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## The Brooch

CC

The air swept up the warm smell of strawberries from one of the patches in the garden, carrying the scent to my nose with a gentle whoosh of wind. The petals of the red roses seem to be stiff in comparison to the fluttering irises and asters. There was something alluring about the stiffness, the burning color, the sharp and slender bodies of the roses. I let my finger stroke a blossom, but too carelessly, for the wind pushed the flower and the rose resisted, tearing off flesh from my finger. I put my finger in my mouth, wetting the crimson drop forming at the spot of infliction. It was then that I came to the conclusion that of all the colors, red was the most sinful.

My attention, having shifted to the flowers burning with the color of passion and danger, returned back to the monotonous hum of my brother. Though he was older, he was stubby for his age, his eyes were unengaged and shallow like those of a cow. His lips pursed and opened in a circle, like some sort of gasping trout. Not a trace of intelligence could be found on his face. His only redeeming quality was his forehead, which was smooth like polished marble. Otherwise, he was nothing but a blubbering bass.

“Did you hear me, John?” he asked, his lips forming an oval, “Or are you deaf?”

“Of course I hear you. I just thought I heard a bee, is all,” I grumbled. To my delight, I saw his head whisk around, his eyes bulging slightly and his fish mouth gaping. He cleared his throat and turned his head back to me.

“As I was saying, you have to get me a glass of water,” he said in a way as though it was a solid fact, like how the sun will rise in the morning and fall before night, and that I would have no say on this whim of his.

“No. Just ask Maud or Lillian. They were around here just a bit ago,” I responded.

“I know, but I don't want them to do it. I want *you* to do it,” he explained with a condescending tone, his dumb cow eyes barreling into mine. Suddenly, my face felt hot and I was sure my cheeks were turning red. My fists clenched, my nails digging into my palms.

“You can get it yourself, you helpless shoat,” I responded. As if not anticipating my resistance, Philip’s face also turned into a darker hue. His face now reminded me of that of a pig’s. He cleared his throat again, and this time the color faded from his face. A smirk stretched across his chubby cheeks.

“You have to do what I say. I am the oldest and I will someday be the head of this family. So, you have to do as I say,” he said matter-of-factly, “Or else I will take everything away from you. Everything of yours will be mine, after all.” In the light, the family brooch pinned to his coat shimmered clearly with purple and blue. I sat there, looking back at him and his brooch, arms crossed across my chest. Then I let out a “humph!” and turned my face away.

His next move I did not anticipate. I felt a stinging pain on my left cheek, and my nose was throbbing and flooding with red. It was then I also realized that I was on the gravelled ground, my right cheek planted in the rocky terrain. He knelt down on my chest, pinning me there to the gravel. In his right hand, he held his slender, oak cane. It did not take much to put two and two together and realize he struck me with it. The world sort of spun around me, the trees and the house warped and stretched like figures reflecting off of water. I struggled to push up, but alas Philip was too obese. He was laughing like some sort of sadistic child tormenting a puppy that was too helpless to fight back.

“You want up, don’t you?” he snickered, pushing his knee further into my rib cage. I took a breath in through clenched teeth.

“Get... off... of me...” I tried to say firmly, but it felt as though my lungs were about to burst and my rib cage would collapse inwards.

“Hmm... how about no? Unless maybe you could make it up to me,” he said, moving more weight on to my ribcage. “Kiss my shoe.”

I gritted my teeth and glared up at his oafish face. The world was still dancing around me, and I could not take in another breath of air. The world started to go black, and I realized that this idiot might just kill me if I don’t do as he said. So, to a great degree of reluctance, I kissed his leather shoe.

“And the other one,” he chuckled menacingly, as though he did not see the blue pigment in my face. Teary-eyed, I kissed his other shoe. He let off the pressure on my chest and air immediately raced into my lungs as I gasped for air. I was also suddenly bombarded with a coughing fit, and I sat in the gravel wheezing. Everything that was spinning slowed down and eventually stopped. The blackness faded and I could see clearly the garden again.

Philip suddenly crouched over my body, perching his elbows in both thighs, like some sort of overfed chicken.

“Do what I say, you fool. I own everything, and so I own *you*. Now, go get me some water,” he said with a malicious smile. And with one final kick to my gut, I keeled over and threw up. I then rose to my feet, wiping away any sick that was left on my face, and went inside for a glass of water.

There was a savage beast lurking about in my gut. It worried me, at first. It thrashed, scraped, screeched, and hollered with such ferocity my heart would start racing and my breath would quicken slightly. Maybe not a beast, but a flame blazing in the pit of my stomach that burned steadily like a well-fed bonfire. There was also a chilling, helpless feeling, like a shard of ice stabbed through the meat of my heart. Never had I felt these feelings before, building up inside of me like the tension before lightning strikes. What was this feeling I was experiencing? A helplessness yet hopefulness, a fiery yet freezing passion?

The moon had risen over the mansion, and I lay in my bed awake. A sliver of moonlight pierced through a break between the two velvet drapes, shining into my eye. I rolled over onto my left side, wincing as I laid my left cheek on the pillow. My face felt swollen and tender to the touch, and my eye had swollen shut. I sighed, trying to ignore the pain and these new emotions ripping into my gut.

I thought of Philip and his brooch. I shut my eyes tightly, and played out the scene in the garden differently in my head. I reviewed some could-have-beens, thinking of ways I could have saved my face or

gotten Philip to leave me alone. This did not suppress these hot feelings, however. If anything, they now felt like boiling water, rising to the top and threatening to spill over.

Then it hit me. The thing that could cure this feeling of helplessness and appease my humiliation: revenge. I wanted him to feel the same humility as me, to feel helpless and shameful like how I felt while on the gravel. But how? What could be done to make him feel this way?

My mind drifted back to the garden. I thought of the imaginary bee that made Philip so nervous. And then it hit me. Shortly after, my eyelids became heavy and I floated off into sleep, the beast in my gut temporarily satisfied.

It was about 3:40 in the morning according to the grandfather clock, and I forced myself out of bed and into the hall. Everything was pitch black; it took me a minute or so to adjust to the darkness of the hallway. Eventually blackness took the shape of vague silhouettes, appearing as fuzzy shadows of familiar objects. I shifted my weight onto the balls of my feet and toes, and gradually crept along the side of the wall. Philip's room was just to the right of mine.

I eventually felt for the door handle, which felt cold and hard in my hand. I twisted it slowly, pushing the oak door slightly, too. Blackness fell into more blackness, and for a minute I was not sure I even opened the door at all. However, I managed to fit myself through the opening, and I blinked hard in Philip's room. I could hear soft noises made from the bottom of his throat. Suddenly his eyes would jostle slightly and he would take a gasp for air, letting out a loud snore. The bedside table. It had to be there.

I quietly crept up towards the bed, using the sound of Philip's snoring as a guide. I reached out towards the wall, and attempted to follow it down to a table of some sort. The back of my hand stroked the edge of a wooden surface, and I followed the graininess of the wood. I let my hand slide cautiously along the table, as to not knock anything over. Then I felt it.

It was cold and smooth, mimicking the texture of glass. The shape was indistinguishable- it was in the shape of a rounded bird. It was Philip's favorite brooch, passed down to the eldest son each generation. I silently crept back to my room, uneasily falling asleep, my nerves still tingling.

When I next opened my eyes, it was around 6:20 in the morning. I forced on a pair of trousers and a vest that I buttoned up halfway. I heard the clattering of some of the maids in the kitchen, preparing breakfast for the family. The smell of biscuits and bacon was prevalent, and my mouth could not help but salivate. Stealthily, I slipped into the kitchen slowly, as not to draw any attention away from their cooking. I opened up the back door and rushed out, the cool air filling my nose and making my eyes teary. The asters and the daffodils in the garden were pungent with a glossy layer of dew. There was the smell of mud and sweet grass mingling in the air. I squinted beyond the damp stone fence enclosing the garden and beyond the old metal gate which leads further into the property. Down the worn-down path is a bog which I had not visited in three years.

I hurried down the path, roots snagging at my shoes and trousers. At one point, I tripped on a stone that protruded from the ground and landed on my side. Pain that remained from the inflicted wounds from the day before seemed to flare up in my face, as if the force from the fall had revitalized the soreness. I got up and brushed off the debris from my pants and vest, the mud clinging to my clothes like a stubborn stain that will take excessive scrubbing to get rid of.

Carefully placing my steps in between any protruding object that may prove an obstacle, I continued walking as the oak trees started to give way to willows and birches, the dirt wet and slippery with a layer of slime. The ground was grey with a thick layer of fog, seeming to mirror the bleakness of the sky. There was the sound of thunder rumbling off in the distance, like the low growl of a grizzly. At the end of what remained of the stone path (a lot of them, I assume, sunk into the earth) I stopped and listened. It was three years ago I discovered a hive while exploring a tree and got stung five times. Ever since, I have not come back. I stepped

over to one of the more familiar willow trees, one that I immediately cringed at, and heard the indistinguishable vibration of insects flitting away in a hive. Good, they were still there.

Grabbing onto the rough bark, I clattered my way up the tree, the muscles needed for such a task having deteriorated over the last three years. Sweat broke out across my forehead, with some drops rolling into my eye. When I reached the first branch of the tree, I shimmied closer to the hive. There was a knot in the tree, right next to the bustling hive of bees. I kept my left eye on the hive and I reached into my vest pocket. I pulled out the purple and blue family brooch in the shape of a sparrow, and clung to it with my right hand. My feet started to slip under me, and I hugged the mossy bark with my legs. Extending my arms as far as they could reach, I placed the brooch in the hole.

Carefully, I let my legs descend the tree as I slowly lowered myself to the ground. There was a harsh buzzing in my ear, and as I went to swat away the pest, I felt a hot sting on my bruised cheek and I let out a whimper. The right side of my face scrunched up in defiance to the pain and I tenderly stroked the area.

Then I heard the distant pealing of church bells, and I broke into a run. It was 7:00 in the morning and I knew that Philip would be awake soon. The earth was slick as I scurried up the path back into the garden.

I found Philip wandering aimlessly, thick fingers gripping his head and shielding his eyes slightly as though he was in a panic. He was outside his room still in his robe, his hair disheveled and greasy, his face pink and piggish. When he saw me, he immediately began to glare.

“What did you do with my brooch?” he huffed, shoving one of his sausage-like fingers into my rib cage. I flinched back a bit, all too familiar with the incident from yesterday.

“It’s somewhere. Somewhere nearby,” I started vaguely, flashing him a mysterious smile. His face grew red and he gnashed his teeth.

“Give it back right now!” he hissed, shaking his fist in the air, “Or else I’ll beat you up again!”

“If you do that, I will never tell you where it is. And you cannot find it without my help,” I added, a wave of satisfaction flowing through me. Philip bowed his head slightly, his eyes forced to his feet.



“What do I have to do?” he asked, almost too faint to hear.

“Follow me,” I answered.

After putting on fresh pairs of clothes, Philip reluctantly tagged along, trying to match my quick pace. He waddled when he walked, and he grunted every time I picked up the pace. I led him out into the garden and through the iron gate. He glanced at me suspiciously, as if I might just be pulling his leg. We struggled down the slippery sloped hill, trying not to slip and fall on the slime. At one point, Philip tripped on a stone, possibly the one I tripped over earlier, and started cursing under his breath. There was a scratch on his leg.

“How far are you taking me?” he snapped, his patience obviously dying fast.

“Close. Just down here,” I responded, walking on down the path without waiting for Philip to catch up.

And I was right. The tree was straight ahead, and I could see the glimmer of the brooch in the knot of the tree. I heard the sound of Philip’s wheezing behind me as he approached from behind.

“Well, where is it, then?” he asked, still trying to catch his breath.

“Up there,” I answered, pointing up into the tree, “See the knot?”

“You’re going to make me climb a tree?” he asked. His face turned red again.

“There’s more.”

“What do you mean there’s more?”

“Look, in the branches up there. See?” I pointed to the brown mass in the tree that seemed to vibrate with activity. Philip followed my finger and his face lost all of its color. He was ghostly white.

“Bees?” he almost whimpered, looking at me with disbelief.

“Uh huh. Bees.”

“Are you trying to kill me?” he sputtered angrily, though the paleness never left his face.

“What? You’re not allergic or anything. Just take back your precious brooch if you want it so bad. I got up there just fine and I’m still alive.”

After glancing at the hive, then the brooch, then the hive again, he swallowed.

“Fine. But you’re going to pay for this!”

Surely enough, he started to heave himself up the tree. It took plenty of effort on his part; He hugged the tree with his arm and his legs with what appeared to be all of his might, and he tried his best to shimmy up the tree, but to no avail. He then tried to use his feet to push himself up the tree, using bumps in the bark as leverage. He had a lot more success with this, and he grunted and heaved his way up the tree like an inchworm with a crimson face. It was then I realized how high up the tree was, and how a fall would be rather dangerous.

Philip made it up to the branch, sweat drenching his armpits, neck, and face. He let his body grip the tree as he took one of his meaty arms and reached for the brooch. His index finger just touched it, and he groaned as he extended his body even further. Eventually, he managed to grab the brooch, and he let out a sigh of relief.

Though I was on the ground looking up, I noticed that a tiny buzzing spec flew into his face. Suddenly, Philip let out a loud shriek and lost all of the balance he had maintained on the branch. He fell forwards, his body barreling down through the air and landing on the ground with a crunch.

“Philip? Are you alright?” I asked. There was no response. He was sprawled on his side, unmoving. My heart started to pound in my chest.

“If you are pretending, it's not funny,” I added. Still, no response.

That sinful color of the roses rushed from his head and mouth, covering the muddy earth. He stared vacantly in the distance with soulless eyes, still clutching his brooch in his hand. My fingers clung over my chest and dug into my skin as I knelt by my older brother. His face lost its scrunched up condescension, his eyes were blue like mine. But they were faded now. A bubble rose up in my throat and my eyes overfilled with tears as I sobbed over my only brother. Sure, a prideful idiot he was, but nonetheless my brother!

It started to rain, drops of water from the sky and my eyes falling on Philip’s lifeless face. I immediately glared up at the hive, which continued buzzing away as if nothing of importance had happened. Did they not know what they had done?

However, my glare softened. My eyes fell on my dead brother, his brooch, and then my hands. It was not the fault of the bees.

**Pluto**  
*Alexandra Zimmerman*



## **Sunflower**

*By*  
CC

Yellow, bright, seeded face  
twisting stem to follow Sun's rays  
Petals fanned out, stalk tall  
Unwavered by the soft wind  
leafy arms spreading before it  
Bathing.

Winter, cold and biting  
nipped the flower.  
Frost and its deathly snare  
Trapped her unmoving in her place  
The flower now drawing into its hood  
The weeping, shriveling blossom  
Dying.

## **Beastly Fear**

*by*  
CC

Fear is a mangy creature-  
Fat, heavy like stone  
Lazing in the stomach's pit  
Feasting on worries  
Well-fed.  
Batting the heart's strings  
Like some frilly toy  
Lazily, half-heartedly  
Indifferent.  
A taloned huntress  
Dormant during day  
Active at night  
Pouncing on its prey-  
Swatting any hopeful bird.

## Blunt Instruments

*Hannah Lavoie*

### Chapter 1

Humanity was compiled of nothing but scum, and I learned that at quite a young age. Men had grown repulsive in their centuries of overindulgence, and their spawn were just as gluttonous, helping desecrate the earth by devouring everything in sight. I was indifferent towards women. To me, they were just as guilty as their sordid partners, but they merely irked me rather than tempted my utter contempt for the human race. *Men*. What boorish creatures, how foul, how treacherous; I could feel their stench on me while I slept after a day “mingling with the commonwealth” in the marketplace. The open square was ripe with the odor of their rejected flesh, the wretched masses that crowded and trafficked their goods and prattled on while their repugnant musk adhered to my clothing. At night their presence was heavy on my skin, smelling pungently of sweat and sin, fouling up the sheets. My stomach turned at the thought of any trace of them lingering with me. The market was especially brutal because I could see all of their faces, their skin leathery and pouching at the cheeks, their eyes watery and hungry, some immoral craving in their expressions. Knowing I breathed the same air that passed through their filthy bodies, I was sickened and would often find myself gagging in the square or tasting bile during mass.

It eluded me. Why would God allow the heavenly body to deteriorate in such a way, how could he stand by as he watched the descendants of his perfect Adam ruin the world? They mangled the aesthetic beauty of nature He had created so diligently, and so delicately. Surely He could see, allowing them to thrive soured the flavor of freedom and peace, destroying the very heart of his painstaking creation. The only respite from choking back my disgust was a mad six or seven hours spent furiously scribbling on a blank canvas, painting supreme beings of evil that created humans from piles of discarded flesh. This is all I saw the rest of humanity as, sacrilegious puppets of meat that trespassed on the holy earth that God had laid down in his

seven days of glory. Their very souls had been deformed, groaning in hunger and profane revelry. I saw myself as another breed entirely. Guiltless, a figure baptized in God's miraculous waters, I had intense faith that He would one day spread light over the rest of humanity, snuffing out evil and caressing the virtuous in his soft embrace. He would rebuild the earth with better stock: plentiful beings of faith and bliss, heaven's own populace that would worship the spiritual beauty of nature and God's visage above all else. I dreamed of this, and would often wake up in the night from an adrenaline-fueled jolt of euphoria, sitting upright and clutching my breast, my heart hammering. But the early rays of day would bring the same result, the dawn shedding light on the repulsive human race that crowded the marketplace and clogged the churches and would continue to repopulate their nefarious breed until the day of retribution came. And until that day, I was content to lock myself in the sprawling confines of my grandfather's estate who had long since died, along with any of my close relatives. I was a solitary creature myself, surrounded by ugliness, filling idle rooms with paintings depicting agents of monstrosity and entities of sin. Stuck in endless purgatory with these fiends in the tumultuous throes of early adulthood, I steeped in depression and was saturated with misery and self-pity. My only relief from the vile world were my paintings and church, the one beautiful structure the crooked hands of men ever engineered. And it was at the church's gate I stood that day, marveling at the grace and compelling beauty of the spires, galvanized in gold as pure as the blood of saints. Upon entering the courtyard of the church, I felt a change in the air and suspected the day of retribution was well at hand, gripping the rosary beads attached to my tunic's belt. I mumbled a prayer, drew a deep lungful of the spoiled air, and pushed the doors open into God's delivering shelter.

It wasn't disheartening how empty the church was, but there was great comfort and relief from being in a house of God which superseded all else. I could feel His presence around me, a deeply satisfying warmth and a purity to the air. I slipped into the pew that was the furthest away from the lost souls that knelt facing the stage, mildly entertained by how the fragmented luminescence of the stained-glass windows mingled with the metallic gleam of the imposing brass pipe organ in the center of the floor, creating shimmering pools that

danced on the floor as I moved my head. Such delicate short-lived pleasures would put some semblance of joy into my heart on occasion.

I knelt at the pew and lowered my head out of respect. I tried to reach out past any of the sensations around me, to extend my body towards heaven without moving. It was these interactions with the divine spirit that I thrived on in my misery. The shelter of the church was a sanctuary, all I wanted to do was lose myself in spiritual ecstasy as I praised He who would one day rid the earth of the maggot infestation it suffered from. That's what humans were, feasting maggots that spoiled the earth and squandered its beautiful bounty. And I could hear their bodies around me in the other pews; not many, but enough to send the sickly cold fingertip down my spine, making the hairs on my arms and the back of my neck stand on end.

I slowly raised my head from the pew, the burden of existence weighing heavily on my shoulders. The murmurings of the few pious creatures around me were stark and unpleasant; an elderly woman weeping, a man entering and dipping his fingertips into the vessel of holy water, a line of pubescent boys in white garments swaying incense back and forth like a pendulum, perhaps one that accompanies the clock that measures the length of our lifetimes. The church became a host for the smoky sweet air, an atmosphere made of a sullen anesthetic, and I inhaled it into my lungs to let the drifting haze purify my body from the inside.

The woman weeping, the man dribbling holy water onto his forehead, the adolescents who hadn't yet grown into the evil ways of their fathers, swaying back and forth, back and forth...

"Bless me father, for I have sinned."

Her voice was frail and childlike, but in the sanctified silence, it was loud and carried through the church like birdsong in dreary winter air where no other living creature could be detected. Upon hearing it, an unfamiliar curiosity pulled at me, which was a bizarre feeling; while the obligatory judgement of her kind tugged me the opposite way. But my head turned towards the confession booth, my eyes unable or unwilling to penetrate the velvet curtain that sheltered the sinner. I was only able to hear fragments and mumbling, which gave me an empty starved feeling. This morbid curiosity to know just how she had sinned made me feel

sick, I could feel the virus under my skin and taste it at the back of my throat and harbor its burning sensation in my eyes which were not so omnipotent as to be able to see her form behind the curtain.

After more lengthy stretches of time than I'd care to admit I measured, she emerged, first as a slim hand to brush the curtain aside and then as an absolute body. Her hair was thick and chestnut red, settling on her shoulders and falling in abundant red furls down her body; a body which was supple in its structure and had an undoubtable air of sophistication despite the rags that dressed her thin frame without dignity. The soles of her feet were wrapped in torn cloth, and her toes were shamelessly on display. Her delicate hands, folded in front of her stomach, were dirt-stained; as was her left cheek, which maintained a hue of *Pescabivona*, so that her cheeks were ample fruits with soft luscious exteriors and dewy gold nectar within. Her lips were ample as well, yet delicate as peony buds that had only just begun to unfold. The skin of this stranger was a pale cousin of the tan that was characteristic of our region, so that she was a white-fleshed rarity among a sea of cinnamon-skinned monstrosities, which I suppose includes myself. I could not tell the color of her eyes.

She exited the church, entering the sunlit courtyard and letting the doors close behind her. I sat up very suddenly, drawing the attention of the elderly woman who was no longer crying and the man who was now sipping wine from a grail in the priest's hands and the boys who had finished their ritual cleansing and were chatting dull nonsense in one of the pews. I followed her based on some primal instinct that I hadn't felt since my schooling days, before the wrath and the disdain towards humanity had blossomed like black lilies within me, poisoning my blood, wrapping thorns around my head like some man foolishly playing the role of Christ. Was I such a martyr myself, or merely acting in the shadow of one? I followed her through the market square, squeezing past the congregations of men as I tried to reach her. The dankness of their sweat tinging the air never crossed my mind, and even the fact that I was touching their squalid flesh didn't bother me in the slightest. I kept her in my sights, past the square and then off the road into thickets that transformed into full-fledged trees the further we went. The wooded area grew denser and we traveled deeper until she came



upon a clearing, with a pale shaft of sunlight that spilled onto the grass, otherwise muffled by the canopy. In the clearing there was a tent big enough for two or three people. Scattered on the ground were bare essentials; a Bunsen burner, a tin pot, and stacked prepackaged food, some implements here and there, an ash-filled crater where there had no doubt been a fire and a pile of sticks that had most likely fueled such a fire. She bent down and began preparing a meal, while I watched in silence behind a tree.

With one hand she stirred the pot over the Bunsen burner, and with the other she fixed her hair into place. I couldn't help but be in awe of her, for she was not an abhorrent creature of sin, but the kind of beautiful woman depicted in renaissance paintings, with a classic face like an angel framed by curly red tresses. She embodied some unspoken purpose; her fragile cream-colored face and the tenderness of her cheeks, the stolidness in her eyes which admixed with her youth and apparent innocence. She had a calm look of sensibility about her, a profundity of the eye, something unprejudiced that embraced the world around her. Her loveliness was unfailing, her refreshing purity washed me like blessed water, as though I was being baptized in cold clarity for the first time in my life. At such a tormenting closeness to her, I detected her skin's musk, an enticing perfume equal parts woody, rich, and feminine. With the soft bounty of her hair and the virtue in her expression and the luster on her white skin that caught the sunlight...she was the Birth of Venus, rising from the foam and stepping out of the shell that had carried her to me.

A small cry escaped my throat as I came to this realization, and she whipped around to face me. Her lips were in a pout and her eyes spoke volumes, but even in anger her beauty was not disrupted. She stood up and crossed an arm in front of the tent, as though protecting a cache of jewels.

"Who are you?"

I couldn't speak. "I..."

"Get out of here!"

"I-I'm sorry." I stood shaking my head because I had no real reason to be there. But I couldn't leave.

She looked at me with intensity, but as more seconds of silence passed her expression became confused and less hateful. She lowered her arm.

“Are you alright?”

“Fine,” I said. “Splendid.”

A subtle smirk raised the corner of her lip, there one moment, vanished the next. “Who are you?”

“My family name is Agosti. I am Vitruvio.”

She mouthed my name, but didn’t make a sound.

“And you?”

“My name is Basilia De Rossi. Though my late relatives might prefer if I didn’t use their surname. I have brought shame to their memory.” She shrugged, lifting shoulders covered in grey rags. “But what can you do?”

I was mesmerized by her tone, a matured lilt with a brogue that babbled in my ears like warm honey. And I could see her eyes now, large and dark and wet and sugared with stars, like the reflection of the night sky on a still lake, where the darkness is at its peak and the stars in the lake tremble as though lost in some foreign movement, a cosmic dance both spontaneous and thrilling, and the beat of her eyelashes kept time in this dark chaos of her eyes.

She cocked her head because I hadn’t caught on to the fact that I’d been staring. The only way I ever knew how to pull myself out of a nightmare was to focus on the scenery around me, something physical that I could see, that I could feel with my fingers. So although these were not the same circumstances and it was not a nightmare I had gotten lost in, I looked around and glanced at her tent, finally saying, “Did you pitch this tent?”

She nodded, and her auburn hair bounded along with her head.

I curled my lip to signify that I approved, however I had the sense that she didn’t care for my approval. “Is anyone accompanying you on this excursion or are you enjoying the scenery alone?”

She stared into my eyes. "I'm alone." Then, after a moment's pause, "And I'm not enjoying the scenery...although it is beautiful, isn't it?" She lifted her chin and gazed up at the tunnel of sky which was visible between the tree trunks and their disorderly canopies. She ruffled her hair with a gentle movement of her hand, and my eyes were fixed upon that hand, which could have been one of the hands that was missing from the Venus de Milo, for it exhibited the same sculpted smoothness and pale gleam of expert craftsmanship.

I suspected her true cause for being situated in the woods in such a way, but I played to her innocence with ignorance. "Then why are you here?"

She met my eyes, then looked down at the grass and slightly moved her wrapped foot. "I am homeless and penniless. I have been since I was a child, when it was my mother who bore the responsibility of finding food and scraps and change, and not myself. I was to grow into such a role over time, being the only one to inherit the part after her death. She died homeless and penniless, too. I fear a similar fate for myself."

It astonished me how someone like her could live in such poor conditions, her only shelter a flimsy tent and her only nourishment cheap scraps of meals. I imagined her trembling in the tent as the rain ripped past its fabric, the cold numbing her fingers and running down her spine as she was wrapped in this thin grey cloth of hers which did nothing to provide warmth, her cheeks drained of color, her lips a bloodless blue, cowering in the darkness and praying for the storm to pass. I imagined her empty stomach churning and growling from lack of food, the pain in her abdomen growing too much to bear as she rationed the pitiful prepackaged meals, living off of daily portions of crumbs and nothing else. My heart ached, I could feel it clenching in my chest. For the first time in my life, I found myself feeling pity and sorrow for someone other than myself.

"Come to stay with me, Basilia." I startled myself by saying it, I hadn't even given it a moment's thought.

Her eyes grew wide and doe-like, and she ran a hand through her bountiful hair as though suddenly bashful of her appearance.

“I couldn’t ask you for something like that,” she said in nearly a whisper; her lips barely formed the shape of the words.

“You’re not asking. *I’m* asking.” I extended a hand, which I hoped came across as a welcoming gesture and not a command or a threat. “Will you come and stay with me?”

She considered my words for a moment, biting her lip with indecision. Her brow furrowed and she turned behind her to gaze at the tent, which she did for a long moment. Then she faced me, and gave me a smile that caressed me in warmth as though I had stepped out into the sunlight after a lifetime of living in shadows. She accepted my hand in hers, and I led her out of the woods, away from the nothingness that pervaded her existence. It was the first time in many years that I had willingly touched another human being.

## Chapter 2

I struggled to gauge her reaction as we stepped into the foyer of my sprawling estate. My gait was rather slow due to the hesitation in my heart. I had never done this before, should I say something to her? We passed the massive pillars of alabaster that framed the hall; they twirled up to the ceiling, planted firmly on both ends. They were smooth and the color of warm sugar, with caramel swirls like dainty wisps of clouds. Her feet, still wrapped loosely in cloth that was meant to resemble something of a shoe, echoed on the parquet floor as she followed me through a labyrinth of spacious rooms with very little furniture. I never bothered to buy any because I never cared to have anyone over. The wide windows gave the interior of the home a golden glitter that effervesced upon every surface, and I suddenly had the strange feeling that we were a pair of insignificant mosquitoes trapped in a tomb of amber. I cringed, was she feeling the same way? Like a prisoner, encased in the empty shimmer? I kept looking at her face; her expression never changed, soft and content and with a juvenile curiosity, her great big eyes taking in the scenery of an ostentatious household she had never known before. I kept tugging at the collar around my neck as it grew hot with discomfort. I was almost

ashamed that this vast and vacant architecture was mine, with no spirit or soul, no comfort of home. Just uninspired trappings that shone dully and hideously ornate chapel ceilings that echoed with pretentiousness. Finally, we reached the room that was my makeshift studio, characterized by a large easel and the lack of a visible floor; the ground was covered in giant sheets of canvas as wide as they were long, and loose paintings, half-finished, were scattered everywhere there was empty space.

It was only upon entering this room that her face changed. Her lips parted in surprise as she took in the hundreds of paintings that were on the walls, her eyes scanning my work with depth and undoubtedly piqued interest. A small smile broke upon her lips, like the crest of a gentle tide on some distant shoreline, the shade of her mouth resembling peach flowers and her nether lip curved exquisitely like a fleshy crescent moon turned on its side.

Seeing her reaction to my private studio, I suddenly experienced a heavy perturbation in my heart, a sense of protectiveness as though my paintings were sacred and for their creator's eyes only. I could feel the uneasy color rise into my cheeks, a shameful hue that twisted my stomach into a constricted knot.

“Let me show you the other rooms,” I offered, in an attempt to draw her captivated eye away from my work.

She didn't move for a moment, as though she had missed my voice as she stood soaking in the artwork around her. Finally she faced me. “These are all yours?”

“Yes. Do you find them alright?”

“They're simply grand. Look at this one...” she approached a long portrait on the wall, the face pallid and sunken, the eyes framed by craggy wrinkles, the mouth downturned with displeasure. Behind the solemn face I had painted a set of wings which were as old and crumpled as the figure's expression, and black pearls trickling from his creased lower eyelid. Each vile teardrop held a small shaded skull painted in its depths, a detail I doubted she would notice. She traced her fingertips down the path of the tears which had left stains on the anemic skin of the figure. Ancient trails of black sadness branched out from his tear duct like dark tree

limbs, climbing and reaching, diminishing any resemblance of humanity in his face. It was one of many like it, a series I hadn't bothered to title but which drove itself onto the canvases with fury and vehemence unlike any other paintings I had ever made. It struck me as funny that this one should catch her eye, above the others.

Her eyes sparkled as they looked upon this thing which I had always considered to be worthless. She touched its thin lips and cratered face, determining the shape of its recessive cheek and thick-boned brow. She spread her fingers out upon the disheveled wings, grey and tattered, as though testing the softness of the feathers, these tainted ruins that could never produce flight.

She stared, and stared.

"What's its name?" She asked without removing her rapt gaze from the painting.

I looked at her. "Its name?"

"Yes." She drew nearer to the canvas and spread her hand out upon its face, as though trying to draw a weeping friend into her consoling embrace. "It needs a proper name."

"I rarely name my artwork," I said, slightly sheepish.

She gazed at the portrait for a long moment. Her eyes seemed, incredulously, to well up with silent tears. "Alright," she sighed. There was such heavy reluctance in her eyes, as well as remnants of how awestruck she had become after seeing my work for the first time. She turned away, taking one last appreciative glance at my painting, and it struck me that she had seemed more impacted by a careless painting than of the quantity of my estate. Somewhere deep and hidden in my heart, this pleased me. And this contemporary pleasure she stirred was completely foreign; it was pure and charged and unrealistic, it was exhilarating and Biblical. When she touched my art, she seemed to exude unto it the electric spark in her flesh as it was in the fingertips of God when he touched Adam, the great conception of man, bloody hearts and quivering skin and ecstasy on a weightless cloud, and it transformed into an ache in my side, as though my bones were whining, crying out as they needed to be heard. I'd never felt this before. Her back turned to me, my eyes trailing down her russet thatch of hair, my rib began to feel sore as though her divine womanhood had been trapped within its marrow,

broken off now into a fragment that spawned something ethereal and gorgeous, a gentle race. Was this the purest stuff of dreams, which the first humans were made of? Had she been created by God Himself, the modern clone of Eve; with cavernous eyes that held undefeatable stars, and fox-pelt hair draped over her shoulders, and the innocent pale skin of an untouched entity who has never seen the sun because until this very day, she had not existed? Everything, all my ignominious actions ran through my memory: how I had followed her without her consent, approached her so casually, spoken to her with such blatant disregard, and *taken her hand*...such pleasantries were now blasphemous to me. I was a traitor. It kept ringing in my head, I had a child of God in my household and she was to be treated with the utmost reverence and respect.

She turned to me, and her smile reemerged like twilight stars gradually gathering their light in the fading sky. My heart was immovable and full of conviction, which contrasted with soft afflictions, like affection and some form of serenity. I had never felt so precarious and yet immortal at the same time; I was trembling, I was conflicted, and never before felt so blindly pious, not even to God; subservient or enlightened or shamelessly infatuated, whatever you want to call it. I was not hasty to contend with any of it.

### Chapter 3

I painted her vigorously. After she had fallen asleep in one of the bedrooms, I crept to my studio and began to flesh out portraits of her with those tremendous eyes that gored me with their captured light, these soft black magnified things that I couldn't stare into for long periods of time for a strange reason. I shaded out the skin of her delicate nose, and added flowing red hair to her head, and a subdued blush that shone like a dreamy summer haze upon either curved cheek. At first I wanted to hide the paintings from her, I felt humiliated and ashamed that I had gone to such secretive lengths to capture her image. But I decided I would show them to her when she awoke. There was something therapeutic about the thought of painting her without secrecy, it made me strangely happy. I even pictured her posing for me there on the stool, her hands

folded in her lap, her face gently expressive and uniform, her hair rolling down her shoulders like sunfire, I was immersed in this inexplicable peace and gaiety that was most uncommon. I felt as though I truly were alive, as if for the first time.

I stroked her likeness onto the canvas for hours, with no more sound than a faint rasp from the bristles of the brush tickling the parchment. It was dead silent, which was why I was so startled to hear a distant disturbance echoing from one of the rooms. I set down my paintbrush and stole to the entryway of the studio, following the muffled noise. Beyond the hall, I could hear bare feet treading on the parquet floor, back and forth, back and forth. I slipped down the hallway and cast a look into the dining area, shrouded in midnight shadows.

There she was. Her skin gleamed impeccably in the moonlight which drifted from the elongated windows, shedding a crude luminescence on the pillowcase in her hands. I could see my cabinets had been raided, gold goblets pilfered, silverware drawers open and vacant; and the pillowcase was stuffed, I could see the chunky outline of its body, as well as the arm from a brass candelabra sticking out of the top opening.

She glanced furtively around the room, clasping the sack to her breast, and fled into the night without a sound.

Some deep primal rage had spawned a venomous blossom within me, but a cold and dreary hopelessness consumed everything else. I was numb. My mind had glazed over, everything was shining in my vision, and wobbling, like some heady nightmare. And then I found myself moving at a steady pace, past the dining area, barefoot across the freezing tiles of the floor; past the foyer, past the sentinel-like pillars of alabaster that were dark and dominating in the night; through the doorway, into the moonlight, into open air. The warm night moisture sponged my skin like a tongue had passed over my flesh. I could see her body growing distant across the lawn, her feet scattering moths like squares of white confetti out of the grass with each hurried step. Cicadas were screeching in my ears, a dry husky monotone that rattled inside my head. I took a breath, and I followed her.



We retraced our steps from my estate to the marketplace, veiled in shadow and vastly empty, into the brush until the brush thickened into that dense tree line. She weaved her way expertly through the trees whose bodies were smooth and ashen as bones sticking out of the moist grass. Her tent appeared in its clearing, the ground around it sparkling with otherworldly dew. I strayed behind, blocked by a tree.

She set the sack down, and approached the tent. "Don?" She whispered.

The tent flapped open and a man with a lean fit body and attractive face emerged. He was wearing dull rags and dressings as she was, his feet barely covered by broken shoes whose soles had nearly ripped off. He smiled warmly into her face, and embraced her.

I could feel the venom of the flower in my chest pulsating, feeding on me, boiling my insides...

She kissed him, and mumbled something like "I brought something for us". She turned around and her smile died as she faced me. I hadn't realized I had left the safety of the trees. I was standing directly in front of her, the sack behind me tossed aside, the cold candelabra gripped in my hand. It was as if the flower had spread its wicked roots throughout my entirety, and I could only sit back and watch, impassive. It drove my hand forward with a primal yell that racked my body.

Her eyes were so large, so pretty, so stricken with fear. I knew I'd never be able to forget them.

She was pushed aside with a forceful arm, and my candelabra struck the skull of the man who had pushed her. He collapsed, I straddled his body and hit him again and again, as methodical in my mind as adding brushstrokes to a painting but with more violence, spreading the red across the canvas. All the while in my mind, *you scum, you scum, you human scum...*

She shrieked behind me, begging me to stop, her voice thick with weeping, and finally grabbed my wrist and wrestled me off of his motionless body.

A little voice came from the tent, and a small red-haired child poked out of the opening. "Mummy?"

*"STAY IN THE TENT!"* she wailed. *"STAY IN THE TENT!"*

I was shaking my head, it was throbbing so painfully. My hands were trembling, one spattered with a warm blackish substance I couldn't distinguish. The flower's influence had subsided, I was no longer numb but my mind was a torrent of confusion and regret. I tried to get to my feet, and was face to face with two young boys with ginger hair and tear-stained, freckled cheeks. Their skin was pale, their bodies swathed in cheap and ragged clothing. They clasped their hands together tightly.

I barely had time to get to my feet, and I tried to say something to them, my mind still partly drugged with rage but tinged with distant horror at what I had done. But a sharp pain manifested at my spine, and I cried out and turned around.

Basilia was there, her face splotchy with crying, her sad black eyes now burning red, teeth gritted. Behind her, the sack with its contents of valuables spilled out over the grass. In her hands, a deceitfully small knife made of pure silver, taken from one of the sets of silverware that she must have pillaged.

I gaped at her as she stood shaking like a feeble flower in a fierce wind, but her face was bold. I remembered thinking to myself, perhaps she isn't a child of God. Perhaps she *is* God. Capable of breathing life into something, then taking it all away, exiling it to darkness for its sins. And that darkness approached me now, I felt its frigid fingertips slide over my back from underneath my shirt. My body was of ice, her eyes of fire.

I felt and saw nothing. Everything faded out, there were no earthly sensations left but a last fleeting thought which struck me as I fell.

If God made us to kill each other, then we are all doomed from the start. Humans are so wretched, but God is the greatest sinner of all for making us this way. I know now, I am no exception.

## A Plateau

*Kirsten Biel*

I stare off the edge into the endless sea  
I stare off the edge with rope in hand  
Will it be enough?  
I have no idea  
So many people have already made the descent

Into unknown salt water  
No true direction to go  
No path to follow  
No goal in the end  
Just don't sink below

These thoughts do not bother others  
They focus on the climb down  
Swimming is easy  
There is a direction chosen for or by them  
But I have none

Friends start making the climb down  
My friends offered their rope to help

But I had been taught  
Never take another's life line  
Never ask for that extra bit of help  
Never take the extra rope

Is it going to be enough?  
Is it even worth it?

The goal is to find a direction in that water  
In the endless unforgivingness of the sea  
The climb down is not so bad  
It is what is to be done after

Scale down the rocky cliffs then swim  
But what if when you make it down you drown?  
The expanse of the unknown  
The endless amount of possibilities  
They all drag us down in the end  
One cannot swim forever

I don't want to just swim forever

Can we not stay on the plateau?

I don't want to climb down  
But the ocean is not inviting, it is terrifying  
I had been taught how to swim but never truly did

I keep being told the rope is enough,  
I have enough rope  
Just go  
But can't I just stay?  
I know I don't like this plateau

But I like being safe.

You stare out past the edge with a brave smile  
And I will follow.  
We will share our rope and swim together

I will take that life line  
I will ask for help  
I will take that extra bit of rope

Because I want to stay with you  
Even if it means swimming into the unknown

### **Red Berries**

*Lexi Zimmerman*



## Dying Dream

*By*

CC

Wispy, brush strokes painting skies pink  
Silky threads of grass wavering  
Warm festoon of honeysuckle swaying  
Glazed over muddy puddles glistening  
Silvery, cool mist drifting  
Over a brick bridge joining two banks  
With mossy, cool, damp stone.  
Air sweet and salty from the bay  
Waves crashing far in the distance.  
Peace sits softly on the soul  
Healing aches from another world.  
Alas, darkness now rips in-  
Trees dwindling, bridge fading  
Sky dimming, color fleeing  
Birds chirping white noise  
Salty, sweet air staling  
Leaving a quiet, dark room.

## The Ghostly Lit Tree

*Lexi Zimmerman*



## The World Anew

*Sylvie Fisher*

It was another dreary day. I got up and dressed myself in a designer outfit, topped off with the fanciest of jewels and accessories. I looked in the mirror, deciding on how my light brown hair should be styled. As I pondered over what to do with my hair, my maid called out for me. “Danniella, your parents are asking for your presence in the dining hall for your breakfast. They wish to see you in five minutes.”

“I’ll be there soon, and didn’t I ask you to call me Danny?” I asked, annoyed that she would forget so quickly. I never really cared for the formal name, Danniella. It felt too stiff and rigid. Not to mention that it was given to me by *them*. My filthy rich parents called me Danniella, since it was a “name befitting of someone from the highest of status”. I hated the wealth I was born into. It separated me from those I loved and wanted to know. I finished getting ready and headed down a long corridor until I was met with a grand staircase, leading to a foyer. After that, I traveled through a winding hallway leading me to the dining hall. Accompanying my mother and father were two others, one a girl, about my age with long black hair and bright blue eyes with the fakest of smiles plastered upon her face, and the other a man, whose age had caught up to him showing the wrinkles and graying hair adorning his face and head.

The two greeted me once I had entered the room, plastic smiles painted on their faces and fake cheer tainting their tones. The second I saw them, I knew they only wanted to be around my family and myself for our wealth, a common issue amongst the wealthy. I silently ate my breakfast listening in on the conversation that the adults were having. They were discussing the event that was going to transpire soon, the boarding of the spaceship were my family and one person of their choosing amongst a few other rich and powerful families would venture off into space to find a new planet to colonize. After all, our planet was running to ruin by the corrupt societies that had grown. Most people are well acquainted with the old discriminations of skin colors and ethnicity. While that was no longer a major issue, a new discrimination arose. Now, instead of the color of your skin, it was the color of your hair that told the world of how wealthy or amazing you were, since

dyes were so hard to come by. For example, my light brown hair was seen as the hair in which a common person would have, while the platinum blonde hair, in which my parents constantly tried to “gift” to me by bleaching my hair, was that deemed of a wealthy person.

After our breakfast, both families got into their elaborate cars and drove to the boarding sight. The ship, seen not too far off, after a few hours of driving, was massive in size and almost looked like it came from old movies about space wars. It was wide and semi-round in shape with a tacky deep blue and white paint plastered on in an attempt to hide the not so elegant parts of the bulky ship. Once we arrived, we followed the instructions given to use about where we were to go and how to get there safely. My family, while rich and powerful, were not liked by the public, which meant we were surrounded by bodyguards as we walked toward the platform. While we were preparing to board the ship, a boy, not much older than myself, with bright white hair stuck out like a sore thumb amongst the crowd. He had eyes that were much darker than mine yet still green. He was a bit more pale than myself, being unable to afford tanning solutions, which I personally didn't care for the use of though my parents adored.

Without consulting my parents, I took the microphone from the man upon the stage who was introducing every one of the families to the crowd, and spoke loudly demanding that the boy with white hair come to the front and be my “plus-one” to the space journey. As the crowd gasped in disbelief, I took a closer look at the boy and his expression. He looked at me in a way I have never seen before. His eyes showed no greed for my wealth, no knowledge of me at all, and pure confusion that could only come from somebody who could have never dreamed of being able to travel on this “fantastic journey”. At last, I might be given the pleasure of having a true friend, the joy of spending time with someone I care for, and the bliss that comes from giving them things in which they never could have obtained themselves. I felt a longing in my heart to display the kindness and which I had always adored, though it was forbidden to show.

As he came to the stage, people parted like the Red Sea for him, as if he was too powerful and holy to touch, being picked by “my family”, even though I was the only one who wanted him to join. The man stole the

microphone back from me and spoke, “And what is your name, dear trampy boy?” The boy looked half offended and half confused about what to say. He looked like a deer in headlights, with his blank staring at the crowd and his blatant disbelief. The boy was trying to muster up the courage to say his name when the man asked him again, in a more agitated voice than his previously disgusted tone.

“My name is... J-Jason,” the boy said, stuttering over his own name, as if he had never seen a group of people this large before.

“And what a pleasure it is to send you off. I’m sure you will make the perfect errand boy,” the man said, before shoo-ing him off along with my family. We all boarded the ship, and as we did so, I ignored my parents’ wrath over my choice and their obvious hatred of my “impulsive and deplorable actions”. I, too fascinated by the boy, ignored them until we were taking our seats and waiting for the lift-off sequence to start. I looked at Jason with a kind smile, in hopes that he would receive my welcomingness and ignore my belligerent parents.

After the lift off, everyone on board got out of their seats and started to mingle for a little while. I got up and looked for Jason, in hopes that I would get to ask him a few questions and get to know him some. Once I found him, I floated over. “Hey! My name is Danniella, but please, call me Danny,” I said in the hopes to strike up a friendly conversation.

“Oh. Well... my name is Jason. Oh. I bet you already knew that. Sorry,” he said shyly.

“The stars look amazing, don’t they?” I asked, trying to defuse the awkwardness.

“Yeah. I have never been to space before,,” he said, looking down at his hands as he fiddled with them nervously.

We sat in awkward silence for a few minutes. I had heard of him and his family before. He was young when his parents went on a similar space journey. They never made it back though. In fact, their ship exploded on live television, which I doubt he wasn’t watching. I felt sorta bad for him.



“Why did you pick me? I mean, there were probably thousands of other people in that crowd and I think many of them are more excited about space travel than I am. So why me?” he asked, rushed after a few moments of silence.

“Well, you sorta are hard to miss. And something about the air you give off stated that you wanted to go on this trip more than anything else, though I think you don’t have the funds to do that on your own,” I said, rather bluntly while trying to make him more comfortable with me.

“Oh,” he said, as I watched him shut down internally.

Over the next three months, the children gorged themselves on brownies and other baked goods, while the parents and adults gathered some of the ingredients and made breakfasts, lunches, and dinners everyday. As time went on, Jason let himself loose, showing more of his personality and removing his shyness from how he acted. He became much more fun to be around too. After the third month came to an end, the ship had landed on a planet that wasn’t even in the Milky Way. I think the reason was because we moved at a pace called hyperspace. Once we landed on this new planet, a new argument erupted from the already on edge crewmates. They argued over what to call the planet for nearly a week before they decided on a temporary name, Planet Z. Planet Z was filled with all sorts of life, trees that reached double the size of a skyscraper and animals that had never been seen before. Where we would normally see grass was a soft pink fuzz, that when stepped on, would leave a nearly permanent footprint in its wake. The “vines” that hung from the trees were a soft blue and sometimes had cyan leaves.

The animals were the most terrifying things though. Some were larger than the ship and others were so small, that if you weren’t careful, you could squash an entire species in one step! The animal that caught my eye the most was a large flying beast. It had a base color of blue, similar to the sky on Earth, and had light purple, pink, and white tendrils that would elegantly breeze around its broad shoulders. It had giant brown eyes that took up a large portion of its head, which was similarly shaped as a horse’s with some minor changes here and there. It had massive hooves in the front and had nothing but the tendrils of silk-like sheets of purple,

pink, and white in the back portion of its body. On it, there were small creatures that had small horns shaping into a crown around their heads. This beast was often found around us and it seemed curious of us. We spent the first two weeks on the ship, and the fights never got better. They started off with minor insults like, “idiot” and “stupid” but grew into fights about chores. Who was cooking? Who was checking the course? Who was logging the behavior or life on the ship? Who was logging what was outside the ship? All sorts of fights erupted and they didn’t stop there. These fights would become violent, with fists flying and blood splattering on the walls.

The fights got so bad that Jason and I started to notice missing people. We were terrified that the adults would strike at us next, so we locked them all in one room and ventured outside the landed ship to grab a couple animals and place them in another room. We planned to test how these animals were acting, since we were the ones logging everything anyway. These animals looked to be aging at a rapid pace and their symptoms were the same as the adults. We were studying them when we noticed the fighting take a turn for the worse. All animals in that room were dead in an hour, at most. We looked in on the adults again and saw that they were speeding toward their doom. We had no clue if it was the same thing, but it was a pretty safe assumption at the time. “We have to do something to help them,” I said, starting to open the door.

“No! We need to leave! If that door is opened, who do you think is next? They will kill us once the last adult is standing. Our only hope of living through this is finding an antidote before we turn twenty, or at least that is my guess of a realistic age. I’m eighteen and it hasn’t affected me yet, so we know that it is later than eighteen years of age. We need to leave and do more research to understand this, but first, we have to leave,” he said.

“Is there really nothing we can do for them though?” I asked sadly.

“No. It is better if we leave them to fend for themselves. We need to survive, even if we can never go back home. We need to live here and pull ourselves up by our bootstraps,” he said, equaling my sorrow.

We left the ship with, no intent of returning to it, though it wasn't of our own will. With heavy hearts and even heavier minds, we started to wander aimlessly. I was never one for fancy clothes and living, but I complained plenty of the odors and the feel of grime on my skin. It grossed me out and I could tell Jason was about at his wits end with my "dainty" upbringing. Jason, on the other hand, was right at home. He was used to the dirt and grime and in fact, he almost enjoyed it. Since we were new to the planet, we had to experiment with what animals and herbs we could eat in this new world for a while, which didn't go smoothly seeing as most things we tried made us throw it back up. Once we finally found a food source, we made a sort of base camp, in hopes of having a small place to call home. After a few weeks of traveling on foot, walking for hours on end, we collapsed in a cave. We didn't have enough energy to go back to the camp we made and instead, waited for the sun of this planet to rise in the morning. In the dark, I felt something poking me in the side. It wasn't really sharp, but it also wasn't really dull. It was really annoying and woke me, putting me in an enraged state, for I don't like being forced awake. I glared into the dark, searching for any sign of a creature that could have poked at me. Jason was fast asleep next to me. It seemed he fell asleep during his watch. I felt my face start to burn and glared even more aggressively into the dark, attempting to shoot "daggers out of my eyes" as the phrase used to be. My hands clenched into fists and I was shaking at my core, no longer in anger, but in fear of whatever might be out there. I heard a soft step behind me and I whirled around only to see nothing there.

I turned back around and came face to face with another creature. It had massive eyes and a soft looking nose. In the dark, it was hard to tell what color it was but I could hear the soft pats of hooves, barely touching the ground. I found that I could no longer sleep, no matter how hard I tried, so I stayed up the rest of the night. In the morning, I was able to glimpse at what I believed woke me up. It looked like a newborn version of the beast that had been flying peacefully over the ship not too long ago. I heard Jason stirring awake next to me and thought, in that moment, that I would be content if everything stayed as it was. But life moves on swiftly and never waits, even if begged to stop, time will forever move forward. I looked at the young

creature again, care in my eyes, as I gently reached for its head, hoping to feel whether it was soft or hard, smooth or rough, and whether it would return my gentleness or if it would be aggressive. It lowered its head and allowed for me to touch it. It was just as soft and smooth as I had hoped. It was softer than a freshly washed fine furred rabbit and smoother than the skin that coats a dolphin's body. It was a puzzling feeling, yet very satisfying and soothing in nature.

The next thing I know, there are about five or six of these animals showing up around the cave, slowly peeking a glimpse, at what I can only imagine was a strange new creature with the potential to be hostile. I then see a taller and more slender figure standing in the shadows of the cave behind the newborn beasts. It didn't seem like a threat so I ignored it for the time being but it being there drew attention to the saddles and reins on the beasts. I assumed that these were mounts and something the tall and slender creatures would ride on. As time went on, Jason and I got ready to leave and head back to our camp. The slim and tall figure walked out behind us and most of the way back, I felt like we were being watched. "Those creatures, for lack of a better word, what should we call them?" Jason asked as we walked back slowly, exhaust filling us to our very bones.

"I don't think it is our call on the matter," I said, using my eyes to point behind us, where the slim and tall creature was still following us.

"That is creepy. Do you think we have anything to be worried about?" he asked.

"No. I think it is observing us to tell about us to others of its kind. If we act hostile, we might hurt it and cause a mini war or make ourselves out as enemies," I said, still noticing the hole that was burning in my back from the creature's gaze and thinking about the times that my parents treated animals poorly, only to get bit, literally and metaphorically.

When we finally made it back to our camp, we guessed at the time and when the creature left us. Since this was a new planet, in a new solar system, it was hard to tell the time. The sun would've helped us tell the time on Earth, but it seemed like the sun traveled at a different rate. This new time change was causing sleep

deprivation and insomnia, though we still tried our best to persevere. We went back out exploring and when we got back to our camp, we saw the slim and tall figure, partnered with another of its kind, seemingly looting our encampment, and as anyone surviving in an unfamiliar environment would do, we tried to scare them away. They were more visible in the daylight. It had long thin arms and legs with their feet webbed and adorned only with four toes on each foot. The hands had seven fingers each and had four knuckles. In return to us trying to scare them off, they slashed at us with spears that were not sharp enough to kill us but would definitely cut us. We quickly backed off, giving them space to do as they pleased. After about, what I assume was, an hour, the creatures turned back to us. They looked at us, cocking their heads to the side. They then closed the gap between us and them. They bent over and placed their foreheads on ours, as Jason and I stood there confused and alarmed. When they separated, they looked at each other and then spoke to us.

“You call yourselves humans, correct?” the one that looked more masculine asked.

“Yes,” I said after a long period of stunned and terrified silence. I was more of a “freeze up” person rather than a “fight or flight” person.

“We are the ‘humans’ of this planet, so to speak, and we are interested in what you are doing here, away from your ship that we scouted a few... months, as you call them, ago,” the one that looked like a woman said.

“Before we continue this talk, shouldn’t you tell us your names? We have nothing to call you,” Jason said with a wavery voice.

“Ah, yes. My name is Elkit and this is my mate, Imi. We are from the species Cerinan,” the male one said.

“Okay. So... we are Jason and Danny and, as you already know, we are humans,” Jason said, genstering to me when he said my name, still incredibly shaky.

“We are away from the ship because it seems like there was a gas near the ship that seeped in and caused the adult humans to go insane and, we assume, start killing each other, like the small animals had when exposed to the gas. We left before they could get the chance to, supposedly, kill us too,” I explained, sorrow weighing down my words and causing me to forget my fear.

“Well, if it is a gas, we might be able to help you find the source, but after that, we can’t really do anything else to aid you. We are not even certain if the gas produced by the organism is something that could cause this reaction to humans,” Imi explained.

“You can help us?! Thank you so much! How can we repay you?” I asked, my eyes glimmering and a massive grin plastered across my face.

“There is nothing you can do to repay us aside from never starting any kind of combat with us. Treat our kind with kindness and peacefulness, not aggressive ill will,” Elkit replied.

“We agree to your generous terms,” Jason said, with his best attempt at a diplomatic tone that sounded more like a kitten trying to roar like a lion.

“I have one more question though, now that we have settled the more important matters. How can you speak our language?” I asked.

“We can understand you because when we touch another creature’s head with our own, we gain the knowledge that they have gathered over the years. We don’t gain any of your memories though, so we are not intruding your mind too much,” Imi said.

Jason and I packed up a few of the necessities in our camp and followed the two Cerinans. We walked for more than one of their day and night cycles until we finally reached a small settlement. The houses were made of stone covered in a soft moss-like substance. The moss-like substance was a dull blue and had most of the feelings of moss except it was warm to the touch and had no slipperiness, signifying that it wasn’t filled with water like the moss on Earth is. The doors of the houses were nearly twenty feet tall, since their inhabitants were massive in their own rights. The two leading us ignored our obvious discomfort with their size and kept leading us deeper into the settlement until we reached the middle. The middle was a massive plaza with carved stones adorning the ground and flowers of all sorts lining the edges. In the middle of this plaza, was a massive plant. The Cerinans seemed to hold this plant at a higher value than most of the other living things in the area. “When you look at this plant, what do you see?” he asked in an oddly aggressive tone.

"I don't know what you mean. Are you referring to the physical descriptions of this plant?" Jason asked.

"I almost have the feeling that he is referring to what the plant may represent," I said, unsure of whether I was right.

"I asked about both. This plant is called an arciousit plant. Since that name isn't always easy to pronounce, we also will often call it an arc plant," Elkit explained.

"Well, if we are analyzing the physical form of the plant, it has long red petals with sharp white bumps lining the middle of each pedal getting smaller the further from the center of the flower-like middle that it goes. It also seems as if its leaves are sharp and can cut. Not to mention the vines that move beneath it," I said, a shiver running down my spine from the vines.

"Is that all there is to the plant though?" Elkit asked.

"Is there more that we are not understanding?" I asked.

"Let me explain further. This plant is what you would call a carnivorous plant. It doesn't only eat bugs though. It secretes a gas which, to specific animals, acts as a lure. It lures them into the middle and the pedals close as an acid rises and teeth make sure that it stays in place and cannot escape. This plant, however, is not known as a violent plant. It acts as if it has a mind of its own and can think for itself, thus shows remorse when killing anything, whether for food or not. The gas that it secretes will not only act as a lure but, to those not used to the gas or have not adapted to its presence, as a poison which when inhaled, the creature will be poisoned to the point of insanity and eventually death. We thought it would be easier to show you what you were up against, rather than allow you to trot to your deaths in an attempt to rid the gas from your ship," Elkit explained.

"Why save us? How come you, and your people, place this deadly plant in the middle of your civilization?" I asked, perplexed as to why they would seemingly sentence themselves to an early grave.

"We decided to save you since it is unlikely that you would pose a threat to us. You don't know much about this planet and the creatures that inhabit it so we find it hard to imagine you two destroying this vast

world. Also, to answer your second question, we place it here because it decided to spare us. This plant holds more of a religious and ceremonial aspect in our lives. Over time it ate less of us, so we started to become immune to its poison. We believe that it chose to eat less of us and chose to spare us rather than, as you would call it, evolution taking place and forcing us to adapt and change,” he said.

As if on cue, the plant seems to droop its leaves and raise them back up, as if bowing to us as its way of greeting. Its petals then shake and shimmer, as if it's happy that we have arrived. Its odd behavior is more than appalling since on Earth plants don't have minds of their own. Since we have nowhere else to go, Jason and I decided to stay in a home just outside the settlement. After months and months of analyzing the odd creature and gaining a form of relationship with it, a small amount of acid leaves its mouth and falls into a leaf, which was positioned to catch it. I looked at it confused when one of the Cerinans came over. “It wants you to take the acid. Here, this should help contain the acid without it hurting you,” they said as they handed me a glass bottle.

“Thank you. Thank you both,” I said as I bowed my head.

The plant shimmered, as it did when it was happy, and let the acid drop into the glass bottle. The acid, to my surprise, didn't melt the glass away. I took the acid to the chief of the settlement, which they called a village, and asked about the importance of it. The chief told me to find my friend and visit the herbalist for a bit of good news. I did as I was told and found Jason sitting by a large lake, dangling one of his feet over the edge and in deep thought. “Jason! We need to head to the herbalist,” I called.

“Coming,” he yelled back after jumping at the sudden noise.

When we arrived at the herbalist's place, they used the acid and made it into a potion, which in turn, we were told to drink. We hesitated to drink the potion and after much questioning, like “what will it do” and “is it safe”, convincing, and assurance of the Cerinan that made the potion and that Cerinan's mate, we slowly and cautiously drank the potion. It had a vile smell and an even worse taste, but for the sake of whatever the good news could be, we drank up. After we had it, the herbalist explained what it was and what it did. They



told us all about how we would be immune to the gas and how, if we made it correctly for our young, they could also live free of the poison. At this, Jason and I blushed, our faces beat red. We chose, in the end to never reveal if the landing was a success, since we still had access to the broken down ship, as we were sent to do, and didn't allow for new humans to populate the planet in which we chose to live the rest of our lives on. The ship might not have been usable with the plants growing in and over it. It was practically a part of nature itself. We knew that the human race would destroy Planet Z, as they did for Earth. We believed it was better if this peaceful and untainted planet remained that way and took the secret of this world, to our very graves, which were made by the Cerinans and our children.

### **Fairy Pinecone**

*Lexi Zimmerman*



## **The New, The Sacred**

*Hannah Lavoie*

Sacred eyes  
Dumbfounded by loss  
Under the silk cotton tree

Silk cotton flower  
In tresses of hair  
Ripple, Venetian sea

Sacred smile  
Never to be born  
Living to die as crinkled lips

Headstrong and worthless  
Greedy moonlight  
Has us in its grip

Sacred whisper  
Carried in the night  
Your eyes, those fireflies

Pack in my mouth  
The discredited sugar  
And honey flavored lies

Sacred fruit  
Freckled with dew  
Flesh as coarse as ours

Let them sink in  
Those ivory mandibles  
Chewing and spitting out flowers

Sacred poem  
From the gold throat of Venice  
The lights of the city hold your soul

They twinkle, then dim  
Then the night settles in  
You are what makes it whole

## Childhood Transition

CC

Sweet ice cream  
Cold and sugary treat  
Held fast in the hand-  
A small, pudgy fist.  
Warming and sweet, the summer's air.  
Young figure dressed in white  
Lost his grip on the cone  
Cold cream falling to the ground.  
Eyes, wet and teary  
He mourned his loss.

Sweet white roses  
Condoling and sympathetic festoon  
Tastefully placed about the focal-  
A long, oak casket.  
Chilling and stale, the parlor's air.  
Blackish figure dressed in death  
Lost his grip on his emotions  
Wet face weeping over the oak.  
Eyes, wet and teary  
He mourned his loss.

## **Creativity**

*Sylvie Fisher*

Something that gives life  
yet can take just as fast.  
The rise of a kingdom.  
The fall of an empire.

The world surrounded in light  
shrouded in dark.  
The pure has been tainted.  
The happy depressed.

It gives rise to new worlds  
but is the cause of their downfalls.  
It is glorified  
while its negatives are ignored.

It lets go,  
never restrains,  
unless it is absent,  
voiding its aid.

It is entertainment.  
Gives life to hate,  
makes others happy  
or upset.

Worlds begin  
only to be forgotten.  
Time moves forward,  
never waiting.

The beginnings fade  
and the ends never come.  
Unfinished stories  
fill the mind.

Could it be?  
Is it coming to me?  
That sweet poison  
Creativity.

## Overcome Pasts

*Sylvie Fisher*

As I walk  
the path laid for me,  
I wait to talk,  
to sit below the tree.

I missed you.  
Your heart close to mine.

I was true  
only everytime.

You cried there  
and I would sit to help.  
Gave you a bear,  
though your friends said, "welp."

You beat me.  
You tore out my heart.  
I was free  
until you wouldn't part

I loved you  
until you broke me down.  
I supported through  
until you found your crown.

You were no queen  
but a monster in disguise.  
You were so mean,  
to no one's surprise.

Now I live  
with a hole you left,  
expected to forgive,  
to cry over your theft.

So I try  
to stand and fight.  
I won't lie,  
my bark's not my bite.

## Gentle Injuries of Dreams

*Hannah Lavoie*

The wasp of dreams stings my jaw  
Injecting me with honey that pools in my mouth  
And makes my lips glisten  
My head swollen and numb with fantasies  
Flecks of bitter security float apart like pollen  
And the most delicate of visions films my teary eyes  
My heart is like a honeycomb, with many empty hollow holes  
Crafted over time in slow, gradual bouts of creation  
Bit by bit, papery and crumbling  
But the scent is clean and some semblance of life thrums and buzzes at the core  
Keeping me going  
And those visions wash over me like a tide of pale static  
I imagine shoulder blades, soft yet striking, white and smooth  
I imagine lips that are shy and willing, subtly wet  
I imagine arms caressing me for the first time  
As that wasp's inebriating toxin fills my jaw with glitter  
That falls in sparkling rivulets  
My teeth glimmer, fractions of rainbow  
My eyes are slick with honey, small golden beads fall as tears  
That crest on my tongue  
And wrap me in the sweetness and the nostalgia for something I've never had  
I want something to hold, something substantial  
Not cruel, beautiful daydreams  
But flesh that I can feel  
Eyes I can glance into, and find devout acceptance  
Someone to wash the honey from my eyes  
And scrape every last bit of glitter from my tongue  
Cradle my head  
As I fall into fever  
Microbes of doubt infect my dreamer's mind  
Is this all illusion?  
Have I grown so used to the taste of old sequins, the warm wobbling world seen through honey,  
That I've become entrapped in some bizarre nature's cycle?  
Death, and growth, and death again  
But the carcasses pile up until there is no room for new growth  
When a honeycomb heart tatters into lifeless confetti  
The sweet succulence drained, drunken by beasts  
And the buzz of life silenced  
The heart becomes an open grave  
Where the rotting fatalities ruin the air, you can only breathe the rank and heavy mildew-spotted moisture  
Burned by too much sunlight, now dying without so much as the moon  
The stars are red and throbbing, bleeding  
The sky is red with the cost of futile redemption  
And I'm blinded...

But something springs from the ground,  
As fragile as a white rose, nourished by the rot  
Roots drinking up the ugly stinking water  
Something soft and untouchable, infinitely perishable  
Snaking its way up the piles of the dead  
Creeping and reaching, the petals as white and smooth as shoulder blades  
The leaves glistening like lips  
The dewdrops blinking like understanding eyes  
And the honeycomb thrives, as the new growth attracts life in the valley of the dead  
And old daydreams shake the dust off themselves, begin churning in the forgotten fashion  
And the visions slip back into my eyes, familiar and ever so sparkling  
And I can almost wrap my arms around him  
I reach out, and touch his skin  
And a golden droplet of honey trickles from my eyelid  
And lands on my tongue  
Fueling the fantasies  
And reintroducing me to the sweetness that exists  
If I stare at his lips  
And I hear the crackling wings of that wasp returning  
I await its marvelous sting.

### **Sun Through the Leaves**

*Hannah Lavoie*



## Letter From the Editors

I would like to show my appreciation for Mrs. Kneisley, our club advisor and dedicated writing mentor. I would also like to thank the rest of the *Tower* staff, who have each contributed something entirely unique to the magazine. Ever since joining this club my junior year, I have felt like I am part of a whole that strives towards improving each others' writing, but also having tons of fun in the process. With the support I got from *Tower*, I was not only able to become a better writer but also a better person in general. Between the quirky writing prompts, impromptu snack parties and countless trips to the candy drawer, I've learned what an excellent job Mrs. Kneisley has done to create a lively, welcoming environment for writers of all grades and all skill levels. But a big part of it should also be attributed to my fellow students who were in the club with me, because they are the ones who took me in and made me part of their group like they'd known me for years. I highly recommend that anyone who has even the slightest interest in writing should join, because the passion and dedication that drive this club can't be found anywhere else! I won't be here next year to see you, but I know my friends at *Tower* will welcome any new members with open arms.

*Hannah Lavoie*

Hannah Lavoie  
Co-Editor of Tower Writers' Guild

I would like to thank our advisor, Mrs. Kneisley, as well as our amazing *Tower* staff as a whole. As a freshman at Pinkerton, *Tower* was the first club I joined and is currently the only club I have been in throughout all my years in high school. It has been so great to watch the club change and grow over the years; every year brings new memories and a new group of students who are just as great as the last. It has been so great to connect with others who enjoy writing as much as I do, if not even more, and I am so grateful for all the friends I've made and the support I have received from them and from Mrs. Kneisley. I have been able to grow more confident in my own writing as well as in myself as a person throughout these past three years, and I hope others who join this club in the future can find themselves doing the same. I hope to see *Tower* continue as it has for so many years, and if you're reading this as a student, I hope you consider joining too. Thank you so much for reading and supporting our magazine; I hope to see you again next year!

*Casey Ames*

Casey Ames  
Co-Editor of Tower Writers' Guild

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