

The New
Roots

Rebool

Literary Journal



rise up.

(Spring 2013)

Notes

From **Bennett**: Hello everyone! I'd like to say thank you to every writer and artist who contributed to this magazine. The works contained in this magazine are sincere. No one wrote a poem to get into the lit mag; everyone did it from their heart. I'm proud of this compilation, and to be honest our literary journal is a looooot better than some colleges' journals. I hope all the readers enjoy this bundle of creativity.



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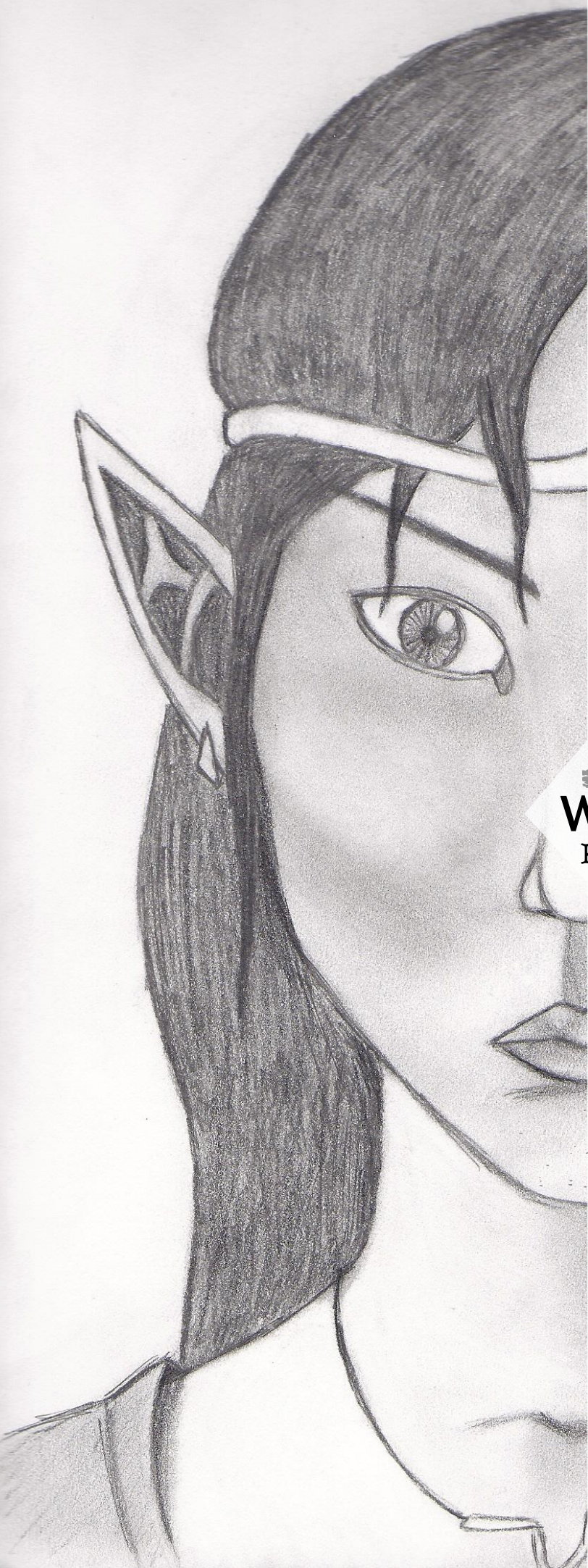
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On Art

Michaël Petkov

Why do I want to be an artist? Well for starters, I can't imagine myself doing a tedious job like systems analyst. What ever the hell a systems analyst does, I surely want no part in that. It sounds rather boring. Nine to five commute? Fuck that noise. I'd surely go mad if I had to do that.

More than that, I realised I wanted to tell stories. Whether through music or manga, I wanted to tell stories and I wanted there to be something that is left behind. I wanted to do something that MATTERS, and art? Art matters.

Ever since I was young I thought this way. For the longest time though, I was reluctant to say that art was something I wanted to do, in fear of being scoffed at. Everyone knows that the arts are far from a stable career track but, what they lack in stability, they make up for in how rewarding they can be.

While I am far from realising my dreams, I can still imagine the pride and satisfaction that I will feel when I go into a store and see an LP or a vol. 1 of my debut work, Jump Comics in the corner and until I get there (and beyond it), I can not stop working to achieve my dreams.

At the time I write this, I am 17. By now, most have given up on their dreams of being an artist and settled for pursuing something more attainable. Those people, for better or worse are a lost cause, but for those that read this and harbour even a thought about being an artist: DO it.

You have one life to live, so why not live it on hard mode?

So, to pursue my dreams, I have little choice but to work every day to claim my rightful place. Until the day I hold a copy of a book in my hand with it's sleek cover, that new book smell and the Jump Comics label placed in the corner, I will work, I will sweat, I will write and I will draw.

After all, it is the thing I was born to do.

Black Holes & Revelations

By Riley Maassen

Chapter 1: Take a Bow

It rained hard. The grey city was now darker as the water washed dried blood from the empty streets. It had been a short fight, but the story was far from over. The resistance had won the battle, they had inspired the greater populace, but they had lost a hero in the process. And everyone in the city knew that the war was far from over, it had only just come to fruition.

On this rainy day, a funeral procession marched solemnly down the main street. In its wake, thousands of mourners clogged the sidewalks, wanting to get one last chance at the hero that saved them. The man who had inspired the entire revolution, who had brought it into the limelight of the world. He had broken the chains that was the tyrannical rule of the government. He was the martyr of the revolution. He was Bellamy.

His soft, pale skin was just barely visible on the cart they pulled him on. I remember the day, I reported on it. I remember the days before Bellamy, when there was no hope for the people; when the world was trapped in the cold grip of the government. Then, their spike-haired savior had appeared. His wide black eyes flashed as he filled every word with vigor and emotion. His shaven face was always bright after a victory.

Now his face was cold and dark. His casket rested at the center of Blue Square, where he

had come to his unfortunate end. A bulls-eye of citizens, all inspired by the work that Bellamy had done surrounded the casket as the eulogies were delivered by Bellamy's closest friends. Drake, the now lone leader of the resistance, spoke of Bellamy's strengths as a leader. London, her long blonde hair soaked by the downpour, spoke of how she idolized Bellamy, while a teary eyed November spoke of Bellamy's loving character.

I was the last to speak. I was S5M to most of the people in the audience, the voice of reason in the monochromatic city. I told the people not to give up, I told them that Bellamy's vision was not yet complete, and to honor him properly, we had to finish the job. To Bellamy, I was the one who convinced people, even though it was Bellamy, in the end, who had won them over. I finished by saying that he won't be forgotten. Sixteen hundred, thirty three people were in tears when the statue was unveiled.

Bellamy's casket resides in a shrine beneath the fifteen foot statue that bore his image. Flowers pile at the statue's feet and in the tomb as the war he sparked rages on around them. The flowers are never swept away, people would see that as disrespect towards the greatest leader that the city had ever seen. Every year on the anniversary of his death, I walk up to the statue and place a rose at his feet, and take a bow.

Chapter 2: Starlight

The cold concrete ran an icy finger up Bellamy's back, but he was undeterred. The roof was his favorite place, and no amount of bad weather could stop him from visiting it. He could faintly hear footsteps and voices at street level, almost gave him the illusion that the city was a normal place. People walked about, shopping, gossiping, being overall good citizens; it would leave a foreigner under the impression that everyone was happy.

The sea of opaque gray buildings that were strewn out in front of him reminded Bellamy otherwise. The oppressive government, led by a man only known as One, implemented gray to keep the people subservient. Keeping citizens in the dark was their speciality. It was why Bellamy was in the resistance, a group of people that wished to see the totalitarian regime toppled, and an open democracy put in place. It was why he was leading the resistance. Strings of rallies and attacks were all planned out by the mind on the rooftop. He burned speeches like the sun, igniting the underground while evading the black troopers.

The black troopers were the police force and the army of the city. Their black, bugged eyes watched everyone in the city, using brute force to keep everyone in line. They were outfitted in completely black armor, hence the apt name. They were incredibly strong, but also incredibly easy to outwit, as Bellamy had done on many occasions. Bellamy had never killed one of the troopers. He had injured them, but not one had died at his hands. Bellamy's counterpart, Drake, did not share this status.

While Bellamy riled up the masses, Drake trained the rebels. The aforementioned attacks, while planned out by Bellamy, were all carried out by the six foot six hulking mass of muscles that was Drake. To the surprise of all the revolutionaries, Drake and Bellamy never disagreed. While Drake had the power to veto whatever Bellamy had planned, there was never any need to. All of the plans that Bellamy had ever made were always perfect. He was the greatest planner that the resistance could ask for, and Drake was the perfect man to carry them out. It was perfect symbiosis, although the revolution had not taken full flight yet.

While both Bellamy and Drake were extremely talented rebels, the revolution never got very far. The government saw it as a fly hovering around a tank; it was rather ineffective. A protest here, a bomb there, the government would ignore it, or worse, they would cover it up, and

the populace would never be aware of the rebels' actions. For once, Bellamy had no clue how to proceed. He couldn't make the revolution bigger, he couldn't take down the government. The answer was constantly on the tip of his tongue, but it always evaded words.

A familiar sounds broke Bellamy's meditation. It was a search chopper; the bane of the starlight. The large machines hovered through the city, used to find runaways and criminals, as well as transport them to the secret government prison. Bellamy heard November's voice calling over the sound of the blades, but he was already running for the door. He dove into the doorway, narrowly avoiding the wretched, black bird. Bellamy breathed a sigh of relief as he lay on the ground just inside the stairwell. He opened his eyes and saw his lover, November, shaking her head at him. While she tried to look upset, Bellamy could see through her blank lips and the scar on her left cheek to see that she was on the verge of laughing. Bellamy had been been in such situations before.

“One of these days...” November started, attempting to hide humorous thoughts in her blonde-haired head.

“One of these days I'll stick the landing?” Bellamy filled in. November cracked a smile, and Bellamy knew he had won. It was the same skill set he used to make November smile that he used to enlighten the masses to the power of revolution.

“Drake wants to speak before lights out.” November told his as they made their way into the safe house. Bellamy paused before leaving his love for the brief moment it would take to converse with Drake. He gave November a kiss and looked into her green eyes before entering the dining room. Drake was huddled over the mahogany table that was plastered with tons of maps. Drake gazed at them with confused and puzzled eyes. He looked up, but kept his tired eyes in the same expression, as Bellamy entered the room.

“Drake.” Bellamy saluted. Drake pushed the closest map away from him.

“It's no good Bellamy.” Drake said in frustration. “We're not getting anywhere.”

“Patience friend,” Bellamy said calmly, “one day soon, we will have a master plan.”

“I hope you're right.” Drake sighed.

“I will be.” Bellamy stated in confidence. “Now we should go to sleep. Another attack in the morning.”

“Always right Bellamy.” Drake smiled. Bellamy smiled back and the two leaders split into their respective rooms.

As Bellamy crawled into his simple, soft bed next to November, he thought about what Drake had said to him. Bellamy had doubts about his own skill. His plans succeeded every time, but there was no master plan. It was his biggest failure as a leader. How could he lead, if he did not have a way to guide the people to a better world.

Bellamy drifted asleep, though, it was not the end of his thoughts. His dream made him a prophet. The prophet of good up against evil. It was a battle of words, but Bellamy could not hear what he was saying. He knew, however, that it was perfect. It was exactly what he needed it, it was...nothing. Something had opened under Bellamy; a black hole. A gargantuan pit with no escape. It was sucking Bellamy in until he could no longer see.

His re-emergence was spectacular. Bellamy exploded from the black hole with the power of a thousand suns, sweeping the enemy off of it's feet and winning the battle. Was this dream a sign? Was it the key to the revolution? Bellamy had no idea. It was a vague dream at most, filled with no recognizable signs. Despite this, when he awoke, Bellamy was filled with new found hope and power.

Fin. 

Fallen Angel

By Kristy Jensen



scorching light flashes before me. Soon I feel a burning pain

in my left wing. The pain, oh the pain. But I must escape. I cannot fall. So I fly on, cringing every time I use my wing. I dare not look back at my injury. That will only slow me down. I must keep flying at all costs. The scarlet ribbon in my hair soon comes loose and falls. My most precious possession.

“No!” I yelp.

I pause just long enough to spin and spot it. I also spot the guards. My quick decision could cost my life, but that doesn't matter. Only the ribbon does. I swoop down, almost into a nose dive, and snatch up my precious ribbon. Looking up I see a dense forest off in the distance.

I could hide. My mind races as I try to make another daring decision. *How can I lose them?*

I waste no time thinking and make a mad dash for the trees. It doesn't take the others long to figure out what I am doing. They send three guards to sweep in front of me and cut me off. But I am fast. I am one of the fastest fliers in all of Heaven. And they know it. I think they expected me to fly around them, because the look on their faces almost makes me laugh as I arch upward towards the sky. Of course it hurts. Being near the ground relieved some of the pressure. Flying to higher altitudes pulls on my weak muscles, causing great pain. Feeling safe enough to take a pause, I look down at the three guards. They are furious. Good. Showing emotion means showing weakness. I tie my beloved ribbon around my right wrist and speed toward the trees just as the guards nearly catch me.

So close. The forest is just a few more miles. So close to freedom.

Suddenly, another flash startles me, nearly blinding me. Screaming in pain, I am struck again, but in my other wing.

“No!”

I’m fast, yes, but nothing can fly faster than a lightning bolt. Especially one from the Council of Archangels. Soon my wings begin to fail me and I start plummeting towards the earth. Angels aren’t supposed to swear, but believe me, I curse my wings harshly as I fall. Now all I can do is watch the ground speed faster and faster.

Am I going to die?

A bolt of lightning can kill any being, whether dead or alive, mortal or immortal. One more strike and I’m done for. Looking at how fast I’m falling, I believe that death would be kinder. I’d rather face a quick death than suffer while mending broken bones caused by this fall. Immortality is great for fast regeneration, but you still feel every little bruise, and boy, is this going to be painful.

I remember when I was small, my father was a guard. He fought in the Great War. The war between Heaven and Hell. Humans say it’s not real, others make up ridiculous stories of valor and triumph. It’s quite the opposite. I lost my father in that war. Many families lost fathers, uncles, brothers. The war maidens were our front line. Only three survived with hardly a scratch. Others were brutally wounded or killed. How can the humans be so cold? There’s only one human I care for. Only one. I cannot see any other human feel as much sympathy as Daemon.

Daemon. How could I forget you? My sweet Daemon. I can’t die. No, I refuse. I couldn’t leave him alone in this world. I must survive! Waking from my memories I see the ground once more.

Too fast! I'm going too fast!

I close my eyes and brace for impact. I shield my head with my arms and curl up. I hit the ground and scream out in pain. The most pain I have ever felt in my immortal life. I'm supposed to be with my mother in the Council gardens. I never thought I would be running from them. Running from my very home. The pain fades to a dull numbness and dizziness takes over. Everything goes black.

Fin.

Sky High Eden

By Pat Stevens

The sound of the trickling water
The peaceful scene
When the entire world passes by
Everyone in a rush
Everyone in a hurry

No one stops to notice
The arrangement of the mother's bones
So carefully placed
Very delicately lain

No one stops to notice
The sound of the wind
Rattling through the leaves
The crunch of leaves under every foot
Here in this place
So far from civilization
Yet so very close

No one stops to notice
undisturbed by the noises around
An Eden within an urban jungle
With all the rustle and bustle outside of this
sanctuary

No one stops to notice
The wee slither
awaking from his slumber
snaking off to find his next meal

No one stops to notice
The strings, which hold down the bonsai
Keeping it from growing
But still it persists

No one stops to notice
The blossom sprouting
From deep within a crevice of earth
A paradox of its own
A perfect equilibrium
Starting with a single drop of water
This little Eden
Here is serenity

AUTUMN GRAVEYARD

ENGLISH INTENSIVE COLLABORATIVE POEM

The tangy sweet smell of the wet fallen leaves.

A morning dew left from a night of icy rain.

Dark looming willows weep for the lifeless.

A cool wind blows, sifting the fog through the cold tombs.

The ground is a sea of fiery hues.

Walking the gentle slope gives a sense of death,

a sense of everlasting peace.

War Raged On

By Kailee Owens

War raged on. A full moon lit up the night sky. Blades flashed and whirled, the clang of metal on metal filled the air. The endless waves of both forces crashed in the middle and became a seamless whole, an endless sea of fighting. A single elf stood in a cluster of vampires.

Her blade cut through the throat of one vampire, slashed through the mail on another and watched them fall at her feet. She pulled her blade over head, cut down through the shoulder of another and watched it crumple under her blade. A dent in her armor pressed against her ribs and made it hard for her to breathe. An arrow in her thigh prohibited her from moving quickly. Bringing her sword around again she cut the legs out from under a vamp, then watched him fall, bleeding.

She looked around for another foe, breathing hard. Thousands of bodies, both friend and foe, lay before her either dead or dying. She fell to her knees, exhausted, and peeled off her broken breast plate. Without that hindrance, she could breath freely again. Getting to one foot she ripped the arrow from her leg. She heard a scream of pain and it took a moment for her to realize it came from her. She got up, sheathed her long sword and started heading in the direction she believed the camp was. As she walked she checked for survivors. She came across a man with a spear driven through his abdomen and into the ground. He was gasping for breath and fumbling, weakly, trying to pull the shaft from his body. She went to him and tried to pull out the spear, but its head was buried too deeply in the dirt.

“This is going to hurt.” She told him. He shook his head in what she took as a nod, though she couldn’t be sure. Gripping the shaft right above the wound she broke it off. He cried out in pain, and she tried to ignore him but couldn’t help but flinch at the sound. She lifted him from the broken shaft and laid him back on the ground. Then she removed the empty sheaths that crossed his chest, and his belt, a deep blue vest, and a cream tunic. She ripped both sleeves off the tunic and tore them into strips to bandage his wound. It wasn’t pretty, but it was the best she could do. Then she replaced the now sleeveless tunic, vest, belt and sheaths. Once she finished she got a chance to look him over. He had shaggy, dirty blond hair and bright blue eyes. He wore next to no armor, the only piece being a silver archer’s cuff with a design of three crescents on it. She noted that the same design was on both his sheathes and there were crescents worked into his clothing as well. He also had on brown leggings and tall brown leather boots. After a moment she noticed him looking up at her; they just stared at each other and after awhile he tried to sit up. Immediately she tried to help him; she got him to stand and made sure he was steady. After she was certain he could stand on his own she took a step back. Then he started to cough and she tried to get him to lie back down, but he waved her off.

“I should get you back to camp.” She said to him and he gave a slight nod. Putting his right arm over her shoulder she gripped him around the waist supporting most of his weight as they started to walk. They walked over a mile, with a few stops so he could rest. Whenever they stopped she scouted for survivors but never found any. They stopped again at the edge of the carnage; about ten feet from the edge of the bodies was a wall of trees.

She cursed in Elvish, letting go of his arm. She started surveying the area when she noticed him staring at her.

“You’re an Elf.” She just looked at him; it was the first time she had heard him speak so it

took a moment before what he said sunk in.

“You’re a vampire.” She cursed some more and started to pace, trying to figure out how to handle this new information.

“Who are you?” He asked, forcefully but quietly. She stopped and turned to look at him.

“Who am I? I am Akira,” She stated calmly, “Heir to the Elfin Kingdom.” She looked at him for a second and asked, “Who are you?”

“I,” He paused for a moment, “I’m Evan.” He sighed.

“Just Evan?” She asked quickly. “What, with no coven, no status?”

“It doesn’t matter who I was.” He paused and turned to face the edge of the forest. “I’m not that person anymore.” He said, fiddling with a leaf.

“Then who are you?” She asked quietly.

“Just Evan, not Evan the Vampire, just Evan.” He sighed, then painfully set himself on a rock and placed his head in his hands.

“Okay, then for now,” She said hesitantly. “I’ll be just Akira.” She didn’t know why but for some reason she felt she could trust him. He looked up at her and gave a small smile, just big enough to show his fangs for the first time. She stared for a moment before sharply turning away. The sun started to rise and she watched it, letting the sun caress her face as she thought about what to do.

Akira turned back to Evan and noticed he was staring at the sun; his face had begun to burn. She gave a short curse and ran over to him. She threw his arm over her shoulder and hurried into the forest. The trees offered some protection but not enough for them to stop moving. His skin had already split on his cheeks and arms. His eyes shut tight, his face distorted by pain, blindly following Akira. She pulled him farther into the forest until they came upon a

small grove surrounded by tall bushes and old trees. At one side was a large boulder; she lead him over to it and set him down behind it. His breathing was beginning to get heavy and worry engulfed her mind. She grabbed some wide leafy branches and started to make him a little cave.

By the time she was done light was starting to filter in through the leaves. Small patches of light dappled the mossy grove. Akira knelt down by the small den she had built and saw that he was unconscious. The redness was starting to fade but she had no idea what to do about the cracks in his skin. She noticed for the second time the empty sheaths on his back. With a quick, deft move she took them and left the shady grove.

She made her way back to the battlefield, eventually finding the spot where she discovered Evan. She looked around and discovered two curved blades that match the sheaths. They were thick and somewhat heavy though the balance was close to perfect. They did not compare to the Elfin blade she carried, but they were still well made. They had long flat gross guards that had the same design on them as his sheaths. They also had a pointed sapphire sticking out of both ends of the guard. Another larger sapphire made up the blades pommel. She also came across her boomerang which she had lost at one point during the battle. It was almost in the shape of a lightning bolt. Much wider at one end it came to a right angle and then went off again at a forty five. The bend was wrapped in leather to create the handle and each corner was sharpened to make it a deadly weapon. She slipped it back in the sheath on the back of her right hip, opposite her sword.

Akira made her way back to the shaded grove, coming across some wild berries on the way. When she reached the grove, Evan was standing in the shadows. The burns on his arms were almost gone and the cracks were starting to close.

“I found your swords.” Akira said handing him the sheathed blades. He took them from

her, nodded his thanks, and placed them next to his little den. She too decided to remove her sword from her belt along with her sheathed boomerang, making herself more comfortable.

She sat against the rock next to the shelter she made for Evan. He sat down against the side of it. She picked a berry she collected from the pile on her palm and popped it in her mouth.

“Akira,” Evan said hesitantly.

“Yes?” She picked up a few more berries while she waited for his response.

“I have always been curious about elves.” He started slowly. “I was wondering if you would mind telling me about your life and where you grew up.”

She took a moment to chew the berries in her mouth, slowly, before answering. “Alright,” She said, turning towards him. “But, let us take turns. You ask a question, then I will ask one, and we will go back and fourth.”

“Alright,” He said, leaning slightly towards her. “Where did you grow up?”

“I grew up in the elves’ capital city of Aimalia.”

“What’s it like?” He asked.

She smirked, ignoring the fact that it was his second question in a row. “It’s beautiful. A sprawling field of wild flowers borders the southern edge. It sits at the bottom of a valley, and a thin river runs to the east in the valley’s center. An outsider could walk right through the heart of the city and not even realize it...” She trailed off, lowering her gaze and fiddled with a small flower beside her foot.

“Sounds like you miss it.” Evan said quietly, after a moment.

“Yes.” Akira looked up at him. “It’s my home. I’ve spent my entire life there.”

“Hmm...”

“What?”

“It’s just... our situations seem to be completely reversed. Like you I spent my entire life at the capital, but I would have done anything to leave. Which I did, that’s why I came here” He was silent for a moment. “Well it’s your turn.”

“Why did you want to leave so badly?”

“My parents were,” he paused. “Oppressive. There was always only one way, their way. Whether it was about my schooling or about how I was to live my life, it was always their way.” He paused, and ran a hand through his blond locks. “How about you, what are your parents like?”

“Well, I’m sure you know the king was killed early in the war. He was a wonderful father as well as a wise leader. As for my mother she is an excellent elf and warrior, though a bit impersonal.”

“It sounds like you don’t quite see eye to eye with your mother.”

“No, I don’t, but we don’t have any real issues either.”

“Well that’s good I suppose.” He said quietly.

“Did you have any friends at the capital?” She asked after a moment.

“I did have a best friend growing up. His parents were friends with mine and we were practically like brothers.” He trailed off.

“What happened between the two of you?” She sat forward, bringing her legs to her chest and wrapping her arms around them.

“We had a falling out not long ago.”

“Oh,” Akira paused. “Do you want to talk about it?” He just looked away. “Well, it’s your turn then.”

“Are you tired?” He asked, looking up at her.

“Very.” She said, just realizing the fact.

“Can you sleep during the day? Then we can travel at night.”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea.” He nodded and set himself down inside the little cave, being careful of his side. Akira laid down next to it and draped an arm over her eyes.

“Akira.”

“Yeah, Evan?”

“Sleep well.” He said after a slight pause.

She lifted up her arm and smiled at him. “You too.” Then placed the arm back over her eyes and tried to sleep.

Fin.

Invite Them to Tea

By Emelie Murphy

He lived just inside his head
A world of parties and pretend
A science of madness
Nostalgic for profound music
and pinstripe pants.

From his hat he brings forth
a cake served on fingers
because he's eaten the plates.
The way to succeed is to make
possible the best
mistakes
Living through dateless days.
Never intending to live any
other way.

Until that clever girl came
and didn't want to play
Most surrender to him
with bewilderment and awe.
Fear was all she saw
when he declared to this
clever girl
for just a quick bit
of her sun and moon haired
mane
Sitting placid she stayed
making friends with his
artful brain

He grasped a summery curl
from the head of the girl
The girl in reaction grabbed
the
teapot and to his face it was
sent

Things could become
so mucked up from one
event.

He looked at the tea
Crying from the Cracks
He held his face angrily,
but didn't throw the teapot
back.

He riddled her and belittled
her
until steam streamed
from her ears
And she frantically yelled
about
So flustered she actually
stuttered
over her delicate tongue.

She finally sprang up
upsetting her futile teacup
Glared.
"You were younger with
imaginings
better than everyone else
Now you're older and you're
wasting yourself.
You had enough genius
to last you forever
and you could regain it if
you only ask the favor"

He looked into the tears
pooling rage in perpetual
blue
and smiled because nothing
but she said were
true.

She sighed instead of scoffed
and he was deafened
by clamorous tolling of
sirens
and stamping of
feet
heard from the rats under
city
streets
A chorus of people
protesting meat.

She said farewell
and turned toward the road

He called her name.

"Please, don't go. I need you.
You know. Show me how
to mend this. I promise
I want ask you for anything
more,
just to help me get back
What I so deeply pine for"

A nod was all she had to
reply
and she gave him back his
life.

Beldha

By Bennett Purdy

As they approached the wooden arch inviting them to Cusach

Village, Yviv slid her large, pointy black hat off, and after folding it neatly, slid it into her lizard's saddle bag. Xiashua watched her from atop his white thoroughbred.

"Why do always take your hat off when we enter towns?" asked Xiashua. "It's not like I can't still tell you're a witch."

"Ah," said Yviv, "but that's the point exactly. To anyone who's wise enough, my vocation is clear. But to the simpletons who would have me burned for my practices, I am nothing more than a traveler in black."

"Well, I'll be happy to get this armor off. Or see if I can find a pretty little thing to do it for me, eh Martland?" Xiashua jeered.

Yviv rolled her eyes.

Beside his two companions on his young chestnut mare, Martland lifted the brim of his own hat, a brown, worn in piece with a wide rim that was tattered in places. He looked at Xiashua but said nothing.

"Bah! Don't you ever just make small talk?"

"I, for one," said Yviv, "appreciate the quiet."

Xiashua grunted and returned his eyes to the road.

Scoping out the town, Martland saw that the road leading in was thin and unpaved, and didn't get any better inside the smallish settlement. In the center of the town, it split into a crossroad, so the buildings were set up in a cross formation, hugging what was little more than a large dirt path. In the center stood two large figures, which Martland, with his sharp vision, made out to be wooden statues. The buildings themselves were rather well-crafted wooden structures, most having an unfinished look on the outside that showed off the grain of the spruce. Dozens of the village people milled about, many carrying food or other supplies to and from the farms that stood outside the town. It was, after all, soon to be winter, as anyone could see from the blazing maple trees scattered throughout the massive, predominantly pine forest.

One building in particular caught Martland's eye. It was a tall rectangular tower jutting out above the rest of the properties, and there seemed to be someone's initials inscribed on the side of it. Martland held up his arm to shield his eyes from the late afternoon sun so he could make out the letters. H... Martland felt a tug on the arm he was holding his horse's reigns with. He tore his gaze from the tower and directed it downward to a young girl, who presently released her grip on Martland's sleeve. She was dressed in colorless clothes that might have fit her better a year or two ago. She offered up a bowl filled with perfect looking apples.

"Apple, sir? Only one copper a piece!" she recited, staring with hopeful eyes.

Martland smiled, a slight curve on the edge of his mouth. He reached into his coat, pulled out a handful of coins and, picking one out, placed it into the girl's open palm.

"Thank you, sir!" she said, beaming as she placed the coin carefully into her pocket before handing one of the bright red fruits up to Martland.

Martland nodded and accepted the apple. The girl, who had been trotting along quickly to

keep up with the horses, ran to Yviv and offered her the bowl with the same enthusiastic inquiry.

"I don't carry much money," said Yviv thoughtfully, "but would you take a rat's eye potion?"

She extracted a tiny vial from one of her small belt pouches and offered it to the girl.

"They're just the trick for the flu," Yviv added.

The girl reached for the vial, but turned her head abruptly when an older girl with long hair called her name from the edge of a farm near the road.

"Miri!" the young woman shouted. "Come here! I need help carrying the barrels of cider!"

Miri looked back at Yviv, who had stopped her lizard to wait for the girl.

"Miri!" shouted the elder girl again.

Coming to a decision, Miri grabbed the tiny glass bottle out of Yviv's hand and gave her an apple from the bowl. Then she ran over to the long-haired girl, who started speaking in a harsh undertone as soon as Yviv spurred on her lizard.

"Miri, you shouldn't talk to witches! They're not to be trusted. Anyway, you know to ask for a silver piece when you see adventurers. They're always loaded."

Yviv glanced at Martland and Xiashua. Neither seemed to have heard the quiet voice of the long haired girl. Martland had the eyes of a hawk, but the racket of his firearms had dulled his hearing. Xiashua was still looking at Miri.

"I want a damn apple," he said to no one in particular.

Yviv looked down at the fruit in her hand, then held it out in Xiashua's direction.

"Here. I've lost my appetite."

Xiashua looked Yviv in the eyes, then shrugged and took the apple.

"Works for me," he said before taking a loud bite.

Harmon Cusach downed the last of a huge mug of hard cider, then slammed the empty vessel down on the table in front of him with a thunk.

"So what you're telling me," he began, staring at the man sitting across from him, "is that we're now charging two silvers less per vial, upon the requests of the middleman? Is that what you're saying?"

The man fidgeted for a moment, glancing around the interior of the bar.

"Well, sir, they're saying there's a cheaper seller."

"Cheaper... There is no other seller! It takes more than a basement to make this stuff, and security's way too tight around Sativlae to use their farms. Tell our man he's a liar, and the Wolves won't tolerate liars. Go!"

"But it's almost dark," said the man hesitantly.

Harmon simply looked at the man sternly until he got up and left.

"Idiots," mumbled Harmon. "All idiots."

The group of travelers were now riding slowly through the town, looking for a stable.

Martland was the first to notice a man walk swiftly out of what seemed to be the tavern. He went for his horse, who had been hitched to a post outside the building, but upon seeing the adventurers, ran back in. Martland kept watching but said nothing to his companions. After a minute, a large man with a confident gait emerged from the tavern, followed shortly by the other man. The large one approached the adventurers.

"Hello there!" shouted the man.

"Greetings," replied Xiashua, adopting the courteous manner he used in public. "To whom do I owe the honor?"

"The name's Harmon," said Harmon, "Harmon Cusach."

"I suppose you're the overseer of this lovely village?"

"Indeed I am." Harmon cast his gaze around to the other newcomers. "I like to greet adventurers when they pass through our humble town."

Most of the people milling about in the road had stopped what they were doing to watch the exchange between Xiashua and Harmon. Yviv and Martland noticed this.

Xiashua bowed. "We appreciate your hospitality. I don't suppose you could direct us to a stable?"

Harmon's eyes lingered on Yviv before he answered. "Straight ahead on the left. You'll see it."

Xiashua again made a small bow. "Thank you much. I hope we'll meet again."

With that, he spurred on his horse past Harmon, and his friends followed. Upon passing, Martland dipped his hat slightly.

Harmon waited for them to pass before muttering under his breath, "Not me." The he

looked around at the villagers standing around watching the scene. “Back to work,” he said in a low voice.

Everyone resumed their previous activities at a greater speed.

Fin.

heartless

By K.Wayne

I try to hide my soul
From the darkness within
But when I'm left alone it overcomes me
Drags me down and seeps through my skin like lotion
Then that creature rises up
It shrieks like a banshee and has those eyes
Those uncaring, unfeeling, cold as liquid nitrogen eyes
And when you look into them
It feels like all the sunshine and all the happiness fades
Until you're left with black and gray
That feeling you got when daddy let go of your bike
And you rode down that street like you could fly
Shatters into pieces that you cannot put back together
That feeling when your daddy tells you you're not his
But he loves twice as much as any father could
Is swept from under your feet when you hear those four words
That a child should never hear
'Daddy doesn't love you'
When I saw those words
Carelessly typed on a piece of paper
When I realized that a father
My father who I never knew, never saw
Never heard his voice with my own ears
Tosses me out like stale bread
Pushes me aside like stray dog wandering the streets
A blanket of depression wraps me up

And as my red eyes drift to sleep

A tear falls on the ink

That wrote my last name

Haiku

By Jesse Mekeel

Silly Little Boy

How Could You Ever Believe

You Could Be A Man

Long Road Home

By Jesse Mekeel



was told it was a small farm town surrounded by mountains. No cell

service, no internet, and no friends. I was seventeen, and there was no one around, but I wasn't alone.

Chapter 1: A Long Road

"Mooom," I croaked, leaning my head up, tired from the long car ride. "Are we there yet?"

She looked back, exasperated, as if I had asked the question repeatedly, when in fact this was the first time.

"Not yet, Jesse," she said. "We still have another hour and a half 'til we get to the house."

"Sucks there's not even cell service out here," I replied. "Can't even talk to my friends."

I knew I'd probably never see my friends back in Ithaca ever again. I looked out the window. The rain was making an awful pattering sound against the roof. Soon water began trickling down the outside of my window.

"I hope we can at *least* get internet at our crappy new house," I sighed.

I knew I was acting bratty, but I really didn't want to move in the first place. We only decided to move because Dad got a new construction job in Ahitac. This was the same Dad who was snoozing away at six in the afternoon in the passenger seat with half of a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, ash still clinging to the end.

The landscape around us was dull. Grey clouds, small towns, big towns, freeway exit after freeway exit. I don't understand how people can be so excited on trips, especially nine and a half hour trips. But finally, after nine and a half hours, I saw the sign I was waiting for:

AHITAC EXIT: 2 MILES

"Finally," I grumbled, not considering if mom could hear me or not.

I was in a bad mood and I wasn't afraid to show it. I whipped my bangs to the side and continued to stare out the window. I was watching the patterns the rain made as it trickled down the window when, out of the blue, sirens blared and three police cars raced past us at speeds I'd never seen before.

"Woah!" Mom exclaimed as she whipped the car to the right, cutting off the car behind us and almost causing an accident. The car behind us swerved and blared their horn as they changed lanes. By this time Dad was awake and dazed about what just happened.

"Learn how to drive!" I snapped at mom, who was terrified in the front seat.

Dad turned and looked back at me, with a serious gaze. I shied away like I always do with Dad. He's always the boss. After a few minutes of silence in the car, we made it to the exit. Mom made the turnoff carefully; she didn't want to cause a real accident today. As soon as we got around the curve, we stopped the car. There were the police cars. They were blocking the road,

but there was nobody around. Mom looked at Dad, and Dad returned her stare. Then, confused, Mom looked back at me, but before she could get a word in, Dad spoke.

“Stay here,” he said as he opened the door.

Rain started dripping into the car. A low layer of fog was slowly sweeping in from the mountains surrounding us.

“What’s going on?” I asked Mom.

“Let your father handle this.” she replied.

All I could do was watch dad casually walk over to the cars, inspecting them one by one. When it seemed that he had taken a good enough look around to be satisfied, he came back to the car.

Something was... off. The fog that had been ever so slowly making its way down the mountainsides now enveloped the valley in a thick layer that made it as if you were blind.

“This fog’s kinda creepy,” I said, getting goosebumps from dad leaving his door open.

He lit a cigarette, inhaled, and said, “It’s the weirdest thing. The doors are all unlocked and the radios are gone!”

“Suspicious,” Mom said, trying her best to look around in the fog. “Let’s go to the police station in town and report it.”

“Alright,” Dad grunted, dragging on his cigarette. “Let’s go.”

We pulled around the discarded police cars and drove off into the dense fog. Mom hunched over the steering wheel as she tried to see through the slurry of fog and rain.

“Jesus.” Mom said under her breath. Though the heater was being awfully noisy, the air around us had a strange silence to it.

“Doesn’t it feel creepy here?” I said, looking for the 'Welcome To Ahitac' sign that Mom said we’d be near.

Nobody answered. “I *said*, does-”

“I don’t think this is right,” Mom interrupted. “We should’ve seen the sign by now.”

“Maybe it was covered by the fog,” I chimed in.

It was a very real possibility, but whenever I gave my opinion to my parents, it usually went unnoticed. I didn’t like that. The clock on the car radio read 8:15 PM, which meant we should have arrived there already. Dad pulled out the large road map from the glove compartment that he had refused to use until now.

After staring at the map for some time, he turned to Mom and said, “I can’t find it, pull over.”

Mom looked scared to park on the side of a road she couldn't even see, but she carefully pulled the car over anyway.

“Why did we even move in the first place?” I grumbled, just loud enough for my parents to hear me. “This is so stupid.”

“That’s enough!” Mom snapped.

Dad kept examining the map. He didn’t seem phased by my comment.

“Okay,” he began, “We should’ve hit the town by now, but for some reason we haven’t. If we keep going we’ll get there eventually. This road leads straight into town.”

With that, mom took the car out of park, and started pulling back into the lane. I couldn’t take it anymore.

“I hate this. This is so fucking stupid!” I yelled.

That got Dad's attention. He ripped off his seat belt and threw his hard, calloused hand across my face. I got angry, and I tried to fight back, pushing Mom while trying to hit Dad. Looking back, I couldn't tell you why I was acting like that, and why I struck my father back.

I couldn't tell you what ran out into the road, because it was hard to tell exactly *what* it was, although there was a clear half a second of seeing it through the fog before Mom swerved. The car skidded and knocked the creature in the head. The car continued to skid down the side road until it flipped over. The car continuously rolled down the steep forested area that blanketed the left half of the road.

All I could see was a mixture of fog, broken glass, and tree branches. I could hear metal bending, branches snapping, and my parents screaming. My safety belt was ripping into my chest and causing my head to whip. I didn't understand what was going on. Finally, we collided with something and I blacked out.

Chapter 2: The Beginning

When I came to, my head hurt, my eyes wouldn't focus, and I tasted blood. When my eyes finally adjusted to the dark that surrounded me, I started to panic. I realized I was upside down. I nervously fumbled with my seat belt, trying to move myself around so I wouldn't land on my neck. When I looked up at the buckle, I realized my hands were covered in blood. Click. The seat belt came loose and I tumbled down in the wreck of a car.

I couldn't make out much in the dark, except that my window had shattered, giving me a way out of the twisted mass of metal. I looked to the front of the car, but Mom and Dad were both missing. I could barely feel my arms or legs, but I managed to crawl out through my

window, scraping my back against the shattered remains of the safety glass. It was pitch black out, and only a sliver of light from the moon came down to comfort me in the cold night. Besides that, one of the car's headlights was still on, blaring its light into what looked like a never-ending abyss of forest. The fog had cleared up, but everything was still soaked from the rain. The tall trees released large rain droplets to the ground every now and again with a faint 'plip'.

The question suddenly popped into my mind: Where were my parents? My head hurt, but I tried to gather the energy to stand up. A stabbing sensation shot through my left arm as I planted it on the ground. I yelled out in pain as I fell back down. A large piece of glass had made it through one side of my forearm, but thankfully not the other. I looked at it in shock, not knowing what to do. Remembering Mom had a first-aid kit in the trunk, I carefully got up without moving my arm. Stepping down, I also realized I ripped a muscle in my left leg pretty badly. But I could deal with that later. I limped over to the back of the car and tried to pry open the trunk with my good arm, it wouldn't budge. I got frustrated and kicked it.

"Mom! Dad!" I shouted. My voice was deadened by the dense forest. I yelled at the top of my lungs and waited, but no one came. Finally, I gave up, screaming in anger and kicking the car repeatedly. I stopped, leaning over and breathing hard. That's when I heard a faint sound. It almost sounded like my name being called, far up the hill the car tumbled down. Suddenly I remembered that Dad took off his seat belt before the accident.

"Dad!" I yelled.

No response.

I looked up the swath of dirt and brush the car cut out of the ground on its way down the hill. I was worried about my arm, but excited about hearing the call. I tenderly pressed around the wound in my arm to fully see how much I was injured. The glass had gone a good

two or three inches in, and it hurt. I wondered if I should pull it out. Touching the glass sent little vibrations up my arm that stung like crazy. I followed my feet to the car, carefully looking for anything that could help me *not* bleed to death. Finally, I found a shirt that was stuffed in the back seat, and some padding from the inside of the seat that ripped open. I sat down on a nearby overturned log. I started getting comfortable with the glass, finally, I grabbed it. The pain was almost too much to bear. I held my arm between my legs and pulled out the glass. I let out an involuntary shout at the pain, but I gathered myself and quickly placed the foam on the wound and tied the shirt as tight as I could around it. Blood formed little spots and then one big blotch of dark red on the shirt. A few tears streamed down my face, but I had stopped the blood. The pain made me feel like I couldn't get up, so I rested for a couple minutes and breathed heavily, letting the darkness sink in around me.

Suddenly, a chill shot up my spine. I got a strong feeling I was being watched.

"DAD!" I screamed, terrified by the darkness around me, and the silence that followed my call. "MOM!"

I frantically looked around, but the darkness yielded nothing. I decided to make my way up the path our car had made down the hill. It was difficult climb because of my injuries, though it wasn't very far. I pulled myself up using the trunks of trees growing at strange angles on the hillside. The top of the hill was in sight in a couple of minutes, but the uneasy feeling kept growing inside me. It was like everyone in the world was watching me but I couldn't see any of them.

"Jesse!" The voice came clear as day.

"Dad! DAD!" I shouted back.

I raced every ounce of energy out of my system to make it to the top, shouting for my father the whole way. Arm pulsating with pain, I arrived at the top. I looked around. Dad wasn't there. There wasn't a road in sight. I clenched my fists as a tear rolled down my cheek.

Why? I thought. *What's going on? Where are my parents?*

I started sobbing and fell to my knees. I couldn't think straight. That's when I saw something move out of the corner of my eye. It was too dark, and my vision was too blurry to tell exactly what it was. Then there was more movement, and it became clear to me. My parents were not here, but I was not alone.

Chapter 3: Not Alone

I stared, horrified at the beings marching closer to me, not knowing what to do. They looked human, but had a different presence to them. I scrambled to my feet and ran, tripping back down the hill to the car, like the familiar entity could protect me. The running disoriented me, and I couldn't even tell where the bottom of the hill was.

All at once they lunged at me. One grabbed my shoulders while the other two tackled me. We fell, rolling down the hill as I struggled for my life. As we tumbled through the rocks and twigs, I managed to land a kick on one of them. It broke away from me and I heard a thunk and an awful shrieking sound as it slammed into a tree. The other two wouldn't let go, and we rolled straight into the car and came to a stop.

They pinned me to the ground, one on each shoulder, and laughed menacingly. The sheer danger I felt for my life made me instinctively grab the first thing next to me to use as a weapon. I happened to grab a nice size chunk of glass and jab it into the arm of one of them. A

hollow windy hoarse scream filled the air as it sprung up and swiftly ascended a tree nearby the car. The other one jumped on top of my torso. I grabbed its neck and slammed its head against the car, then again and again. My adrenaline was so high I hadn't realized I had already killed whatever it was, and was now beating a lifeless body.

I examined it, dragging it in front of the one working headlight on the car. The skin of the thing was burned and it had no eyes, just black holes. It looked like a long-dead corpse. I looked at my hand. I had sliced it on the glass I picked up. I didn't even care. The adrenaline hadn't gone fully away yet.

I needed to escape the dark. I crawled inside the car and turned on the ceiling light, carving out a small area of yellow light in the blackness. I curled up and began shaking uncontrollably. Everything was wrong. Nothing made sense. Quickly, I grabbed anything I could to cover up the broken windows so I couldn't see the terrifying nothingness outside. I was freezing and covered in my own blood, but managed to finally fall asleep at dawn.

I awoke to a tapping sound on the side of the windshield. Hoping it wasn't one of the monsters, I shifted the stuff I had piled next to the window and peeked my head out of the car ever so slightly, only to find a deer pecking at the back seat foam I stuffed in a hole in another window. I smiled softly, relieved it wasn't another dark creature. It was the middle of Fall, so the cold mixed with the wet leaves on the ground to make a wonderland of orange and red forest. Actually, I thought, it was a pretty beautiful forest now that it was light out.

I decided I needed to head out and look for somebody. The blood had crusted to my hands and my arm, so I could easily peel it off, except on the wounds. I searched through the car and retrieved my dad's hunting knife, his lighter, and my BB rifle. As I climbed out through the window, the deer ran off, leaving me all alone once again. I trekked up the car's path and made it

once again to the top of the hill. All it once the fact that the road was completely gone really sunk in.

“I can’t believe it,” I said to myself.

How could they abandon me? How could they be so selfish?!

I spat, then looked down the scope of my rifle in the direction Ahitac was supposed to be, but all I could see was dense forest. Where last night there had been a road with two long, steep hills on both sides was now just a long ridge with a dirt road on it where the highway used to be. I turned myself around to the direction I thought the freeway lied, figuring it could only be four miles to get to it, max.

I took a couple steps, then stopped.

Mom and Dad are probably in Ahitac.

Sighing, I turned around. I knew it was a bad idea. What would happen if I went that way? What if I actually found them? What if I found Dad? I spat again, and began walking toward Ahitac. Walking along this path, I noticed footprints. They were about the size of Dad’s boots, but spaced out about ten feet from each other. I decided to follow the tracks, not knowing where they led. My forearm and leg still stung from the night before, but the cold air was soothing. I walked about a mile before seeing movement far down the road. I quickly looked down the scope of the rifle to see what it was when I heard a twig snap loudly behind me. Then came a booming voice.

“Put your weapon down and put your hands behind your head!”

I stood there, paralyzed with fear. I slowly turned around to see a police officer standing behind me with his gun pointed at me.

“Woah, woah, woah, man! It’s just a BB gun!”

I set the rifle down. An overwhelming relief came over me. A tear rolled down my cheek and dropped to the ground.

“What you doin’ out here, boy?” the cop asked, lowering his gun. He had a real southern accent.

I explained to him my full story. The empty police cars, the accident, my parents missing... and the creatures. He took a close look at me.

“Boy, you on any drugs?”

That question offended me, seeing as I just poured my experiences into him in good hope.

“No officer,” I replied. “I’m not. I need to find my parents.”

The cop still looked suspicious of me, but must have realized I was harmless, and holstered his gun.

“You hurt?” he asked, pointing at my arm.

“Yes, sir,” I replied. “A piece of glass went into my arm during the accident.”

It hurt, but I didn’t want to show it.

“Okay,” he said, “Gonna take you down to the station, get this situation figured out.”

My face lit up with excitement.

“You mean in Ahitac?” I exclaimed. “I think that’s where my parents are!”

“Alright then,” he said as he started walking. “Let’s go.”

He brought me down the road to his police car. I realized the car must have been what I was seeing moving earlier. He let me get in the front seat. When we were both in I put on my seat belt. After everything that happened, I wasn’t taking any chances.

“What’s your name, kid?” asked the cop.

“Jesse,” I replied. “What’s yours?”

I looked over at him, noticing that his radio was missing, just like the ones that were blocking the road when we got off the freeway.

“You can call me Officer Jacobs.”

I dared to ask what I was thinking.

“Why don’t you have a radio, Officer Jacobs?”

He looked at me and said, “There’s no signal for nothin’ in Ahitac.”

The next few minutes of the car ride were silent. It might have been from lack of company for the past couple of hours, but something seemed eerie about the police man. He seemed to be in the exact right place at the right time, like he was waiting for me to pass by on the trail.

“Sooo... Why were you out all alone patrolling the road?” I asked him, looking around the car.

I caught a glimpse of his face. He knew that I was on to whatever it was he was doing. All at once I needed to get out of the car.

“Let me out of the car, please.” I asked.

“Sorry little man, can’t do that.” He replied, a slight grin forming on his face. “Not 'till we’re there.”

He sped up the car, and I knew something had to be done or I was in trouble. I remembered the hunting knife I shoved in my pocket from the wreck, and ever so quietly, opened it inside my pocket. The click of the blade locking into place was enough to alert the officer to what was going on. He slammed on the brakes, once again slamming the safety belt into my rib cage.

I panicked as he tried to take out his gun, but before he could get pull it out of his holster, I hit him in the side of his face which gave me enough time to unbuckle my seat belt, unlock the passenger door and leap out before he fired, just missing my neck. I scrambled to the back of his car, breathing heavily and terrified. I pulled out the hunting knife. It was about six inches, but it was pointless unless I could get near him. I didn't want to kill anybody, but I had to do something.

He stepped out of his car.

Maybe he doesn't know where I am.

Just then, a bullet whizzed past the back of the car, deafening my right ear.

"Come out, little man," he said cheerfully, firing his gun into the air.

This man was insane. Something had to be done, or I would die. I swallowed hard, and hopped out from the back of his car and ran at him. He leveled his gun at me and fired. A bullet went through my left shoulder before I tackled him and stabbed him in the stomach. I pulled the gun out of his hand and backed off, screaming as I clenched my shoulder. The bullet had shattered my left shoulder blade, and I could feel all of it. Officer Jacobs, who had fallen to his knees, spit out large amounts of blood and was looking for his gun.

I pointed the gun at him and shouted, "What's going on??"

No response.

Then he looked up at me and started laughing. I got mad, and pointed the gun at him with my right arm. I had never held a handgun before but I couldn't let that show, it could be the end of me.

"Answer me!!" I screamed.

I aimed the gun at the ground beside him and squeezed the trigger. The pavement shattered around the bullet hole, sending spikes of dirt up and cutting his face. He knew he was going to die, so I don't know why he talked.

"Your parents are there," he said, pointing. "In Ahitac."

He fell over, the life left his eyes, and he was dead. I sighed, then crumpled to the ground. It took more energy than I thought to do that. A large blood stain was advancing down my long sleeve shirt.

"Fuck!"

The pain was intensifying. Gripping my shoulder, I searched the dead officer. I found an extra clip and the keys, then I hobbled over to the car. It was an older Chevy Impala that had had seen some action. Scratches, bumps, and rust that I had not noticed before riddled the sides of the police officer's vehicle. I was a mess, but I managed to open the trunk without straining myself. Inside I found a first aid kit, and a pump action shotgun. I never thought I'd need to use it, but I threw it in the front of the car just in case. I properly fixed up my bullet wound with antibiotic and lots of gauze, then did the same with my arm wound. I was worried, though. It looked like it was getting badly infected. I made a splint for my arm, not knowing if it would help or not.

I had never driven a car before, let alone a police car, so naturally, as a seventeen year old, I had to try it. It would beat walking, anyway. I could only steer with my right arm, because my left had taken so much damage.

"Alright." I whispered to myself, starting the car. *Take it out of park.* I shifted from park into drive. I pressed on the gas more than I should've, and the car jolted forward, sending spikes of pain shooting up my arm. I winced, but once I leveled out my speed to about ten miles an hour, I

was fine. Well, I wasn't fine. My mind was racing, because soon enough, I stopped ever so carefully at the sign that read:

Welcome To Ahitac

I was terrified to go any further. My foot refused to go back on the gas. I looked at my hands and they were trembling with fear. I gripped the wheel tighter.

What if they're not here? I thought. *What if the whole town's like that cop?* I let out a huge sigh, trying to relax a little. *I've seen too many horror movies.* I slowly pressed on the gas, inching forward, approaching my destination.

Chapter 4: The Truth.

The air around me was thick and the fog was setting in again. I had never felt so much terror for my life before. I didn't know what it was like to be a man until now, for my Dad had always taken responsibility for me. Maybe he thought I was too weak. Well, not anymore.

Before the fog got too thick to see through, I saw smoke in the distance, probably coming from a chimney in Ahitac. A bend in the road caused unnerving amounts of pain in my arm, but then I saw it. This was no farm town. This was my old town. The home I grew up in. I remember everything about it. I drove in, but not a car in sight. The fog was blanketing the region as I drove past all the familiar things that I grew up near in Ithaca. I stopped the car, and then it hit me. Ahitac was an anagram. I slammed my hand on the steering wheel, letting the car horn blare as I swore angrily into the car.

“WHAT’S GOING ON?” I screamed.

Just then, a large roar shook the car, and the street around me. My eyes widened to the familiar sound, as if a thousand of those creatures who had stalked me the night before had been watching me from afar this entire time. I pressed on the gas, turning the car roughly to the left and jamming the broken pieces of my shoulder blade together. Screaming in pain, I raced to the street I grew up on, back to the house that seemed most familiar to me.

This is my last hope for my parents, I thought. If they’re not here, I’m leaving.

I parked in the driveway that I had seen Dad come home so many times in late at night, keeping mom and I up worrying. I cautiously opened the car door, and took the handgun with me.

“Mom, Dad!” I yelled through the dense fog, running to my back porch.

My whole arm, from the left half of my chest to the end of my fingers was pulsating with pain. I rushed to the door and pounded on it, yelling “Mom, Dad! Mom, Dad!!”

“One second!” I hear.

It was mom’s voice. I was home... I saw Mom through the window in the door before she opened it.

“Mom!”

I was the most excited I had ever been to see her. But she looked at me terrified, like she didn’t know who I was, like the tattered mess standing in front of her was not her son. She looked different... older than I knew her to be.

“Mom, it’s me!” I said, looking straight into her eyes.

“Dear!” She called behind her. Instantly Dad came around the corner as well, and gave me a long, hard stare.

“Guys, let me in!” I said, weirded out by the looks they were giving me.

All of a sudden I remembered I had a loaded gun in my hand. I looked at it for a second, then let it fall, clattering on the ground.

“I need to talk to you! It’s me, Jesse!”

Their eyes widened with horror. Dad stepped closer to me, examining every part of me.

“You’re not our son,” he said, turning his back. “Leave or we will call the police.”

He started towards Mom, like he was no longer interested in talking to me. Mom was tearing up, and again, tears came to my eyes.

“How can you say that, Dad? Do you know what I just went through?”

He kept walking away from me. I burst out in tears.

“How can you say that I’m not your son?” I was yelling now. “How do you not remember me?! You were never a good father, but I thought maybe you’d care about your own son enough to recognize him!”

He stopped in his tracks, and turned around.

“Are you telling me that the son that’s been living in our house is an impostor?” He yelled back at me, with fire in his eyes.

“Look around you, Dad! Are you stupid? This is just like Ithaca! This town has something wrong with it!”

He looked at me with confusion. I kept going.

“Have you even LOOKED outside? Look at the house! It’s the same as our old one in Ithaca!” For the first time ever, he looked around him. The terror shook him as he realized the truth I had forced on him.

“Honey, what’s wrong?” Mom asked him.

Dad turned around to her, but then he saw her in a new light, like he saw the house. She wasn’t Mom. The look she gave was that of another woman in Mom’s skin. He broke down, something I had never expected Dad to do. He retreated into the house. But we needed to get out of there.

“Dad, open the door! Quick!” I yelled. The woman pretending to be my mom called into the house.

“Jesse, we have a guest.”

The familiar sound of someone coming down the stairs from my room alerted me that I was about to see the impostor. I knew if I didn’t do something quick, Dad and I would be in danger.

“Dad! Open the door!!” I yelled at him.

He stayed where he was, down on his knees, clutching his head and crying. I quickly grabbed the gun from the ground, and using the backside of the handle, broke the glass frame of the door. The glass shattered all over the place, giving me an entrance inside. I climbed in.

“Dad, get in the police car outside. Now.” I slapped his back, bringing him back to reality. He looked up at me.

“Give me the gun.”

“No Dad, I’ve got this. Get to safety, now. There’s a twelve gauge in the passenger seat; use that to protect yourself. If I’m not back soon, leave. Now GO!” I exclaimed.

I realized I had become a man to my father, and he respected my decision. He ran out to the car as I ventured further inside.

Epilogue: The End.

I held the gun tight in my right hand, looking around the corner to the kitchen. The house was silent. I checked the clip: it had seven rounds in it. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and ran into the kitchen.

“Where are you?” I exclaimed.

The house had a different feel to it. Like it had aged. I looked around and realized why. There were pictures of me that haven’t even been taken yet. It looked like I was in my mid twenties. I was in awe, looking at the happy family pictures that never existed in my reality. The Jesse in the pictures wasn’t me, however. I could tell the difference, even if Dad couldn’t. Just then the sound of the shotgun firing filled the silent air.

“Dad!” I yelled, bolting out of the house.

There was no fog, there was no grey sky. I could see clearly. The blood dripping from the passenger side door. The splattered crimson filling the inside windshield, dripping down ever so slowly. I cautiously walked over to the car.

“Dad!” I was tearing up. “Daaaad!”

He was gone. He had shot himself, and it was too much to take. Suddenly, laughter. I turn back to see the other mom and me laughing at me. The anger built up inside me.

I raised the gun and shot mom seven times in the chest, until the bullets stopped coming out. She fell to the ground, motionless. The other me kept on laughing. The fire had consumed me. I was screaming, and screaming, and screaming.

“What are you doing?” the other me said.

I stopped screaming and looked up.

“Why didn’t you leave us alone?” he asked.

“That was my father!” I screamed, pointing the gun, slide locked back, at him. “Give him back!”

“He’s not yours anymore. He’s ours.”

With that, he disappeared. The other Mom was gone too. Turning around, I saw that Dad was gone too, and the mess was gone from the inside of the car. It was over. I gave up.

I got into the car and felt the engine roar as I turned the key in the ignition. Then I drove off, the way I came. I drove outside of Ahitac, never looking back. I drove endlessly, fog gathering all the way, but finally I made it. The traffic was busy. I could tell that no one would see me until it was too late. I slowly unclipped my seatbelt, wiped the last tear out of my eye, and drifted into the intersection.

Fin. 