the *clouds*

Like the pale newborns \_\_\_ without  
their mommy

\_\_\_lost

Or with the *curious*find—<sup>2</sup>  
of the “new world” \_\_\_\_\_

Your *limp*

• sunscreen

*smeeeeeeared*

arms

<sup>1</sup> ing

<sup>2</sup> ings ^^^^



*wailing*

with the appearance of no strength

Flap—<sup>3</sup> >>>>  
—>>>>>>>>>> ^^^^^ in ----- > motion ----- > of  
your waddle waddle walk

The biggest difference between you and a duck is how H. A. R. D you walk

waddly — STOMP

- waddly — STOMP

Sometimes, I can feel the ground sh<sup>ake</sup>

The earth worms argu—<sup>4</sup> for a

...brea  
k

But,  
In the end

I will continue—>>>> to make

- fun of your walk,

- Even slip it into the wedding toast
- ~~But just know your waddling~~
- ~~Is the only reason I am able to~~
- ~~Find my home~~

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<sup>3</sup> ing

<sup>4</sup> ing

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# ALEXANDER

---

*Anonymous*

---

This cursed month of March  
I cannot deny  
In the barbershop, he passed by  
And I had asked for his name  
He said I seemed familiar  
And gave me a paper phone number.

This cursed month of March  
I cannot deny  
I had held his head while he lie  
And pressed my lips to his hair  
He said he was visiting  
And I was excited.

This cursed month of March  
I cannot deny  
Where I've gone and go, I pry  
And to her, I lied -  
I like when I am at center  
My mind and body, taking control.

This cursed month of March  
I can no longer deny  
That I envision and scheme and try  
To be, to possess, to hold  
And once I've concocted that color  
I shell up the sheen.

This cursed month of March  
I cannot deny  
This is the final cry  
I shall keep you in reverence  
I will keep what you've taught me  
And I will not hurt myself for it.



---

# ALEXANDER

---

*Anonymous*

---

This cursed month of March  
I cannot deny  
I leaned into him when I cried  
And when he pulled me close  
And told me it would be okay  
I wanted to stay.

This cursed month of March  
I cannot deny  
That love song is for you  
And although you are long gone  
I miss our long lava nights  
The mornings, our walks never stopped.

This cursed month of March  
I can no longer deny  
I wanted you with me always  
And I like to see you  
But I do not ask you to visit  
Because I will want you to touch me.

All those months of March  
I can no longer hide  
The excitement I have  
And the comfort I feel  
I remember our burnt crosses  
Our singing in the woods  
I remember our playing in the light  
And me wearing your hat  
I remember him asking to hug me  
Apologizing, crying  
And I smiled, and I wanted to, and we did  
I remember asking you to hold me  
Amid all my tears, all my crimes  
And you did, around me, you were  
And I held your hands;  
I remember dancing in the night  
Our sharing of names  
I remember you living with me  
And how much fun we still have  
I remember your confession

And how I, for the first time,  
Gave an honest expression  
I remember, just yesterday,  
The drummer smiling at me  
How I felt, driving to the barbershop  
And how I asked for your name.

This month of March  
I will not hide  
I remember our New Year's day.

---

# THOUGHTS. THE PAST. THE PRESENT

---

*Demari Shinnery*

---

I'm proud of you  
the pain you've suffered to get here unimaginable  
The long days you've spent breaking yourself down  
incomprehensible  
You've grown so much it makes me wonder  
how did you even get here?

I thought you hated this world  
rebuked everything that came along with it  
I thought you would always be alone  
never to have friends  
never to have people who care about you  
never able to come out of that shell  
I remember you being scared to walk on sand  
A hermit you are no more, you're left a free butterfly.

I thought you would be left stranded,  
in the dark and cold ocean still unable to extinguish the fires from burned bridges.  
I thought your sanity would crumble.  
I thought your arms and legs would be left white from the blade.

Fall  
why do you keep getting back up?  
I thought you hated your life.  
what are you fighting for?  
Are you happy?



---

# THOUGHTS. THE PAST. THE PRESENT

---

*Demari Shinnery*

---

*I am.*

I get back up to carry 2 villages on my back.

I hate this cruel world.

But i'll continue to run and smile,

for the people who taught me how.

I fight for them because they gave me the strength to fight for myself.

So how did I get here you ask?

I'm not there yet.

---

# GONE HOME

---

*Meghan Baehl*

---

legs dangle carelessly until they are stilled  
she was strong, even if they say she was weak-willed.  
she fought a daunting battle silently  
no complaints  
our strongest soldier  
succumbed to the temptation of peace

wouldn't you do the same?  
if god had welcomed you home?  
heaven is the only home she will ever know.  
she died a brave death  
fought the good fight  
no matter what everyone else says.

being laid to rest  
is a cure for restlessness  
unshed tears  
due to unsaid concerns  
warning signs  
left unwarranted

*rest in peace!*  
how can she?  
when you continue to judge someone you didn't know  
or didn't *really* know.  
she cannot sleep peacefully knowing that you are mourning  
now quiet children, go to bed until morning

here comes death, her cruel collector  
but it was a debt she was willing to pay in full  
so weep no more, you mustn't disrespect her  
it will only wreak havoc on your own soul  
don't eulogize on her behalf  
or try to come up with something pithy for her epitaph

black worn  
& worn down  
rain pours

as I pour out my heart  
her legacy etched into stone  
stone cold



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# GRETCHEN MY DOG GRETCHEN

---

*Emma Gavazzi*

---

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

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# FLIGHT

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*Tharini Nagarkar*

---

i am an object at rest, in an object in motion  
as i soar across cities, stars twinkling ahead  
yet i am restless, such a strange notion

aluminum rattles, a slight commotion  
the seatbelt sign blinks on, yellow and red  
i am an object at rest, in an object in motion

the air is dry, skin ashy, need hand lotion  
sinus pressure builds; glad my nose hasn't bled  
yet i am restless, such a strange notion

beneath me the rippled blues of the ocean  
the blues of this new path i so eagerly tread  
i am an object at rest, in an object in motion

there's no stopping this brimming emotion  
salinity trickles down my cheek, a tranquil tear shed  
yet i am restless, such a strange notion

the wheels hit asphalt, i feel the rubber's erosion  
soon to breathe fresh air but a pit fills with strange dread  
i am an object at rest, in an object in motion  
yet i am restless, such a strange notion

---

# HI WORLD

---

*Eddy Bysiek*

---

Packed  
Really packed  
So totally busy  
Going places right now  
So fast  
Too fast  
Time to live, really live  
Slow down

---

# SOULS

---

*Eddy Bysiek*

---

Hidden inside of a heart  
Souls lie motionless  
Searching for a reality  
All beating together

---

# PENROSE DOMINO PLATEAU

---

*Ethan Schwandt*

---





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# WHAT HAVE I FOUND YOU

---

*Ethan Schwandt*

---





---

# YARN

---

*Ethan Schwandt*

---





---

# TWO-STORY SKYSCRAPER

---

*Ethan Schwandt*

---





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# BLOSSOMING DAYS

---

*Jaime Thompson*

---





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817

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*Kelly Jenson*

---





---

# TAKE A SEAT

---

*Kelly Jenson*

---



---

# ENDURING GRACE

---

*Frankie Garr*

---





---

# METRO STOP

---

*Frankie Garr*

---





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# OL' RUSTY RED

---

*Frankie Garr*

---



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# BIRD BY FEEDER

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*Jean Benson*

---





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# FIRST SIGN OF SPRING

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*Jean Benson*

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# UNTITLED

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*Rylie Heffernan*

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---

# UNTITLED

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*Rylie Heffernan*

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# UNTITLED

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*Rylie Heffernan*

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## DR. GLASS' DAUGHTER

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*Rose Pfeiffer*

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"Something terrible has happened to your daughter, Dr. Glass. This is not how you deal with it—creating this clockwork imitation? It's not—"

Time and time again, Phineas doubts my capabilities. It's exhausting. Why can't he accept the truth?

"But she is my daughter, my old friend." I plaster a smile upon my face. Elvira is my daughter, pure as springtime blooms. She has always been. She stands here by my side; the ticking of clocks accompanies her heart's every beat.

"Maybe once, it was."

Those words. So cruel and unprovoked. Damned for uttering such things. The outrage ignites within me like the boilers that run each cog and wheel that makes life turn.

"And once, you were my dear friend." I shatter my plaster molded smile, dropping it to blankness. The words seem to make his innards squirm, probing eyes defeated. Good.

"Byron, open your eyes. Lift your goggles from your face!"

I do remove my goggles, letting them hang around my neck. But only so he can see the fury surging in my eyes. "Phineas, leave us."

He heaves a sigh and takes up his top hat, smoothing his dark hair.

"May reality deliver upon you a swift kick in the rear..." He straightens his pin striped vest. "...in the form of a steam powered shoe. Good day." He dons his hat and starts out of my workshop.

"Perhaps I shall make one and deliver it to your door, Phineas. Good day!" I call after him as he departs. I am met by a humorless laugh and the slam of a door. Elvira stands idly by me, silent. She is tired from her performance, fair eyelids drooping and delicate shoulders slack. "I am sorry you had to see that, little Bumblebee." I gently take her hands, smooth and delicate.

*"It doesn't bother me much, dad. He's wrong, I'm here."*

Surely, she's too tired to talk, but I know what she'd say. Elvira isn't easily bothered; she dances and twirls upon clouds. She is a masterpiece, a heart incorruptible by the arrogance of man. Carmine painted lips... a tutu as lovely as the night sky. Elvira adores dancing. It is the very thing that stirs her from slumber each day.

Elvira's hair is a mess from all her dancing. Her mother's hair was the same ashen brown, not blonde like mine. But Elvira shares the blue of my eyes, a perfect balance. Like how I must balance for both her mother and as a father. I softly sigh. "Come, we'll go to your room." Elvira doesn't move right away, not a twitch of her bright lips. My eyes trace over her face, I feel my heart sink at the sight of her sullen expression. "Oh... no wonder you dare not move...you fell down last time you danced...yes..."

She dips her head in a nod. *"All I want to do is dance... but I keep falling."* I carefully take her face in my hand. It's rough from scuffs acquired by the falls.

"I know, Bumblebee... but fear not, I'll fix you up."

A smile blooms upon her face. Phineas had been right about something dreadful having happened to her. A violent accident in my workshop had nearly crippled her legs.... Elvira had gotten perilously close to one of my machines. Elvira loved to watch me work... She feared she'd never dance again. The pain of that surely cut like a knife— that grief would make her unrecognizable to the once joyous daughter we adored. But I helped her, though she's still getting used to her new legs. Oh... our Bumblebee, who used to clumsily prance about when she was little, flitting from step to step... just like a little bee hopping from flower to flower. That is how she got her nickname, after all.

I gently guide her through bronze hallways. I created a lift to make it easier for Elvira to get to her room. We reach it, a platform that runs on a track on the wall. Steam hisses and whistles a familiar tune as I pull a lever. Gears grunt and groan as the platform begins to lift. I keep her steady as we go. The squeal and lurch of machinery sees us on our way until we reach her room. When the platform reaches the top there's a soft hiss, and a door slides open. I helped her off of it.

Elvira's room is beautiful. Her mother had made it certain with the canopy bed and ornate vanity. I wish Silvia was here to see how good Elvira's gotten at dancing, but such an industrial life proved poor for her health...

Elvira's room crowns the top of our tower. She says it makes her feel like a princess.. I smile at her and sit her in front of her vanity. I turn a valve and hanging lights lurch over our heads to rest over the vanity, creaking as they go. They turn on with the pull of a string. "Settle in, my sweet, I'll be there in a moment..."

She gave a light nod of her head in reply. I hate to leave her waiting so long. This won't be. I simply crossed Elvira's room. I turn a crank not far from the window. The machinery groans as gears pull a hook along a path, landing it before me. I exhale and remove my lengthy overcoat, hanging it on the hook. My vest remains over a white shirt, brass bands clip the otherwise flowing sleeves closer to my arm, dividing the sleeves into segments. This keeps them out of the way when I work. Whistles blare outside the window, smoke and metallic scent carried forth by the wind, accompanied by a rampant sort of *pitter patter, pitter patter, pitter patter*. Seething, I make my way to it.

Drifting lazily by not far outside the window... is Mr. Jenkins and his blasted flying machine. He powers it by pedals more so than steam. It's a strange contraption. I would call it the balloon or a blimp attached to a bicycle with steering fins. I spread my hands on the windowsill, leaning forward out of it. He looks over and tips his top hat, eyes peering over a bushy mustache. "Ah! Good day to you. Mr. Glass!"

Dr. It's *Doctor* Glass. My years labored away at university were not so that such a blathering fool could call me 'Mr.' "Same to you, but do you mind? My daughter is exhausted, all this racket will surely disturb her."

"I beg your pardon?"

I sigh and rub my forehead. "My daughter, Mr. Jenkins."

"I thought she--" he starts to say.



I glare daggers, he's a wretched gossip. I could feel my heart sink in an instant, chills prick through me— "Don't say it. She's right here." I look over to her, she's sitting dangling her legs off her bed. "Say hello, Elvira," she listens, tilting her head. Oh dear... her tired state has her wave done in an awkward jerk of her hand.

His eyes widened; his stomach seemed to have dropped. Good, I've embarrassed him. "Oh, my apologies, I'll be off!"

*Pitter patter, pitter patter, pitter patter.*

His strange device ushers off at a frantic pace.

A whistle like a train's sounds once more. The 1 o'clock airship is departing. Passengers board its main deck from a dock a few stories down. Its great balloon inhales and exhales, propellers flit in anticipation. The airships fill the skies like a great school of fish, swimming through smoke and clouds.

Mr. Jenkin's device mocks the great airships of Diridrift, our fine city. I aided in the design of them. They are a marvel, nearly as much my child as Elvira is.

I exhale and turn a crank near to the one that had brought forth the hook. Blinds of brass crawl across the window. I let out a sigh of relief as the sound muffled. Then I returned to Elvira. Her head snaps over to me, I freeze. "Oh— you're bleeding again—" Crimson red was starting to peek from cracks traversing her delicate complexion. I hurry over, reaching and gently assessing each fine crack upon her carefully sculpted face. "Don't worry— I will fix it right up..." I hurriedly grabbed a container from one of the vanity drawers. Contained within it is a sort of paste. A bitter scent wafts from the container as I open it. "Close your eyes, Bumblebee..." She listens, I take off my gloves, I dare not risk agitating the cracks with the leather. First, I take a handkerchief, its fabric caresses her face as I wipe the blood. Then a thin brush, reminiscent of a paintbrush, fills in each crack with the paste. Soon, all is fine. Elvira is anxious. She squirms in her seat after I finish. "*I want to dance again, dad...*"

"Patient... patient... You can wait until evening, sweet..." I undo her bun and start brushing her hair. With each stroke she relaxes more.

"*Okay...*" I catch a glance of my reflection. I'm a terrible mess compared to her, there is oil splattering my skin, from tinkering in my workshop this morning. Still, I brush her hair until it's smooth and tamed. Then, Elvira holds out her arm. I take her arm with my own and help her stand.

"Now, will you rest?"

She nods, slowly.

*Tick tick thump, tick tick thump.*

It's close enough to hear. But it's a marvelous sound, a reward of such grueling work. I escort her to her bed. She sits down, leaning against her pillows.

"*Wait, dad—*"

"Yes, Bumblebee?"

"*Could you play me a song to help me rest? It's not easy to sleep in the middle of the day...*"

A smile twitches on my face. "I'd be happy to." She smiles. I get up and go to the valve that'd brought the hook, I turn it once again. There's a creak and another hook lurches into sight, my coat disappears through a trapdoor at the end of the track. On this hook, a case is hung, contained within it, is my viola. I've played since I was a boy growing up in Diridrift's neighboring town, Toffton. Toffton was a place where there was no magic, it was bland, so small. No airships would drift overhead, no machines would have been built to fly, among grand buildings and sprawling, fast moving life.

I take my viola, its wood outlandish amongst the brass and bronze. I make my way back over, sitting beside Elvira. She watches with brightness in her eyes as I begin to play a melody. Each draw of the bow across the string works like the gears that run day to day life in Diridrift. Her eyes droop with drowsiness, and her face relaxes. Elvira begins to drift off, head leaned against my side. So, I let the music fade off as she dips into slumber.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Dearest reader,*

*It is with an aching heart I inform you, that what you have just read is not the full truth.*

*I'm afraid something far worse happened to Miss Elvira Glass. It was never an accident in Dr. Byron Glass' workshop. I observed her dancing on stage. Her movements were but jerks and twitches of clockwork. For... clockwork is what she consists of. Most of what was once Elvira Glass is dead.*

*Now, the young girl is a marriage of flesh and gears. The Elvira Glass lurching and twirling on stage was one of several girls attacked in the city of Diridrift throughout the past months. A case which I was tasked to investigate.*

*Miss Glass was the only girl who managed to escape the vicious attacks. She was able to give an ample description of the man who attacked her. Without Miss Glass, we would not have been able to catch this mass murderer.*

*But... Miss Glass was far from lucky. The poor girl would never be the same. Miss Glass' body was brutally lacerated. There was much doubt she would live much longer, wounded profusely. However, Dr. Glass couldn't stand it. He was furious and grieving. Thus, he used his brilliance and made a project of her conundrum.*

*Miss Glass became a marriage of flesh and clockwork. Dr. Glass made it so she was born anew. With careful work of mechanics and a disturbed yet brilliant mind.*

*The hands he held close as he twirled Miss Glass upon the stage, were cold and lifeless. It is truly a gruesome existence lurching and groaning beneath the perfect porcelain shell, a mash of aspects of the living enclosed.*

*I do hope with all my heart, as I still care deeply for Dr. Glass and his family, that one day Byron finds peace. One day he must let go, and allow for Elvira to move on. I know it would break his heart... but things do get better. It pains me to see him so disturbed. He is not himself.*

*Signed,*

*Phineas L. Cadwell*

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# THE BEST OF YOU TO LOVE AND THE WORST OF YOU TO HOLD

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*Zena Wronka*

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There are many ways to define something. Some are guttural, instinctual names and categories. These follow from a linguistic pulse to name the thing and describe its simplified material essence. The world is full of them: Cat. Water. Man. Other things take up books, you must spiral around the thing, like a bird, describing its synonyms, attributes, negations, causes, and effects to find the thing- these are theories, ideas: Justice. Love. Math. These complex things require that distanced, hovering approach. But some descriptions cannot even be held by the rigid logic of theory or the tyranny of the axiom. We know some things require abstraction, narrative, and art to hold in their movement, their dynamism. People are that way.

The hot water falls down my forearms in stingy, itchy streaks; a metal sponge confronts the oil spill on the pan; the burnt pieces of some roast form a brown rusted halo around the metal bottom. Scrubbing that black tarnish I consider the frying pan a fallen soldier in the battle that is dinner; a wounded hero who died for the full stomach of some sleeping child. Singed and scarred by the burning flame only to be scratched and assaulted by steel wool and burning water. Like a tarnished silver medal it hangs above the oven as proof of the stalemate between the flood and the fire. You see, pan seems to fit that first category of words, but of course, as my scrubbing revealed, it doesn't.

When we further define the material world, it is revealed that the noun is hardly as sedentary as we'd like to believe. The thing becomes defined in terms of its use, its tool-obstacle essence. Its purpose or impediment to the being that animates it. And thus, the pan is at once an object of intense meditation- a modern tool of sustenance, a trophy of the domestic triumph: feeding the family, a cosmic battleground for chaos and order- much more than its single-syllable essence discloses. People are this way. While seemingly belonging to the first category, the ways we refer to them are inherently relational, they don't signal Being but rather Being in relation to something, someone else. As if to explain the thing requires the dissection of its purpose: King. Daughter. Writer. It becomes apparent that we must also define humans themselves in terms of their purpose, and their relational status to the world around them. This ancient insight seems to be held by the many Twitter users whose bios read like a cast of characters in a play: musician, engineer, father. It also serves as one of the main purposes of this story. To introduce myself to you requires me to tell you about her. Because Daughter necessarily implies Mother, the way Being necessarily implies Creator.

I was born in a fire. I didn't see the flames, but I arrived in this world covered in ash and soot. The afterbirth must have looked like the silvery-black, earthy remains of a campfire. I was burned, singed, and scarred but the birth records only indicate that I was seven pounds, two ounces. Female. The certificate declared that my name would be Christine with a finality like a fact in a textbook. A designation of my individual species, my breed, yet somehow also like a prophecy, a container of something yet to be realized. The piece of bluish-green paper was adorned with this sort of regal, triumphant border of leaves and flowers, and decorated with a pair tiny footprints in the right-hand corner, exiting the screen. It seemed to almost say: she will be called Christine and she will be important, but in a stately, secular manner. Like a formal decree. Like a piece of legislation that totally ignored the brutality of the event, the smell of smoke that must have filled the room, and the almost-dead woman covered in the silty carnage of a fire. I imagine that's what peace declarations signed on the battlegrounds must be like.

Many instances in my life since then have been the same: suffering, dirt, and blood. In fact, it's always felt like my mouth was full of blood and my body was full of dirt since that day I came out of the

fire. I don't know if the smell of burning ever left my skin. My childhood was spent eagerly awaiting menstruation. It seemed like the day my existence could cease to be Christine and take on its destined relational status. As a child you must awkwardly fumble around with an individual identity, you must wander around with that unidimensional description. You have yet to be identified in terms of your purpose, your relational status, because you lack the responsibility of an object of purpose. You have yet to be dirtied by any of the tragedy and violence that can transcend the flatness of your material essence. So I awaited the day when I would cease to be a purposeless burden and become the cause of some other things' cruel and wonderful existence. The day when I'd bleed. The day when I'd burn.

The violence of my birth led me to wonder- how dare I just erupt into time and space so crudely, so raw and so unwelcome like that. My mother seems to reason that if I had been innocent I wouldn't have been covered in so much ash. I reasoned that if it was my flesh and my spirit that ignited the flame, it was her dry, dead insides that allowed for the burning. My dad thinks it's because she thought about smoking every day of her pregnancy. My mom knows that she drank enough to put out any sparks that could have been created by the cigarette ash. It turns out my destiny would be stained by that ash, too. Conscience of that black stuff as soon as I was conscious of myself put me at odds with its source. It turns out that when you're at odds with your creator- the womb that bore you, the breast that fed you, the blood that runs through you- you tend to resent *the* Creator. Perhaps that's why matricide is the ultimate nihilistic deed, even suicide appears like a holy sacrifice next to the murder of one's own mother.

Most of my childhood I wished that my mother would do us all a favor and drown herself in the pool or hang herself with the garden hose. For a depressed alcoholic, suicide by way of drowning seems fitting; their desire for a liquid unconsciousness can finally be fully satisfied. A lot of my meditations about my life have arrived while I hovered above kitchen sinks washing dishes, where I find myself now. Domestic chores always offer a state of deep contemplation; as if the devils climb out from the drain pipe, lured by the burning water, leaping from frying pan handles onto your shoulders. You, intoxicated by the soap and steam, are seduced into scrubbing down the skillet along with your psyche. Repressed desires and regret gather and clog the drain. The wet mass you toss into the trash, the remnants of every dish, are tossed along with all of the rotting stuff in your own head. It's always standing there in yellow dish gloves that I wonder whether I am good or not.

It's standing there I began to realize that goodness often lacks a definitive substance. It's more like the negative space between the black stuff. It's the scrubbed pan that's fed a family but has been burnt and dirtied in pursuing its end. It's an active resistance, a struggle, against the bad rather than any positive movement towards the ideal. Perhaps goodness isn't an ascension at all, perhaps it's more like tugging against something and remaining in place. It's allowing for the burn, the tragic destruction, the making of some stinking mess, to serve some higher purpose- perhaps that's what goodness is, embracing the tragedy.

Because the little girl who so wished her mother would drown herself in the pool, also sat on the laundry room floor, holding a pack of her mother's cigarettes in one hand and an ancient pair of orange KitchenAid scissors in the other, attempting to destroy what was killing her. Sitting on those cold tiles, trying to cut those burning things in half, severing the tobacco from the filter, I didn't know if I loved my mother. Trying to cut through the whole pack of them, held upright in a tiny fist, working the dull blades sporadically through the eight dollars of tobacco I thought I wanted her to die. Yet this love act already assumed the notion of goodness that would arrive to me as an adult stooped at the sink. Perhaps my goodness would be the space between the filter and the tobacco, the empty distance between the ruined white spongy tips and the pile of brown soot gathering on those tiles. I never told her I loved her, but I'm

sure when she saw those crushed paper sticks, half white, half brown, lying beside the dryer, I'm sure she thought about how much I must love her, as she pulled me up by the arm and threw me in my room. Maybe she thought about her only child, that ashy nine-year-old who burnt her, while she did the dishes that night.

And so now all of my sentences end with the word yet. I might not be good, but really I'm just not good yet. I'm a singed, calloused thing crawling around in the dirt, looking towards a smoke-filled sky, but seeing the sun between the ash. As I take a drag from a crushed-up Newport on my back porch steps I think about that little girl and the distance gained from the tragedy of my birth. And I know I haven't yet justified this difficult existence, but perhaps my daughter might.

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## IT'S TIME

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*Brooke Johnpier*

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All my life, I have been the protector of the household. The Big Humans have always taken care of me, and I've always taken care of them. It has made me feel good these past fifteen years, but recently, I've realized that my time is coming to an end as protector.

Big Human (whose real name is Ted) brought home a "protector in training" yesterday. He's a 3-month-old American Bulldog who goes by the name Roscoe. Roscoe is young and inexperienced, but I can tell that he will take over my job as protector of the Humans just fine.

Roscoe came trotting into the garage where us animals sleep (there's a cat that goes by Tammy and a guinea pig that goes by Joey. Don't ask how Joey got there, he just showed up one day) and plopped down on his bed. He began licking his paws and I cleared my throat.

"What?" Roscoe asked.

"What do you mean, *what?*" I said snottily.

Roscoe bared his teeth at me and retorted,

"What do you think I mean, *Max?*"

I jumped up from my bed, booked across the floor, jumped on top of Roscoe, tackled him until he was laying spread-eagled, and I sank my teeth into his neck. I could feel his accelerated heartbeat, his fear, and his eagerness to learn how to fight back. I slowly released the flab of his neck and climbed off of him. As I sat back down on my haunches, Roscoe was looking at me with wonder in his eyes.

"Where the *hell* did you learn how to do that!?" he exclaimed.

I chuckled.

"It took a long time to learn," I said. "But trust me, you'll learn too. That is, if you allow me to."

I looked at Roscoe and extended my right paw in both friendship, family, and most of all, mentorship. Roscoe looked at the paw, looked up at me, and grinned. He took the paw, and the teaching began.

During the course of the next six months, I taught Roscoe the ropes of the Human household. I taught him how they liked to be treated and protected, and that the Little Human, Delaney, didn't like when we would bark; she would cry. I taught Roscoe how to fight, how to lead, and how to alert Big Human Ted if he needed to get the "bang-bang" out. Ted didn't like to use the "bang-bang," but if it was necessary, he would.

My sixteenth birthday came and went. It was actually nearing my seventeenth birthday. It was two days before, to be exact. Roscoe and I were sleeping on our beds in the garage, when we both heard the sound of shattering glass, and then the sound of a "bang-bang."

Immediately, Roscoe jumped up, ready to get into action. His teeth were bared, and he was in the fighting stance that I had taught him. Just as he was getting ready to howl his warrior call, I shook my head.

“No,” I whisper shouted.

“Why *not*?” Roscoe whined.

“Because,” I said. “It’s time.

Roscoe looked at me. I nodded with a jerk of my head.

In that moment, the door to the garage from the house was kicked open. A Big Human in all black walked through the threshold holding a big “bang-bang.” Roscoe charged past him and into the house, where he would protect the Human family. I stood in the middle of the garage as the man turned back around and faced me.

I bared my teeth and growled, knowing that it wouldn’t do much. But if it would just give Roscoe enough time to get the Humans out of the house and down the street to safety, that’s all that would matter.

As the man in the black outfit opened fire with his “bang bang” I charged him, screaming my warrior call. I felt the bullets rip through me, but I also felt when my teeth ripped through the man’s throat.

## 2 HOURS LATER

Even though my eyesight was blurry, I could still see what was going on around me. I could sense that there were other people besides the Human family around. I could also smell a lot of blood. It was a mix of mine and the human I had attacked.

I looked down to see that my body was shattered. My rib cage was showing, blood was pooled around me, and I saw, and felt, my labored breathing. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the Human family looking at me. Roscoe was also looking at me. I tried to raise my paw in acknowledgement but couldn’t. A bullet had broken the bone.

Roscoe came booking over to me and started licking my wounds.

“It’s no use,” I said. “I’m too far gone.”

Roscoe looked at me with tears in his eyes.

“Don’t say that!” he cried. “You’re the protector of this household, you’re-”

I told him to shush.

“Roscoe,” I said in between short breaths. “You’re the protector of the household now. You’re the one that has to save them from events...just like you did tonight.”

I looked at him, and he looked at me. Roscoe put his paw on mine, and I felt the warmth, power, and strength of a young dog that was a protector who had been well trained. I felt him grip my paw even harder as we both said at the same time,

“It’s time.”



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THE MARVELOUS CONJUNCTION OF GASOLINE PUMPS AND FROZEN HAMBURGERS

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*Thomas Pursel*

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The goddamn beeping. The reminder of being unremarkable. And annoyed. It was more urgent than any alarm clock. If Anna woke up late, no big deal. The store manager would be pissed off, but when isn't he? He's trapped in the same boat she is. The boat where the goddamn beeping is louder than the waves crashing down, the waves that are smothering her airways, clogging her ears, dragging her under till she doesn't know which way is up. She didn't know that the store manager could turn the sound down a notch, (down ten, in fact), but it wouldn't have mattered if she did—he needed something to complain about. It's hard to be miserable when the only problem is that there are no problems.

Orders piled into the abyss of computer storage systems. She called out one number, the idling customer stood there amongst a dozen others—warm food is important, but compared to doom scrolling Instagram? Fuck it, there is no comparison. And the goddamn beeping? Nothing could compare to that either, except a gunshot maybe. The store manager might appreciate that. Especially if the police shut the store down. Wishful thinking.

She called for her coworkers again. Alas, voice drowned. She was under.

“I'm order four-oh-six. I've been standing here for twenty minutes, and my food isn't ready. Are you gonna do your job, or what?” The haggler was bald, and had a trucking headset on. He wore a white NASCAR shirt with a hole above his right nipple, where gray chest hairs protruded, uninvited. In one hand was a six-pack of Miller Lite and an open bag of sour cream and onion potato chips. With the other hand, shoveled the chips into his gullet in the way that old-timey locomotive engineers shovel coal into the train's engine.

“I’m sorry sir. That will be ready in a few minutes.”

“I gotta get back on the road lady!” A flake of crumb flew across the counter onto Anna’s lip.

“One minute, sir.”

The goddamn beeping. It came periodically. There is a minute of silence, or relative silence; Anna’s coworkers gossip in the back, and the beeping comes back.

Anna looked at the screen. Four-oh-six. Ordered six minutes and fifteen seconds ago. Quadruple onion ring topped burger, mayo, ketchup, mustard, extra cheese, with grilled cheese sandwiches for buns. Cut in half. Chop-chop, time’s a wastin’.

Spun around, the floor was slick. The grooves on her shoe soles worn down, she slid across the grease. She grabbed the oven handle for stability. Then the goddamn beeping. It may have shattered her eardrum. She looked to her right. Her coworkers were chucking ice cubes at the freezer door. Upon contact, they were fragments. Like her tympanum. Until it was restored. By the beeping.

The oven door fell. Nearly falling, she sizzled her arm. But orders were coming off the screen. The oven mitt. Where was it? Anna whipped her head. She needed it now, else the burgers in the oven turn out like her arm. She felt it more now. The oven was hot, but she had enough sense (or instinct) to toss her arm away. Regardless, her skin was hot; it melted itself. Had she looked, the gash was visible. A customer asked her if she was alright, but that was a silly question: she couldn’t find the oven mitt.

She called for her coworkers.

“Oh, sorry Anna. Here is the oven mitt.” Lucas peered from around the freezer, and tossed the oven mitt to Anna. She fumbled it, and when it fell to the floor, her knees fell on top.

“Anna, get your shit together. We got customers.” The manager crept behind her, grabbed her from under her armpits, and lifted her to her feet. “You can’t throw our stuff on the ground, these oven mitts touch food that people eat. They put it in their mouths. You understand? Look, because I am such a great boss, I’ll wash this off for you. But seriously Anna, get it together.”

The burgers baked in the oven, no way to retrieve them.

“Miss? I’m order four sixty-two. Can you put extra ketchup on my chicken sandwich? But not too much. I don’t like a lot, just extra.”

There was no four sixty-two on the screen.

A customer approached Anna, and said something gibberish.

“I’m sorry sir, you’re going to have to speak up. I can’t hear you.”

He took off his glasses, his eyes fell with. “You’re out of Miller Lite. I see that feller over there got some, but I can’t find any.”

“Sir, if you’ll go to the register and let them know—”

“Don’t you younguns know how to do your goddamn jobs.” This was a statement.

The goddamn beeping.

“And can’t you turn that thing down. Can’t hardly hear myself think. I’on’t like it.”

The manager came with a dripping oven mitt. Anna took it. When she grabbed the tray of burgers from the oven, she thought for a moment of throwing them across the kitchen like a frisbee. She thought of it hitting Lucas in the head, and almost smiled. She thought of it hitting her manager, and she did smile.

“Are you just gonna hold that thing or are you gonna make my food lady?” It was four-oh-six, and his bag of chips was crumpled in his hand.

Anna sat the tray on the counter. His sandwich assembled, she called out his number. When he grabbed it, he threw the crumpled bag of chips at her. “Throw this out for me, will you?”

One order off the screen. How many left?

Gretchen was standing next to Anna. Even the mesmerizing freezer can’t hold attention forever, Anna supposed. “Anna, do you want to see my newborn’s pictures?”

The beeping.

“Bitch, can’t you see I’m trying to work?”

Gretchen’s eyes widened. The doom scrollers looked up.

“Anna, take your hat off. You can go home. Don’t bother coming back tomorrow,” said the manager.

So Anna took a breath.

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# IS IT SNOWING YET IN ST. PETERSBURG

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*John PolICASTRO*

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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.

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.

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.



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.

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.

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# THE FALLEN MORNING STAR

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*Rachel Panek, Editor-in-Chief*

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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.

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."

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 shined 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.







THE LAUREL