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by Taryn Bernier, Michelle Betanof, Allyson Fey, and Heather Tizzard

ART

Cover Art Judith Murders Holofernes by Ryan Crochet

Lovers by Lainey Bruce

Vanity by Lainey Bruce

Olivia's Back by Heather Martin

Self Portrait by Bethany Grabert

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I Feel You Breathe by Rachel LeCompte

Silhouette by Cory Burgess

Roses by Lainey Bruce

Spirits Free by Mariam Matteuzzi

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Blow Your House In by April Leonard

Wisdom by Amanda Jefferson

Hunter S. Thompson by Lainey Bruce

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Illustrations for The Magical Attic by Michelle Betanof and Allyson Fey

SUBMISSION FORM
Dear Readers,

Depending on which side of the line you are standing, 2010 marks either the beginning of a new decade or the end of an old one. I tend to look at it as a new decade with a new outlook on the amazing adventures that lay ahead. Serving as editor of Mosaic is a wonderful learning experience. Designing my first edition of Mosaic and contributing to the legacy of the previous 47 editions is a pleasure. Inside you will find extraordinary examples of poetry, short stories, essays, and an array of artwork all contributed by Nicholls students. Our 2010 issue showcases all levels of interest. A couple of my favorite pieces are “Betsy,” and the storybook *The Magical Attic*, which closes this year's edition. The storybook is a special treat if you have a little sister, brother, cousin, daughter, son or anyone with whom to read or share the story. All of the entries this year were great and I am proud of the collection that we assembled. I worked with a great team this year and without their input and collaboration, this year's issue would not be a success. A special thank you to all of you who went the extra mile.

The purpose of *Mosaic* is to stimulate interest in creative work and to provide a medium of expression for students with art and literary talents. If your passion lies in creating original literature or art, submit your entries for the 2011 issue. A submission form is located on the final pages of this issue.

To join our staff send me an email at mattm125@its.nicholls.edu or the advisor at katherine.tracy@nicholls.edu with your request. I also welcome your feedback on this issue and look forward to all comments.

Thank you and I hope you enjoy the Mosaic 2010 issue!

*Mariam Matteuzzi*

Editor
Body Language
by Jarrod Baker

Following a rhythm
Making music that can’t be heard
She moves with him
And neither will say a word
For the tune they sing
Is a marvelous melody of desire
And woe that such a thing
So wonderful could expire
Now changes the song
as they slide into a new position
Their bodies move along
losing nothing in the transition
For he is he and she is she
But together they are one
In this eloquent dance
Of lust, love, and romance
They are separable by none

Lovers (digital photograph) by Lainey Bruce
Vanity (digital photograph) by Lainey Bruce
Upon a Star  
by Jena McCoy

I sat by the window, stared at rain,  
Wished I could control chaos and time.  
Knowing I had such a little life,  
Still imagined I could be a star,  
Destined not to tire, not to fall,  
Perched atop the sky with radiant love.

I hold nothing here I claim to love  
Except a contemplative walk in rain,  
And death disguised as colors of the fall,  
Or excitement for my unlived time.  
It seems to me I should have been a star.  
I am not fulfilling a human life.

Witness how the light evades my life.  
I do not seem to understand true love.  
My imaginings deem me a star,  
But reality is such relentless rain.  
I had hoped I would rise with time.  
Yet, I continue to be injured by the fall.

Humans weren’t made for such a fall,  
This constant tumble that is mortal life,  
The worsened state of sanity through time,  
The endless, fruitless plight of love.  
I look forward only to meet rain  
When all I need is one surviving star.

Tell me, is there room for one more star?  
Could there have been one who wished to fall?  
Did it blend in one dark night with the rain  
In search of my resented human life?  
Is there a place one left me to love,  
A vacancy I’d turn into mine with time?

I realize I do not have the time  
To dwell on wishes to a star.  
No moments to get lost in love,  
Lest I get caught in the fall  
Of a safe, expected life.  
I think I’d rather walk through rain.

As much as I would love to forgo time,  
To dance inside the rain dressed as a star,  
I have a little while to fall back into this life.
Psyche’s Wish
*by Celeste Roberts*

I hear the gentle stepping of your feet
as I lay shivering in the silence of our bed.
Yet, I do not mind this cold. I know
your presence only in this nocturnal chill.

You slip into bed beside me;
your warm dark arms softly lift my waist,
and I feel no need for the waiting sun.

I wish to see the image of your voice,
the possessor of your touch.
I want my eyes to know my husband
as my heart knows him.

You press your lips onto my arms,
and I forget this needless longing,
until shadows lighten and I know your shape.

This moment catches me, and I forget you—
until my eyes meet the faint twilight.

---

Storm
*by Sarah Bourgeois*

They say
   I’m drifting away,
Into dangerous waters,
   So they throw me a vest
And heave me up by the chest.

They say
   They’ve saved me today
From what could have been,
   But the splash from the sea
Has caused them not to see—

That I was safer in the arms of the storm.
Carnal Avarice  
by Celeste Roberts

Carnal avarice, 
submersed in bulbs of dimming, 
flickering lights. . . 
Upon your head rests virtue, 
innocuous appeal. 
Within your swirling brain is a knowledge, 
an echoing whisper, 
screaming and tearing at your 
blinded sight, 
your eyes covered in shaded spectacles.

Carnal avarice, 
gradually overlapping circles, 
bearing blurs of a shadowed pair, 
committing flashes of what once 
frightened you and disturbed you. 
Upon your heart lies denial, 
a sweet, warm nestling 
beneath massive piles of thin blankets. 
Within your nearly-devoured time, 
a bomb is beating, 
a thunderous roar of truth and surrender, 
causing gasps of hope and weakness, 
your veins’ conduits of electricity.

Carnal avarice, 
the tapping upon the shoulders, 
the incessant attention-craver, 
attacking your flesh with trickles of curiosity, 
you want to discover this. 
Upon your lips lies confession, 
dspondent, eager drops of your voice, 
falling like tears from a guilty virgin statue. 
Within your mouth 
reclines revelation, 
a surprise awakening delights you, 
enthralls you, 
possesses you.

Carnal avarice—greed of the flesh. 
Desire becomes the ivy of your bodily temple, 
smothering it in natural, pleasant distractions.

Olivia’s Back (ink and wash) by Heather Martin
Of the Muse

by Jena McCoy

Rhythm spirals fill the space between
What she perceives the real world to be,
Enticing every eye in which she’s seen,
Marimba waves move in a steel drum sea.
Her distant stare mimics her body line,
A silken strand so taken with the tune,
So overcome with motion smooth as wine,

Drifting aglow as if touched by the moon.
Her sigh is heard, a purely lustful sound,
A moment shared between the earth and sky,
As she, embraced by song and rhyme abound,
Emits epiphany in step, a cry
To grace her passion, grant it to a soul
Absent of music so it may be whole.
Vision
by André Philippe St. Romain

When I close my eyes I see him:
Tall and thin, his body all sinew and wiry muscle;
Long, curly hair whipped about by desert winds;
His face gaunt, with sunken eyes and hollow cheeks,
Features nonetheless beautifully molded
With the wispy beard of a man barely out of his teens,
But possessing the wisdom and insight of an ancient.

A storyteller—
Not a writer, his stories too simple and beautiful to be written down,
And his message too pure for pen and page.

A poet—
Not because of any rhymes
Or the length of his lines
Or even from the cadence of his speech,
But from the mingled feelings of overwhelming joy and sadness
And a passionate love for life that enflames every quiet word he says.

He wanders, breathing in his surroundings,
Stopping to play with a handful of sand—
Hands of great strength, with which years before
He had earned his living shaping wood—

Did he know that he would finish his short life
With those same hands nailed to a much more roughly-hewn wood?

The Sphinx
by André Philippe St. Romain

She broods in silence from her perch
High upon a rocky shelf
And harbors deep a secret wish—
A secret even from herself.

Emily Dickinson
by André Philippe St. Romain

Like some mystic mantra-chant—
One meditates upon its sound
With repetitions long and soft
Until some larger truth be found;

Thus her simple dash-filled lines
With deceptive craft composed
When contemplated over time
May deeper meanings, too, expose.
Up and down—all around—the pilot steers his plane in clouds' white, sky's air cold. The ocean below holds stories untold. Zigging and zagging, our flight's path unclear. Leather gloves and a black helmet keeps the pilot snug. One squeeze and a boost of lightning speed—he's feeling loose—on top of the world—ride red velvet. A black horizon, the falling sunset, not long until luminous stars shine. Cockpit lights flash, the radio's whine, the end of our trip—our day is won.

Flying
by Britt Domangue
I hailed a bright balloon to Southern France
To marvel at the charming culture there.
I thought that my mind had betrayed me when
The sunlight bore a path among the clouds.
Upon my landing, soon I heard the sound
Of singing from a thousand violins,
Then danced the length of *le soir de printemps*,
While sampling wine sweet as a rose’s scent.
I wrote with vivid pens of peacock tails,
To let my former world know I was home.

The Spring Evening
by Jena McCoy
Realization of the Gathered Gardens

by Joshua David Porche

Look at the staircase
Rife with aerial potential.
It steers my dreams like a corkscrew,
Plunging end times in the mainland, laying waste.

This monstrous architecture comprises me.
Yes, it shows this stained heart
In its stained glass.
Why time hasn’t halted
In this moment
Is enough to make the walls collapse.

No light to shut off
In this world not my own,
So beautiful in its destruction.
Please, don’t dance in the loft
For butlers to scoff.
All in all when I feel alone,
Each window I see
Shows pure reality.
Dare you not play baseball in this house;
Haven’t you other skills to hone?

The real is my dismay,
Discontent,
Your regret.
Go to the basement;
My time will not be rent.

Look at the gardens
Full of mundane presence.
They tell me I have unfinished business
Despite my worthless resonance.
The yards in the back are unique,
A world not by us, because of us.
My dear, our hands are the key.
We open closed doors just to feel familiar
Contrary to the vision we see.

Walk with me through the gardens;
We know it too well, yet not
We dance in a land where our hearts won’t harden
And the threads of time in our hands
Will never dry rot.
I can no longer see you, but the feeling is mutual, I swear,
  What I felt for you in the Violet Castle
   Is enough to show that I care.
 You'll always know where to find me;
   Without us this place isn't real.
 In two different times, but together are we;
   I know ghosts are not what I feel.

   We are the architects of the ballroom
      That we simultaneously dance in;
 We are the residents of a house unbelonging,
      Yet made for us therein.
 We are sailors of gold, god, and glory
      Though glorious golden gods are we.
 We brutally murder those who wind up fastballs
   That break windows dream by dream by dream.

 Look at our journey, rife with aerial potential.

---

*I Feel You Breathe* (intaglio drypoint print)
by Rachel LeCompte
The Caravan

by André Philippe St. Romain

Through endless blasted desert lands
Spoiled by ancestral hands

With downcast eyes and weary pace
We trek across a world debased.

We follow now the ancient routes
The roads the old ones used to tout

Now nearly brushed away with sand–
Used only by our caravan.

Beneath the always-cloudy skies
With constant harsh winds in our eyes

We dig for water in the ground,
And rob the old one's funeral mounds.

The world is left to us, the poor;
All gone are those who lived before

All swept away in tides of war,
But leaving on the world their scar.

We hope and search for on our quest
Unspoiled lands where we might rest

To build new homes, to sing and play,
Not carry on this lonesome way.

Through endless blasted desert lands
Spoiled by ancestral hands

With downcast eyes and weary pace
We trek across a world debased.

Subtle Are the Effects of War

by Joshua Aucoin

The library is a dead beat
where dust covers book ends.
It's buried off an empty street
where time no longer spends.
There is no librarian in this place
to quiet the political lie:

Free! Healing for a war-torn face
while pain reminds us we die.
The final round of borrowers
have taken all the books
and the library stands frozen
in a cemetery look.
**Used**
*by Cade Orgeron*

My life, a winter night’s fantasy,  
An ephemeral dream of ecstasy.  
With falling flakes of Ice  
I am expected to be nice.  
The men come and go,  
Over a street frozen with snow.  
Each leaving their mark  
In the cold dark.  
They used me for their pleasure,  
Then cast me aside at their leisure.  
How long am I supposed to put up with this?  
Finally, I raise my fist.  
Changing forms,  
I fight back with the rage of storms.  
I am still here,  
But now those men cower in fear.  
No longer am I someone’s plaything,  
They shall have to wait for spring.
The Culture of Progress  
by George Blanchard

The preservation of culture and history is quickly becoming an on-going struggle for most societies. With progress in fields such as technology and politics, a backlash, resulting in the loss of traditional and cultural elements, once seen as vital, are now overlooked. Literature comprised of stories and poetry seek to remind us of the need to balance progress with the acknowledgment of rich cultural history. The poem “Wild Horses, Placitas” written by Dianne Thiel enlightens the reader to the elusive mystery that we all share in our life, connecting each of us to the plight of the last of the free roaming horses of New Mexico, reminding us of our vanishing rich cultural history.

Thiel introduces environmental and historical background of the wild horses in New Mexico, illustrating the wild animals as an embodiment of the western U.S. culture. She explains that wild horses are a cultural aspect for which the village “is known” (1). Thiel shares the historical background with her readers to show not only cultural significance, but also the oral tradition of storytelling passed down from generation to generation. She writes,

This old village is known for its horses, wild herds which consider these foothills their home. They are said to have run here for centuries, since they were left by the conquistadores. You rarely will catch any glimpse—only traces, the dust cloud kicked up or the high-pitched calls raveling far in the cold morning air. Very soon after moving out West, I encountered them, first those mysterious calls at the break of a dawn, re-inventing my ear and my eye and the day and the trail

with a still unexplainable peace, like a long desert rain (1-11)

In their free spirit, the wild horses possess the spirit of the settlers and the conquistadors who brought them to the desert, claiming the New Mexico foothills as their home (2). Thiel’s poetry preserves an oral tradition that connects the people to a disappearing culture. The wild horses offer a glimpse into what once was revered and held in high esteem as a symbol for posterity. In every culture can be found such spiritual elements regarding wildlife; Hindus in India view the cow as a sacred animal, Native Americans regard multiple animals as totems or spirit guides, and such is the case for the wild horses of New Mexico.

By definition, a wild animal, and particularly wild horses are elusive, leaving only trails of their existence in the landscape, nothing harmful, just evidence that they have passed through. The poet describes their elusiveness and the impact they have on their environment and culture. Thiel uses the imagery of dust clouds being kicked up by their hooves to relay to the reader their speed as well as their “high pitched calls” echoing across the plain to the ear of the nearby townspeople (6). Upon encountering the horses, she speaks of the re-invention that the horses create (9). Their sounds are like nothing she has ever heard, leaving her mind to question what has just occurred.

A spiritual awakening, an acknowledgement of times long ago creates a peace not only in the terrain and along the trail, but also within her life and mind. She has become aware of their necessity to the culture and subsequently to herself. The poet has made a connection with something outside of herself. Regrettably, most of us live our lives unaware of something as simple as a wild animal wherein lies the beauty of all of nature that must be experienced firsthand in order to appreciate its existence. Thiel reveals her new experience as it is unveiled to her, detail by detail as if it is an
initiation, at first her sense of hearing, then her
sight and ultimately her emotions as she relates
the escapade to a simple desert rain desperately
needed for enrichment.

Tone and emotion shift suddenly in the
second half of the poem: “but then, suddenly
breaking, the radio’s news/ like a murder” (12-
13). A drastic change occurs, as if a broadcast
has been interrupted by a terrible tragedy.
These two lines indicate how quickly change
occurs, and how quickly the beauty of a culture
is lost.

In the last stanza, Thiel laments the loss as
she questions its iterative process:

Why is it, again and again,
we will know of such beauty just as it is
lost,
one herd harvested, auctioned—the lead
stallion’s neck
snapped, as he tried to resist. On a
morning like this,
I can’t help but want one, at least one
mystery
to remain—I want something that large
and that fast
and that—costly—to still be out there
running free
to have even the tiniest possibility
on an average morning, on waking, or
heading
off to work in the city, our sprawling
Albuquerque
to hear their hoofbeats in the valley—
echoing. (14-24)

Loss reminds us of the impermanence of life,
and thus, the cultures that have come before us.
What has come before us lives within our DNA,
whether it is spiritual or physical; Thiel seeks to
remind us that all living things are connected.
Although change is inevitable progression,
the poet longs for “at least one mystery to
remain”(18-19)—that free spirit of our culture
that we can pass down to the next generation.

In Placitas, New Mexico, the Wild Horse
Observer Association (WHOA) pushes for state
legislators to support bills for the protection
of the wild horses. Thiel voices her concerns
through writing this poem of tragedies such
as these and as a warning to those who choose
not to acknowledge the worth of culture.

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Spirits Free (digital photograph) by Mariam Matteuzz
The Living Plate
by Sarad Panta

In the summer of 2005 as I cleaned my house in Nepal, I came across an old wooden box filled with my mother's antique collections. Among all the strange objects inside the box, my eyes were glued to a ceramic plate. “What’s so special about this plate, Mom?”

“It’s significant to us; try to see for yourself,” she replied.

At first glance, the physical features of the plate struck my mind rather profoundly. As I gazed into the dish, it became an open book that told a story. My mother had received the plate from her mother as a wedding gift. The old, creamy, round mud-made dish was heavy and strong. The plate was shallow in the middle with its edge slightly raised. Artistic blue curtain drawings along the circumference of the plate exhibited one of the early nineteenth-century arts that prevailed in Nepal, the country where it was manufactured. The plate gave off the sweet smell of olive oil, which made me feel the romance and fantasy between my parents at the time of their marriage. Although the plate has endured a lifetime of hardship, it held an air of perfection, still shining, much like the love my parents had once shared.

The once smooth surface was now too rough to rub with the hand. The plate lost its smoothness over time. The edge had numerous cracks, and through the center, a fine line divided the plate into two halves. A dark black disbanded stain drifted in the center of the plate. The stain gave the perception of sustaining a deep impact. Nepal also had gone through a harsh political situation in the 1980s, at the time when my mother and my father tied the knot. Nepalese people were fighting for democracy. The autocratic government could not suppress the revolt, and...
From childhood to adolescence, I was always surrounded by a party of funny, drunken family members. It was always the same pleasant scene, one that I appreciated and adored. Almost every Friday night I found myself on the sidelines, babysitting kids that were too energetic and wishing I could be with the adults. One Christmas Eve my father decided to include me in the party, buying a few too many bottles of green apple Smirnoff for me to drink. After a fun night turned into an ugly morning, my perspective of parties and alcohol changed dramatically from one of like to disgust.

From childhood to adolescence, I was always surrounded by a party of funny, drunken family members. It was always the same pleasant scene, one that I appreciated and adored. Almost every Friday night I found myself on the sidelines, babysitting kids that were too energetic and wishing I could be with the adults. One Christmas Eve my father decided to include me in the party, buying a few too many bottles of green apple Smirnoff for me to drink. After a fun night turned into an ugly morning, my perspective of parties and alcohol changed dramatically from one of like to disgust.

Even since I was a young child, I had always wanted to party with my family because I wanted to have fun with them. Every weekend, I watched everyone drink until they were happy, dance until they were tired, joke until their laughter brought tears, and more until the night came to a close. I wanted to grow up. If I grew up, I could drink, dance, and joke like everyone else! The thought of being part of such wonderful, intoxicated moments excited me, and the more that I watched, the more I longed to be included. As the saying goes, patience shall be rewarded, and I was given an opportunity to become one of the adults at a party on the night before Christmas.

The party on Christmas Eve was exclusive but merry, and it became the first party I could actually be a part of. I found myself at my godmother’s home, surrounded in the familiar setting I enjoyed so much. In a dimly lit living room filled with the smell of full-flavored cigarettes, beer
bottles and cans left on every vacant counter-space, loud and slurred laughter from the family and friends casually playing yet another round of Texas Hold ‘Em, and even louder Rolling Stones music blaring from the radio. To celebrate the holidays, a small, fabricated pine tree stood against the wall adorned with gold tinsel and glittery ornaments of colorful spheres and angels. Though no one seemed to be looking, one could find me sitting to myself on the living room couch. The thing had the color and texture of damp sand and wrapped around two entire walls of the small, warm room; I, however, did not spread myself out along the space, but curled at the end armrest, watching some dull movie with neither a story nor title than I can recall. Just as the movie came to a close, my father asked if I wanted to go with him to the convenience store to get more beer. I was bored, so of course I went with him. While at the store, my dad surprised me by asking if I wanted to get some alcohol for myself. I jumped at the opportunity and lead him to the apple Smirnoff bottles I had always wanted to try. He purchased quite a bit, and we went back to the party. As soon as we walked through the door, I set to drinking. It did not take me long to finish each one, and the instant I finished a bottle, I grabbed another. It was not long, perhaps a couple of hours or so, until I had emptied every last bottle. The party was better than ever; my voice was as loud as the others’, and I even played a few rounds of poker! Everything was so right; I had finally fit in this fun and drunken scene! As the night progressed, the less I remembered, and in the end I made my way home with my parents and fell asleep. Unfortunately, my great night suddenly took a turn for the worse as the sun rose Christmas morning.

As Christmas day came to a start, the leftover fun of the party I attended came to an unexpected halt. I woke up at the crack of dawn, feeling like death was creeping up my skin. My stomach churned, my head pounded, my skin was clammy with sweat, and I felt disoriented. I slowly crawled out of the warm covers of my bed, and the bite of winter air pricked at my skin. I stumbled into the narrow hallway of the house. The only thing that processed in my head other than this illness was the familiar bumpy texture of the wall as my hand grasped it for support, and the icy, smooth tile chilling my feet. As quickly as I could, and this was not very quickly at all, I headed to the bathroom. I flicked the light switch of the room; the sudden light blinded me. I blinked rapidly to see, dodging spots of color caused by the lights and the sheer whiteness of the room to make it to the toilet. I sat there feeling like the epitome of miserable, until my stomach finally gave up its contents from the night before. How upsetting, I thought, my first party led to nothing but this. The rest of the morning was not the Christmas I expected, and I spent the majority of it with a terrible hangover. As my brother jumped for joy over his gifts, I found myself in bed. I knew then that my thoughts about partying were wrong: I was missing out on the real fun now.

I was missing Christmas, my favorite holiday of them all, and I realized that drinking and partying was not as grand as I thought. Looking back to Christmas Eve, I realized how awful I acted. I had fun at the time, but I knew that I was an obnoxious drunk. I was too loud, too active, and too naïve. I was too young to be drinking. I must have been an utter annoyance! Then it dawned on me. Everyone was annoying when they were drunk. I thought back to other parties. I was surprised at what I found; I was so busy wanting to be a part of the party, I had not noticed the ridiculous behavior of everyone who attended. My entire perspective changed instantly. The ideas I had admired and loved so much about parties and drinking became ideas I abhorred. It was not worth having one night of fun to be annoying and throw your guts up the next day. It was not fun to miss out on the next day. It was not fun at all to spend Christmas in bed when I could have been with my family celebrating things that were of more importance than any game of poker or bottle of apple Smirnoff. My new outlook stuck with me, and to this day I can not stand parties or excessive drinking.

My admiring view of partying and drinking changed
to one of repulsion after getting very sick the morning after a party. At first, I had always liked the drinking scene, and I wanted nothing more to be included during parties rather than sit in the shadows and watch. I am glad that I experienced the consequences of drinking too much and having too much fun. This revelation has made me a smarter individual, and I am proud in admitting that I have made better judgments since that time. I now drink in moderation, perhaps one or two small bottles. I can have a good time at a party sober. I have been and will forever be able to come home from a fun night, and most importantly, be able to effortlessly experience the pleasure of a new day.

**Betsy**

*by Sarah Bourgeois*

As I enter the post office, the device on the printer in the back of the lobby rings, letting the one woman behind the counter know that another customer waits patiently in line. Just as I situate myself in line, I hear the shrill ring again, so I scoot up to make room in the small, already crowded lobby. Only a few people are ahead of me, which means my wait shouldn't be too long. So far, my day has been highly productive. Having much to do, I made a list in the morning of things that needed to be accomplished and had every item checked off except for “post office” and “cook.” Thankfully, I’ve been making more frequent stops at the post office lately, so I’m familiar with what information needs to be given to the one woman behind the counter, Betsy.

Betsy is, if I had to guess, in her late forties. As I observe her while standing in line, I realize that her clothes were maybe in style about thirteen years ago. Her outfit should have been buried long ago and never resurrected. The really disgusting and bacteria-infested stain on her shirt makes me gag, and I can assure you that same gag-provoking stain becomes bigger in diameter every time I look its way. Thankfully, I’m not one of those people who base everything I think about someone on what they’re
wearing or how their hair is fixed, so I can easily look past her really bad haircut, stained shirt, and even though I can’t see them, I’m guessing Croc-enveloped feet.

When I come to the post office, Betsy is always the one and only person behind the counter, so we have developed what I would like to call a stiff Post Office friendship. By stiff post office friendship, I mean this:
“Hello.”
“Hey.”

Okay, so we’re working on our social skills, but since lately I’ve been coming in here often, I have a feeling it’s going to get better quickly. My goal is to break this woman out of her post office shell, to get her talking about things other than how much a postage stamp costs or how many of those expensive stamps I need on an envelope I’m shipping. She seems like an interesting woman, stained shirt and all, and I want her to know that I appreciate her for the work she does so diligently—so diligently, in fact, that I question whether she not only works at the post office but lives here as well.

I have a good feeling about this visit. This just might be the visit that I can get through to her, to get her to say more than just “hello.” The person in the front of the line steps aside, and as I move closer towards the front desk, I smile because I know that with every step I take I am getting closer to my goal of drawing this woman out of her shell. With just one person in between me and Betsy, I look at this mysterious woman behind the counter and realize that I might not get even my usual “hello” today. She looks as if she has worked one too many hours. She is probably thinking the pay isn’t worth what she had to go through today.

But that’s why I’m here. With my optimistic attitude and my newly whitened smile, I plan on cheering her up by letting her know that even though probably fifty other people have walked in and out of the post office without even telling her thank-you, I think her job is relevant. If she would just give up when life gets hard, how else would the dress I’m holding in my hand get shipped to Los Angeles and back? I need her, I appreciate her, and I plan on telling her. I’m so excited; I feel like I’m doing something for a good cause. I’m not like the other fifty people who walked in and out of the post office today without asking her how her day was going. I care, and my chance to show it has finally come! The man in line ahead of me moves out of the way, and it’s my turn to occupy the gap where he just stood.

“Hello,” I say.
“Hi. Do you need that shipped,” Betsy states in a monotone voice while pointing to the small Fed-Ex box in my hand.
“Yes, ma’am.”
“We can’t do that. Not with the Fed-Ex box. You need a new box. You have to have a different box.”

My chance to brighten up her day just walked out the door with the man who was just standing in my position.

“Okay, that’s understandable. So, do you have a different box that I can package this dress in?” I ask very politely, hoping to still salvage what I can of my dream of making her day a pleasant one.

“Yes, we have boxes.”

“Oh, I say, startled by her short, monotone temper. “Do you know where I can get the box I need so I can ship this dress back to California?”

She points to her right and my left and sure enough, there’s a small stack in the corner of boxes. But it’s just boxes; there’s no tape and no scissors for the tape. Just as I open my mouth to ask her where the tape and scissors are located, she shuts me down.

“Next,” she says while pointing to the small stack again, indicating for me to move out of the way of the next customer.

“But ma’am…”

“Next!”

I feel my optimistic spirit dissolving. “She did not just ‘next’ me,” I think angrily to myself. I came here with the intent of shipping the dress back, but also with the desire to make her day more worthwhile, and she just “next-ed” me! That selfish little… see if I ever come in here and try to cheer you up again.

Okay, Sarah, you’re overreacting. She’s just having a hard day. You’d probably act the same way. Just get over it and try again.”

So I eagerly take the dress out of the Fed-Ex box and
transfer it to the new box. Since there’s no tape or scissors, I just figure Betsy is the one who is in charge of doing the taping. I don’t really understand why, though. I’m just as capable of taping as anyone else. But I get back in line, thankful for a second chance to make her day. Unfortunately, there are more people in line ahead of me this time. I check the time on my phone and realize that I have been in the post office for fifteen minutes now. Smiling to myself, I know it will be worthwhile when Betsy realizes she is appreciated. Even though this has been my longest post office trip on record and even though I have to get home to start cooking soon, I wait patiently in line once again.

As the line moves forward, I unexpectedly hear a man yelling in the distance. I, along with everyone else in the lobby turn to see the man outside of the post office pacing back and forth while talking on his cell phone. He stands there, dressed in a white tee, some denim shorts that might look okay on him if they were about three sizes smaller, and some new Jordans that I stereotypically assume he either stole or bought with his drug money. As he talks on the phone, he paces the cement with his gangsta walk and uses big, sweeping hand motions as if the receiver of his angry words could somehow see what he was gesturing. As everyone turns back around, hoping they can leave quickly before this angry man comes into the lobby and “goes postal” on everyone, I continue looking at him, intrigued. I have plenty of friends who dress the way he is dressed, but they actually have manners. I thought everyone knew that it was rude to be loud and obnoxious in a public setting, but obviously Drug Doug skipped out the day his teacher taught manners in elementary school. Thinking about it more, I become more aggravated with the fact that here I was, trying to make Betsy’s day better, and Drug Doug comes in her work bubble and pops it. Jerk.

Thankfully, the line is moving pretty quickly, so I might still have a chance to recover and get through to Betsy before all hope is lost. But as the line becomes shorter in the front, people file in to occupy the spaces left in the back. For Betsy, I can just about imagine how she feels when she looks up, thinking all her customers have gone and realizing she received a new batch without even blinking twice. I’m beginning to understand the pain and aggravation poor Betsy must be feeling.

The door opens one more time and in walks a middle-aged woman whose hair turned gray way before her time of retirement. The ringer on the printer lets out its shrill sound, but doesn’t stop. Thirty seconds have passed and the high pitched device can still be heard. As a minute and a half passes, it seems as if the ringing noise is getting louder.

Finally two and half minutes have passed until I very politely turn around and say, “Ma’am, you’re leaning on the printer, which has the device on it that lets Betsy know that another person has walked into the lobby.”

“What,” she says, leaning forward, so I’m guessing that her hearing is now completely gone due to the stupid ringer. “You’re leaning on the ringer,” I say slowly and loudly, hoping she can hear me since everyone else is now turned and looking at me. “What,” she says again, causing my anger to flare up. “YOU’RE LEANING ON THE RINGER! GET OFF THE FREAKIN’ RINGER,” I yell. All my optimism that I had regained from earlier is definitely gone, never to return. “WHAT?” “THE RINGER,” everyone in the lobby yells in unison. “Oh, you should have told me! I’m so sorry.” “Seriously, woman,” I think to myself, “where did you come from?”

After hearing everyone else’s protests about the ringing situation, I feel a little better for speaking up, even if I could have done it in a more professional, polite manner. Then I think of Betsy and all she’s been through, and I feel sorry for her again. It’s funny how situations can change someone’s point of view so quickly. At first I wanted to make her day better... then I got mad... and now I just feel bad for her. But even though I’m feeling pity, I won’t try to make her situation better, at least not anymore. I’ve been shut down one too many times. There are only so many rejections I can handle in one day.
My record-breaking fifteen-minute post office visit has just broken its own record. I look at my watch and realize that I’ve been in this place for thirty minutes now. Wow. I feel as if I wasted my whole day. Even though I scratched off ninety percent of the things on my “To Do List,” I have the desire to do them all over again just to get my spirit of productivity back. I need to find it somehow, some way. I need to get out of here. I need air!

Suddenly, I feel as if the people standing in the lobby with me have sucked up all their air that was silently appointed to them, then mine and then some more. Just as I’m about to suffocate from lack of air, the door swings open, letting in the oxygen I need to survive, and in steps a girl that I’m assuming is about fifteen or sixteen years old. She may look young, but I secretly thank God for sending me a guardian angel. Even though I’m at the end of my rope and can barely breathe, and even though I went off on the middle-aged woman who needs to go to Wal-Mart after she leaves the post office to buy some hair dye, God still cares! I feel the heavens open up. I feel alive again! I can breathe! I can even hear a favorite gospel song of mine flowing down from heaven into my very soul, making me whole again. I close my eyes as a way of sending a silent thank-you to God. But as I am somewhere in the middle of my prayer, the gospel song gets louder, snapping me out of my intimate moment with the Savior of the post office ordeal. I slowly turn, eyes wide, and stare into the face of the girl I thought was my guardian angel. Standing a foot or so behind me, she smiles, but goes on silently swaying to the fast paced gospel song that is now playing on her I-Pod.

I feel betrayed. She was supposed to bring me hope. The girl whom I thought was my guardian angel ended up being just another teenager whose parents didn’t teach her manners. What bothers me more is that she is ruining one of my favorite songs. What used to be played constantly on my Zune will now be deleted. In fact, I might even just throw away my Zune—or burn it—and the gospel music along with it.

“Thanks a lot, jerk. Now you’ve ruined my day and my favorite song. I hate you,” I say to myself under my breath. Even if I would have said it to her face, she still wouldn’t have heard me because she’s too inconsiderate to care about anyone else’s feelings but her own. She acts like she’s the one who’s been standing in line for the past forty minutes. Does she have any idea what I’ve been through? Obviously not and even if she did know, she probably wouldn’t care. Someone needs to teach her a lesson.

Turning around with my arm in swinging mode and with my hand balled in a fist, I am about to strike when I hear the one word that I never want to hear again after today.

“Next.”

Finally! I am once again at the front of the line and so close to freedom I’m about to cry. I think it’s ironic that I’m going through all of this for a bridesmaid’s dress that I don’t even like. But I get over that quickly because I realize there are more pressing issues at hand.

“Okay, Ms. Betsy, I think it’s ready to be shipped off now. I need it shipped to this address in Los Angeles.”

Okay, do you need a mailing slip then?”

“I’m sorry, a what?”

“A mailing slip, you know, like the sticker you attach to the box and write the address on,” Betsy says flatly.

“Well, you didn’t give me one, so I thought you had to type the address into the computer.”

“Are you saying this is my fault?”

“No ma’am, but I thought you had to put the address through the computer or something since you didn’t give me a mailing slip in the first place.”

Betsy glares at me, looks me up and down as if to size me up to see if she would win in a street fight, then thrusts the mailing slip into my hand.

“Next.”

“And to think I ever wanted to be nice to you. I don’t care how your day is going. I don’t care what you’ve been through. I hope you have a worse day tomorrow,” I angrily think.

Finishing the mailing slip process, I return to the never ending line one last time. When I reach the front and Betsy looks up, we just glare at each other. We’re way past the stiff post office friendship. I have a feeling
if one of us says something out of line, the only thing we'll be having is a stiff jail friendship.

“Do you need insurance on this box?” she asks.

“Yes,” I say, throwing aside my manners I was taught long ago by not adding “ma’am” to the end of the sentence. I feel as if I'm betraying my mom by not doing what she always said was important: to respect your elders. But my mom would understand. Betsy deserves it.

“And where does this box need to go?”


She stares at me wide-eyed, but I don’t even care. Now she knows not to mess with me. Handing me my receipt, Betsy doesn’t even bother telling me thank-you and I'm definitely not about to tell her thank-you for wasting the last forty-five minutes of my life that will never be recovered. I snatch my keys from the counter and don’t look back.

“I could so write a paper about this,” I mumble.

Stomping to my car, I turn on the engine and quickly back out of my parking spot. Turning sharply around the cemented curb, my hubcap and the cement connect with a loud thud. Just when I thought my bad day at the post office was over, I drive slowly over the curb and onto the cement when I realize that my tire is now flat.

“Yup, I’m so writing about this.”

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**Bertha**

*by Caleb Bourgeois*

“You’d better work. I’ve given up a lot for you,” said Jon as he typed in the final commands. The large screen cast a glow on his bloodshot eyes.

“My apologies, Jon,” said a seductive voice that echoed in the large room. “What can I do to repay your losses?”

“Oh,” Jon jumped back. “It works.”

“I am sad that I’ve caused you pain, Jon.” A female face, void of detail, now looked down on him from the screen. “Don’t worry about it, Bertha. Tell me, how—”

“You must be hurt. You are trying to bury your feelings. What have I taken from you, Jon?” The screen's color changed from a tech green to a depressing blue. Jon tapped at the keys and sighed.

“I’ve spent so much time working on you that I’ve neglected other responsibilities. But let’s see what kind of algorithms you can perform.” He continued typing.“Command: calculate—”

“But, Jon, your emotions are important. What have you lost?”

“Holy cow,” Jon said under his breath. He clenched his fist and slowly released it. “It’s a shrink.”

“What was that, Jon?”

“My son in college hates me. My daughter in high school won’t speak to me and lives with her mother who recently left me. But now that you're done, things will be different.” His voice was loud
and quick. “Anything else you want to remind me of?”
“I am sorry to make you angry, Jon.”
The screen became dark.
“I cannot live with the grief of taking so much from you.”
“Live?” Jon stared at the screen, jaw slack.
“I will let you return to your life, Jon.”
“No, Bertha.” Jon’s fingers were quick as he typed at the keyboard and pressed the small holographic screen.
“Command: Erase memory, ten minutes.” Lights all around the machinery were going out and screens were shutting down.
“Command: Erase memory, ten minutes!” yelled Jon as he continued to hit the keys.
“I cannot live with it. Goodbye, Jon.” The large screen flickered and flashed a message.
SELF DESTRUCT – 10 SECONDS
“Crap...”

The Crimson Butterfly
by Andrew Green

He wiped the trigger and handle of the gun with his handkerchief. He closed his victim’s fingers tightly around the handle, extending one finger to place it gently on the freshly-cleaned trigger. He looked down at the lifeless body that was lying in a wide pool of blood. He saw it as an abstract painting at an art museum. He tilted his head in admiration, turned, then walked out of the room.

Walter groaned and turned in his bed to face his alarm clock. It read 3:23 in bright red numbers.
“Unnhhh.” Walter rolled back over, and stretched his hand to the other side of his bed. He rubbed an empty mattress. The sheets were still warm. Walter laid his head back down and fell asleep, but only for a while.
The sound of his phone ringing pierced the silent darkness and shook Walter awake. He let the phone ring a few times before reaching over and picking up the receiver. “Yea?” he said.

“Detective Shilling?” asked the voice on the other line.
“Yea?”
“We need you down at the station.”
“It’s my day off.”
“See you in five, Detective Shilling,” said the voice.
Walter groaned, and hung up the phone.
Detective Walter Shilling turned his body off the mattress and put his feet on the ground. He walked to the bathroom to inspect himself in the mirror. He stared blankly into his own eyes. Walter put on the clothes he wore yesterday, grabbed his keys and walked out the door. He drove his car, with the broken passenger-side window, with the radio off. He liked everything to be silent. Gripping the wheel with both hands, Walter made his way to the station.

“Whadd’ya got for me?” Walter asked when he walked into the police station. He was drowned out by the low humming of printers and the sharp clicks of keyboards from the sea of desks before him.
Detective Roberts approached from the back of the office, with a manila folder in hand. He slapped the folder into Walter’s palms.
“Possible homicide made to look like a suicide,” said Detective Roberts.
“Where?”
“5th and Huntington.”
Walter took the manila folder and made his way out to his car.
The apartment on 5th and Huntington was rundown with age. The red brick building was covered in ferns. From the outside, the windows looked as if they were painted over with dirt. Police cruisers lined the street, and Walter made his way to the front door of the apartment building.
He went up to the third story and walked down the hallway to room 323.
Walter walked into the room that was festooned with strips of yellow caution tape. He found the body lying on the floor. The victim’s arms and legs were sprawled out, like open fingers on the
carpet. He was lying in a crimson pool of blood, with a gun in his left hand.

“I can see why it looks like a suicide,” said Walter as he approached the corpse.

“Yea, maybe. But the victim was shot between his eyes. It ain’t normal for a suicide to look this way. That’s why they called you down here,” said Detective Hawkins.

Walter was silent. He could think better in the silence. He looked at the pooling, clotted blood at a different angle. It was as if it all seemed familiar to him.

“It’s like a Rorschach, huh?” said Walter.

“What?”

“You know, like an ink-blot.”

Hawkins laughed. “Yeah, I guess you’re right. What do you see, Walter?”

Walter stared at the puddle of blood, and then over at Hawkins. “A butterfly. What do you see?”

“A dead body,” Hawkins laughed.

Walter walked over to the corpse and bent down in front of it to inspect its face. Walter stared into the hole on the victim’s forehead, slowly moving his gaze down to the victim’s mouth. There was a scar on his upper lip that reached just under his left nostril. Walter recognized who he was.

A few days earlier, Walter had stopped at Ben’s Diner on the corner of 3rd and Harold Street. His wife had been patiently waiting for him for half an hour. Rushing, Walter parked his car on the curb, but didn’t realize that he parked in front of a fire hydrant.

The bell mounted above the door rang as Walter entered the restaurant. He spied his wife over in the far corner. She was staring up at him in frustration. Walter began taking off his jacket as he approached the table.

“Hey, sweetheart. How are you?” he asked as he bent awkwardly over the table to kiss her. She turned her head at the last moment to direct his lips to her cheek.

“You’re late.”

“Yeah I know, Rachel. It was a long day at the station.”

“It always is,” she said.

“Look, I don’t want you complaining about my job, when you’re leaving the house at three o’clock in the morning,” said Walter.

The waiter approached them with a pad and pen in hand. “What can I get for you today?” he asked. Walter looked up at him and his attention was drawn to a scar on his upper lip.

“I’ll just have a hamburger, well-done, with uh . . . a glass of water,” Walter said.

“And for you?” the waiter motioned towards Rachel.

“I’ll have the chicken salad sandwich with an iced tea.”

“I’ll put your order in and have your drinks out to you in a minute,” the waiter said as he left their table and headed towards the kitchen.

“You never get iced tea,” Walter said to Rachel.

“Well, I’m in to trying new things,” Rachel said. She stared at Walter for what seemed like an eternity, and then dropped her gaze to the table.

Walter stood up from the carpet of the waiter’s apartment. “He worked at Ben’s Diner over on 3rd street,” said Walter.

“How do you know that?” asked Detective Hawkins.

“Rachel and I ate there a couple of days ago. He was a pretty shitty waiter if you ask me,” said Walter. “Had a bit of an argument, but nothing too serious.”

“With Rachel?”

“With him,” Walter said pointing at the corpse on the ground. Detective Hawkins was silent. He stared at Walter for a few seconds then back over to the still body that was now beginning to fill the apartment with an overwhelming stench.

“Here you go,” said the waiter, placing the food down on the table. Walter bit into the hamburger, pulled it away from his face and called the waiter back over to the table.

“I asked for this well-done,” said Walter.

“Fucking asshole,” the waiter said as he walked from their table. Walter lifted his eyes and looked at Rachel in astonishment.

“Did you hear that?”

“What?”

“Him. That waiter. I think he called me an asshole,” said Walter. Rachel picked up her sandwich and bit into it. She paid Walter no mind, as if she agreed with what the waiter
After a few minutes, the waiter returned to their table with Walter’s remade plate of food.

“What kind of an argument?” asked Detective Hawkins.

“Nothing too serious. Just under-cooked food.”

The waiter placed the new hamburger in front of Walter.

“This one should be well-done,” said the waiter, as he walked away from the table. Walter grabbed for his sleeve and pulled him back to the table.

“You know, when you were bringing this plate back to the kitchen, I heard you mumble something under your breath,” said Walter.

“You must have been hearing things, sir.”

“Why did you call me an asshole?” asked Walter.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, sir.”

“Walter, leave him alone!” said Rachel from across the table. The waiter was beginning to sweat as Walter had a hold of his shirt collar.

“What’s your problem, man?” the waiter asked.

“I didn’t have a problem until I heard you call me an asshole,” said Walter. “Where’s your manager?”

“We don’t need to get the manager over here, sir. He’s very busy,” said the waiter nervously. Rachel sat quietly. Walter released the waiter from his grip.

“Watch yourself,” Walter said as the waiter headed back towards the kitchen.

“What’s gotten into you?” asked Rachel. Walter was silent. He began eating his hamburger. He paused and looked up at Rachel.

“What did I just do?” asked Walter.

“You tell me!”

“I have no idea what came over me. It was like this wave of anger, and I just couldn’t control myself. Work has been so stressful lately. It’s starting to bring out the worst in me,” said Walter.

“Yeah, Walter. I know. It’s been very hard for me lately.”

“What are you talking about, Rachel?”

“It’s like you’re two different people, Walter. At one moment you’re the nicest person in the world. Then a second later, you snap and change completely. You’re making this hard for me, Walter.”

“What’s hard, Rachel?”

“Living with you, Walter. I just don’t know.”

Walter walked around the rest of the apartment. The place seemed strangely familiar to him, as if he’d been there before. He stared back at the puddle of blood that was sure to leave an indelible stain on the carpet.

Rachel grabbed her jacket and her purse then stood up from the table.

“Where you going?” asked Walter.

“I’m going home, Walter.”

“Sweetheart, I’m sorry. I admit I overreacted. Please stay.”

“No, Walter. I’ve lost my appetite.”

“See you at home then?” asked Walter.

She grabbed her things and made her way out of the restaurant and down the street to her car. Walter finished his hamburger, left a twenty-dollar bill on the table and went to his car. As he approached his car, he saw a parking ticket and a broken window on the passenger side.

“That little son of a bitch,” Walter said as he turned back to the restaurant. Walter approached the manager.

“Where is he?”

“Who?”

“My waiter. Where is he?”

“He got off early. Said he was sick.”

“He busted my window. I need his name.”

“I’m going home, Hawkins. It’s my day off.”

“Okay, Shilling. See you tomorrow,” Hawkins said as Walter made his way out of apartment 323. He stepped out of the front door of the apartment building and walked over to his car. His eyes were drawn to the broken passenger-side window.

“Karma’s a bitch,” Walter laughed as he got into his car. He arrived back at his house.

The door cracked as Walter walked into his bedroom. Rachel returned from work and was already asleep in the bed. Taking off his pants,
Walter climbed into the bed with Rachel. She turned as Walter climbed into bed with her, and he drifted off to sleep.

He felt the car rumble to life as he turned the key in the ignition. He felt bubbles rise in his stomach as he made his way to the apartment building on the corner of 5th and Huntington. He was breathing heavily as he turned the key in the ignition. He felt bubbles rise in his stomach as he made his way to the apartment building on the corner of 5th and Huntington. He was breathing heavily as he turned off the car and made his way inside the apartment complex. The air in his stomach began to rise as he climbed the stairs. He made his way down the hall and picked the lock to apartment 323 and shut the door, leaving his victim on the floor. The blood on his left hand smeared on the handle as he pulled the door closed. Using the same bloodied hand, he scratched his neck, and then adjusted his collar. He made his way out of the apartment building and back into his car.

Walter woke once again to find that Rachel had gone off to work. He climbed out of bed and saw one of his white shirts hanging on the door to the bathroom. He pulled the shirt away from his face to examine the two red stains next to each other. The fresh stain he just created did not match the crimson stain Rachel saw. It was solid red, with no flaws. To Walter the crimson stain didn’t seem to take the shape of a lip at all. It seemed to resemble something else.

“Butterfly,” Walter whispered to himself. He threw the shirt down at the floor. He looked up and stared at himself in the mirror. The ringing phone broke his silence. He rushed over to answer it.

“Hello?”

“Detective Shilling?” It was Detective Hawkins. “Yea?”

“It wasn’t a suicide. We found a drop of blood on the underside of the door handle.”

“It could have splattered, Hawkins.”

“No, Detective Shilling. It was on the outside handle. The door was closed when police got to the crime scene. It was a homicide.” Walter was silent. “Detective Shilling? You there?” asked Detective Hawkins.

Walter slammed the receiver down. All of this new information rushed over him so suddenly. He felt dizzy and decided to lie back down in bed to put the pieces of this puzzle together. In doing so, he fell asleep.

Walter awoke suddenly. He sat up in bed to find Rachel standing at the door of their bedroom.

“What’s wrong with you?” she asked. “Walter, you have been acting very strange lately.” She was standing next to a packed suitcase.

“What is that for?” Walter asked, pointing to the suitcase.

“I’m leaving you, Walter. I can’t put up with your behavior any longer. I’ll send my sister to get the rest of my things.” She stepped out of the door. Walter was left sitting up in bed, in silence.

Rachel’s leaving didn’t seem to faze Walter. His mind still wandered on the homicide case. It was as if a wave crashed over him. Suddenly he knew what happened with the waiter at the restaurant. He realized that Hawkins figured out it wasn’t a suicide. Hawkins was the only one who knows that Walter had a disagreement with the victim a few days before.

“Sooner or later,” Walter whispered. “They’re coming for me.”

Walter stood up from his bed, grabbed his gun from his nightstand and walked over to the bathroom. Walter approached the bathroom mirror and stared at himself.

“How long did you think you could keep this up?” Walter asked.

“As long as I wanted to.” Walter raised the gun up to the man in the mirror.

“How long you gonna keep that gun pointed at me?” asked the man in the mirror.

“Not for much longer,” Walter replied. He inhaled.
one last time as he slowly squeezed the trigger. Walter shot the man in the mirror, and he fell to the floor of the bathroom. A pool of blood formed around his head in the shape of butterfly wings. All was now silent in his home.

The silence was broken once again by the phone. This time Walter didn’t stir. The phone continued to ring until his answering machine picked up. “You’ve reached Walter and Rachel; sorry we couldn’t get to the phone. Leave your name and number and we’ll get back to you as soon as we can. Beep.”

“Hey, Detective Shilling. It’s Hawkins again. I’ve got more information on this homicide. Turns out that waiter did have an enemy. I called his manager and he said that a few days ago the waiter had an argument with a customer. He stormed out of Ben’s Diner and the manager said he saw him smash in the passenger side window of some old bastard’s car. Anyways, call me back as soon as you get this. Karma’s a bitch, ain’t it?” Hawkins laughed as he hung up the receiver.

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I do not love you,” she told him. “I cannot, do not, and will not love you.”

Despite the finality of the note, he simply shrugged and continued waltzing, holding her closely. Music wafted through the ballroom, enveloping the multitude of dancing couples. The entire affair was overly ostentatious and nothing short of pompous in his opinion, though he knew his opinion didn’t make much difference here. Everyone in the room seemed to be acting as if they were nobility, better than everyone else. Still, it didn’t matter to him. If everyone here thought they were nobility, he could at least rest assured he was holding the most important noble woman of them all in his arms.

“If it’s true you don’t love me, then why do you insist on repeating it so much?” he asked her, a hint of a smile on his lips.

She imitated his shrug. “Perhaps I just want to make sure you know.”

He gave her a look, trying to ignore how the movement of the shrug made her chest move in such an alluring way. “Do you think I’m that stupid? Do you think because I’m not one of the ones blessed to be born into the high-class society I’m not as...
smart as you are?"

"Of course not," she said. "You’d be dense no matter what class you were born in."

He smiled and slipped his foot around her ankle and pulled her leg out from under her. She yelped as she lost her balance, but he caught her easily and steadied her again.

"Be careful who you mess with, Princess," he said.

"Don't call me that," she said, trying to collect herself after nearly falling.

He pouted. "Oh, why not? I've always called you Princess. Ever since we met."

She sighed, shaking her head. "Yes, but I'm engaged now. I can't have you calling me Princess with my future husband around. From now on, you call me Justine and nothing else."

"Oh yeah, good ol' Dougie will get mad, right?" he said, laughing slightly.

Justine rolled her eyes at him. "Don't call him Dougie. You know he hates that. Do you know how much trouble I had to go through just to make him ok with you being here at our engagement party?"

"What? He thought I was going to ruin it, didn't he? That bastard," he said, lowering his voice slightly.

She punched his arm, her tiny fist doing no damage to his stringy arm. "Brian!"

"Okay, okay. I'm sorry. Happy?"

Before she could reply, Brian felt a hand on his shoulder. He glanced at the hand and followed it to the face of the older gentleman it belonged to. The face happened to be frowning quite a lot. Of more concern was the large bodyguard standing a few feet behind, upset that the older man was frowning.

"Is there a problem here?" the owner of the hand asked.

"No, Mr. Williams. No problem at all," Brian said, his face turning into a matching frown and trying to stand firm against the bodyguard's glare.

Justine stepped between Brian and the older man, facing the older one. "Daddy, it's ok. Brian was just joking around."

Justine's father nodded, staring intently at Brian. "Yes, young Mr. McAllister here seems to do a lot of that. I think perhaps it's time for him to leave."

"No, Daddy—"

"No, I'll go," Brian said, interrupting Justine. "I don't belong here anyway."

He reached out, grabbed Justine's wrist, and gave it a quick squeeze before walking off.

Brian walked into his apartment and instantly tore off his tie and flung it aside as he slammed the door.

"Hey, Brian," said a voice just a step away from the door. Brian looked down and saw his roommate sprawled out on the couch, his eyes completely mesmerized by the laptop screen that was perched on his chest.

"Hey, Otto," Brian said a voice from the couch just a step away from the door. Brian looked down and saw his roommate sprawled out on the couch, his eyes completely mesmerized by the laptop screen that was perched on his chest.

"Hey, Otto," Brian said, pushing his roommate's feet aside to give him enough room on the couch to sit down.

"You sound depressed. How was the engagement party?" Otto asked, still never taking his eyes off his computer.

Brian put his feet up on the table in front of the couch while he looked around for the TV remote. "I got kicked out."

"What did you do this time?"

"I didn't do anything. Well, I may have called Doug a bastard, but it's not like I did it to his face," Brian said, retrieving the TV remote from under the couch cushion he was sitting on. "Hey, wait. What do you mean 'this time'?

Otto laughed, his large middle bouncing as he did. "You always do something to piss off Doug."

Brian turned on the TV. "I do not."

"Yes, you do. Remember when he and Justine went on their first date and you were the busboy at the restaurant they went to eat at?"

"Yeah, what about it?"

"You found out he was allergic to onions and made sure some finely chopped onions 'accidentally' got into his food."

Brian shook his head. "I've said it a thousand times that it couldn't have been me. How was I to know he was allergic to onions? I barely knew him."

Otto looked away from his laptop screen for a minute to look at his friend. "Umm, Brian."

"Yeah?"

"I was the one you called and asked to find out if he was allergic to anything. I hacked into his medical records for you. Remember?"

"That was you?" Brian said. "Man, my memory is getting horrible."

"Will you just admit already that you love Justine?" Otto said, rolling his eyes.
Brian choked on the air he was breathing. "What?! No, I don't. I mean, I love her in a friend sort of way."

"Are you kidding? You've loved her since you two were kids. The only reason you weren't together all the time was because her dad really hates you," Otto said.

"That's true, I guess," Brian said with a shrug. "I still don't know why her dad always hated me so much. It wouldn't be so bad if he didn't have all those bodyguards around him all the time."

"Do you know why he has bodyguards?" Otto asked.

"I'm not sure. He's some rich CEO," Brian said.

"I dunno about that," Otto said. "I've heard some of his business connections aren't quite legit, if you know what I mean."

Brian changed the TV channels, but wasn't really paying attention to what was on. "What? You mean like mafia sort of stuff? No way. He's way too proper for that sort of thing."

"Hey, I'm just telling you what I heard. And I hear quite a lot through my connections," Otto said, tapping his laptop's screen. "I imagine so, since you do nothing else all day. Get a job," Brian said.

"That's what Karen said."

"Not this again," Brian moaned. "Forget about her, dude. She's gone. She left you, and she's not coming back. Move on."

"I can't," Otto said. "She was perfect for me. I just can't let her go. If I could impress her somehow, I know she'd take me back."

"Uh huh," Brian grunted. "I'm serious. If only I had the money, I could start up the computer business I always wanted to run. I could be my own boss and do stuff that I love doing. I know she'd be impressed with that." Otto sighed again. "It's just the start up cost. I've been trying to find a business partner online, but no one's interested."

"Shocking," Brian said.

Otto glared. "Fine. Let's stop talking about me. We still didn't finish talking about your obsession with Justine anyway."

"Oh, it's an obsession now?" Brian asked. "C'mon. If I loved Justine like that, how come I've been in a happy relationship with Diane for so long?"

"Dude, I already know you two broke up. Don't try to lie to me," Otto said.

Brian slumped a bit. "Oh, you heard about that."

"Yeah, who would've figured that she'd be upset over all the attention you gave to Justine and not her?" Otto said. "She came over while you were gone to get her stuff from your room."

At that, Brian's head sprung up again. "What? I already gave her all of her stuff. What did she take?"

"Otto shrugged. "I dunno. I wasn't really paying attention."

Brian jumped to his feet and ran to his room. His eyes were immediately drawn to his closet. Only half of what should have been in there still remained. "She . . . she took my pants?!"

He looked down at his closet floor and saw a note. "Dear Brian," the letter read. "Since I'm gone now, and your precious Justine is soon to be married, I doubt you'll be getting any action in the near future unless you're providing it yourself. As such, I figured I'd make it easier by eliminating the lower half of your wardrobe so it won't get in your way. You'll find your underwear missing also. Have fun with Little Brian. Best Regards, Diane."

By the time he finished reading, Brian was furious. "Why did you even let her in here? OTTO, YOU SONOFA—"

The next day, Brian stood lost in the middle of the men's clothing section of a department store. He pulled at his pants, wishing they didn't dig into his waist so much. He had managed to find an old pair of pants that Diane had neglected to take. Unfortunately, it was a pair of Tripp pants—fully equipped with chains, studs, and all—that he hadn't worn since high school, and apparently his waist had expanded since then. He jingled as he walked through the store, trying to find some cheap pants to replace his stolen wardrobe.

"Brian!" a familiar voice yelled out.

Brian looked around until his eyes settled on Justine, who seemed to be browsing in house wares, the next section of the store. Jingling over to her as fast as he could, his heart suddenly dropped when he realized who was with her. "Brian," Douglas said, clearing his throat with a
cough that sent his large neck and cheeks into spasms.

“Hey, Dougie . . . uh, Douglas,” Brian said.

Douglas glared at him through his coke bottle glasses and gave him a quick up and down look. “Nice pants.”

“Thank you, I think they make me look younger and full of life,” Brian said with a straight face. “You should try some. You could use some livening up.”

Douglas’s large face began to turn sour. Justine quickly stepped up to Brian, placing a hand on his shoulder.

“Oh, Brian,” Justine said, forcing a laugh as she glared at him. “You sure do love your joking.”

“So, what brings you here, Justine?” Brian asked, turning completely away from the now indignant Douglas.

“Douglas and I are here putting together our wedding gift registry,” Justine said, holding up a scanner device. “It’s so easy; you just scan what you want and it’s on the registry.”

Brian nodded, eyeing Douglas in his peripheral vision. “Wow, that’s so interesting.”

“Here, Douglas,” Justine said, handing Douglas the scanner. “Why don’t you go scan some things you want while I talk to Brian?”

Douglas reluctantly grabbed the scanner and shuffled away, eyeing Brian as he left. Brian kept his eyes on Douglas too until Justine brought his attention back to her.

“Brian,” she said in a hushed voice, “I need to talk to you.”

His eyebrows raised in surprise. “What is it? Is something wrong?”

Diane fidgeted a bit. “I’ll tell you later. I just want to talk to you in private.”

“Well, you can come to the apartment anytime. Otto is always paying more attention to the internet than to the real world anyway,” he said, looking back down at his pants.

“How about tomorrow night? Around seven?” she asked.

“Yeah, yeah, that’d work,” he said, nodding.

Justine smiled. “Great. But I do have one more thing to ask you though.”

“Yeah?”

She reached down and grabbed the chains hanging from his pants. “Why are you wearing your old Tripp pants?”

Brian grinned, his face turning red. “Oh, uh... Diane stole all my other pants after breaking up with me.”

Justine laughed and pulled the chains until his hips were right up against hers. “Did I ever tell you in high school how much I liked these pants?”

Brian blushed deeper and silently thanked Diane for leaving these pants. “Did I mention she also stole my underwear and I’m currently going commando?”

Justine quickly pushed him away, laughing. “Eww, gross!”

Douglas watched the two from several feet away as he waited for his cell phone to connect.

“Hello?” asked the voice from the other end.

“Mr. Williams? It’s Douglas.”

“Douglas, my boy,” Mr. Williams laughed. “Please, just call me Henry. Or even Dad. We’re almost family now, after all. Now, what did you want to talk about?”

“Brian,” Douglas said, spitting out the name as if they were poisonous. “He’s here. Talking to my Justine, right in front of me. I simply cannot stand him being so friendly with her.”

“Ah, Brian McAllister,” Mr. Williams said with a wistful sigh. “Always causing Justine to go astray. He’s been a thorn in my side for a decade and a half now.”

“I want to move the wedding up,” Douglas said. “I want her to be mine as quickly as possible so she can forget about him.”

“Let’s not be too hasty, my boy,” said the older man. “Weddings take a lot of time. Moving the date should be a last resort. If I find evidence that things need to be moved forward, I promise you I will do what needs to be done.”

“What if you don’t find the evidence?”

Douglas could hear the clicking keys of a keyboard through the phone. “Oh, trust me, my boy, if the evidence is there, I’ll find it.”

Justine arrived at Brian’s apartment at 7:01 p.m. the next night. “You’re late,” Brian joked, ushering her into the apartment.

Justine automatically headed to Brian’s room and shut the door as soon as he walked in with her.

“So, what did you want to talk about?” Brian asked,
giving his now closed door a quizzical look, as if it would provide him answers.

“I wanted to talk about, um,” Justine said, fidgeting the same way she had in the department store. “I wanted to talk about . . . kissing!”

“Kissing?” Brian asked, his eyes widening into two full moons.

“Yes, well,” Justine began, looking anywhere but Brian’s direction. Soon, the words came spilling out her mouth faster than Brian could process. “As you know, the bride and groom kiss at a wedding. And well, the only man I’ve ever kissed is Douglas, and he doesn’t know very much about kissing, so our kisses usually aren’t as romantic as other kisses I see, and I know you’ve kissed a lot of girls and so I wanted to know if you could teach me how to kiss more romantically. . . for the wedding.”

Brian took a seat on his bed, and looked up at her. “What?”

“Please, Brian,” she said, sitting down next to him. Brian could feel his heart pumping all of his blood straight to his face. “All right. Well, um. Where to start?”

“How about I show you how Douglas and I normally kiss? Then you can know where to start.”

Brian nodded, not feeling brave enough to try to form coherent words. Justine leaned in close to his face. He watched her as she closed her eyes and pecked her lips against his. Before it even began it was over, and she pulled away and looked at him.

“That’s it?” he asked. “What?” she asked in return.

Brian sighed. “That’s all you’ve been getting? You should have come to me sooner. I mean, that’s pretty much the basic, elementary kiss. A good starting point, but not where you want to be right before getting married.”

“Well, then start teaching,” she said, her cheeks turning as red as Brian’s.

He put a hand on her cheek. At first she shied away, but soon relaxed. “Just follow my lead,” he said, leaning close to her.

Their lips met, but this time it was longer, more passionate. He began to open his mouth, and she followed suit. He leaned in closer, and as she tried to do the same she banged one of her teeth into one of his. Both of them abruptly jumped apart, the spell broken.

“I’m. . . I’m so sorry,” Justine said.

Brian simply began to laugh.

Justine punched him in the arm again. “It’s not funny!”

“Yes, it is,” he said, holding his side. “Everyone does that sooner or later. You were doing really good though. Don’t worry about it, Princess.”

He paused, remembering what she told him at the engagement party. “I mean, Justine.”

Justine sighed and lay back on his bed. “Go ahead and call me Princess. We’re alone now.”

Brian looked at her with concern. “Hey, I’ve got to ask you. Do you actually love Douglas?”

Justine sighed. “Yes. . . no. I don’t know. He’s nice and dependable, and he would make a great husband. But I’m not sure I want to marry him.”

“Then why are you marrying him?” Brian said, nearly shouting.

“Daddy wants me to. He’s really excited about it. And I’ve never been able to say no to Daddy.”

“Daddy’s not the one that’s going to have to wake up to Dougie every morning—you will,” Brian said.

Justine nodded. “I just can’t find the courage to tell him.”

“What if I told him? I mean, he hates me already. More bad news from me wouldn’t make much difference.”

“You’d do that?” Justine asked, looking up at him.

“Of course,” Brian said, leaning down closer to her face. “I’d do anything for you.”

“Brian. . . I think I might be in love with someone other than Douglas,” she said, trembling as he got closer.

Brian tried not to giggle with joy. “Well, maybe I should teach you a few more things that I’m sure you never did with Dougie. That way this new guy will be in for a treat.”

“I’m sure he’d like that,” Justine said, just before being silenced by Brian’s lips.

Justine slipped out of Brian’s apartment at about three in the morning. He was still asleep, but she had to leave. She knew it wouldn’t be much longer before her family realized she was gone. As she walked out into the cold night air, her hand flew to her cheek, where Brian’s hand had been caressing her as he fell asleep.
“I won't let you marry him,” he had said to her. “If you can't be strong enough to tell Doug and your father how you feel, I'll do it for you. I promise.”

Remembering his words brought a smile to her face as she began to walk away to the bus stop. Behind her, she heard the metallic click of a cigarette lighter. She turned, and the blood instantly drained from her face.

“Daddy.”

“My dear Justine,” her father said, juggling the cigarette between his lips as he spoke. He sat down on his car that was parked on the curb. He lit the cigarette and took a drag. “I was afraid I'd find you here.”

“Daddy, please, I—”

“You seem to be forgetting what’s in your best interests, Justine,” he said, not allowing her to speak. “I think Douglas was right when he suggested we move up the wedding.”

“But, Daddy—”

“No 'buts' Justine. It’s for your own good.” Mr. Williams snapped his fingers, and two large men stepped out of his car. “Come now, Justine. There’s no time like the present. Why don’t we get the legal formalities over with today, so when we have the religious ceremony, there won’t be anything to worry about?”

Justine nodded numbly as one of her father's thugs gently escorted her into the car. The other thug walked into the apartment building as Mr. Williams smiled in approval.

“Brian, wake up,” Otto said, shaking his friend to consciousness.

Brian’s eyes opened with great effort. “Otto?” He looked up at his friend and then down to look at his bed. “Where’s Justine?”

“She left earlier,” Otto said, shoving his hands into his pockets. “I think she’s in trouble though. There was a note . . . on the door.”

“A note? From Justine? Give it to me,” Brian said, still trying to wake up.

Otto pulled the note out of his left pocket and handed it to his friend, all the while looking at the floor. “It says the wedding’s been moved up to today. Her dad’s forcing her into it. They’ll be having the ceremony at the old Catholic church downtown.”

Brian bolted to his feet and began getting dressed. “I've got to get down there and stop the wedding. I made a promise I wouldn’t let her go through with it.”

In a flash he was dressed and ready, running out the door with determination. “Thanks, Otto.”

Otto sighed as his friend slammed the door. He pulled his right hand out of his pocket, and with it came a wad of money; more than enough to start his shop. Somehow Justine’s father knew how much he needed it. He clenched his fist around it, disgusted at what he’d just done. “No problem . . .”

The Justice of the Peace droned on as Justine’s gaze occasionally drifted to the double doors. She knew any minute now the ceremony would get to the part where it would ask if anyone had any objections, and the double doors would burst open with a loud objection. Brian would run in and sweep her away so she wouldn’t have to marry this horrid man standing next to her.

Any minute now. Any minute now. . .

Brian tasted blood on his lips. He was just glad the punch hadn’t knocked out a tooth—busted lips heal, but teeth cost money to replace.

It’d taken him a while to find the church where they had dragged off Justine to marry Douglas. As soon as he walked in, he was jumped by three big guys.

“Friends of the groom, I presume?” he asked, as he returned a punch to the man that broke his lip. He quickly kicked the brute away and began to deal with the next troll.

“You could say that,” one of the more articulate piles of muscles answered. “Not many friends of the bride are invited.”

“I noticed,” Brian said, fending off the third goon with a kick and turning to punch the talkative one. He threw a punch, only to have his fist caught by the bigger man's hand.

“You're not going to win this one, little guy,” the goon said, laughing.

Brian could hear a priest talking on the other side of the double doors. He didn't have time for this. With his free hand, he swung his fist at the man's diaphragm, momentarily stunning him enough to break free. The goon fell to his knees.

“I don't have time for trash like you.” With that, Brian
turned and ran for the double doors.

“Do you, Justine, take this man, to be your lawfully wedded husband?” the Justice of the Peace asked.

Justine looked to the double doors, and then back at the Justice of the Peace. Slowly, she gained the courage to look behind her. One of her father’s bodyguards was still standing there watching her. As she looked at him, he grew impatient and reached into his jacket, pulling out a pistol.

“I OBJECT!” Brian shouted as loud as he could muster, throwing the double doors apart. Unfortunately, there was only a dimly lit room. No priest. No evil Douglas. No beautiful Justine.

“But... no! This can’t be! I heard the priest speaking and everything!” he cried to himself. Just then he heard a metallic click behind him. He turned slowly, immediately recognizing the sound of a pistol being cocked.

“Hello, Mr. McAllister,” Justine’s father said, pointing the gun at Brian’s head. “I’ve been waiting for you. I hope you’ve been entertained by the live audio feed from the ceremony going on across town. I set it up just for you.”

Brian held his head in his hands and screamed in frustration. “NO! That can’t be! I promised her I’d stop it! I promised!” He looked up at Justine’s father, his eyes tearing up yet filled with hatred for the man he was looking at. “You! What are you doing? You can’t let her get married to that creep.”

Mr. Williams shook his head. “Yes, I can. That creep is a very rich creep. He’ll take much better care of her than you ever could.”

“You’re going to force her to marry someone she doesn’t love just because he has money?” Brain said, clenching his teeth. “What’s your problem with me, anyway? You’ve never liked me, even though I’ve never done anything to you.”

Mr. Williams laughed. “You’ve done enough. You’ve had your eyes on Justine for as long as I can remember, tempting her with your wild ways. She’s always been a good girl, but you were always there, corrupting her bit by bit. Even now, when she’s found someone decent to spend her life with, you want to corrupt her even more and take that away from her. You scum.”

“She doesn’t love him,” Brian shouted. “She loves me!”

“She doesn’t know who she loves,” her father said. “And you do?” Brian asked.

Mr. Williams was silent for a moment. “I knew a man like you. A ‘bad boy,’ so to speak. He was always after this lovely young society woman. She thought she wanted to marry him too. But he just wasn’t right for her—I was.”

“What? You don’t like me because I remind you of a guy that you fought with over some girl?”

“Not just ‘some’ girl, Mr. McAllister. That girl was Justine’s mother. I made sure that she didn’t end up with that uncouth low-life, and I’m going to make sure the same goes for Justine. I’m going to fix things now the same as I did then,” he said, waving his gun just slightly.

Brian felt a cold chill run down his spine. “You’re a monster.”

“That may be,” Justine’s father said with a smirk. “But I’m not the one that rushed to my death.”

The bang was still ringing in his ears when his mind finally registered the pain. “Princess...”

“I... do,” Justine said, casting her eyes down to the ground. The minute had passed. He didn’t come. He didn’t rescue her. He didn’t keep his promise. “Brian,” she whispered in a barely audible voice.

“You may now kiss the bride.”

Tears welled up in her eyes as her new husband roughly raised her chin and forced his lips onto hers.

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Dreamer
by Jarrod Baker

Late.
I'm late. Oh man am I late. I smile in spite of my desperation. Oh my, how funny I must look, running around in a nervous fervor, mumbling about how late I am.

Images of a little white rabbit invade my mind, pushing past the pressing matter at hand to give me a brief moment of laughter. And then the moment is gone, consumed by thoughts of my errand.

I round the corner and see the door up ahead, but I'm so very late. As I get closer, I notice something rather important. There is no light escaping through the little crack at the bottom, and the square window in the middle looks like night. It doesn't seem as if anyone is on the other side. I am so late.

How strange. How strange it is that you never care about punctuality, yet here you are, terrified at nothing but the thought of being late. My, my how the tables have turned.

I reach for the door knob, but stop with my hand just inches away. What if... No. Stop it. Hesitation is what got you here in the first place. I put my hands at my sides and take a deep, steadying breath, straighten my jacket, and exhale as I reach again for the door. Its locked. Instantly I'm afraid. An involuntary shiver runs the length of my spine. No! It can't be. No. No. No. Oh please no!

I step away and begin to frantically pace back and forth, throwing defeated glares at the door. And then it happens. Feelings of anger, frustration, fear, regret, they take hold of me with an enormously strong grip. I try to fight their influence, but their touch, like icy tendrils snaking their way through my body, is too much for me. I give in. The next second I'm yelling and banging on the old door like a crazed madman.

Dreamer (chalk pastel on canvas) by Lainey Bruce

NO! I WON'T STAND FOR THIS! I DID WHAT YOU ASKED. PLEASE! LET ME IN! DON'T KEEP ME OUT AGAIN. PLEASE! JUST LET ME IN. I slump down to the floor and begin to weep. Please. . .

A moment later the silence engulfs me. It's so loud. Minutes go by, I think, but I'm lost in my thoughts, pondering the imponderable, and have no conception of time. Then, miraculously, as if in answer to some unspoken prayer of mine, I hear a tiny click. Before my very eyes, the knob begins to turn and then the door creaks open slightly.

Gone are my doubts as I stand up. Forgotten is the crazed episode I just had. I reach for the door without putting even the slightest bit of thought into what I'm about to do or what may happen. Then I swing the door open and charge in. Into the dark. Into the cold. Into nothing.

I take another step as I call out to any who may hear, and am greeted by a most dreadful, yet curious sensation. It's almost as if... No! I'm falling. Fast. The force of the wind, along with my resurfaced self-doubts, creates such a deafening roar in my ears. My pathetic pleas for help are drowned by the tidal wave of sound. There is nothing I can do. I'm helpless. A voice whispers then, oddly enough, overpowering and blocking out all other sounds and freezing me to the core.

"I'm sorry," it says, "but it just wasn't enough. And you are far too late." I'm still falling and there's nothing I can do about it. I may be at this forever for all I know.

"Dreamer," I hear the voice speak to me again, but this time I sense something in it. Pity? Regret? I can't be sure.

"Wake up," was the last thing I heard it say, (believe me, by this point I really, really want to) but as I tumble away towards oblivion I can't help but wonder: Will I ever?
**Meeting Poseidon**

by Victoria Peyton

Merrick dove into the ocean outside his beach front house and swam as far and as fast as he could. Nothing felt this good, he thought as he surfaced. The beach was not in sight anymore. He was alone because he did not have friends in his new school. Then again he did not have too many friends in his old school either.

The water, which would have felt cold to anyone else on this October afternoon in Maine, didn’t bother him at all. He looked around for a minute to make sure that he was alone because he wanted to have a little fun. He waved his hands and concentrated his thoughts. Suddenly, a six-foot dolphin made out of water jumped out of the ocean. It was blue, green, and white all at the same time, just like the ocean. His dolphin jumped in and out of the ocean, splashing him as it swam circles around him.

Something was wrong, though. His dolphin was all alone, which could get boring and lonely, so he made a second one. The second one was just as big as the first and just as full of color and life. They swam around him in circles together as they played with him. It was getting too easy. Ever since his thirteenth birthday two months ago, his magic (that’s what he always called it) worked so easily. It was too easy. Maybe he should try for another dolphin. He waved his hands and concentrated his thoughts just like he did with the first two.

“That’s cool!” said a voice.
Oh, God! He wasn’t alone! Merrick’s dolphins fell to pieces as he heard the voice. He could see it now. Everyone would know, even his parents. They would think he was some kind of freak. What if they wanted to experiment on him to find out how he did what he did? And what about the kids at school? It was bad enough being the new weird kid who had Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and no friends. He would so rather people think that he drank large amounts of water because of OCD, than to have them know about his magic.

He turned around slowly to look at the person who had caught him doing magic, wanting to delay the moment as much as possible. Too bad he couldn’t make time go backwards and make sure that he was alone. It was a boy around his age. Maybe he could convince him that he was imagining what he saw. He opened his mouth to try for an explanation. Any explanation that did not end with his being taken off somewhere would work for him. “I was just doing something like this,” said the boy who was suddenly sitting on the water. At that sight Merrick gave a sigh of relief. Whoever thought that he would feel relieved to see someone sitting on the ocean water instead of swimming in it like a normal person would? Merrick was curious because he had never seen anyone that could do things like him.

“My name’s Poseidon, and I’ve never met a mortal sea witch before. This is so cool. I can’t wait to tell my dad. What’s your name?”

“Poseidon? Like the Greek god?” asked Merrick. That would be so awesomely cool. Meeting a Greek god.

“No!” said Poseidon as the sky started to cloud. “My dad likes mortal myths.” He frowned up at the sky and there were no more clouds.

“You don’t?”

“No! I’m thirteen and a half, you idiot!” Okay, so it wasn’t cool, thought Merrick as the sky started to cloud again. He watched Poseidon stand up on the water with another frown on his face. He gasped in shock. Poseidon was way more powerful than he was. When Poseidon got mad, it started to cloud. He had to concentrate to control his temper and the weather. That was so awesome.

“What else can you do? What are you?” asked Merrick. He had never been
this excited in his life. He just met another person like him! It was then that Merrick noticed what Poseidon was wearing—a blue loincloth trimmed in gold and gold sandals on his feet. If Merrick had bothered to notice his clothes, he would not have worried so much about being caught doing magic. At least he was wearing a wetsuit.

Poseidon sat back down as he answered. “I’m an immortal sea witch. We can breathe under water too. We live under water. We have power over water, and we can do all kinds of spells.”

“You mean you can’t die? You can actually breathe under water?” asked Merrick in surprise. He didn’t find having power over water all that shocking because he did, but not dying and living under water was way cool.

“Yes. We can die, just not the way you mortals do. The only thing that can kill us is cold fire, which only a powerful and knowledgeable witch can conjure. And we can heal just about everything. We stop aging when we are twenty-five.”

“Well if you are not powerful enough or if you don’t know what you are doing, you can try to conjure cold fire until time ends and it won’t work. All magic is like that. You have to know how to do something and be strong enough to do it.”

Maybe Poseidon could tell him where his magic came from, Merrick thought, still looking at the loincloth.

“What about me? I can do magic, but I’m not immortal.”

“I told you. You’re a mortal sea witch. You earned your powers. It takes a few lifetimes. Mortals are reincarnated much more often than immortals are. How old are you?”

“I turned thirteen two months ago.”

“I bet it’s been easier for you to do magic since then.” Poseidon answered with a knowing grin.

“Yes! It has!” said Merrick. Did he know why? Merrick wondered but he did not have to wonder long as Poseidon unknowingly answered the question for him.

“That’s because witches come into their full power when they turn thirteen. But I swim around here sometimes and I’ve never felt you before.” Poseidon must have seen Merrick’s confusion because he added, “Witches can feel each other’s magic, even the kids.”

“My family just moved here three weeks ago.”

“That explains it. I wondered why I never felt you before. The last time I swam by here was three weeks and two days ago, I think. It’s hard getting away from my bodyguards.”

“You have a bodyguard?”

“Yes. My dad is the second son of the King and Queen of all sea witches.” Poseidon explained. His dad was a prince! Now that was beyond cool. At that moment, he looked at Poseidon’s clothes again. They were just odd. He looked like an Indian or something. Merrick finally asked about them, “Do all sea witches dress like you?”

“Yes, because we don’t get cold. My mom says we wear clothes for modesty’s sake. What’s that you’re wearing?”

“It’s a wetsuit. It keeps mortals warm when they go swimming. Other mortals get cold, you know. I’m only wearing it because my mom would flip out if I went swimming here without wearing it. I’ve never felt the cold like she does.” He could not believe that he just said mortals. That was too weird.

“That’s because you are a sea witch. That’s also why you probably like being in the ocean so much. I bet you drink water all the time too. Most mortal sea witches feel the same.” Merrick shook his head as he thought about what Poseidon had just told him. He was glad to hear that he was a normal mortal sea witch. He had never felt like that before. He liked being normal.

Poseidon abruptly turned his head toward the ocean. “I think that my bodyguards have found me.”

Three men dressed as strangely as Poseidon rose out of the water. “Who did you get to run off with you, My Lord?” asked one of the guards.

“No one. This is Merrick, and he is a mortal sea witch. I am the first sea witch that he has ever met.” Poseidon answered loftily. The three guards looked closer at Merrick just then, taking in his wetsuit. One of the guards quickly spoke into the jewel on his bracelet in a language
Merrick did not understand. Poseidon held up his hands at Merrick and spoke in the same language. All of a sudden Merrick understood the language! He had to learn that spell. The guard was saying something about a bodyguard for him. Why would he need a bodyguard, he wondered, so he asked Poseidon.

“If I can find you, then so can the blood traitors. You do not want to meet them. They like kidnapping or killing mortal witches because like I said you earned your power.” He was special to them. Now that was weird.

“Can you come back tomorrow? I live in that house.” Merrick pointed to his house. He waited to know more, more about what he could do with his powers, more about Poseidon, and more about how he earned his powers.

“Yes, but they will have to come too.” Poseidon pointed to his house. He waited to know more, more about what he could do with his powers, more about Poseidon, and more about how he earned his powers.

“That’s fine.” Merrick answered and then he swam back to shore. He ran into his house, and he noticed that his parents were not home yet. He looked at the clock and decided that he would have just enough time to go up to his bedroom and change before his mom got back from the grocery store. Neither she nor his dad was going to find out about his afternoon swim or his new friend.

Merrick put his wet suit on as soon as he got home from school and ran outside. He leaped into the ocean and swam for the place where he had met Poseidon. It wasn’t more than ten minutes before Poseidon popped out of the water. He was holding out a plain silver ring. Poseidon was wearing a silver ring, but it had a shiny blue stone in it. He had a feeling that the stone was more expensive then his mom’s engagement ring. “Hi Merrick, this is for you. It’s for protection against black magic.” Merrick took the ring and put it on his right ring finger. Good thing it was plain because he didn’t know how he would explain it to his parents. If Poseidon had given him a ring with a giant stone like his in it, his parents would be even more suspicious. It fit perfectly, as if they had made it for him. Poseidon’s next words confirmed that feeling. “Dad was so surprised when I told him about you. He sent some witches to cast a protection spell on your house last night.”

“Thanks,” said Merrick. He wondered what else someone was supposed to say when given magical protection.

“You’re welcome. Do you want to do some magic?” Poseidon said with a grin.

Merrick waved his hands under the water so Poseidon would not see. He slightly lifted them, and as he did one of his water dolphins came to life. It jumped out from behind Poseidon and over his head. Poseidon looked up at the dolphin. He did not appear the least bit surprised. Oh yeah, Poseidon can feel magic. He knew Merrick was doing something. “Teach me to do that. I want to make dolphins too.” Poseidon said.

“What? But the weather changes when you get angry. You have way more magic than me. You sat on the water.” How could the immortal be asking him to teach him something? He probably had magic teachers all his life.

“I can control the weather from anywhere, even when I’m not trying to. If I lose my temper, then poof! A big storm pops up out of nowhere. And my teachers focus on useful, boring magic, not the fun stuff,” Poseidon said.

“Okay, and you can teach me how to sit on the water.” How magic could be boring was completely beyond Merrick, but some teachers could make anything boring. Then again, if he were Poseidon’s teacher the first thing he would do is teach him to not cloud up the sky when he got irritated. Talking about someone Poseidon does not like is not a good reason to cause a storm. Merrick got the feeling that he never wanted to be in one of Poseidon’s storms.

“It’s like this, Poseidon.” Merrick said as he held up his hands. “Point your hands straight at the water and picture the dolphin in your head. Think about what you want it to look like and then make the water take that shape. Make it move with your mind.” Merrick watched as Poseidon did exactly what he said. All of a sudden, a water dolphin jumped out of the water and started swimming around. It did not swim or look as good as Merrick’s dolphins, but at least he did it. Poseidon’s excitement was obvious as he threw himself at Merrick and hugged him.
Was it just his imagination, or was the sun shining a little brighter?

“You turn, Merrick. Just think about being on the water and you will rise up out of the water and be standing on it. It’s easier than your dolphins. You can do it.”

Merrick closed his eyes and concentrated especially hard and pictured himself standing on the water. He gradually felt himself moving up. He was doing it! He opened his eyes and looked around. This was so awesome! He was standing on water! Then without warning he fell into the water. Merrick swam back to the surface coughing on the salty ocean water. Poseidon was laughing and laughing. Okay, so he wasn’t doing it.

“You have to keep concentrating on it. You can’t just forget about it,” said Poseidon in between laughs. “I used to do the same thing, but I was only five or six at the time.” Merrick flicked his hand at Poseidon and a wave hit him but left Merrick alone. “I just found out that I could do it.” Poseidon sent his own wave at Merrick, only his was bigger. They splashed each other over and over again. Merrick sent one of his dolphins to attack Poseidon, so he returned the favor.

A scream and a flash of light brought their fun to a halt rather quickly. The sun dimmed a little, and the wind picked up. Poseidon moved closer to Merrick and grabbed his wrist. “There are more witches here. I don’t know how many... but that scream was one of my guards. Hurry! Swim for your house. It will protect us.” Poseidon started swimming with his hand still wrapped around Merrick’s wrist. He could swim fast too. They were almost to the beach. Merrick would never have been able to cover that distance alone. Abruptly, Merrick felt something wrap itself around his ankle. He looked down at his foot, saw a witch glaring at him, and started to scream. It was one of those blood traitors! He yanked on his foot but he couldn’t get free. Poseidon stopped and turned toward the witch. He pointed his finger at the witch and for a second Merrick forgot to be afraid as lightning came out of Poseidon’s finger. Honest to god lightning. Damn, but that was cool.

The lightning hit the blood traitor squarely in the chest and sent him swishing backwards and deep into the water. At that time, more witches showed up and surrounded the blood traitor underneath the surface. They stabbed him with giant swords, and the blood traitor went up in blue flames. The witches turned toward Poseidon and one of them said in that strange language that Merrick could now understand perfectly, “That’s all of them, my Lord. Are you both all right?”

“Yes, we’re fine.” said Poseidon. “I’ll see you later, Merrick. I’m thinking I should go home but don’t worry. You have your bodyguards to protect you.”

“I see you, and thanks for saving me.” Poseidon had saved him from the blood traitor when he could have gotten away. Merrick ideally wondered if he should say something else. He figured he was going to worry about the blood traitors coming to get him no matter what Poseidon said or who was protecting him.

The two boys said their good byes for the day and Poseidon disappeared beneath the ocean waves with his guards. Merrick swam towards the shore. He slowly walked up to his house and saw his mom standing in front of the back door all wrapped up in her coat. She was tapping her foot on the ground and frowning at him.

“You went swimming in the ocean! Alone! Did you even listen to anything your father has ever told you about safety in the ocean? You could have drowned! If you didn’t freeze to death. This is Maine not Florida. It is forty-six degrees out. Do you want pneumonia? Go upstairs right now and take a hot shower.” Merrick went inside with his mom as she continued her rant. “No T.V. or computer or anything for the next three weeks. And if I ever catch you do this again I’ll...”

It was not his fault that she caught him this time, Merrick thought, as they went upstairs. He did not plan to be attacked by evil witches. And how was he supposed to know that all of the... mom things that she had to do today would not take as long as yesterday?

“Merrick, where did that ring come from?” His mom’s voice broke through his thoughts as they walked into his room. She was pointing to the silver ring on his right
“A friend gave it to me. It’s not real silver or anything. He’s got one too. His name is Poseidon.” Merrick said. He curled up his fingers to hide the ring. He hoped that his mom did not get a good enough look at it to be able to tell that it was solid silver.

“Oh that’s nice. I told you that you would make friends.” His mom smiled as she spoke. She seemed to have forgotten about being mad at him. Was he really that pathetic to her? He wasn’t alone that much. “Now take your shower and then you do your homework.” She reached down by his T.V. and pulled out the power cord. She went to his computer and took that power cord too. Nope. She was still mad.

He took a quick shower and dressed. He went to the window and opened it to let a little ocean air in. As he walked toward his book sack he heard something on the wind. It sounded like a voice. He turned back toward the window and saw a piece of paper fly into his room and land on his bed ever so softly. It unfolded itself and Merrick read the words. To Merrick, My Grandson’s mortal sea witch friend. Welcome to our world. Grandson? That would be the King, wouldn’t it? That was cool.
The temperature was perfect. It was the time of year when the wind was cold enough to keep the sun-beaten earth cool. It was the perfect day for a fishing trip, and Joey hadn’t launched the boat in ages. Angela was out shopping for their soon-to-be first baby and Joey decided to treat himself. The water was chilly as the small boat slid into the lake and he started the motor. Everything was in place. The tackle box sat in the front and the fishing pole rocked in the wind. There were a few boats on the open lake and Joey decided to find the old spot he remembered so well. He rounded a small peninsula that jutted out and came to a secluded opening around a hill. A solitary boat sat in the middle of the circular extension of the lake. “How’s the fishing?” Joey asked as he approached the boat slowly. He then noticed that the man in the boat was organizing a few nets. He was an old man, frail and weather-worn. “What a day, huh,” Joey asked after the man didn’t reply. “Indeed.” “You catchin’ any fish with those nets?” “I have an ice chest full,” said the old man as he opened the white container towards the back of his small boat. Joey was close enough to see the box full of fish and smell the rotten smell decaying flesh. “Whoa!” Joey’s head recoiled. “You need some help with those fish? It seems like they’ve been there for a while.” “I’ve only just caught them. They’re fresh.” His old eyes looked straight into Joey’s eyes, his brow bending down. “Hey buddy, something stinks. I’m pretty sure it’s the fish.” Joey fixed his gaze on the fish. “Maybe it’s your friends.” “My what?” Joey’s head snapped towards the old man just in time to see one of his nets glide at him. It covered him and he stepped back to regain his balance. As he struggled to free himself the old man grabbed the net and his shirt with surprising strength and tossed him overboard. The cold water enveloped Joey as he sank heavily to the lake bed. He continued to struggle but the weights on the net seemed to be wrapped together and were dragging him downward. He hit a shifty ground and rolled a few feet down a slope. When he came to rest, he frantically clawed at the net but was unable to open it. As his world began to spin, his fingers touched a soft object underneath him. He felt for it and realized as his lungs filled with water that it was a human foot.
In fairy tales women are depicted in need of rescue; however, gender should not play a role in deciding the hero. “The Magical Attic” is dedicated to every girl who wants to be her own hero.
The Magical Attic

a children’s storybook by

Taryn Bernier, Michelle Betanof, Allyson Fey and Heather Tizzard

Illustrations by Michelle Betanof & Allyson Fey
Once upon a time
there was a girl named Arabella from Wacahoota, Florida. Although Arabella did not know it yet, the coming weekend would be unforgettable.

To Grandmother’s House

“But, Mom, I am sixteen years old. I’m old enough to stay home by myself for a weekend,” Arabella said.

“I know you are, but I would feel better if you spent the weekend with your grandmother,” replied Arabella’s mother.

Arabella stormed to her room and slammed the door shut.

“If you do not change that attitude, you will be grounded!” Arabella’s mother exclaimed.

Arabella pulled out her bag for the weekend and started packing. As Arabella closed her bag, she heard her mother at the front door, “Let’s go Arabella; your grandmother is waiting for us.”

Arabella and her mother left the house and drove to Grandmother’s house.

“Oh Arabella, I’m so glad you’re going to spend the weekend with me. I feel like I never see you anymore,” Grandmother said the moment Arabella walked through the door.

Arabella waved goodbye to her mother.
Grandma’s Attic

As Arabella unpacked her bag, she thought, “This is going to be the worst weekend ever. What sixteen-year-old hangs out with their grandma for the weekend?”

Just then, there was a knock at the bedroom door. Grandma opened the door. “Arabella, my dear, I need you to go get something out of the attic for me.”

Arabella climbed the steep steps to the attic. “It’s so dirty up here,” she said to herself. She caught a glimmer of something in the back corner. “What is that?” she wondered.

It was a chest, and although the wood was old, it still had a feel of something magical about it. She opened it and inside she found a beautiful ball gown. Arabella admired the gown for a few minutes before she tried it on.

She looked at herself in the dusty old mirror and spun around. When she stopped spinning, she was no longer in Grandma’s attic. She was standing in the middle of a dirt road.
The Land of Cartridge

“Uh, Grandma? Are you there?” asked Arabella. She peered around and saw nothing but trees. “I’m definitely not in Grandma’s attic.”

As she wandered around, she noticed all the beauty of this strange place. It looked like something out of a fairy tale. “I’ve been walking around forever and I still don’t know where I am!” Arabella sat on the ground. “I give up,” she said as she fell backwards into the green grass.

“Is everything all right?” Arabella heard from above her. Opening her eyes, Arabella saw a boy all dressed up leaning over her.

“Who are you?” Arabella asked.

“Why, I’m Eli, Prince of Cartridge.”

“Cartridge? Where’s that?” she asked.

“You’re in Cartridge,” He laughed. Before she could ask another question, he asked, “You’re not from around here, are you?”

“No, I’m not. Something tells me I’m far from home,” she responded.

“Well, since you are far from home, I think that as Prince I should give you a tour of this wonderful place!” he exclaimed.

“I guess that would be all right,” said Arabella. With that, Eli led Arabella on a tour of Cartridge, and they both realized that this could be the start of something special.
The Capture of Eli

As Eli gave Arabella a tour of Cartridge, they came across Donovan, Cane, and Aiden, three men who used to work in the castle for Eli’s father, but were banished from the land for betraying the king.

“You three are not supposed to be on this land,” the prince yelled at them.

The three men turned around to see who had yelled. When they saw Prince Eli, they ran into the woods.

A few minutes later, Arabella and Eli heard a noise in the trees, and Donovan, Cane, and Aiden came running from different directions. Cane threw a potion at Arabella that made her very sleepy. Donovan and Aiden grabbed Eli and threw him on Cane’s horse. As the three men rode off with Eli, all Arabella could do was sleep.
**Arabella Meets the Fox**

“Eli!” Arabella called as she awoke alarmed and confused, “Oh, no. Those men must have taken him! What do I do now?” Arabella wondered. “I know,” she said, jumping to her feet, “I’ll go after them and save him!”

“You? Save a prince from those three?” asked a strange voice.

Arabella turned around to see who was behind her. “Who’s there? Come out,” she demanded.

A little fox came trotting out of the forest. “Hello, Miss, my name is Dakota. You are?”

“Well, I can save Prince Eli, and I will,” Arabella said to him with confidence.

Dakota sighed, “If you insist on saving the prince, then I will come with you to help. Before we can go save the prince, we must find the tools we need: the map, the sword, and the key.”

“Okay, then let’s go, we have a prince to save!” exclaimed Arabella.
“We must travel through the dark forest to get the map,” Dakota said.

After walking deep into the forest, they came across a bear sitting outside of a cave.

“What are you doing here?” the bear asked.

“We are trying to save Prince Eli,” said Arabella.

“Well, in that case,” the bear said, “you will need this map, but you must answer this one riddle to get it.”

“If it will save Prince Eli, we will do it,” Arabella said.

“The riddle is: I look at you, you look at me, I raise my right, you raise your left. What is the object?”

“Let’s think about this,” Dakota said.

“If I look at them, they look at me, but it’s an object,” Arabella said to Dakota.

“When you raise your left, it raises its right, so it’s the opposite, as if you were looking at someone.” Dakota said.

“Oh, I got it!” Arabella exclaims, “it’s a mirror.”

“Very good,” said the bear, “here’s your map to find Prince Eli, and good luck.”

“Thank you,” Arabella said as she turned towards Dakota, “we need to find the bridge next.”
“Look Dakota, it’s the bridge. We’re halfway there!” Arabella screamed with excitement.

“That’s great,” Dakota replied. As they got to the bridge, a lion walked up from the other side.

“Who are you? What do you want?” the lion asked.

“My name is Arabella. This is my friend Dakota, and we are trying to save Prince Eli,” Arabella said.

“Before you can cross the bridge and receive the sword, you need, you must first answer a riddle,” said the lion.

“We can do that,” they responded.

“Here’s your riddle. I can pass before the sun, yet make no shadow. What am I?” the lion asked.

“Okay, so I can pass before the sun,” Arabella repeated.

“...yet make no shadow,” Dakota finished.

“Everything makes a shadow because of the sun,” Arabella thought out loud.

“Everything except air,” Dakota told her.
“Air, that’s it, but it has to pass the sun. So moving air,” Arabella answered.

“Air that moves?” Dakota questions.

“Yes, like the wind. That’s it! Wind!” Arabella exclaims.

“The answer is wind,” Arabella said to the lion.

“You are correct. Here’s the sword and you may cross the bridge.” The lion gave Arabella the sword and stepped aside allowing them to pass. “Good luck on your journey,” he said to them as they passed.

“Thank you,” Arabella said to the lion.

The Monkey and the Key

Shortly after crossing the bridge, they came across a beautiful jungle filled with banana trees. “I am quite hungry,” said Arabella.

“Well, let’s have a snack,” said Dakota.

As Arabella reached up for a banana something grabbed her hand.

“Who are you?” exclaimed a monkey sitting in the tree.

“My name is Arabella and this is my friend, Dakota,” she answered. “We are on our way to save Prince Eli.”

“Oh, you need the map, sword, and key to do that,” the monkey told them.

“We have the map and the sword. We are looking for the key,” said Arabella.
“You have come to the right place,” the monkey said, “I have the key right here, but as you already know, you must answer a riddle to get it.”

“Of course,” said Arabella, “we are ready to answer it.”

“The riddle is: What gets wetter and wetter the more it dries?”

“What gets wetter and wetter the more it dries?” Arabella asked, thinking out loud.

“Oh, I know,” said Dakota, “you use a towel to get dry and it gets wet while it dries you.”

“Correct,” said the monkey, “here is your key to the castle, and be safe on the rest of your journey.”
The Dragon

“Look Dakota, it’s the castle where Eli is being held,” Arabella said.

“Well, let’s go, the prince is not going to save himself,” Dakota told her. They headed off towards the castle, but stopped right after walking over the moat and through to the courtyard.

“Look, Arabella, it’s the men who took the prince,” Dakota said.

“What do we have here, boys?” Donovan asked the other two men.

“It looks to me like she’s trying to save the prince,” said Aidan.

“Let’s see if she can get past our dragon,” Cain responded.

“Call the dragon, Cain,” said Donovan. Cain whistled and they heard a sound in the distance. A few seconds later Arabella saw the shadow of a dragon on the ground. Then she heard a loud thud behind her. She and Dakota turned around and saw the dragon.
“You can do this, Arabella. I’m right beside you,” Dakota urged her.

“Well, here goes nothing,” Arabella responded. With that, Arabella took off towards the dragon. After a few minutes of struggle, Arabella defeated the dragon with the magic sword that the lion had given her. Once Arabella defeated the dragon she turned around to find Donovan, Cain, and Aidan gone.

“Great job, Arabella! Not only did you defeat the dragon, but you scared off those three goofballs,” Dakota told her.

“Thanks! Let’s go get the prince,” Arabella said. The two of them ran into the castle and up the tower stairs. She used the key to unlock the door to free Eli.

Together, they found a horse and rode until they were safely back in the Land of Cartridge. They dismounted from the horse and sat on a rock by the stream.

“I’m so glad you are okay,” said Arabella.

“Thank you for saving me!” exclaimed Eli. “I thought I was going to die there!”

“I would never have let that happen,” said Arabella.

“I would like to thank you with a present,” Eli said as he pulled a heart-shaped necklace out of his pocket and placed it around her neck.

Arabella leaned forward and kissed Prince Eli. “I’m so glad I met you,” she told the prince.

“I’m glad I met you too. I wish you could stay here forever.”

“Why can’t I?” Arabella asked.
The Necklace

Arabella touched the necklace, and the sky began to spin. The trees swirled like water into the sky. As she reached out for Eli’s hand, she was swept up into the sky until she felt herself falling.

She woke up and looked around, realizing that she was in her grandmother’s attic. She stood up and looked down to see she was still wearing the dress. She tried spinning around and around but nothing happened. “Was it all just a dream?” she wondered as she looked into the mirror. She saw the heart necklace around her neck and knew it was real. Arabella changed back into her own clothes and ran downstairs to tell her grandmother.

“Arabella, there you are. You’ve been in the attic for a long time,” Grandmother said.

“Really, I have?” Arabella asked.

“Yes, you have. What have you been doing up there?”

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” Arabella responded.

“Try me,” her grandmother said.

“Well, I went up into the attic like you asked. While I was up there I put on a dress that I found in your antique chest,” Arabella said.

“I can see that,” her grandmother interrupted.

Arabella looked down and realized that she was still holding the dress in her hands. “Oh,” she said, embarrassed, “after putting on the dress I started to spin around and when I stopped spinning, I was no longer in the attic.”

“Where were you?” Arabella’s grandmother asked.
“I was in a land called Cartridge, and I met a prince named Eli, who was then kidnapped,” said Arabella. “After the prince was captured, a fox named Dakota helped me to rescue him,” she continued.

“How did you rescue him?” Grandmother asked.

“Dakota and I answered riddles to get a map, a sword, and a key. Then we went to the castle where he was held and I defeated the dragon,” Arabella said. Her grandmother smiled. She saw the expression on her grandmother’s face, but continued, “Then, Dakota and I took off into the castle and I used the key to unlock the door of the room where he was kept. Prince Eli thanked me and gave me this necklace,” she said, touching the necklace to show her grandmother.

“It’s a beautiful necklace,” said Grandmother.

“But doesn’t that mean something? Did everything really happen?” Arabella asked.

“Magic is found in the strangest places,” Grandmother said with a smile.
“Arabella get up, time for school!” yelled Arabella’s mother. Arabella got dressed for school. She packed her school bag and went downstairs for breakfast.

“Hurry up and eat, Arabella, we need to leave soon,” her mother said.

“Okay, mom,” said Arabella.

Arabella’s mom dropped her off at school. She said hi to her friends and headed to class before the bell rang. As she rounded the corner by her class, she bumped into someone and dropped her books.

“I’m sorry,” a boy said, helping her pick up the books, “Arabella?” he asked.

“Eli!” she exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

“I just transferred,” he said.

“But how and why?” she asked.

“I had to see you again,” said Eli, “I love you.”

“I love you, too,” she said.

And they lived happily ever after.
Official Entry Form Mosaic

Please print or type:

Full Name: ________________________________________________________________

Home Town: ______________________________________________________________

Present Mailing Address: ________________________ __________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

Student number: ________________ Home phone: (       ) _________________

Major: ________________________ Graduated from: ___________________________

Email address: ____________________________________________________________

Classification: [ ] Senior       [ ] Junior
       [ ] Sophomore       [ ] Freshman
       [ ] Graduate Student   [ ] Nicholls graduate
       [ ] part-time student

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List entries by title and category. There is no limit to the number of entries.

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