

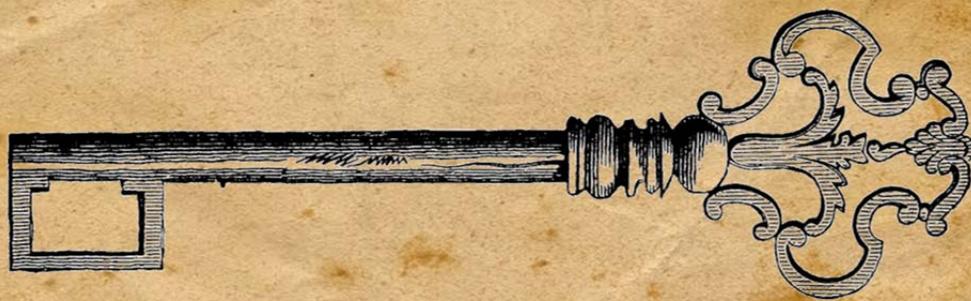
*Sammuel Ch. Shindle*

1891

# Unlocked Voices

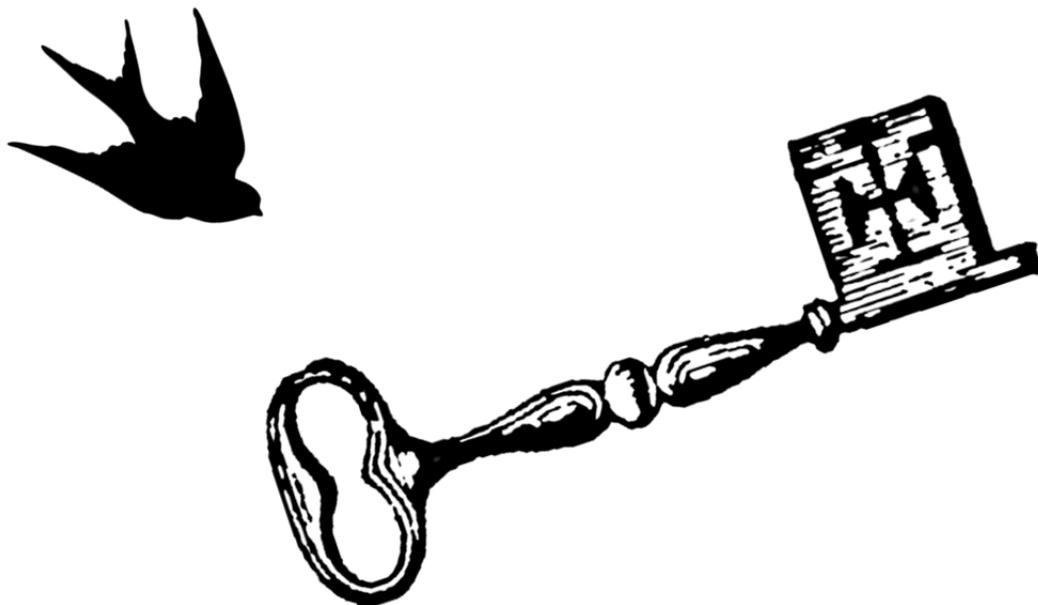
Featuring selected entries from the  
Henderson District Public Libraries  
3<sup>rd</sup> annual Teen Creative Writing Contest

2012



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# Middle School Poetry

## “If I Were In Charge of the World”

By Gavin Garcia

If I were in charge of the world,  
I'd cancel carrots,  
books,  
ferrets, and also  
dull fishing hooks.

If I were in charge of the world,  
there'd be robot servants that obey us,  
free cars so no one takes the bus, and  
dogs with cats that don't cause a fuss.

If I were in charge of the world,  
you wouldn't have six hours of school a day,  
you wouldn't have dollar slots so you don't have to pay,  
you wouldn't have bossy people that tell you what to say,  
or “Be nice to your siblings mister.”  
You wouldn't even have brothers or sisters.

If I were in charge of the world,  
a chocolate chip cookie  
would be a health food shake,  
and pieces of broccoli  
would be a delicious ice cream cake.

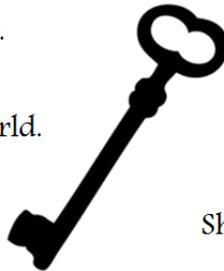
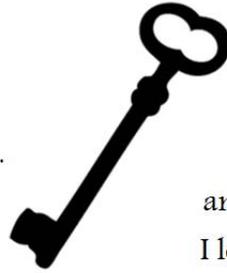
If I were in charge of the world,  
every one daily,  
would play the ukulele,  
and every single poem,  
whatever they say  
wouldn't have to rhyme  
to still get an A,  
plus.



# “Lorraine”

By Gavin Garcia

There once was a girl I liked,  
and I think she liked me back.  
She was a beautiful emo chick  
with the black eyeliner and the blue lipstick.  
She didn't have many friends,  
she was alone.  
she never talked to me  
but gave me a moan.  
She had long messy hair  
and a glassy stare.  
Her name was Lorraine  
and it drove me insane.  
She didn't like me for my heart  
but for my BRAIN.  
So every day at school  
I would try to talk to her, but look a fool.  
I would follow her everywhere she'd go.  
I don't know why she walked so slow.  
I'd bring her a soda and some flowers.  
I felt hypnotized by her emo powers.  
Then one day she just disappeared  
This is the worst thing I ever feared  
I checked out in the yard.  
I checked in the gym.  
But all I could find was a severed limb.  
Where oh where is my emo girl  
To find her again I would give up the world.  
She had big long messy hair  
and a glassy stare.  
Her name was Lorraine  
and it drove me insane.  
She didn't like me for my heart  
but for my BRAIN.  
So I went home that day



with a broken heart.  
I really missed Lorraine.  
My world was falling apart.  
I closed my eyes and slept away  
and when I finally woke up it felt like days.  
I looked out my window and something felt  
strange.  
It's like the whole world had suddenly changed.  
I see emos everywhere  
with a moan, moan here and a moan, moan there.  
Oh NO! They're all emos!  
I wonder why they walk so slow.  
I saw an old lady run out and scream  
The emos ate her like a jelly bean.  
Now I can finally see  
they are not just emos  
but emo Zombies!  
I knew I had to go find Lorraine  
and save her from this world gone insane.  
I grab my nun-chucks and my chainsaw  
I strapped on my ukulele & my wolverine claw.  
I head outside and I do my thing,  
I take 10 zombies down with one quick swing.  
I dropped 19 more then another 25.  
They can't stop me, they won't take me alive  
Finally near her home, I look around and see.  
I took out every single last emo zombie.  
I saw her standing at her door  
She held out her hands, could I ask for anymore?  
She had big long messy hair  
and a glassy stare.  
Her name was Lorraine  
and it drove me insane.  
She didn't like me for my heart

but for my BRAIN.  
And so, I held her in my arms,  
and she seemed to smile.

Time froze  
and, we stood together for a while.

it was the best moment of my whole life.

She then moaned at me  
And gave me a bite. Ouch!

When I woke up  
I had messy hair,  
I walked really slow  
and had a glassy stare.

I was finally together  
with my emo Lorraine.  
I didn't like her for her heart  
but I loved her for her brain.

ZOMBIES! ZOMBIES!

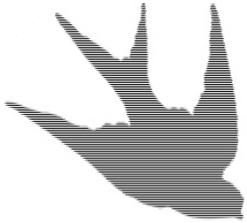
We want to eat your brains  
Zombies! Zombies!

It's something that we can't explain.

ZOMBIES! ZOMBIES!

We want to eat your brains  
Zombies! Zombies!

It's something that we can't explain.



## “The Boy Who Never”

By Jasmine Mixson

There once was a boy, who never smiled,  
Who never grinned, who frowned,  
His face was straight,  
Only listened, but never spoke,

The boy who never showed any emotions at all.  
He only listened, listened in the back of the room,  
Watching from afar,

Wishing that he had more time, time to play with the friends that he missed,  
The friends who soon forgot about him.

About the boy that they met in the back of the room,  
The boy still there since 1982.

Frozen there for the rest of his eternal life,  
The boy who only got a slight chance to act like a kid,  
The boy, still there waiting for an end.



# "Devil's Brew: Ode to the Witches"

By: Kristianna Redding

Come all, come all devilish ghouls.  
Come my pretty ones, and be my tools.

First 5 drops of dragonfly blood,  
Stir with some stinky pig crud.  
Silkworm stomach and porpoise puss,  
Boil with a leg of octopus.  
The pupil of sharks' eyes,  
2,000 ground-up fruit flies.  
For the enemy, beware.  
There will be danger everywhere.

Come all, come all devilish ghouls.  
Come my pretty ones, and be my tools.





# Middle School Short Story and Essay



## “Quick, Over Here!”

By Caitlyn Anderson

“Quick, over here!” said the detective, as he blew the dust off the old map. He had torn every one of the floor boards up in a frantic state of mind.

“What are we, Sherlock Holmes and company?” said his son, Ezekial. Normally, he would have laughed at his son's antics. Except today was different. Today he was searching for his youngest daughter, his pride and joy.

“This isn't a joke Ezekial, you know this was her from that stupid book she pored over,” he replied with an urgency to his voice. His youngest daughter, Bella, loved this book *Spiderwick Chronicles*. For an eight-year-old, she was an avid reader.

One night three days ago, seemingly months ago, they had all sat down for dinner. It was the fourth night that week that she had brought that book to the table. Ezekial started making the usual cracks at her eagerness to read for hours upon hours. The jokes usually entailed things like “You're a nerd, no wonder you're failing math, when was the last time you actually got off your behind and went outside.” The detective reprimanded him, but poor Bella ran to her room crying.

Ezekial is just a teenager, and he's been acting out since his mother died 2 years ago. Ironically, the same time Bella got into *Spiderwick Chronicles*. They both had their own ways of escaping the terrible reality that they called home. The detective tried to make them feel loved and feel whole even though a part of them had been ripped away. That night after she ran to her room, Ezekial went to check on her. The detective was washing the dishes and thinking over his latest case. When he heard Ezekial scream for Bella, he knew something was wrong. The dish he was washing fell to the floor and shattered. He ran upstairs to see his strong, stubborn teenage son kneeling by Bella's bed crying. There was a note written in jagged eight-year-old handwriting.

*“I know you guys luv me but I reely miss mommy. I think I know where she went. The book told me. I'm going to find her. We'll be a familee again.”*

They went to the police station and made a missing person report. They searched the neighborhood for hours. They went to her school and her friends' houses but found her nowhere. This led to many sleepless nights for the detective. Ezekial pulled himself together and tried to act normal, thus the flow of nervous jokes made with a quiver in his voice each time. It was last night that Ezekial mentioned searching her room. She spent most of her time in there with her nose shoved in that book after-all. Little did the detective know, but Ezekial had read the *Spiderwick Chronicles* twice in the day before, just searching for any clue he could find to help find his sister.

They tore her room apart until the detective found the loose floor board. Underneath it he found a copy of the map of the Spiderwick Estate. He found pictures of his wife and family. He also found a map from the local library of the woods that were a few blocks away from his house. With that one picture, the detective remembered Bella asking him about them.

“Daddy, what's in the woods?”

“Oh Hun, it's a mystery. Not many people venture in there. Mommy did when she was little though, before the woods had overgrown and become the home of all those wild animals.”

“What did she say about it? Did she like them?”

“She adored the woods. She often told me about an old cottage that she and her sisters would play in. She loved those woods more than anything when she was your age.”

“Hmm. I miss mommy.”

This had been weeks and weeks ago. It was a miracle he still remembered at all, as he had been working on a huge case at the time. He grabbed his son and jumped in their truck. He drove well past the speed limit and reached the woods in less than two minutes. Ezekial jumped out of the car and ran into the dark woods before his father could grab him to stop him. These woods were crawling with natural predators. At the thought of this, the detective shivered and ran just as fast as his son without a second thought. Ezekial had become quite mad and was screaming Bella's name as loud as he could. After about three calls, he was rewarded with a child's shriek back. They ran as fast as they could towards it, but on the way Ezekial bent over and grabbed the longest, sharpest stick he could find. The detective screamed his daughter's name until he became hoarse in the throat but got a reply back not from his daughter, but from a wolf. Ezekial turned around with his eyes widened in fear for his young sister.

After running for five more minutes at full speed, Ezekial reached a small cottage much before his father did. The wolf noticed him before he did. He stopped with a groan as he saw the large black wolf pacing the outer perimeter. The wolf lunged itself at Ezekial, but years of sports left him quick on his feet. Ezekial jumped out of the way, escaping the wolf's claws and teeth by only inches. He swung the stick around and hit the wolf in his abdomen, tossing it into a tree. The wolf tumbled down, but he recovered very quickly.

Ezekial saw the wolf get up and begin to pace. It was obviously planning out its next move. Ezekial just prayed the next move had nothing to do with the timid, scared, little girl bundled up in the cottage. The wolf had very obviously decided its next move was to lunge past Ezekial into the cottage window, but as soon as it leaned back to leap, the detective had a log held very high over the wolf's head. He brought it down with the intensity of an alpha trying to protect the youth of his broken pack. The wolf simply slid to the ground. It looked more peaceful than dangerous in death, and it scared Ezekial very much. It is much easier to kill something if you know they are evil, but the truth is that wolf was just a victim to its instincts and growling stomach. Ezekial turned on his heels and ran in the cottage without another word.

His sister was sitting in the corner, clutching a very old blanket and a doll. The book was sitting next to her, tucked underneath the blanket carefully. She was tired and seemingly unhurt, but famished. She obviously had not eaten since the dinner that caused her to flee.

“Bella, you're okay,” said the detective.

“Daddy, I'm so sorry I left. But I had to! And look what I found,” murmured Bella, as she held out a blanket with her mother's name embroidered into it. She passed the doll to Ezekial, and as he examined it, he noticed it was the spitting image of his mother as a little girl. It was porcelain and painted expertly. No other hand except his mother's could have made such a beautiful thing. It was dusty and dirty, and it must have been decades old, but it gave him a

strange feeling of calm. His little sister had run off to find his mother, and in doing so, she found pieces of her for both of them. Tears silently ran down all three of their cheeks.

“Bella, mommy's not here anymore. She's watching down on you, and she'll always be with you, but not here in this cottage, in your heart. So come home baby girl, let's go home, okay Ezekial, okay Bella?” said the detective with tears in his eyes. And they did.

They went to the hospital and had Bella examined. All she needed was a good line of fluids, and a good meal. Ezekial realized something that night, as well as the detective. Even though dreams of his mother and them becoming whole again made it easier to survive by cracking jokes to mask his insecurity, it didn't help him live. It didn't help any of them live. They were all living with a ghost in their home. As much as they all loved their mother, and wife, they must let her go. Bella can dream all she wants, but her mother cannot live on with her the way she wants anymore. The way their mother lives on with them is in an entirely new, special way. She lives on embedded in their very hearts and even in the tokens of love they found in the cottage. They have learned to not continue to hold on. They let go of her, and they held on to each other for once. They went home, holding hands, feeling as whole as they ever will. It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, after-all.



7:54

By Marques Parker



7:51. Panicked screams of the students echoed through the yellow school bus as it continued to accelerate. No matter how hard the bus driver tried, he couldn't fix the jammed gas pedal. The brake and the emergency brake did nothing to slow down the bus as it neared a heavy intersection.

7:52. The speedometer read 80mph as the bus entered the intersection. While weaving in and out of the intersection, the students were catapulted out of their seats and thrown against the finger stained windows. Cars were swerving and skidding, trying to avoid the bus, but sadly, not the other cars. By the time the yellow blur that was the school bus had safely made it out of the intersection, about three piles of cars were in the middle of the street.

7:53. After narrowly surviving the intersection, the bus began nearing the prestigious MacIntosh Middle School at 94mph and counting. The bus driver's hands were flying around the steering wheel, trying to somehow slow down the bus. He was so set on trying to stop the bus (and tune out the hollers of horror and the scared screams of the students) the driver didn't notice an orange school bus come flying out of a passing neighborhood. The students screamed, knowing that their future was written and their fate was signed. Just as the orange bus was about to hit the rapidly advancing bus (which was moving at 104mph now), the time ominously changed from 7:53 to...

7:54.

# "A Soldier's Christmas"

By Emilie Robins

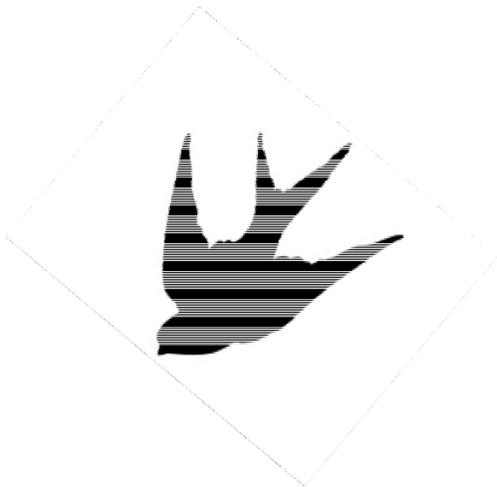
This Christmas, for most of my companions, was yet another gruesome year of miserable fighting, cold, sopping trenches, loneliness, and despair. But to me, it was much more than a mark of darkness. For even in my misery, I could feel the glow of God and the true meaning of Christmas illuminating my heart and lighting my path as does the star of our savior guiding us to peace. To share this magical light inside of me with others, I manage every year to spark the joy of my companions by giving out small, yet special gifts with the miniscule sum of money I earn for laboring in the war. This year would be different, as my troops' year had been tough and our supplies were lacking; I had no money, and therefore, I truly believed, I had nothing to give.

My heart was sinking, hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute. After about five demoralizing hours under the pitch, black sky, I finally conjured up the strength to carry my burdensome weight back to the dorm and turn myself in for the night. After traveling a couple of miles in the treacherous snow, I came to a sudden halt, dead in my tracks, for about a hundred feet in front of me lay a motionless outline, shadowed by the stormy clouds blocking the moonlight's glow. There I stood, still as a lioness tracking her prey, pondering the identity of this mysterious figure. It was much too small to be a fallen member of a bison pack, so evaluating by size, I justified it safe enough to move closer. After all, it was probably just a young deer that had frozen to death, similar to the ends of a lot of us out here. As I reached the lump of darkness, I jumped back aghast. No, it was not a bison nor a deer, nor any wild creature of that sort, but a soldier, trembling from the frigid gales, on the edge of death.

My dilated eyes scanned his helpless body, dried blood caked one of his immobilized legs. Many deep wounds covered his body from head to toe, but what stood out the most was the emblem on his uniform, which was not identical to mine! We did not stand on the same frontier as brothers. We were enemies. As soon as my horrified eyes noticed this staggering detail, my body froze. Every muscle stiffened. I swear my heart skipped a beat. My blood turned icy cold. As if on cue, my shaky hand gripped my gun and just as my fingers went to pull the trigger, something happened, a magical moment that

I could never explain. My hand relaxed and my deadly weapon crashed to the ground at my feet, I quickly stripped myself of my dirty, ragged clothes and, kneeling by the poor man's side, wrapped his body as comfortably as I could and slung him lightly over my shoulder. With renewed strength, I trudged through the snow heading to an old, abandoned shed I had discovered many days earlier, for the infirmary would never take a presumed enemy under their aid. The long dreaded miles turned into short footsteps as I came to the clearing where the small shed stood. Gently laying the pained man down on the old, dried straw, I built a fire and smoked some mutton I had rationed for my Christmas dinner. I knelt to the ground and lifted the meat to his weary lips. Even through his throbbing despair, a look of gratefulness I had never before seen in my life flickered in his eyes, a peaceful, thankful, loving glow, a light of Christmas. Deep in my heart I felt at peace. No longer did my heart sustain guilt for not being able to afford a tangible gift for my companions, for I had given the gift of myself. I had given the true gift of Christmas.

Looking out the shed's boarded windows, the clouds had cleared and a star, the star of God gleamed radiantly down upon me. I smiled to myself and my heart filled with warmth. I was filled with Christmas.



# High School Poetry

## "My Heart Belongs To You"

By Esther Brincat

My heart belongs to you,  
And though oceans separate us,  
We are no longer two.

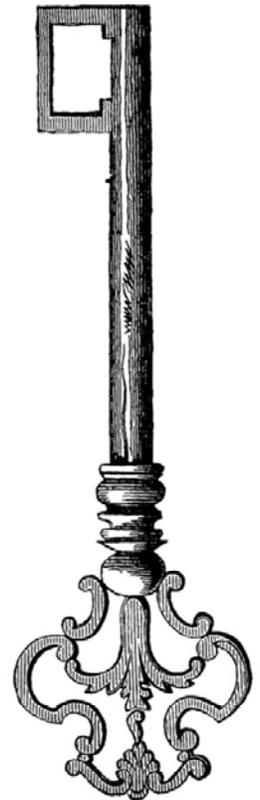
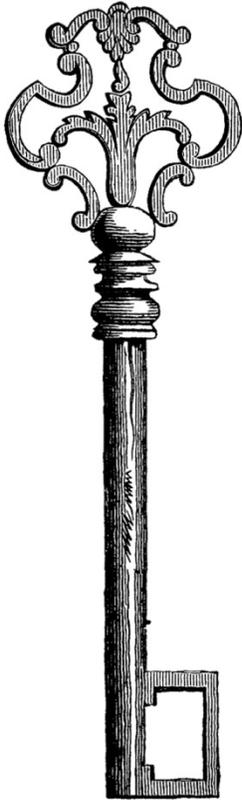
We've become one,  
And that is alright,  
And though agony comes in the night,  
I know my heart belongs to you.

And when the warm sun rises,  
Along the coasts of this shore,  
I know that our love binds us,  
Like two ropes never wanting to be torn,

My heart belongs to you.  
And I will wait,  
I wait for you.

My spirit rests on this shore,  
And knowing that never more,  
Will you be away for long.

Nevermore... Nevermore...  
Will we be apart,  
Nevermore...Nevermore...  
Will the Sands of Patience stop my heart,  
From loving you.  
For my heart belongs to you.



# "Blackout"

By April Contreras

1891

This wasn't supposed to happen.

The womb is a life's haven.

It is a mistake I must wash

away.

It is a sin to take a waiting breath

Why did he leave me?

How could someone be so beastly?

I have been thrown in the

shadows.

Her soul must be tarnished in

Everyone has a secret.

A murderer would call him an it.

I have no

choice.

There is always a

There is no time.

I will not hear you lie.

I am

suffocating.

He will be left

It is the only thing I can let go.

You will have much to owe.

It is not even alive to

attack.

He is so helpless that he cannot even

Nobody can hear me scream!

Hear His angels sing!

How can they be so

blind?

How can she be so

I don't want this curse.

You are smoldering the greatest gift.

I am in my own personal

hell.

You will surely burn in

# "Gone"

By Rube Faye

My thoughts are tangled in a web full of rage

I have too much anger for a girl my age

When I think about it feels as if I'm going insane

Step in my shoes and I bet you'll feel the same

I can't look in the mirror, I don't wanna see my face

'Cause I'd only see all the things I would like to change

Scratches up my arms because I love the pain

All these bad things I just wish they were dreams

So I could toss and turn to wake myself from my sleep

Lieing here blank with my eyes to the ceiling

Sinking deep into all my depressed feelings

Trying to erase all the stress from my brain

Hands on my ears 'cause they fill my head with hate

You can look but you won't find

By the time you hear this song you'll be

It's too late 'cause I'm gone.....



*Samantha Hayashi*

1891

## "New Day"

By Samantha Hayashi

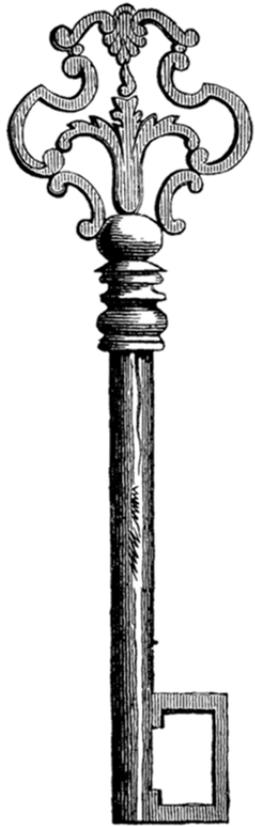
Rain drops fall in light or dark, day and night,  
Clearing only for unforgiving sun.  
Leaving behind clouds of pure silver white,  
Reaching earth light uncovers the world's fun.  
Light blue cracks the dark spreading, and I smile.  
Jumping leaping all around the meadow,  
Welcome the sun reaching for miles and miles.  
First color I see is golden yellow,  
It becomes too bright, so I close my eyes,  
And I listen to the sounds of morning.  
A young child watches the changing skies,  
Atop a hill in a meadow shouting,  
A new day is here wake up and restart,  
Work, sing, live your days with an open heart.

## "Cold Wind"

By Samantha Hayashi

The wind blows freely.  
Brushing against my warm skin.  
Making me shiver





## “Westward”

By Ben Jones

Summer mountains in the break  
not much farther to go  
High Sierras gleam so close  
soon forgotten will be our woes

These eves and days  
have made us sick  
the stars shine  
like separate globes

We have travelled so far  
so far our feet have bled,  
but summer mountains gleam so close  
and soon forgotten will be our woes



## “If”

By Ben Jones

The world could be full of flowers -  
- if I could let it.

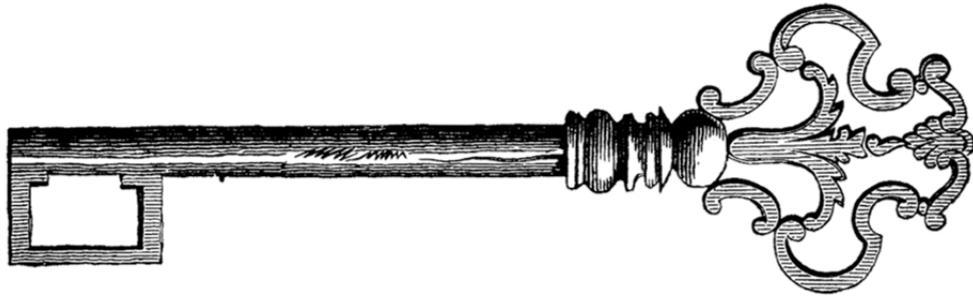
I could make my nights  
enwrapped wine-colored with deep silks.  
I could live in a blossoming world  
- if I could only find the road.

# “The Way of Man”

By Jeri Rose Mallory

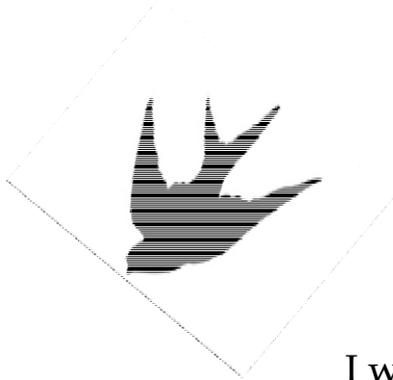
They gather around the fire,  
For tonight is the night,  
A night for sorrow,  
A night for fright.  
The moon has risen,  
And with it the fear,  
Will the creatures come out?  
Are they already here?  
The drum is always beating,  
Steady and true.  
The rhythm is constant,  
The beat is in you.  
It sends a warning to all,  
Who dare to approach?  
A warning to the creatures,  
If they dare encroach.  
They are armed to the teeth,  
With quivers and bows,

With knives used for carving,  
With spears poised to throw.  
When the battle begins,  
And the blood starts to flow  
They fight from the high ground,  
The creatures, the low.  
The battle was long,  
But when the sun starts to rise,  
They sing songs of triumph,  
And victory cries.  
The battle was won,  
But the war still goes on.  
For they will not rest,  
Til the creatures are gone.  
They will always fear,  
What they don't understand.  
It is irrational,  
The way of man.



# “Where’s My Hero?”

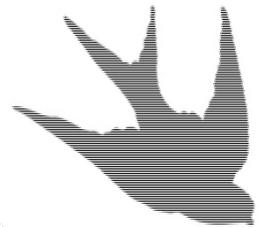
By Renee Tesarek



2

Superman can fly,  
Spiderman has his webs,  
Batman can fight,  
But what do I have?  
“Let’s play superheroes!”  
I was always the useless Invisible Man.  
I was left abandoned,  
While everyone else played and ran.  
Then one day that useless superhero,  
He would just disappear- on to the next land.  
But nobody ever misses  
The Invisible Man.

Where was Superman when they were taken from me?  
Where was Spiderman during my distress?  
Where was Batman to defeat *my* Jokers?  
Where were my heroes when I was trapped in my mess?  
Tip-toeing through Gotham City,  
I yelled at the top of my lungs.  
My Bat Signal must be broken,  
Because my superhero never comes.  
Forgotten and abandoned,  
In the dark alleys filled with crime.  
Each day I lose myself more and more,  
To Venom’s awful lies.  
So I, the Invisible Man,  
Will sit here forever waiting.  
But most days I doubt that  
My Superhero will ever save me.



Patented March 21, 1876.  
NO. H 125

# High School Short Story and Essay



## “Born to Be Tame”

By William Culbreth



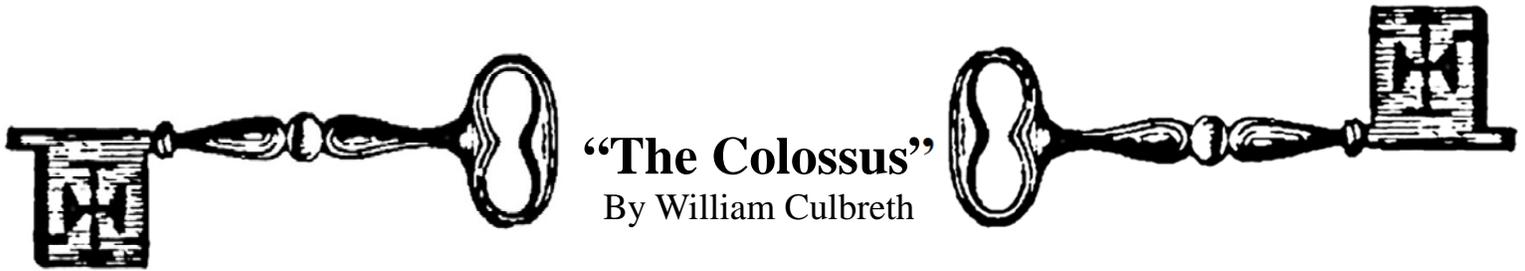
Every day, repeatedly picking up tiny pieces of bedding and transporting them into the hut where his lazy cage mates slept, tiny Leonardo constantly lumbered back and forth. Like Cinderella, this beautiful golden creature was left outside to toil in the glaring light. He shared a glass cage in a noisy pet shop with five other hamsters. Little children excitedly banged on the glass imploring, “I want to hold one!” The indifferent employees roughly handled the hamsters when they took them out for display to prospective buyers. The poor hamster lived a truly uncomfortable existence.

One day, a couple of onlookers remarked how lovely, smart and industrious he appeared and Leonardo was liberated from his misery. A hand grabbed him, and the rodent suddenly found himself inside a small cardboard box. The cardboard container was then placed in a moving vehicle. It was truly a strange sensation. The hamster crashed about with agitation. Finally the motion stopped. The cardboard box was taken inside a building. When he arrived there, he did not know where he was, and his reaction was really uncivilized and he continued to thrash around. A wire cage with a small pile of multi-colored food, a suspended water bottle and a mesh exercise wheel waited for him. He was very confused by the new odors and sounds. Since he was not used to human kindness and comfort, he ignored outstretched fingers and hands that wanted him to get familiar with them. Instead, all he could do was to run like a whirling dervish. Eventually, after he was offered enough treats, he began to imprint with the humans. Over time, he settled into his new home with comfy bedding and a large squeaky wheel for exercise.

The life of the little hamster continued with a predictable rhythm. Nutrition was replenished every other day. He would eat his fill and then squirrel the remainder away in his tinted plastic hide-out attached to the side of the cage. The humans went to bed at eleven P.M. and the rest of the night was his as he ran contently in his wheel in the darkness alone. He did not think about the world beyond his cage and why would he? He had enough food, enough warmth – sometimes too much warmth in the summer when the interior of the house became too hot for the little creature without sweat glands who would lie on his back seeking relief-and enough entertainment. He was too small, too timid and too light colored to blend in well with the outside world so he knew to stay put. All was well until the night when a strange apparition appeared. Leonardo saw a vision of Marble, a household pet from the past who got his name from his chocolate and white markings. With a white stripe on his back, Marble looked like a miniature skunk and perhaps he was related to the skunk family. In fact, his skunk cousins may have called him away into the wild. Marble was fearless. He had tried to escape one dark night by crawling out onto the porch and though he was recaptured, he disappeared for good a short time later.

The vision commanded Leonardo to come out and join him in the wild. “Come on friend, break out and be free! There is so much to do out here.” Using his wheel as a support, the little golden hamster pushed on the door of his cage, it popped out. He flew through the air and immediately landed with a light thud on the ground. Once he recovered, the hamster discovered that the apparition had disappeared. Leonardo panicked, “Where should I

go? I don't where should I go!" He lacked the bravado of the tiny skunk hamster. Leonardo looked around despondently and wished he had never broken out of his cage. The rodent missed his wheel and his stockpile of food. All he could do was curl up on the floor in a corner below his cage and go to sleep. When daylight broke, he was awakened by voices that sounded familiar first calling his name – though he never would answer – and then exclaiming, "There he is!" All the same, he was afraid to look up so he played dead. Suddenly he was lifted upward by a hand and he found himself back in his cage with all his comforts: his bedding, his wheel, his food stock, and his water bottle. He was grateful to be home. The wild life was not for him. He was too timid and he enjoyed his creature comforts too much. Some animals are house pets and others, like Marble, cannot be tamed. Leonardo was the former type of creature. He was not meant to answer the "call of the wild."



In our front yard, there is a deodar tree. It is tall and it has a lot of sharp, pointy green leaves, huge heavy branches and bristly pinecones. It's like a giant who stands with outstretched arms; it is like a monstrous beast. This giant is a source of activity for wildlife. Squirrels use it as their home or hiding place for their treasure like juicy oranges they carry from the backyard orchard, cats use it as a scratching pole, ravens strut menacingly under its branches, and parrots fly to the top and squawk noisily while they evade the cats that scratch below. But not all the parrots succeed. One day a cat must have caught one of the parrots and we found it dead under the tree. We dug a little hole and we buried it there because we were afraid to touch the scary odd looking bird and transport it someplace else. So now the deodar shades a parrot graveyard.

There are two petite houses near this colossus. The deodar was planted back in the 1920's when the first homeowners bought the dwellings. During the summer, the tree gets very dry and the grass turns brown like hay and the arbor emits a dry tangy perfume. The tree drops desiccated, crunchy needles, which cover a lounge chair under the tree and our sidewalk. They stab and attach to my feet when I walk barefoot on the sidewalk. The arbor provides much needed shade. During the course of the day its shadow moves across the lawn but sadly it never covers the house. In the fall, when the Santa Ana winds blow, the branches sway back and forth angrily. We become worried that the tree will collapse onto the house. But the evergreen is strong and it never leans over no matter how strong the winds become.

During the winter, the rain wets the deodar and the tree exudes a fresh, sweet scent. The tree loses raindrops to the ground. During this season, the needles plummet and create a soft mat that is gentle on my feet when I step on it, shoeless. When I do wear shoes, the needles and the mud stick to them and make a caked mess. The tree does not do anything during the winter when it is dormant but the wildlife still enjoys its sanctuary.

Sometimes the colossal deodar is very annoying, other times we appreciate the tree because it keeps us cool, especially during the summer when we are very grateful for its shade. Our neighbor does not like it and would like to chop it down because it is too messy. But other people in the community might protest against this action because it is part of the history of the city. We believe if it were gone, our house would look odd. Our residence would look like it is missing something because the conifer was there from the beginning. It took 80 years for it to grow into the tallest tree in our front yard. We do think that if we lost the gigantic evergreen, we would lose a piece of history and a part of our neighborhood that makes it unique.

# "The Apothecary's Dilemma"

By Natasha Culbreth

Warm light and herbal perfume seeped from the apothecary's shop as it stood in the dark narrow alley way. A boy soon approached, forcefully grasping his hand in bitter agony as he neared. When he entered the shop's light, his ratty appearance soon became evident. His soiled garments torn and stained by blotted scarlet. His once noble bronze hair reduced to dark elf-locks, his once fair green eyes clouded with disease. Inside the shop the pain lessened as his attention diverted to the array of items littering the small shop's messy displays and shelves. On a table near the open door sat herbs of all varieties, known and unknown alike; to them he owed the shop's myriad of scents. On the walls hung an exotic arrangement of animals, ranging from the common to the rarity of fanciful legends and stories. On a wall hung the stuffed and preserved head of a kelpie, the greasy locks of the horse-like creature could not hide its distinctive square pupil eyes. Beside it, protruding from a wooden base was the head of a faun, its eyes closed, horns artificially shined to perfection. Atop a glass case stood a Harpy, her majestic gray feathered head cocked to the side as its vacant eyes stared and red lips remained parted, as if still contemplating her prey. The boy remained awed by the creature, for its size was comparable to him.

"A beautiful creature, isn't she?"

The boy turned. An elderly man sat at his glass display, a long carved pipe was pressed to his lips. The man's eyes shone with wisdom and mystic from under his thick dark eyebrows. His face remained somewhat hidden behind the ashen tangles of his beard. Behind the man were shelves of jars containing small preserved animals surrounded by green fluid and batches of herbs. Under the glass counter were a collection of insect-like creatures, which came in a numberless varieties and colors in wings and shape, but all shared the same humanoid features. Creatures one could only consider to be fairies.

"Well, are you here only to stand gaping?" growled the man. The boy rubbed his arm as the pain steadily returned, along with the string of nausea, fever, and hunger which followed.

"I need help." the boy managed to mutter, as his face and eyes grew red with agitation.

"Don't we all. Could you be any more vague, boy?" the man growled in return, gazing from behind the veil of fragrant smoke which arose from his pipe.

The boy trembled as he held out his arm gingerly across the counter, looking from it to the elderly man. The man stood up in surprise, carefully moving the layer of soiled cloth which surrounded it as the boy winced. The wound was deep, turning green and rotting from infection.

"What did this, and when?"

"A wolf, three nights prior."

The man shook his head as his pipe returned to his lips creating another circle of smoke.

"Vague boy."



"I don't know exactly what type of wolf it was, all I knew was that it was rabid."

"How did you get bitten in the first place?"

"I had gone out hunting, with my hounds a week before. That was when I first met the beast. It startled me and my dogs, I narrowly escaped, as it took every single one-" the boy was cut off by a low chuckle from the man.

"One wolf managed to kill every single one of your dogs?"

"It was a large thing, had the strength of ten men fueled by a crazed passion for blood." said the boy, wincing again as the pain powerfully waved through his arm.

"Enraged, I set out revenge on the beast. I searched for it and eventually did find it. I was far away from home when it attacked. I came this time with every weapon I could carry, still it overtook me and tore at my arm before I could get proper aim at it. I did manage to kill it, but blacked out from the illness the creature brought. I had to return on foot, for my horse had twisted its ankle during the fight. I finally stumbled into this section of town over two days of painful traveling: I had no supplies to tend to the wound."

"Was it a werewolf?"

The boy froze. He turned his head as he finally gave into the reality he feared. The poor boy, thought the man, intoxicated by the sickness inside him. The youth was probably a beggar, attacked by such a creature while wasting away in the streets. This boy was too gullible and naïve to be in a healthy state of mind.

"Do you have something to help?"

The man took a pondering puff from his pipe, before bending over the counter and casting one last gaze onto the gruesome wound. The boy's eyes grew dull, vacantly reflecting the warm light around him as they dimmed. He was very weak, his complexion pale around his jutting bones and weary eyes. He was very ill, and would certainly not survive. Even if he did, he was sure to become one of them and begin an even worse existence than his current one.

"There is nothing that can be done," the man said sullenly, turning away from the boy.

"Please sir, I can pay," feverous tears began to drop down his ill cheek before grasping his stomach in distress.

"The pain will grow, until you can't bear it, until it takes you. You will be one of them." the man mumbled, now removing the pipe from his worn lips.

"Please, there must be something. I can pay."

The elder could not bear the sight of the youth as he stood in agony. The boy, still trembling, managed to produce a brilliant pocket watch from his ragged pocket. The watch was enclosed in styled silver, with the name Leonard Lyon engraved inside, the delicate hands of which still took excellent time.

"Take it, please. I know you have something that can cure me. I am a rich noble by birth and cannot return home in this state. I am as good as dead in this condition; I can pay more later if it is as you wish. I am willing to pay anything."

The man felt sullenly sorry for the miserable youth, he had probably stolen the watch while living on the streets. Yes, this boy was a thief outside of his delusional mind. No one would miss the boy, and the man could easily put the youth out of his misery.

"Alright," the man hesitated but soon placed confidence into his mind. He was doing what was right. "Stay here. I shall return with a cure."

The boy's dimming eyes lit with a small glint of naive hope. The life of a werewolf was no existence for any man. Treated wrongfully by the public and officials, even the wealthiest when infected fell into a life of poverty and theft, soon believing themselves to be animals. The disease was painful. No, the boy was better off dead than living. The man returned, enclosed in his hand was a cyan bottle, which he placed on the counter before the boy. He was even sicklier than before, his eyes blood shot and skin absent of all earthly color.

"Drink, if you must. It will cure you."

Cautiously the youth took the bottle, and before drinking he glanced at the man one more time, the poor boy too feverous to question, too ill to care. The youth drank slowly, leaving the entire bottle dry. He closed his eyes as his body numbed, finally falling to the ground. The man moved from his counter to gaze as the boy took one final breath.

"It is better this way," the man whispered to himself. No guilt came over him as he watched the boy's chest settle. The pain was gone now. The man bent down to the body, his knees ached from the sudden movement. As he examined the boy, prying open his pockets. His gaze shifted to the boy's chest for a moment. The boy's neck tie lay about his neck in a disheveled manner, his shirt was loose and stained a grimy yellow by his sweat. His vest was open, revealing his pale bare chest, there lay a mark of scarlet and green puss. It seemed to be deep and narrow, with a small metallic object lodged within it. The man looked at it, then grabbed the boy's arm once more. They were scratches and bites, deep, but not of a werewolf. They appeared more akin to the slashes of a sword, and the bite of a common dog. Nevertheless, the man reassured himself, the boy was a simple pauper; no one could accuse the man of murder. As for the wounds, those were none of his business, and could remain a mystery for all he cared. He dragged the body out back, and buried it. Having no use for the watch he placed it with the assortment of other expensive goods he had, not expecting anyone to ever buy it.

Several weeks later, two strange youths entered the shop, boasting fine leather jackets and boots. Why such strutting boys ventured into this ragged town was unknown to the man. They regarded the room in identical awe, admiring the stuffed pelts and old artifacts. They soon remembered their reason for coming after taking in the exotic wonders of the room.

"Sir, we are looking for a boy." said the straightforward one, as his comrade continued to stare around at the shop.

"With youth comes vague words." the man blew a puff from his pipe while eyeing the boys with annoyance.

"My brother, he was last seen out hunting. He may be injured. We've traced his steps to this town, no one has claimed to have seen him. We were wondering if perhaps you caught sight of him. He is a brown haired boy, about my height and age. His name is Leonard Lyon."

The man managed to suppress his shock. He did not know what to say. Was the miserable boy who he claimed to be?

"I have seen no such boy." the man lied. "No one frequents my shop these days, especially not youth."

The straightforward one nodded with a slight smile of thanks, although disappointment rose in his expression. They were to leave, however the curious one stopped the other, muttering something in his ear as he gestured to one of the displays.

"C-can we see that watch in this display?" the straightforward one stammered. The old man's heart seemed to pause for a moment. The watch, the cursed watch. The man could do nothing but approach the glass display case, and remove the watch. They held it gingerly, awed by the object.

"Where did you get this?" asked the other one.

"A man came in, traded it for some money."

"Yesterday a mad pauper came to me, claiming he had seen my brother off in the forest pestering an old werewolf. We bribed him with this very watch to tell us where my brother had gone, he directed us to this town and ran off with the watch."

For the first time the old man realized something about the watch, on the interior lay etched a portrait of a boy.

"Who is that?" asked the man.

"That is the very brother we are searching for."

The man gave a small sigh of relief at this, for this was not the boy who had come to his shop. But then came the sudden realization: the pauper was the werewolf, taking the garments and identity of the noble boy, all in a vain attempt to receive a cure for his illness, too maddened by disease to accept that no cure existed.

The two youths left, off to search another shop or town in the vain pursuit of a possibly dead brother. As the man was too weary from what had occurred, he closed up shop early that night. He chained the store below and climbed the creaking mold infested staircase to his small apartment. As he drew the old tattered curtains of his apartment window, something caught his eye. He trembled as he saw his garden in the moonlight; a large empty hole had taken the place in which the dead boy had been buried.



## **"Deer Hunt Story"**

By Sierra Lompfrey



The thick bang reverberated through the valley as the deer collapsed on the hillside in a heap. He was a 3 point buck, approximately 2 years old. I felt so accomplished. My uncle, dad, and I had been hunting for three days; the next day my youth tag for area 22 expired and we were going home, deer or no deer. Filling my fourth tag with an exceptional buck was a great feeling, but the experience of how I got him is worth more to me, and the memory will always stay with me.

Thursday, October 27<sup>th</sup> a little after noon, my dad and I began our trip. We have a cabin, which is over a three hour drive from our house. Instead of going to our cabin for the night, we made a detour and scanned my area before sundown. We saw eight does; however, my dad and I agreed I would be shooting for a buck. We met up with my uncle at our cabin and had some hearty chili, then retired early for the evening, as we would be waking up about an hour before sunrise to be on location.

Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, the morning weather was frigid--26 degrees--but it did warm up considerably throughout the day. To a Nevadan that's used to 115 degree summers, this was shocking! Bundled up, we headed out in the jeep and began the day. Originally the plan was to return to the cabin around noon, but we didn't end up getting back until seven that night. We drove all over the mountain to no avail. Once when we were driving, we spotted a herd of deer. They were at the base of two knolls grazing. Being too far away to clearly glass them, we drove a ways on a dirt road, parked, and took an extensive hike to get a better look. The wind was at our backs, though, and by the time we got close enough, they were gone. Their tracks were abundant, but they were nowhere to be seen. We returned to the jeep and carried on. At noon, atop a sage covered mountain overlooking the vast desert valley, we had lunch. The view was unconventionally appealing. After we ate, we scanned the hillsides and 700 yards away, saw a group of six does grazing. However, I was not going to settle for a third doe; I wanted a modest gun rack to hang in our game-room. I did feel somewhat guilty for surpassing so many does, (about 30 that day) but I kept my goal in mind.

Saturday, October 29<sup>th</sup> we planned on returning to the cabin by 10:00 because there were many things that needed to be done, and if I didn't get my deer we would make our last effort that evening before dawn. This day, we changed our tactic and decided to go to the area by the highway where the deer constantly crossed, and many got killed. In the meadow, it was difficult to differentiate objects

in the dusky monotones. My fingers were throbbing from the cold air that inevitably entered my gloves. My uncle and I were scanning the meadows around us, but my dad wandered nearer to the highway. Suddenly, it happened. Three deer bounded through the brush and trees. Simultaneously, we ran after them, planning on cutting them off when they reached the clearing. It worked; 200 yards in front of me stood a massive stag. Forgetting the prior numbness, I ripped off my gloves and steadied my gun. I aimed and pulled, forgetting in the excitement that it was on safety. Time seemed to race against me. Fumbling with the lever, I pulled back and put my scope on him. It was so frenetic because I knew if I didn't pull the trigger as soon as I had an opportunity, just in hopes of more accuracy, he could bolt and disappear in the pinions. I squeezed and froze. The buck kicked erratically and took off with the does. We were puzzled; there was no blood or fur with his tracks. My dad and I followed his racing footsteps through the forest for 300 yards. The tracks never seemed to slow, and no blood or fur was visible. Timing is indisputably crucial when hunting. The miss dampened my hopes, despite my dad's condolences of the 'rushed nature' of the shot and my uncle's stories of his misaiming during his antelope hunt. That deer was huge and there was no denying the pride and envy it would bring stuffed on a wall. The day marched on, and I forgot about that steed as we saw more bucks. At one point, my dad was stopping the jeep on a hillside to scope out the hill across from us because he saw a white butt when my uncle spotted a buck 10 feet off the side of the road. This area had a lot of juniper and pinion trees, and when we got out, deer tracks also. The deer was spooked by the white jeep, and my reactions were not exactly exigent. Anyway, as he was disappearing in the thicket, my uncle reported that he saw two problems with that deer: it was puny, and it only had one antler. As the morning continued, we saw more deer, and most were forked-horns. Some progress is better than none. At about 9:00, my dad decided to go to the location he often advised others to try, yet never went to himself. The sun was warm, but the air was still cool. As we rounded the bend into the valley, the yellowness of the area was prevalent. On the hillside there were scattered burned cypresses, and a herd of about six deer: two bucks and four doe. The location was ideal: there was not too much plant life to conceal the animals, and they were virtually trapped because they wouldn't run down towards us, and running up was quite a ways. We jumped out of the jeep and moved closer to them. They took very little notice of us. My uncle scoped out the bigger buck with his Swarovski while my dad propped up the shooting sticks for me. I sat down and was able to carefully aim. I had to wait for the buck because the position he was in made it so a tree branch blocked his vitals. Indifferently, I held the crosshairs over his body. Moments after he stepped out from behind the tree, I constricted my fingers and held the rifle steady as the bullet flew from the barrel. The deer toppled to the ground, and the others ran to the East. Smiling, we high fived and went to collect the deer. We took pictures, and then my uncle gutted him. We then dragged him down the hill where my uncle parked the jeep. Just then, a red Chevy turned the same corner and pulled up next to our jeep. It was my dad's boss. He congratulated me, then motioning to the deer, said his son passed this buck up yesterday but missed some 'monsters' earlier in the morning so he came back to claim this one. Like I said, timing is everything. On the highway, returning to our cabin, I checked the time and it was just after 10:00.

That Saturday was my dad's birthday, and while the UNLV shirt and coffee mug I got for him were back at home, I think the deer was sufficient for the day's celebration. It was a fun trip and I'm glad I got to go, even though it coincided with some Halloween parties, I managed. A lot of my friends, girls and boys alike, would love to have the opportunity to go hunting like my family does, and I'm especially grateful to be one of the few girls in my generation who does.





## "Soul Mate"

By Aimee Mahoney



The bodies on the floor broke her heart as she stepped over and around them. Tears threatened to spill, and she couldn't swallow the lump in her throat. She didn't know these people, and didn't have a reason to care about them, but because of their closeness and the realistic sense of having them near her, the unusual feeling of depression set in her bones. Had she been home, reading in comfort, or watching a movie or news report, she would have felt nothing for these people, no matter how much she thought of their families and lives. Here, it was real. Here, it was her. Here, she had spilled blood.

Souls appeared before her and the tears that had begun to fall stopped, as she pulled them to her with an unknown power. She watched almost helplessly as the warehouse ghosts ran from the force that drew them to her and her heart wrenched a little more. She was finally able to let the few that remained go, feeling only slightly satiated, and turned towards the door.

"I'm proud of you, young one, but if you do not take those that remain, they will wander here forever without purpose and without rest. Put them out of their misery, my dear." Tears threatened her eyes again as she turned back and took the remaining spirits for herself, obeying the man that had appeared before the door. "Well done." He noticed her tears. "The guilt will disappear as you grow into it. Let's go home, young daughter of the Aelos." She hadn't asked for this fate. She did not want the guilt to disappear. She did not want to become a heartless soul-sucker. But she followed the man out the door and sat quietly next to him on the previously empty park bench. Street lamps lit their spot, and she put her hood over her eyes, trying to suppress the tears. The man's voice split the silence and he spoke an incantation to take them home.

A boy walked down the street, the path familiar from weathered travel, noticing a feminine hooded figure alone on the bench. He walked up and spoke a soft greeting to her, but she did not move. He crouched before her, trying to see her face. Her eyes were hidden in the shadows of the hood, but her milky white skin shone in the dim lamp light. Her lips were clamped tightly together, and a tear ran down the side of her face. He backed up in shock. "Are you okay?" She looked desperately to her right as if someone were there, then back at him quickly. "Do you speak English? Are you from here? Are you lost?" he asked softly, as to not startle her again. Her eyes revealed themselves as she met his gaze with a fearful and guilty look. He gasped.

They shone a bright blue with veins of silver running through them, almost seeming to move in the depths of her eyes. He stared wonderingly at the swirling silver, moving as if they were spirits, swimming in the oceans of her eyes. As if the ghosts noticed him looking at them, they seemed to look toward him, reaching out for him, and suddenly, they were escaping her eyes and floating toward him, mouths open in silent shrieks. The girl suddenly disappeared. He stood up in amazement, beginning to feel dazed and forgetting what had just happened to him, while those bright but pale blue eyes seared the back of his mind.

Days passed and the girl didn't return to the human's civilized world. He distinctly remembered her beautiful eyes, but couldn't conjure a name or where she was from. Memories were blurred and he couldn't quite remember anything that had happened with her. But as he walked home from work past the same park bench, his indistinct memory of a ghost coming at him sped up his pace the slightest bit. He knew he could go a different way without much change in time, but he felt he would meet her here again if she were to come back. And as he saw the hooded figure in the distance, he knew his efforts paid off.

Tonight, it had been an office worker staying late. Guilt surrounded her mind, and she couldn't see for a moment. Her head felt light, and she began to faint, letting the blackness be soothing to her troubled mind. But instead of an impact, she felt arms around her, and she opened her eyes, surprised. Her hood had fallen back, and she felt exposed as the boy she had met before saw her pale face with the eyes filled more with silver and her shimmering platinum curls. She tried to stand up, but her knees shook, and he held her arm tightly. His mouth moved, and she thought she could hear his voice, but she couldn't comprehend that he was speaking at all. Her mind raced, and she tried to clear it enough to try and understand him, but once she found he was talking to her, she couldn't get the words to click.

His chocolate eyes captivated her instead, so different from the pale eyes, skin, even hair, of the Aelos, The soul-suckers. The differences in normal people--she preferred to think she was at least a person--had always astounded her. Her people watched them from afar, secluding themselves from true civilization until they needed a soul. She was thankful that, at least, it wasn't necessary too often, and, when problems arose, people like her mentor took care of it. She lived the high life, if one didn't include the guilt that terrorized her every waking moment.

Pressure on her arm broke her from her reverie. Her eyes focused back on his, more politely rather than the deep infatuation from before. She tried to speak, but her tongue was thick in her mouth. He had an almost understanding look in his eyes, but she knew he would never understand her. She found the will to steady herself and broke away from his grasp. Without a word spoken, she turned and ran away, as far away as possible from him for his own safety. The worst thing would be for him to forever lose himself to her.

But he chased her. He hadn't forgotten her this time and he vowed to himself not to. He couldn't understand how he would forget those silver eyes with the blue veins-- such a beautiful blue that had him wishing the silver was gone. He ran, keeping track of her bouncing curls in the distance, wondering in the back of his mind how she was so fast. She turned the corner into where he knew was a dead end, as he passed it every day, and knew he had her. But when he rounded the corner, she was gone. He stood there, catching his breath, letting his mind race with questions, before he turned around and walked dejectedly home.

There wasn't any more that he could do. She was gone. He had a sinking feeling in his heart that she wasn't coming back again, that he would never see her again. Her face was all he could see when he closed

his eyes, and he found himself wishing he could just hear her voice. If she would just speak to him, he would be satisfied. He imagined her voice soft and sweet, but rich and full of emotion. How else could he describe it but by the things he felt when he only looked into her eyes. His denying mind decided he was in love with her and that he would do whatever it takes to find her again and be with her. 7891

Days turned to weeks and weeks to months, but she was the only thing on his mind, in spite of every other interference that his life could bring to him. He had never met so many pale, blonde, gray eyed girls in such a short span of life; it seemed almost supernatural. They were all pretty, but they lacked humanity, though he didn't realize that at the time. He wondered what would be different if the blue streaks filled their eyes instead.

A year passed and, with time, her image faded. She could see that he was finally forgetting her as she watched him carefully. As much as she knew that it was best for him, she didn't want to be forgotten. She enjoyed the intrigue and the attention. But this was for the best. Her mentor had worked hard to make him lose interest, although time was the one that took her away. She couldn't shake the feeling that it wasn't complete, that there was something more that needed to be done. She watched him, hood up, from the old park bench, as he walked past her, across the street. Her mentor appeared next to her.

"I can tell you know what is next. There is one blue piece in your left eye, and you know that he is the soul that will fill it. The guilt and the pain will be gone. That's what you really want, isn't it? You don't want him, and this way you will have his soul forever. You know this is what needs to be done. Go ahead, young one. He will be most vulnerable now, as you are like a fantasy, a dream to him. It's perfect. Go."

He disappeared at the end of his words and she got up silently with a depressed aura about her. She knew this was the only way that he would never be a problem to her or to her people. The rationalizing didn't make it any better for her, but she knew what she needed to do, and she crossed the street, shrouded in darkness as her mentor had been the night this began. Her increased sense of power only seemed to darken her mood as her foot touched the sidewalk behind him. She tried to destroy all traces of feeling as she slipped an arm around his neck with a hand over his mouth, the other with a knife to his heart.



He knew what was happening as soon as her hand hit his mouth. He felt the pressure on his chest, and he shook her hands away. She immediately moved the knife to his neck and he stilled. A small hand held onto his hair with an almost sensitive touch. "Are you going to kill me?" he asked. The only answer was more pressure into his neck. "That's yes, then," he choked out. "Do I get a final request or anything?" The pressure eased and he turned to look at her. She narrowed her eyes at him, almost angry, but he could see the despair that lay behind them. He wondered at his one-way conversation. There must be a reason she never said anything to him. "I want you to tell me your name, in your voice, no writing or silent letters or anything. Tell me."

Her eyes widened and he watched her lips part. He was tempted to kiss her, but he knew such a brash move would get him a knife through the heart. He figured it would be okay to die if the last thing he heard was her voice and her name.

"It's Alena."

Her voice was more sweetly beautiful than he had imagined. Before he could say anything more, there was a sharp pain across his chest. His spirit escaped his heart and went straight to her eyes, the final spot where he felt he belonged. Her eyes turned completely silver, and dampened to gray. He watched Alena drop his body and clean her knife. She walked away, and wondered out loud how she could have ever cared for such a random and useless human. His spirit wandered restlessly in her eyes, watching her true Aelos reality. There was no more emotion in her eyes.



## "Bench by the Road"

By Brenda Salas



*There's this place I like to go when I need a place to sit and think. I never spend much time there, but it's a nice place to escape to. All you have to do is take a step off the road. There, you will find my thinking place. It's a small patch of grass with a wooden bench, flowers grow around it. The sun beats down; there's not a single cloud in the sky. Feel free to sit upon it. If you do, I'm sure you'll feel the sense of peace I always get. But this place wasn't always so peaceful.*

*The place by the road, used to be quite dead. The grass never grew, weeds grew as they pleased, and the bench was barely in existence. I sat there anyways. For most of my life, I sat on this bench. Life? What use did I have for that? Once I escaped and sat down, I had no intention of going back. I felt that I belonged there.*

*In the place where others couldn't invade.....where life couldn't enter. I was finally free. No one could hurt me there. This is what I thought. What I didn't realize was that I was harming myself by staying there. I decided I liked it there,*

and that's all that mattered. I was going to lie down on that bench, and fall asleep. That's when she walked up.

The moment the girl appeared, I knew things would never be the same. She stepped onto the grass, and it turned green. The grass that had been dead for so long, and wouldn't regrow had been revived. The girl smiled at me, and knelt down. I stared at her with a sense of wonder. With a smile on her face, the girl began to pick at the weeds. They seemed to grow as fast as she was pulling them up. I couldn't understand why she would bother. The girl never looked up, or attempted to talk to me. She simply did her work. The longer she stayed, the more the grass grew. Soon there was nothing but green grass. The weeds were gone as well, but I knew that was only for the moment. The girl smiled at me kindly; this was a smile that was so foreign to me. I wasn't really sure how to comprehend it. It was then that she spoke to me.

"You need to move," she said. I shook my head. I wasn't going to leave my safe place, no matter who tried to make me. She smiled again, and grabbed my hands, pulling me up. She didn't force me to leave. The girl simply pulled me off the bench and sat me down in the green grass. She placed a hand on the metal arm of the old bench. To my surprise, it began to fix itself. "How are you doing that?" I asked, but she didn't answer me. It took a while, but with time, the bench was healed. She pulled me up, and sat me back down on the bench. I wondered why she had done all this. I couldn't fathom why anyone would care. Once again she surprised me.

The girl sat down next to me, and pulled me into her arms. "It's okay," she told me. "You don't have to try so hard." Something about these words made me break down. I had gotten the permission I had longed for so long. Finally, it was okay for me to be myself. I could stop lying to myself and others. I didn't have to force a smile on my face when I wanted nothing more than to break down and cry. She felt so warm-- not the kind of warm you get when you curl under your blankets with the heater on-- a different kind. She felt safe; she felt like home.

Home. There's another feeling that was foreign to me. I'd never known home, family, friends....any of that, it was all new to me. But somehow this one girl was able to bring all of these things into my life. For the first time I had a place to go to, where I felt safe. In her I found someone to confide in, someone I could trust when the rest of the world turned their backs on me. She was the first person to stop and sit with me, the first one to try and fix my safe place. After I was done

crying, the girl pointed to the ground and said, "Look." Flowers were growing at my feet. All around, flowers were blooming.

"You made them grow," I said to the girl, but she shook her head.

"You did this. The seeds were always there. Your tears set them free."

For the first time, in a long time, I felt a smile spread across my lips. This wasn't a forced smile to make sure others didn't worry. This was a smile of pure joy.

"I'm proud of you," she said.

How long did I long to hear those words? I couldn't believe someone had said that to me. I had finally made someone proud. I couldn't believe it. This all felt too good to be true. It was then that the girl stood up and started to walk away.

"No! Don't leave me!" I plead. She was my savior; she couldn't just leave me.

"I can't make you come with me," the girl smiled down at me.

"But I can't be alone again," I said. My eyes started to water. The girl held out her hand.

"If you wish to come with me, then take my hand," she said.

If you sit upon the bench, don't linger long. It's peaceful, a nice place to think, and a great escape. But that's where the danger comes. It's good to escape for a short time, but you still need to live your life. If you linger too long, the road will disappear, and the spot will start to die. You'll end up like I did. Only, I can't guarantee you'll have a savior. So, please feel free to sit, but do not linger long.

Oh, I'm sorry. You think this story is unfinished don't you? You want to know if I took her hand. I would think my decision is obvious. I took the girl's hand, and never let go. I wouldn't be here if I hadn't.

Thank you, Sharmila. Thank you for finding me, and saving me from myself. Thank you for healing me when I was so injured. But most of all, thank you for loving me. I miss you and I'll never forget you, no matter how life separates us.



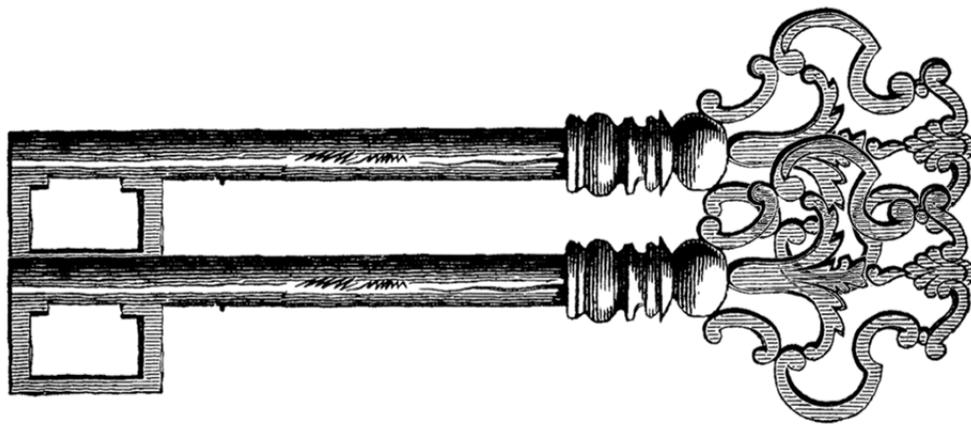
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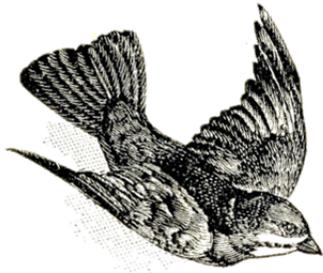
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# Thank You!



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