

the Lyricist

2014



Editor's Letter

With every new edition of *The Lyricist*, one question is invariably asked: what is the theme? And with every new edition of *The Lyricist*, one answer is invariably never enough. Nature, family, love, death, religion—all of these subjects are shown in art, yet how does one cram an entire magazine into one category?

The theme of *The Lyricist* is ever-changing. Contributors share their poetry, their artwork, and their stories, and each piece has a unique perspective to give to the audience. The harmony lies in every artist's willing submission to the magazine, to his or her fellow contributors, and, ultimately, to the reader. To borrow from Whitman, *The Lyricist* is a song of ourselves, and here we stop, waiting for you to dive into this song, and read.

The 2014 *Lyricist* could not have been created without our staff and our incredible advisor, Mr. Nathan Salsbury. A special thanks to Dr. Gina Peterman for her encouragement, Mrs. Susan West for all of her assistance, and to Mr. Daniel Rodgers, Ms. Haven Hottel, and Dr. Cordelia Hanemann for sharing their expertise in design, technology, and poetry with our staff. Without the help of these and more, the 2014 *Lyricist* would never have been heard of.

2014 *Lyricist* Staff: Victoria Berger, Editor

Ashleigh Bilodeau	Justin Bradley
Brenna Jones	Katlyn Rogers
Chase Clary	Leigh Senter
Christina Price	Maggie Pogue
Christopher Weston	Matthew Eberle
Donnie McCabe	Nichole Bolyard
Greg Thomas	Nicole Kessler
Hayley Redding	Rachael Herwig
Jacob Berger	Stacie Wuske
Jessica Inscore	Taylor Clark

Table of Contents

Poetry:

Bean, Megan: “Frappuccino” (17) and “Sing, Cane” (37-38)

Berger, Jacob: “Angel of Mine” (34) and “Distance” (39)

Bilodeau, Ashleigh: “Mansion and Redemption” (41-42) and “Rekindle” (46-47)

Bradley, Justin: “Carolina Storm” (26)

Farmer, Katria: “The Understanding” (33)

Greene, Camry: “Rain” (27)

Howell, Tori: “Kristy” (18-19) and “The Music!” (51)

I, Sebastian: “Done Bees” (44) and “Kaliedescope” (48)

Inscore, Jessica: “Wales” (15) and “Purple” (49-50)

Jones, Brenna: “Sunset, Sunrise,” (22) “Beneath the Stars of Endless Light,” (35-36) and “Lady of the Water” (45)

Love, Sam: “The Perfect Holiday Meal” (52-53)

Mundy, Claudia “From the clouds it came” (7-8)

Myers, Jaclyn: “Evening Prayer” (16) and “Silver and Gold” (25)

Price, Mckenzie: “Winter” (23-24)

Quah, Jessica: “Watercolour,” (11) “ma,” (12) and “Temple” (40)

Rider, Rebecca: “Changeling,” (6) “Thanksgiving Day, 2006,” (9-10) and “Waiting for the 420 to Jerusalem on a Sunday Morning” (13-14)

Rodriguez, Edythe: "Silhouettes" (32)

Updegrove, Jacob: "Catullus" (20-21)

Weston, Christopher: "Breathing" (54-55)

Wolfe, Katherine: "Out for a Swim," (28-29) "The Snake Hunter," (30-31) and "On Learning of My Sister's Illness" (43)

Artwork:

Bilodeau, Ashleigh: "The Eye of the Butterfly" (66)

Bolyard, Benjamin: "Everlasting Love" (67) and "Capicious Countenance" (69)

Bradway, Jessica: "Bambi Hiding," (65) "Eiffel Tower from Across the Seine River," (72) and "Cliffs of Moher in West Ireland" (73)

Cook, Summer: "Baby Kennedy," (64) "Creek Game" (71), and "Seashells and Sand" (74)

D'Ancona, Joanna: "Fairgrounds" (68)

Jones, Brenna: "White Butterfly Bush" (75)

Pogue, Maggie: "Dew drop" (76)

Williams, Richard: "Willie" (58) and "Tee" (63)

Wroten, Cynthia: "Slow Death," (57) "Captured Jewel" (59), and "Missing Children" (61)

Zimmerman, Andrew: "Daylight Brunch," (60) "The Elephant and the Tamer," (62) and "Snow Day" (70)

Prose:

Castellucci, Matthew: “Solis-Seid” (90-96)

Davis-Weeks, Dero-Asha: “A Love Story” (78-81)

Weston, Christopher: “Flora” (82-89)

Lyricist Student Poetry:

1st Place: “Silver and Gold” by Jaclyn Myers

Lyricist Statewide Poetry:

1st Place: “Waiting for the 420 to Jerusalem on a Sunday Morning”
by Rebecca Rider

2nd Place: “Sing, Cane” by Megan Bean

Honorable Mention: “Frappuccino” by Megan Bean

Lyricist Student Prose:

1st Place: “A Love Story” by Dero-Asha Davis-Weeks

2nd Place: “Flora” by Christopher Weston

Honorable Mention: “Solis-Seid” by Matthew Castellucci

Lyricist Student Artwork:

1st Place: “The Elephant and the Tamer” by Andrew Zimmerman

2nd Place: “Daylight Brunch” by Andrew Zimmerman

Honorable Mention: “Missing Children” by Cynthia Wroten

Special thanks to our *Lyricist* 2014 judges:

Dr. Cordelia Hanemann, Mr. Michael Brantley, and Mr. Daniel Rodgers

Changeling

The lazy lines of the earth are blurred
as if God brushed his thumb across the lake,
trying to redraw what he sketched in the night.
My feet leave diamond-cut footprints in the sand
that trace back to an open door
and an empty cradle with second-hand sheets.

By the water, a heron —
one leg lifted, toes curled
to catch the marble sun when it rises.
It waits, as if in the empty house
a clock is not counting moments
like rosary beads.

The bird cracked its beak
and spoke:
Child, what are you doing in the wild?
I'm looking for home,
I'm looking for home.

—Rebecca Rider

From the clouds it came

From the clouds it came

At a quick'ning pace

And touched on the tops of the trees

But the leaves kept the rain

From hitting my face

While the storm it moved into me.

At first it was pleasant,

A gentle reprieve

Relief from the sun's burning rays

I welcomed the calm,

And basked in the cool,

As mercury slid down the vein

Then dripped did the drops, they fell from the tops, no longer held back by the leaves (too green to hold back the siege).

It turned on its course, a gale of a force, I noticed the wind, too, had changed.
(The wind noticed in me the same.)

It poured down in sheets—

The season's monsoon—

this wave, when it caught up to me.

Between water and heat
My shoes were consumed
My feet grew too heavy to move

The rain settled in and wouldn't relent
Gripping all that was green in its grasp.
Transcending time, water to wine, cutting a path white as snow.
The light of strike, the close of the eye, a flood in the blink of a flash.
No further I could longer go.

skin. It's not deep enough for that kind of flood, so it seeped, seeped deep down
into my clothes, unbeknownst, unbesound, undetected it found and seeped,
seeped down into my bones.

The water—it swallowed me—whole.

—Claudia Mundy

Thanksgiving Day, 2006

I grabbed my cousin by the wrist —
felt the pitter-patter of her pulse,
beating like a bird —
and led her across the bridge.

Rains forced the lake to rise.
Made the black body slink across the concrete slab.
We slung our shoes around our necks,
the rubber soles knocking against our ribs like drums,
and waded in.

The current grabbed our legs,
and we walked like drunk men:
frozen feet feeling for the edge,
breath steaming from the furnace of our lungs.

While the water spun in our wake like galaxies
I tried to tell a story.
Odysseus, braving the sea,
shipwrecked and salt-laden.

But I could not say that he
was the only one to make it out alive.

We came to the shallows, saw
the lake swallowed cars,
houses, even trees,
and knew the raptor eye of nature
blinked.

—Rebecca Rider

Watercolour

We are childlike again – this art
makes mere suggestions of outlines,
letting everything else seep through
sheets of paperpulp soaked and
stuck to the countertop; colours
enter, trickling like mercy
from another wet world into this.
Beyond the autumn-glazed window
one half expects to see the steady sky
bleeding into the horizon.

—Jessica Quah

(ma)

This brush fits my hand
poorly; it leaves
a trembling trail, staggers
haphazard strokes in frail monochrome
negotiations with the invisible
joint of fibre to fibre, of
hard to
unhard and unsoft
to soft –
still, I create a woman,
hesitant, lean a horse, only
quivering slightly, against her side,
wonder how she supports the weight.

—Jessica Quah

Waiting for the 420 to Jerusalem on a Sunday Morning

I.

Last night's fog is already burning off the mountainside,
and the cars are beginning to wake with sleepy honks.

The heat cracks down,
the sun has carved its name into my skin.

The doves call from the garden wall,
Who? Who?

II.

I came here, all the weary miles,
to try and sculpt a Galatea
out of heat and light. To create
someone worth loving.
But this land will not remember me.

A million years of feet
have packed the dirt
into mountains full of holes.
The mountain shrugs its shoulders,
and another history
is gone.

III.

Across the road a grandmother climbs

the hollow hills.

She wraps her head with a crown

of cloth.

Gravity drags her skirt against her hips.

One hand props her spine straight,

the other holds a fig leaf,

green as Eden.

—Rebecca Rider

Wales

The skies were blue
with white cotton balls
spread across in clumps- sometimes
dark like a thin film was
covering this world,
but I didn't mind- and cold beads
fell onto my forehead and I
just let them fall where they wanted
because it meant I was a part
of it all; green,
oh, the ground was so
green, and tiny white dots
freckled it and climbed up
the walls of this church,
which is so beautiful it brings
salty tears to my eyes; I
could never do it justice with words-
but who ever could? Even now,
just a memory, always a memory,
if I could just be there-
maybe I could wrap my mind around it.

—Jessica Inscore

Evening Prayer

Braid the sunset
And weave the river slow-
Let it sparkle between burnt evening strands,
Hold my hands.
Take my soul
And look through it into the light
That flows between water and sky,
Soothe from it the night
That scratches deep
With its clock-hand claws.
Keep the morning shadows too-
Let smooth sun slants
Warm my face,
Illuminate yourself
In the daybreak.

—Jaclyn Myers

Frappuccino

White frothing to the top
As though to rise to the autumn sun
On a passing breeze, forming its own clouds
Against the clear plastic firmament
Of the grande cup.
I breathe from down deep, inhaling
Milk, ice, whipped cream,
Extract of vanilla bean.
The surprise of the cold semi-solid sweetness
Bursting in the mouth.
I guzzle away beside my sister and her caramel cappuccino,
The Sirens on the sides of our cups exchanging smiles with half-closed eyes.

—Megan Bean

Kristy

My neighbor down the road had a horse.

My horse,

as far as I was concerned.

I would ride my bike up to the grouchy electric fence,
(its droning threats could not deter me)

thrust a carrot between the wires, and there she came
ambling over, dapple gray coat and charcoal mane

drab and unimpressive

to the usual passerby,

but illustrious and gleaming to my callow eyes.

She would *munch-munch* the carrot out of my hand,

and I would stroke her velvety nose.

Nothing could hurt me with Kristy there; she was the miracle horse.

That last visit...

I maneuver around the moving truck on my bike—

pedal down the road as fast as I can!

Oh! A guilty pang at the realization I have no carrots...

I pull dandelions from the ditch,

anything to lure her to the fence.

She comes (of course.

She always comes, she is not like the parents,

picking and choosing when to show affection),

and then, in a fit of rebellion...

I slipped under the fence!

... Sure that any moment I would be caught,
but knowing that the risk was worth it.
I stood next to her, sliding my hand along her side,
tracing the dappled pattern on her thick neck,
Feeling her warm, calm pulse.
She was not afraid, and so neither was I.
I silently thanked her,
I had no idea what for at the time,
but now, a decade removed, I know.
She was shelter, and peace—

My escape from a world of change.

—Tori Howell

Catullus

I was taught when I was young
that the world moves on and on.
The earth spins and the stars move
each unyielding their ways.
And in times of difficulty, I knew,
I would move on too.

And I grew.

I was taught when I was young
that even the earth was tilted.
From the spinning and the turning,
the chaos and the time,
something beautiful existed.
Each in its own time, I knew.

And I grew.

I was taught when I was young
that things happen for a reason.
And when dark things came,
when harsh winds blew,
I would endure them for a season.
For a time and half, this I knew.

And I grew.

And now I teach myself,
in spite of trial and storm,
time, it seems, continues.
Even though the world is dark
and I cannot see ahead,
a beauty blossoms in the future
if only I give it a chance.
And so I wait on the edge of tomorrow...

And I grow because I knew.

—Jacob Updegrove

Sunset, Sunrise

At sunset, when the shadows fall
Over rocks and under trees
Through woods at night, where owls do call
And o'er the wild stormy seas
On distant waves, where no one sees
The sun departs, and daylight flees
And darkness falls

At sunrise, when the shadows flee
Creeping o'er the crooked walls
And the forests wild and free
Glancing through the ancient halls
Where the dusk and daylight fall
And mournfully the doves do call
The shadows flee

—Brenna Jones

WINTER

A crisp, dull blue fills the sky
Stained by a thick layer of fog.

Winter.

Bitterly cold leaves fall
Gently from the trees,
Piling up in the shadows underneath.

The sky turns a hazy white,
And tiny shimmering crystals begin to fall lightly.

A crow dives between a row of bushes
Cutting through the air just above my head.
Making wisps of brown hair stray from behind my ears.

I walk back up the creaky, damp wood steps
And go back inside
Toying with the thin woven bracelet on my arm,

I look out the frost covered window.

... “It’s “Winter.”

—Mckenzie Price

Silver and Gold

Winter trees wait for the sunset
To plead the debt
Earth owes the sky-
Dark limbs stretch high.

Sharp branches poke the golden glow
The poor below
Wish, work, and weep
To coin and keep.

But frost sits where no gold can stay
The next cold day-
A silver peace
For winter's lease.

—Jaclyn Myers

Carolina Storm

A soft breeze blows sweet scents through the humid country air,
As owls coo loudly in hopes of catching wild southern hairs.
The sky is low and cloudy as thunder rolls down east,
The sun succumbing to the rain like a glowing beaten beast.
Rain patters on my roof like God's bullets from on high,
As pecans fall and crack and magnolias paint the sky.
Cardinals do flutter as wind sweeps up their wings,
Frogs croak with the thunder as it wakes them from their dreams.
The rain has now descended on this quiet little town,
It is now full of noise, of those southern stormy sounds.

—Justin Bradley

Rain

Rain, not water,
but silver beads of memories
that come to us in a downpour
when the hopeless need to fight.

Rain, not water,
but drops of passion
swallowed into lakes
for the unfortunate.

Rain, not water
but fame
failing to replenish the thirst
of the broken-hearted.

Rain. Everything. Anything
but water!

—Camry Greene

Out for a Swim

He was wearing a safari hat
to protect his face from
the beach sun.

His right shoulder sagged
beneath the weight of a life preserver
wrapped under his right arm
which hung paralyzed at his side.

He walked stiffly on
match-stick legs.
As he reached the water,
he turned around
and smiled a freakish smile
from a face
badly burned.

The mouth was small,
the smile tight.
His face had no eyebrows
and tiny slits for eyes.
He took his hat off
and laid it in the sand,
then staggered toward the ocean.

Once in the water,
the life preserver helped him float,
and he seemed like anyone else
out for a swim
unshaken by the stares
his walk to the water
had evoked.

—Katherine Wolfe

The Snake Hunter

His red tank shirt
exposed muscular,
tattooed arms.

A snake on each bicep.
As he moved, the snakes moved
draping themselves over
bulging muscles.

He said he'd won a trophy
for catching the most pounds
of copper head snakes.
He'd let them bite him
to build up an immunity
to their poison.
It hadn't worked.

He had *almost* died seventy times.
When asked by a woman reporter
how he could take part in such
a dangerous sport, he grinned

and his yellow, smoke-stained teeth
showed as he said, “How can you keep
from going after a beautiful creature?”

—Katherine Wolfe

Silhouettes

All we see are silhouettes,
Yet we think we know one another.

We pass judgement,
Inferring the book from its cover.

All we see are silhouettes
Yet we think we know the struggles.

We overstep our bounds,
Filling in other people's puzzles.

All we see are silhouettes.
The color of my skin, his eyes, or her hair.

Blonde versus brunette,

Dark versus fair.

All we see are silhouettes.

Do not assume that you know more.

The eyes tell the untold truth,
But they cannot reveal my internal war.
Because all you see is my silhouette.

—Edythe Rodriguez

The Understanding

The cleaning lady saw me cry today.
No one other than family has before.
The cleaning lady saw me cry today.
She just slipped right in the door.
She saw the tears running down my face
Escaping from their prison.
She saw that I needed space
And tried to quickly evade my vision.
So like a shadow, like a thief,
Like the wind, she blew away.
She saw me alone, in my grief
Her absence was the most comforting thing to say.
It was almost as if she could feel
My heart begging for privacy.
As if she once also tried to conceal
Her pain from society.
I'll probably never thank her for it
Aside from an awkward smile in the hallway
But I'll admit, I will never forget
The cleaning lady that saw me cry today.

Angel of Mine

Angel of mine
With your paper wings
And shaded in halo
And drawn wings to give you light to shine
These angles and lines
May mean nothing
But they just go to show
That each creation can be divine

—Jacob Berger

Beneath the Stars of Endless Light

Beneath the stars of endless light

How is my heart to fear?

Why should I tremble at the night?

Beneath the heavens I hold dear?

How is my heart to fear?

When darkness 'round me lies?

Beneath the heavens I hold dear

I know the sun will rise

When darkness 'round me lies

I lift my eyes to the heavens fair

I know the sun will rise

But for now, the stars are there

I lift my eyes to the heavens fair

Where the word of God's proclaimed

But for now the stars are there

And they cry out his name

So therefore I will not fear
Why should I tremble at the night?
For I feel Your presence here
Beneath the stars of endless light

—Brenna Jones

Sing, Cane

“Cain said to the LORD, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear! To-day you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.’ Then the LORD said to him, ‘Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.’ And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.”

Genesis 4:13-15, NRSV

Sing, cane,
of hardwood floors,
soft carpet, concrete steps,
the wrinkled hand whose weight holds you
to earth.

Sing, cane,
of copperheads
and red clay banks under
tall pines that sway in wind and breathe
secrets.

Sing, Cain,
of wild fields, woods
dark above open mouths
and flashing teeth. A brand whose scars
spell grace.

—Megan Bean

Distance

From a distance, He watches with keen eyes
To each instance, His presence is twined
In all existence there is a sketch of His design
At a distance, yet always here nearby

—Jacob Berger

Temple

The old gods spoke in this place:
this is all you were wed with,
this is the life you were rid of
and here is where it is
all taken back and
set aside for yesterday;
and when you have put on
the skin you left behind,
then you will be ready to turn
your ashes to dust.

—Jessica Quah

Mansion and Redemption

Candelabras tilt softly
with the sighs of wax falling;
their melting whispers are drip, dripping—
soft sings the cadence of haunting!

Heart-flames like dark dancers of fire
flicker and float—drawing desires.
A gambler's game we willingly play,
counting our cards and expecting our pay.

These warping walls and wilting corridors
Relinquish gilt treasures and marbled doors;
Avarice resigns in her deceptive design
light subsides—thorn-blackened skies.

This morphing mausoleum of melting gold
folds Soul's paper – fold over fold.
Trapped, within, Greed's bones and skin:
lost lives warping in a palace of sin.

Tears, porcelain mirrors, alas we betray
lachrymose dwellings within Self's estate.
Rolls-Royce roses wither on tarnished stems
falling as limp litter 'neath star-less limbs.

Redemption relieves with purple peace
as wired gates dissolve, and catches release.
Gold dust flounders from our milky eyes
as Love unbinds Sin's coiling ties.

Perfumes, sweet, water the Son's feet—
His washed servants kneeling, humble and meek.
Hushed is woe's bitter, earnest knell
resting 'neath heaven's sky of bluebell pastel.

—Ashleigh Bilodeau

On learning of my sister's illness

I wanted to hold something
her hand had touched
a flower, a letter, or such.
I wanted to trace the letters
of her name
over and over again.
I wanted to feel the smooth strokes
of her pen
and believe
her days would never end.

—Katherine Wolfe

Done Bees

You circled your fingers along my spine like you were drilling into my soul. You would leave caverns in my bones. Is this a place for things to burrow, like bees into a hive? Or a portal that the flux of darkness in me will soon escape through? Maybe it is both, maybe the demons in my head will march out through these tunnels while you infest yourself. Perhaps you are trying to preserve me, pouring amber into the fractures your see have been made deeper than my flesh. I worry, is it me you see, or the memories?

—Sebastian I.

Lady of the Water

Lady of the water, pale and fair
Trailing lilies in her jet-black hair
Fishes swam about her feet
When by the stream we once did meet

Lady of the water, pale and fair
Glimmering jewels in her jet-black hair
Silver slippers on her feet
When in the city we once did meet

Lady of the water, pale and fair
With my tears in her jet-black hair
Splashing water round her feet
When in the garden we did meet

Lady of the water, pale and cold
By the stream where we met of old
And yet I was no longer there
Lady of the water, cruel and fair

—Brenna Jones

Rekindle

Cemetery gates in my wake,
as I thumb through pallid bones—parched and sedate.
Words are sunken graves, weathered with wintery winds,
crumbling and diminishing within neglected stone skins.

Emotion, like wisps of spring spirits have fled,
leaving, in maddened sleep, the neglected dead.
Once friendly fields lush with sweet listening lilies
become listless and brittle, cadaverous cities.

How crooked and askew grew the soft simile sunflowers,
Alas forsaken by Apollo's poetic powers.
Clytie's constancy and reverent ways I have betrayed,
observing my fading ink within night's sleek shade.
Caught in a grotto of foggy grey, the sun's rays never linger here,
repelled by soft lunar tears and rains of failing's fears.

How disheartened they weep, these water-color Words,
abandoned, never written, wandering towards
a shrouded citadel rimed with regret's restraining risk
whilst a pale albatross perches and persists amid the mist.

My mind was once Versailles' mystical hall of mirrors
illuminated and marvelous in its imaginings and pictures.
Now sunken is my manor amid the twisting deep of twilight rivers
where black-feathered condors pilfer precious paper specters.

A desert slick with inky waves and not a white page to mark,
yet there sleep in silver sculptures ancient charts of the heart.
Alas sudden zephyr breathes over the sun-less seas,
rekindling winking lights on dwindled wicks of galleries.
Aeolian arias trip along corridors of tiled glass and rosettes
as a remedy, a tea of honeyed light, drips in reviving sunsets.

—Ashleigh Bilodeau

Kaliedescope

Exhausted by the sickening romanticism I cannot seem to shake from my view of the world. Comparing those lost and fleeting to a process of failed adoption. Living on a poetic high horse just to look down at those around me. My organs tear at the thoughts I have on a daily basis. Lacking a sense of time and yet full of narcissism and self serving obligations. A skewed idea of the purpose of those around me, mere props to be used under the influence of my pen. Every experience over analyzed and drawn up on such a scale that any inkling of truth is removed. Twisting any conversations overhead into a series of words never genuinely spoken. Taint with ideas that keep me awake at night, leaving me with eyes inscribed with dark smudges that tell better stories than the words I join together as a dilettante.

— Sebastian I.

Purple

Purple flew- across streets
and bridges over Green water,
past the intersection where
Red and Blue sat gossiping about
silly things like Black and White politics;
No one ever judged a royal color
like Purple, except maybe jealous Indigo,
who never could figure out his identity;
swimming to the depths of the
dark, dark oceans where Orange lava
springs out from the trenches;
Yellow comes from the sky- makes
the Grey pavement hot like Charcoal
and lit cigarettes.

All the earth saw Purple and he saw them-
he let his hand slip into the palm of Pink's
every once in a while; then out again,
like a Neon wave, searching throughout
fields and cities and Clear air- rainbows
did not please him quite enough and
mirrors only reflected what he already knew;
for years, Purple wandered on Brown dirt,
and still Purple found no light
until he saw me.

—Jessica Inscore

The Music!

The music!

It speaks to me, it calls my name

Distracts me from the day's veneer.

It reaches into my chest

With gossamer hands

And draws out all my fears, my hate,

My love, my joy

It pulls out what I did not even know was there

And holds it before me.

“Look,” says the melody, “you see?

You cannot hide yourself from me.”

—Tori Howell

The Perfect Holiday Meal

Planning the meal had gone really well
until relatives created the feast from hell
RSVP's came back with emails to heed
every individual's unique dietary need

The vegetarians asked for no meat
so that spared a turkey the oven heat
We planned to toast with eggnog
Until the lactose intolerant
wanted none of that grog

So next we considered fresh fish
hoping it would make a pleasing main dish
A distant uncle, worried about his ticker,
became a real nuisance, that ol' stickler
I could hear the cook's curdling shriek
at the request of food without fins, face or beak

Then the exasperated cook let out a sigh
Saying at least there's pumpkin pie
Until the next phone call added a request
Please nothing with sugar at my behest

That left only the homemade rolls
on a list that once resembled a scroll
Then a great aunt said please prepare for me
a meal without wheat, a meal gluten free

Finally one day we gathered at the table
For the meal that's now a family fable
The chef did his best to please every critic
serving a single fruit salad, free of anything acidic

—Sam Love

Breathing

From the room

next door

I hear

shallow

breathing

My grandfather

trying hard

to stay alive

for

his family

The doctor

says he

is

almost

gone.

Not
much
life
left
in him.

Silence.

It
is
now
over.

Then
from down
the street, I
hear the strange sound
of a newborn baby crying.

—Christopher Weston



Slow Death
—Cynthia Wroten



Willie
—Richard Williams



Captured Jewel
—Cynthia Wroten



Daylight Brunch
—Andrew Zimmerman



Missing Children
—Cynthia Wroten



The Elephant and the Tamer
—Andrew Zimmerman

Tee bit



Tee
—Richard Williams



Baby Kennedy
—Summer Cook



Bambi Hiding
—Jessica Bradway



The Eye of the Butterfly
—Ashleigh Bilodeau



Everlasting Love
—Benjamin Bolyard



Fairgrounds
—Joanna D’Ancona



Capicious Countenance
—Benjamin Bolyard



Snow Day
—Andrew Zimmerman



Creek Game
—Summer Cook



Eiffel Tower from Across the Seine River
—Jessica Bradway



Cliffs of Moher in West Ireland
—Jessica Bradway



Seashells and Sand
—Summer Cook



White Butterfly Bush
—Brenna Jones



Dew drop
—Maggie Pogue

A Love Story

Dero-Asha Davis-Weeks

I remembered why i was afraid of the dark the night the hurricane made land-fall. The newscasters and weather people called it Hurricane Katrina. Before we left, the people at my school called it the storm. And those who were from there just called it Katrina. Like Ivan, a likeness from the year before, it was like a relative that everybody knew and about which many stories would be told. It was like a reference point meant to capture the attention of the audience and mark the passage of a past time. Not unlike “once upon a time” in a fairy tale or “in my day” among old friends.

Maria and i had made it to Baton Rouge two days before.

Our university had shut down and asked everyone to leave. Everyone has to vacate the premises, President Cohen echoed all over campus. Our campus was already mostly empty but not because people had already left. It was move-in day just for freshmen. The first to come, the first to go. Welcome! Became find a way out. Find a way out became find a way out fast.

We made the sixty minute drive northwest in less than two hours. Not everyone we passed on the road were strangers. Two cars ahead of us were the RA's from the second floor. Fifteen minutes ago we had passed the lady that works in the dining hall. Some cars had families and some just had friends. Some cars were filled with two like us. Some were filled with one. Five months later, we would see many cars filled with none.

No one was allowed back in to the city as it held its breath. A city just hours before was alive and well, jiving to the promise of a new day. The humidity had hung in the air ready to burst into rain right there in front of you. But that was the way my city welcomed me. That was the way my city loved me. Its warmth hugged me to the core blanketing my woes. Its syrupy pace allowing me time to think my own thoughts. Its history sung to me, guiding me like the old ladies on the corner of magazine & napoleon. As it happened, for months the only heat i would feel would be the tears filling my eyes until they were able to break free. But in this way we were together again. My city and me.

On the road i wondered how my beloved city would be able to breathe when the beats of its heart slowly ebbed along the I-10. The din that normally filled downtown was pulsing its way out with the contra traffic.

Maria's pregnant cousin breathes heavily in the next room. We slept soundly the first night thinking it was just another *hurrication*. A hurrication like any other, we all thought – unforgettable to us and known to few. Last year, Phil and his boys made it to Mexico for three days in maragarita-ville. The year before that one, Kaitlin and Eva had lay out and burned to a crisp in Galveston. Their friend Jolene had driven down from Houston and met them there.

The next day Anderson Cooper and his colleagues successfully scared us into buying supplies. We went out to fetch necessities. By daylight bottled water in the fridge, canned goods stacked next to an electric can opener, frozen pizza, and ice were home with us along with a neighbor confined to a wheelchair. Then, daylight turned to dusk and more. Inside, we turned off the lights.

Blackness. Softly-spoken rain overwhelms the air with moisture. The wind stirs the drizzle into a deluge. a single leaf whirlwinds in the hullabaloo of debris. Water splinters branches, spearing through the unsuspecting quiet giving whatever in the way no chance to run for cover. Raindrops crash against the windowpanes, ricocheting off each other, fighting to cling to the air over and over before falling to the ground. An encore of thunder bombshells in cadence with the lightning smudging through the curtain illuminating the sky.

Blow out the candle, my mother was telling me. She had lit it for me. I was the youngest of her three children, her only daughter. I was the one i knew she loved most. The one she dared to light a candle for in the midst of the darkness surrounding us. But I am scared. I Am Scared. Blow it out, she whispered more frantically.

My mother, my brothers, my father and i were hiding from the rebels. The darkness was our only cover from the child soldiers. They were children like my brothers and me. Some even younger than me. Children with no mother to light a candle and no father to protect them. We hid in the darkness because it was one of the few things we had that they could not steal.

where we huddled now -on one spindly straw mat- used to be the living room that once had embroidered sofas and printed chairs and a table with books and newspaper clippings of old recipes. My mother loved to read and my father loved to cook. My mother loved my father and my father loved his country. But it was because of my mother that i never saw my father again.

The breeze from outside creaks the swinging door and I move in closer to my mother. I want to scream, but I do not. We never did. For all the fear we carried inside of us during the war, we never screamed. About five score and

seventy years before, this was a land for the freed. Now it was at war with itself. We were the ones who paid for its selfishness, its greed, its anger, and the injustices it carried deep within because we were selfish, greedy, angry, and we too harbored the injustices within us. We lashed out at each other cutting away pieces we thought unfit until so little was left.

I was too young to have loved my country like my father did and my mother too. But i did as best as i could even when there was so little left to love. The rebels took everything they could and came back for what they missed. First, they stole our food and replaced it with hunger leaving us too weak to make any sound at all. Then, they stole our peace and replaced it with a violence so brutal it took our breath way and because of this we could not scream. They stole our families and replaced them with dead bodies. They stole our dreams and replaced them with nightmares. They stole our secrets and replaced them with horror so terrifying it wracked our bodies with convulsions and still we did not scream. We stayed silent, without happiness or sanity, moaning and delirious.

A crack muted the silence. Was it thundering, now or was it gun shots? Momma, what's going on? But she did not hear me, because my mouth did not move. The sound was louder now and the mat stirred. Someone was at the door. No one made a sound. If we were quiet enough, they will think no one is here and leave, but our silence only magnifies the sound of them breaking down the door. They are inside. The rebels are inside. I see the shiny part of their guns glistening from the moonlight streaming through the pane less window. They command us to go outside. My mother holds on to my younger brother and me while my father leads the way. I wonder what else they could want. They have already taken everything we owned, but i was wrong. (They had not taken us.)

We were facing them and while one was poking my mother's dress with his gun, the other was asking my father questions. I tried to understand what was happening but i could not. Not exactly. I wanted to remember so i could remember to forget this, forget them. My focus darted from the man with the gun prodding my mother to the man with the gun prodding my father. It seemed every answer my father gave was the wrong one. The tall one asked my father who he worked for. He answered and the fat one split his forehead. I did not dare look up but stared at the blood splattering in the rocky dirt at my feet. They asked him another question i did not understand. I was losing focus. More blood was on the ground. Both of my mother's hands were clutching us now when a moment ago she was linked with my father.

The questions had stopped. Both guns were pointing at my father. The fat one pointed his at my father's head. The tall one at his heart. And still we did not scream. A silence so deafening- the rattling emotions in my head seemed enough to pierce my ear drums from the inside. My head was pounding. My brother was shaking. My mother's hands were wet. They were dripping. Something was dripping on me, warm and wet. I shut my eyes tight snapping that mental picture into the darkness framed behind my eyelids. (To be developed later, in another kind of darkness) this is what love is to some people. I wanted to remember.

When it was light again, my brother and I were preparing for final descent in the United States. Welcome to America, land of the free – this time the promise came from a lady with a lighted torch. We were on the ground now; my mother's sister was picking us up. The next time we were ground level, it was cold and wet. We had slept outside an immigration office that night trying not to get sent back to the place where my dreams were buried along with the memories of my first love. But I did not remember then. When we finally got in, our numbers were still only thirty-something. I still did not remember.

The thirty-something of us gulf coast students who had made it to North Carolina were at our new school that fall, miles and miles away from where the heart is. People ask us, over and over, how we are doing. What was is it like? I pause for an instant every time, wondering do I tell them this is not the first time.

See, that's the thing about love.

Flora

Christopher Weston

I consider myself to be a rational person. Someone who stays calm in the face of adversity and always looks for a logical solution to any problem I encounter. Someone who is skeptical of anything remotely supernatural or outside the boundaries of logic and rational thought. Someone who doesn't believe in magic.

But rationality simply crumbles in the presence of Flora Knight.

She moved here a few weeks ago, at the beginning of the spring semester, and she was the only thing anyone talked about for quite a while. It's the small town curse: the new kid is the only exciting topic of conversation. But she wasn't just new: she was...well...odd. There's really no other word to describe her. She's rather short and petite with shockingly pale skin and contrastingly dark hair that has a single streak of green running down its length. She has multiple piercings on her ears, nose, and tongue, all of which are usually occupied by some form of rings or studs. She always wears black, too: black shirt, black pants, black jacket, black boots with spiked heels that make her look just a fraction taller than she actually is (and even then, she still doesn't come up to my chin, and I'm not exactly tall myself).

But it is her eyes that are most noticeable. They are of a bright shade of electric blue, almost white, giving her an ethereal presence. Hardly anyone can look her in the eye for more than a few seconds; those pale irises are just too unnerving to gaze into for any longer than that. Sure they're just contacts, everyone says. They have to be. Nobody's eyes can achieve that unearthly color naturally. Of course. Right.

I don't believe it.

I can't explain why I'm so certain that this is her natural eye color, not even to myself. It's just a feeling of certainty I get whenever I look at her. Certainty that Flora Knight is no ordinary girl. And this certainty has only grown since I first met her. And now, considering what's just happened...

But I'm getting ahead of myself. First I have to talk about Michael. And Ellen.

Michael Thomas is my best friend, an athlete but certainly not a dumb jock. I point this out for a reason: he is not a stupid guy. He knows when something is wrong with his surroundings. He's intelligent enough to realize when something is amiss. But even he didn't notice anything wrong with Flora. Ellen Jones was his girlfriend. They had been together since freshman year, and until recently it looked as though they would continue their relationship into college. Graduation is coming up, and they were both accepted to the same school. No one questioned it: Michael and Ellen were simply meant to be, a match made in heaven.

And then Flora moved to town.

For a while, maybe a week or two, it seemed that life would remain as it had been. Sure, Flora was strange, but she never did anything to purposefully upset our routine, as far as I can tell. She was quiet and stayed in the background for the most part, sitting in the back of the classrooms, not raising her hand to answer the teachers' questions, handing in assignments without a word of complaint. After the novelty of her appearance wore off, everyone stopped turning to stare at her and treated her just like any other classmate.

Except for Michael.

I'm not exactly sure myself when the change started to happen. Perhaps it was the moment he first laid eyes on her, I don't know. Regardless, I soon became aware that Michael was fascinated by this girl. If they passed each other in the hall, he would turn and gaze after her with an almost comical look of bewilderment on his face. In the cafeteria, he would choose a seat with a good view of where she sat by herself. Occasionally she would glance over at us and Michael would look away quickly. I rather thought I could see Flora smile whenever she caught him staring. Once, I even saw Michael gazing at her in the library during study hall, hiding behind a bookshelf. She was seated at a nearby table reading a book, but her eyes were not roving the pages, and there was no mistaking the amused grin on her face. I could only shake my head in exasperation at my friend's hopeless infatuation.

But I wasn't the only one to notice. And Ellen was definitely not amused by her boyfriend's new obsession. As the days progressed, she went from surprised to hurt to furious. More than once I overheard the two of them arguing. The gist was always the same: Ellen accused Michael of cheating on her, Michael denied it and swore he loved her, Ellen called Flora a slut, Michael

jumped to her defense, Ellen would burst into tears and flee, and Michael would stare after her looking helpless. “I don’t know what to do, man,” he told me one afternoon as he drove me home in his beat-up-yet-still-functioning car. “I tell her over and over that there’s nothing going on between me and Flora, but she doesn’t believe me.” He groaned and shook his head. “I just don’t get women, I guess.”

I had no words of comfort to offer, but I did tell him that I thought he spent a little too much time staring at Flora, and if he wanted to ease Ellen’s temper he ought to pay the new girl a little less attention. He looked around at me in genuine surprise when I said this. “I don’t stare at Flora,” he insisted.

I raised my eyebrows and began counting off the times I had caught him sneaking glances. His face went red and I felt a little guilty for embarrassing him, but he had to know. He seemed truly oblivious to just how obvious his fascination was. He was silent for a long while, and I apologized for upsetting him. “No,” he said quietly. “It’s not your fault. If what you say is true, then...” He trailed off and didn’t finish the thought.

For a couple of days after that he seemed to come to his senses. He stopped turning to stare at Flora and paid Ellen more attention. This seemed to appease her, and for a while I thought everything would return to normal.

I should have known better.

I didn’t completely register anything was odd when I noticed that Flora wasn’t seated at her usual spot in the cafeteria one afternoon. I merely shrugged it off. I knew she was present: I had shared Biology with her earlier that same day. I just assumed she was running late. But I certainly didn’t expect to see her sitting at another table, and definitely not the one Michael, Ellen, and I usually shared.

Yet there she was. She was sitting right beside Michael, apparently deep in conversation with him. I was still too far away to hear what they were saying – I had come to a dead standstill upon seeing them together and was still unable to move from shock – but from the expression on Michael’s face I could guess that it was about some pleasant topic.

And it didn’t take a brain surgeon to see from Ellen’s expression that she didn’t want Flora there. Suddenly fearing a declaration of war, I forced my legs into motion again and hurried over to my seat. “Hey man!” Michael said,

glancing over at me as I sat down.

Flora looked over at me and smiled sweetly. It was a friendly gesture, not at all threatening, but I felt a chill go down my spine nonetheless. Those eyes were even more unnerving up close. “Hello,” she said, and I was momentarily taken aback. It was the first time I’d heard her speak, and her voice caught me off-guard. I don’t know what I’d been expecting, but her soft, melodic tone was surprising to me for some reason.

I greeted her in return and glanced over at Ellen, whose displeasure was only barely concealed and not very well at that.

“Flora was just telling us about her old school,” Michael said. His words were directed at me, but his eyes never left Flora. “It was a much bigger school, in the city.”

I made some noncommittal noise but said nothing. Michael was too engrossed in Flora’s presence to notice even if I’d started spouting off the Declaration of Independence; there was no sense in bothering to add to the conversation.

“I hear you’re on the basketball team,” Flora said to Michael.

His face fell slightly. “Well, yeah, but...we suck this year. We haven’t won a single game.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Flora simpered, putting a hand on his shoulder. Michael’s eyes went comically wide, and I would have laughed if I hadn’t felt Ellen’s anger rolling off her like an infectious heat. “Well, I’d still like to see you play. When is the next game?”

Michael seemed to be utterly speechless, so I answered for him. I think Ellen glared at me but I didn’t turn to see if I was right.

It was true that our basketball team was doing poorly this year, but I had been to every single game to give my support. I usually sat beside Ellen in the bleachers and we both cheered Michael on. At the next game, however, Ellen chose instead to sit with her best friend Tina Henry, and I found myself seated next to Flora. Of course. She seemed to have a good understanding of how the game worked; at least, she didn’t ask me many questions about the rules. Instead, she clapped when everyone else clapped and cheered when our team

scored.

And the amazing thing was just how many times we scored. In fact, by halftime we were ahead by thirty points, and most of the shots had been made by Michael. He was in top form that night, and his excellence gave the team the extra boost of encouragement it needed to carry our school to victory. We finished with a final score of 80-14, and Michael had made the last shot of the game. Naturally. The crowd was roaring in triumph, and Michael was in the center of all the attention. Somehow, Flora and I made it to where he stood, and his face brightened when he saw us. “You did wonderful!” Flora said, beaming.

Michael grinned and, to my utter surprise, he pulled Flora to him in an enthusiastic hug. “You were my good luck charm tonight,” he told her, and she smiled sweetly up at him.

I looked over Michael’s shoulder and saw Ellen standing just behind him. Her face had gone white: she had heard him. She whirled and stormed away, but I don’t think Michael even knew she had been there. At least I hope to God he didn’t, for his sake.

The next day, the inevitable happened. In an uncomfortable scene in the hallway between classes, Ellen confronted Michael, and by the time their shouting was finished, they had broken up. Ellen retreated into the bathroom in tears, and Michael joined me and Flora for lunch. I couldn’t help but feel that he ought to look at least a little sheepish over what had happened, but he seemed totally unaffected by it all. Indeed, he asked Flora out only a few minutes after he sat down with us. She accepted happily and hugged him, and the two passed the rest of the lunch period happily ensconced in their own little world while I awkwardly looked around the room, embarrassed to even be nearby.

Ellen did not come to lunch that day, and for the weeks that followed she sat at a different table, the same table that Flora herself had once occupied by herself. She now sat with Tina and spent most of her time glaring at Michael and Flora, who never even gave her a thought. Of course the other students whispered about the sudden relationship swap for a few days (small town, remember?), but this soon died out and things took on some semblance of normality. But I could never quite push the image of Ellen’s enraged expression out of my mind, and every time I saw Michael and Flora together I couldn’t completely squash the feelings of unease that bubbled in the pit of my stomach.

And then came that Wednesday afternoon. The day when everything that I had subconsciously feared came to be, even though I didn't recognize it until much later. Not until it was too late to try stopping it.

There was nothing to suggest anything was going to go wrong that day. The sun was shining and the weather was nice. In fact, the weather had been consistently good ever since Michael and Flora had started dating. By now I was getting used to Flora's presence at the lunch table, and I wasn't feeling quite as uncomfortable around the two of them together, even if I did have to avert my eyes from time to time. I still felt that there was something off about Flora, but I was a little more accustomed to her odd nature so I didn't consider it much.

At lunch that day, Michael asked her out to dinner, and she happily agreed. As they discussed where they were going to eat and what time he would pick her up, I noticed Tina standing nearby, not looking at us but texting someone on her phone, glancing up occasionally to see if a teacher was around. I didn't think anything of this until afterward, and I still kick myself for not making the connection sooner.

I didn't know anything had gone wrong until the next afternoon, the first rainy day we'd had in quite some time. Lightning flashed and thunder rumbled throughout the morning, and every time the wind roared I felt uneasy. I wasn't sure why I was so uncomfortable or why I connected this feeling to Flora, but my disquiet continued throughout the whole morning.

And I could hardly fail to notice that Flora was absent.

My unformed fears were confirmed when I sat down to lunch. Michael was already seating at our usual table, looking uncharacteristically morose. He looked oddly lost without Flora beside him, like a child who has been separated from his parent in the supermarket. Sitting down opposite him, I asked what was wrong, and he looked up at me with unfocused eyes, as if he didn't really see me. I repeated my question with a bit more urgency, and he gave a small start. He shook his head and murmured, "Last night...last night..."

I asked him if the date had gone badly. He shook his head again. "No, it was great. Everything was fine. Until...until we were on the road home..."

He paused, probably to collect his thoughts. I waited with barely-concealed impatience. I now knew that something had gone wrong, and I felt as though my sanity depended on knowing what exactly had happened.

“We were on Forsythe Road,” Michael finally said. “You know, that really dark stretch of road between here and Huntley?”

I nodded. I did know: more than one accident had occurred on that winding, twisting path. My unease mounted.

“Well, we were driving along, and suddenly another car came up behind us with their high beams on. And they got really close. If I’d hit my brakes they would have rear-ended us. Well I was scared, of course, but I didn’t think we were in any real danger until...until the car bumped into us. I had to fight to keep my car on the road, swerving from one lane to another. We’re lucky there wasn’t another car in the oncoming lane. Flora was screaming and I was yelling, and then the car hit us again and this time I lost control, and the car went into the ditch. Neither of us were hurt, thank God, and even my car only got a little dent in the bumper.” He grinned a little ruefully. “It’s a good car.”

I didn’t totally agree with him: his car had broken down too many times to be considered a “good car.” But now wasn’t the time to argue it with him. I asked him if he knew who had hit him, and his face darkened. “I...I can’t be certain,” he said. “But I did get a brief glance of it as it drove away, and...” He glanced across the cafeteria, and I followed his gaze to where Ellen and Tina were seated. They both seemed to be in unusually high spirits. I looked back at Michael with raised eyebrows. He nodded. “I think it was Ellen’s car. It had a peace sign sticker in the corner of the back window, just like hers.”

I suddenly remembered seeing Tina the previous day texting someone. Hadn’t she been close enough to hear Michael and Flora make their date plans? Could she have been relaying the information to Ellen? I told Michael of my suspicions, and his face went white. “Those... those...” He seemed unable to find the right words to describe them.

I cautioned him, telling him that we had no evidence that it wasn’t merely a drunk driver or something, but I don’t think he heard me, and to be honest I didn’t believe a word of what I was saying either. I asked where Flora was, and he said, “She’s at home. She called me this morning and said she didn’t feel well. I think she’s still too badly shaken from what happened to come.”

I didn’t add anything to that, but the unease I’d been feeling all day

suddenly increased, and I wasn't entirely sure why.

The next day, however, it was as though nothing had happened at all. It was a sunny morning with no trace in the sky of yesterday's storm, as if the rains had never even come. Flora returned to school, looking as though she had never been scared out of her mind. She and Michael were both at lunch as usual, their hands entwined and voices lowered in that same way that always made me want to look away in embarrassment. Everything seemed to have returned to normal.

The only difference was Ellen and Tina.

I imagine you were expecting them to have been killed, right? Well, sorry to disappoint you, but no. They are still alive. But...changed. Their hair has gone pure white and wispy, like the hair of a corpse. They stand erect and motionless, and their arms hang stiffly at their sides. When they walk, they appear to almost glide down the hall. Their expressions are blank, and they never acknowledge anyone around them, not even when spoken to.

And their eyes...oh, but I can't even talk about them. They're just...too terrible for words...

I discussed Ellen and Tina's ghastly transformations with Michael and Flora at lunch that day. "Yeah, it's weird," my friend agreed, though I rather thought his voice seemed kind of forced. I could have imagined that, I suppose.

But there was no imagining the look of smug satisfaction on Flora's face.

“I’ll ask again: where are you hiding the men and women who came with you?”

The man didn’t respond with words, but with a beautiful gaze. Surprisingly, beautiful is the right word. His face may have been bloody, and his body bound to the chair and broken, but his blue eyes shone like sapphires. He brought a pained smile to his face that was so sincere it frightened his adversary. How and why was such a hopeful expression making it to his face? The adversary didn’t like this one bit.

“Alright.”

Click.

A pistol was cocked. The adversary raised it to the man’s head.

“You’ve got five seconds to tell me, or you die.”

The man was chuckling, but not defiantly. It was—well, once again the term “beautiful” seems to fit.

“If I’ve anything to tell you, it’s the reason for the hope that I have. Will you not listen to a dying man’s final request? I would love for you to hear.”

Anger? Confusion? It was hard to say what went on inside the adversary’s head.

“So be it.”

BAM!

The gun went off. It barely missed the beaten man’s head. His eyes were closed in preparation.

“Well done.”

At these words, he opened his eyes and looked straight at the adversary with the same beautiful look; only this time, the adversary wore it too.

“Ahehehehe. Ahehehe!”

Quite an unusual scene, but they had no shame: they were laughing together. Guess what adjective would be best used to describe it.

“Hehe! Give me a hug.”

“Ow! Haha, my back is still broken, remember?”

“My bad. Here, let’s get out of this place.”

They both closed their eyes together and wore matching expressions of relief and excitement.

A warm and fuzzy feeling...and then: a *really* warm feeling. The light was beating down on their backs. They opened their eyes, and they were relieved to be back home. The men sat there on the ground for a moment, taking in the wonderful heat after being in the cold, dank warehouse.

There was a log cabin in front of them. It was brown, and even somewhat dirty, but there was something wrong with it. After all, musty log cabins may be romantic, but you couldn’t really call one beautiful; but this one was. Every detail about it was...perfect. It wasn’t the paint job or the structural design—but oh, the perfectness was real! The structure seemed to pop to life, like something in a 3D movie. It was separate from its surroundings: something to gaze upon for no apparent reason other than the fact it was there and it was beautiful.

And around the cabin: what a sight! Plants, flowers, and shrubs of different colors decorated the ground up to fifteen feet or so away from the cabin. But there was something different about the colors. One can stare at a normal blade of grass and say, “that is green,” but one could stare at this grass and experience that the leaves are green, just as the cabin could be experienced as brown and orderly and majestic.

But that wasn’t all. The trees around the cabin in every direction were... gold! But not the golden color of the trees of this earth. No, it was the golden color of the world of the two men: a gold that could be experienced and savored. Even the bark of the tree seemed to pop with reality. And the ground—the dirt—was browner than the cabin, but it was such a sight to see! Here it was! The two men saw it clearly. They saw what you and I see, but clearly, so that they saw it for the beauty it really was. A cabin. Some flowers and plants. Trees with golden leaves and grey trunks, resting upon brown earth. Infinitely more beautiful than such a sight here on our earth.

“I’m not gonna’ lie: I thought you were actually going to kill me.”

“I was thinking about it. But I saw you weren’t going to cave in.

“I wouldn’t have minded. You tore my back up pretty good.”

“Yeah, I did. Hehe.”

The pure laughter resumed, as they stood up with peaceful smiles on their faces.

“Hey Treasure-Seeker, let’s go look out over the Majestic Viewpoint of Hy-rall Hill,” said the now fully restored man, stretching his arms in enjoyment of newfound health.

“Absolutely, Redeemed Soul from Dark-Obsession.”

They turned around, away from the cabin, and went towards the golden trees. The ground there sloped immensely, slowing their ascension. But it didn’t bother them. They just ran. They ran up, and up, and up, admiring the slanted trees all around them. Before they knew it they were at the top of the—well, neither mountain nor hill is really the right word. They were just at the top.

They loved this view. So many different places to look at! Ah, there are the snow-capped mountains seventy miles below. How small they seem! How many different clouds and groups of clouds! Some are up here, some are down by the mountains, and many are in-between. Wow, the clouds over there are a vibrant green! And in every direction, at least one or two more tall landmasses as high as the ones they were on. That one must go ten miles higher than this one! Now that’s an amazing snow-covered land over there! The terrain is entirely white with ice and snow, but the tree leaves are a bright blue. Look at that dense forest over there. A mystical, deep dark green and grey reside there, but not of an evil kind.

There is probably not any word in existence to describe this scene of beauty. But there it was.

“You passed, by the way.”

“I should hope so. Haha!”

“I’ll never forget my final trial.”

“Oh, you mean, hehe, that weird...chamber?”

“Yeah, that was it.”

They broke down in laughter once more. You could still see the purity in their faces.

“That usually doesn’t even happen on earth. I can’t even understand why—”

“Well, the Soluris Hydalterra planned it Himself, Redeemed, so I couldn’t complain. Oh, speaking of which, that was your final trial.”

“...What?”

“That was it.”

“Amazing.” Redeemed looked awestruck and peaceful. He started speaking again, but slowly. His pace picked up as he got further along. “It didn’t even seem that hard. Truly nothing is as wonderful as the Soluris Hydalterra’s love. It is beyond comprehension. Oh, I thank you for your Gafe-Lichumfeel, which allows us to see clearly. Indeed, spiritual sight is what it’s really about. That’s all there is. How sad that the Jyra-Seid do not see.

“Yes, that they would all see. That they would live in reality. The truth is that this is what awaits them is they would only have faith. But oh, how near-sighted they are. You don’t need to see this place to live like it’s real. Or need to see the Soluris Hydalterra face to face, but rather in faith. The face to face would come to them one day, like it has for us, if only they would believe. I thank you that you hear our prayer, and will make us strong to accomplish our tasks. All glory to you now. Amen.”

“Amen. I’m thankful for your faith, Redeemed. Now I’ll bet you’re excited to go on your first solo mission!”

“Oh yes, I’m excited! I wonder when the Soluris Hydalterra will tell me about it?”

“Actually, I have it written down right here. I haven’t seen it myself, but I was entrusted to give it to you.”

Treasure-Seeker handed Redeemed a folded piece of paper. Redeemed looked awestruck; he felt like a child opening a Christmas present. His heart was beating fast.

He read it intently with an excited (almost mischievous) look on his face, while Treasure-Seeker observed with glee.

“A friend,” Treasure-Seeker thought, and then looked out at the scenery again. “A beautiful home. More friends, and the love of the Soluris Hydalterra. Ah, what is right with me that I feel such joy!”

“I love this mission!” Redeemed exclaimed, and startled his friend. “Not what I was expecting, but I won’t complain. Definitely pray for me, though, that I’d keep my focus and joy.”

“Of course. Do you, uh, have any idea how long it’ll take?”

“Probably four or five days.”

“That short? Seriously? Oh man, tough luck; it’s one of *those missions*.” And the two started laughing.

“Well, I guess I’d better get going. Thanks for helping me out, Treasure-Seeker.”

“Any time.” They shook hands.

“I might have to take you up on that. This could be difficult to handle without returning here.”

“But I’m sure—no, I *know* you’ll pull through. The Soluris Hydalterra is faithful and true, and will sustain you to the end.”

“Amen to that.” Redeemed looked back out at the scenery one last time. Such beauty! “Yes, perhaps these peoples’ eyes will be opened, that they may believe without seeing this place at first. After all, I have yet to see this place, but I live knowing that it’s real! With the love of the Soluris Hydalterra, and the help of the List of Solis-Seid, I am ready for this joyful mission.”

He closed his eyes. The warmth faded, and physical discomfort set in. He couldn’t see, and he could tell that he was blindfolded. Pain. Pain everywhere.

“Man, these guys must be serious.” he silently chuckled to himself.

He was thrown down to the floor. The blindfold was taken off, and he was lifted to his knees. In front of him stood a burly man with a vile look in his eye.

“Mr. Reed, I have some issues with what you’ve been proclaiming to my people.”

A beautiful gaze responded.

“Wow,” he thought to himself, after staring at the intimidating appearance of the man. “Treasure-Seeker plays a really good devil’s advocate.”

Following is the mysterious List of Solis-Seid. Warning! Interpret only by the Spirit:

Soluris-Hydalterra = Ruler of Creation—God.

Solis-Seid = Ruler's Child—A person who has been saved by the Soluris-Hydalterra.

Jjyra-Seid = Ruler's Enemy—A person who has not been saved by the Soluris-Hydalterra.

The Terraplauz = The Courtyard—Name for the earth's locations in general. As the Soluris-Hydalterra owns everything, the world is His Courtyard. The Solis-Seid, as his children, can enjoy it freely. It is not to be seen as several different locations, but rather one large "Courtyard."

The Terras-Prolateis = The Gigantic Castle—Name for the earth. It belongs to the Soluris-Hydalterra.

Aberdoll-Syphon = My mission field—Name for the ministry location of a Solis-Seid.

Um-Finalis = Final Role—The term describing a Solis-Seid's relationship with the Soluris-Hydalterra. It is, in a sense, a complex relationship that entails many ways of thinking. It is reserved only for the children of the Soluris-Hydalterra.

Enulam-Rithe = Spirit Mind—The mindset that each Solis-Seid is to strive for. Through total humility and submission, we conform our thinking to the thinking of the Soluris-Hydalterra.

Gafe-Ultarain = Perfect Land of Safety—Where the Solis-Seid go after they die. Much mystery surrounds it, but we know it is a place of perfect contentment and worship of the Soluris-Hydalterra.

Gafe-Lichumfeel = Perfect Emotion—Although our emotions are fallen while still on the Terras-Prolateis, we will have a perfect emotion in the Gafe-Ultarain; this gives us assurance that we will always be satisfied there. We can get glimpses of the Gafe-Lichumfeel now, and are to strive for it if we want to be productive in our lives.

