



ibid.

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"The decline of literature indicates the decline of a nation"

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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Love and the Slave

“Nigger” is the lash of the whip across the back
Flesh is torn across those deemed black
Blood burns and boils in the sun
This life you'd give to kill just one
Love is dead

Amongst disease and death the word brought no attention
But put it with pain and damnation
Simple word becomes the greatest discrimination
Strikes to the heart of every generation
Man cannot make cure for his own poison
But love is immune
Brothers and sisters became part of a family
Music and dance gave individuality
Pleasure overcame pain so great
Joy does not remember hate
Love was created and love survived
Love between people joined the divide

Jeremy



Jw

Today I went to a school I guess was called St. John's-Ravenscourt, and there were so many houses and automobiles around I could barely find my way there. But by-and-by I found the entrance to the school and I swear, the second I walked into the school everyone heads came and looked at me like I was some sort of ghost. And I can already tell you I had enough of that when I ran away from Pa. Well, when everyone was lookin' at me like that I walked up to the nearest Missus and I say to her: "Excuse me ma'am, can you tell me where I am?". The Missus looks at me funny and says: "You're at SJR, do you go here?". Blamed if I knew what that meant so I just kept on a-walkin'. And I walked for a while and I could only see kids. There was maybe 1 adult every 20 kids I saw. So I walks up to one of the kids and I ask him, "Hey you, what type of place is this?" The boy says "Seriously? This is a school" Now I didn't know why everyone was talking so proper but then i realized. This was a school and these kids must be students which were learnin here. The boy then asks where I was from and I tells him that it was none of his business, and then he laughs and says I talk funny. And I tell you, it was mighty queer to see all these students dressing up for school, I woulda thought they were going to church. All of a sudden this loud buzz sounds and I yell in surprise. I looked around embarrassed and I saw all these students coming out of rooms and walking straight at me! I tell you I was in my right mind to run out there mighty quick. But everyone walked right past me into this big room and started to get food. Now normally I wasn't hungry but because of all that walking I did before I got here, I got pretty hungry so I went inside to get food but this same Missus from before stopped me a says to me I can't eat there. So I turned around and went home.

Victor

There he was. Dante looked at a man who others viewed with reverence and admiration and saw only a fat, short, ugly looking man, balding and trying to cover it, feebly wiping a sniffing, droopy nose. And Dante was forced to kneel before him, barely able to hide his contempt for the man. “Archpriest.”

“...Dante. I haven’t much time. What do you want?”

“I require permission to-”

“Permission declined.”

“-leave Dominion. Now this is important, Archpriest.”

“And my answer is still no. Doubly no. What could be so important that you would... shirk your duties, hm? To leave behind the cathedral to which you belong?”

“Something is going to happen. Something is wrong, and it’s fated that this will end in the worst way possible. And you’d be lying if you said that it was in the best interest of the church... The best interest of humanity, even, to keep me here.”

Oliveri snuffled, scratching his considerable balding patch. “Dante... What is society without order?”

“I asked you a question first.”

“And I answered it. What is a society without order?”

“Maybe slightly better than the chains you have us wrapped in here.”

“Dante.” The Archpriest rose to his full height, which wasn’t very great. But there was a change in him man. He had shifted from the miserable curmudgeon that Dante had known his whole life to a man with a voice, a man with power. For only the first time, Dante could vaguely understand how others could respect him. “I do not do what I do and say what I say to be cruel, not to be unjust, not because I am a pathetic miser with nothing better to do. You are a lone man without even a family and children to look after. I have a community and a religion to look after. You have yourself. Perhaps you should start placing the good of the many ahead of the good of just you.”

“I’m unconvinced. You have no idea what I mean. You haven’t even heard me out.”

“Then please, pray tell, explain what could be so important.”

“Black smoke. It’s a sign, I’m sure of it. And a masked face. Something is going on. It concerns everyone, and it won’t improve unless someone does something about it. And because you obviously don’t care...”

“Black smoke? Perhaps, since your studies have been going so... swimmingly, you could tell me what exactly that means?”

Dante faltered slightly, and the Archpriest seized on that chance. “I thought as much.”

“Condemnation to this whole damn church! Start listening to me, Oliveri, and start realizing that I’m an adult! Not the child that you took in years ago!”

The short man narrowed his eyes and inhaled through his teeth. “Oliveri? Ah, are we on a first name basis, now? Do you forget that I am still your superior? Or perhaps you would prefer this conversation to become a little more... candid? Maybe, just for a start, you’d like to tell me what you’ve been doing down by those cliffs every day?”

Dante felt his knees weaken. “How do you-”

“Or maybe you’d like to discuss those three years that you left the church? How you stormed out an impetuous adolescent, and came back so markedly... changed, hm? Perhaps you’d like to divulge some of what went on during that time?”

“Stop changing the subject!” Dante roared and rose to his feet. He was angry, and it now went far beyond some silly permission to travel the skies. Oliveri had made this personal. “This means something, something to me, something to you, something to everyone on this whole gods-defiled rock! Maybe more important than anything you’ve ever done, and ever will do! It’s time you took a stand for something, instead of preaching to the masses out of greed and a debased need to hold the power. So tell me, Oliveri, permission to leave Dominion or no?”

Oliveri’s voice changed very suddenly. The insults were gone, the pride had gone, the anger had gone. It was just... very hollow. “Permission denied. I know about fate, Dante. As much as you do. More. Fate led us both to this moment, and it’s been telling us different things. I already believe in something. It’s the good of all of us. I’m going to keep believing in that.”

87634218.

Dante had almost forgotten about the numbers. They had disappeared from his mind. But now they pulsed in his consciousness, pulsed with a vengeance. They swirled around, thumped in his brain, took control of his mind. 87634218. 87634218. 87634218. They were angrier now. 876342188763421887634218876342188763421887634218876342188763-

“NO!” Dante shouted. “Stop!” For a brief moment, Oliveri and the hall of prayer had disappeared. It was only him and the numbers. Now they were fading. He knew what he had to do. He had to please the numbers.

Oliveri had misunderstood. “I’m sorry, Dante. I am, truly. But my decision is final.”

Dante nodded in a short, jerking motion. It was a nod of reflex, not of consent. Then he made as if to back away, while furtively searching around the room. There, on the pulpit to his side. There was the ceremonial mace, dotted with eight beautiful gems. Surrounding them was a steel cage.

“Dante? Are you alright?”

In one smooth motion, Dante reached over and grabbed the mace. It was a heavy artifact, but he barely noticed its weight. Swirling the mace over his head, he brought it down to bear with all the strength on Oliveri’s head. With a yelp like a frightened pup, the Archpriest dove out of the way. The mace snapped Oliveri’s wooden desk into two with a thunderclap crack. His target no longer protected by furniture, Dante swung the mace again, in a powerful underhand strike. This time, the metal bludgeon met Oliveri’s chest, sending him flying back while the sound of snapping bone filled the air.

For a brief moment, Dante stood over the crumpled body of his Archpriest. Former Archpriest. Dante had never been a medical expert. He could be alive, he thought. It’s a possibility. But Dante didn’t really care. With a shrug, still gripping the steel cudgel, Dante gingerly stepped over the broken figure and stepped out the back door.

There were lives to be saved.

87634218.

Ryan



Stardust,
The sparkling sand of the sky,
So eloquently falls to our eyes,
Yet the Moon quiets their light,
Keeping the midnight wanderer,
In tow.

The meteor explodes and sizzles,
Its embers seed a fire,
Inside the hearts of men,
Who awaken with the noise,
Ask what fell,
And where they could find it again.

The truth shatters,
And the men return to their routines,
Hunting and hiding,
Trying to survive,
Humanity is asleep,
Nowhere to go but down.

As the days past swiftly,
Many creatures come and go,
With the environment they know as home,
But a lone figure withstands,
Rid of all that was before,
And lost no longer.

A human emerges from his cave,
Reaching into the darkness,
For answers to his existence,
From the cliffs,
That cover all that was,
That's ever been.'

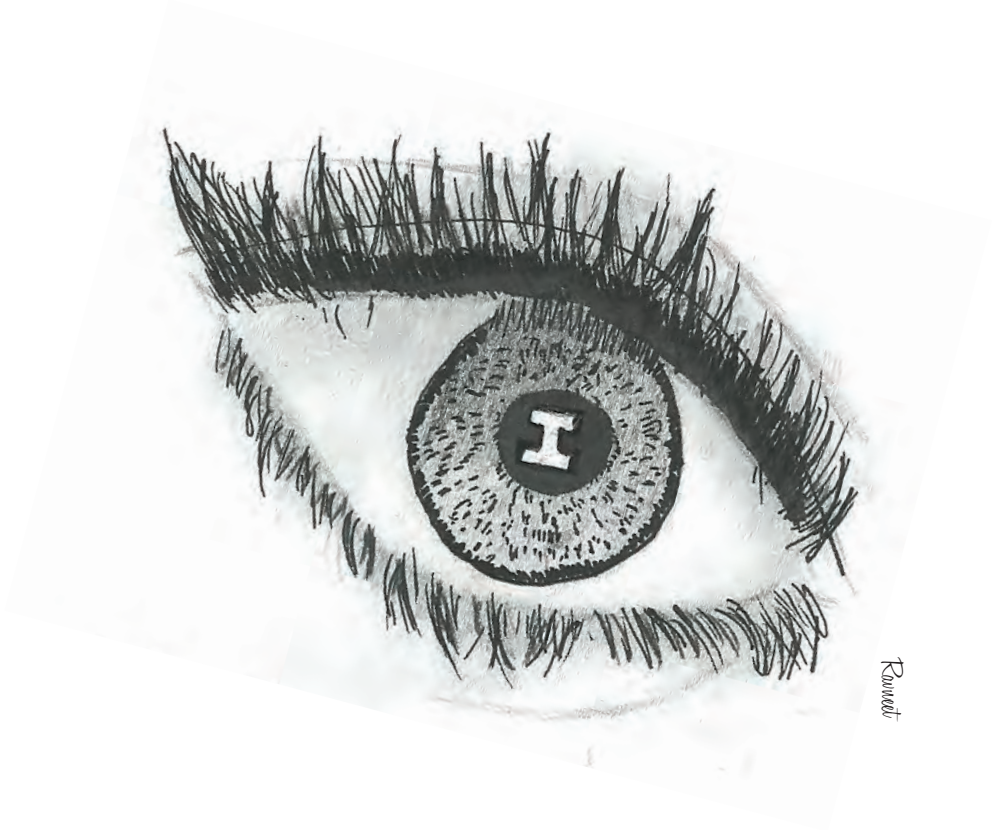
The night's silence resides,
Over age-old trees,
The glimmering lakes,
With fish forever entrenched,
And the forest filled with creatures,
That are grounded.

Man lingers at the cliff's edge,
And returns a glance,
Thinking about turning back,
To the valleys,
That nurtured him
And provided safe haven.

No, thinks Man,
He must not go back,
We must never go back,
To the fields we've outgrown,
To the land that is known,
We have already overstayed.

Humanity leaves the planet Earth.
As the aging sun rises,
And the sleeping creatures,
Would know no difference,
For they had all that they ever needed,
All they ever wanted,
And ever would.

Matthew



Ramona



Christina

Poverty

Poverty is not my cousin,
Is not my lover,
Is not my preacher.
Poverty is not my brother.

Poverty is not my prayer,
Or the song that I sing.
Is not my answer.
Poverty is not my dream.

Poverty is not my teacher,
Not the hand that I hold.
Poverty is not my anger,
Not my spirit, not my soul.

Ah! But this poverty is real.
It races through my mind ,
Crashes into my heart,
& leaves me deaf and blind.

Poverty is my companion.
The aching cold inside my hollow.
The blow behind my eyes.
Poverty is the shadow
Inside my shadow.

Ravneet

Ugh, I hate Hell. Prisoners whining, the barely edible food, and the fire all around you gets old fast. Thank God I'm not there anymore. Being His bounty hunter is way better. But for some reason, I miss that place. Maybe it's because the bullets in my chest. God, they hurt. Even angels feel pain. Focus. I can't die and I need to kill him or I need to rob again. I broke enough rules already, and I can't let the world know who I am. I won't be able to sleep, never mind assassinate targets. I only let people know who I am if they're going to die in a few seconds.

The target's six foot three, wearing a white suit and carrying a non-licensed M4. Not hard to find when he's literally the only living thing in 5 miles. I already found him. He's hiding in the ship's control deck. He may be strong and an expert marksman, but he is not smart, that's for sure. He's hiding in the first place anyone would look. Now he's in front of me, confused and scared. I'm holding the exact sword God gave me to kill targets and deadly criminals. Anyone killed by this sword is sent straight to God's punishment room, where the person is tortured by methods worse than ones in Hell, like being forced to listen to LMFAO's Sexy and I Know It. After a swing from this righteous piece of metal, his soul is in there, being tortured from the second he goes in. Now I'm hungry. Hopefully, there's still food left in the buffet. The ribs are amazing.

I love my power. I get to teleport, summon demons, conjure up hellfire, and a lot more. I teleport right in front of the ribs and thankfully, they're still there. They're still warm. And they didn't get splashed with blood, unlike the pineapples. But thankfully, I hate pineapples. Hopefully, they didn't screw up the sauce. Rumors say last time the chef screwed up, people found chalk in the mashed potatoes. And tonight, he didn't screw up.

Too bad he's dead, or I would give him congratulations. I wish I could resurrect people. Oh wait, I can.

"Hey, chef, your ribs are amazing."

"Thank you, strange sir. And please don't kill me again."

What a coward.

"I'm sorry, but you know that I killed all these people. You need to die." And the blood is on the baked potatoes. I didn't like those anyways. I only care about the ribs.

Wow, these are better than I thought they would be. I didn't think a human could cook this good. I'm lucky that I killed the chef with my other sword. Now I'll eat these ribs whenever I'm called up there. I wish I could eat these every day. But I guess being a bounty hunter doesn't let you eat like a king. I should at least pack these. The kid is probably hungry and I'm late by about two hours.

"Hey, kid. I'm home."

The kid just says, "My name is Jake, and did you bring any food? I'm starving."

Kids these days. Always caring about themselves before others. But who am I to judge? I never knew a kid except him. Who knows, he might have been nice before he became an orphan. But right now, he's in middle school and never listens to me. I hate it when he ignores me. I never know what he's thinking. I couldn't read a human's mind since God took away telepathy from us angels, saying that it 'hurts the idea of free will'.

I hate it when he takes away powers from us. Does he really think that we're going to change their mind by force? Last time an angel did that, we had to turn him into a human. His name was Jack. You've probably heard of him. He killed a lot of people.

"I brought you ribs. Do you know how many people I needed to kill to get this?" He doesn't change his expression. I don't blame him, since he knows who I am.

He says "I'm guessing once you become Hell's warden, you're allowed to kill. There's no blood on it, right?" He figured out that I'm Lucifer in the moment he saw my eyes. Why do I always forget to change my eye colour? And he's worried about blood because last time I packed up food from a mission the sauce was replaced with blood. By the way, I know you're reading this. I'm Lucifer, the fallen angel. I used to be great friends with the archangel Michael, and I probably know I'm in a book if I'm a former archangel.

Don't worry, I won't rip off Deadpool. I hate talking to the writer anyways. We always argue. Once, we talked about music, and started arguing. He thought Franz Ferdinand was better than Arctic Monkeys, and my opinions were the opposite. He forced me to listen to LMFAO, Justin Bieber, Katy Perry and a lot of other horrible artists for hours. But how do you think Franz Ferdinand is better than Arctic Monkeys?

"Uh, Lucy, I'm waiting for my answer." I forgot about Jake's question!

“There’s no blood. I ate it myself.” He probably trusts me. I say probably because I’m the supposed devil. By the way, I rescued Jake from the streets. He was attempting to pickpocket me, but I caught him the moment he tried. I promised I’ll give him a better life, and I did, even though I’m a lousy parent.

“Barbecue sauce is on the top shelf on the left side of the sink.” I know there’s barbeque sauce in the ribs, but Jake likes to have extra barbeque sauce just in case.

“Thanks. How many times did you get shot?” Jake always asks that question. He doesn’t worry about me dying because, well, I’m immortal, but it’s not just that. When I first adopted him, our house got robbed. I took 50 bullets to the chest and cut the guy in half. I killed him outside, since I didn’t want to give Jake psychological trauma. Those were the good times.

I guess I should tell him. “I got shot by three magazines full of bullets. One magazine contained 20 bullets. All of the bullets went straight to the chest. Even though I can’t die, getting shot by bullets still hurts a lot.”

Jake looks impressed. I haven’t seen that look on his face since I literally shot an apple off his head without aiming. Even if I had missed, it would have just gone through him without harming him. “That’s a new record. The last record was two magazines with one half full.” I forgot about my last record. I didn’t really have time to care about it. I had to go on a trip every week. Sometimes I took along Jake with me, but I usually leave him behind. Seeing people die is not good for a young mind.

I need a drink. I didn’t drink any type of liquid during the last five hours. My fridge is full of vegetables and meat. But what Jake doesn’t know is that I magically created a hidden container full of soft drinks and ice-cream. “I found your hidden container. It was clever hiding it behind coke. I reached in inside the box, and I found a door instead. I also drank all of your root beer.” I knew I shouldn’t have hidden it behind the box of coke. Why didn’t I put it behind my mint ice-cream container? He hates mint.

“You drank all of my root beer?!” Jake doesn’t look scared at all. I wonder why.

“Yes. And God left a message. He wants you to take care of one of your old prisoners. Jack the Ripper escaped.”

“Again? Last time he escaped, he started World War II.” God, he’s annoying. It took me a month to kill him last time. Yes, I killed Hitler. What is he going to do now, infect the world with zombies? Well, at least I’m getting paid. “How much is he paying me, Jake?”

“He’s paying you 50 billion dollars and enough Doctor Pepper to last a year.” Now that’s payment. Believe it or not, five million dollars are not worth getting shot enough times to get cut in half. Well, time to get on with it. There are people to kill and Doctor Pepper that needs to be drunk. And if you say Doctor Pepper tastes horrible, I’ll find you, and I’ll send you to God’s punishment room and force you to listen to *Sexy and I Know It* for all eternity.

Min Soo



Two Crows The silken mist drifts ahead,
A vaporous figure in the morning glow,
Whilst beneath it she winds,
Unstopped in her continuous flow.

In the forks of a pair of willow trees,
Two lone crows sit facing each other,
Their heads tilted sideways,
Looking down through the eerie cover.

Where I walk in solitude,
The silence gives me pleasure,
It sings and twirls around me now,
Maintaining rhythm without measure.

Jan



Jan

Consumed can't sleep...I've fallen too deep...into thought, that is. or memory..or dream...I can't tell anymore....should I be worried?....what's that? oh nothing...I just thought I heard you say you loved me...you do?....who are you...have I known you long?... oh...right then you're 'him'.....you're 'them'....everyone that has ever been, ever will be...you're not?...not what?...alive....oh, I see...neither are we.

Alex

Up, down, and sideways. Parallel and not. First, second, third dimension, the mind is not a place to dawdle. Do not attempt to take your time and take your chances, you may get lost.....But if you do, remember, time is a figment of a small child's imagination. So sit and stay awhile. Find yourself, the self you never knew.

Sideways

Alex

Beautiful Beautiful. You think I'm beautiful. That's a new one, beautiful. I've been called smart, interesting, special, but never beautiful. Because if they said that, well, they'd be lying. No, really. No, I'm not. Saying it doesn't make it true. Why would anyone ever think I'm beautiful, let alone you? I'm not skinny, I'm not tall, my hair is a mess and I don't wear makeup. I don't look like a movie star or a model. So why would you ever think I'm beautiful? ...That's what I thought. No, I get that you were trying to be nice. No, I do appreciate it, really, but if you were going to be nice, couldn't you be honest as well? Because, instead of making me feel good, you have me standing here listing reasons why I'm not beautiful. No, don't feel bad. It's my fault I can't accept a compliment. Thanks for trying.

Michelle

On one cold winter day in Winnipeg, I was in for a surprise. The day before, my friend invited me to go see the new exhibit at the MTS Centre. The *Bodies Exhibit* had just arrived and I was pumped to see the wonders of the human body in action. I recalled that in Grade Eight, my math teacher had shown us pictures of the *Bodies Exhibit* in Toronto. At the time, I was stunned by the quality and detail of the preserved humans in only muscle and bone. There seemed to only be great scientific intelligence and discovery at work. That day, my friend and I arrived at the *Bodies Exhibit* around 2:00 PM. While waiting in line, we talked about ordinary things, but we were both so excited. Then the sun shone in my eye, and for the briefest moment, I saw one of the giant billboards with a human body being displayed. I looked into his eyes and time suddenly stopped. There was a remarkable resemblance in those eyes to my great grandfather. They were brown and hazel.

My friend punched me lightly on the shoulder and said it was finally time to go in. She clearly had not seen my reaction. We bought our tickets and in we went. It was dark in the corridor that we entered. Off to the distance were a light and a circular stairway. We climbed those stairs and immediately stepped into a state-of-the-art facility. Bodies were everywhere supported by high-tech wiring and beams. There were hearts, lungs, brains, kidneys, and everything else of anatomical importance. So it was true. The *Bodies Exhibit* looked like the world's most comprehensive collection of the human body and its related structures and organs. We walked around and examined various bone structures, marveling at the detail. By accident, I shifted a finger joint but quickly adjusted it back. To my left, a security guard was approaching, and I motioned to my friend to move the other way. We stealthily dodged the security guard and entered the male body section. We noticed that everyone was crowded around one particular figure positioned in a fighting stance. Eager to see it, I dragged my friend towards the six foot tall man. Again, there were those brown and hazel eyes. Instead of taking pictures like everyone else was, I took some time to really examine the body's face. Something wasn't right. The face, even without the skin, looked familiar. I told my friend that I would be right back and she took my backpack. I made my way towards the bathroom and bumped into another security guard. Suddenly, it came to me. There was not a single reference to where these bodies had come from.

I felt my mouth open and close, and the words spilled out. I had no control over what I was saying, but I asked the security guard, "Where in the world did you get all those bodies?" A bead of sweat trickled down his forehead as he hesitated. He looked at my brown and hazel eyes and then to those same eyes that all the display bodies had. He tried to say something, but it was barely audible. At last, he spoke, "They are unclaimed bodies of Chinese prisoners." A voice in my mind spoke out loud and clear. All of sudden, things blacked out and I travelled through time.

I remembered the tales my great grandfather used to tell me when I was but a little boy. I was back in China. It seemed impossible but I was speaking and looking into the brown and hazel eyes I had seen at the Bodies Exhibit. I felt a sense of dread. Was it possible that my great grandfather was captured and then brought to America for display? Out in the fresh air, I was having lunch with him, as he told me stories of his great grandfather. The sun was shining down on us, and I smelled warm ginger. I noticed I was wearing a ginger colored robe as well, which was quite peculiar. I had never owned a robe. As his story progressed, I learned many things about his great grandfather and my family history. His great grandfather was a noble sensei with many friends. Together, they formed the Jade Dragon Militia. His name was LaoHuLong, which meant Tiger Dragon. He lived by the Chinese Code of Honor during a time of constant war and turmoil. I spilled my soup on my ginger colored robe, and then I was back at the Bodies Exhibit. In a daze, I made it slowly back to where my friend was. She was quite alarmed and asked where I had gone. My time traveling seemed bizarre to me, and I didn't know how she would react to it. I said I had gotten lost, and she burst out laughing. Together, we walked around some more and arrived at the female body section.

I asked myself if I was going crazy. All sorts of odd symbols began to appear on the walls of the exhibit. They were ancient Chinese characters. For a second they were on fire, but quickly turned a jade green. I tried to decipher them, but could make nothing out. I only read simplified Chinese. There was one section of the wall that flashed a bright, blazing blue and I saw the characters I had seen before. When I travelled back to the past to see my great grandfather, the characters of LaoHuLong were framed on his wall. Those were the characters that made up his great grandfather's name. So it was true. There was something extremely mysterious about the *Bodies Exhibit*.

My friend slapped me on the face, as I had been staring at the wall for over five minutes now. She asked me if I was alright. She clearly had not shared my visions from just moments ago. Should I tell her? But before I had the chance to speak, my foot landed on a sharp black stone.

It was midnight and I had no idea where I was. In the distance, I heard shouts and screams of “LaoHuLong, LaoHuLong”. It dawned on me: I was back in the time of my great grandfather’s great grandfather. The stories my great grandfather had told me were all coming true.

It was 978 AD. China was under the rule of a corrupt emperor of the Han Dynasty, QingZhiHuang. He had devoted much of China’s resources searching for the Jade Dragon Treasure, the sacred jade sword that would give one eternal life. The Jade Dragon Militia were the sacred guardians of the treasure. LaoHuLong’s family had created the sword. It was then that I realized my heritage. I was the descendant of a great leader, and my family had a great responsibility. But what had happened? I remembered when I was six year old and my great grandfather had told me that LaoHuLong and his entire Jade Dragon Militia had mysteriously disappeared along with the sword. But, in LaoHuLong’s bones was the code to the sword’s location.

Travelling through time again, I landed back in the Bodies Exhibit. My friend was busily examining a female body and I needed to see if my visions were true. Somewhere, somewhere in the exhibit could be one of my ancestors. One of those bodies could be LaoHuLong!

I willed myself to have another moment of time travel and willed myself back to the time of LaoHuLong’s mysterious disappearance. I landed in the emperor’s palace, where LaoHuLong and the Jade Dragon Militia were being held captive. The emperor held a sharp black stone. He had discovered the guardians of the Jade Sword and forced them to tell him the location of the treasure. By the Ancient Chinese Code of Honor, LaoHuLong refused. All his friends were on his side. I smelled ginger from the hallway. Suddenly, the emperor thrust the sharp black stone at LaoHuLong’s forehead. I screamed. So it was true. I saw the Emperor kill each and every one of the Jade Dragon Militia on the spot. But what would the emperor do with all those dead bodies? My question was answered when Emperor QingZhiHuang put the remains of the Jade Dragon Militia into cargo ships and set them loose into the Yellow Sea. Over time, they drifted to North America and were discovered on the shores of British Columbia. A fairly prosperous man took the bodies and created the Bodies Exhibit. So it was true.

In a complete mess, I crashed into a wall at the Bodies Exhibit and entered the room with the male body in the fighter stance. Those same brown and hazel eyes looked into mine. I looked back. It was LaoHuLong and not my great grandfather. The body had the cut in the forehead from the sharp black stone. So it was true. Suddenly, I was angry. How could the creators of the Bodies Exhibit use my family in such a disgraceful way? How could they publicly display my great grandfather's great grandfather, when he was such a hero? LaoHuLong died protecting the treasure, and for him to be forgotten and seen only as a mere figure of science was clearly unacceptable. I had to do something.

But first, I had to find the code. I looked into the body's eyes again. The brown and hazel irises now had a touch of jade to them. I looked at his forearm and there, under the flesh of his arm, was the code for eternal life. All this time, the jade sword had been passed down through my family. The code said simply, "The jade sword rests in the most recent descendant of my family. He who holds the sword shall experience eternal happiness and a life of peace and prosperity." That descendant was me.

I ran and I ran and found my friend and took my backpack from her. I fumbled around and produced the key chain my father had given to me a while back. He had gotten the keychain from his father and so on. So it was true. The pieces of the puzzle were all making sense now and the key chain began to glow a jade green. I ran back to LaoHuLong and a voice whispered, "You have done it, young one. Now free me." The keychain sent out a brilliant spurt of green light and one by one, the bodies of the exhibit faded away. Back through time they went and, finally, LaoHuLong and his Jade Dragon Militia returned home, to where they had always belonged, resting forever in peace. I was now the guardian of the treasure for the years to come.

It seemed like I had gone through a century in time, but my friend was still there waiting for me. It was time to go. The exhibit was being shut down due to technical reasons. As we walked out, she asked me, "What happened?" I didn't answer her; some things are best left secret.

Allen

The image keeps playing back in my mind, again and again and again, over and over and over. There is that man standing in front of me, laughing as he holds the small pistol. I am covered in blood. So is he. My girlfriend lies cradled in my arms, dead. He has the eyes of a wild man. If there's one thing about that scene that I will never forget, only one, mind you, it would be those maddening eyes. I couldn't tell you what colour they once were. With the bloody scene reflected in his eyes, they looked like a bright crimson. But that wasn't what mattered. The pigment staining his iris was hardly the catalyst for a murder. It was how wild they looked, how... how unnaturally wide. And that grim smile, somewhere between a scowl and a beam.

I still try to remember what slight it was that I had done to him, or what had forced him to take that path. God knows I've done enough to people like him to warrant it. I just never thought it would come so soon, not while it was all going my way.

I say one more word, but I cannot remember it. I can never remember it. All I know is that it isn't 'please', isn't 'no', none of that clichéd drivel. The more it plays in my mind, the more and more convinced I am that it is his name. His name. Like I can remember that either. These holes in my memory, and wouldn't you just know it that almost all of them had to do with that one scene. And my childhood, as well. But I doubt that I'd ever need to remember that.

I wish I could remember who he was. I wish that I could bring him to justice. Mind you, I probably don't deserve it. Justice, that is. I believe in karma, now.

And then he shoots. The bullet travels in slow motion. And I see waves of sound coming towards me, and hear a dull hum. What did they call it back in English class? Foreshadowing. Irony.

Then I am hit, but the police are there. The man escapes, and I am taken to the hospital. This they tell me afterwards. That one officer who looks like an ugly troll, and the other who has no face. They are my guardians now. I am looked over by things from beyond.

The vision stops. I get up. Where am I now? I hear the dulcet baritone of brown mixed with the piccolo trills of green. It seems as though I am in an open field somewhere. I look up to the sky, and watch as the low register gives way to the alto chords of blue, mixed with the sopranissimo clouds. I look too far and am assaulted by the discordant screech of the sun. I turn back quickly.

“Hey!” I see the whisper of a faint echo. Behind me, then. And there is a small figure, a jumble of cheerful melodies. It must be a child, then.

“Hey!” The waves this time are forceful, but not unbearable. “Mister, you’ve been just standing here for hours. Are you alright?”

I grunt. “Who are you, kid?”

The waves change. Longer, almost solemn. “Well, I dunno.... I’m not supposed to give my name to strangers!”

As he gets closer, I can make out more about him. His sweater smells rough, shaggy, ripped and torn, while his hair is a silky smooth scent. This is a strange one. What child cares more about their hair than they do about their clothes? Was this child an orphan? Had he run away?

“All the same, kid. I’m fine. I just... I’m fine.”

“You don’t look like it. Do you want me to get you a--”

“I said I’m fine!” I can see my own waves, now, bouncing off of him and back towards me. His expression had soured.

“Ouch, mister. No need to yell. But seriously, the lady tells us that we should be happy! I know lots of ways to be happy! Do you want me to buy you a--”

In one smooth motion, I rip my gun out of its holster. Something about this kid. This stupid little kid, and that was all it took to push me beyond the point of rage. My gun smelled cold and smooth, felt like the taste of blood. All my twisted senses screamed at me to stop. The black steel sung a dirge of pain and loathing.

I know why. This I can remember. It is his gun. The only weapon I have left.

“Don’t try me,” I whistle through clenched teeth. “Don’t.”

To his great credit, the child simply stands there, not moving, not saying anything. I have no choice but to put the gun away. He keeps standing there.

“I could get you a sundae! A popsicle? One of those things that the lady says adults like? A.... Pros... itoo?”

In spite of myself, I can’t help but laugh. I start to laugh, and then I start to howl. I fall to the ground, convulsing with laughter. I see the waves rattle all around me, and I do not care. I feel the fresh, bitter-tasting lawn, and I do not care.

Then I stop. I get up. “Who are you though, kid? Are you an orphan?”

He nods glumly. “Yeah. I stay with the lady now. She’s nice, but she keeps a bunch of other kids, too. Sometimes she forgets about me.”

I extend a hand. “How would you like to come with me? I’ll look after you. I’ll let you join my business, even. Would you like that?”

The kid considers for a moment. Then he nods brightly. “Okay! Let’s do it!” The wave is bright and promising. He reaches out as well, shakes my hand. Surprisingly firm, but I can feel the salt on his hands. Perhaps he’d been more nervous than he had let on.

Good. Fear is what makes us human.

“I guess if you’re working together, I’ll tell you my name! My mommy called me Ramy. Short for Rammiel! But the lady just called me hell-devil. I don’t know what that means.”

I laugh. “We’ll stick with Ramy, then. Welcome aboard, son.”

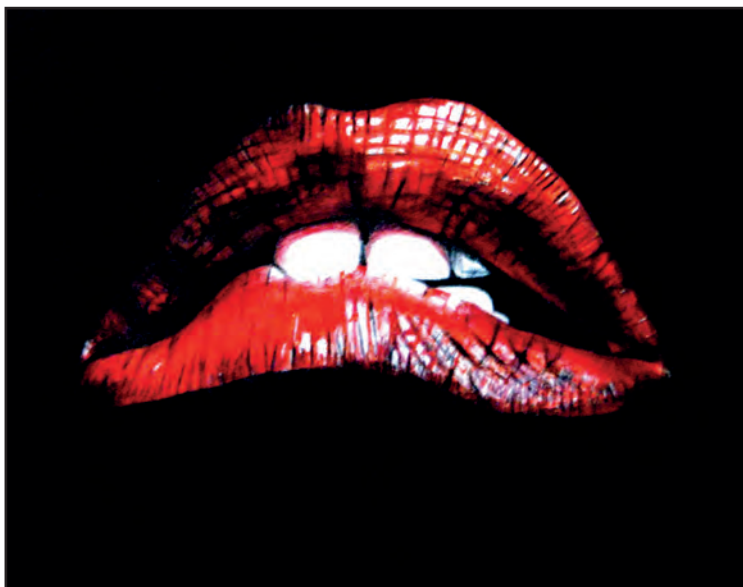
But beneath my cordial greeting, there is something deeper. A memory. Something has resurfaced, something from the past.

I remember, now. I was an assassin then. I still am now. That man.... I had killed someone of his, someone special. But I do not care. Business is business. I regret nothing. I will live my life how I always did, and my weakness will become my weapon. I will kill again, kill to survive now. And this boy, this Rammiel, he will help me.

I still cannot remember the man’s name. But now I finally remember my own.

Andrew Dain.

Ryan



Andrew Dain

Fallen

Silence,
The eternal fire ends with a flicker,
The sage of death leaves with a wicker,
The day is gone.

Endings,
That meet sooner than a foe,
Cause grinding woe,
Abrupt departure.

Far
Across the midnight sky,
At the field's end,
The moon leaves.

Deep
Across the wicked sea,
A creature weeps with plea
For the lark.

Gone
Is the wind in the trees,
The flowers in the fields,
That thrive.

Lethal
Are the battles that we fight,
The harsh words that we spit,
That survive.

Fatal
Are the barbaric spears,
The ghastly points
Of the heart.

Lost
Are the days that we spent,
The birds on their nest,
The sky blue.

Devoured
Are the memories we kept,
The games we played,
The fire in our hearts.

Ripped
From the fabric of life,
In the tranquil light,
The hope,
No more.

Matthew



Jew

I am the greatest tradesman the town of Sopkape has ever seen. After forty years in the practice, I can re-tile a floor without any strain. Usually the jobs I do are small, yet there is often enough work to keep me occupied. There aren't many people in Sopkape, for it is almost all farm land. The only reason anyone still lives in this town is that they were born here and have no money to go elsewhere. There isn't much but our strawberry patches, copper mines and the local hospital, the best building in Sopkape. That's where I am right now, laying in one of the hospital's beds. I will die. I know I will. I need a liver transplant in order to live, but the hospital doesn't have the facilities to give me one. For a liver, I must travel to a different city, yet I have no money to do so. My wife tried to find money in vain, and she soon gave up. Now she sits by my bed, knitting, saying little. When she does talk she tells me that I keep muttering, Lucy, come back, in my slumber. She says this in an expectant tone, hoping that I'll tell her who Lucy is. When I don't, she goes back to her knitting. This leaves me with a considerable amount of time to think about what she wants to hear, who I am, and how I have lived.

I was born in this hospital in 1939. My father failed to show, so my mum named me herself: Sam. It was mother who looked after me the most because she was home all day. My father inherited our house, which had a large strip of land connected to it, meant to be farm land. Since my father was a tradesman, not a farmer, it had little use. Nobody wanted to buy the land, so we were stuck with it. At the time, there were few vegetable farmers; mostly there were meat farmers who were always in need of herding dogs to protect their animals. The only place to buy dogs was miles from Sopkape, so to make use of our land my father began breeding the dogs the farmers needed. Within a year my family had a dog farm. The dogs weren't well taken care of and would usually hunt rabbits in our yard for food when they'd starve. I wasn't supposed to play with them because my father believed that love or care would make dogs lame. Yet, when he was gone I'd sneak into the yard.

There was one dog, white as snow, which was much smaller than the others. My father had a strict rule on runts: kill 'em before you have to spend money on 'em. I hated my father's ways with animals, so I taught the runt to hide when my dad came in the yard. I spent a lot of time with the runt, so unlike the rest of the dogs, I gave her a name. Lucy.

I suppose my wife thinks that Lucy was another woman that I favoured over her. In some ways, Lucy was a better friend to me than anyone ever was. The good thing about dogs is that they appreciate you for life if you take care of them. Dogs look up to people because they know that, without you, they might not survive.

“This is your fault, you know,” my wife says. “You’re gonna die, just like your father did, and then what happens to me? I’m going to live alone, with no money left. Why couldn’t you just stop drinking?”

I pretend not to hear and silence falls upon the room again.

Across the street from my home was the local bar. It was always open until late because some of the men refused to leave before morning. After work, Father would go for a few drinks, promising to be home early. When he would stumble through the door, penniless and cross, my mother would say nothing. Instead, she would urge me to leave the room. Usually I would sit on the front porch and sketch the dogs in our yard. During my days at school, I had seen one of my teachers drawing at her desk once class had finished. I was amazed that it was possible to create something out of almost nothing. That day I’d bought the pencils and special paper myself. I never told my parents that I drew, because they wouldn’t have understood. Artists weren’t heard of in Sopkape because they made no money.

My father was a proud man and he worked hard, but even with the dog farm, the money he lost in the depression could never be regained. I had three older brothers that my dad all sent to work in the copper mines to make money. Mum never liked my brothers working in the mines, she was afraid that something bad would happen to one of them. Every couple of months a boy would disappear in the rubble. I never thought that my eldest brother would join that group. At eighteen he was buried alive in a cave in. Mum stopped talking to Father then. To make use of his time, Father started going to the bars to drink even more. He said it helped him forget. After a while, drinking made Father violent. When Mum would ask where the week’s pay had gone, he’d usually hit her. The neighbours used to complain about the noise my father made, sometimes they even threatened to call the police, but they were too afraid of my father to do that. I was used to pain, because my father usually beat me when he was drunk. I never cried when he hit me. Father used to say that crying was for weak people, like my mother. I should have known better than to disobey him.

One night, while he was fighting with Mum, I went into the dog pen to draw. I thought I'd be safe there, that he would be too tired and wouldn't notice my absence. Sure enough, I was wrong. I was careless to have gone in the pen with my sketches. You see, my father had already figured out my future. I was to be a tradesman, like him. Drawing wasn't masculine and it wouldn't make money. I was the only one of his sons that had received an education and he wanted me to support him financially once I got a good job. He hadn't known about my visiting the dogs, or my drawing. In his mind, I had defied him. Lucy was a calm dog and didn't mind much when my father and Mum were in a bout. However, she had never seen my father beat me before. I should have said something to calm her. Words of reassurance to let her know that I was fine, even though I wasn't. Maybe I had enough of my dad and I wanted someone to protect me. Lucy did just that. I still remember the look of disbelief my father had when the runt sank her teeth into his shoulder.

"Damn dog, I'll kill ya!" he yelled, running inside our home. I never thought he'd approach Lucy again, for fear of being bitten. I should have hid that dog in a place where my father could never get to her. No matter how hard I try, I can never forget the sound of gunfire and the feeling of Lucy's body going limp. If I hadn't run, my father would have probably shot me, too. I knew I could never go back; running away was the only option. I used spare change and rode a bus to Vanesol, the farthest I could go. I had nothing left after the bus fare, yet the thought of my father brought a bitter taste to my mouth. I tried selling some of my drawings in the streets, but nobody wanted them. That's when I started nicking things from stores. I'd take cans of pop, Cracker Jack and sometimes money from the register to sustain myself. Eventually, when I got older, I spent the money to buy alcohol. Being drunk dampened my sorrows, it made the world seem less heavy and I could forget about Lucy. Getting caught was the least of my pains.

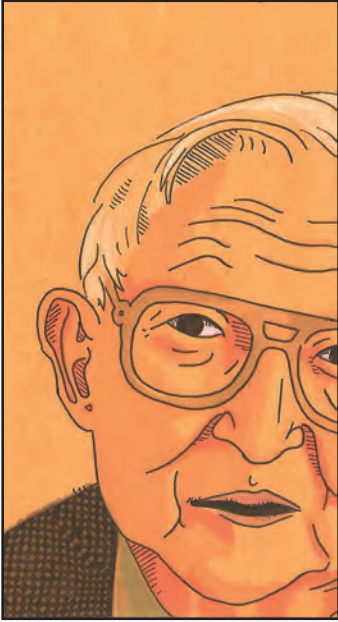
I was put into a reform school for stealing booze when I was fifteen. I was told I had to learn a trade or I'd go to jail. That's where I became the man my father always wanted me to be, a tradesman. I was better than my father was, no doubt. I never hit my wife or my children, not once.

Eventually I went back to Sopkape, but I never visited him. When I remember my past, I have to have some whiskey, to live in some peace. I've never told my wife about those years of my life, and I don't think I ever will. Some things are best kept secret.

Elizabeth



(inspired by A Doll's House, by Heinrich Ibsen)



Jerry



Johanna

Souvenir

if I remember
will everything be better?
if I remember
will they stop screaming?

because my memory
is like a rotting bridge
stable ground
then I fall through
hurtling, plummeting
drop off the train of thought

my brain begins
to work things out
then it's like
"ahh... unicorns."
bobbing, drifting,
floating like a stray balloon.

Ruthie

the slate's been wiped clean
(involuntarily, must I add?)
it's a cloud full of holes
because they say I am
thick, dense
so *stupid* at times.

I try to be everything
be what people want to see
but my brain betrays me
so I'm back at square one
fluttering, grasping,
fumbling for my cue cards

if I remember
will they keep smiling?
laughing?
if I remember
will they stop hurting me?
us?

just keep smiling.
they won't hurt you then.



Adrianne

The act of taking out the trash has never, ever been satisfying nor beneficial to me in any way. My landlord thought it was a good business decision to put the dumpsters into the alleyway which separated my apartment from the one beside it. Like most alleys, it was dark and ill kept. Numerous puddles would form in it when it would rain. Because the grates were perpetually clogged, they'd stay there for a while.

During this particular instance, however, something was caught in one of the grates. After I'd thrown my Glad Bags into the dumpster, I leaned down and picked it up. It was white, smooth, rectangular with curved edges and a cracked screen. It was one of those old iPods. Strange I should find one now, I only upgraded to one of the touch models recently. I picked it up and dried it off with my shirt. Miraculously, the damned thing still had power. I turned it on to find it only had one song on it, entitled "Regrets", without any artist or album to speak of. Curious, I fished a pair of ear buds out of my pockets and plugged them in for a listen.

And listen I did, in terror. Every single petty complaint, every act done in haste, every offense apologized for in my short life bored itself into my skull, making my short comings, the great lot of them, unignorable and obtrusive.

I could not stop it. The machine compelled me to listen, to turn the volume to full and give it my full ear. Mindlessly, I walked up to my apartment, unable to escape the mesmer of the device. It brought back things I didn't even remember. It put things which I once was proud of in a much bleaker light. I hated the abominable thing and I hated myself for picking it up but I couldn't return it; I was mesmerized dammit!

For hours, the horrible thing neutralized me. I sat at home, staring dumbly at the wall with my mouth hanging open and my hands loosely gripping that thing. Finally, the device broke me. In a fit of rage and want of ignorance, I attempted to throw it out of my apartment window. It would not fly, it had dug into my hand with small tendrils or hooks. It drew some blood, but not much. The more I tried to pull it away, the more it held on and the more it hurt.

I worried about it. The machine was clearly not normal and I didn't understand its mechanism. Would it devour me if I left it as it was? Would it bring me pain and displeasure as I lived my life? Or would it simply sit there, a nuisance to grow used to? These all seemed perfectly plausible at the time, I assure you. But, as I had no way of affecting it, I had to leave it be, as fearful as I was to do so. I went to sleep and left my parasite to sleep along with me. When I woke up, it was not on my hand but on my back; it had not grown, nor become malevolent in the night, though I did have nightmares of the things which it had told me the day before. Still, it was hidden, out of the way, and I would not consider that a curse.

Thus, I went about my day as if nothing had been altered. I acted no more chipper than before, nor more sultry nor depressed. My friends noticed nothing off, for, to them, nothing was off. The machine bothered me though, and even today, when the ear buds weren't in, I could hear it. I could hear it nagging me. I could hear it jeering me. Though it seemed that my focus had not been jarred, below the face I wore, it was.

Home again, the machine moved - I noticed that when it did, it did not unlock itself from my flesh but flowed through it as if through water - to my hand again.

There it sat, obvious to me. I had to be rid of it. I began thinking irrationally, that the device was some form of demon sent to punish me for the sins it so dutifully reminded me of or some manifestation of my guilt meant to be cured by suicide, madness or prescription. I hated it. I hated it so much.

After that resolution, it would not let me sleep and I had nothing to do but brood on it with my new time. This got me nowhere at all. It would recount even recent events, including picking it up. Especially picking it up. I took this as morbid humour.

I'd decided, one morning, to give myself an ultimatum. That night I was to either deal with the device outright and force it out of my life, or resolve to ignore it and never pay the damned thing any mind at all. I felt that nothing good would come from making either of these decisions.

I decided I was going to ignore it. It was, in my mind, the choice of lesser consequence. As much as I felt its presence, and as much as it yelled at me, I managed to sink it in the sea of my own skin, pushing it into a place where I'd never have to see again.

The fight was brutal for the machine. It struggled to remain topside as I consumed it, battling violently against my body. It used its vile appendages to push away from me instead of bind to me as it usually had, but it was for nothing. Eventually, it could not resist any longer and it was consumed by the torrents of my flesh.

It did not return. It did not return for months, unfortunately. It rose, larger and more hostile, from all over my body. It now had thousands of white tendrils which wove in and out of my muscles and bone and nerves. As the demon roared it took my body for its own use but left me with my mind. Through my own eyes I saw myself, an automaton, a backbone for this creature. Everything that I did was dictated by it. It had not killed me but I wish it had. There is no punishment more extreme nor hurtful as this.

To ignore it, I reasoned, was foolhardy. It wouldn't leave forever, it would return again and I'd never be rid of it. I brought the iPod to my face and began to scroll through the now filled library. Every item I remember now with painful clarity. The device had not lied about a single one, though I suspect it had been misinformed. I didn't regret taking it out of the puddle any more.

I scrolled through and each time I reconciled with the machine, myself, an item vanished, accompanied by a heartless lashing to my skin. The more I atoned the more my body fell apart, torn by this vengeful angel. When the final item had left the screen, the machine retracted its pearly tendrils and fell to the ground. Like a crab it scuttled off, pleased with itself.

I lay on my sofa: bleeding, but alright. I wasn't entirely myself anymore, knowing so much about what I'd done wrong. It felt better. This was a good pain.

Alex



OK



OK

The wind was howling and the rain was pouring down. Every drop felt like a shard of ice, a needle, jabbing into his skin. It was dark. The streetlights cast an orange glow over everything. A few metres away, cars sped past, their headlights reflecting on the wet pavement. In the distance, someone shouted.

All of this was going on, but he didn't appear to notice it. He just sat outside, against a building, seemingly oblivious to his surroundings.

He felt numb.

For weeks now, he had just been sitting outside, against a building, feeling numb. Occasionally, pangs in his stomach, caused by hunger, would pierce through the numbness, and he'd heave himself up, go to a dumpster outside a nearby grocery store, and search for any stray pieces of bread someone might have thrown out. When he was thirsty, and his parched throat could bear it no longer, he scrounged around on the sidewalk, found a few quarters, and bought himself some water from a drugstore.

This was his way of life, at least, it was how he lived for the past few weeks, and how he was going to live for the foreseeable future.

He knew all this, but had no emotional reaction to his impending fate. He just felt numb.

From somewhere far away, there were footsteps approaching him.

He registered this, but couldn't bring himself to turn and see who it was. Whoever it was had no meaning, no value to him. No one did.

He was alone.

The footsteps grew closer, and quicker in their urgency, but still, he didn't move.

Finally, they stopped in front of him. From his vantage point, he saw only a pair of feet, attached to slender ankles. The person who had approached him was wearing heels. Black leather heels that were reflecting the glow from a nearby streetlamp. The ankles were covered in flesh coloured nylon tights.

He took all this in, but had no reaction to it. The facts were just proof of his hallucinating brain.

The rain continued to pound, unrelentingly on his head.

After a few beats of silence, a voice spoke.

“Dad?” It tentatively asked.

The voice was quiet, but sounded foreign to his ears. It was soft and sweet, and didn't seem like it belonged here, on the rough streets.

He didn't respond.

“Dad? What are you doing here?” The voice said, again, stronger this time. “Dad, I know that I hurt you. I know that you're suffering, but you had to know that I had no choice.”

Still, he was quiet. It was as if the voice had never spoken.

“Dad!” The voice said urgently, growing in intensity. “Dad! I know what I did. I know how much pain I've put you through, but right now, you're putting the family in pain too. They can't bear to watch you waste away like this, after--after all that...happened.”

The voice was expecting the man, her father, to have some reaction to this, but there was none. He continued to stare at the ground, unemotional, unaware.

Sensing this, the voice spoke again, this time back to its original, gentle tone.

“Dad, I know you're hurting, but you've got to stop. How many times can I say sorry? Please. Please, Daddy.” The voice cracked and wavered, but attempted to continue. “Please, just come back. You're not doing anyone any favours by staying out here. Please.” The voice was begging now, on the verge of tears.

A stray tear leaked out of her eye, but it blended in with the rain around it, so no one ever knew it existed. It didn't matter though, it wasn't real.

The voice broke down, losing control of her emotions.

It was as if a dam had broken. All of the hurt, all the anger, all the fear the voice had felt in the last few months all came crashing down on her at once. Unable to bear the weight, she collapsed on the hard cement.

She lay there for quite some time, crying, her tiny shoulders shaking with sadness.

Through all of this, he just sat. His eyes showed no flicker of interest and betrayed no emotion. It wasn't real.

After the voice was done crying, she looked through her bloodshot eyes at the boy. She thought that she'd see her father, the same one who had taught her how to ride her bike, who have cheered louder than anyone when she won a spelling bee...

She didn't see that. All she saw was a shadow of the man she once knew.

Seeing this, her heart felt heavy. She'd tried, she'd tried so hard, but it was never going to be enough.

She could never repair the damage that had been done.

She felt as if her heart were breaking when she thought this. She would have cried, but she was so tired, drained of all emotions.

Once she realized this fact, she picked herself off the ground slowly, brushing drops of water off of her coat. She went over to the man, kissed him on the head and whispered, "I love you Daddy."

She turned around, and walked slowly away.

The man heard the footsteps receding into the distance, the opposite way they had come.

He felt numb.

Deborah



Deborah

Nothing

The page is still blank and white, as white as pure light will ever be
And my pen, also pure but longing to be used.
However, the day is still fresh and full of hope and potential.

But hours pass and my pen still longs and my page still pure.
The tick of the clock becomes a rhythmic pulse, counting down to my demise.
I feel sweat drip across my cheek and down to my chin,
Knowing that I am short of time.
But then something catches my eye.

I turn for a second and realize it's nothing.
But to my surprise, I don't turn back.
I continue to stare and examine... nothing.
For a moment, I think of nothing...
What is nothing?
Can nothing be seen?
Can there ever be nothing?

The clock strikes a loud tick and I realize time is of the essence.
I look at my page and there is nothing.
I hold up my pen and there is nothing but dry ink.
The once fresh day has become dim.
With nothing having been done, remorse sings me to sleep.

David

A twig snaps.
I jump, startled.
Then gasp.

It's Him.
My One.

His face is sharp in the moonlight.
Staring straight at me
Hunched over the grave,
Shrouded in my cloak.
My eyes wide and fearful.

A tendril of hair escapes my hood.
It blows
Freely
Jubliantly
Dancing with the stormy breeze.
Both of our gazes lock onto it
In jealousy

We do not speak.
We have no understanding.
Our connection is severed.

Silently, he takes my arm.
He takes it firmly,
Gently cradling the elbow,
Like I'm a fine Lady he's escorting,
Dressed in the finest of silks
Jewels glittering
Instead of my ragged homespun
With thorns in my hair.

I give up

I am done fighting
I have no desire to struggle any
more.

I hold out my wrists,
Allowing him to chain me.
Gentle clanking ends my freedom
forever.

He guides me to his horse
Roughly
Callously
I make myself limp
Follow his command.

He ties me down.
Still, I make no struggle.

He unties the horse.
His gaze is concentrated on
The ground
The sure leather knots
Anywhere but me.

Our eyes meet
His are cold
Hardened
Apathetic.

He is merely doing his duty.
He is one of Them.

As we gallop away,
I see only darkness.
There is no light left.

Adrienne



Abu Dhabi

They've been at it again.

The girl caresses the ivory keys gently, heart still throbbing painfully like a war drum from her escape, away from that unhappy room.

In truth, it shouldn't be so marring, but they don't usually fight so venomously, and certainly not so often.

Now it's getting different. Darker.

One detached part of her mind connects it to a summer storm, brewing so thick you almost choke on the tension.

She sets the practice pedal, and arranges the sheets of handwritten emotions one last time before sitting up straight.

Feel your spine align perfectly straight.

It's all your turn now.

Long pale fingers flex, then settle on the keys they were hovering above.

Heart hasn't calmed down, racing with anticipation.

The melody is slow, low, drawn out, painful.

The fingertips cross each other with ease. She's done this before.

A strand of wavy dark hair curls over her shoulder and falls in her line of sight. She calmly whips her head back, not breaking stride in the music and her fingers.

For a small moment, she can pretend it's just her, almost ramrod-straight but her head's sort of hunched over and the sheets covered in notes and the piano, the beautiful piano sitting against the wall, smooth black gleaming in setting light, shadows cast only by the curtains and the papers and her.

As she progresses to the bottom of the second page, faster now, a familiar suffocating prickle builds in the back of her throat. She ignores it, or tries to.

Third page.

It's fast by now, allegro, yes, a swirling storm of arpeggios and rests and pounding on the keys and in the midst of it somehow she's let go of the practice pedal she knows because it's so, so loud now, just like her breathing and heart, pounding, pounding, like a herd of stallions.

She closes with a spectacular banging chord, holds it as she leans back, feels her back crackle, dimly aware that her hair has entirely escaped from its restraints and is leaning back like the rest of her, and her eyes are closed because no, no, don't cry now, you can't no not now.

And as she's reaching for another sheet, the dike shatters and it starts as a series of snuffles and tears rolling down her cheeks silently, slowly, both sets of papers still clamped in both hands, but pretty soon (sooner than her music) it's become a storm, a noisy storm with full out tears, whimpering shuddering sobs that she wants to contain but just can't because it hurts so much, and even snot (ew) that she knows she's getting everywhere, on her now-messy hair that seems to be everywhere now, it's dripping on her front for goodness' sakes, on the paper (oops).

She drops the sheets unceremoniously and bows her head to meet her cupped hands, feet curling on the warming brass pedals. And as she cries, and cries and shakes uncontrollably and nobody comes, making her feel so tiny like she's alone in the universe, and the papers swirl like loose feathers around the bench and instrument, she knows she's given herself over fully, painted who she feels like who she is in both music and mind.

Because she has created true art.

But she's all by herself, with no witnesses.

The way she likes it, the way she's known it.

*no eyes puncture
the delicate face
because this is true art,
this desolate grace.*

Ruthie



Adriano

Green Fairy

Come to me
Come to me
My salvation
My partner in crime

Come to me
Twirl
Swirl
Your skirt flaring
Your legs
Long
Slender

She looks at me
Questioningly
Sternly

She speaks
“Are you sure?”

Her voice like golden drops
Iridescent orbs
Suspended in the air

Yes
I am sure...
I need her
I need her
Desperately

She sighs
Looks over at me one last time
I motion for her to begin
She knows her routine
She has performed it countless times

She leaps onstage
A perfect arabesque

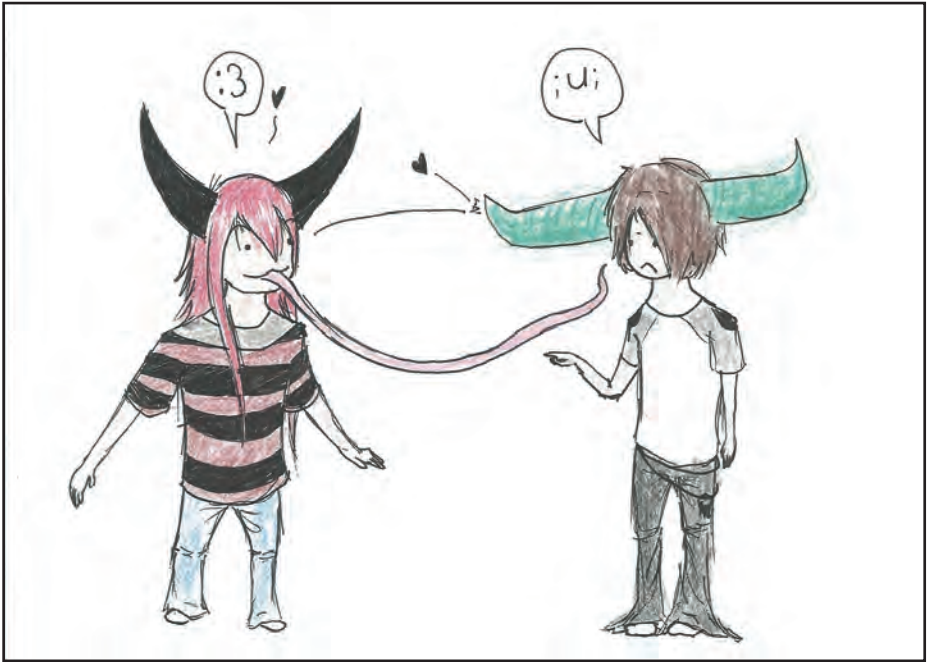
She begins to spin
Pirouette after pirouette
A whirl of colour
Of Gold

She flies, taking the stage with her
They are rising up
Up
Into the night
Always to return

I watch her fly away
My little fairy
Who solves everything
Waving her little wand

I turn my gaze to my true love
No barriers between us now
The fairy has done her magic well

Adrienne



FINNY



FINNY

City of Death

Of twisted child and burning flesh
By wicked word the sickness spread
The cloud of death hangs in the air
And voices cry “but ‘tis not fair”

The crying shout doth beg it close
And so it comes with endless sigh
The infant’s wail begins to slow
And then a sound; a mother’s cry

Closer and more the shadow comes
A swish of cloak a flash of steel
Though no blood flows, child’s breath is gone
As mother’s pain becomes too real

As loved ones lives be lost to thee
Pain shall be bared for all to see
An infant’s wail drifts through the dust
Darkened shadow rises from rust

“Not my child, no not my son!”
And her hands hold the infant close
And as her eyes doth search the sky
So the child’s soul doth slip to lie

Max



Adriano

“Kal, where are you going?” Lena was running after him.

“Away,” he replied.

“Away where? Why? You can’t leave this place.” Lena darted across the hallway and lunged for him but missed.

“Sorry, Lena. I have to leave.”

Kal and Lena hit a dead end, and Lena pinned him to the wall. “What’s wrong, Kal? You have been acting weird lately.”

“It’s nothing. Bye.” Kal struggled out of Lena’s grasp, ran straight to the entrance chamber and pressed the open button.

“Kal!” Lena yelled, “You’ll be killed out there!”

“I have to find out who I am!” he shouted back, and then jumped off the station. Lena ran over and found him in an Invisiscooter.

“Goodbye, Lena!” Kal pressed the close button, and the giant door started coming down. He turned his scooter around and ran straight into Roslyn Antera.

“Oh... I’m sorry!” Kal said, flustered.

“No need to apologize. What are you doing out here?”

“I was just about to ask you the same thing,” Kal said.

“You tell me first,” Roslyn said. “You hit me after all.”

“Okay,” said Kal. “I’m leaving.”

“Obviously. Why?”

“I... I don’t know, Roslyn. Dr. Burkell showed me this space ship that they’re going to use to escape into space, and it just felt so weird.”

“Weird? Explain.”

“It felt familiar! I thought I was going crazy, and I was afraid to tell the others, so I was running away. Why you are out here?”

“I won’t tell you. I’ll show you. There’s someone I think you’d want to meet.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“Right, follow me.” said Roslyn.

Roslyn zoomed off with her scooter, and Kal struggled to keep pace. The pair sped off from the invisible building into the city. They took twists and turns through run-down and closed side streets to avoid being captured by the Venusian cops. Kal looked down at the city. Many buildings were in terrible shape, and the citizens were dressed in thick cloaks and wore sunglasses to protect them from the sunlight. Poverty grew even before the rise of the dictatorship.

“Look, here we are.” Roslyn pointed to a building with a door camouflaged into the wall. “Lay the scooters outside. When you come in, let me do all the talking.”

“All right,” Kal replied.

Roslyn landed with Kal behind her, and knocked on a door. An old man with wacky hair and large spectacles answered. “Hello? Who’s there?”

“Mr. LaFlamme, it’s me, Roslyn.”

The old man looked around and then his eyes met her.

“Sorry, Kal,” she whispered. “He’s partially blind.”

“Ahh,” the old man said, “If it isn’t my dear Roslyn. How are you today, child?” He looked up. “Oh, you’ve grown, my dear.”

“Hello, sir,” Kal said.

The man’s eyes darted around. “Who’s that? I hear a noise!”

Roslyn gave Kal a look. “It’s my friend, Mr. LaFlamme, Kal.”

“Ah. Is he your long lost brother you told me about? I see so few people these days.”

Roslyn flushed then whispered to Kal, “Don’t ask.” Then she looked at the old man. “He’s a good friend, seeking for your advice. May we come in?”

“Yes, yes, of course,” said the old man. Kal and Roslyn walked into the house. Roslyn took a seat at the couch. The house was quite small and in the center there was a table with a glowing crystal ball and several scattered pieces of parchment.

“Roslyn!” Kal whispered. “You took me to see a fortune teller?”

“Calm down,” she said, “He’s not half bad. I found him a few years ago. Turns out he’s my great, great uncle. He escaped the prison camps. I think he will solve your problems.”

“Sonny!” The man shouted, straight in Kal’s face. “Where did you go?”

“I’m right here.” Kal spoke with his teeth clenched.

“Ah, if you say so. Please, please sit down at the fortune table.”

“All right,” said Kal. He sat down nervously and glanced at the crystal ball. The old man sat down at the other side.

“Now,” said the old man, “have you come here to seek your past, present, or future?”

“All three, Mr. LaFlamme,” Roslyn said. “It’s very important.”

“Good, good. I do well with important people. Given the circumstances, Kal, I’ll give you this one fortune for free. Now, what’s your name?”

“Um... Kal, sir.”

“Right. I remember now. Where do you live?”

“Well that’s kind of hard to--”

“No need to explain. You live at an invisible building. Am I correct?”

“Yes.” Kal was unimpressed.

“When did you begin feeling a need for answers?”

That’s an odd question, Kal thought. “It was when I woke up the morning before we received--”

“An eviction letter, I know.” the man finished. “Kal, put your hand on the crystal ball.”

Kal did as instructed and the old man put his hand on the other end of the ball. He then murmured several words and a long paragraph of incomprehensible magic spells.

“Kal Vinofsky,” he continued, “Take your hands off the crystal ball.”

Kal did as instructed. The old man waved a hand over the crystal ball.

“I see,” he breathed heavily, “the night sky. Darkness. No, it’s filled with gleaming stars. I see a spaceship, hurtling at great speeds away from... What is that?! A blue-green sphere. A planet. I see three figures. One is looking into a peculiar instrument. Another appears to be putting on magnetic boots. I see another ship hurtling toward them. I see.... I see....”

The old man lifted his hands from the crystal ball.

“What did you see?” demanded Roslyn. “Is he the one?”

The old man took off his spectacles and cleaned them with a shiny lens cleaner. He then glanced at Kal, at Roslyn, and back at Kal. “My boy, I have never met anyone quite like you.”

“I could say the same,” Kal remarked.

“A strange aura of alienness surrounds you.”

“Alienness, sir?” Kal sat further forward in his seat. “Am I an alien?”

“Yes and no.” The old man said, disconcerting Kal even more. “Roslyn, grab it for me.”

Roslyn was baffled. “You don’t mean the book?”

“Yes! The prophecy. Get it now, please!” The man started breathing heavily. Roslyn ran over to him.

“No need to worry about me!” he said.

Roslyn moved to a bookshelf and grabbed a thick volume off of the top shelf. She handed it to the old man, who flipped it open onto a table, and turned to one of many bookmarked pages.

“Ahem,” he said. “This is the *Prophecy of the Essences*.”

*“There will be three beings flying into space,
One noble, one loyal, and one of disgrace.
The creatures will come across a bright essence manufactured,
From a dying species by evil fractured.
They will travel back in time,
Unexpectedly sublime.
A war will come and go.
And these beings will stop the show.
Two will live, and one will die.
These creatures will disprove a lie.
And the star riders will save the world.”*

Matthew



Jim

The Cityscape of the Beacon

Night falls and we come to rest
Light shines despite sun's regress
And in the darkness there is less
For the eyes the sight a test

Sky and sea hold steel
Around the beacon lights kneel
And I doubt night's seal

Metal and night are dark
And so they are not apart

There are three

The sky in span
The darkness holds it all
For it is time of the sun-fall

The light from so many living hands
Upon switches so out of sight
Casting out the yellow light

And the sea so solemn in its grasp
Reflecting what little bright it can
For she has always carried man

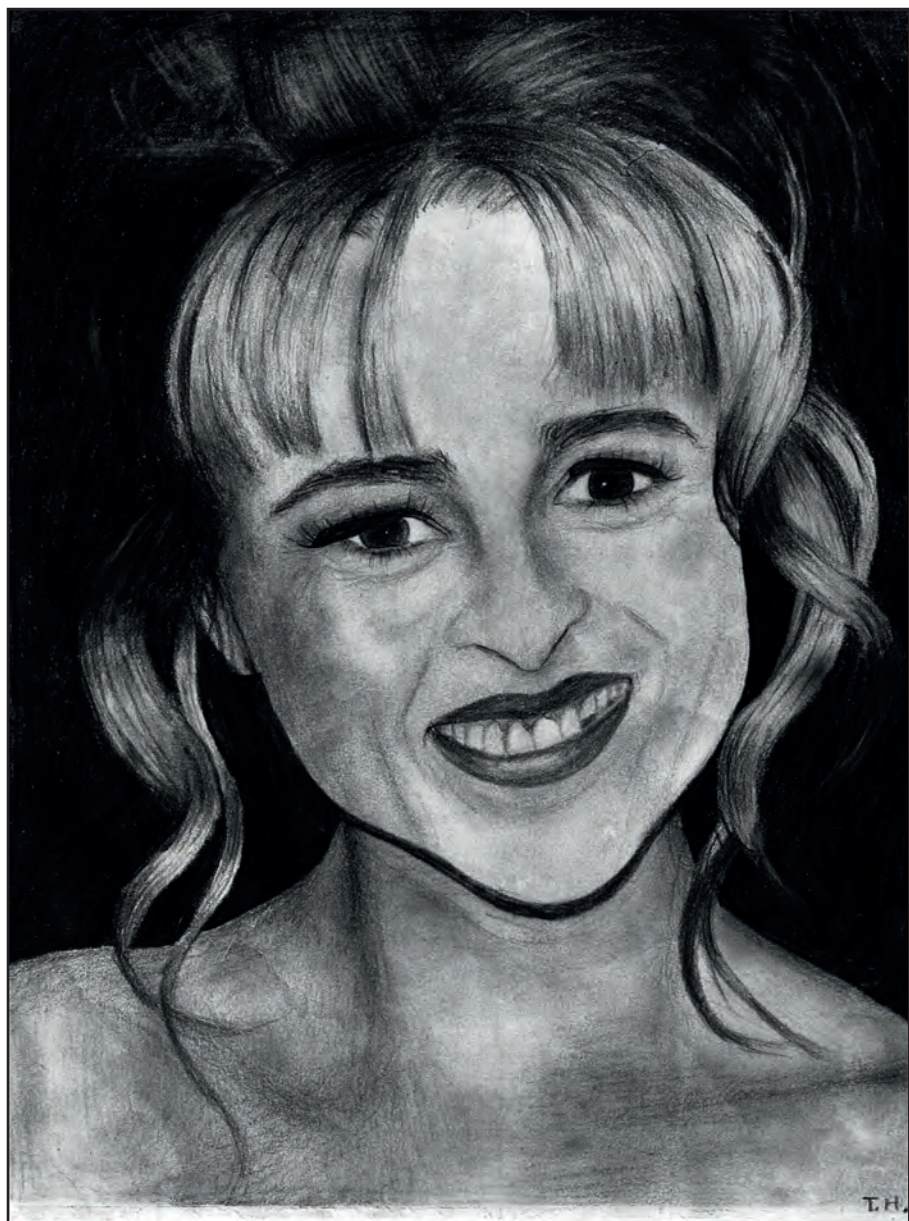
And so high the beacon shines
She shines white into the sky
And so it begs the question why

Jeremy

Curls

Her town weeps
Warriors wailing in the streets
Women clutch each other as they cry
Tearing at their clothes
But she does not
She sits in her house
Amicably
Peacefully
Wearing her best dress
Curling her hair
Each curl another memory
Another moment entwined
They call her evil
They call her insensitive
Say that she's wrong
As they sob through the town
While
She sits resolutely
Intent on her aesthetic pursuits
Making herself more beautiful
No one sees her tears
No one sees the scars she's hiding
They only see her bravery
And mock it

Adrienne



P. Pinoff/L

T.H.

The room is a mess of quiet bustle, a hum of activity behind your back as you keep your eyes glued firmly to the scene outside the window.

A part of your mind wrinkles its non-existent nose at the pea green paint coating the four walls.

Otherwise your attention is undivided as your stare remains focused outside. Mainly on the outer gate.

Because he's coming for you someday. He promised and everything.

Your brain is temporarily commandeered by a twig of a child barging into your field of vision (heh. Field.) and rooting itself in the corner of your eye.

Enough plant comparisons.

A muttered "What?" shoots from your mouth. You can almost see it bounce off the poor thing's forehead.

"Why do you sit there every day?"

You wince at the kid's high reedy voice. Ugh. And you thought nothing could crumple your mask of calm.

A quick breath. "Because I'm waiting for someone. He promised me he'd come soon, get me out of here."

Stick Bug is not placated. "How much do you trust him?"

"I'm sorry?"

Begin a short, utterly pointless staring fight.

Okay, no normal kid has a snake tongue. You shudder. Snakes freak you out.

"How can you trust him to retrieve you?" This kid is rude.

"He promised me, kiddo. Now go away."

The stick bug kid squats on the tiled floor, cocking its head. As if it is a rattlesnake or some other disgusting scaly limbless reptile. Eerie.

"Kid. Not a question. Go away."

Uh. Fangs?

Sort of starting to notice a greenish tint to the creepster's skin. Stupid snake train of thought.

It's happening all too quick for your eyes.

One second the kid's there, in front and below your window seat, and then you gasp harshly and try scrambling away, but it's not enough and it's too late, because *God get it off it's biting through my arm oh nooo go away you freak are you human or snake or--get off me!*

That placid section at the back of your mind notes, *That's actually pretty cool. And why is everyone a monster?*

Shut up brain, this is serious!

But I see Medusa and a platoon of zombies.

And even as you're having this short conversation with yourself, the snake-child has bitten through your forearm, even your bones are now part of the gory mess (at least it wasn't your writing arm), and your flesh is rotting, mottling, oh no the poison's spreading--

You wake up in the dark, gasping and shivering.

What was that?

An alarm shrieks in the distance, and in response you throw your blanket off and tremble as your feet connect with freezing hardwood floor. You twitch at the sickly green paint on the walls.

Joining the mass of children and not-quite-adults flooding the hallway in favor of Pancake Day, you think about the dream.

Or was it a dream? You're confident that this is the waking world. Then again, you've been proven wrong before. Who said that you couldn't be dreaming about your waking world?

Oh shut up.

You spare a paranoid glance behind you.

Who said that this wasn't the nightmare?

Ruthie



Adrienne



5876x



5876x

Adopt

Stray --

without a place to stay.

Suffering souls found in crummy holes.

These numerous lives

Unidentified.

Crumpled sheets waiting to meet

A form who will feed

Each curious face in a lonely space;

Internal sighs

Sparkling eyes

Outward cries.

Each individual's marks

Warming hearts

Yet still alone --

please take me home.

Ann

WHAT WOULD YOU ATTEMPT TO
DO IF YOU KNEW YOU COULD
NOT

FAIL ?



The Masked Man

What is it?

It is a mask, and not a man

The face eternal, the eyes inconstant

It is a mask, and not a man

Similarity disturbs, difference secures

It is a mask, and not a man

Shelter in fear, shield in courage

It is a mask, and not a man

Bound by pain, brought for protection

It is a mask, and not a man

Hiding a truth, revelling a ruse

It is a mask, and not a man

We cannot see past, understand present sight

It is a mask, and not a man

The expressions are exaggerated, sole emotion at the core

It is a mask, and not a man

Weak of will, chained and controlled

It is a mask, and not a man

It runs, it jumps, it twists, it shouts

It is a mask, and not a man

Immovable, fated, resolute, stubborn

It is a mask, and not a man

Soulful or soulless

It is a mask, and not a man

Damnation or duty

It is a mask, and not a man

Remove the mask

It is not a man

Jeremy

"...Bramble Bay Institute. I don't know where it's actually located, but apparently not even their alumni know exactly where it is. It only accepts the children of alumni, or the so-called 'incredibly elite'. Definitely the most selective school on the planet, but really the only option,"

Jay looked up from his place across the table. "That won't be a problem for me,"

The man next to him frowned. "Jay..."

"I know," Jay muttered almost apologetically. "But based on my accomplishments and my knowledge of their school, not to mention Madagascar and everything that followed, they have to take me,"

"There were extenuating circumstances in each case,"

"I know that, Lynx, we all do. But *they* don't have to,"

"You'll have to tell them about Madagascar," Lynx mused.

"Only the basics, obviously," the man sitting next to Jay quickly cut in.

"Obviously, Father," Jay said sarcastically.

The man frowned once again, and Jay sent him a suitably chastised look.

"Puma," Jay asked after a moment. "How do we get in contact with this institute, or whatever the admissions process is?"

"Seems like they do an extensive background check, and there's an interview. Pretty straightforward, if you ask me, but it seems like it takes a lot before they even consider beginning the process. As for informing them of your interest, that's easy enough. We'll send a -"

Three booming knocks echoed through the building, and four people immediately jumped to their feet. As they ran toward the front door, they drew their odd assortment of weapons. One carried a elongated rifle, fitted with a makeshift sight. Two carried simple handguns. Jay held a short dagger in his left hand, and a longer blade in the other.

When they reached the door, they shifted into a well-practiced formation. One of them pushed a button on the wall and the door swung open.

A girl stepped forward, her head to the ground. She opened her mouth to speak as she looked up. She jumped backwards and let out a small shriek as soon as she noticed the weapons levelled at her.

Jay sheathed his blades and stepped towards her. The others left quietly, fading into the background without a sound.

"Kate," Jay greeted her, his mouth twisting into a smile.

"Jacob," she smiled sadly, her obvious surprise quickly fading.
"How are you?"

"Good, good,"

There was a long pause.

"Er, do you want to go... do something?" Jay asked.

"Hmm?" Kate blinked a few times. "No. No, I - I was talking to my parents. They don't want me to see you anymore, which is awful, but I guess whatever they say is right, so..."

Jay's brow furrowed further, but he kept a light tone of voice.
"You're an awful liar, Kate. What's really on your mind?"

"No, it really is my parents. They said we have to stop seeing each other, so that, er, has to happen,"

"You're still lying, Kate," Jay teased. "What's really going on?"

"You don't get it!" Kate suddenly sounded infuriated. "My parents are making me do this, so I have to,"

"You're lying! Your parents aren't making you do anything!"

"Fine, Jacob, you want to know what's really going on?" she asked, her voice a gaining a sharp edge.

"Of course,"

"It's you, Jacob. You're out all the time, but never tell me where you are or what you're doing. We hardly ever see each other, and even then only when I go out of my way to find you, or you show up at my house in the middle of the night. You lie as easily as you breathe, you think you're better than everyone, and I feel like I don't even know you.

"It's not because my parents said so that I'm breaking it off with you - God, they've been wanting me to do that ever since I met you - no, I'm doing this because you're a jerk who has probably been cheating on me since the day we met and I was just too stupid to realize until now!"

They stared at each other for a moment - she, infuriated and breathing heavily; he, practically unruffled, a confused look across his face.

"So, wait," Jay began. "You're breaking up with me?"

"Is that really a question? Seriously??" she swung her hand at the side of Jay's face, catching him completely unaware. "Ugh!"

She turned and stormed off, leaving Jay to stand alone in the doorway, his hand covering the slowly reddening patch on his cheek, a confused expression on his face.

Kevin

To a Hero

Feel, think, breathe, live
Let compassion be your guide
Walk, move, look, forgive
Be and exist, your heart opened wide

Discover, fly, begin, rest easy
Open your face to the sky
Embrace, accept, love, be free
As if tomorrow was the day you'd die

Prosper, thrive, flourish, succeed
Seek solitude in your calmest retreat
Ground, give, grow, Godspeed
Befriend those whom you'd never meet

Stand stronger than ever in your own skin
Be yourself, let your story begin

Stephanie