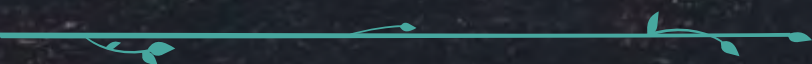




# Eagle's Nest

Volume IV



Presented by the Eastern Arts Society

“Tree-lined Path”  
by Rachael Hubbard





"Sun on the Rocks"  
by Dystiny Kern

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# Poetry

“The Dress” by Nicole Yurcaba

I rest quietly  
in your mind’s recesses  
until some self-taken photograph’s appearance  
reminds you of my existence,  
of my residence in your life,  
and provokes you to whisper softly  
as your cheeks crimson--  
“You really should wear more dresses.  
It’s not a bad look for you.”

“Reflections After Watching *Frankenstein*”  
by Nicole Yurcaba

In the end, I empathize  
with The Monster. Innocently,  
he lifted little Mariah above  
the water, thinking she would  
float as elegantly as the  
daisies which she invited him  
to cast into the pond.

I watch the villagers hunting  
him with hounds, chasing him  
with blazing torches and sharpened scythes.



“Ole Rusty”  
By Dystiny Kern

“Shadowplay” by Nicole Yurcaba

Shadows—two—black, they dance  
hand-in-hand, illuminated  
by Autumn’s burlesque browns,  
orange-burnt red;

the world—with each of their intimate moves--  
rotates to the wind’s soft fiddling.



“Days to Come” by April Hockensmith

Time flies,  
And all things must die . . .

Face the days,  
Living each one in your own way . . .

Never fear what’s meant to be,  
Have faith and be set free . . .

“Happy New Year” by April Hockensmith

Out with the old  
In with the new

Some have fallen  
While others grew

We’re all just here  
For a little while

So live, love, laugh  
And create your path



“Little Lady”  
By Dystiny Kern

“How Do I Deal?” by April Hockensmith

How do I deal,  
When you don’t understand how I feel?  
How do I cope,  
Is there any hope?  
My heart is heavy and full of dread,  
When I remember everything said,  
We are supposed to stick together, you and I,  
Unfortunately I’m just left to cry.  
Another night spent alone,  
Too many days now,  
Some, just your voice by phone,  
It’s sad to say I even feel this way,  
Wake up again it’s just another day?

“Lessons Learned Hard” by April Hockensmith

Visions and memories dance through my head,  
All the trauma, fright, and the nights filled  
with dread.  
With the morning light the pain was still  
there,  
No one knows what each day will hold,  
Only the man above knows if we will  
old.  
Live each day to the fullest with no regrets,  
So all who know you will never forget.



"Deep-Set Devotion" by Chris Windley

Silent legions march to the beat of any mortal man's drum, but your voice has yet to truly leave me.  
As if a rain never meant to complete its fall, your voice echoes still, as partially  
manufactured memories compelled to resonate deepest within me:  
mere mockeries of their unsevered selves now disheveled  
and devoid of any and all honesty.

Memory served and correct whispers hopeful nothings into hopeless eternities,  
believing the weight of its words just and deserving of equal opportunity to be  
spoken freely and received the same; but those... accursed *things*—*their* fare is  
forever fated as fully ill-favored: unworthy, unacknowledged, unheard of,  
and completely professed in vain. An ever-deepening wedge waxing,  
wanes.

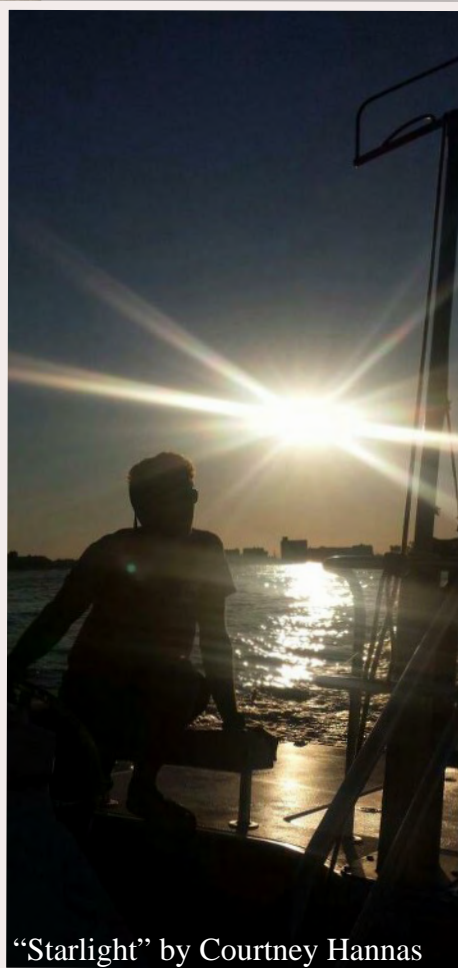
And unscathed, hollow waves varying of voice ebb in and flow out,  
linger slowly, and drift far off and away, to then reappear over and again  
like the memory of the rain that never completely fell.

That duplicitous dancing drought.

I wade shallow depths within a well  
deep-set and arrested in doubt.

And as sure as Moon to faithful tide, your  
voice is the only one to ever remain,  
wholly deceptive, wholly receptive,

transcendent through and  
through throughout: the  
very Pinnacle of  
living a life  
Devout.



"Starlight" by Courtney Hannas



"A Love-Struck World" by Chris Windley

There is less power in the bomb than in the kiss.  
A properly laid kiss can be life changing.  
A door to a bold new world,  
where everyone is forever young:  
love as a weapon versus a negative block.  
No fear of old regret, sour hate nor hastened death.

Because when you live your life in fear of death,  
the bomb has more power than the kiss:  
happiness is blocked.  
Nothing is what changes.  
The forgotten were young,  
lost too soon in that cold barren world;

however, in the warmth of world,  
it is indeed Death  
that cowers in the presence of the Young.  
Armed with love and anti-mattered kisses,  
the Past severed--changing  
Weak is the opponent's block.

With no effective move or sufficient block,  
foes meet defeat, allowing new adventures to take hold of this world.  
It is not set. It is alive, dynamic and already changing.  
Yes, there is some death--  
just less. With fewer good-bye kisses.  
Far too many dreams die young.

The future is held in the hands of the young.  
Archaic ideas, ignorance, anxiety and anger are the blocks,  
but the power of a willed wish--a thimble kiss,  
undo scars inflicted at the whim of any overlord. The World's  
bull-headed, her resolve stoic and defiant against her death.  
Her will may sway, but ultimately is never-changing.

Just like the seasons~the same each year but slightly changing:  
Spring blossoms, yielding more young.  
Winter opposes this, to balance the sum. Death,  
a cycle not even Mother Nature could block;  
as is the same with every manner of beast in this world;  
their fates sealed in a puzzled mystery of ifs and that One Kiss.

That One Kiss is different. Other kisses  
wish they could be this: time-stand-still changing.  
A love-struck world, rightfully so, belongs to the young:  
unafraid, unhindered, unblocked by the clutches of death.



"Into the Sky"  
by Courtney Hannas



"Such Is the Highlander's Way" by Chris Windley

Airy waves and clouds bursting with Original Glory.  
Bag pipes singing the songs hailing the Legends to the Winds.  
Can you hear it? The dedication, the pride and  
Defiant hills, the Fallen cursing the soon-to-be thundering sky.  
Eavesdroppers: Be wary of the location of your head, for  
Fountains of blood shall exit your body in haste in the case of your beheading. The  
Gates of the Abyss wait in baited breath for the likes of we.  
Honor is the World. Your Will, the Words. Live vibrant by the Sword.  
Instantly life times disappear, Eons absorbed with the Flash of Lightning: The Kill. And  
Just like that, crack! Down goes the body, mortally slashed.  
Kowtowed in Death, whose favor stands with Another. Oh, You  
Lost your head? I'm sure you'd rather be me instead.  
Mockery at its best. May the victor be forever blessed!  
Now your memories, skills and strength are mine. And tonight,  
Over a Cockburn's of Leith's 1796 wine, my  
Party and I shall dine in Hell-fired drunken stupors. Amidst a fool's  
Quarrel between friends, I'm  
Reminded of my Love to my left, so inept.  
Surely she will die before another Highlander does me in.  
There can only be One.  
Under the radar I'll live, before mortal love kicks me in my weak ass again,  
Vexing is the life of a Highlanding Hermit, repeatedly forced to untether this heart. All the  
While Watchers constantly assessing from where the point starts to its end.  
"Xenophobia!" The ignorant cry. Eventually, I'll watch them tire and wither. Good-bye.  
Young was so long ago. Old seems to be so close until the next fated day.  
Zap! The Kill! "I am alive still!" The Quickening delivers my favorite kind of thrill.



"Shower of Gold" by Dystiny Kern



"Tell Us" by Curtis Hakala

What was it like?  
They ask, with bright smiling faces.

What was it like?  
To fight in mispronounced places?  
To walk the jungle trail  
as sweat stung your eyes  
and thirst threatened to take you to your knees?

What the hell was it like  
to kneel in mud  
and talk to a wounded friend  
and try to keep him from dying from shock  
while waiting on a chopper that is lost  
and wondering if the unseen enemy is about  
to kill us all

for intruding HIS domain?  
Why tell?  
They don't care.

"A War Story" by Curtis Hakala

She wanted to hear about the war.

So I told her about the death of a friend  
on a jungle trail  
while the rain fell  
on his blown-off legs  
and the corpsman whispered lies  
into his missing ear while cradling him with shaking arms.

She did not want to hear any more about  
the war.

"Dawn's Early Light" by Curtis Hakala

One night we took a walk with guns  
and packs to kill the faceless men at dawn.

We surrounded their homes and sent a platoon  
to drive them into the morning sun.  
We were young then.  
So damn young we talked of girls  
and football games while waiting for the killing  
to begin.

Sipping hot coffee  
and dreaming of tender thighs  
we noticed the eyes of the man with the gun as he  
rose  
to send death across  
the grass so green.

We cheered as the guts fell.

Then,  
went back  
to our talk of tender thighs  
and telling lies  
of those we had felt  
before growing old in this land.

"A Pack of Camels" by Curtis Hakala

I never see a pack of Camels  
without thinking of the nameless lieutenant  
I helped carry dead to the waiting chopper  
as the poncho fell  
and his smokes hit the trail.

"A Warm Summer Day" by Curtis Hakala

He wore his shorts today.  
Shorts to show his legs were not real.  
He stared in silence as the unscarred chaplain  
told how fine it was to bleed for one's country --  
as the New flag  
flapped in the summer breeze.





"For Socrates"  
by Nicole Yurcaba

Никола М. Юрча  
2015



"EMS" by Jacqueline Kile

### "Why EMS" by Trevis Wagner

The pay ain't that great  
Sometimes nothing at all  
The hours are long  
And a mystery each call

So you might ask me  
"Why do you do it?"  
"Why do you go there,  
And put yourself through it?"

My answer is simple  
What I do is an art  
It's something that's in me  
Comes straight from the heart

I do it for baby  
And her very first breath  
It's for the new mom  
Smiling, covered in sweat

I do it for parents  
Scared for their child  
For all of the people  
With thanks in their smiles

It's for the people  
The young and the old  
Who feel society  
Left them in the cold

It's for the gentleman  
Who died tonight  
I held his hand  
And he lost the fight

It's for the children  
Crying and scared  
I help them feel better  
Just by being there

For the sick and the injured  
Their family and friends  
I'm there for them  
Their strength to the end

My time with them, fleeting  
An hour or two  
But I helped make a difference  
And that's what I do

Sometimes it's scary  
Sometimes just boring  
But some of the calls  
Can really be flooring

It's not for the money  
It sure ain't for fame  
It's just for the people  
Who are glad that I came.



“Rough Like Sandpaper” by Taylor Titus

Rough like sandpaper,  
black with grease,  
but still  
they feel so good to me.  
The smell of your hard day's work  
entices me.  
Your brown hair  
curly  
at the ends  
beckons me to tame  
the way that we  
joke and play,  
makes everyday  
worth the wait.  
My love for you  
is stronger  
than  
anything I have  
ever known.  
I couldn't imagine  
waking up on  
someone else's chest  
or patiently waiting  
for anyone but  
you.  
At the end of the each day,  
I am thankful  
for many things  
but  
for you especially.

“Dill's Beauty” by Dillon Ruddle

Once upon a lonely Hill  
There sat a lonely boy named Dill  
He sat staring intently at the stars  
Awaiting the sight of a splendid superstar.  
High in the sky she soared like a bird  
He waited and watched and didn't say a word.  
Brilliantly in a flash of light  
She fell from the sky and ended her flight.  
Dill was there to catch the falling beauty  
When he caught her he saw that she was a cutie.  
Locked in a irresistible gaze  
They were both suddenly amazed.  
Love falling from the skies  
No more little Dill cries.

“Two Decisions, One Choice” by Brooke Riggelman

The difference between the two,  
one made me feel wanted,  
the other didn't show.  
When you chose your friends,  
You drove me to know.

You let me be myself,  
but secretly judged.  
Your love was so bold  
I couldn't get enough,  
now with nothing to hold.

I miss you so much,  
you thought you knew me,  
reading me like a book.  
We had it planned out,  
but you're such a crook.

Our memories, our love,  
they're nothing to you.  
I don't know what to say.  
My first love was him,  
yet we parted each way

When we were together,  
laughter was about, but  
all we did was fight.  
Now that we are separate,  
I thought that it was right.

Hopeful wishing to go back,  
turn the clock and  
forget about the past,  
respark what we had  
and make this time last.

Which ones which, you'll never know.  
They're kinda the same.  
I don't know who to pick.  
I guess you could say now  
that I've been the prick.



# Prose

“PC Fog” by Curtis Hakala

It was a misunderstanding. No harm was intended initially. I had really just settled in, and was about two PBR’s away from being content, when this lively little mist danced around the big bend in the river. I wasn’t catching anything or losing any worms, and I could feel the beer slowly coat my throat and rattle my synapses awake. There was always some kind of smoky mist rising from the canyon, but I’d never seen it so animated. It was childish the way it scampered through the gorge, jumping and going everywhere at the same time. Although it had no eyes, ears, hands, or nose, the mist was sentient and pulled up short when it noticed my presence. Trying to be affable that early in the morning was difficult, but I attempted a pun anyway.

“Hey, you seem to be in some kind of a fog.”

Naturally, it couldn’t speak but transformed itself into big loop-de-loops and circles for dots that characterize a young woman’s handwriting.

*What do you mean I seem to be in some kind of fog?*

“I’m not trying to be a wise guy; it was more of an attempt at humor than anything else.”

*Do you think it’s funny to be called dense or labeled as being in a state of confusion?*

“I guess I never really thought about it. I was using comedic license. You know, as long as it’s funny, anything goes. I wasn’t implying anything fishy.”

*Jesus, you really are clueless. First fog, now fish? Who are you? The world’s first alliterative bigot? You think the carp—much less the golden trout – in this river like being associated with feelings of doubt or suspicion? Next you’ll piss off all the squirrels by turning their name into an adverb. I’ve met many Red Squirrels, and they are a brave and trustworthy lot.*

“You sure do ask a lot of rhetorical questions. You make me feel like getting drunk and watching Jerry Springer.”

*That’s truly where you belong. Not in the crowd but on the stage. Let me guess, you live in a converted school bus down by the river? Classy. I should have stayed in New Haven.*

“Hey, take it easy. Let’s not get personal. West Virginia isn’t bad ... in fact, it is Wild and Wonderful!”

*Echhh, you humor is like a cheesy plastic purse – it lacks quality and taste.*

“What do you got against cheese? Were you beaten with a block of Munster as a child?”

*Touché. Point well taken. I’m lactose intolerant, and sometimes I’m insensitive to the plight of dairy products, especially the softer French cheeses. You can’t be too careful these days can you?*

“I don’t think you can after this conversation. By the way, I applaud your self-expression. You remind me of a girlfriend I had my sophomore year in college. Instead of circles for dots or periods, she used hearts. She was a stone cold fox.”

*Just when I thought you had learned something. You just can’t stop being ignorant, can you? Although I have no objection as to whether a fox is hot or cold, I do take umbrage with the objectification of small mammals. When are you going to show some empathy? What kind of pig are you?*

“Vietnamese. Pot-bellied. Me love you long time. What’s your position on Foghorn Leghorn anyway?”



“Morning Fog”  
by Rebecca Duncan





“Coffee Dancer” by Rachael Hubbard

“4<sup>th</sup> and Pike” by Matthew Persinger

The phone was ringing. It had been four days this time. I paused a minute and then picked it up before the answering machine kicked on.

“Hello.”

I heard noise in the background, traffic, yelling, sounds of the city. After a few seconds a woman’s quiet voice, “Hi.”

What the Hell, I’ll keep playing the game. I’m invested now; I know my role.

“What’s up?”

“Can I come home?”

“Where are you?”

“A few blocks from the market, the bus stop by that place where we had burgers and watched the bums through the window. Do you remember that?”

“Yeah, I guess. You on Fourth Avenue then?”

“I think so.”

“Half hour, I’ll be there.”

\* \* \* \*



I got off the West Seattle Bridge and made my way up First Avenue. I didn't hurry. She wasn't going anywhere, and my brain needed time to sort things out. Heavy thoughts intruded on me as I tried to focus on driving. I pulled over to light a Camel; my hands were shaking. I rolled the window down and pulled back into traffic. Seconds passed and I saw blue lights in the rear-view mirror; I feel a sense of relief as the cruiser flew by me. Good, I have enough problems without the cops.

The tires rattled on bricks as I reached Pike Street. I glanced at the lunchtime prostitutes as I turned onto Pike. Did they really get any business at this time of day? Why not, all the dealers were working in plain sight right next to them, and they got plenty of business. A car honked as I pulled into the left lane without looking. Some guy playing the role of a businessman was flipping me off and yelling something at me as he swerved around me. I pulled up next to him at the light, stared at him, and smiled. He looked away.

The light was red when I reached Fourth Avenue. I could see her standing at the bus stop with all the future passengers, staring at the ground. Her brown hair hung limply, a victim of the morning's rain. She looked like a refugee of some war or disaster or something. Pathetic. That's all I could think, but I didn't know if I meant her or me. Maybe the situation was pathetic; we were simply playing our roles.

I tossed my cigarette out the window as the light turned green and pulled into the bus stop. She winced as she saw me and started towards the truck. A Metro bus had pulled up behind me and was blaring his horn, angry at my invasion of his bus stop. I waited until she got in and slowly drove off.

\* \* \* \*

"Smoke?"

She mumbled something that sounded vaguely affirmative. I lit a cigarette, handed it to her, then lit one for myself. She smelled like old smoke and wet flannel. Her heart-shaped bartender face was thin and tired, the skin unhealthy and pale. I had come to hate these moments. Silence was riding shotgun, and we welcomed that silence as we smoked. There really was nothing to say anymore. I didn't have the energy, the honesty, to get angry. Guilt weighed her down like an anchor, but she seemed to bask in that guilt as if it could sustain her. I hated that more than anything, the guilt that kept me tied to her, the guilt that made me think something worthwhile might still be there. The truth was, without that guilt, I was done. It had become almost impossible to remember anything resembling "good times." I was just playing my role and looking for a way out. We kept smoking as the truck rolled along First Avenue, back to the bridge, back to West Seattle.



"Snowy Mountain Morning"  
by Dawn Wratchford





“European Tower” by Rachael Hubbard

“The Game” by Brian Bucklew

No matter who you are, if you find your way here, you are foreign, and the city is a stranger to you as well. This place is home to no one, and yet, by night, every city is home to me. Every city, village, township, or hamlet is just another chance to play. This entire world was made just for me. It was made just to be a game board. *My* game board, and every living person is a piece for me to play with.

I got to three last night, and two down already tonight! I think I just might go for my personal best score before I leave! Eight in three days when I last visited The Port. Not my best work, I know, but it is pretty damned good for this disease infested sewer of a city. It's the Watch. It's always the freaking Watch! Fucking City Watch is just a bit smarter here, and they scare far easier. They come close every time. Every tavern, every brothel, every corner is just another chance someone may find out that I am the master of the game they have been playing with me. The excitement! The rush in my blood! The pure joy of it all! Let's face it . . . removing another piece from the game board is just so fun!

I move.

Through the alleyways, over the rooftops, through the keeps, and sometimes even on my belly in the ditches.

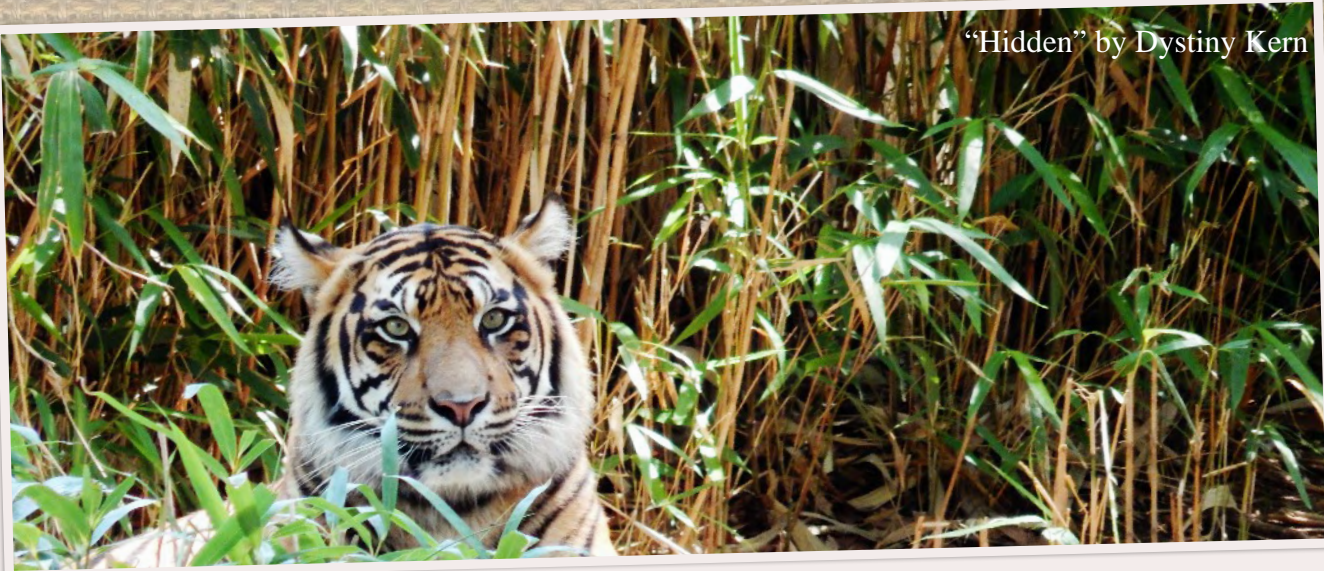
Always moving.

Never seen.

If by chance I am seen, I am the *last* thing they see. If our paths cross, then you are the next piece to be removed from play. No discrimination. No mercy. Man, woman, or child, it does not matter. Young, old, rich, poor, weak, or strong, everyone plays my game. Truthfully, they're really not even people. There's no need to feel guilt, or horror, or shame . . . they're not even living souls . . . or self-moving spirits. They are nothing more than playthings that have been placed here for no other purpose than to amuse me.

Too close! I got wrapped up in my own thoughts and nearly missed that guard. Fucking Watch. I had to dive into a stinking slops pile just to stay hidden! I am not ready to end the game just yet. My heart is racing so fast! I live for moments such as this! I really need to find myself a student. Someone I can raise in my beliefs, teach everything I know, and stand proud when he removes his first game piece. Then I think I will kill him. Oh well. No need to get sentimental. I have to be more careful. By now last night's enjoyment has probably been discovered. After tonight, I can't afford to be too complacent. After all, I still have one more night of games! I simply must, must, must beat my personal best before I have to move on. I wonder how many I can get before dawn? Four? Five? With any luck the next home will be a family. Oooohhhhhh . . . mother, father, a few children . . . my, my, my, the fun we will have together. Finding families is the supreme exultation! I can imagine it so clear! All of them





sleeping so peacefully, nestled into their beds . . . Oh, I do hope they are dreaming! The euphoria I would feel from waking them from their sweet dreams of riches, candies, and lusts, and entering them into the nightmare I create for them.

Another Watchman. *Sigh*. I suppose I should take to the rooftops, even though it is so boring up there with no one to play with. Hmmm . . . this looks like a good place to climb. These hot summer nights make the stones slightly more slippery than usual. Too much moisture in the night air blows in from the sea. Although, that does make things a tiny bit more interesting. It could happen . . . it really could. I *could* possibly get a foothold on a loose stone, and fall. I *could* land right into the lap of the City Watch. I *could* be captured . . . finally . . . but not tonight. I made it. On the roof. Now it's boring. I suppose the world will just have to wait. This *could* have been the day every city in Naa'ri would have rejoiced. They *could* have been rid of me. The Pestilence of the Port . The Menace of Markwood. The Dark Wind. The Creeping Death. Actually, I think I rather like that one. It sums me up quite nicely.

Well. Now what? That is a good distance to the next roof. Too far to jump across. I'll go another way, then. Maybe if I - Wait! How delightful! What luck! Three Watchmen have congregated right below me! Fools swapping their stories. Of course, they are bullshit stories, but I'm sure it helps them break the monotony of walking back and forth, over and over. Their routine has become my treasure! How fortuitous! This situation presents me with a dandy of a challenge.

I have to do it.

I do.

It is too tempting not to. I can't resist. Looks like I am about to jump.

Seems to be about the distance of maybe . . . four ox carts . . . maybe four and a half. I don't think it's going to happen, but what the hell.

Alright. Think this one out.

I need to get a good running start . . . on a very small rooftop, wait until the last possible instance to make my jump . . . over an endless gaping chasm, be quiet as a mouse, and hope the Watch doesn't spot me.

This should be easy!

No!

They can't leave!

They're ruining everything!

They - oh . . . That's fine then. Just moving to lean against the wall. Must be a long story. So, there they stay, relaxing on the wall.

The wall facing me.

The one on the far side of the alley.

The wall connected to the roof I need to get to.

This just keeps getting better by the moment! Freaking Watch! No sense in waiting. I have to go as far back as I can. If they can't hear my heart pounding, I will be shocked.



Well . . . off I go!

Fast!

Faster!

Faster, damn you!

Running hard, touching my feet lightly. No stopping now . . . the edge . . . the night. In the air, no turning back. Everything has slowed. Two heartbeats seem like two days. Almost . . . almost . . . NO! I'm not going to make it!

Reach!

Yes!

Fingers on the ledge! I slammed the wall hard, but this is no time for pain.

Quickly!

Up and over!

Made it! The whole front of my body feels like it's been hit with a very large hammer. It wants me to stop and recover, but I am in control. Not my body.

Don't stop.

Keep moving!

If they looked up, they saw nothing. The game continues . . . on to the next rooftop, and then the next.

\* \* \* \*

The Slums. Hundreds of disheveled shacks and broken down shanties occupy every space in the district. Only a few Watchmen here. No one, not even the City Watch, is fool enough to spend too much time here when the sun goes down.

An artist could not paint a better setting. Mud everywhere, slops lining what few alleys there are, and several dogs feeding on the corpses of whatever creature they are fortunate enough to dig up.

As I said before, this truly is home to no one. Every dwelling in The Slums is owned by the lords of this land. For a negotiable price, anyone can put a roof over their head for a night or two. If you don't have gold, you can pay with your wares, a night with your wife, or, in the case of a few lords, a night with your children. Day in and day out, the people come and go. Merchants, vintners, pirates, mercenaries, and various other travelers litter The Slums, and bring with them many different tastes. Or lack thereof. You are just as likely to buy a fish as you are to find a knife in your belly. From this roof, I can see a few of my *colleagues* wandering about. Racketeers running their scams in three separate, poorly lit, corners, a number of drunken brawlers looking for a fight, and two rogues lurking in the shadows searching for the next purse to cut. The rogues never fail to humor me. Idiots. They think they are so professional at what they do, believing no one ever sees them.

There's another!

It took me a few moments to find him, but find him I did. I always do.

Novices.

Until I reach my next play room, I have to stick to the alleys. Can't very well skip from rooftop to rooftop on shacks. Imagine the look on some unsuspecting fool's face as I crash through his ceiling! Imagine the look on my face! *That* would be hilarious! I wouldn't be able to control myself. I would laugh and laugh. . . The poor fool would think I'm insane! Right up until the point I cut his heart out. Don't imagine he would find that as funny as I would.

On the ground now.

Mud and water everywhere! I just cleaned these boots yesterday! Every damn time I clean them . . . it never fails. They get soiled with mud, shit, or blood. I'm certain if I hadn't cleaned them though . . . There is one of the novice rogues now, walking towards me with a look in his eye that tells me *he* thinks he has another prize. As he approaches, I give him a look of cold death, and he knows . . . I am no man's prize. I am his better. Wisely, he decides to keep walking past me, in search of new prey. For half a breath, I thought I was going to get number three for the evening.



Far enough from possible interlopers now. I hate interruptions when I am playing. Time to look in some windows. Let's see what games I can play tonight. Old man. No good. Another old man. Damn it. An old woman this time. Fuck! Is there no one in this district that isn't shriveled?! Ah. Now there is the prize I have been looking for. My treasure. My priceless artifact.

Two children, a boy and a girl. Sleeping so soundly. If there are children, then there is at least one parent here as well. At the worst, I will get three! Oh! A cat also! I'll have to skewer it first. Right in front of them.

Now to find a way inside. Always check the door first. Some people are stupid enough to leave their door unlatched.

No. No good. Check the window then.

Damn. I should have something in my satchel of joys that can lend me a helping hand. Perfect! This wire should do the trick. Unwind it, bend it to the shape I need, slide it under the door, and I'll be inside in no time. I almost forgot. I need my mirror. Nearly have the latch hooked . . . slide it slowly . . . careful . . . got it!

I am the best there is.

I am amazing.

I am just *that* damn good!

The door hinges creak. Why not. I am not at all surprised by the noise. I don't think it was heard by anyone else.

Inside now. . . close the door slowly . . . it creaks again . . . Why doesn't anyone take care of anything anymore? This is just careless. How difficult would it be to grease the hinges every once in a while? There is no excuse for a noisy door. These people annoy me.

The latch is hooked, and now it's time to play. Move quietly past the children, and on to the parents . . .

\* \* \* \*

My eyes open, and I feel something cold and thin resting on my throat. It is a knife. It's in the hand of a man standing over me.

"Shhhh sh sh sh sh," he whispers.

"Make no movements, make no sounds," he tells me.

I listen.

"Do everything I tell you, when I tell you, and this will be much easier for you. If you understand me, nod once."

I nod. A black rag covers his mouth and nose. All I can see are his dark brown eyes and long, ruffled, black hair.

This isn't happening! I'm dreaming! I have to be! I'll wake up soon enough, I will! Please, please, please wake up . . .

"Wake your husband, and do so very quietly."

I listen. "Marten," I whisper. "Marten!" A forced whisper. He's stirring. His eyes open, and the man speaks.

"If you move, I will kill her. If you speak, I will kill her. If you have a heroic thought, I *will* kill her. Nod once if you understand."

He nods, and the man looks to me.

"Put this gag in his mouth. If he resists, I will kill your children, then I will kill you while he watches. Do you understand?"

"Ye-"

"No words! Nod only! We have already established the rules. If you speak again, your children will die, while you watch. Do you understand?"



I nod.

"Good. You are a quick study. I think you will do just fine." He holds the knife to my throat and climbs over me, over Marten, to the other side of the bed, and moves his knife to Marten's throat, all in one lightning fast, fluid motion.

He tells me, "Get up, and move the chairs from the supper table to the middle of the room. All four of them. Do you understand?" I hesitate, then I nod. He notices. "Do what I tell you, when I tell you. When I give you a command, you will answer at once. Do you understand?" I nod more readily this time. "Very good!" He looks at Marten. "I see why you married this one. It has to be her brains because it sure wasn't for beauty. How can you stand stooping this low every night?" He laughs quietly. "You know what? Don't answer that question. Some things are better left a mystery. Tell me her name, but *only* her name. No other word will come from your tongue, or I will tear it from your mouth."

"Ophia." Marten tells him.

"It seems you aren't the only smart one in the family, Ophia. Your children must be bright as a thousand candles! Would you kindly place the chairs side-by-side please? Good, good."

He pauses for a moment, then continues his orders. "Now, Ophia. I want you to come around to this side of the bed. If you try to run, I will . . . I think you already know by now. Let's just leave that as a standing consequence. Kill, murder, maim children while you watch, all that good stuff. That should save me a few words and some wasted breath."

Do what he says, let him take what he wants, and it will be over soon. Then we can get out of this holy forsaken pit.

"You are doing very well, Ophia. Have you done this before? You seem so . . . accustomed to being ordered around." I make no movement. Too afraid to answer with anything other than a nod, so I don't think it would be a good idea to shake my head. He notices.

"My, you *are* intelligent! We are going to get along wonderfully! This shall be such a delicious game!"

Game?

He places the knife at my throat. "Marten, I want you get up and sit in one of the chairs on the end." Without a word, Marten does as he is told.

"Well done. Let's walk slowly and quietly to him, shall we, Ophia?"

We move together towards Marten. I can feel the steel of his blade pressed firmly at my neck. Firmly enough to matter, but not to kill. I have no choice but to do as he says. Please, let this be over soon!

"Listen carefully, both of you. I will only give this instruction once. If you fail to do as I say, blood, kill, children."

I don't nod, but I understand full well.

"Marten, I want you to place your hands together behind the chair. Place your palms facing outward, away from you." With his free hand, he reaches beneath his jacket and produces several pieces of rope, then moves the knife to Marten. "Ophia, I want you to take one piece of this rope, and bind his hands together tightly. Make it as tight as you can possibly get it. If it hurts him, then you are doing it right. Once that is done, I want you to take two pieces of rope and bind each foot to the legs of the chair, then one more around his chest, to the back of the chair."

I do exactly what he tells me, and I do it as fast as I possibly can.

"You are performing beautifully, Ophia. I think I like you! Let's be friends! It has just occurred to me that I have failed to properly introduce myself. I know your names, but I haven't given mine, have I? How terribly rude of me. Can you ever find it in your heart to forgive me? I mean, if we're going to be friends, I should make myself known, right?"

I nod slowly.



"Marten, Ophia, you may call me . . . well . . . I'm sure there are several things running through your minds that you would love to call me. Tell you what. Pick one of those, and that's who I will be. Be creative now, I already know how smart you are. Silly me. How is Marten supposed to tell me his name for me with that dreadful gag in his mouth? Should I take it out?"

I nod.

He laughs, again quietly. "No, no, no. I don't think that would do at all. If we're to play the game, we must play by the rules after all."

That word again. Game. Rules?

"Now that Marten is incapacitated, let's wake the children, Ophia."

Oh, holy, no! "Please . . ." A simple word and I can't stop it from escaping my lips. He reprimands me by placing a small cut on my cheek.

"Now, now . . ." he says. "We did agree on no words. That will be the last time you speak. It was just a mistake, I'm sure, but no more words. We must follow the rules after all. Now then . . . where were we? Oh yes! The children. When I place the blade on your son's throat, you are to wake your daughter. Wake *only* your daughter. Wake her gently, wake her quietly. Get her up, and move her to the chair next to Marten. When she sits, place the gag in her mouth, and tie her fast in the same manner as Marten. I'll wait here and make sure your son sleeps comfortably. He does look so innocent, doesn't he?"

He has my son. I wake her. "Elisa . . ." I whisper gently, nudging her. "A few words to calm, no more," he tells me. "Elisa, wake up my flower . . ."

"Mommy? Is it time to go? Where's Daddy? Who is tha-"

"Shhhh. Be quiet darling. We don't want to wake Mason. Come with me."

"But-"

"It's alright, Liss. Everything's going to be alright, you'll see."

The man looks at me with an icy glare, and his eyes remind me of his rules. I have already tested his patience.

"Mommy, why is Daddy-"

"We can't talk about it now, Liss. We will later. I promise. I need you to sit in the chair next to Daddy." I kiss her forehead, stroke her golden hair. She sits. I can't fight it any longer. The tears flow like rivers, running down my face. I am so scared. With shaking hands, I tie her hands behind her, and then her feet to the legs of the chair. I struggle to place the gag.

"Now I want you to do the same thing with your son, having him sit next to his sister," the man tells me, wearing a thin smile. The monster is smiling. I wake Mason with a whisper.

"Everyone is awake now," the man says, "You don't have to whisper."

Mason's eyes flutter; he wakes up, and with a quick glance at the man holding a knife, begins to cry, but our keeper has no sympathy.

"Oh, boo hoo hoo! Shut up, you sniveling little whelp! Hurry up and tie him to the fucking chair, Ophia! Whatever you do, don't forget the gag . . . that thing will be a blessing, stuffed in his mouth! Too much crying out of him and my head will hurt!"

I hug my son. "Shhhh . . . stop crying now, Mase. This will all be over soon." I sit him next to Elisa, and tie him, then gag him, and look at the intruder for his next command.

"Well done, Ophia! I know this has been a rough night for you, and rest assured, this will be finished soon enough. You look exhausted! You deserve a rest. Have a seat next to Mason."

I sit, and he asks me questions as he ties me to the chair.

"Answer everything truthfully. I will know if you lie, and you know what I will do if you don't play the game correctly. Will you be expecting any visitors tonight?"

"No"

"Do you have any other family in The Port?"

"No."



"Very good then." He walks behind us.

"What is Marten's age?"

"Thirty-four."

"Mason?"

"Nine."

"Elisa?"

"Seven."

"And your age?"

"Thirty-two."

"Wonderful."

"Please," I beg. "Please . . . the jewelry is in the chest by our bed. Take what you want. Take it all. I beg you."

He laughs. Jewelry? You think I came here for your baubles? No, I'm afraid not. Take it all you say? My dear, I intend to. I plan to take everything from you. As for begging . . . you have not begun to beg enough . . . not yet.

He gags me, and moves behind Elisa. Muffled screams fill the room. Out of the corner of my eye, I watch him cut off one of Elisa's fingers. I am helpless to do anything but scream. Marten is somewhere else. He stares, with a blank expression. The intruder digs through a deep leather bag looking for something. I didn't notice he had anything with him other than his dagger. After shuffling through the bag for a few moments, he pulls out four, square, white placards with a small chain attached to two corners. There is something painted on them I can't see. They are each covered with parchment.

Holding them by the chains, he places them over our heads and hangs them in front of us.

"There. That should do it. All set up now. Do you mind if I have a seat on your bed? That was tedious work. No? You don't mind? I don't want to impose, or be a bad guest. Alright, alright . . . if you insist." He lies in front of us on his side with his head propped in one hand. "This has been . . . one insanely long night, wouldn't you agree? I am going to sleep *so* good when I get to bed. I feel like I have just done a full day's work! What, you think this is easy? You think . . . this all just . . . *happens*? That everything falls magically into place? You have no appreciation for me." He throws his dagger. It makes its home in Marten's belly. "See what you did? You made me lose my temper." He sighs. "I'm sorry, Marten. I just get so upset knowing that I did all of this for you, and you never show me how much you appreciate the things I do. This all takes planning. It takes work to make sure everything goes right. I do try so hard. Oh well. I don't think anything I ever do will be good enough for you."

Marten is gone now. He just continues to stare. With the exception of a blink every so often, he never moves.

"What do you say we get this game underway, eh? You did so well with my instructions, and you listened to my every command with near perfection, so . . . I will make this easy for you as I promised. Oh, you thought I would let you go? No, no my friends. I never said that, but I did say this would be easier for you. Oh, don't cry Ophia, you gigantic, fat cow. I know you told Mason and Elisa everything would be alright. That it would be over soon. You were half right. You did lie to them, however, and I hate, hate, hate liars. You have to be punished."

He gets out of the bed and walks to me. He stands in front of me very still for a moment, then grabs my hair, pulls my head back, and cuts off one of my ears.

"That hurt me more than it hurt you, my dear, but now you have been punished, and I hope you've learned your lesson, young lady! Wait. This isn't right. I gave my dagger to Marten, took Elisa's little finger, and an ear from you . . . are you jealous, Mason? We don't want you to be jealous. Please don't cry. I didn't mean to forget about you."

His hands lock around my son's face. Mason cries, and tries to struggle. A thumb presses his eyelid, pushes in, and pulls out his eye. I'm starting to feel faint. He notices and slaps me so hard I feel my teeth rattle. Blood fills my mouth.



He takes a few steps back and sits on the bed. "You may have noticed the rather large necklaces I have given to you as a gift. Would you like me to tell you about them? Don't be afraid. Speak up! No one? Hmmm . . . Alright then. I will tell you anyway. On each placard, under the parchment, is a number. One through four. I don't know who has what number. I don't want anyone to feel like they are being cheated, so this is completely random. Whoever has number one, will be the first to be removed from the game. Then number two, and so on. Whoever has number four is the winner, and wins the absolute joy of watching me kill the rest of your family! YAAAYY!!!" He claps excitedly. "What say we get on with it then, shall we?"

He removes the parchment from Marten. Number three. "Oh, so close, Marten! you almost had it!" He tears away the parchment from Elisa. Number two. "So it comes down to Mason, and the highly intelligent, yet immensely large cow, Ophia! I think I'll rip them off at the same time. Build the intensity a little. For what it's worth, Ophia, I do hope you win . . . "

He rips both of our parchments off at once.

I won.



"Fishing Hole"  
by Dystiny Kern



“Fly High Denver Skies” by Michael Parsons

It was December 25, 2011, Christmas. I had just awakened from the prodigious sound of my alarm clock. I was filled with the excitement of joy. I quickly took a shower, brushed my teeth, and got dressed. In thirty minutes, my family and I were out the door on our way to Washington Dulles International Airport to catch my flight to Denver, Colorado.

On the way to the airport, I fell asleep. My mom was driving, and my dad was asleep in the passenger side. Upon our arrival, I was awakened by Mom shouting, “Get up, we are at the airport!” Up and motivated, I reached for the door handle of the car and proceeded to the trunk of the car. After five minutes of attempting to get my suitcase out of the trunk, I was on my way.

Upon entering the sliding doors, I smelled the aroma of concession food permeating the airport. I headed up the escalator with my suitcase behind me to check in at the service desk. I arrived at the service desk and was greeted by a middle-aged, brown-haired woman.

The woman asked, “Sir, are you flying alone today?”

“Yes, yes I am.”

The woman handed me my ticket, and I was off to the departure gate with my mom and my dad.

While walking to the departure gate, my mom asked, “Michael, do you have everything you need?”

“I think so, but more money would be satisfying!”

“Michael, you have enough already!”

Walking fifty or so more feet, I was greeted by the departure gate. Looking at the departure gate sign, I noticed that the sign said “San Diego.”

I rudely asked my mom, “Why are we at the wrong gate?”

“I don’t know Michael, I just followed behind you!” replied my mom.

Racing across the airport, I finally found my correct departure gate. Waiting to board the plane, my mom hugged me and said, “I love you Michael.”

I replied, “I love you, too.”

Going through the gate, I was surprised by a flight attendant. She had a distinctive accent along with short blonde hair.

The flight attendant said, “Sit anywhere desired.”

Being the last to board the plane, I picked a seat in the back of the plane beside another gentleman and an elderly woman. I sat down in my seat and prepared for take-off. The plane ran down the runway at full speed.

I silently whispered to myself, “What in the hell had I got myself into?”

“What did you say, young man?” bellowed the woman who sat beside me.



“Fly Away” by Courtney Hannas





“Country Light” by Brooke Riggleman

I remarked, “Hell.”

“Well, you know young man, when one says the word hell, he or she will end up going there.”

“I’m just terrified; this is my first time flying!”

After flying for four hours straight, the plane finally landed in Denver, Colorado. The plane slowly made its way to the arrival gate when I heard, “Thank you for flying Southwest Airlines” over the intercom. Leaving the plane, I reached for my cellphone and dialed my uncle’s cellphone number.

I asked my uncle, “Where are you at?”

“Waiting for you.”

Feeling lost and confused, I followed the signs to reach my uncle. I rode the Energy Express Train to go from one side of the airport to the other.

My phone rang and I answered, “Hello.”

“Michael,” said my uncle, “Where are you? I don’t see you.”

“I’m on my way.”

Finally, after twenty minutes of traversing the airport, I reached my uncle.

My uncle asked, “What took you so long?”

“I don’t know; all I know is that I’m hungry.”

It was Christmas, and I made it to Denver, Colorado. I am surprised I did not miss my flight. How stupid could I be? I mean, I did go to the wrong gate. After all, I enjoyed the experience even if I did get serenaded by an elderly lady. Best of luck to the rest of the public with his or her flying adventures.



“A Vacation with John” by Connie Evans

John is missing! This thought keeps repeating itself in my head like a bad song. Where the heck could he be? An eighty-year-old man who never leaves his house without arguing about it for three days first. Seems unbelievable that he could just disappear, but it's true. I've been through every room in this house twice, and he is not here. “John, come out or I am going to drink your coffee.” John loves his coffee. That would have made him show himself if he could hear it. His cane is on the back of his kitchen chair; his hot coffee and warm eggs are still sitting on the table, giving the impression he vanished into thin air.

Today started out being a really good day. It's Friday, the middle of June; in the early morning, the dew is still wet on the grass. A picture perfect day. As the sun peaks over the mountain, the sky changes to a deep ocean blue with two enormous, fluffy clouds floating lazily along the horizon. The only things to disrupt this beautiful setting are the military helicopters that are flying over occasionally. I think to myself, “I only have two patients today; then I have the rest of the weekend off, but I have to find John first.”

I decide to make one more trip through the house before I raise the alarm. This time I carefully check every closet, corner, and nook and cranny where a man can fit. Upon entering the living room, I spy a small closet in the corner, a really small space that goes back under the stairs. From this angle I can see the door is open just a crack. I remember getting something out of there once. What would John be doing in there? He has to be, though, because he is not anywhere else in the house.

Walking slowly across the room, I put one foot as quietly as possible in front of the other. My legs feel a little wobbly, and my hands are shaky as scenes from every horror movie I've ever seen are flashing in front of my eyes. When I am several feet away from the door, I stop. Listening closely, I am sure I heard a noise, just a small rustling of some kind of fabric. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea; maybe, I watch too many movies. Should I get my phone off the table and call for help now? Why did I even put it down? I have to know. Is John in the closet? Is anyone? I start moving again.

With my attention so focused on the door, I don't see the hand that reaches out from behind the couch, grabs my ankle, and pulls me to the floor, halfway behind the couch. My heart is thumping fast and furious, like a runaway horse. Intoxicating, exhilarating and terrifying adrenaline is gushing through my body as a gnarled hand covers my mouth and a familiar voice, raspy from years of smoking, whispers in my ear, “Shhhh! They are here! The enemy has penetrated the perimeter.” The first thought in my head is “Thank God I found John.” The second is “Uh oh, this is bad.”

John is a veteran of the Korean War who occasionally suffers from flashbacks. The helicopter activity that is going on this morning probably set off this episode. Rolling over on my back, I look into his vacant eyes. The twinkle that usually shines in his beautiful blue eyes is missing, turning them into a dark abyss. I have found John. I know exactly where he is: on a small ridge in North Korea called Pork Chop Hill, halfway around the world and more than sixty years in the past. He was one of few soldiers to survive days of intense, vicious fighting for a strategically worthless hill.

As another helicopter flies low over the house, the windows shake and the pictures on the wall rattle, making a cacophony of noise. John covers his ears and starts reciting the Lord's Prayer. Reaching out, I take his wrinkly calloused hand in mine. Gently rubbing I tell him, “I'm here with you John. I will stay as long as you need me.”



"John, I need to do some reconnaissance. I need you to stay here and keep our position safe." Crawling out from behind the couch, I quickly get my phone to call for back up. My boss decides as long as he is not violent it will be better to have just he and I in the house until his family can get here. On the way back, I grab his coffee and eggs off the table, knowing he is diabetic and needs to eat.

After we have been behind this big ugly green couch for a few hours, with me venturing out every once in a while for supplies such as water and a snack for John, we both are getting hungry. I make "radio contact" using my cell phone, to see if we can get some food delivered. Within half an hour I hear the "supply officers" slipping in the back door. Again, I make a reconnaissance to the kitchen, and to my delight, I find a Dairy Queen bag with a few hamburgers, French fries and chocolate milk shakes.

After a tiring morning of defending this hill, eating a delicious lunch and hours of being scrunched up between the wall and this horrible green couch, I very easily convince John we need to move to a more secure location. He stretches out on the couch, and I promise I will keep a vigilant eye out for the enemy while he naps. I wish I could help him fight this battle, but I know it's one he has to do alone for now.

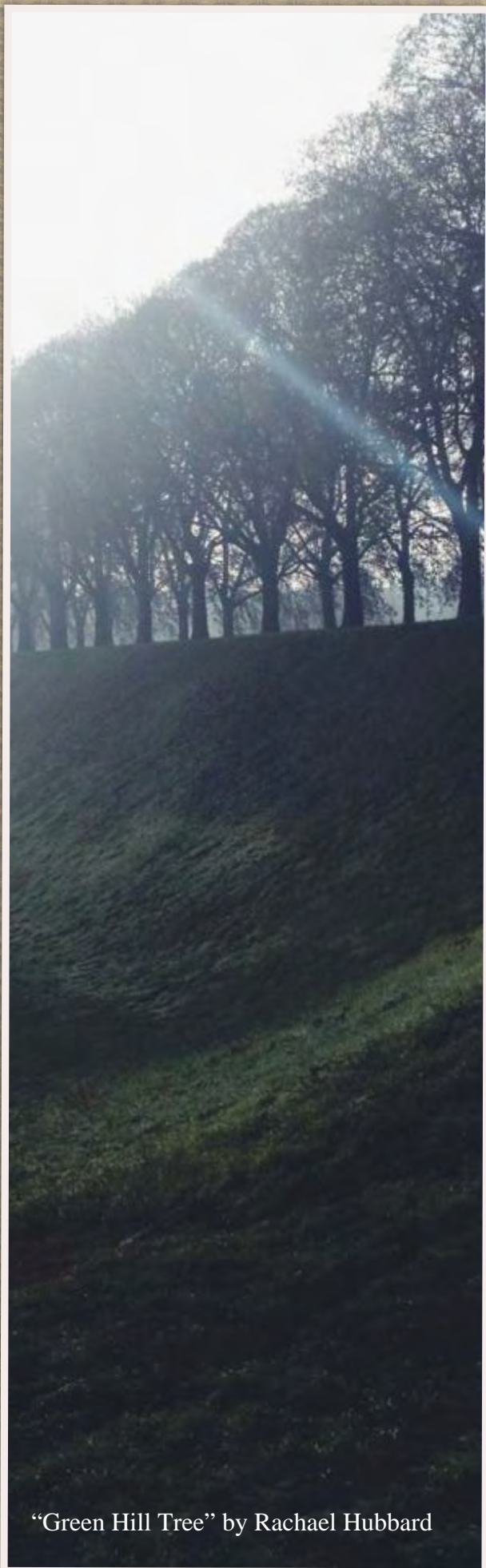
My boss broke "radio silence" to inform me that his family was coming in from Maryland and would be here this evening, in case I wanted to have a replacement, or if I thought we needed to transport him to the hospital. I decide I will stay; his health is not in danger, and I feel a duty to see this assignment through.

We spend an emotional afternoon and evening until his family arrives, talking about the events that dictated how he lived his life. The stories he told were watered down, but still I can see and hear the anguish as he tells me about his two best friends, one a cousin, both like brothers, all raised together from early childhood. I learned about the rambunctious antics of young boys, the tribulations of three rowdy young men, the first time they got drunk, the first fight over a girl, and the love of a brother that has not been forgotten in sixty years. I learned about how they joined the Marines together, proud to serve the country they loved. How excited and happy they were to be shipped out together. How truly devastated, heartbroken and guilt ridden one was to come home without the others. How hearts can break when you have to hold your brothers in your arms as they gasp their last breath within twelve hours of each other. I even learned how you can feel like you have been dead for sixty years but still breathe.

As I was leaving after his family arrived, John walked me to the door. "I just wanted you to know I could have let you leave right after lunch. I was okay by then, but field rations have never been as good as Dairy Queen, so I let you stay." Kissing his soft leathery cheek, I reply, "John, you are a rascal." I look back one last time as I get in the car. He is standing by the door with a smile as bright as the noonday sun. With a small wave he turns and walks back in the house. I am driving down the road when I remember a conversation I had with my boss the previous week. I had wished I could take a vacation someplace far away from home. Laughing out loud I realize I spent my day a world away, and more than a half a century in the past. That's about as far from home as I could go. Those pesky wishes!

That was the last time I saw John. His family moved him to Maryland where he died five months later. Standing in his family's graveyard on a cold, dreary, and rainy November day, I could still see his smiling face as he waved at me from the door. This man had changed me, not a life altering change, but somehow knowing his story of survival, makes me a better person. A glint of light on the tombstone next to John's grave catches my eye. Unbelievable! I recognize this name! And the one beside it too! I had heard all about these two young men a few months ago. My rational brain knows the light is the sun playing peek-a-boo from behind the clouds, but my emotional heart wants to believe that it is three brothers being reunited after a life time apart, which makes me smile. As the casket is being lowered, I turned to walk away, not able to separate the tears from the rain running down my face. With a quick look over my shoulder, I whisper, "Rest in peace my friend, rest in peace."





“Green Hill Tree” by Rachael Hubbard

## “How Writing Music Changed My Life” by Julian Sterns

Growing up without an outlet can be tough. I often struggled with problems because I had no one to talk to. It wasn't until a friend of mine told me to try writing music that I found the answer. I often wondered, "How can writing music change one's life?" Writing music changed my life in several important ways. First, it gave me therapeutic release. Second, it served as a great tool for problem-solving. Finally, and most important of all, it gave me a lot more confidence.

My first, and probably most relevant, reason for writing music was to find someone to talk to. Because of my depression, I always felt alone in the world, trapped in a void of my own problems with no exit. For this reason, my choice outlet was to write music about it. Music is the never ending page that allows a person to freely voice his or her opinion without any judgment. It is the perfect person to talk to in my opinion.

Writing music gave me an amazing source of therapy. Whenever I write music, I can slowly feel the stress of the day being taken out of me. Angry, sad, or just plain old "pissed off" I can write about it. The lines on the page turn into a blank canvas to dump the day's drama. Serving as some sort of diary, writing, instead of talking through my problems, gives me the opportunity to assess myself. As a result, I can work through the day's trials and tribulations and move on feeling a calm sense of relief.

Another reason I chose to write music is the simple fact of problem-solving. Due to my depression, I never had the confidence, nerve, or even the will to talk to others about my problems. Why should I talk to someone who is only going to judge me for what I say? Consequently, I chose to speak to a "person" who can't talk back to me and judge me. Any problem that I have can be turned into a song. As I continue to write, I analyze my thoughts and decipher why I should or shouldn't feel the way that I do. Because of that fact, whatever problems that I am currently going through make their way from issues to solutions.

Mental stability is another amazing tool that writing music gave to me. Any amount of stress, anger, joy, or sadness that I feel can be confessed on the page. This way I am no longer being forced to bottle up my problems inside. Thus, no more emotions weigh on my brain like a ton of bricks screaming for a way out. Everything goes on the page; therefore, my mind doesn't get overwhelmed with emotions that I am unable to control. With no overwhelming emotions trapped in my brain, I have achieved mental stability. No more days of wondering how the rest of the stress filled days are going to go. Without music, I truly would be a different person.



The last and most important attribute that music gave me was confidence. Originally, I never knew that I had such a talent. Each time that I write I can see my progression. This alone gives me a confidence boost. Seeing myself excel in every song makes me feel accomplished. As a result, I see the positive Influence that music has on my life and how it changes me as a person. Once a shy, depressed teenager, I now have become an outgoing man with a whole new level of self-confidence. When I choose to share my music with others, I get nothing but compliments from everyone that's around to hear. For me, that in itself is the greatest part of writing music.

Writing music really did change my life. I grew from a shy and depressed teenager with no way out in the world, to an outgoing young man with extraordinary talents. Music is my tool of choice for solving the daily problems that we all face in life. Serving as a useful tool for problem-solving, self-medicating therapy and more, music is the best tool that I could have chosen. What has music done for your life lately?



“West Virginia Life” by Courtney Hannas



“A Day of Exploration” by Haley Greathouse

As I was lounging on my sea green beach towel beneath the sizzling, golden hue of light, I couldn't help but to observe the poised beauty of the rustic terrain surrounding me. From the abundance of trees and full figured bushes, to the juvenile schools of tadpoles feeding along the edge of the water, I decided South Mill Creek Lake is indeed the ultimate place to spend exploring the exquisite outdoors and relaxing by the navy, deep green colored water on a weekend summer day.

With the mild breeze running against my skin as if it were fingers, I began to feel the undesirable results of the blistering rays of sun swimming around and over me. For a brief second in time, I envisioned myself as if I were being baked inside of a smoldering oven. Continuing to lay sprawled out atop my thin, cotton beach towel situated upon a fused bed of gray and black marble sized rocks and powdery dirt, I shifted my head to the right only to scope out a perfectly painted canvas of towering, emerald green pine trees. In that moment, I decided to make my way over to explore the army of monstrous pines.

Upon arriving to the edge of the pine trees, I began to breathe in their fresh, woodland scent. Looking around, I noticed two songbirds chirping along to each other in the nearby brush. I continued walking through the majestic pines, stopping every so often to take in their pure beauty that was surrounding me. Most of the trees, I noticed, were well over one-hundred years old; their trunks were wide and sturdy, but also rough and weathered from years of being exposed to all of Earth's many elements. As I continued walking in between the rows of trees, the sharp pine needles brushed across my hand like the stiff bristles of a paint brush.

Walking back towards the direction of the lake, I caught a glimpse of a small flock of Canadian geese and their young scattering out of the cool, crisp water to nest down for the evening. As I continued pacing myself down the dusty, gravel covered path, the family of geese startled out ahead of me then gracefully took flight and landed upon a mound of tall grass.

I began to make my way down onto the old highway which is now partly submerged underneath the lake. I took a moment to gaze at my breath-taking surroundings while getting caught up in thoughts of how differently this area must have looked before the lake was created and the highway was still in use; it's amazing how the outdoors can change so much over time. I recollected myself and continued down the old, broken highway and back onto the gravel trail that circles the lake.

To my left, a herd of deer fed upon freshly fallen acorns amongst the trees at the edge of a large, grassy field. They paused momentarily and looked toward my direction but seemed unfazed by my presence. The signs of beaver were apparent by the numerous amounts of trees that had been chopped away to pieces of nothing. Scores of trees lay across the ground and several beaver dams can be seen hugging the edge of the water.

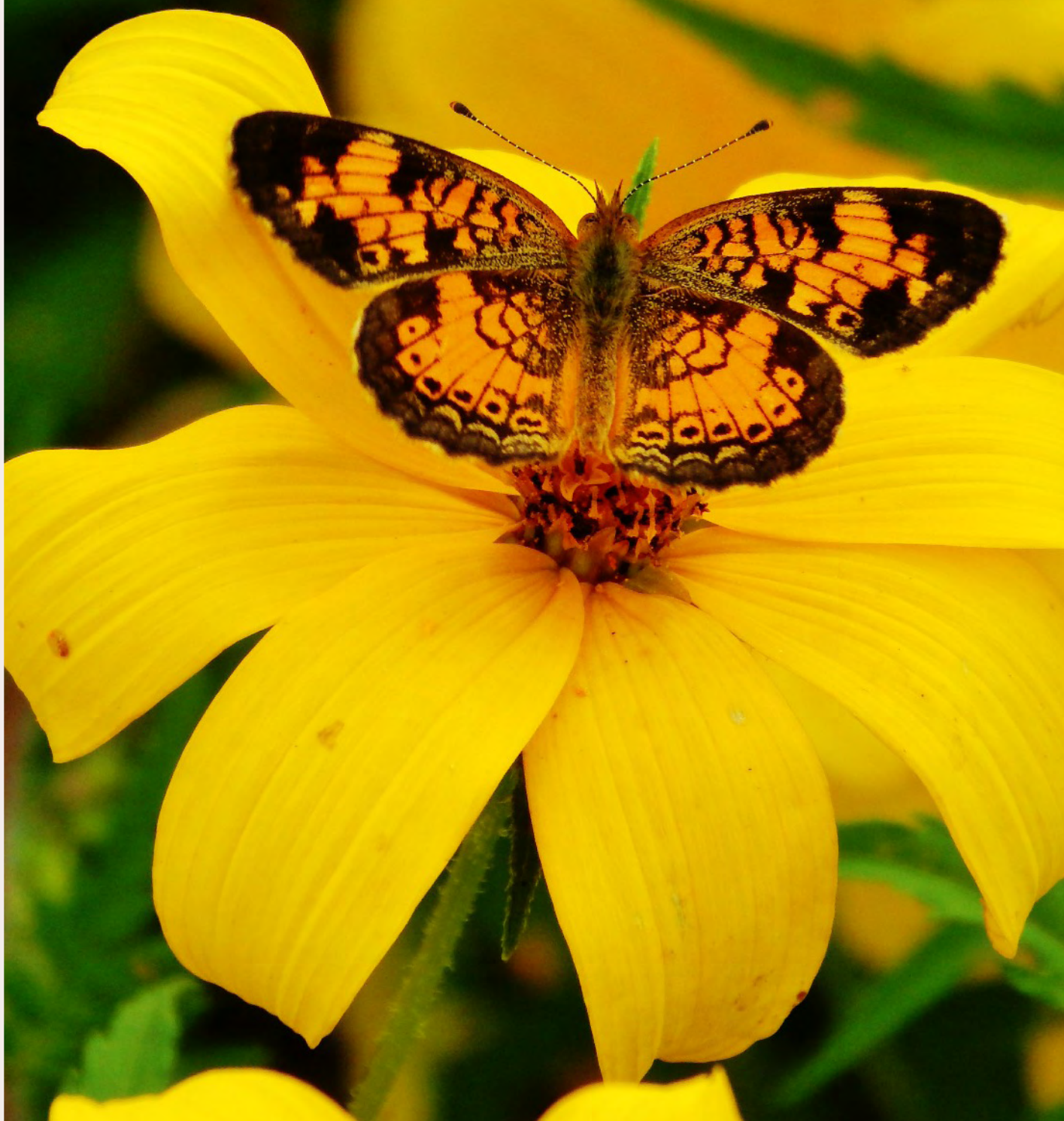
At the mouth of the lake, there sits a narrow channel of water which feeds into the main body. I pushed my way through the tall weeds and suddenly my foot began to sink into a deep muskrat hole. All along the narrow channel of water lay holes and canals created by the families of muskrats that have made the area their home.

Exhausted from my calm and peaceful trek around the lake, I decided to stop and rest upon a hill of slate rock. While gazing down at my watch, I realized that I had spent hours entertained by the abundance of beauty and nature's embrace. As the sun began to fade behind the mountains and trees, I watched as time began to slip away; I relished the final moments of daylight all the while thinking to myself that there's no place else that I'd rather be.





“Suckin’ That Gold” by Dystiny Kern





“Summer Colors”  
by Dystiny Kern

