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The Laurel

ST. BONAVENTURE UNIVERSITY

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a girl *like me*

by Meghan Baehl (Fiction Editor)

ricocheted
two bodies entwined
labored breathing
a *love* affair that occurred
so *unceremoniously.*

stolen glances
lead to taking chances
to sneaking around in the cover of night
we swore each other to secrecy

i guess that meant *nothing.*
ostracized
i can't bear to hear even the utterance of your name
you know a girl like *me* will never be the same.

regretfully,
i cry for days on end
only to be soothed by thoughts of you
in a condition worse than mine

4 months from now
i will find a piece of your existence
and it will remind me of your betrayal
because a girl like me never *forgets.*

sem.seven

by Meghan Baehl (Fiction Editor)

*legs felt like lead
seldom get out of bed
for a reason better left unsaid*

*a certain frigidness looms in the air
such a docile disposition one might tear out their hair*

*a scarf around the neck
of a self-proclaimed trainwreck*

*a tinge of color returns
the season adjourns*

*only for awhile
for the season tends to beguile
the most perfect climate for a chionophile*

Photo by Meghan Baehl



A Plea of Forgiveness

by Micky Carneiro (EIC)

All this talk of change is driving me insane.
You act as if my dear friend is

Six

feet

under,

But I think both

You and I

Are just

Looking at the same

Picture from a

different

angle.

Why is it so hard for you to see this

Beautiful being,

Who once showed me how to

Chase after my

Best self.

Can't you see him?

Aren't you charmed by such

Ethereal beauty?

How can you not be

awestruck

By such

Encapsulating mind filled with

Dreams of

Valorant skies,

Starset galaxies and

Magic carpet rides.

How could you not see the

Wonder

In those eyes

Full of hopes as big as

Space needles.

How can you not smile when that

Contagious, **boisterous** laugh

Reaches your ears and

Melts your heart a w a y...

This beating, throbbing heart

So warm, so gentle, so

Stubborn, and yet full of kindness and

Compassion.

Yet why does it not feel

This affection for its

Owner?

Like a clock that

ticks

each

second

away,

Each one is earned with every

B r e a t h

You take, not wasted on

Self-loathing.

Perhaps your eyes need a new prescription,

because

You look to me, a man who's

Lost sight of who he once was, and who he

Wants to be.

So enveloped in pain that it's

All he knows.

So blinded by self-destruction he cannot see the

B L O O D on his hands pours out from

His own

Re-opened scars—which he confused for

Birthmarks.

Why do you apologize for the scars

Under your skin?

What reason do you have to lie to yourself?

If past met future, and future met past,

I'm sure the first words that crossed your mind

Picturing such a meeting would be somewhere

along the lines of

Fear, Pain, Anger,

Guilt.

But give it time, and

Perhaps your vocabulary will adapt to

New words—

Kindness

Which you taught me to embrace,
But could not fathom yourself
Worthy of.
How could this person, so full of love and
Laughter and
Think of himself a nasty beast?

A criminal of existence?
A repulsive stain on the tapestry of history?

Forgiveness,

Love

Dreams

GODDAMNIT, you fool!

How could you not look upon yourself and

Fall
in
love

The way

So many
Already have?

I know that I should've written more,
Given you more,
And nothing I can say can ever
Right my wrongs
To you, but I would
Happily
Take your place if it would
Atone for my
Sins against
You,

But most of all,
I wish I could have said these
Words to you
Before the
Ticking of your
Heart
Stopped.

By Night

by Ana Dobrot

I am something new by night.

*I am the red worm yarn hooked
in your blanket that gets kicked off the bed and
into the open gullets of shadow fish.*

*I am Jonah, an outdoor car's headlight
cutting myself from the belly of the shadows to swim
over your sleeping face.*

*I am the popcorn kernel of truth in your dream.
your sleep's heat opens me into a white foam grenade,
I remain the shell unfolded like a beetle wing.*

*I am the breath that escapes for your open window,
the cold draws me like a ghost off your tongue.
your loose lips become a gun barrel, I am smoke*

by night, I am something uncapturable.

The Bronze Throne

by Andrew Fox

You awaken in the back seat of your big brother Jeremy's Jeep. His warm green coat falls away as you sit up, rubbing the sleep from your eyes.

Jeremy's eyes catch yours through the rear-view, "Finally awake?" He asks. "I've always been jealous of your ability to sleep in the worst conditions possible. This path has been nothing, but bumps for the last mile and a half," he remarks, pulling off the road and parking next to a small tent.

Peeking your head out of the window, you find yourself surrounded by a sea of sand. You and your big brother Jeremy had been planning a trip out to the Gobi Desert in search of a secret city smaller in size but greater in importance than the Black City of Genghis Khan. A city, far more ancient, lost to the sands of time and buried beneath the sands of the Gobi. Your contemporaries called it a fool's errand. There's no way such a city exists! Nothing of value could remain intact that long! You powered through their critiques and scraped together the funds necessary to form an expedition by cozying up to a few eccentric investors. As you step out of the Jeep and stretch your legs, you appraise the site. A few tents had been set up just outside a large hole. Inside the hole, the bones of a small city built around an oasis. Heavy machinery hums in the distance and the familiar face of your most eccentric investor approaches.

"Mr. E, I presume?" Before you stands a white-faced man in a pristine white polo shirt, khaki pants, and a ten-gallon hat that appears to be leaking. He extends his hand, and you shake it politely.

He continues, "I am Brawn McClurry. No doubt, your favorite Texan," he chuckles a little too hard at his own joke, "and I'm so glad you invited me on this expedition."

You seem to remember a particularly drawn-out discussion in which you politely persuaded Mr. McClurry to support you from afar. Maybe he should be turned away, but the twinkle in his eye, his manic smile and the water leaking down his face, sticking in his thick mustache makes you feel a little guilty for even considering sending him home empty-handed.

Unsure of what to do, you decide to talk to Jeremy about it. You join him in unloading the tools and rations from the Jeep into the tent. While grabbing only the lighter bags, you ask him how he feels about McClurry sticking around.

"I don't really mind him." Jeremy answers, "Honestly, it would be nice to have someone a little more normal to talk to while you're busy drooling over stones," Not a hint of remorse or even hesitation in his voice, "Still, up to you. It's your dig bro."

You've always appreciated his honesty, but sometimes, like now, it stings a little to be so accurately criticized. Before you continue, you must make a choice.

Turn to page (12) if you wish to allow McClurry to accompany you into the ruins

Turn to page (11) if you wish to crush a grown man's dreams

You approach McClurry's tent, steeling your resolve before you break the news to him that he'll have to pack his bags and go. It was a hard decision to make, but ultimately you can't risk endangering your investor (you'll lead with that one you figure) and as an untrained individual he might contaminate evidence. You won't budge on that point no matter how broken he looks when you've finished speaking.

You decide you've had enough rehearsal, and you walk into the tent-Or you would've anyway, but McClurry steps out of his tent two cups of hot tea. The steam drifting lazily over the rim catches your eye.

"I heard an awful lot of pacing outside, so I thought I'd offer you a drink. Tea. Made it myself," McClurry holds out one of the cups just close enough for the scent of warm freshly brewed tea to clear your sinuses and wash away your resolve.

You really were going to tell him to leave, but the weather wasn't really right for that sorta thing and you didn't want to kill the vibe and your throat was kind of sore anyway and you wouldn't want to get him sick, so you decide that it would be best to leave it for tomorrow as you head back to your tent.

That night is filled with tossing and turning as you sweat through your blankets worrying about how to break the news to McClurry. The look in his big blue eyes as he fights back tears, the sad little twitch of his sweat-flecked mustache, and the hunch of his shoulders as he trods off.

A pillow smacks you in the face and you look over to see Jeremy sitting up, tired eyes staring you down, "Just talk about it already man, all that shuffling around is keeping me up."

You explain your dilemma to your brother, and he reminds you that he can't always bail you out when you're scared. If you want to kick out McClurry you've got to "nut up" and do it yourself. You retaliate with several complaints, but a few well-placed half-joking words of wisdom from Jeremy make your worries fade into the background. The rest of the night is spent reminiscing about that time Jeremy helped you fix the backyard after you and your friends dug for fossils without permission; and when you helped him pass pre-calc even though you were two grades below him; and how you wouldn't stop fighting over the family computer so your mom confiscated the power cord.

He's got this obnoxious laugh that fills a room, like a dying donkey with a sore throat, a strange mix between the end of a wheeze and the first half of a sneeze, but it never fails to make you smile.

As his breath returns to him Jeremy says, "Alright, get some sleep, dude. Big day tomorrow," then he throws the blanket over himself as he turns over.

Tomorrow has arrived. You've talked it over with Jeremy and decided that it's probably best to let well enough alone. He's not really hurting anyone, and Jeremy said he wouldn't kick him out for you so there's simply nothing to be done about it.

Turn to page (12)

It's difficult to tell what happened or what he had gained due to the lack of detail in the images. You suspect that this painting may predate some of the oldest hieroglyphics yet discovered. Its story is likely lost to the sands of time, but you ask Terry if he's heard of any local myths that resemble the one on the wall.

"There is a story that my host family claimed they had passed down through generations," Terry lowers his head a little and begins speaking dramatically, "A story of gods who lived beneath the Earth. Two brothers stumbled into the cave of the gods' and struck a deal with the beings at the bottom. They say that only the younger brother emerged and that he had gained the power to coax even the barren sands into supporting life. Naturally, the adventurer became a king, ruling over the land he had cultivated."

"What happened to the other guy?" Jeremy asks, kicking rocks loose from the wall. Terry continues, "Some say he fled in terror of the gods; others say that the king killed him so that he could keep this new land for himself. The king refused to explain the land's success and as he aged, the crops died, the people begged him to use his powers, but he refused, and his people starved. Before long, the king and his land were completely abandoned."

"Nobody would just kill their brother for some stupid land," says Jeremy a bit defensively,

"He probably just did something less cool, like taxes or something."

Terry shrugs, "Perhaps. It's only a story after all."

Jeremy is wrong of course, brothers kill each other for less all the time, but you're pretty sure he'd never let it go if you brought that up now, so you decide to keep it to yourself.

"Gentlemen," McClurry shouts, "I believe that whatever this door hides may be of more use than a story or a mural."

McClurry pushes a stone door open on the far side of the room. The door sits behind a lectern of sorts, this room must've been for congregation. Your flashlight illuminates the dark hallway, but it doesn't quite reach the end. You cautiously lead the way, light trained on the stones at your feet. The others' flashlights slowly scan the walls and ceiling. A doorway appears on your left. A few more steps and you stop just short of stepping on the stone trapdoor. Upon careful examination, the carvings on the door are very intricate, and the handle has eyes carved all along the outside.

Jeremy looks over your shoulder and says, "I'm sure that's a super interesting floor, but shouldn't we check out this room back here before we start staring at every random stone?" Despite his condescending tone, you have to agree that it would probably be smart to check out that side room first, but something about this door calls to you.

Turn to page (14) if you can't resist the pull of the mysteries beyond the trapdoor

Turn to page (13) if you'd like to investigate the side room before going deeper

Hearing the wisdom in your brother's words, you pry yourself away from the trapdoor. Jeremy is already poking around the room with his flashlight and his clumsy hands.

You shine your flashlight around the room to see a few stone beds carved into the walls in pairs of two, one on top of another. You suspect that this is where the priests slept, meaning that managing the temple was a full-time job.

"Seems like they only sleep in pairs here," says Jeremy, gesturing to the stone bunk beds carved into the wall, "Just like we did when we were younger. Remember how you insisted that you get to sleep on the top bunk, and mom said no because you're scared of heights, but you insisted. Then the first morning after we got the thing you pretended to be sick because you were too scared to climb down by yourself."

You feel your ears burn up and you shoot him a stop-talking glare, about halfway through, but he's having too much fun to listen. McClurry is cackling, and Terry is doing his best to respectfully stifle his laughter, but Jeremy's doubled over, and his booming laughter is practically forcing them to join in.

McClurry had a good impression of you, he respected you as a colleague, maybe even a friend, but now everyone is laughing at you. They all see you as an idiot and a coward because Jeremy just had to tell that story. A few weak attempts to salvage your honor stutter from your mouth, but your embarrassment seems to only make them laugh harder. Your stupid brother always does this, moving in and stealing your friends from you with his charm and height and muscles and smile and every terrible story about you that he can remember. What an asshole!

You don't have to stand here and take this, especially not from him. You are a professional dammit, and if it weren't for you he wouldn't even be here, but he's never said thank you. Not once.

You storm out of the room, shoving your stupid brother out of the way and heading straight for the trapdoor.

Jeremy takes one big breath to recover from his laughing fit and shouts after you, "Hey, come on. I'm just messing with you man, it was funny!"

Turn to page (14)

Ignoring Jeremy, you pull the rounded handle until the door comes out of place and slide it off to the side. Staring into the dark depths of the cavern, you feel a pang in your chest and a strange throbbing sensation in your head and you find yourself unable, or perhaps unwilling to look at anything else. Your flashlight clatters to the ground and you begin to descend this uneven, half-broken ladder. Your foot slips into the first rung and then the next as though you already knew where they'd be.

As you descend the ladder, you hear the distant calls of your companions, but they're getting muddy, "Wait! Where- you-g-in" until finally they fade into a dull clamor of syllables coming from indiscernible directions. Your feet find the stone and like a bird migrating south for the winter, your body knows where it's meant to be.

"HEY!" You hear a dull thud and feel the cool stone against the palms of your hands. You look around you to see your hat on the floor and Jeremy standing over you, pissed off.

"What the hell was that?" Jeremy says, his voice cutting through the fog in your mind. You confess that you aren't quite sure as Terry helps you to your feet.

"You could've walked into a pit of snakes or scorpions or some shit dude! Be careful! Jesus, man! Scared the shit outta me, stupid..." Jeremy walks off to continue his grumbling from further away.

"Young man, that was incredibly reckless," McClurry says, wrapping his arm around you while he returns your hat, "But I'm sure you knew that. So, tell me-" He yanks you closer "Why'd you do it?" He looks at you expectantly, almost excited.

You reiterate that you aren't sure what happened and ask Terry if the myth mentioned anything about mind control. Terry looks at you with a bewildered expression and cautiously shakes his head. McClurry picks at his hat. He seems disappointed by your answer. The fog is dissipating which you consider a good sign. Whatever is thrumming in your head has only increased in volume. You struggle to compare the feeling to anything you've ever felt before; it feels almost like a migraine, but with ulterior motives. The more you think about it, the less it makes sense.

You shake yourself out of the thought and take stock of your surroundings. You are in a large empty cavern with a single doorway. This may have been used for storage, or less public rituals perhaps, but you have no idea why it would need to be quite so large. Terry is looking around the room with his mouth agape, McClurry is keeping an eye on you, presumably to keep you from wandering off again, or maybe to ensure he gets to see it up close next time, and Jeremy is... gone.

You call out to him, but only your echo responds. You try to listen for his clunky hiking boots hitting the stone, but trying to focus only concentrates the pulsing in your head.

"I think I hear him over here," says Terry, taking off down a side passage.

Turn to page (15)

You come out of the passageway into another large nearly empty chamber. The floor, covered in etched symbols, rises in the middle to form a small hill and atop the hill rests a verdant throne, likely rusted bronze. In front of the throne, stands Jeremy, mumbling to himself. As you approach him, the pulsating in your head turns into a violent pounding, causing you to stumble. You barely feel McClurry catch you, and you can't hear him. Even as he stands in front of you, hands on your shoulders, you can't make out a word of what he's saying.

Zealous rage boils your skin. You shove McClurry out of the way. You must claim the throne. You march toward the throne. It's bursting with power, power that should be yours. You don't register Terry's hands on your chest as he tries to push you away. You just knock him over and continue towards the throne. Your Destiny. You don't notice Jeremy's fist until it connects with your jaw throwing you to the ground.

"This one is mine," he growls as he leans down at you, eyes clouded with red mist. Then he turns his back to you, and stomps toward the throne. Of course he wants to take this from you too. You have to stop him, but your head is spinning, and you can't get to your feet.

You watch as Jeremy sets himself on the throne and announces in a discordant voice, not quite his own, "I am KING."

The rust falls away in large flakes to reveal the shining bronze underneath. The throne, or perhaps Jeremy, begins to radiate a blinding light and the air in the room becomes thick. Your chest tightens and you begin gasping for air, but just as your vision begins fading to black, a blast of concussive force explodes out of the throne and you are thrown backwards, smacking headfirst into the wall.

A familiar hand on your shoulder shakes you awake. McClurry's afterimages converge into one central McClurry as you blink your vision into working order.

"Wake up, wake up," you hear his enthusiastic shouting faintly through the ringing in your ears, "We've made an incredible discovery! The throne, the king, the gods-it's all real!"

He pulls you to your feet and ensures that you're steady before moving over to the unconscious Terry to make the same declaration. You touch the back of your head-a jolt of pain shoots through you. Stumbling towards the blurry bronze throne, you try to will away the tunnel vision as you search for Jeremy. You try to shout his name, but the best you can cough out is a raspy whisper. You fall to your knees in front of the throne. Directly in front of you lay a large, heavy pair of hiking boots. You look up to see Jeremy's clothes worn by a mummified husk.

Tears stream down your face as you cling to your brother, trying with all your might to pry him free. He won't budge. Using everything you have left in your dust-filled lungs, you scream your big brother's name.

He does not answer.

Turn to page (16)

The world felt colorless as you left the cave. You moved like a zombie through the passageway and up the ladder and out the door. McClurry rambled excitedly at you the whole way, but your mind was still in that room. You couldn't pry Jeremy's pale, withered body from the throne, it seemed to sink deeper into the bronze every time you pulled. According to McClurry, the patterns on the floor had filled with a red, gaseous energy that moved through grooves on the floor like blood through veins.

You stepped outside to the cheers of workers and a lush oasis town, completely untouched by the sands of the Gobi that had nearly completely covered it mere days before. McClurry threw his hat into the air and whooped in celebration as the crowd surrounded you. Apparently, they had watched this place come to life. You pushed straight through them and beelined it to the Jeep, crawled into the backseat, curled up under your brother's big green coat, and cried.

After a while, Terry got in the car and sat beside you. He didn't say anything at first, just sat with you. When you finally run out of tears, you ask Terry what he saw in there hoping to hear something completely different from what's been burned into your mind. Like maybe it was one big nightmare, and Jeremy was just out of sight partying with McClurry and the others. He'd always loved parties.

"I saw your brother sit on the throne, shine bright as the sun, and then explode," he recounts, "If I had to guess, I'd say that's what the king lost, from the legend I mean." He trails off and then seems to debate with himself for a moment before saying, "I'm sure he's still in there somewhere."

You appreciate Terry's attempt to cheer you up, but you can't stop replaying the moment in your head. Every detail, the moment he walked away, the way he glared at you like you were nothing, the smug look on his face as he took the throne. You gently prod the bruise on your jaw, it still hurts. He always was stronger than you, but in all your life, he'd never hit you. Not once. What will you tell your parents? Jeremy got absorbed into an artifact and all you could think about was how he was taking it from you, how you deserved it. Knowing what you know now, maybe you did.

You'll have plenty of time to think about that later, for now, you throw yourself into your work. You write down everything you can remember about the oasis, the cave, the throne. You discuss the information with McClurry and Terry. Spending days on end just trying to make sense of it all. You publish a preliminary report on your findings and invite scholars from all over to study this hellish machine in the hopes of freeing your brother. You're not sure if you can get him back, but you at least want to bring him home.

You tell your parents that Jeremy is stuck in the cave, but you've been taking good care of him, and he'll be out any day now. You can't bear to tell them the whole truth. You feel guilty enough taking their son from them, you couldn't bear to take away their hope. Admittedly the lie is more for your benefit than theirs.

Turn to page (17)

You spend many years studying the throne and managing the dig site, now an oasis teeming with life, alongside McClurry, who is no longer the sole investor, but remains your most eccentric supporter. You've tried bullets, thermite, lasers, and diamond-tipped drills, but nothing can make any impression on the throne, or even your brother. He seems to have been rendered invulnerable and immovable. The ground beneath him has taken on similar properties.

It seems that the throne is only bronze in appearance, though without any way to collect samples, it is impossible to be sure. However, every year it rusts, just a little, starting from the top and crawling slowly towards the bottom. You can't prove it, but you suspect that the rusting is somehow tied to Jeremy's life force. Like a calendar, counting down his days.

In your free time, what little you have, you sit in the cave, talking to Jeremy. Keeping him updated on your progress and reassuring him that you haven't forgotten him. Though, you try not to bore him with too much of the "dorky" stuff. Sometimes you just sit down there, in that cavern, just you and him, and tell old stories in the hopes that it might shake something loose in Jeremy's dormant body. You're not sure if he can hear you, but when you lie there and listen you swear you can hear his obnoxious laugh. You know your big brother is still in there somewhere.

"Hang in there, Jer. Just a little longer."

He Cheated

by Lilo Fragala

*The night I found his treachery, I cried.
A part of me died inside.
As I looked at the screenshots,
I couldn't believe my eyes.
He was my knight in shining armor,
I loved him forever more.
Every time I came home, he would shake with fear of telling me.
Keeping it down, hidden.
I hate that I still love him.
I hate that I feel tied to him.
I hate, hate, hate.
But I still love.
And with time, I will forgive.
The men before him treated me different.
Like an object to use.
Like a trophy or a toy.
My father, long passed, would have killed him for his actions
But I am not my father.
The tears I cried burned into my skin,
Another scar on my body and mind.
Was I not good enough? Was I lost to time?
Shaking with anger and fear,
I told him I knew what he had done.
He cried, finally admitting.
He was scared just as much as I was.
The regret pulled him down,
The fear made him drown.
I will pull him back out,
And slowly with time,
He will be in my arms again.
The scars are still there in my heart, just like many others from the past.
But I am stronger than my wounds.
Thoughts of him linger,
Good and bad.
But I want to make more with him
No longer sad.
Wedding bells still ring in the back of my mind
I used to dream of the day that he would be mine.
Maybe that day will come, but not soon
For now I hum a new tune.*

Anti-Eudaimoniac, Circuitous Route

by Emma Gavazzi (Poetry Editor)

Is it not wildly absurd merely to be? I sit behind a truck in the township, doing God-knows-what (I'm sure God actually does) in terms of chipping trees lining a ribbon of pavement nonchalantly plopped upon land once free. The lightest snowfall litters my windshield, but it's the kind that lends itself to slight annoyance in lieu of awe. I stretch my feet out, pointing my toes like those of a cat—I hate driving long distances with shoes on. It's at this point that I realize that I've forgotten to pay attention to which songs have been playing, and now I must rush to play songs that I haven't gotten to hear in the car recently, or songs that I have heard but haven't been able to listen to as truly as I could have been due to the company of others and the barely distinguishable anxiety that accompanies the company of those others. I try to remember one single instance in my life, even counting my childhood, in which I've felt content, and then I'm disgruntled with myself because why haven't I let myself feel content when I should have? Then I reason that there is, in fact, always something.

Speculation on A Restless Village

by Emma Gavazzi (Poetry Editor)

*a pause in regularly scheduled programming,
preoccupied with envying the flow of droplets
cascading down an imitation porcelain shower wall;
because they have direction,
they move with purpose
and rapidly.
et in arcadia ego,
utters the lingering trepidation of potential.
the problem is that I have my whole life ahead of me;
it isn't that I cannot,
simply no room in the inn
which is my agenda,
in which to do a thing.
I'm so spent on the arbitrary nature
of a pithy life;
my neighbors languish the weeks away
with manifest destiny of friday beers.
and as we lay dying,
will our attendants care to consider
how we lived?
petrified of being perceived,
come to realize that most of humanity
know not and think not of me.
what really is the allure
of accolades,
without someone to hold them
while you sleep?
serenity when?,
when omniscience will never be mine.
what do I know?
I but think
and tremble
and cherish;
justified true beliefs,
likely by accident,
upon which I operate,
as if real.
interminable scarcity of time,*

*within which to do as I please. but then again,
 what would I do,
 if time were mine?
 what would I want to do?
 I haven't had time to think about it.
 some hearts tender by nature,
 others tenderized.
 pattern of attachment
 correlates to
 the waning of the moon.
 if Mary Magdalene was a whore,
 what does that make me?
 a woman not born
 but become,
 a sinister culprit,
 a scholarly fiend.
 the ephemeral nature of all that we are
 and all which is created by human hands;
 individual works negligible,
 but futile,
 how could they be?
 when the classification
 of lone villager
 is an oxymoron.
 brother sun acutely attuned
 to no one
 nor to the ways of the world;
 crinkles cemented by my mother's eyes,
 ravines carved on either side
 of my father's nose to his mouth,
 resulting from
 the blessing of joviality;
 to inherit would be a gift.
 naught but time,
 if I'd only make it;
 condemned to a life
 littered with arrival fallacy.
 all systems clear
 and solution cogent
 but instinctively discarded:
 become profoundly content.*

Photos by Ethan Hawksley





Photos by Rylie Heffernan (Photography Editor)



3 Poems

by Brooke Johnpier (Fiction Editor)

Nicotine

*I took three quick puffs
The nicotine hit my lungs
I then overdosed*

1972

*A Plymouth Satellite
Blue in color, strong and fierce
Was brought back to life*

Emotional Eating

*Eating spicy ramen
The flavors hit my tastebuds
And cause me to smile*

A PIT CREW SHORT STORY

#411 – A NEW FAMILY MEMBER

by Brooke Johnpier (Fiction Editor)

James:

I poked my head out from the engine bay and choked in a huge breath. The fresh air cleared out some of the diesel fumes that had built up in my lungs.

“How’s it lookin’?”

I sighed and looked down at my best friend.

“Not good,” I said. “A rod broke through the third cylinder head. Until we can get the parts, we ain’t moving.”

Jack shook his head, pulled out a Newport 100, lit it up, and swore. I grimaced and looked back down at the engine that was temporarily out of commission. Bridget was still down in the bay getting the parts numbers for us and looking for potential solutions, but it was no use. The 2017 International Lonestar was stuck.

I jumped down after I helped Bridget out of the bay and pulled out my phone. I looked up the phone number for the nearest truck parts store and called them. But after I gave them the parts numbers needed to get the Cummins going again, it came to my attention that no store in the state of Georgia carried those specific parts. After I thanked them, I hung up and walked over to Jack and Bridget.

“Bad news,” I said. “No-one’s got the parts.”

“What do you mean no-one has the parts?” Jack snapped.

“No truck parts store in this here state we’re stranded in carries these parts. Or, at least, that’s what John at Georgia Truck Parts said.”

“Well, that’s a problem,” Bridget said. “Especially because we have to get to Atlanta by Wednesday.”

“Yeah.”

I looked up and saw Jack staring off into the distance. That could only mean one thing.

“What are you thinking?”

Jack didn’t answer me and instead walked to the side door of the trailer, opened it, and went inside. I looked at Bridget and was just about to ask her what she thought he was doing when the tailgate of the trailer began to lower. Then, an engine was started. And as soon as the tailgate hit the ground, Jack backed his truck out. He hopped out of his truck and ran over to us.

“Keller, Diablo, you two drive around Georgia and see if you see any truck yards or residential areas that have a lot of vehicle parts in the yard. James, Bridget, come with me. We’re going into Alabama.” (In case you didn’t know, Keller and Diablo are two of our other friends that were with us at this time.)

“Alabama?” I sputtered. “What do you mean Alabama?”

But before my question could be answered Bridget had dragged me to Jack’s truck and we were off.

Bridget:

Never in a million years did I think that I would be heading to Alabama. But then again, I never thought that I would be in a world-renowned cover band that was going to be performing at State Farm Arena, either. But here we were.

Shockingly enough, Alabama wasn't too far from where we had broken down in Georgia. In fact, it was only three hours away. And it seemed that luck was on our side as well, because the area that we drove into was pretty bad. And by bad, I mean poor. And by poor, I mean that there was enough junk in a single yard to satisfy a junkyard crusher for a while.

Jack had been driving in the "Heart of Dixie" for about 45 minutes when all of a sudden, he veered off to the left.

"Jesus Christ!" James yelled. "What are you doing?"

"Going down this road, what do you think I'm doing?" Jack said nonchalantly.

James groaned and looked out the window. I looked out the windshield and immediately noticed that there was something up ahead in our path.

"Hey," I said as I pulled Jack's arm. "Slow down. Something's in the road."
"I see it."

Jack downshifted and slowed the truck down until it was at a complete stop; in front of us was a man.

"Bro, why is this dude just standing in the middle of the road?" James asked.

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe he doesn't-"

I trailed off. The man in the road and I had locked eyes and for some reason I could not look away. For some reason something was coming over me. It was almost as though I knew this man that I had never seen before, ever, in my life.

I wondered what Jack would think of this and turned to ask him when I noticed that he was outside of the truck, in the road, and talking to the man. After a brief conversation, Jack came back to the truck with a big smile on his face.

"What are you smiling at?" I asked.

"I believe this guy has the parts we need," Jack said. "I told him our situation and he said he has a parts pile in his backyard. Can't hurt to look, right?"

Before James or I could interject, Jack had already driven into the man's driveway and was following him into the backyard.

Jack:

As soon as the guy opened his mouth, I knew something was off. And normally, I would've driven right on by. But for some reason, he had a connection with my girlfriend, and I couldn't allow that to progress. Call it jealousy or over-protection, but I love Bridget more than anything; I couldn't allow anything to come between us. So, I had to play the little game with this guy, get the parts to get us back on the road, and get Bridget the hell away from here. And to make that plan a reality I wasted no time in putting it into action.

Within five minutes, all four of us were digging through the pile of parts despite both Bridget's and James's protests. On a side note, though, James and Colton, the infamous guy, seemed to be getting along really well. They were carrying on about '80s cars like it was nobody's business and cracking insanely cringe jokes. But that didn't matter because Bridget was right next to me...

"Hey," Colton said. "I'm Colton. I don't think we got to meet earlier."

He extended a hand to Bridget who took it a little bit too hasty for my taste.

"No, we didn't," she said. "I'm Bridget, by the way. It's nice to meet you."

Colton had a stupid smirk on his face that I wanted to smack off of him, but so did Bridget. And no matter how I felt about this Southerner, I couldn't get mad at the love of my life. So when Colton and Bridget walked off together to go look at his 1968 Pontiac Executive Safari, I lit a cigarette to ease my stress.

As I took a 20-second-long puff, I looked across the pile to see James's face beet red and his hand over his mouth.

"What?" I snapped.

"Oh nothing," he said in-between wheezes.

I crossed my arms, raised my eyebrow, and glared at him. "Bullshit, Dell."

"Alright, alright. I find it extremely funny that Colton likes Bridget. That's all."

"Well, I don't. In fact, it pisses me off."

I took another drag off my Newport and stared at Bridget and Colton across the yard. They seemed to be having a good time, but I just couldn't shake the feeling that Mr. Harris had a trick up his sleeve. Just as I was about to mention my suspicions to James, Bridget came bounding across the yard with Colton in tow and holding his hand. I was so shocked I didn't even feel the alternator I dropped on my left foot.

"Jack! Jack!" Bridget exclaimed as she ran towards us. "Colton found the parts!"

"Really?" James asked. "Wow, that's great."

"Yeah," Bridget said as she came to a stop next to me. "Not only did he find the parts, but we were talking, and he said that he's really interested in coming to see the band this weekend and becoming friends with us!"

"Hey, I'm down for that," James said.

Everyone looked at me. I opened my mouth and immediately shut it because what I really wanted to say couldn't be said.

"Sure," I said as I plastered a huge, fake grin on my face. "That would be awesome."

"Yay!"

Bridget jumped up and down with Colton as she held his hands. James and I locked eyes and if looks could kill he would've dropped dead.

James:

Driving back to the truck was most certainly an experience. Jack didn't utter a single peep and Bridget, Colton, and I bonded like crazy. Turns out that he, too, didn't have the best life growing up, and that he also struggles with anxiety. And, he also has autism, which Bridget can relate to. It was like he was a long-

lost family member that we had just found.

After the three-hour and forty-five-minute drive back to the truck, Bridget, Colton, and I climbed up into the bay and fixed the engine in record time. While we did that, Jack, Keller, and Diablo went to get pizza and wings for us to eat in the hauler afterward because, by the time we got done, it was close to midnight. But before we knew it, we had completed the job, Jack started the Lonestar up, and all of us jumped up and down in relief.

“Come on,” Jack said. “Let’s go eat!”

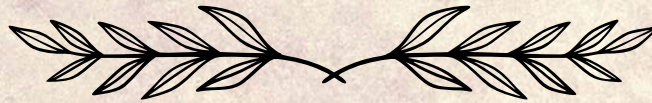
Everyone followed Jack into the trailer to get food...besides Bridget and Colton.

“Hey,” Keller said. “Where’s Bridget and the new guy?”

I looked around. “I have no idea.”

“Shit,” Jack cursed.

He ran to the window, looked outside, screamed the f-bomb, and ran out the door in a matter of ten seconds. I looked at Keller and Diablo and they just shrugged their shoulders. I shrugged and went to eavesdrop on the conversation.



“Look, I have no idea what you’re getting at-”

“Yes, you do. You’re trying to steal my girl away from me, and I don’t really appreciate that.”

Jack was standing next to Bridget with his arm around her and pointing his finger at Colton’s chest.

“Stop it,” Bridget said. “First of all, Jack, there is absolutely nothing between Colton and me. We are just friends. Secondly, Colton, I don’t believe for a second you have feelings for me, but if you did, I am happily taken. Is that clear? Does everyone understand?”

“Yes, very much so,” Colton said.

Jack just “hmmmmmmph’ed,” turned on his heel, and saw me standing there in the shadows.

“JAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEESSSSSSSSSS!”

I squeaked and ran into the trailer as Jack chased after me to Bridget and Colton laughing hysterically.

Prohibition

by Brooke Johnpier (Fiction Editor)

The room was filled with a layer of smoke. Each man at the bar had a cigarette in his hand and a beer in front of them. As the door opened and the draft came in rattling the photos on the back wall, every man turned around and stared at the newcomer.

The newcomer slowly walked into the bar area and looked around. To the left was a billiards table and to the right was a dining room. After scanning the area for a minute or two, the newcomer walked to the left and then forward, plopping down in between two regular customers.

The bartender came over washing a glass.

"What can I get ya?" he asked.

"Some turpentine," the newcomer said.

The entire bar went silent and everyone looked at each other. The man at the table closest to the door jumped up and slammed it shut, and then he locked it. He went to the dining room doors and shut them too. He then stood in front of the back alleyway between the bar room and the dining room with his arms crossed. He looked around himself and then at the bartender. He nodded and did a little grunt. The bartender looked at the newcomer.

"You a cop or sumthin'?"

"No sir," the newcomer said. "I just like me some turpentine is all. Ya know, since they outlawed the stuff a few years ago, it's hard to find the good stuff."

The bartender raised his eyebrow.

"Why am I supposed to believe that?" the bartender said. "You can get turpentine pretty much anywhere these days. Especially in the speak-easy's."

The newcomer laughed.

"You think I haven't tried them yet?" asked the newcomer. "They won't serve me because

of who I am."

The bartender looked down the bar and saw what the newcomer was looking for on the lower shelf that ran the length of the bar. The bartender looked the newcomer up and down.

"Ya promise ya ain't no cop?"

"Swear on my momma's grave."

The bartender reached down and grabbed a clear bottle. He then grabbed a glass. He opened the clear bottle and poured the illegal liquid into the glass. He then handed it to the newcomer. As everyone watched, the newcomer took a drink.

"Ahhhhhhhh," the newcomer sighed. "That's some good stuff right there. Thank ya kindly, sir."

The newcomer downed the drink in two more gulps, threw some money on the bar, and left. As everyone stared after the newcomer confused about what it was all about, the glass had a lone droplet of liquid beginning to fall. It was forming in the middle of the red lipstick imprint left on the glass's rim.

Commandments

by Mary Quinn McNaughton

*I've been the personality hire at every job I've ever had
I believe in doing things because I love to
No elaboration
Ever.*

*I've loved people in two minutes and mourned their presence
However brief
for years,*

*I am nothing if not present
A series of questions and a coffee in hand.*

Excerpt from American Teenager

by Mary Quinn McNaughton

She was unbeatable, perfection embodied. Her ribs continued to vibrate, beating unnaturally with the music, and her vision began to blur, making a kaleidoscope of the LED lights. She was in the middle of it all, her hips swaying. She could feel the pressure of the other people's bodies huddled together, pressed far too close to one another. Bea looked stunning and strong, at least she thought she did, but there was a fragility about her tonight, like a sparkly tapered candle just before it's blown out. She felt someone's hands slide around her waist, moving from her waist to her upper thighs, inadvertently lifting her miniskirt a little. She assumed it wasn't Noah, but a meaningless exchange like this never killed anyone. She felt euphoric.

Untitled Poem

by Mary Quinn McNaughton

I knew I was never going to make it as soon as I put my first words on the page

Always with a Bic pen

Smooth and black and perfect

Until scribbles marred unused loose leaf

Or on a Word document

Times New Roman, 12 point

I knew I was not a poet from the second I had a thought that was too beautiful to keep contained

I am not sensitive

I am loud and boisterous and obnoxious and happy

Not sad and small and boring and wistful

*I am minute four of the sun exploding-
chaos just out of view*

I am bright in dark places, corners

Not pure and white and on stage, on display

*I knew my future would never be
poetic*

I don't have the rhythm to slam

*Just rhythm to dance and laugh
and loudly at that*

Not quiet

Contained

Not like excellence with a Rubbermaid top snapped and locked on

Free

Like river water in a mason jar

No top, wholly alive.

Do You Know?

by Molly Miller

*Do you know where to go
When you're lost at the party
With no one you know?*

*Do you know where to go
When you look into the crowd
Knowing there will be no one you know?*

*Do you know where to go
When you're sitting alone at the movies
And hope the other people don't know?*

*Do you know where to go
When your tears run down your cheeks
But you can't let anyone know?*

*Do you know where to go
When your family member is sick
And doesn't want you to know?*

*Do you know what you already know?
How this whole thing is going to go*

Dr. Glass's Despair

by Rose Pfeiffer (Fiction Editor)

"Elvira, my dear, you're usually quite curious about what I'm working on. Something the matter?"
No answer. Silence, if not for the steady ticking of clockwork machines, and the beating of a single heart.

"Elvira?" I turn from my desk to face her. She stands idle at the edge of my workshop, eyes closed.

Tick, tick, tick...

The longer I look the more lifeless she seems.

Tick, tick, tick.

Like the moments of a life racing by. The thought lingers and all at once her face seems to change—blood dripping from slashes on her face and body, dyeing parts of her outfit red. I can't look. I tear my gaze away and hold my head in my hands. It's in my head. It's all in my head—how could this be? Why wasn't it me—? No—!

Tick, tick, tick.... The usually comforting sound starts to boom in my ears.

Images flood in like the dam of the city reservoir broke. But that couldn't break, I was the one who designed it—!

"Don't you remember the funeral, Byron? The flowers were beautiful...you gazed at them, wistful daze in your eyes and said they reminded you of the fields you'd roamed as a boy."

I took him there once when we were young lads. He'd seldom left the city until that day.

"We laughed and we cried, grasping onto the memories gone by. You'd never believed in any god above the stars, but that day there was a prayer in your eyes."

I laughed and rolled my eyes. "You should've been a poet, Phineas."

I wouldn't have lasted, I'm afraid."

Elvira was never that tall, standing at the edge of the workshop. Yes— she was only fourteen...

As a girl, she would sit on my knee as I worked. She'd laugh at the oil smudged on my face and wipe it off.

As she got older, we'd practice dancing. She'd do ballet and try to teach me, then we'd laugh as we both lost balance and fell.

But those days are no more. No more memories, strolls, picnics, or trips outside the city.

I found her lying there. She weakly called for me, "Dad—"

I told her not to speak, to save her strength and I cried out for someone to help. She hadn't come back from her walk. Phineas and I went looking. I should never have let her go on her own—I'd been busy working. I never thought— A shadow of a man swept out of view. Maybe I should've gone after him—but something within me couldn't bear to.

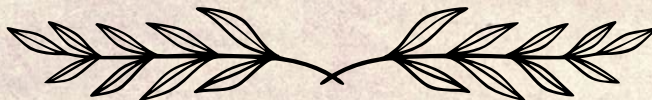
Phineas caught up to us and called for his contacts. That day I felt lucky to be close friends with Diridrift's top investigator. He told me to stay and tend to her wounds. He knew I wouldn't leave her. I told him what I saw of the man and he took off after him. Help arrived and—and—that's when things got cloudy in my mind.

What stands before me is a state of living dead. *But... what do I do now...?*

Phineas' words echo in my thoughts, something he'd tried to say so many times: "Let her go, Byron." I should make a music box to honor the memory. Both she and her mother adored it when I'd such simple yet beautiful things. Those past trinkets, simple yet full of wonder. Would it do much to fill the emptiness that now seeps back into my heart? No...I'm afraid not. I know this shadow will seep into my

heart at random...one day I'll be sitting and suddenly the silence of my home or workshop will overcome me. Then I will start missing. I've walked this path before, yet somehow it still hurts. You'd think one would get used to the black wings of Death, the cold, pale hand, like the cool metal I work with. Yet...you don't. I remember better now. Not a drop of color on a once lively face.

I should find out more about the murderer. I cannot say I know whether or not Phineas and his men have caught him. I don't want to give him the benefit of my surrender just yet. I have theories, I have notes, and methods. Yes, perhaps this clockwork life that stands at the edge of my workshop could be of better use.



I sit in my office, going through files upon files—how does this killer keep evading us? We all still very much miss young Elvira Glass...Well—in truth I should speak for myself. I'm afraid my opinion is quite biased. She... she was my goddaughter after all. As for Byron...how I've tried. I dislike seeing him this way...A brilliant, beautiful mind burdened and broken by all of this. I fear I'm starting to lose hope in getting through to him. I know, there are much more dire issues at hand. Unfortunately, I'm quite fond of him— and of course, what was once the Glass family. I've known Byron since we were young—not quite boys but not yet men. His input would be useful in this case, I admit. But alas...perhaps I will give him one more chance. Until then, I ought to do my job.

What am I missing? Are the connections I've made so far not even there? Victims all young girls, all neatly cut like a surgeon or maybe even a barber.

Thud, thud.

A sudden knock on my door disrupts my thoughts.

"Hm? Who is it?"

"Otch, Phineas, who do you suppose it is?" A familiar voice calls, and frankly, the last one I expected—the doctor himself. I feel myself grow hot with confusion. The last time I'd spoken to him, he was far from being in his right mind.

"Byron..?" I muse under my breath. I am reminded of how foul he acted last time and find myself replying: "A paying client perhaps?"

I hear him scoff. "And I thought I was the funny one. Would you be so kind as to open the door for me? My hands are quite full."

What on Earth is that outrageous man up to? I stand and head to open the door for him.

Dr. Glass is standing there with a satchel bag, two rolled-up parchments poking out visibly, and he's carrying others in his arms. "Byron—what on earth—?" He almost drops some of them. I shake my head and take a few out of his arms. It reveals this wild, untamed look in his eyes. I don't think I've seen that look since— well since he flew us over the city walls when he'd fixed the glider he crashed in my front lawn...back when we were younger and I'd only just met him. He...used to be quite the wild one. It was kind of enjoyable—But the city bids us all to conform, it's not like the outside towns. We have customs—rings of class, and each ring must act a certain way.

Though, his gaze hardens to a resolved seriousness. He doesn't even take off the long black overcoat he's wearing—and is still wearing the odd little glasses he uses when he's working, the ones with multiple lenses he pulls down depending on what he's working on. "Set those down for now, I have something to discuss with you. Come, we're going to the cemetery."

I find myself startled by his abrupt appearance. "The cemetery? Byron— what on earth are you on about?"

"Grab your coat, Phineas, if we hurry, we can catch the next strider there. Alva, come, may I have the flowers?"

Unsure what else to do, I hastily turn to grab my overcoat. So many questions try to reach the surface but I stifle them. Suddenly I hear a *clank clank* clunking... when I turn, overcoat in hand I find myself facing Byron holding a bouquet of flowers—far out of place against the— automaton now beside him. It's the one he called Elvira— but she's different now. The pale covering on her hands had been stripped away to reveal the intricate bronze workings beneath, she was no longer dressed like a ballerina, but in common clothing. Dread settles in. "You're still on that..?" I can't help myself from saying, as I fix my gaze on the flowers instead.

"No. She is my assistant, called Alva now. I can explain later, come, come," he waves his free hand. Didn't even give me a chance to get my top hat, because he went as far as taking me by the arm. Ugh, how improper. I could easily break his grip, but I don't know what that machine would do. So, I simply rolled my eyes and let him.

But I can piece things together.

The cemetery.

He redid the automation.

He came to me.

He is acting more wild.

He must know.

Well, he always knew what really happened, but he seems to have stopped denying it. Perhaps his dragging me along is an attempt to find comfort. It's not easy to understand Dr. Byron Glass. He's a figure that looms large above Diridrift. The very walker we're trying to catch is yet another one of his inventions. He releases my arm once we get out to the street. A walker is starting to leave, but he shoves the flowers in my hands and waves down the driver of the walker with both of his arms. I have to try not to be appalled by his behavior.... But it also reminds me of when we were young. He was a wild, untamed, improper young man from a fishing village. I suppose I can understand why he's acting this way then. Dealing with those losses and the reality of it all must be straining for him.

The things have four mechanical legs and a platform that can fit four passengers and a driver comfortably, a quick and efficient way to travel.

The driver realizes who is hailing him, does a double take, and immediately stops the walker. He'd started heading to his next destination.

"D-Dr. Glass—" he blurts. "My apologies, come, I will take you where you need to go, sir—"

"Yes, yes. Good, thank you, young man." Byron holds out his hand to take the flowers back. I roll my

eyes at him and give him back the flowers. I almost forgot how ridiculous he can be.

“Thank you, Phineas, for holding them for a moment.”

At least he thanked me. “Yes, of course.”

The walker hisses with steam and lowers to the ground. “All aboard, gentlemen,” the driver dips his head and some steps emerge to make the climb easier.

“After you,” Byron motions for me to climb on first.

“Thank you,” I offer a smile and climb onto it. Byron follows and helps Alva on.

The driver notices her and tips his hat. “Ah, welcome aboard miss.” He smiles at her. Alva says nothing and only dips her head. I watch as Byron gives the young man what could be described as a deadly glare, as though he’d been flirting with Byron’s actual child. I suppose it’s similar—he did create the automaton, making it like his daughter anyway. A daughter of his mind perhaps. The young man’s expression turns to a nervous grimace at his gaze. I can’t help but be a bit amused by that. “We’re heading to the cemetery,” Byron says.

The driver gives a nod. “Alright then.” The walker rises back to its legs and starts to move.

Byron turns to me and waves for me to stand closer. Confused, I do so. The doctor lowers his voice. “Did you catch him yet?” He leans close.

“Who do you mean, Byron?” I say, though I’m afraid I already know the answer. Perhaps I’m just trying to put off the...inevitable truth. I speak quietly too.

“The man who murdered my daughter. Did you find him?” He keeps his voice low so only I hear above the hissing, clicking and clanging of machines.

My theory was right. He’s stopped deluding himself. Thank heavens.

“So, did you?” he repeats, I assume in my reluctance to immediately answer. There’s something in his eyes that says he’s already come to the conclusion himself. A cold, despair brought persistence.

“I’m afraid not...” I admit, unable to look him in the eye as I deliver this news. It weighs heavily on my consciousness.

His expression drops to something blank. “Just as I feared.” He moves to try and look me in the eye now. I’m hesitant. “That’s why I’m going to help.”

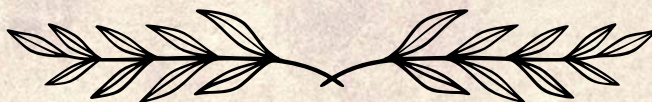
Oh. “Are you sure?” I met his gaze.

“Yes, I think I can be quite helpful. Alva too. She’s been modified for the purpose of finding this murderer.”

I see— that’s why he kept the machine. “Very well then. We shall work on it together.”

A hint of a smile appears on his face. “Good.”

I haven’t seen him give even a hint of a smile in a long time.



The cemetery was like a breath of fresh air among the bustling city. I close my eyes and take a deep breath. There’s this silence in the air... as though every sound ceased, except for our breaths and the ticking of Alva’s clockwork heart. I open them once again. My airships float above us, busying themselves with the ebb and flow of passengers.

“Come on then.” I feel the words faint in my throat...but I know the words escape because once I start to walk, Phineas follows. As we walk to find the graves, my mind seems to numb. I search for those racing thoughts like steam-pushing gears—but it’s just... quiet.

Hush, huuush, murmurs the wind. Like a lullaby. I reach into my satchel bag, brushing the cool metal of the unfinished music box. I gathered some minor materials for it before I went to visit Phineas.

Crunch,...

Crunch...

Footsteps on the gravel path.

Stones...the names are incomplete, missing one of them. I feel a coldness as my eyes settle on the stones. But then there’s a touch of warmth on my shoulder. Phineas had carefully touched my shoulder for an instant. My balance feels... off. My own fault for those restless nights spent working...but that’s not important now.

Her mother passed away when she was young. I'd tried so hard to do it on my own. I was too proud to ask for help...

Maybe I still am. Even when there were people... I catch Phineas looking at me, that analytical look on his face. Willing to offer some help.

I'd been so caught up in— whatever I'd been working on, arrogant, ignorant. Something null and void now—I hadn't made sure she was going with a friend or anything—I just let her take a walk? Maybe growing up outside of the city made me naive in that way-but there they lay, my name like a curse upon them.

I feel the exhaustion seeping into my limbs, was it just the exhaustion?

My legs feel weak and I find myself dropping to kneel beside the graves. Seeming somehow confused, Alva mirrors the motion. I can't help but be a bit amused, a faint laugh in my throat. I lay down the flowers. Alva stands and takes a few steps away. I feel my heartbeat quicken for an instant, perhaps dreading if she wandered off too far. Phineas sits down beside me, I see his gaze snap to follow Alva too, I suppose we feel the same way. We watch each metallic step.

She crouches down by the side of the path and picks a wildflower. The gears in her knees whirl as she stands back up and walks over. Alva lays the wildflower between the stones, mirroring me. I can't help but smile faintly. I think Phineas does too. We sit in silence for a moment. I watch the airships drift by. *Oh, how unsightly.* I catch the silhouette of Mr. Jenkins's odd balloon bike. I wince at it before standing. It takes a second to get up, same goes for Phineas. Alva follows. Phineas straightens his overcoat.

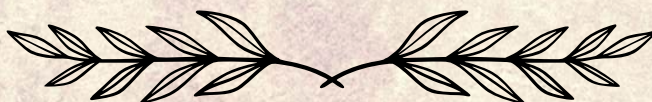
“Shall we reconvene tomorrow to discuss our plan?”

“Yes, of course, the sooner we catch that murderer the better. You can look over the pages I left on your desk.”

Phineas does not seem quite thrilled by that idea. It makes me smirk at him a little and he rolls his eyes, “Yes, of course.”

“Good,” I say. “We'll meet in my workshop.”

Phineas nods. “Very well then.”



(Next Day)

Many beautiful creations decorate Byron's workshop. There are brass faces, beautifully crafted. A model of the city's airships hangs from the ceiling. A different model perches on a table. I remember the days I spent with Byron as he designed them. I know this model, it was a scale test. Maybe it'll bring some wonder back to Byron... I pick up the model and crank a wind-up key. It starts to fly around.

Chug chug chug...

I watch with a smile on my face and catch as Byron's gaze shifts from his project for an instant. But then he looks away. Spinning machines of brass, figurines, and various machines decorate the workshop, all moving to the ticking of clockwork,

Another trinket clunk clunk clunks away.

Tch tch tch tch,

And that is.... It's a different device. A tiny version of a machine flies across a city skyline. It has a sail, shaped like wings. A tail with a steering fin, a plank with a foothold, motors, and pulleys. A lone figure rides it, gliding.

Chk, chk,

It moves along a track, going diagonally downwards, and then it flips behind a cityscape cutout. I painted that one. When I was young, I thought of myself as a bit of an artist... It doesn't look too bad. It emerges from the other side. It climbs up the track again, only this time, there's a second figure clinging on to the first. This one clunks diagonally upwards. I adored when he made these transforming scenes...

I can't help but chuckle at the second figure. That was me, he fixed his odd little flying machine after it crashed in my yard— and dragged me along for the test flight. That was when I first met him. I didn't have a clue what I'd gotten myself into back then.



View from my window



Mountain Night



Starlit Carnival (digital)

Space of mind



The Music Box (digital)



Departing light



Just beyond the trail

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