



# Tapestry *of* Dreams

An Anthology of New Writers

*Summer Writing Studio 2020*

*Story Studio & Greater Victoria Public Library*

Story Studio is a charity that inspires, educates and empowers youth to be great storytellers, transforming lives and strengthening communities. We create innovative, 'fun-first' workshops that develops narrative capacity in youth, and celebrate young writers by crafting beautiful publications from their words.

This anthology is composed of selections of stories and poems written by dedicated writers between the ages of 12 and 18 as a result of our eight week Summer Writing Studio program in connection with GVPL.. Participants worked virtually over the course of the summer to complete an independent writing project while learning and receiving feedback from professional authors and editors.

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# ***TABLE OF CONTENTS***

Excerpts from Isle of Loss.....	4
Collection of Poems.....	21
Sanguinum.....	30
Reflections.....	34
Charmed Lives.....	44
Collection of Poems.....	49
Skies and Stories.....	54
Untitled.....	63
Untitled.....	76
Aeternum.....	82
Poems.....	88
Child of the Revolution.....	96
Breathing Blue.....	107
Poems.....	115
Odie's Text.....	127
I Could Have Saved You.....	132
Pharmakis.....	142
Kingdom of Lies.....	148
The Epic of Lily.....	158
Barriwallow's Revenge.....	171
Revenge of the Ifres.....	183
About the Authors.....	189

# ***EXCERPTS FROM ISLE OF LOSS***

by

Kahlan Arnold

## Prologue – Ten years earlier

I was five when it happened. It started as a beautiful autumn day, when the sun had the strength to fight against the coming winter and expelled enough warmth to make me comfortable in a light sweater or a warm shirt. Colourful leaves in dozens of shades swirled around me like dancers and I reached up to grab them from the air, snatching them from the sky like they were gold, only to cast them aside when my chubby baby hands couldn't carry anything else. Even then the children of the earth were my favourite playmates.

Katrina, my older sister and in my view, a superhero, sat on a pile of leaves she had fashioned for herself. There was a book abandoned on her lap, her long brown hair pulled back in a messy ponytail. She had decided that, as she had just turned ten, she was “all grown up”, but I could tell that she wanted to play with me. Mommy had left for work and Katrina, though she was too young to watch us, was better than Daddy. Mommy had told us not to worry, that Daddy would sleep all day. He hadn't come home the night before. That morning, though, he showed up as we were eating breakfast. He walked funny, like when I spun around and around and got dizzy. Mommy stood up from the breakfast table hastily and pulled him into their bedroom. She didn't come out for a while and when she did, she was dressed for work, with her bright green *Community Restoration Project* shirt. She hugged us.

“What's wrong with Daddy?” Katrina asked. She had seen the worried look on Mommy's face and the strange way Daddy walked. She was now on the verge of tears. I just sat there.

“He's just...tired. Leave him alone and he'll sleep all day, okay? He needs the rest. Why don't you go play outside?”

We reluctantly (Katrina) and happily (me) followed Mommy out and waved as she biked away.

After a lot of pleading, Katrina joined me, tossing leaves into the sky. We made a big leaf pile on the grass and then backed up all the way to the driveway. Katrina went first, sprinting across the asphalt and jumping into the pile of leaves with a scream of delight. She stood up,

wildly shaking leaves out of her hair, half of which had fallen from its bonds and was now blowing in her face. I giggled.

“Your turn, Nova!” she said.

I nodded, “Will you do a countdown?”

“You do it!”

“Pleeeeeease?”

“Fine. Three.... Two.... One!”

We were both too preoccupied to notice the car starting in the driveway. I started to jog forward.

“Wait! Stop!” Katrina yelled, just noticing the car.

Startled, I tripped over my feet, and fell to the ground. The car roared forward. I tried to scramble backwards, but it was too late. Staring up at the car window, I yelled “STOP” at the man behind the wheel. Daddy. He noticed me, his angry-looking face morphing into one of terror. But he noticed me too late. There was a crunch. There was pain. So much pain. There were yells and tears and blood. And then there was nothing.

When I woke up in the hospital, I knew something was wrong right away. There was a strange Nothing where there was supposed to be a Something. My right arm was gone.

## Chapter One

I discovered the roof a couple of weeks ago. I was climbing up the stairs to the second floor of the school, breathing in the putrid mix of cleaning supplies and sweat, when I noticed the ladder. It has always been there, but now it was as if a spotlight was pointing to it. It seemed to glow. I looked up and found that the illumination came from a small hatch in the ceiling that was propped open, letting in beams of light. They seemed drastically out of place at Sparrowood Secondary, the king of artificial lighting, industrial-looking buildings and biased, old-fashioned teachers. This light was like my first breath of clean air after being trapped in a burning building. Of course, I didn't risk actually climbing the ladder. I wanted to. That ladder sucked me in like a black hole, but I forced myself to ignore the call. Mr. Reed had asked me to collect some worksheets for our class in the office and anyway, if the hatch was open, then there was probably someone up there. But thoughts of the ladder filled my mind and refused to leave, taking up residence in a tiny corner, just far away enough to be ignored but not quite forgotten. I'm not sure why I'm remembering the roof now, but the memory is invading my head. *'I can't forget about my English homework tonight. Remember when I discovered the roof? I sure hope the bullies won't find me. I bet I could hide from them on the roof. What's it like up there anyway?'* I groan, then force my mind to focus on the task at hand.

The sun is shining and I'm walking to the far edge of the school field to find something to eat. Mom hasn't had a chance to go shopping and I don't have any money for cafeteria food, so I'm without a lunch. Sparrowood's field is small, with weeds on the far edge that grow to monstrous sizes and refuse to be hacked away. The back fence looks like it has been attacked by blackberry bushes, but they won't be ripe for months. Dandelions, then. I grab a few awkwardly, my inability taunting me.

Suddenly I feel a shove from behind and I stumble, landing hard on my right side. Pain explodes where my arm used to be and I gasp. I've always had painful phantom limb sensations, and this is no exception.

"Hey look. The alien's picking some flowers. What are those for? Your friends? Oh right, you don't have any friends. You don't even talk. What's wrong, alien? Having a bad day?"

I look up to see Jetta, Crystal and Ethan circling me. Jetta is the one talking. Her golden hair sparkles in the May sunshine. Jetta is my own personal thunderstorm. She shoots me with her lightning - though it's anything but light - over and over again. Though Ethan and Crystal hurt me too, they are nothing like Jetta. If she is lightning, then Ethan is thunder, and Crystal is rain. I hate them. Though in reality, I do enjoy thunderstorms.

I stare up at Jetta, trying not to cry. But with the pain, and the bullying, I can't avoid it for long. A tear traces a path down my face and I hate myself for it. Other tears follow and soon I am sobbing.

“Ooh, look guys, the alien’s *crying!*” says Crystal. She is tall, with long black hair woven into a slim braid. Crystal isn’t friends with Jetta and Ethan, but she’s fiercely jealous of their relationship, and as she is known to be the smartest kid in the school, she joins forces with them to avoid being bullied herself.

Ethan is handsome, there is no doubting it. He has brown hair and green eyes that sparkle like emeralds. With his muscular build and relaxed manner, Ethan has the reassuring knowledge that he will never have to work to be popular. For as long as the trio has been bullying me, Ethan and Jetta have been dating. Crystal just tags along, never releasing the flimsy hope that Ethan will fall for her instead.

I debate my options. Staying here is not a possibility. I don’t want to run, because I know Ethan is much faster than me, but I don’t know what else to do. So, I push myself off the ground and sprint. They follow. The earth is uneven, and the weeds just add another obstacle, but I can’t stop. I hear Ethan’s feet pounding along behind me and speed up. Unfortunately, a particularly nasty weed is right in my path. It doesn’t knock me over, but I stumble, and Ethan pulls ahead of me and grabs the single remaining dandelion out of my hand, viciously ripping it to pieces.

“No!” I cry. Ethan just grins, and I can hear Jetta and Crystal laughing behind us.



I sprint off again, toward the school, figuring that I can lose them in the maze of school hallways. The back door opens seconds before I can reach it.

“Whoa!” yells the kid behind the door, a boy, with light brown skin, hair, and eyes. Theo, I think his name is. He launches himself away from the door, and then turns around to watch us run past.

Kids swerve out of the way as I slow my breakneck pace to a fast walk, knowing that ours is probably the only school in the country that strictly enforces the “no running in the halls” thing. Behind me I hear Ethan, Crystal and Jetta’s feet relaxing their strides as well. If we had kept running, we would be caught by one of the many hall monitors, who watch the corridors like guards patrolling a castle. Somehow, though, they manage to miss my constant torment.

Our school is U-shaped, with a few extra portables and a gym scattered around it. The bottom of the U is at the back, so at the front there is a large space for people to congregate. Many eat their lunch there instead of the small and stuffy cafeteria or the loud and heavily guarded halls, so someone has set up tents for shade and cover from rain. I avoid that area with such passion that if the field and school were on fire, I would possibly choose to stay in the building. Firefighters would have to drag me out. I head to the right, stepping over several pairs of legs sticking out of lazy students who can't bother to move for me.

Part of the way up the U is my oasis: science class. The door is always open, and our teacher lets me hang out there sometimes. From the beginning, Mr. Mushroom had understood me. (None of the students know his real name and fungi are his favourite. On the first day of class, he told us his name was Mr. Mushroom. No one doubted him until he told us on April Fool’s Day that it was a joke). He let me do my own thing, not fluttering around me like some of the other teachers did. He figured that if I really needed help that I would ask for it. He gave me books about survival and nature. He was my hero.

I found out early on that the door that supposedly leads to a closet is actually a large storage room, filled to the brim with science-y stuff. And it connects with the other science classrooms beyond it.

I slip inside the classroom, quickly crossing the floor to the storage room, and then through it to the furthest classroom. By the time they charge through the door, I am long gone. After I leave the trio of science classes behind, I make a beeline for the stairs. I climb them and am about to hurry down the corridor when something catches my eye. The ladder. The hatch. It is closed, but it could be unlocked. *‘Do I dare to go up?’* No one is around. No one would know. I could do it. It is then that I hear voices. Loud voices.

“Where’d you go, alien? Are you hiding from us? Don’t hide. We were just trying to help. Was it the flowers? It was for your own good, you know. Flowers are not the best way to make friends around here. Come back!”

Oh, no. They’re getting closer. And closer. I have to go. Carefully, delicately, I take a step. Towards the ladder. Then another. And another. Then up the ladder. One rung. Then another. And another. I pull myself up. It’s awkward. The ladder is not meant for one-armed people. I try to lean against the ladder, twining a leg around it to keep me in place, then reach up to the next rung. Then I step up. Repeat. It takes far too long. I can hear Jetta’s crooning voice getting louder and louder. They’re at the base of the stairs.

The hatch is not meant for one-armed people, either. With one leg wrapped around the side of the ladder like before, I reach for the handle, turn it, then push. It opens, and I scramble onto the roof.

It isn’t a pretty sight, that’s for sure. Gray cement, random vents, cigarette butts, graffiti. Then I see them and forget all about the roof, only just remembering to wedge a random rock between the hatch and the roof to ensure a way down. Beside the school are a couple of giant ash trees with canopies stretching over the roof, providing a shady oasis under the trees. I hurry over there, and lie down on the cement, letting dappled sunlight turn the undersides of the canopy into a gorgeous mosaic of greens. Then I stand on my toes and brush my fingers against the leaves. It gives me comfort to know that they are right beside me, protecting me.

But the trees are not my only comfort. I have the sky - larger than the tallest tree, stretching over everything. Water-colour streaks of blue - no, not blue. Blue can’t begin to describe it.

I wander around, gaping, for a while, astonished because even though I've looked at the sky countless times, I've never really *seen* it. The Sky Blue pencil crayon, I discover, is a total lie. You need more than Crayola to paint the sky. Every moment brings new delights, and I am content to spend my break drinking up colours, gasping and *ooo*-ing in delight.

In addition to the sky are the clouds, some like streaks of paint, others like puffs of cotton, in all sorts of amusing shapes. The sun is there too, though I don't look directly at it, reminding me of its presence with a warm hand on my back. I lie back on the ground, resting my head on my arm. Curly red hair fans out around my head.

I'm small, with a face full of freckles and curious brown eyes. The red hair is from my dad, but my freckles are a gift from my mother and the sun on my face. '*Sun kisses*,' Mom always said. I like to imagine that Dad isn't actually related to me, that my father is the sun, and the red hair actually represents the sun's fire. I know it's not true but pretending that it is can be enough to get me through a rough day. My eyes are a mix of both my parents, the soft brown colour from Mom, and the rock-hard core from Dad. There's some *me* in my appearance as well, in the pimples that disguise themselves among my freckles (a testament to how little I wash my face), in the inquisitive spark in my eyes, in my lack of clothing in colours other than green and grey. The only marks from the accident other than my arm - or, rather, lack of arm - are a collection of jagged scars on my cheeks and arm. The scars come from being scraped along the rough asphalt. Really, it's a miracle that that's all that happened.

I sigh, pushing away the tendrils of memory that curl around my neck, choking me. '*Relax*,' I tell myself. But I can't. There is a storm ahead, I can feel it in my bones. I will not be calm for long.

## Chapter Two

I linger at the fence outside the school. The worry inside of me has only grown since lunch, and I can't help but feel hesitant to take the next step. Are the bullies planning something? Will they ambush me after school? I don't know. And the not-knowing just makes it worse. My mind fills with terrible possibilities, most of them involving my death, and I shudder.

I hate when my brain does this; when I think up the most ridiculous of scenarios and then actually start *worrying* about them happening. At least, I think my worries are ridiculous... "Hey. Move over. Some people have to walk through the gate you're standing in the way of, you know?" This statement is accompanied by a shove that throws me off-balance. I trip to my right, and, as there is no arm there to break my fall, I land painfully, my head hitting the metal fence with a muffled *clank*. The source of the voice is, unsurprisingly, Jetta. She stalks past me, Crystal and Ethan behind her, then turns around to smirk at me before leaving.

I massage my head. It's not bleeding, which is good, but it hurts. Badly. I feel light-headed and dizzy, and the pain seems to be the only real thing in my life, like the world around me is smudged and blurry, faded colours with soft edges, a bunch of cotton candy. Not the pain, though. It is sharp and bright, overpowering. When a concerned voice collides into me, I gasp.

*"Hey. Um, are you okay? You look, uh, kind of dizzy?"* I glance up. In front of me stands a boy. For some reason, seeing him makes me think of the day I discovered the roof. *'Oh right'* I remember, *'It's the boy who I almost ran into trying to get to the school. Theo. This is awkward.'*

"Sorry!" I blurt out, then inwardly wince.

"Uh...for what?" Obviously, he's already forgotten. Oops.

"Oh. Uh. Nothing. And I'm fine."

"You do not look fine."

“I’m *fine*,” I say. Then I realize how impolite that sounded. Then I get up, because this is probably the longest civil conversation I’ve had with anyone who isn’t related to me, and anyway, after being so rude, I can’t just stay there. It’s too late to take the words back, so I have to follow through with my rudeness.

The world is still blurry, and as I get up, it seems to spin around me. Or maybe I’m just dizzy. I stumble, and collapse to the ground. And then Theo is beside me again, kneeling close to my head and staring at me like his body moved without his consent and he’s shocked to be here.

“You’re not okay. Where’s your parent’s car?”

“I walk. Leave me alone.” I say.

“I better take you to the nurse.”

“No!” Determined, I roll over so he can’t see me. I’m about to cry, I know it. I can’t resist him if I’m *crying*. The pain is a knife, and I can’t see the nurse. He sends an email to the parents of every kid that shows up at his office, so my parents will know what happened. Dad, if he notices (which is questionable), will get mad at me for fighting. Mom will switch between worrying about me and giving me the *I-can’t-deal-with-this-right-now-why-can’t-you-be-normal* look. I hate that one.

“No, actually. I can’t be normal because your husband drove over my arm. It’s not a choice.”

“Come on, Nova. You can’t just stay there. You have to see the nurse.”

I curl up into a tight ball. The tears are coming, now. “NO!”

“Well, at least let me walk you home.” He places his hand on my shoulder. I am seriously doubting the sincerity of this offer. Why would anyone want to walk me home? I bet he’s working with the bullies. Otherwise, why would he touch me? Most kids won’t even look at

me. They sneak glances to stare at the place where my arm should be, but if I turn to look at them, they rip their eyes away.

But there is something in Theo's voice. Something that makes me want to let him help me. Let him touch me. I roll to face him, and his determined expression wavers. I must look a mess. Tears leave their marks on my face, tattooing my eyes with red to prove their existence. There is dirt and bits of asphalt, from the ground. I have several small cuts on my arm and legs. I probably have a big bump on my head. Also. I have one arm.

But still, he crouches beside me, reaching out his hand. I look up at him. His light auburn hair seems to glimmer in the sunlight, and his eyes remind me of my mother's, a warm, kind brown. Some of his courage must have spread to me because I take his hand, let him pull me to my feet. He wraps his arm around me to support me, grabs my satchel off the ground, and hoists it over his shoulder. We walk haphazardly towards home. It's only until later that I realize that he never had to ask me where I live. How does he know? We don't talk much. His hand is gentle on my back. I like it. "How do you feel?"

"My head's all fuzzy." Why am I telling him this? I'm breaking all my rules for surviving the civilized world:

1. Put on a mask. Be what they want me to be.
2. Don't draw attention to myself.
3. Talk as little as possible.

He doesn't seem to care, though.

"I told you we had to go see the nurse." His voice is light and teasing on the outside, but underneath I can sense concern. He is wearing a mask, too. At school he always acts carefree, but to me, he seems kinda tense.

Maybe I am better at seeing through masks because I wear my own. Can he see through my mask, too? Does he know there is a creative, curious person inside my quiet girl appearance?

That has always been one of my greatest fears, pounded into me through years of bullies - who always go for the quirky kids - and Dad, who scares me into hiding. But for some reason, I'm not scared of Theo seeing me.

Theo is a weird kid. He spends most of his time at school in the library. (I discovered that when I tried to hide from the bullies in the library for a few weeks. But I kept getting kicked out because I wasn't doing anything "productive". Also, for a couple months afterwards, I was called an "alien from the planet Nerd".) And when he's not in the library, he's carrying a book. Or writing in the green notebook he takes with him everywhere. I wonder if he gets bullied too.

I've also seen him at the public library a few times. I would be getting books about nature, or hiking, or wilderness survival (my favourite things), and he would be in the teen section, or the poetry section, or sitting cross-legged on a bench in the corner. As we get closer to our house, I start worrying. What will my family think when I show up dirty, cut up, crying?

My mom's a hard-working woman who tries to single handedly care for me, bring in enough income to keep our half of the tiny duplex and feed us, and deal with dad. She loves us, and she'll be worried for me, but in the long run it'll just stress her out. Mom doesn't need anything else on her already super-human sized plate.

For an alcoholic, Dad isn't that bad. I mean, he doesn't go around swearing and hitting us. You're probably thinking '*Didn't he go and run over my arm?*' Well, he did. But you weren't there. You couldn't imagine the look on his face. The horror. The grief. The regret.

He was better after that. He never came home drunk. Dad would take his car, and disappear for a day or two, and then come back for a while. But there was still fear inside me, whispering "what ifs" that grew into tangible beings. Fortunately, he probably isn't home right now. If he were, he'd get mad. Really mad.

Katrina, my sister, is my favourite. I feel bad for her. As a smart and pretty twenty year old, she should be in college, maybe dating, living a good life. But instead, she balances online

education with an almost full-time job, taking care of the house when Mom's busy, and watching me. With all her work, though, she always makes me feel loved. Her room was the first place I felt I belonged in, and most of the time, she doesn't mind if I sit on her bed while she works, as long as I'm quiet. If she sees me like this, she'll give me a hug, a gummy bear, and sit on her bed with me until I calm down.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Theo asks.

"No."

"Oh. Okay."

We're only a couple blocks from our house when disaster strikes. By disaster I mean thunderstorm. By thunderstorm I mean Jetta, Ethan and Crystal. One moment I'm walking down the road with Theo, the next, they stand in front of us, grinning.

"Is that your *boyfriend*, alien? Is he an extra-terrestrial too? He must be, 'cause there is no way a human being would fall for you," Jetta grins as she says that, taking pleasure as the words hit me.

Theo pales, then turns to me, "Bye!" Then he's gone, dropping my bag at my feet.

"YOU!" I scream, "WHY?! Next time don't bother! Not if you'll just run off again! Or are you working for them? Are you? I bet you're doing it just to avoid getting bullied yourself! CREEP" Hate erupts like a volcano within me. Roaring down the mountain of my mind, destroying and corrupting until it physically *hurts*. Was Theo leading me to the bullies? That little... I stop, realizing something. I just called him a creep. Just for trying to get away. I would do the same thing. And I called him a *creep*. How much do those kinds of words hurt me? And I just hurt him.

"Sorry," I whisper. Then I run. Call me a coward or call me sane. Whatever. It doesn't matter. But I am not letting those bullies tear me apart anymore today. I need to calm down.



But they follow, words shooting me down. And with my hurt head, it's only a matter of time before I fall. Fall to the ground, asphalt scraping my cheeks. Fall into a pit of sorrow, hope bleeding out of me. Fall into the bully's trap, the predator catching the prey.

"Come on, alien. We'll help you home." There is no kindness in this offer. Ethan hauls me roughly to my feet.

"Now. How shall we carry you?" Jetta asks.

"Over the shoulder?" Crystal suggests.

"Like the baby she is?" Ethan asks.

"No." A positively evil grin spreads across her face. "Upside down."

This is bad.

Ethan puts me back on the ground, grabs my ankles, and pulls up until I am dangling helplessly in the air. Upside down. My fingers stretch towards the ground, but I can't quite reach it. I twist and writhe like a fish hauled out of the water, but it's no use. And so, I let myself dangle. I let them think they have won. And maybe they have.

When we turn onto my street, Ethan drops me. I gasp in pain as my head collides with the road. My *head*. It's too painful for similes or metaphors. There is nothing I can relate this to, so I curl up, trying to shield my head from further blows. I want to stay there forever. But the universe has other ideas.

"Um, alien? Nova?" I didn't know that Jetta knew my name. "I think your Dad - is that her Dad? - wants to talk to you. I, uh, think maybe you should get up." Her voice sounds nervous.

What's going on? Someone - Crystal, I think - is pulling at my arm.

Slowly, I uncurl, pushing myself up with my arm. I can hardly see through tears and pain. Down the road, in front of our duplex, is Dad. His face is flushed. He walks toward me unsteadily. Oh no. He is drunk. Drunk and extremely angry. His red hair is matted to his head, sweat visible even from a distance.

“Is that your dad?!” Jetta asks, “Is he... drunk?”

“Guys, we should go,” Crystal says, practically begging. “I think Nova and her dad have some, ah, catching up to do.”

“NOVA!” Dad screams.

“Guys, let’s GO!”

They dash away. I glance back at Dad. I haven’t seen him drunk in a long time. Panic jolts through me like electricity, barrelling through my brain, pushing my pain aside. My mind switches between two scenes: now and the day I lost my arm.

“NOVA, get over here this minute!” Dad shrieks.

The roar of the motor; the car advancing.

Despite the staggering way he walks, Dad manages to move in a manner that feels predatory, a lion stalking its next meal.

The screams that belong to me and my sister; the car advancing.

He stands in front of me.

The car reaches my body. And keeps going.

“DID YOU WRITE THIS?”

Time stops. Everything stops. In his hand, a letter. My letter. A dark night, a fearful night. Me breathing heavily, squeezing my sister tight. I remember that night. The night when everything was too much, when the darkness was a beast, choking me. I escaped to Cat's room.

"Write," Kat whispered, placing a pen in my hand, a paper on my lap. "Write the feelings out of you."

There were many nights like that; a glitch in time when a ghost of another terrible day haunted me. So, I wrote letters to the people who hurt me. My father, often. The bullies, sometimes. A stranger at the grocery store who looked at me funny. I wrote them away, wrote letters to them in which I yelled and screamed and hated.

I kept them under my bed. My father looked under my bed. My father found the letters.

Dad holds up the piece of paper and squints at it. "Dear Dad..." He reads in a taunting voice. I zone out again, remembering writing those words.

*Dear Dad,*

*Other kids love their dad.*

*They decorate Father's Day cards with sparkles. They proudly show them their report cards. They sit on their father's lap while he reads stories. I don't remember the last time any of those things happened.*

*I wish I could love you, but I hate you. You make my life misery. Do you know that I get bullied? Do you care?*

*I wish I could forgive you. I wish I could let those angry feelings towards you go. Would I feel like a weight was lifted off my shoulders, like in books? I can't let go though, because more weight is added every day. Every day that I hurt and I hide and I cry. Because of you. I can't forgive you because you are always hurting me more.*

*I feel my arm being crushed every day. I am ashamed to be your daughter.*

*I hate you,*

*Nova.*

When Dad finishes reading the letter, he glares down at me. “You miserable little child. You thought you could say those things about me?”

I sob. Everything is falling apart. Dad was never meant to see those letters. Jetta, Ethan and Crystal were never meant to see Dad. I slowly crawl backward. *I need to get away.* Who knows what Dad will do to me? *I need Mom.* But she’s at work, oblivious to the situation at home.

“Cry-baby. Get up.” Dad grabs me by the collar of my shirt and pulls me up.

“You will have to be punished. Little girls can’t say whatever they want about their fathers, you know.” He lowers his voice and brings my ear to his mouth, “You say you hate me, huh? Well guess what? I’ve never been too fond of you either.” Then he slaps me. Hard. Across the face. I scream. More pain. This time, stinging. Burning. He throws me backward. I hit the ground. Pain. Pain. *Pain.* I want to curl up; go to sleep. I don’t want to wake up again. But my father is walking towards me. He looks like he could hurt me again. And all the anger I have ever felt roars to life inside of me. I feel like I could kill someone. I get to my feet. *Pain.* He has caused me *so much pain.*

“I HATE YOU!” Screaming, I run past him. Towards home. I will pack my stuff, and then I’m leaving. I can’t do this anymore.

# ***COLLECTION OF POEMS***

by  
Serena Ball

## **Rebirth**

You were torn from your roots,  
Chopped to the ground.  
Cruel,  
Beautiful,  
Symmetric.

Embarking on an unwanted journey,  
You were splintered;  
Taken from your home.  
Shred.

Ideas were birthed,  
Ink poured through you,  
Words for rings.  
Pressed,  
Cut,  
Folded.

You were displayed on a rack;  
Handled lovingly.  
Taken to a new home,  
Your spine was broken;  
You fueled imagination.  
Inspired minds.

And turned over a new leaf.

## **Mind's Eye**

“This is war!”

“I call sniper!”

Our giggles and shrieks pierced the air  
As the pristine blue sky grew black with smoke.  
Slithering through grass,  
Tumbling down hills,  
The fresh scent of grass mingled with mud.  
Mustard gas filled the air,  
We took no prisoners.  
We ran,  
Lungs burning.

“Let's play desert island!”

The thunderous dark sky melted into blue once more.  
Grassy knoll transformed into deep ocean,  
Stretching horizon blended into water.  
No more trees,  
Mud,  
Or playground.  
Soft, untouched sand dug in between our toes  
As the Titanic submerged.  
Of course, our books were saved.  
This was the reason why everyone should carry pocket knives,  
We reasoned.  
My tattered shorts were no longer.  
We stood in elegant soiled nightgowns.  
Basking in the tropical sun,  
We purified water,

Fished with bare hands.

“I’m bored,”  
We moaned.

Trudging indoors,  
Tickle trunks were opened.  
Armed in bonnets and shawls,  
We were pioneers,  
Mountie’s wives,

Little women,  
We lived in little houses on prairies,  
We were Anne Shirley’s sisters.  
Always orphaned,  
Our children always with croup.  
With strong, resolute chins,  
We darned socks,  
Were widowed by war  
“Missing in action,”  
The telegram always read.  
Always hope,  
Never tears.  
Walks to and from the train station  
With baskets, of course.  
Our husbands returned,  
Shell shocked.  
Long, thin scars running down their faces,  
They jumped at loud noises.  
I constructed lunch pails out of coffee tins and skipping ropes.



War ended one sunny day,

“It isn’t right to play war when it still happens.”

## Dispassionate Entity

dams against tear ducts  
shove razors down your throat  
that strangle words  
beat rational thought into submission  
feeding sorrow with a mask of anger  
a masquerade of dancing desires  
mining through a myriad of broken thoughts  
icy fingers on necks  
crawling spiders on backs  
claws that ravage blood and muscle  
sucking life through a metal straw  
moving into your chest  
unpacking Its boxes  
lurching in your stomach  
and feeds  
prickle of fangs in flesh  
tearing  
    cutting  
        searing  
            ripping  
mangled  
the sting from an element you shouldn't touch  
It leaves your skin raw and charred  
black against red    red against white  
metallic blood that floods your mouth with warmth  
drop  
  
by  
  
drop

breathe and boil  
tingle and torture  
It lurches then pulses  
squeezes through bone

It's everywhere  
yet invisible  
a broken elevator  
whirring  
    choking  
        barking  
w h i s p e r s in your ear  
piercing    screams in the dead of night  
dull    shoes on wooden floorboards  
then,  
    silence.

## 26 Letters

I remember my first poem,  
Story, novel. Heavily resting on my brain,  
Light as feathers now.

The words vibrated and spluttered in the depths,  
Flooded my soul,  
But refused to emerge.

Just insects on paper,  
Only plotless stories,  
Merely reflections in a quarry.

Outwardly subtle and still. A boat,  
Cascading over crystal ripples,  
Gently bobbing.

But the depths are where the action is. A dazed heroine,  
Murder with no motive,  
Stories with no end.

So what are you to do?  
Imagination tosses to and fro,  
Until seasick with adventure.

Its beauty insidious,  
As most things are.  
There's only one cure:

Pencil to paper, fingers to keys.  
Flotsam and Jetsam, washed,  
To shore.

Rummage through,  
Bandage the weak,  
splint the broken,  
Polish the gold.

That's writing,  
My dearest.  
Now start again.

# ***SANGUINUM***

by

Christian Banos

John had been driving home from work in his RAM 1500. He had had a boring day at work and right now all he wanted to do was return to his house and collapse into bed and hope tomorrow would be better. He took a sharp turn and entered the area he lived in. He parked at his apartment and got out of his car. He lazily walked towards his front door, dragging his feet because of how tired he was. He had been working a missing person's case for weeks.

John placed his hand on the doorknob and entered his home. It was quite messy as it usually was. There were dishes left unwashed and clothes on the floor. He walked into his room and his eyes widened when he saw a creature unlike any he had anything he had ever seen before. He took his gun from the pocket of the brown jacket he was still wearing and shot the Terrible thing. When that didn't work, he clicked his tongue and ran. "Crap...!" It picked him up and it observed him. Chills went down his spine. "Oh no." and then every bone in his body broke simultaneously. He didn't even have time to scream.

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It was a rather cloudy day of summer. School had ended for Max about a week ago, and he was looking for exciting things to do. Max had blonde hair and was wearing a red T-shirt and jeans. Max and his friends planned to meet up at a park and think of things they could do with the large amounts of spare time they had. He went outside and got on his rusty old bicycle and headed over to the park to meet up with his friends, trying to think of ideas on the way there.

The ride only lasted a few minutes and sure enough, his friends were all on the main structure of the park, which was about two metres tall and in as poor condition as all of the other things the park had. He and his friends were all fourteen. The slide was rusted and seemed to be painful to go down and the chains for the swings looked like they could snap at the slightest pressure. The park was in this condition because it had been replaced by a better one and they hadn't bothered to take this one down.

"Hey, Max!" Jack called from above. "C'mere!" Jack was his closest friend as they had known each other since they were six years old. He had dark hair and wore jeans and his favourite coat, which was long and black. Max went around the structure to find the ladder to climb up. It was in bad condition, but it would hold.

He climbed up and greeted his three friends. He had met James and Andrew in school a couple of years after he met Jack and they had all had stayed friends ever since. As a result, they all knew each other almost bizarrely well and enjoyed each other's company. They would usually meet up at Max's house and plan to play card games and end up in an all-out battle with plastic swords and toy guns. "Max, do you have any ideas for what we could do today?" Andrew asked. Andrew wore a hat with the logo of a baseball team on it and a gray hoodie.

"I was thinking we could just go get pizza or just play video games today. Sure we do that nearly every day, but it's fun nevertheless," Max answered.

"Yeah, but don't you want to do something more interesting?" James said. He was wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt and wore glasses. James was moving away from town this summer and wanted to use all the time they had left to have fun, and therefore, wasn't satisfied with "Pizza and video games".



Then the three of them all looked at each other and then looked over to the abandoned building. In the area they lived in there was an urban legend of a monster called Sanguinum, and it was said that *It* was responsible for the people who would often go missing around town.

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# ***REFLECTIONS***

by

Rowyn Card

## Chapter One

I look into the bathroom mirror. My reflection stares back at me as I tie up my chestnut brown hair. She mimics my every move, as we are one person. Just before I leave, I make sure that everything is together in my backpack. At least once every ten minutes, I find myself back in front of a mirror. It's like a moth being drawn to a light... Wait, why am I doing this? I'm going to be late for my bus! Sprinting out the door at almost track meet speed, I hope that it hasn't left without me.

Mr. Johnson, the bus driver, doesn't seem too pleased when I rush onto the bus, slightly out of breath from yet another race against time. "I'm going to phone your parents soon if this doesn't stop," he grumbles as I pass. "You can't keep the bus waiting like this. You're lucky I wait for you."

It's a good thing I can run fast, so I'm usually only a couple minutes late. Plus I have track and field today, so I look at it as a warm up! As the bus starts moving, joy spreads throughout me as I remember we'll have extra hurdles today.

When we arrive it feels like it's only been a couple minutes, but my phone states that it's been almost fifteen. Instead of a row of houses, Oakland High School stands in front of me. Forest surrounds the other side of the school, trees varying in height. As I scan the crowds, panic starts setting in. '*Where are my friends?*' That horrible feeling of anxiety spreads in my chest. '*They haven't abandoned me, have they?*' Through my scrambling thoughts, something pokes me front behind. Zipping around, screaming "AAH!"

My best friend Calla stares at me with one of the creepiest grins I have ever seen.

"You have to stop scaring me like that!"

"It's so easy though!" She can be quite annoying sometimes but it's hard to stay mad at her for long.

As I relax, Calla still has that sinister grin spread ear to ear. *'Oh, right!'* Yesterday I dared her to wear high pigtails for the entire day today and she's doing it. You know what, I'm going to join her. Sliding another scrunchie off my wrist, I redo my hair to match hers. Briefly glancing at each other, we know what we're going to do next. We link arms and merrily skip towards our squads hangout spot, evil grins matching like our pigtails.

Our spot sits under a towering maple tree, which is perfect for climbing. When our friends spot us, they look confused for a second but then they shrug. It's no surprise anymore, we've done too much weird stuff together. Everyone seems like they would've wanted to sleep in, if given the choice. Considering most of them had crammed in a crazy sleepover plus some studying last night, waves of yawns aren't strange.

"Nice pigtails!" Denver jokingly says as we approach.

"Thanks!" we reply cheerfully.

"How was your night?" Calla asks.

"It was fun," they all yawned. "But now I'm tired," Denver admits.

"Same," Alexis and Riley add sleepily. They each hold a McDonald's cup in their hands. Alexis tilts her head back and takes a long drink, savouring her coffee. *BBRRING!!!* The school bell shrieks, signalling the start of the school day.

"Well," Riley cheers, "Lets go!" We all link arms and skip merrily towards the back entrance of the school.

## **Chapter 2**

As we enter the school, swarms of students pass around us, heading toward the first class of the day. Riley and Alexis part from our group to head to gym class for Block A, while Calla, and Denver and I head to woodwork first. We speed walk to the other side of the school, to our class. Arriving a few minutes early, Calla decides to bring up our big woodwork project. The woodwork classes are getting our assignments this week, which count for a good chunk of our grade for the last term.

“I hope we make candy machines!” Calla exclaims excitedly.

“Me too,” I reply.

“That would be really fun,” Denver adds.

By now, pretty much the entire class has gathered outside Mr. Mars’ woodwork class. Just as the last couple of people race toward us, the door is unlocked from the inside. Mr. Mars holds the door open as we enter, smiling as we pass. He is one of the jolliest people I’ve ever met. He’s also the only teacher who we can run the machines with. On the rare occasions he isn’t here and a substitute teacher fills in, we can’t use them. After the last person comes in, he lightly shuts the door and merrily skips to the front of our work tables. Mr. Mars rings the small bell on the desk beside him a couple times rapidly. Within a couple seconds, the entire class falls silent.

“Today you start working on your projects! I’m so excited to show you how to make them and help if needed.” His smile and cheery mood is practically contagious. Everyone in the class has a smile on their face. On the other side of him there is something covered by a large sheet of fabric. I’m pretty sure an example of what we’re going to make is under it. ‘*What could it be?*’ I wonder.

He swiftly tugs the sheet off, revealing a circular wooden table and stool sitting beside each other. The example looks cool but a bit bland, however I can easily customize mine when I

make it. “We’ll be making a table with a stool!” he announces, “I can’t wait to see how all of yours turn out. Now come with me,” he says as he walks over to the machines. “I’ll show you how to build the legs for both of them, then you’ll get started.

Beginning the legs isn’t too hard because I have built similar things in woodwork before. By the end of class, I’ve made a good start. As me, Calla, and Denver walk out, Calla says, “It’s not as cool as a candy machine, but it will still be fun to make.”

“Yep,” Me and Denver reply, thinking about how cool they will look painted.

Block B is math for Denver and I. We are so busy talking about how we can make our projects look amazing that I don’t notice when Calla heads in a different direction. Before I know it, we are in Mrs. Birch’s classroom. I’m seated behind Denver so it’s easier for us to pass notes. This class usually passes slowly. Trigonometry isn’t my specialty, but I’m starting to get the hang of it. Today is test day. I don’t know if I’ll be able to do all of the questions, but Denver can always help me out, as long as we don’t get caught. When the test lands on my desk, I glance quickly to the back. I’ll definitely need help with those. Flipping back to the front, the questions don’t look as hard, but tests tend to get harder, not easier. Picking up my pencil, I start on question one.

After the duel, which is what I’ve nicknamed the test, the bell rings for the tastiest part of the school day. Denver and I shoot out of our desks, dashing to the front to hand in our tests before we race out of the classroom. Cafeteria food sometimes has a bad reputation for being disgusting, but that is absolutely not true when it comes to my school. It’s so awesome that I always try to get some whenever I have the money.

Speeding through the halls, we follow the doughy, tomato smell to the cafeteria. Other students from all over the school join us in the sprinting race for pizza. The line for food on Friday Pizza Day grows at a rapid rate. By the time we rush in, barely short of breath from dashing for pizza, the line is almost to the other side of the cafeteria. The smell is SO fantastic.

I've heard that they have to order at least twenty pizzas from two locations to meet the demand. Why is the line so short? It may not look like it but the line right now is just about half the size of what it gets to be. Our buddies are further up the line.

"Hey! Calla! Riley! Alexis!" I call out. Because the cafeteria is quite loud with conversation, I have to shout louder to get their attention. I try a couple more times and after four tries they finally notice me. They wave, and Calla sticks her tongue out with a teasing smile. Calla always looks beautiful. The cozy-looking bubblegum pink sweater and the pale sky blue jeans go perfect with her raven coloured hair. After they pay, Alexis and Riley walk to our usual table. The line speeds up and soon I am at the front.

"Three slices of ham and pineapple please!" I tell the cashier lady.

"Pineapple..... ON PIZZA?!" A kid behind me and Denver exclaims with a disgusting tone in their voice, "Gross!"

"No it's not!" I shoot back at them. Nothing is wrong with pineapple pizza! They pretend to throw up. Why do they hate it so much?

"Let's just pay for the pizza and go," Denver says as she pulls me away, then goes back and pays for her pizza. We walk to our usual table on the other side of the cafeteria from the food.

Sitting down at our table, I wonder what kinds of pizza my friends got. Judging by appearance, Alexis bought three slices of pepperoni, Denver got two ham and pineapple and two cheese, and Riley has two barbecue slices and three slices that have feta cheese on them, I don't know what kind it is though. *Woah!* Sitting before Calla is seven slices of pizza, which are all different types.

"How are you going to eat all that?!" I ask, amazed that she ordered so much. Although, knowing her, she can probably eat all of it.

“There were so many options and I’m so hungry!” she answers, “All the pizza looked so delicious.”

With that, I pick up my first toasty slice and take a bite. Freshly cooked tomato sauce squeezes out, warming my tongue. The ham is smoky and mouth-watering and the pineapple crunches, adding a fruity zing. Let’s not forget about the crust, which tastes fresh out of the oven. I devour my pizza so quickly. When I finish, most of my friends are almost on their last slices. Calla still has two slices left, but she doesn’t look like she’s done yet.

Once everyone has eaten their pizza, we get up and head outside. “I need to go to the washroom,” I tell my friends. “Calla, do you want to come with me?”

“Sure!” she replies and we turn around to leave.

“Meet you at the maple tree!” Alexis calls.

“Okay!” We shout back as we speedily walk to the nearest washroom. She holds the door open and we enter together. After I wash my hands, I go to dry them with some paper towels. Suddenly, the lights shut off, plunging the room into darkness.

“Calla!” I angrily shout. She does this all the time! After calling a few times, she still doesn’t reply.

Something incredibly strong grabs me from behind, pulling me with ease. “OW!” Smashing into a mirror, it completely shatters on impact. Bits crash onto the sinks, mirror shards slice open my back like tiny knives. Falling onto the floor I try to let out a piercing scream, unaware if I succeeded as everything sounds so quiet. *‘I am alone. Nobody is here to help me.’*

The lights flicker back on seconds later and a pale Calla looks down at me, looking almost as shocked as I feel. Mirror shards litter the sinks counter and beside me, glinting in the light.

“Are you okay?” Calla asks, looking the most panicked I’ve ever seen her.



Pain shoots up my back as I sit up and I cry out. It hurts so badly.

“Can you stand up? We need to go to the office!” Calla says.

After helping me up, she guides me out the door. As we trudge over to the office, my cuts remind me of their existence, painfully beating with each step. I’m glad Calla came with me to the washroom.

When we get there the secretary, Ms. Jones leads us to the medical room. Sitting down, the pain ignites one more time before becoming a duller ache.

When she looks at the cuts, a worried look quickly appears on her face. “How did you get these?” she asks, looking quite concerned.

Would she believe me if I told the truth? I’m not sure falling on the shards from the mirror I was smashed against by who knows what is believable.

“It’s complicated, I’ll be fine,” I speedily reply.

Her face tells me that she wants to know, but she won’t question any further. Grabbing some bandages from a cabinet beside me, she starts applying them as lightly as she can. It hurts a little bit but not enough to visibly show pain. As this is happening, Calla is beside me, saying words of encouragement, that it will all be okay. When the nurse is done, Calla and I walk to our friends, whose faces are all pale when we tell them about our frightening experience in the bathroom.

Time speeds up and before I know it, school ends and the five of us are standing outside.

“How was your test today?” I ask Calla. Her test was in social studies, where her class has been learning about Italy and its history.

“The test was pretty good, how was yours?” Calla asks.

“I probably got some answers wrong, but it was okay.” I pull out my phone and check the time. With less than ten minutes left until track starts, I need to get changed. “I’ve got to go to track and field,” I tell my friends.

“Okay, bye!” they answer.

“Have fun!” Denver and Calla call.

After I change, I grab my backpack and dash over to the field. I participate in hurdles and the 400 meter run. Most of the team is there when I arrive, chattering in different groups. I place my backpack down on the freshly cut grass at the edge of the crowd. Close by, Ms. Blackthorn and Mr. Kurtzman stand, holding clipboards. Mr. Kurtzman's eyes search the crowd; He's probably checking the attendance list. Spotting me, he swiftly checks beside my name on the list with his pen.

“Everyone listen up please!” Ms. Blackthorn shouts. “Today, you should begin focusing on training for your specific events. We have two more hurdles for people training for that event. Warm up will be one lap of the track. Head over to the starting line please,” she says.

We briskly walk over and as soon as we’re ready she counts down. “3, 2, 1, GO!” she shouts and we race off. I love running so much! As I speed along, my hair dances in the wind. The competitive side is also really fun, especially when you come out on top.

When the last people finish, I skip over the equipment sitting beside our backpacks. Jess, my track buddy, follows and we set up two hurdles at a time, until we have formed a long line with enough space in between hurdles to speed over. It’s on the track, but out of the way of the other people running. We mostly practice in silence, occasionally talking about school and what we’ve been doing lately. Near the beginning, my foot catches on the last hurdle and I fall forwards onto the rubber-like ground. My hands are lightly sparking in pain as I walk back after lifting the hurdle back up.

“Are you okay?” Jess asks.

“Yep, I’m fine,” I answer.

Our coaches stop by from time to time, observing as we take turns leaping over the hurdles, one foot over and one foot around. When Mr. Kurtzman calls all of us over, cheer spreads around from a fantastic practice. “You were all amazing today and you worked hard, have a great weekend!”

My mom is waiting for me by the car when I draw near the parking lot, a warm smile on her face. A feeling of relief washes over me as I head home and away from another interesting day at school.

# ***CHARMED LIVES***

by

Liz Darroch

### **III. Misfortune Favours the Bold**

For Madoc's eighteenth birthday, his parents allowed him to buy the black motorbike he'd coveted for years (they wouldn't pay for it, so he'd been saving up). The bike's padded seat was big enough for two, but even though Felix would accompany Madoc on his visits to the city, Caleb and Bliss expected their son to drive with caution.

"Lots of city folk don't have Charms," Caleb reminded Madoc when the boys were preparing for their first real excursion after the test drives, "which isn't an excuse to disregard their safety."

Madoc helped Felix onto the bike, complaining, "Do they seriously think I'm gonna run someone over?" Felix made a vague noise as Madoc climbed up in front of him.

His Protectee was glad to spend less time in the country, and Felix couldn't blame him. Their friendship with the next-door neighbours had grown increasingly strained, for reasons Felix hadn't identified.

As the CEO of a clean energy company, Karoline Proctor was swamped, but the two girls' behaviour was confusing. Felix hadn't heard about a falling-out between Daria and Aminta, yet he constantly spotted Daria leaving her house alone. Aminta, who seemed to be avoiding Madoc, had told Felix her Protectee was being a normal teenager: shopping, clubbing, attending rallies the boys didn't quite comprehend.

The city where Madoc's parents ran their consulting firm was sprawling, not condensed, but its downtown offered a relative anonymity that the boys enjoyed. They would browse the neon malls, loitering in stores and fraying cashiers' patience. They'd grab meals at famous restaurants, unless they forgot to reserve a table and ended up at a food court instead. As their final tutoring lessons wound down and Madoc's parents stopped enforcing a strict curfew, he and Felix could stay out longer into the night.

It was a mild September evening when they entered the city later than usual, just as the sun was setting. In the dim light, navigating the labyrinth of skyscrapers and casinos, Madoc managed to get them hopelessly turned around.

“We don’t have a map, do we?” he yelled over the engine’s growl, slowing down so he could hear Felix better.

“No GPS either. We overlooked that when we were choosing a bike.”

“Be helpful if Charms had a natural sense of direction,” Madoc grumbled. “You’d think that’d be part of the whole protection package.”

“Sorry –” But the bike jolted into a pothole, and Felix glanced at their surroundings with a sinking stomach. Poorly maintained roads. Homes of ugly brick or concrete, splintery shingles and grimy, peeling paint.

Noises from downtown remained audible, but despite this neighbourhood’s “e to an affluent area, it felt like another planet. These narrow streets and their shabby buildings must have been what Madoc’s parents called “the slums.” Felix’s skin crawled as he registered that the windows in the majority of the houses had their blinds drawn.

Madoc was coasting now, evidently caught between fascination and revulsion. Felix leaned forward to suggest they go back the way they’d come, but a hoarse voice cut through the silence. “Charm?”

He and Madoc practically fell off the bike. Once they’d regained their balance, they turned toward the woman standing across the street. It was difficult to guess her age – her face was pinched, her gray dress ragged. She looked at Felix, the passenger rather than the driver, and asked, “Are you his Charm?”

“Let’s get out of here,” Madoc muttered. But Felix gripped his arm and pointed at an alley behind the woman.

A tattered group of people was emerging, as threadbare and gaunt as the first woman, an excess of bad luck emanating from them. Misfortunates. Their eyes were riveted on Felix, though some watched Madoc with interest as well.

Madoc tried to swerve out of their reach, but they were close enough that he couldn't risk an abrupt movement. Felix wasn't certain if Madoc would regret hitting a Misfortunate, but he was hesitating. The boys tensed as the group formed a loose semicircle around the motorbike's left side. On their right, a crumbling sidewalk prevented escape.

"Charms don't show up here," said a tall man who'd shoved his way to the front, older than the woman. His skin was ashy, his countenance deeply lined. Felix and Madoc had observed stray Misfortunates in other parts of the city, buying cheap groceries or chatting with friends, but they were never this bold. The man stepped forward and said, "Won't you give us luck? You can spare a bit of it, can't you?"

"I, um," Felix stammered as Madoc's elbow jabbed him in the ribs, probably indicating he should appease the Misfortunates. "An interaction with a Charm is, er, scientifically proven to increase your opportunities for three days –"

"Why are you helping him?" the woman in gray snapped, pointing at Madoc. "He doesn't need extra luck. He won the lottery of life just by existing."

Her companions ignored Madoc's presence, reaching for Felix with knobby hands.

The tall man got a grip on his hood, and Felix screamed as he was nearly yanked off the bike. Madoc lashed out his arm, shouting curses at the man, who let go of Felix and staggered onto the sidewalk.

"We need to *go*," Felix gasped, and Madoc revved the engine, executing a so sharp that Felix almost lost his balance again. The Misfortunates scattered, still pleading for luck, as the boys picked up speed. They fled through a darkening city toward sounds of traffic and partygoers, neither of them sufficiently composed to analyze the Misfortunates' actions, or their own.

But the woman's haggard face was vivid in Felix's mind. She and her friends might have hurt Madoc, dragged Felix away like he was nothing but a resource to be used.

He wondered if anyone could be kind when their luck was finite.



# ***COLLECTION OF POEMS***

by

Liliya Evdaeva

## **How I Wish To Go Away**

How I wish to go away,  
To the land within the pages,  
A place with dreams and fantasies,  
A world that lives with sages.  
To have a journey to begin,  
An adventure to fulfill,  
With everlasting purpose  
While the real world just holds still.  
A place of magic in the air,  
Where there are villains to defeat,  
And where anything can happen,  
To go there is a feat.  
How I wish to be so gifted,  
As to lead a stranger life,  
Full of mystery and surprises,  
Where your soul will fill with light.  
How painful is the thought,  
Of being only normal.  
No castle to belong to,  
No one to overthrow.  
I simply wish to live in a story,  
Where the words just flow and flow.

## **Always For You**

I'll be the one to catch you,  
When your world around collapses,  
When you sink and fall and almost drown,  
I'll be one of your relapses.  
When your current sucks you in,  
And your sails are flying off,  
I'll be the one to build your boat,  
And I'll ease away your cough.  
When you cry alone deep in despair,  
Know that I will find you,  
Hold you tight and whisper,  
"You know you have me, don't you?"  
Your world that will come crashing down,  
Burning, broken, embers,  
I'll be there by your side forever,  
And I know you will remember.  
Together we will fight your monsters,  
Me and you we'll conquer your storms,  
And in the end when day shines bright,  
To me your problems soon will swarm.

## **Beneath Your Skin**

You lead the way to worlds unknown,  
A treasure in your eyes,  
You don't know what you'll find in here,  
A shock or a surprise.  
It's dark, I know,  
And scary too,  
You haven't reached the end though yet,  
It's a place where quiet is very few.  
I don't know what you're looking for,  
What you think you will achieve,  
It's not a place you come back from,  
Pain sinks within these grieves.  
You look around all weary,  
Yet it's not as hard as you may think,  
The walls are soft, not scary,  
And the crazy's mostly at the brink.  
Truth is you're reluctant,  
To look inside yourself,  
Frightened of what you may find,  
Lying on these dusty shelves.

## **Look Away**

She was a glowing ray of sunshine,  
A light that paved her way.  
Others stopped and noticed her,  
Though they always looked away.  
A soul that burned and brightened,  
A fire in her heart.  
A silver streak ran in her veins,  
To her mind, which made her smart.  
She never cried for fearful,  
To show them she was weak.  
She trudged through storm and swamp,  
Not looking back, not ever meek.  
Her passion grew inside,  
Until it rippled through her skin.  
She was soft and warm outside,  
But strong and fierce within.  
She was not to be feared,  
Rather than adored.  
She would do what she wants,  
While the rest were all just bores.

# ***SKIES AND STORIES***

by

Kira Hawthorne

## Alex

Eliot sits down next to me, quiet. I'm not sure why he asked me to come up here. When I said that I had something to tell him, I didn't imagine a place so... lovely. The view from up here is so different from anything else I've seen. Up here, you can see the ocean in all its glory. The sky is close enough to touch, the colours brilliant and bold this late in the evening. You're far away from the city which tries to break you daily, floating among the clouds. It's peaceful up here. I never thought I'd feel peace again.

Neither of us talk for a minute. It's clear that neither of us know what we're doing. My fingers tap against the tile, full of nervous energy. *'Everything is more beautiful from up here. I can actually see things.'*

Eliot turns and looks at me, "Alex."

"Yes?"

"You said you wanted to tell me something."

"I... I do. I just don't know how," I avoid his gaze, hesitant.

"If you want to, I'll listen. Even if you ramble." A small smile plays at his lips.

"It's about why I do this," I gesture with my hands, trying to convey what I mean. "The reasons why I'm trying to change things, to start a revolution. The reason why colour is my enemy more than my friend. Why my sister-"

I break off. Tears fill my eyes without warning. I swipe them away impatiently, unprepared for the emotion that comes with talking about Alexandra.

"I've never told anyone anything about this. About my sister, what she did, what happened to her. You're the first."

Eliot sobers immediately. He takes my hand and squeezes it. "When you're ready."

*'What makes him be so kind to me?'* I start slowly, unsure how to put everything into words. "You know how you look your nature? Your past, your memories, all that? Good and evil, with little to no in between?"

He nods, teeth tugging on his lower lip.

"There are people, like me. Grey people. We're hated and... my sister wanted to change that. She would have too, if not for..." Uncertain, I trail off. I shake myself and say, "Let me start over."

"Of course."

*'Breathe in, breathe out. Tell him.'*

"I was eleven when they came for Alexandra. My sister, she was telling a story to my mother and I as we baked. It's not something we did often, but it always felt good when we did. Alexandra knew how to put feelings into words, no matter what. I've always wished that I could do that." I wince. *'Stop rambling, Alex. Get to the story.'*

"I'm sorry... I don't know how to put this into words, really. You're the first." I know I'm repeating myself, but I can't help it. I'm so nervous, I can hardly think.

"It's fine. Really." The small smile from earlier dances across his face.

My lips raise in response, without me meaning to. I take a minute to collect myself, then continue. "I wasn't grey, then. Neither was Alexandra. She was always more like the clouds- white, silver and storm purple, all in one. I was the ocean, all blues and greens and untold depths. They came for her anyway. She had begun to write stories then distribute them. They were meant to make one question why there was no grey area, no in between the dark and the light. That wasn't allowed. As you know," I eye Eliot, who nods again.



“When the officials came for her, the sky was a delicate blue, the blue of mornings, of new beginnings. There were two knocks at the door. Two knocks signaling the loss of my twin.” My voice trembles and breaks, but I don't stop. I can't.

“I ran to the window, saw the officials, and was terrified. There were two of them, one was a hard looking man of fire and ashes, the other a woman, much softer than her partner, who looked like a cat. They wore the sigils of the merchant council, flame red on bold sapphire blue. My feet couldn't carry me up the stairs fast enough. I had, just days earlier, told Alexandra to stop writing, that it was too dangerous. Mother had begged her to stop, as had Father. That though they were proud that she was writing, writing to make a change was... is... dangerous. But, tucking a lock of silver hair behind her ear, she told us she was doing this for a reason. She was so convinced that her words could do something, even at eleven. So assured, as always.”

I pause, mouth open, as I see her face in my mind's eye. Her bold smile, the way she talked with her hands. She was beautiful. “Mother opened the door, hair messily pulled back, her apron dusted with flour. Her hands shook. I remember peering down from the shadowy stairwell, seeing her hands shake. ‘We're here for Alexandra,’ said one. His eyes were blood red, terrifying. When she came from the kitchen, eyes wide and skin pale, Mother let out a cry. I did too, a soft one. Even the officials softened for a moment, not expecting an eleven year old girl. They were expecting someone older, an adult. Someone who knew what life truly is. Not a child.”

I see Eliot soften at that. He understands the innocence of youth.

“If Father was there and not working, he would have tried to stop them. To keep Alexandra for another day. But he wasn't, so it was over quickly. So quickly. Too quickly.” I bite down on my cheek, so hard I draw blood. “She would be tried for whatever crimes the lawmakers could come up with, and then hanged. None of us had a doubt that she'd be hanged. She had simply done too much. Alexandra, my sister. Hanged. I still see her sometimes, swinging from the rope, face blue and twisted from lack of oxygen. At the time, there was no cage and burning. It was only hanging thank goodness. I don't think I could have handled knowing that she

burned, crying out in pain and fear. Though maybe she wouldn't have, she was always the braver of the two of us." I pause, emotions flooding me like the tide.

"That's hard to believe..." His voice is soft, softer than I expected.

*'Eliot is... listening to me. I...'* A tear slips down my cheek and I look down. He urges me on with a dip of his head, silent.

"The second official, the softer one, gave us a moment for goodbyes. Alexandra ran to Mother first and hugged her, both crying. Their whispered goodbyes took only a second. Then, taking the steps two at a time, she ran to me. Wrapping her arms around me, she whispered, don't let this die with me. Don't let the grey disappear. For me. Look to the stars, always, always. I held her tightly, trying not to cry. 'I won't,' I said. I will. I love you. She gave me a slight smile. "Me too. Always."

Unbidden, more tears fall. Faster and faster until I'm crying in earnest. I haven't cried over her once until today. Now though, my emotions are unchecked and everywhere. Eliot doesn't move to help me, though he clearly wants to.

"Finally giving in to the inevitable, I let go of her. I knew this was wrong, that there should be another ending to our story. Yet I let go. I let go." I take a shuddering breath, trying to keep a hold of myself. *'I need to finish.'*

"She took a deep breath, trying to not fall apart. Strong until the end. looked at my sister one last time. Purple-black eyes, silver hair, pale skin. The scar above her lip she got from falling out of a tree. Her ink-splattered fingers. Her smile, her real one, the one that had never before failed to make me happy. Always. Then, between one breath and the next, she was gone. Carted away by the council so that the grey could die with her. So the threat to their world wouldn't be changed. So that colour was the only thing left. But I'll take her place, I swore to myself. I'll bring the grey to a position of honour, the way she wanted."

At this, Eliot flinches, but I ignore it. I'm determined to get to the end of my story. '*Why is he surprised? For my sister, anything.*'

"I walked over to the window to look at her once more, being dragged away. I was ready to build a world for my sister. Though I was alone, without the one who made me brave, I was ready. It won't die with her." By the time I finish I'm out of tears, feeling the pain of everything again. Eliot looks at me and shakes his head once.

"Alex, I..."

"Don't. Please." I press my lips together to stop myself from saying any more. He gazes at me, eyes full of understanding. Reaching out I put my hand on his, twining our fingers together. Eliot doesn't flinch away. Instead, he grips me tighter.

"So..." he says, haltingly. "She's the reason why you fight. The reason why you want to bring back the grey. Your sister."

I let out a soft laugh, "Not just bring back. Raise up. I'm going to make the grey something everyone wants to be. I'm going to make anyone who ever hurt one of us pay. And I'm going to laugh while doing it." I curl my free hand into a fist, imagining a world where grey could exist freely. A world where my sister would have never been hurt. Where I wouldn't have to be afraid. Sorrow and anger war within me, neither able to beat the other back.

Eliot turns away, just slightly. "Alex..." He looks torn. *Torn between what?*

"*What?*" I snap. "You don't understand, do you? You're not willing to try. Not even for me." Those last words slip out accidentally, but he seems to not register them.

Turning back to me, shaking, he said, "No, no. Alex, no. I do understand. The willingness to do anything for those you love. But I have so many questions. Ones I'm not sure you'll answer."

I look at him, trying to see past all his masks. Trying to see the truth.

“Eliot, please. Ask. So you can understand.”

I look harder, deep into his eyes. They're a stunning gold, with flecks of red. *Don't think about that, Alex.*

He cocks his head, thinking. “Well... Is your real name Alex? And if not, what was your name before? What happened to your parents? How many years ago was this? You aren't that old, it can't have been that long ago. And-” he stops abruptly.

I nod at him to continue.

“What does grey even mean? I know it's a stupid question, but... I've never known. It's not exactly something that they teach in school,” he smiles wryly. Eliot lays back on the roof, looking to the sky.

“My name... I can answer half of that. No, it's not the name I was given at birth, but I wanted to honour my sister. Keep a piece of her with me, you know? And I'm sorry, but I can't tell you my real name. It's a part of another world, now.” I shake my head, cursing myself. *‘Why can't I just let someone in? Why do I always keep people at an arm's length? Even now, at my weakest and most open, I can't trust him.’*

"I'm sorry."

Eliot tilts his head towards me, giving me a half smile.

“Alex, I’m just curious. If there are things you can’t or won’t answer, I can understand. I have those things, too. Don’t be afraid of me, please. You’re a friend.”

I look at him, stunned. “Eliot, I-” *I've blackmailed him, threatened his family, and made him work with someone he clearly hates. We're friends?*

He laughs a little, smile growing wider, “We can talk about friendship later. Please, answer the rest of my questions before I die of curiosity.”

*‘At least he's being playful about it.’* Though my story's shadows haunt me, I find that I can smile. So I do.

“If you insist. To answer your second question, my parents grew stronger. Far from falling apart, they became fully fledged rebels. Attending meetings, spreading word, everything.” My voice fades away on that last word as memories rise to the surface. “Everything. In the last year or so, they’ve been doing less, but they still support me. It’s because of them that I’m able to live here, because of them that I have the money to eat and sleep.”

Eliot nods, “I know what that’s like. Mine are the same, doing everything they can for me and my younger sisters.”

I squeeze his hand, realizing that I hadn’t let go. “As for your third, that was just over four years ago. I’m fifteen.” My voice grows quiet. I look away from him more nervous than before. *‘This is the part that counts. This will make him want to stay, or go. I can't mess this up.’*

“And... as for your last... grey is in between. It’s invisible, ignored, put aside. Here, at least. At its heart though, grey is really just the way of living between two extremes, good and evil, light and dark. It’s saying that good doesn’t matter because evil doesn’t either, not really. It’s saying that light and dark are really just the same, it all depends on who’s telling the story. Grey is looking to all sides of things and viewing them equally. It’s... all that, and more.” I look at Eliot, hoping to see acceptance. I find it. *He understands.* I can't help it. I smile.

He sits up and takes my other hand in his. “Alex. I... wow. This is marvelous. *You* are marvelous. Everything you do, how you do it. I know why, now. Why you chose this, why you choose it still, even after everything. I understand, I swear. I can see it.”

I don't know why I believe him, but I do. Maybe it's his smile, or the way he looks at me. But I believe him. Warmth floods through me. *‘He understands.’*

“Thank you,” Two simple words, the meaning all more than I can voice. Our eyes meet.

“No,” he says. “Thank you. For your story. Now... let me tell you mine.”

***UNTITLED***

by

Sophia Herrington

It takes me only three days to fall in love with Bounce.

On the first day, he gives me a voice. He and his sister Butterfly – the Puzzle twins - come to find me in the alley again, late on the night of the day we'd met. This time Bounce holds a small, polished wooden box. He sits down beside me and balances the box on his knees, then clicks the gold, flower-shaped clasp and lifts the lid.

Inside are rows and rows of miniscule wooden blocks carved with every letter of the alphabet, arranged neatly in a metal tray. Bounce lifts the tray out to reveal more little blocks, these ones with words like *Yes* or *No* or *Please* etched into their surfaces. The very bottom row is filled with tiny faces: a face with tears falling from its eyes, one with arched brows and a mouth wide open, another with a smile that showed off dozens of stark white teeth.

The lid of the box is lined with a thin layer of metal. Bounce lifts a block from the first tray; a letter Z. He flips it upside down to show me a drop of silver, so small it can barely be seen.

“It’s a magnet,” he says. He places it against the lid of the box and lets it ping into place. Then he plucks out an H and an E. “That’s you,” he says, tapping each letter. Then he spells out his own name above mine, and Butterfly’s below it. “And there’s us.”

Butterfly is beaming and clapping her hands softly together.

“What do you think?” she asks. “Isn't he a genius?”

In response, I pull three cubes from the box and latch them to the lid. The first says ‘Yes.’ The second is the cheery, wide-smiling face. The third is printed very, very small so that it can fit all on one square. ‘*Thank You,*’ it says. But it isn’t nearly enough.

On the second day, he gives me a fist to fight with.



My brother Biri and I don't have much, so what we do have is more precious than it would seem. We have no parents, but we have the hero who rescued us. We have no family, but we have each other. We have no roots and nothing to care for, but Biri has his friends and his fame. I have my brother to watch over, and I have my dog.

I named him Puddle for the wet, muddy patch of earth I found him in. It had been four years since Biri and I had been collected by the hero. I'd been walking home from school, my face caked with chalk and tears and rain. It was a large classroom, and I could get away with not talking most of the time. If the students were feeling particularly rowdy one day, they turned right to me with their taunts and jeering. Then, when the teacher had too much of them, it was me he sent out onto the step alone to sit for hours and hours. Long enough that I was forgotten until the final bell sounded and the other children came pouring out the door to step all over me on their way home.

On another of those days, I waited, just as always, until everyone else was gone before I began the trek towards the hero's hovel. I took the same route as I had every day for the past four years. Only this time, I wasn't alone. I heard a whining ahead, and trotted to reach it.

Soaked, whimpering, and scared to death was a fuzzy, white and orange puppy. He'd looked at me with eyes just as sad and wide as Biri's had been for so long, in the cave where we hid and for months after.

I didn't have a second thought about taking the puppy with me.

From that day forward, Puddle answered to me and only me. He wouldn't let anyone else feed him or throw him a stick or even touch him. Once, when he walked me to school as he did everyday, a boy stepped close to me and tried to snatch my books from under my arm. By that time, Puddle had grown to the size of a miniature pony. His paws were like a lion's, his tail like a thick, furry cobra, and jaws like a shark.

He took the boy's arm in his mouth and tore the skin right down to the bone. The boy hadn't stopped screaming until he collapsed on the ground, unconscious, his head rolling grotesquely, his clothes bright red with blood.

Puddle and I had been banished from the school grounds for good. I never returned, not for a minute, and was perfectly glad of it.

On the second of my days with the Puzzle twins, we meet in the morning outside the hero's front door and stroll into town. Puddle comes with us, staying far away from Butterfly and Bounce. They don't seem to be bothered by him in the slightest.

We arrive at a creaky old tavern which, according to Butterfly, serves waffles soaked in whiskey, if you know the right people to ask. A little golden bell tinkles above our heads as Bounce pushes open the door and we step inside.

It's early, and there are only four people in the tavern besides us. Two men in mud-encrusted boots and fraying overalls sitting by a window drinking from what looks like glasses of nothing but sludgy white foam. A woman in the furthest, darkest corner of the room whose head rests on her folded arms. And the boy behind the bar. He looks familiar in a way that makes my chest feel heavy, like a giant, meaty hand is pressing me back towards the door.

The young bartender raises his head to greet us. When he sees me, his face hardens, his eyes widen, and he takes a stuttering step backwards, knocking into the shelves behind him. Glasses and bottles rattle and fall, shattering against the wood floor.

"You!" the boy says, thrusting out an arm to point in my direction. He kicks his way through the bottles on the ground and swerves around the counter.

"Where is it?" he demands.

The Puzzle twins look at me questioningly, but I shake my head, confused.

“Where’s what?” Butterfly asks.

“The mutt! Where’s the damn mutt?”

Realization hits like the crunch of a key turning in a lock. My eyes travel to his arm to find a lumpy, pink scar stretching from his wrist to the space just below his elbow. The boy from school, the boy Puddle had attacked years ago. He’s lucky to have an arm at all, but there are daggers in his eyes and venom on his tongue. He’d turned the colour of revenge the moment he saw me.

I keep my gaze locked on his and my back turned firmly to the door, behind which I know Puddle is patiently waiting for me. I can’t give away his bearings to a person who wants him dead. But Butterfly takes care of it for me, anyway. She shifts towards the door, ever so slightly, her eyes pinging back and forth. The boy with the scar catches this instantly, and bolts to the door. The bell clangs in warning, then another, and another as I race outside, Bounce and Butterfly trailing behind.

I get to Puddle before anyone else, click my tongue, and take off around the corner. We dive past a florist selling plants with teeth and tongues, a tattoo parlor that specializes in tattoos that make noise when you touch them, and a furniture shop where a woman was emerging with a sound-muffling pillow under each arm. I feel a knobby hand on my shoulder. Butterfly pulls me sharply into the crevice between the furniture shop and the next building over, where a rickety staircase missing several stairs leads up to the roof. I shove Puddle up first. Butterfly and I follow, with Bounce behind us.

The roof is stacked with cans of paint, some of them empty, some of them unopened, some of them only part way full of sad, ruined paint that no longer has any use to anyone.

Our wild-eyed pursuer bursts onto the roof seconds later, knocking over a can of butter-yellow paint that splashes our shoes and begins spreading across the stone in a thick, slimy pool. Puddle can sense my fear and the scarred boy's rage. He can sense the danger that blooms from them. Claws flexed and teeth snapping, he lunges at the boy before I can take hold of the leather collar around his neck.

The overturned can of paint had been no accident - it was a trap. There isn't a shred of fear or panic in the boy's eyes as Puddle leaps at him. The glorious, glossy-furred, ruthless hound drops down in the middle of the growing yellow stain and slips, long legs sprawling as if on a frozen pond.

A crazed look in his eyes, the rogue bartender whips a stained, wrinkled rag from his belt. He pounces at Puddle, hooks the cloth under his throat, and pulls back, hard. Puddle yelps in pain and tries to drag himself to his feet, but a knee jams itself into his back, pinning him down. Butterfly and Bounce are quick to throw themselves into the scuffle, but I am quicker.

I throw myself on top of the boy and lock him in my grip, one hand on his stomach and the other on his neck. I feel him struggle beneath me, hear the twins bark my name in unison, and then the body sandwiched between Puddle and I goes limp. We roll off into the mess of paint. I can feel something wet dripping rapidly onto my hands. It must be paint. But paint isn't supposed to be warm, especially in a place where the snow never stops falling and the wind is always icy and sharp. Bounces approaches slowly and crouches down beside me.

"Zhe," he says, "Give me the knives."

I open my eyes, not having realized that they'd been closed. I'd forgotten how to scream years ago, but if I hadn't, the sound would have been heard all the way in the District of Libraries. My hands are wet with blood. I pull them away from the body beneath me, one from the space between its collarbones and the other from between its ribs. A knife lies in each palm.

The hilts are simple, flimsy even, but the blades are polished and pointed, their edges thin as paper. Blood is pooling on the ground beside the thing that had once been a boy.

Bounce reaches out and clasps his hands over my wrists, telling me softly to drop the knives. I let my fists fall open, and the blades disperse like puffs of silver vapour before they hit the roof.

“It’s okay,” Bounce whispers as I started shaking violently, “We’re going to fix it. No one will know.”

“Make us a bag, Zhe,” Butterfly says, gently but firmly, “A big one.”

I hold out my seeping, red and yellow hands and a boy-sized black bag weaves itself together in my arms. The threads are loose and missing in places, but the fabric is thick and sturdy. Butterfly pries it from my hands. I turn away from her and bury my face in Puddle’s fur. He’s panting and covered in paint and blood, but he’s alive. The body is gone when I lift my head up again, and the big black bag is bulging.

“We’ll take care of it, darling, don’t worry yourself,” says Butterfly, “Just...go home. Straight home, as quick as you can, alright?” She’s looking at me with a fierce determination that makes my blood shiver. I nod my head.

“And try not to let anyone see you, yes?” Bounce orders, an identical look crossing his features. “Take the back alleys, the rooftops, whatever you can. If anyone asks, tell them you were playing a game of chase and had a mishap up on the roof here, or...or you hit your head and don’t remember how you got all messed up. Okay?”

Hiding would be no problem at all. I’d done it every day of my life. I wonder how I’ll manage to make up stories without a voice to tell them with, then remember the little box of letters tucked safely into the pocket of my coat.

Bounce hefts the body in the bag up over his shoulder and they both turn to leave, but I stop them, tugging on the cuff of Butterfly's sleeve. She turns, and I gesture to the paint still soaking the roof.

"Serves them right for leaving unsealed cans of paint all over their roof," she says, shrugging.

"I think she means the blood," Bounce remarks. He then shuffles over to a cluster of half-empty cans and nudges one onto its side with the toe of his boot. More paint joins the blotchy pattern forming on the rooftop. Red paint. It swallows the blood the way a crowd can swallow a murderer.

When I see it, I begin to tremble. Once, one of the hero's patients had broken down on the sofa across from him, convulsing and shaking uncontrollably. They'd knocked a lamp from its table and tipped a perfectly good cup of tea onto the rug. Later, when I'd asked the old man what had happened to the patient, he'd explained that they had been in shock. As my shivering worsens, becoming more and more violent, the image surfaces in my mind: my view of the hero's healing room from the crack in the attic floor, him on his wooden stool and the patient quivering and jerking angrily before him. Only this time the patient has my hair, my nose, my frail figure. Bounce throws himself down on the rooftop next to me, his knees splashing into the paint.

"What is it Zhe?" he asks, "Tell me what's wrong." His eyes flit down to my shaking hands, and he reaches out to gently draw the little wooden box from my pocket. He unlatches it and thrusts it into my lap.

Hands still shuddering, I pluck a throng of letters from their slots and arrange them on the inside of the lid, then flip it around to face the twins.

"I didn't want to kill him. I couldn't control it," the letters say.

Bounce lashes out and grabs my wrists. The little box clatters shut and falls from my hands to my lap.

“Zhe,” he begins, “This was not a bad thing, what you just did. You defended something.” He pauses, carefully considering his next words and whether or not they should be spoken, then lowers his voice and his head so that his sister can’t hear.

“I believe that you did mean to, deep down,” he tells me. I looked back at him, appalled. “That’s a good thing, Zhe. You’re fearless and powerful and those things will keep you safe. No one can protect you better than you.” He winces as though regretting his last words and combs a hand through his hair, unknowingly streaking it with yellow paint.

“Maybe try not to go around stabbing people to death, though,” he cautions me, laughing under his breath.

I open the box again and jab my finger angrily at the second sequence of letters.

“You will control it. We’ll help you,” he says, glancing over his shoulder at his sister. She nods and gives me a small, tight smile. Then Bounce stands up and hauls the boy in the bag to the edge of the roof, and he and Butterfly disappear behind it.

On the third day, he makes my brother smile. Biri flourishes under his fame like a garden in a thunderstorm. He is skilled at knowing what to say, who to be seen with, and when to take a bow, but it is not what he was born to do. He was born to paint.

Biri’s prominence is the ability to make paint out of anything he touches. He can dip his finger into a pile of dirt or a bed of grass and, in minutes, transform them into a magnificent artwork unlike anything I’ve ever seen. He uses only his hands; no brushes or knives or sponges. Most of his paintings are strange, distorted animals: a butterfly with feathered wings instead of smooth ones, a nest of wasps with human faces, sheep with bird legs and bears with no fur.

He can paint other things too, but he does so very little, and only ever very late at night or very early in the morning. These are the paintings he doesn't need light to paint, things he could transfer from his hands to the canvas even if he had no eyes at all: his friends, the village streets and buildings, the hero, himself and me. The one thing he can't paint no matter how hard he tries, no matter how strongly I try to convince him to, is our mother and father. Although, once I'd come home to find that he'd left a canvas small enough to fit in the palm of my hand on the easel. He'd used parts of the metal bars of his bed frame to form two slim silver owls, side by side, a trail of blood made from cherry skins tracing each of their feathery throats. One of their heads appeared to be only partially attached. Although it was only a painting, the head seemed to be wobbling, just on the verge of tipping onto the ground. I'd snuck the little canvas from its place and tucked it under my mattress, where it remains to this day.

Biri's art is breathtaking and mysterious, something you could look at for hours rather than a few seconds, but he hides it from everyone but the hero and me. He's never told me why. It could be that he is worried that art like his, something so raw and violent, will tarnish his shiny, unblemished reputation. It could be that he wants to keep it to himself for as long as he can. Perhaps he feels that he needs to have a secret, that it is a requirement in our household. I've got mine, the hero's got his, and Biri has his art. Even our parents had things to hide, things no one will ever know.

On the day after I murder the boy who tried to murder my dog, I hear a tapping at the window above my bed. It's early in the morning. The sky is still black, the room around me even blacker. I can hear Biri's slow, even breathing drifting through the air towards me.

Slowly, I raise myself up to the window, kneeling on my pillow, and swipe aside the thick green curtains. Bounce's violet eyes are twinkling at me from behind the glass. I can't help but smile. I crack open the window, careful to be as silent as possible, and he clambers in over the sill as smooth and stealthy as a spider. Butterfly is nowhere in sight, so I pull the window closed behind Bounce and gesture for him to sit on the bed beside me.



“Zhe,” he says, sounding out of breath and slightly giddy, “I hope I’m not... intruding or anything.” I shake my head, assuring him that he isn’t.

“Good. Well, I just...” He stops suddenly and cocks his head to one side, seeming to register the third pair of lungs in the room, still breathing deeply against the other wall. He swallows, and then leans in close to whisper. “I came to tell you that everything is taken care of. No one will ever know and none of us will ever need to worry about it ever again.”

I go still. I had been working for the past hours to drive out the thought of the dead boy, the boy I’d killed. Every time I looked at my hands, I was certain I could still see his blood soaking my skin.

But then I hear what Bounce has said, really hear it, and the breath returns to my chest. I feel the blood evaporate from my hands, watch the boy’s face, the paint-splattered rooftop, and the black bag vanish from beneath my eyelids. I pluck the little box of letters from my nightstand and lift out the first tray. Bounce pulls something from the pocket over his heart - a round, ripe blazerberry, electric blue with tiny golden flecks along its surface. He squashes it between his thumb and forefinger and it erupts its luminescent insides all over his hand, giving off a dim, yellow light. He holds his hand near the box so as to help me see the letters, and I pull out the “Thank you” block and set it in his other hand. When I look up into his face, however, I see that his attention has drifted to a space behind my shoulder.

I turn swiftly around and find my brother staring, his dark eyes flicking between the boy on my bed and me.

“Hi...” he says, drawing the word out in his confusion.

Bounce, to my horror, gets up and strides right over to Biri, who is sitting frozen in place at his easel, hands drenched in muddy brown and tangy yellow paint. On the canvas in front of him is the half-sculpted face of a boy I recognize as Biri’s closest friend, the one who I don’t think

I've ever seen more than a few feet from Biri's side. Hyder is his name. I heard my brother yell it earlier today when his friend had snuck up behind him and poured a pail of dead beetles on his head.

Bounce sticks out his hand and Biri shakes it without missing a beat. They introduce themselves. Bounce is shockingly at ease considering the situation at hand, and Biri sounds just a little defensive. He keeps looking at me, meeting my eyes with a questioning look of his own. I only smile at him, as sweet and loving and big-sisterly as I can, reassuring him that the boy who's shown up in our bedroom unannounced can be trusted.

Then that same boy who hopped in through the window caught a glimpse of the stacks of canvases lining the walls around Biri's easel.

"Biri, did you paint these?" he asks.

"Uh, well, yeah, I did," Biri mumbles. Nothing like this has ever happened to him. He's trapped. A stranger has entered the one place he can paint without any eyes to judge him. There's nowhere for him to hide his stained hands, let alone the piles and piles of art he's accumulated over the past twelve years of his life.

Bounce crouches down to better inspect the paintings. "Do you sell them?"

"No. They're sort of a secret," Biri says. He's laughing nervously, but only I can tell that the laughter holds no humour. He was nervous before, but now he's angry.

"Seriously?" Bounce sounds completely baffled. In his scan of the art along the walls, he comes across a painting of a dragonfly with an elephant's trunk and two sets of long, thick purple tongues for wings. He reaches out to it with both hands, then stops himself and asks, "May I?"

Biri nods reluctantly. Bounce lightly touches the dragonfly's wings and its beady black eyes.

"Beautiful," he mutters. "Can I keep this one?" he asks my brother, twisting around and beaming at the both of us.

I look immediately to Biri. His eyes grow wide and his mouth opens and closes several times before he stammers, "I... I mean of course, if you want it."

"Splendid!" Bounce exclaims, a little too loudly, "Perhaps I'll come back another day to browse some more, but I've got to run off now. Butterfly will be waiting." He goes to the window and pulls himself up and out. Before he disappears over the edge, he says, "You really are an outstanding artist, Biri. I'll see you soon, Zhe." He winks at me on his way down.

When I turn away from the window, Biri is grinning a grin I have never seen before. He looks positively elated and wondrously proud.

Bounce made that smile. And anyone who could make my brother smile that way was worth the World.

***UNTITLED***

by

Freya Hoskins

## Esma

Sometimes I hate Canadian winters; the snow or hail or freezing temperatures. But the storms are a whole different level of craziness. Okay, so you may argue that Alaska or maybe Russia's storms are way worse, and I'm not saying that those storms aren't terrible and I would never want to live there but still... I live in Port Renfrew on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Vancouver Island is a really underrated place. It's full of natural beauty and kind people, but no one really comes here. I used to live in Victoria, a beautiful place with mild weather and many tourist attractions. My dad is a stay at home dad and he's kinda obsessed with seeing wildlife such as cougars, bears and whales. I thought it was cool the first few times but I mean, he has to stop dragging me around with him everywhere. My mom works as a biologist and it doesn't bother me much, although her job was mostly the reason we moved here. She needed to study the Salmon shortages and she's part of a project to restore Botanical beach. I get home schooled when my dad isn't dragging me around to see some cool slug or tree. I really miss my friends from Victoria and I was so mad at my parents for making us move. The winter storms are so bad. And almost every week it seems, even in the summer, the power goes out. Nothing exciting ever happens in my life anymore, I'm just hoping mom gets a new job.

Today is my thirteenth birthday. My parents have baked a cake for me, I walk into the kitchen and see my mom and dad are in the middle of an argument. I know I shouldn't eavesdrop but I need to hear this.

"Do we really need to do this Bob?" Mom asks with tears in her eyes.

"Eleanor, it's the right thing to do. She's old enough now, she needs to know the truth."

I don't want to hear anymore so I walk into the kitchen and my parents act like nothing happened.

"Happy birthday Esma!" They cry in unison.

“Thanks mom. Thanks dad,” I say, trying to keep the suspicion out of my voice.

“E?” Mom asks, their nickname for me.

“Yes?” I know this, whatever they were talking about in the kitchen will finally make sense.

“Have a seat, me and your dad need to tell you something...” She trails off looking at my dad for support. “I should’ve told you this before but... I just couldn’t face the truth. Before I tell you this, Esma know that me and your dad will always love you no matter what.”

“Okay,” I say slowly.

Mom takes a deep breath and dad puts a hand on her shoulder. “You're adopted, there really isn’t any other way to say this...” She trails off seeing the expression on my face.

“What?!” I’m in shock. This has to be a joke. “No I’m not, you would’ve told me...”

“It’s true sweetheart, we wanted a baby so much... but your mother couldn’t have one of her own so we decided to adopt and, well we got you!”

I stay silent waiting for more explanation.

“The orphanage lady was very nice and she asked us to respect the mother’s wishes and name you Esma which means Supreme. Your mother and I loved the name so we took you home and have kept you ever since.”

“I know it must be a shock for you sweetie...” Mom trailed off again.

I didn’t know what to think, thoughts were spinning around in my head. I have other parents. Are they alive? Do I have other family? Another thought came into my head, I had always wanted siblings, did I have a twin? No, nobody would be so cruel as to separate twins... especially not my parents.

“I just need some time to process this...” I said turning away and running off into the mist gathering outside our house. I pushed away leaves and bracken, scratches all over my face and arms, but still I kept running. I ran until I can't run anymore. I fell down and cried and cried and cried. I cried until I couldn't cry anymore. Eventually I sat up and saw a shadow moving from behind the tree. I stood up expecting a bear or wild animal...

## **Nestori**

I have always known I was adopted and have loved my mother even more because of it. I have also always known that I have a twin, but my mother (who I know is my adopted mother) has told me that now is not the time to go looking for them. In my opinion being adopted is an honor, your adoptive parent(s) chose you out of all the other babies at the orphanage. Of course it does make you wonder why your parents left you and if they had a good reason to. It also makes you kinda resent them a little bit, wondering what your life would've been like if they hadn't given you away... I know it's not that simple, but it still makes me wonder if I have unknown relatives if my birth parents are even still alive. So on my thirteenth birthday I decided to ask my mother about my birth family as she seems to know quite a lot about them.

“Mother?” I asked cautiously.

“Yes dear?” My mother looked me up and down trying to figure out what's wrong.

“I need to know more about my birth family, I know you don't like talking about it... But I need to know. It just keeps me wondering, can you tell me about my family?”

“You mean your father, Nestori? Well he was very kind and always cared about me and you, but something got into his head and made-”

“No mother, I mean my birth family.”

My mother sighs, “I was afraid of this. Although I knew it would come up one day... Well let's see, I once knew your mother quite well. She and I were great friends, I didn't get to know her husband at all but one day Lacie just disappeared off the face of the planet. Her and her husband took all their belongings with them. The one night thirteen years ago exactly she came knocking on my door with you in her arms begging me to protect you before vanishing off into the night. You've been mine ever since Nestori.” She stopped for a moment overcome with emotion.



“In your blankets there was a note asking me to name you Nestori and telling me that you had a twin sister named Esma and you were to meet her just after you turned thirteen.”

“Where does Esma live?” I ask tentatively.

“Victoria, British Columbia, Canada,” I have been saving up for years and we have flights booked for tomorrow so go pack your bags.”

The next morning I hopped on a direct flight to Victoria, I’m excited but very very nervous. Thousands of questions spinning around in my head. When we got to Victoria we learned that the family had moved to Port Renfrew. In a brief moment of panic I thought that you had to take another plane, which I knew my mother couldn’t afford, then I learned that it was just a two hour drive away!

***AETERNUM***  
***A COLLECTION OF POEMS***

by  
Astrid Kim

## **The Storm**

Oh my dear butterfly,  
How your wings make me smile,  
There are a thousand colours and shades.  
When you fly in the sun they all stop to grin.  
Don't worry about the rain,  
I'll be right there to keep you safe.  
I know the times are getting hard but I'll protect you.  
I know you get sad sometimes,  
But remember the clouds aren't here to stay.  
And when the sun rolls out again you'll be flapping your wings.  
Do the beetles pick on you again and again?  
I wouldn't bother with them, they'll stay out in the rain.  
Oh my dear butterfly,  
When the beetles pick on you just call my name,  
I'll be there in a hurry to scare them away.  
If you're a little bit sad or a little bit mad,  
Don't worry about the distance the wind will carry your message to me.  
My friends, the birds will call out to you,  
Melodies of the sweet ocean blue.  
Maybe you'll smile again.  
Don't wear a black cloak just to hide your true colors.  
Oh my dear butterfly,  
I don't know how the story ends.  
The storms they grow closer  
And haunt our dreams.  
If ever they get me you must fly away,  
My shadows will cast you and take you away.  
No matter if you cry,  
The birds will comfort you.  
As the storm come closer you must run away,

For you know I was never here to stay.  
I may make it out but I don't know for sure.  
For now all I say is goodbye.  
Oh my dear butterfly,  
I love you.

Oh my dear butterfly,  
I have made it from the storm,  
I can see the smile on your face and it brings one to me.  
As the sun rises again,  
My storm clouds are gone,  
The little rays of light fall on my face once again.  
Your warm embrace fills my heart and I think once again,  
Your wings are so colourful.  
My friends, the birds are singing once again,  
I'm flying by your side,  
And I'm smiling one again.

## **A Shotgun To the Wind**

Now I wonder where the wind blows,  
If it leads me or gets me lost.  
Do you think of the possibilities when we follow the wind?  
When the ocean blows over,  
Will the wind fill with gas,  
My suffocation.  
We'll have nowhere to go.  
I don't think I need to live,  
If those after me will not.  
Why do we not see these days,  
That we're killing ourselves?  
They say the butterfly wilts,  
But what if it's not ready to go?  
If a shotgun to the head is any easier,  
Why do we suffer like this?  
'Cause the wind will blow us away.

## Cotton Candy

A smallish size of cotton candy,  
Mum says big is too much.  
The crowd cheers,  
Well, not for the cotton candy of course,  
The grey stands hold many people,  
Popcorn, candy, fizzy drinks in their hands,  
Hiding from the sun beating down.  
Eyes fixated on someone running,  
Why is he running?  
He's running beside grass, greener then normal,  
I don't really care what he's running on, it doesn't look very interesting.  
I wonder how many times he'll run around the grass,  
He looks tired so maybe he stayed up past his bedtime yesterday.  
Naughty runner.  
Maybe he couldn't sleep because he didn't want the monsters to get his toes.  
I wonder if he would want to borrow my night light.  
*"One small cotton candy!"* yells the man in the small booth.  
Oh, yay!

## **Stop Marble**

Your face isn't a mask, so don't break it.

Your body isn't a movie, so don't judge it.

Your feelings aren't a program, so don't delete them.

Your friends aren't plates, so don't drop them.

Your love isn't light, so don't snuff it.

Your eyes aren't a canvas, so don't cover it.

Your life isn't a book, so don't close it.

# ***POEMS***

by

Soren Kim



***as i often tell myself***

there are no things  
so gentle  
as curtain creases  
in the breeze

watching fabric fold  
like waves  
or hair  
or wind-full trees

stop  
and start again  
and  
dance about  
with ease, carefree are those curtain  
creases rippling  
in the breeze

they seem to glide  
behind my hands  
as i reach for  
my last soup can  
behind the pantry door

from the edges  
of my eyes  
i catch a peek  
at whispering  
curtain creases  
in the breeze

gentle  
are the fabric folds  
dancing  
like the trees  
starting, stopping  
and serene  
unbothered as i peek  
after i had reached  
and felt them  
twist behind me  
there rang a soft  
faint trilling sound  
and i  
was certain they had breathed

## ***A Violent Rejection***

There are no ends  
Not found in order,  
Not seen by eyes of our order

There are no ends not found

In order, not seen by

Eyes of our order

There

Are

No

Ends

Not Found

In

Order,

Not

Seen

By

Eyes

Of

Our

Order

There

Are

Ends

Not

By

Order

There Is Nothing Found By Order

Our Ends Are Not Seen By Order

Order Ends By Our Eyes

## ***Together Boys***

My brother's head sits heavy on my shoulder. His long hair sticks to my chest, his breath creaks like how the wind wanders through the tree-husks in summer. The beach is sickly cold, and we shiver in our ugly shells of dirt and blood and seawater. My feet move with the pulsing of the waves and the shifting of the sand. My arms reach for my brother's chest, wrapping their thin fingers around his sunburnt skin, feeling his vertebrae and ribs through the grime like how they felt the tips of our blades when we would carve the leather in the fall. He coughs--I feel his spine quiver--then retches a perfect globe of purple-gold ichor. It lands softly in the sand. It starts to pour from his nose, slowly at first, then quicker, through his eyes and mouth and ears and it's dripping down our chests and our legs and wandering in rivers toward the waves. I reach under his chin and watch the drops fall into my palm. They look like marbles catching the descending yellow sun and the melancholy blue water and our own amber eyes in a whirlpool of colour. They streak and shimmer and are *alive* and, like a spark in the darkness, I know. I see it in the lines of my palm. I know my brother will die today, as the sun begins to set behind the empty ocean, and the wind begins to push through his silent husk, and his bones begin to grow through his leather skin. I know I will leave this shore, this sand, these waves. But in this space that threads the horizon, in this time between the reign of the sun and the reign of the moon, I will hold him. My fingers will trace his back, my heart will beat beneath his hair, and my shoulder will nest his heavy head as marbles roll down his face and reflect his fading light.

## ***My Hands***

My hands rifle through a box that once  
Contained the dismembered body of  
One grotesque flowered chair or another  
But has long since been eviscerated to  
Become a vessel for the sickly sweet  
                    Smell of Non-Toxic Watercolour and  
                    Variety Colours Crayon Pack  
Crushed and bled and gutted  
Onto vast fields of bone-white scrolls  
Rolled up like cigarettes to be lost  
In a great fire in a forgotten library

My hands reach for a crude still of a  
Man with wings, face hidden, reined  
Lighting bursting from his stick figure  
Palms, his eyes glowing with some  
Unremembered power as blue  
                    As the sky that hangs precariously  
                    Above a field of heretically fake grass,  
                    Pierced by spears of neon yellow from  
                    A half-moon sun, but one of countless  
                    Landscapes perfect in their absurdity,  
                    Confined in a house of cardboard and  
                    Captured youth

My hands rend a sculpture of some nameless  
God, its Play-Doh flesh and pipe cleaner bones  
Crumbling under new air's breath and time  
Once lost that now writhes in stale vengeance

My skin no longer feels the weight of spectral stains  
My mouth no longer speaks of innocent things  
My feet no longer run unchained to the ground  
My eyes no longer burn with glorious freedom

Among the cacophony of spilt life and lost  
Time, I drift to a self-portrait which I do not  
Recall creating, yet there it sits with its  
Too-red smile and too-round face and I am

Not who I was *I am not who I was* and it is  
Signed with a handprint in rainbow and I  
Press my own fingers to its ghostly edges and

And our hands are no longer the same size

# ***CHILD OF THE REVOLUTION***

by

Maisha Klette



## **Prologue**

Let me tell you a story...

Once upon a time, there was an evil king and queen, in a faraway land, who lived in a beautiful palace, and had everything one could wish for in the world. But they were cruel and mean. They spent all the country's money on parties and clothes, not on things their country's people actually needed.

Then one day, the people revolted. They killed the king and queen and took their daughter prisoner. They elected a new leader. And everyone lived happily ever after.

Did you ever wonder what happened to the daughter in that story? A daughter still too young to have participated in the evils of her parents?

I can tell you. It's my story. I am the daughter.

I am the daughter of the revolution.

## Chapter one.

I pressed my forehead against my grimy prison window, trying to see the stars. They always gave me courage.

“Miss. Time to go.”

‘*Yes. You are leaving today,*’ I reminded myself.

“Hurry up” said the guard.

I pulled on my black gloves and picked up the suitcase. I looked around the grey room for the last time. Thank God I was leaving; the ceiling was almost caving in. My eyes took in the tiny bed, covered with grey, lumpy blankets, the mildew covered window, and the rickety table and chair. “Who is coming with me, please?” I asked.

The guard shrugged, “Pierre and Gabriel. You liked them, didn’t you? And that old governess of yours, Madame Macaw.”

“Mackae,” I corrected him.

“Her. Come on.” He offered me his arm. I glanced at it scornfully and pushed past him. I went down the crumbling stone steps and breathed in the musty air for the last time. Out the door and into the night, to the carriage. Somewhere, a clock struck midnight. Someone opened the carriage door and I took the outstretched hand offered to me.

“Hey.” It was said so softly, I hardly heard it. I turned towards the owner of the hand.

“Hi, Alex.” I whispered. He was still so young. You could become a guard at eighteen. He was the only one I really liked. He had become a friend, no matter how much I was resolved to hate him. And then...And then. It was him who found out about my mother. He who told me.

He who caught me when I fainted. I was sixteen now. I would be seventeen in six months. He had only just turned eighteen.

“If I come visit you at that place, you’ll tell them to let me in, won’t you?” He asked me now. I swallowed and looked straight ahead.

“Of course,” I said.

“Goodbye, Adeline,” he said.

The door shut and the carriage started. I arched my neck backwards, looking towards the dark tower, making a silhouette in the sky. I was going away from my home. Away from all I had ever known.

The tower faded behind me and I faced forward. Madame Mackae pressed a gentle hand over mine.

“Free at last, my princess,” she whispered.

“Yes,” I murmured. But even then, I knew I could never be free. Too much had happened. There were too many memories. And memories don’t free you.

*Two weeks later...*

The carriage rolled to a stop. I breathed a sigh of relief. We had been riding in it for two weeks, only stopping to sleep at inns, where Gabriel had had the audacity to say I was his daughter and to call me 'Mary.' I had shown my displeasure at this, but he paid me no mind. It was for my safety, he had said.

The carriage door opened, and someone helped me out. Words were murmured in my ear, "Wait here."

So I stood, shivering in the palace courtyard in my thin clothes and gloves. I was aware of people coming and going - taking my suitcase, taking the carriage away, leading me towards the front steps. Still I stood, numb and freezing, waiting for only one thing.

Doors opened and closed. The harsh wind whipped at my face. People came and went. Still I stood there, until suddenly the doors flew open with a bang. A beautiful golden-haired girl was standing there and talking in a stern voice to several people who looked like the king's advisors, and then she was holding my hands and kissing me on each cheek.

"I'm your cousin, Elizabeth," she said. In addition to her hair, she had a red-rosebud mouth and skin as smooth as a porcelain plate. She looked like she had stepped out of a painting, and she reminded me a bit of my mother.

It only took a moment before I sank to the ground in a deep curtsy. Whatever happened, I had to please these people. They were my only hope.

Elizabeth laughed. "Don't bother with that," she said, pulling me up. I still wondered where the king was. It was most important that I please him, but it seemed rude to ask.

"Lizbeth! Lizbeth!" A little girl came running out of the still open palace doors and grabbed onto Elizabeth's waist. Elizabeth put a motherly hand on the girl's head.

“My sister, Isabelle,” Isabelle peered out from behind her sister’s skirts. Her eyes were blue and wide as saucers, and dark blond curly strands framed her face.

“Ah. So the mysterious princess has arrived.”

“Shut up, Carl,” said Elizabeth, without turning around. I looked up and saw Prince Carl, Elizabeth’s older brother. He bowed, I curtsied.

In a minute, a man in his twenties wearing red velvet breeches was standing in front of me and I was sinking down into a curtsy so deep I wasn’t sure I could hold it. He pulled me up. “It is very good to finally see you,” he said.

My mouth was so dry I could hardly talk. “Thank you, Your Majesty, for taking me in, and...” I trailed off. I couldn’t say anything more.

“You must meet the queen, my wife,” he said. “Come, darling.” A woman with hair so golden and glowing it rivalled Elizabeth’s came forward. He slipped his hand around her.

“Maria,” said the king, introducing her. He turned to leave, then paused. “You can call me Francis, if you wish,” he said finally. “My siblings do.”

“Thank you, sir.” I curtsied again, and by the time I rose, he was gone.

Elizabeth, Carl, and the shy Isabelle who was still hiding behind her sister remained. Elizabeth, who seemed the most outgoing of them all, had opened her mouth to speak, but before she could, a maid appeared on the step and shyly told me that she had come to show me to my new rooms.

“This way, Princess Adeline,” she said, gesturing.

“It’s Ashka,” I said. My cousins were staring. The maid’s forehead creased.

“I was told it was Adeline,” she said.

“It’s Ashka,” I replied. She nodded, and I followed her inside.

People kept sneaking glances at me as we walked down the hall. Of course. I’d seen it on the trip here. I was a foreign princess, and a martyr at that. It was fascinating. An angel. At least, that’s what they thought.

I barely registered the grand rooms we walked through. I had grown up in what was considered the most fashionable court in the world. Everything paled in comparison.

“Here,” said the maid finally. She pushed open a set of double walnut doors. My eyes swept the site that awaited me. A grand receiving room trimmed with lace and silk and mahogany. And then, a stout, middle aged woman with sandy-colored hair was upon us, sobbing over me, and curtsying. Again, the crying. *Before*, nobody had seen reason to cry over me. I was a princess, but I caused more mischief than I was worth, and I would have glared at anybody who dared cry over me anyway.

“Princess, uh, Ashka, Madame,” said the maid.

Unlike the maid, Madame Charmian didn’t seem bothered by my name. Ashka was Shoshoni, the name of the ancient land on which both Brittany and Eistria, the country I had grown up in, and the country I was standing on now, we built upon. Shoshona had collapsed, but some of the words, traditions, holidays, and names remained. Shoshoni names had all but died out in Eistria, but they were still common in parts of Brittany. Not for royalty, however. My mother naming me Ashka had been a shock to the public, to say the least.

“Madame Charmian, Your Highness. I was governess to the Princess Elisabeth for many years. The king has appointed me head of your household, and I do hope I will be to your satisfaction. Now,” She lowered her voice conspicuously. “I knew your mother when she was just a girl, you know.”

“You did?”

“I did. I was her governess too. I was very young then. Your mother was such a sweet child, you know.”

I liked Madame Charmian immediately. She then rang a bell and a trio of maids appeared.

“Hanna, Elsie, and Florentina, your chambermaids,” she introduced them. They wore the same uniform as my maids at home, black dress with a white apron tied the waist, and a mob cap with lace trimming covered their heads, except for a few tendrils escaping it.

“You will one day have a Lady’s Maid,” continued Madame Charmian. “But for such a personal appointment we thought we ought to let you choose your own. And there’s no rush. Hanna and Florentina can handle that sort of work perfectly. Elsie’s young, but she’s learning.” I just nodded. “And you could have ladies, if you wanted, but that sort of thing isn’t really done here, except for Maria.....” she trailed off and I jumped in quickly.

“I don’t want ladies,” I said.

Madame Charmian relaxed. “That’s all right then. Your education has, I trust, been finished?”

I nodded. I was stretching the truth, at best. Everything had stopped after the riot. My governess had been sent away, and we had access to very little in the Tower. My mother had tried to teach me, but she could remember nothing of her childhood history lessons, and was even worse at mathematics than I was. James, my mother’s personal guard, had tried to teach me, but he could only remember the military history he had been drilled on when training to become a soldier and had given up on mathematics after it had taken him an hour to explain what the square root of 4 is. I was competent in history, had excelled in literature, and had passed geography, however, so I figured I was fine.

Half an hour later I found myself standing in front of Francis's desk, feeling rather faint. I had opened my mouth to begin, but he had held up his hand.

"I just need you to sign these documents, Ashka, and then we can discuss the other things," he said. It was then I noticed his eyes. They were a dark bottle green, and they protruded slightly. They were like a cow's eyes, if a cow could have snake eyes.

Immediately I was on my guard. Alex had warned me about this, told me they might try and trick me into giving things up, if I seemed gullible. I scanned the documents while I readied the quill.

The first one was fine. I had been exchanged for seven Britannian revolutionary prisoners, and all I had to do was confirm that I understood this and accepted it.

The next one was a problem. The text at the bottom of the page read:

*I, Adeline Helena Sophie, Princess of Chemania, Duchess of Brittany, hereby agree to the following:*

*In exchange for the keep and care of His Majesty, Francis I of Eistria, I Adeline, grant him fifteen percent of my current fortune (inherited jewels, money, etc), on the understanding that I will get the rest when I marry, and will be granted a monthly allowance of 500 dollars.*

What, did he think I was stupid?

"I'm not signing this," I said bluntly. Francis drummed his fingers on his desktop and sighed.

"Then, my dear cousin, we have a problem."

"I don't need an allowance, I have more than enough to get by on my own."



“No, you don’t. You would if I were to give you the money, which I have no intention of giving you.”

“What about the jewellery? It belonged to my mother.”

Francis fiddled with one of the rings on his fingers. “I’m aware who it belonged to. I may consider giving some of it to you, but you must understand that several of the pieces are too heavy for someone who is still in their teens.”

“My mother was given many of those pieces when she was fourteen.”

“After she was married. It makes a difference, being married.”

“I’m not signing that thing,” I jutted my chin out.

Francis looked at me out of the side of his eyes, picked up the document, crumpled it into a ball, and tossed it into the fireplace. “It really makes no difference, whether you sign it or not. The immature thought that you have a certain power just by abstaining from signing a document is incorrect. You are under my care, and you will get your inheritance when you turn eighteen, or when you marry.”

“An inheritance that you will have taken fifteen percent of!” I spat the words out.

“If the jewellery has sentimental value for you, I can take my share from the money.”

“You have no share. It belongs to me, all of it. And I assume,” I narrowed my eyes, “That when you say ‘marry’ you have someone specific in mind? You may as well just tell me now.”

Francis shrugged. “There is no need for me to lay it all out now. It would be better if you wait until your seventeenth birthday to get married anyway, and you have only just arrived. There is no rush.”

“I hate you,” I whispered. “This is why you wanted me, isn’t it? So you could have legal rights to my jewels and my money, and have me as a political pawn, marry me off to whoever gives you the most benefit! Or is it that brother of yours? Do you think that by marrying me you may one day have access to my country? Well I can tell you, you are wrong about that. They hate me there. They won’t want me back. And I wish you’d left me to rot in that tower!”

“Be careful, Princess Ashka.”

I was certain I heard him say it before I slammed his study door.

# ***BREATHING BLUE***

by

Tia Landry

Rolling down the subway, the train came to a screeching and abrupt stop. Most of the passengers' bodies jerked forward, including Lia's, whose hands smacked the seat in front of her to protect her head from hitting the seat. Alert, she looked up and saw people exchanging worried and confused glances.

Lia turned her head sharply to look at Oliver leaning on the opposite side of the train. He appeared to be just as shocked as she was, with his hands gripping the pole near him to steady himself. She squeezed her hands tightly around the bag full of papers and flash drives that hung in a black bag around her shoulder, turning her knuckles white. Lia's stomach went tense and the colour drained from her face.

Mutters began carrying throughout the train. Looking out the glass windows and train doors, Lia could see people impatiently waiting to board the train on the underground platform, as if it were a normal day to them. Several minutes went by. During that time Oliver and Lia had exchanged a few worried glances from across the train. The doors weren't opening.

"Let us out!" someone spoke loudly.

"Open the doors," another voice in the back of the train called.

As quickly as they stopped, loud gasps were suddenly heard coming from the people outside of the train. Most passengers inside the train turned to look out at the people waiting to board the train. Most, if not all, of the outsiders were looking down at their feet gasping in shock.

"Water," someone said aloud.

"Water!" more voices called, this time with more panic.

"It's a flood!" another voice shrieked.

A man standing next to Oliver started to speak, "It can't possibly flood a train..."

“Let us out!” Passengers began banging on windows. The water had now risen to the outsiders’ toes. It was rising quickly. Too quickly. Lia’s fearful eyes looked up to Oliver who was trying to keep his cool, but Lia knew he was just as scared as she was.

Lia’s mind was short on sleep. Her eyes pleaded to droop shut but the adrenaline pumping through her veins kept her awake. *‘The papers weren’t wrong,’* she thought. *‘This is how the government was going to attempt phase one of population control.’* Lia and Oliver knew every city where every disaster was going to hit. The only thing the government papers didn’t tell them was when.

Both Lia and Oliver’s fathers hadn’t died for nothing. Each of their fathers was a government scientist. Partners.

About a week ago now, both of their fathers were said to have died in a lab experiment gone wrong. But neither Oliver nor Lia bought it. It was a cover up. A top secret government cover up. Before each of their fathers vanished, they each left them heaping amounts of evidence from the government’s shady plans for population control, with only a note from Lia’s father that said: *Take these to Mikey's place. He knows what to do.*

And right now Lia held all the evidence they would need to prove it, clutched in her arms on a flooding train, desperately trying to make it safely out of the city.

“There’s water in the train,” someone cried out.

Lia looked down to her feet. Seeping through the bottom door, water was trickling around the cabin. Oliver slid up next to her, placing one hand on her upper arm, but she wasn’t sure if he did it to comfort her or to comfort himself. Lia felt a lump form in her throat. *‘Could I really trust him? He could take the papers and run leaving me if he really wanted to. I am no value to him,’* she thought.

Water was still rising on the way to their toes. The people who were waiting to board the train were frantic. All of them were in two big crowds desperately waiting to climb the two sets of

stairs back on to the streets of New Jersey. Lia could see the water rising much faster out there. It had now climbed to the outsiders' calves.

“Open the doors!” multiple voices yelled through the train. You could now hear people’s feet splashing around in the train as the water rose to their ankles. Through all the chaos, Oliver leaned over to Lia, almost bending down to whisper in her ear.

“You think they know we’re here in Jersey?” Oliver whispered with a hint of Russian accent.

“Chances are slim but not impossible,” Lia said trying to contain the shakiness in her voice. Her eyes scanned the train car searching for anyone who seemed the slightest bit suspicious. Oliver paused, studying her reaction.

“The station is going to flood and something tells me the streets will too. We have to get out of here and make it up a tall building,” Oliver said in a hush so quiet Lia almost didn’t hear him over the loud chaos. By now all of the outsiders had already scrambled up the stairs. Lia’s heart was pounding and she felt a cold sweat around her lower back.

“Open the bloody doors!” Oliver hollered over the voices. Water was sloshing between the panicked feet on the train. Lia looked down at the cold ice water reaching just above her knees, soaking the tip of her long black coat she wore. She brought the sack of papers and tiny flash drives to her chest, squeezing them as tight as she could, her fingernails clawing the bag. If the papers and flash drive were ruined, each of their father’s deaths would have been for nothing. Lia was not about to let that happen. Not in a million years.

Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye, she saw Oliver moving away from her. His legs kicked up water as he splashed his way down the train car. His body language displayed anger. Panic tensed through her body. *‘Did he leave me? He just left me!’* Confusion swarmed through her tired mind. Her eyes still watched Oliver walk away.

“Oliver! Where are you going?” Lia called out into the noise of chaos.

Oliver didn't respond. She wasn't even sure if he could hear her voice over everyone else. Lia's stomach was clenched tight and her breaths became short.

"I NEED IT NOW!" Oliver yelled in an aggressive tone that could be heard through the whole train car. Voices died down and heads turned to look at Oliver who was arguing with a man in a construction vest. Lia looked over, relieved that his intent wasn't to leave her, and she saw Oliver reach for a hammer that was in the construction man's tool belt. As Oliver took the hammer the man shouted something angry to him but Oliver didn't have time to listen to him. He was already storming back down the train car towards Lia with a hammer clenched in his hand. At the speed he was coming towards her, a thought crossed Lia's mind. *'He wouldn't hit me with the hammer? Would he?'* As he got closer Lia took a step back, the ice water still surrounding her legs. But as Oliver got closer his stride slowed down and he turned to the door with a wide glass window in the middle. People had already cleared away from him giving him plenty of space to do what he wanted to do next. With the hammer in his right hand he pulled his arm back and swung the hammer at the window.

*WHAM.*

He had made a fine line of cracks in the glass. For his second swing he gripped the hammer with two hands this time, swinging it like a baseball bat.

*Wham.*

*Wham.*

*Wham.*

The glass cracked more and more each time. He was actually doing it. A hint of a smile crept on Lia's face. *'Maybe they wouldn't die down in a subway after all.'*

It was getting harder to walk in the water as it now approached her thighs, numbing the rest of her legs. Looking around the train she saw people having full blown panic attacks, some making calls to loved ones, others fighting to stand their place, but the people who stood out to her the most was a mother with her two young kids. The young boy was crying and sobbing

as the water reached his chest, while the mother desperately held the little girl, also sobbing, in her arms.

*SMASH.*

Lia snapped out of her quick daze to see Oliver had smashed the window. As quickly as he did, people swarmed around the window, desperately clawing to get out. Oliver finished scraping the last remains of jagged glass around the window using the side of the hammer.

“ONE AT A TIME!” Someone yelled.

“WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST!” More voices called. Everyone seemed to agree, women and children first. One man hopped through the window onto the outside to help the women and children crawl out the window safely. Lia watched the mother and her two kids go through first, followed by a few others and single women. Lia suddenly felt Oliver come up beside her and grip her lower elbow.

“Don’t drop them,” Oliver said with a hard stare glancing down to the bag.

“I won’t,” Lia returned a cold look. It bothered her Oliver didn’t trust her but she had no time to argue now. The water had risen to her upper thighs now, and a cool sweat started to break out on her neck. The ice water had officially turned her toes completely numb. They were running out of time.

“You’re up next ma’am,” the man who had been helping the woman and children climb through said to her as Oliver shoved her forward, clearly impatient wanting her to go next.

“Okay,” Lia spoke quietly, her heart pounding in her throat.

“Got one coming through,” the man yelled to the guy standing outside the train where the water reached his thighs too. Lia kept one arm wrapped around the bag and used the other to push herself up through the broken door window. Her stomach went tight from fear.



“I gotcha doll,” a man in his late forties reached out and grabbed her shoulders, helping Lia down into the water without stumbling. “Head up the stairs and get to a building,” he said.

“Thank you.” She wanted to say more but the panic consumed her voice when her legs jumped into the ice cold water again.

Lia started heading toward the stairs, her legs pushing through the water, when the thought of leaving Oliver behind entered her mind.

“Oliver, wait, I need Oliver!” Lia quickly turned around calling out to the men helping people though the train. Lia’s eyes searched desperately to see Oliver in the train car still crowded with people. ‘*Screw this,*’ Lia thought she saw Oliver mutter, reading his lips.

“Move it, let me through,” Oliver said, shoving his way out the window ignoring the others around him.

“EVERYONE FOR THEM BLOODY SELVES!” a voice hollered.

At that moment panic began. The water was still rising and more people gave up trying to move in an orderly fashion. Oliver hurled himself through the tiny window, falling into the water with a splash. Others followed him, also hurling their bodies out the broken window, falling over top of each other.

“MOVE IT!” Oliver said, still in the water with people surrounding him. He screamed at Lia, pointing in the direction of the stairs. Hesitant to leave Lia, clutched her bag hard to her chest and pushed her way through the freezing water as fast as her legs could go. The water was close to her waist, and her legs were numbing. Lia started to climb the stairs carefully, watching her step as to not trip. Looking back she saw Oliver and the rest of the people only had a few minutes before the water would reach the top of the stairs, making an air pocket below. ‘*He would make it. Right?*’ A pain grew in her chest. A pain from fear. A pain from exhaustion. Her legs, moving a bit faster now, swished through the water, fighting each stride she took.

Nearing the top of the stairs she saw the water began to get lighter and it was easier to move through. '*Oliver.*' She thought about taking a look back, when suddenly, as she reached the first step with no water, her legs buckled beneath her. Her knee smacked the concrete step and her head hit the wall. She still clutched her bag as if it were a child.

"Get up!" A familiar voice behind her called out. There was Oliver, wrestling his way through the water with nobody else behind him. Still in a bit of shock, Lia stumbled to her feet in the heeled black shoes she wore. She strongly regretted her choice of wearing them today. "We've got to get up a building," Oliver said, reaching out to steady Lia up by gripping the back of her coat. "And from now on I'll be taking care of these," he said, ripping the bag of papers and drives from her hands.

Anger boiled in her chest as he continued to run up the stairs in front of her, the bag of papers and drives in his arms.

# ***POEMS***

by

Annie McClure

## **The Thoughts of a Day: A Series of Haikus**

Moon sets, sun rises  
Nighttime flows right into day  
Now it has begun

A dancing woman  
Gracefully flows through the room  
Moving like water

Haikus are snobby  
They're always saying nothing  
Poetry is dumb

I'm a slow reader  
But I will get faster soon  
No need to be rushed

You are so handsome  
A rainbow cannot compare  
I love you so much

Reflecting myself  
When I look at the water  
Who is it I am?

I'm invisible  
No one can see or hear me  
While in my corner

Cute, adorable  
Handsome, wonderful, nice, fun,  
All these describe you

Sleep won't come easy  
It never does anymore  
I just lie awake

Two knitting needles  
Fighting a peaceful battle  
Making something nice

My friends treat me well  
It's me who causes the pain  
But I'll somehow stop

Heartbreak isn't nice  
It shatters you like you're glass  
But it can be fixed

Taking medicine  
Downing pills to get happy  
Doesn't even work

Math is all patterns  
It reminds me of writing  
They are connected

Putting on makeup  
To hide your imperfections  
You don't have any

I feel like a doll  
I've no personality  
When I am alone

My dreams confuse me  
Each night it feels so real  
I'm living two lives

Daylight comes and goes  
My mind has yet to come back  
It stays a stranger

So lonely, so cold  
Stranded in an empty room  
All I do is age

Lonely, I'm left here  
I only have these dolls now  
No human contact

I drew a picture  
And sure, it's kind of good but,  
You look way better

Give me time to heal  
I have got scars on my arms  
Which haven't faded

My heart aches for you  
And I miss you each second  
But I'll wait for you

Why are you not here?  
There's an empty seat near me  
Why won't you fill it?

A woman sits down  
She has exhausted her strength  
But she'll dance again

Sun sets, moon rises  
Daylight softens into night  
Beginning anew

## **Who I am Inside**

My soul is like a flame or fire  
And only shared with those I desire  
I don't let many people inside  
Out of pride  
Into the chambers of my very heart  
It's not as easy to enter as some Walmart  
It's locked, I have the only key  
Unless I like you, you will never understand me.

I'm not afraid, just locked up  
It's much like sharing the same cup  
I won't do it with some random person on the street  
I don't consider them friends I've yet to meet  
Why is knowing me so important to you?  
Is it because I'm something new?  
Like nothing you've really seen before  
Now you want to know more  
Well I have personal space  
Don't treat this like some race  
To get to know me

Why you can't you go be  
Bothering some other girl  
Stop acting like I'm this pearl  
This object filled with mystery  
You aren't going to be remembered by history  
As the one who broke down my wall  
So go call  
Someone who wants to let you in  
You're not getting under my skin.



Please just leave me alone  
When it comes to you, my heart is stone  
You don't get to see me  
So let me be me  
Be who I am without all the questions  
I don't require your suggestions  
On how I'm supposed to care  
How I should share  
My heart and soul with the world  
I won't let myself become unfurled  
I am who I am, and you don't get to know

So go.

Who I am inside  
Is the person who will hide  
From your prying eye  
Until the day I die.

## **I am a Doll**

I am a doll  
Still, not moving at all  
And when I'm all alone  
I've no personality of my own  
Perhaps I'm porcelain, perhaps I'm brass  
If you drop me I'll crack like glass  
A tumble, and my face is gone  
I am simply a pawn  
For I am a doll  
Still, not moving at all  
When you're not here to play with me  
I am completely empty  
So lonely, so cold  
All I do is grow old  
On an otherwise empty shelf  
But I wasn't always by myself  
I used to have a friend  
Before they met their end  
Now I latch on to anyone who comes near  
Yet I always wind up here  
On this shelf  
No sense of self  
For I am a doll  
Still, not moving at all  
I always miss you  
Connection is a must  
Else I simply gather dust  
Waiting to be used  
Likely abused  
But it is my job

My heart does not throb  
For I am a doll  
Still, not moving at all  
I am a toy  
Used for people's joy  
The house is silent and oh so dark  
I see no light, not even a spark  
Come back to me please  
Or else I'll freeze  
Stop moving entirely  
Even when you play with me  
I'll simply be  
A body  
But I suppose that's fitting  
At least I won't have to deal with sitting  
On this shelf all day  
With no say  
Free will? I have none  
I'm not allowed to have my own fun  
So please come back  
So my soul doesn't crack  
With you I'm improved  
And without you I can't be moved  
For I  
Am a doll  
I am still  
Not moving  
At all

## **My Feelings: A Series of Tanka Poems**

Red orange yellow  
Green blue indigo violet  
All of the colours  
That make life vibrant and fun  
Cannot be compared to you

Poetry is hard  
What's even the point of it  
I see no reason  
To just write and write and write  
When there's no sort of purpose

I don't like myself  
Why can I just look like her  
Cause she's so pretty  
Both on the inside and out  
While I look so terrible

I'm a teenager  
But I don't feel like the rest  
I don't go party  
I've never really had friends  
Sitting here all on my own

The beauty of life  
It remains hidden from me  
Because I struggle  
Each day that I have to live  
Someday I know I'll see it

The boy I once was  
Never really existed  
I'm a normal girl  
So please just treat me like one  
That's all I've ever wanted

Long distance friendships  
They still count as proper friends  
Just not there right now  
Sitting in their home chatting  
But they can still support me

The only way that  
You can see whether it was  
Worth it is if you  
Make it right up 'til the end  
And see it with your own eyes

# ***ODIE'S TEXT***

by

Annika Rodetto

**Aug. 1**

A heavy summer heat persisted through the black night leaving Gingerhill as dry as a desert. The Andorro sisters claimed that the heat creates the perfect sugar beet season; at least it is good for something.

I kept hearing the secretary at our home saying, "It ain't right, that old fella taking care of that poor young girl. I mean look how she's turned out!"

Other than my more-than-messy hair and endless 'stupid' thoughts and ideas, I think I turned out pretty well despite living at an old folks home.

I'm standing in Frog Creek now, trying to think of poetry to write. All I need is something to rhyme with Andorro...

**Aug. 2**

Grandpa's got a new girlfriend. Her name's Tilly. Gramps and I were talking about her in the morning. "I like this one," he said leanin' back in his chair, taking a long drawl on his cigar.

"The cigarette or Tilly?" I asked.

"Both. They're both Cuban. Maybe I have a thing for them Cubans."

I nodded attentively.

"Don't tell Francy I'm smoking again," he says. Francy is his nurse. "She keeps on stealing my smokes so she doesn't have to go out and buy any."

"But Francy said..."

"- Francy says a lot of things. You hear me girl?"

“Yes sir,” I nodded in agreement.

I walked down the hill behind Sunnyside Old Folks Home and right near Frog Creek. The Andorros were out on the fields again.

### **Aug. 3**

Francy found out ‘bout Gramps smoking again. She found the cigars in his couch cushions.

“Is your Gramps smoking again, Odie?” she asked.

“No he ain’t,” I protested.

“Did he tell you to lie?”

“No.”

“Odie...” It was followed by a long series of *tut tut tu’s*.

But something good did happen! The Andorros lent me fancy church shoes!

### **Aug. 4**

Talked with Tilly today. She asked, “What’s your favourite colour of lipstick hon?”

“I ain’t wear none.” “Now THAT we need to fix,” she said and she went on to explain that she wears ‘pomegranate burst’. Whatever that means. “Here hon. You can have this one.” She handed me a fancy looking tube.

“Strawberry Blossom?” I read the label.

“That’s right, girl. You need a mother.”

“I do?”



“That’s right. You do.”

“Mrs. Andorra could be my mother!” I suggested.

“Now that’s an idea!” So she lent me a real pretty dress to impress the Andorros.

### **Aug. 5**

The Andorro’s have asked me to come over tomorrow! I’ve laid out my church shoes with Tilly’s fancy dress and the strawberry blossom lipstick. Francy notices it and teaches me how to put on lipstick!

### **Aug. 6**

I walk through Frog Creek and past the Andorro’s sugar beet fields and up to their sweet little farmhouse. I walked through the screen porch doors and into their kitchen. Susan and Ann Andorro were already sittin’ there. Their mom (Mrs. Andorro) was at the head of the table. I pulled out their rustic brown chair and sat down.

“Hi Susan! Hi Ann! Hi Mrs. Andorra!” I excitedly began.

I was surprised when this was met with shocked looks of horror. Susan sat in disbelief, before looking pointedly to her mother for guidance. Ann ran over and poured water down my dress! I yelled out in disgust while Mrs. Andorro patted me down. “What’s wrong?” I asked, surprised.

I turned around, humiliated, to find the burnt remnants of my dress. My beautiful dress. In wet scorched pieces. Whatever am I to tell Tilly? The cupboards then caught up in flames and Mrs. Andorro extinguished them with the remaining water in the pitcher and a damp towel. Scorch marks ran up the tiled walls and water damage soaked the wooden cupboards. Ann lent me a jacket so I could walk home without getting too cold because of my burnt dress. I politely asked if I could still stay for dinner, but for whatever reason she told me it would probably be best if I just went home. The nerve!

**Aug. 7**

Spent the whole day trying to forget the incident.

**Aug. 8**

Francy saw me moping in the hallway and said, "Keep your chin up Odette. Things will get better." Gramps was right, what does she know.

**Aug. 9**

Walked in on Gramps and Tilly while they were kissing. Gonna spend the night at Francy's private suite.

**Aug. 10**

Francy made me pancakes for breakfast. I finally dared to go within a mile radius of the Andorro house. I walked to Frog Creek.

**Aug. 11**

Francy says if I spend any more time at Frog Creek, I'll turn into a frog myself.

**Aug. 12**

Went with Francy to the market. We ran into Mrs. Andorro. She said a bright hello with a smile but turned away quickly to avoid conversation.

"Good day Mrs. Andorro," I replied, but she continued to walk away.

"Good God, what did you do?" Francy asked me.

"I vowed to never tell!" I muttered.

"Pah! Nonsense! You are fourteen! You can't make vows!" She spat.

“I jolly well can and have,” I replied proudly.

She rolled her eyes. “Fine, don’t tell me.”

***I COULD HAVE SAVED YOU...***

by

Kasha Ross

## **Chapter 25 : Jimmy**

I promised on the damn sun. I wish that promise wasn't so serious to us but it is, so I couldn't stop running. Not when the blood circulating through my legs only consisted of lactic acid. Not when bags of bleach sat in my chest and leaked into my stomach or when Tequila told me it was okay to stop.

"Jimmy it hurts," J whimpered as he started gaining consciousness. His face barely even surprised when he saw me. He started groaning a couple blocks back, his broken, burning body hitting mine with each careless step. It took all my willpower not to stop. Because even though he hurt as I moved, his inability to scream in pain made it worse.

I shield him the best I can from the lashing branches and leaves but they still slash at his delicate flaming skin. I lay him down in the medical hut, noticing for the first time how caved in his cheeks are, how I can count all his ribs when they cut off his shirt and how only small portions of skin are free of any wounds. Finn and Anna push me out as I pace, thinking of the worst. His body falls limp as I watch through the piece of plastic, my own circulating pain, knees almost buckling under my weight, before a heart monitor beeps to life, lines showing his faint heartbeat.

I relax for only a second before I tense again. Harley should have been right behind us, she should be here. I look frantically through the gang for her wavy brown hair, for her golden eyes. Rey and Johnny lay on the ground, their smoke bombs and weapons sprawled around them as they argue. Uri sits, holding his ribs as a person I've never seen before wraps him in cloth. Tequila and Buckey must have ran after me. Tequila's nimble fingers lock around my forearm and Buckey belly flops on his brother. Even Até is moving towards us but there's still no Harley, Ace or Luke.

"You okay?" Tequila asks, leading me to a log, forcing me to sit and catch my breath.

It's still night so people sit around us, some coming over to help clean us up and check if we are injured. I wave them away, the others sit singing around the fire or reiterating for bed.

“Yeah,” I say removing my weapons from my pockets and pulling my jacket off as I’m burning up. “J’s not doing too well but he’s a Hudson, tough like Harley. He’ll be okay,” I mention mostly to myself, my chest loosening and the bags of bleach disappearing as my breaths even. “Harley should be back by now.”

I know she didn’t need to sprint like I did, there could be so many reasons why she’s caught up. Knowing her, she could have tried to help the other prisoners escape. I can’t even check on her. Rey, Uri and Buckey were the only ones with walkie talkies.

“She might be caught up saving some people,” Tequila nudges me repeating my thoughts, “Besides Harley’s not alone, she has Ace, Luke, and Malick and Jasper are waiting for them at the tree line.”

“That’s what I’m worried about,” I mutter running my fingers through my sweat soaked hair, my heart beating as fast as my knee bounces. I trust Ace, but he’s not much of a fighter. And though Luke has shown how much he wants to protect Harley, I still can’t find a reason to believe he won’t save himself instead of her.

Ace walks into the clearing, Malick and Jasper walking solemnly at his side, their heads hung. No Harley. No Luke. It takes me a minute to get to my feet and put all the pieces together. I Notice Ace’s tear soaked face, his eyes staying on the dirt, droplets falling from his nose. Tequila’s hand leaves my arm to cover her open mouth. Ace pulls at his fingers mumbling as he counts.

“Where is she?” I first whisper, then demand as heat rushes to my cheeks. But he only shakes his head, sniffing.

“I tried to—but—she wouldn’t let me die.” His words throw me off.

*‘Let him die?’* I don’t know whether to scream at him for leaving her or to comfort him because he was close to death. Harley would never choose herself over him, over any of us.

Obviously anyone with eyes can see Ace is her family and she would never let him die if that meant she would live.

“What happened?” I breathe, stopping myself from jumping to conclusions and losing myself in rage toward the wrong person. I unclench my fists, his puffy, glossy eyes finally meeting mine. He’s barely holding himself together, working so hard to hold back the waterfall of tears pressing against the dam he has so hurriedly built for our sake.

“Luke waited till you and Uri left. Until Harley and I were alone with him. He grabbed me and put a gun to my head.” As he talks, I grab at my hair, trying to pull myself out of this nightmare because that is the only sensible explanation for all of this. A nightmare. “He told her to surrender herself willingly to the Big Three or he’d put a bullet in my head and make her watch me bleed.” His voice starts to shake. The gang and other people close in around us, making me feel boxed in, claustrophobic. “I told her to leave, that it was okay but she wouldn’t. They took her and I couldn’t do anything.” His voice breaks and he starts to hiccup, Uri supporting him as hesitant tears return.

Faces look to me, mouths moving, but my whole universe has gone quiet. My biggest fear, taking hold of my tough exterior and covering my ears. I’ve worked so long to protect her, to have her in my arms and once I finally did. I wasn’t able to put myself in front of her. To take all the bad so she didn’t have any. To do what she has been doing for me for fourteen years. Never asking for anything, not even a thank you. I could have saved her, made Uri or Ace take J, stayed with her the whole way. But I listened to her. I believed she would be okay.

“Jimmy?” Tequila cautiously reaches for my arm but I rip it away.

“We have to go back,” I start forward, my heart slithers into my airway. Ace doesn’t think twice before blocking my path.

“You can’t. They probably moved her already. She made me promise not to let you go back. Not now anyways.” He frantically pushes against my shoulder but I shove him aside effortlessly.

He may be more muscular than me but I am more aggressive and ruthless when driven by anger. By the need to get to her.

“You could have stayed by the building, waited till they moved her and followed them.”

“I had no way of knowing which exit they would take her through and once you left more hunters showed up. They would have shot me. I almost didn’t make it to the tree line without being seen.” He moves back in front of me, not backing down. Malick, Jasper and Uri all assisting him now.

“You were scared of getting seen and maybe shot,” I spit, my mind racing, my neck muscles flexing. “She got taken to save you and she might die.” I stop myself before impulse takes over and I put all the blame on him. He couldn’t have done anything alone and he was willing to die so she could live. Ace drops his eyes for only a second and I see my chance. I spring forward, gaining a couple feet before hands grab at my legs, pulling me down.

My chest tightens, lungs chained by grief, struggling to help me live. My eyes turn to ice, shattering as tears blur the world. My jaw seals itself shut as I scream through gritted teeth. Head pounding, like an orchestra playing fifty different songs at once, all off key. I grab at roots and branches, crawling, pulling, fighting forward, but four bodies land heavily on me. Too much for me to fight against, eventually securing my arms and pushing my cheek into the dirt.

“I need to—” I cry at the top of my lungs, jerking and flailing. Hitting limbs and solid objects.

“Jimmy stop!” Tequila yells, her cry reaching me through the chaos. Almost sounding like the day she found my stash of drugs. She says it again and I break. I let them hold me down, having no more strength to fight against them but the urge to get to Harley only grows. A fiery pit, fueled by gasoline and fragmented pieces of my heart. So powerful that I forget what used to occupy the space before. Nothing around me matters as I imagine what might be happening to her.



“Let me go!” I scream, inhaling dust and splintered earth, letting it scrape my throat. “Please, just let me go,” I repeat. This time my voice leaving me, along with my commonsense and my conscience. I am weak.

If our roles were reversed and I got taken, Harley wouldn't be breaking down. She would stay strong for everyone around her, instantly making a plan to get me back but she is the stable one and I am weak. For her I am forever weak when she is not around, she is what makes me strong. I let her down.

Bodies slowly leave my arms as I stop fighting. Testing me, but I don't spring forward. I only move my fingers through my hair and use my shirt to help wipe my tears. The shirt she wore yesterday. Her beautiful breath like perfume lingering on the fabric.

The rest of the bodies leave me but I lay still, staring at the small bugs crawling over fallen leaves, wishing to be like them, aimlessly wandering.

Até's face appears in front of me as she sprawls out beside me. Irritation fills me. That's what Harley does when I'm in my moods and she needs to talk to me. Até's face shocks me, it almost looks like her eyes are watering, like she has recently been crying. Actually sympathetic. The last person I would expect to comfort me.

“Jimmy,” she whispers, her backpack swaying to one side. “We are going to get her back. I promise. But right now Luke has most likely shared our location with the Big Three. We have to move camp. We sent guards to find out if there are hunters spying on us.” She pushes herself up now, kneeling, stretching her hand out to me. Her braids messy, rushed, the wolf skin sitting crooked on her shoulders. I push myself up ignoring her hand, slowly making my way to the hut to pack up mine and Harley's things and to burn all of Luke's.

“What about J?” I ask, remembering there's a new person I must take care of. Someone I can't let die or get taken again. I don't want to think about the fact that if Harley never comes back, J will be all I have left of her, constantly there to remind me of how useless I am. ‘Stop,’ I scold myself.

“We’re moving him first, along with the medical supplies. Anna and Finn just got him stable. Malick, Jasper and four other guards are going with them,” she says. Malick and Jasper instantly leave my side, going to J’s. That eases me a little.

“I’m going with him too,” I say firm, wiping myself off, giving myself a task to distract myself with for the moment.

“Very well,” Até says standing in place as the gang runs off, rushing to gather their stuff. She stays with me, waiting for me to say more.

“What about the huts?” I ask.

“What about them?”

“Are you going to leave them for the hunters to take over? To find stuff they shouldn’t? Why run when you can fight? For what might be the only bright place in this miserable forest.”

“It would be idiotic to stay,” she snorts, “If we stay and fight and win, they will never stop sending more and more hunters until we are no longer here. I would rather have all my people live then to watch them die slowly.” Her muscles tense, a silver breastplate glinting through her jacket as the sun hits it. I sniffle, wiping my nose, making her relax again. “I know you're scared we’ll be moving farther away from her. I know you're not thinking straight and I know you think I’d rather let her die then save her because I’ve been dreaming of that since the first day she showed up. But for some reason I can’t let her die, I couldn’t live with myself if I did.” She touches my arm softly before moving on to help the others hurry along.

I don’t know if she’s changed her mind about Harley because she’s seen how the gang relies on her, or because of the way Harley held Emerson when she was dying. I never thought Até would ever feel that way about her. It would be like Rey not talking for two minutes.

“We found some,” a man yelled. Him and four other guards move into the clearing, pushing three hunters in front of them, their hands bound behind their backs. The first hunter uniform

has blood blossoming around his stomach, his face pale. The second is badly beaten, his face swollen and the third is unscathed.

Até appears at my side again removing her bag and pulling out her dagger. “How many of you are there?” she demands.

“They're not talking, but these three are all we found closest to the camp,” said the guard as he pushes the hunters to their knees. Até pauses in front of the hunter with the bullet wound, pursing her lips. I gravitate towards them, feeling my heart slow. Até steps aside letting me take over, knowing what I intend to do.

“How many more are there?” I grunt choosing the hunter who is unscathed. He’s smart enough not to get hurt. Selfish enough not to put himself in danger. He smirks, like he would never expect someone like me to do anything rash. He hasn’t seen me in a fight, he hasn’t seen what I do to people who talk bad about my gang, my family. “I’ll ask you one more time— How many are there?”

He shrugs, his ugly dull green eyes taunting me. I punch him hard in the stomach, making him gasp and keel over, low enough for me to kick up and connect with his face. He looks back up, shrugging. My knuckles connect with his eye. His jaw. His nose. I punch and punch until the hunter is on the ground groaning. I swing back my foot.

“Stop,” the hunter with the bullet wound yells. “It’s only us,” he sighs.

I turn to him raising my hand. No more tears, no more weakness. “How do I know you're not lying?”

He flinches, the bullet wound dripping blood down onto his pants. “I have a map in my breast pocket.”

“Steve,” another hunter tries to object but the man he called Steve glares back at him.

“It shows the position of every hunter, in the city and the towns,” Steve says his eyes focused on the ground now. Até reaches into the man's pocket, pulling out a small gold coin. She turns it over in her hand, no button to activate it. “It’s face activated,” Steve says, offering his face to her.

Até points it towards him and a hologenic map pops up, with green dots moving about the streets and in the buildings. Only three in no man's land. Até calls Asteroid, handing the gold coin off to him to copy or hack in to. She pulls her gun pointing it at Steve. The first badly beaten one starts to panic.

“We gave you the information you asked for. We aren’t loyal to the Big Three, Steve and I. They killed our families and made us become hunters because we had potential. If you let us live, we’ll work for you. We have trackers in the back of our necks. If you leave them here it would throw the Big Three off your trail for a bit.”

Até considers this. Steve showing no objection to what his friend said, the other hunter pushing himself up, looking more surprised than the guards. Até lowers her gun.

“Very well. You two,” she gestures to two of her guards. “Remove their tracker and then take them to Anna or any other healer to be treated.”

Steve and the other hunter look grateful as the guard drags them away, but the one still kneeling in front of me smiles. “You will not go unnoticed for long. They will find you and torture you, the same way they will torture Harley,” he purs, his words feeling like acid. “They will kill her and all of you for being traders,” he crouches, spitting blood at my feet.

I stare at him, not moving, watching his mouth twitch with hysteria. The fiery pit in my stomach flares up into my throat. Into my eyes. Até flips the gun, presenting the handle to me.

“Will you do the honours?” she asks so plainly. I expect her to smile but when I look at her, she appears distressed. His words hurt her like they hurt me.

I grip the gun pointing it to the hunters forehead. He squeezes his eyes shut bracing himself for the impact. My hands don't shake, my mind becoming blank, till I see the hunters that killed my parents. The hunters that jumped me for the first time. The hunters that took the only woman I have ever truly loved. I do not feel my humanity trying to sway me. I feel it cheering me on.

"Jimmy," Tequila gasps, emerging from the hut, holding her bag and my own, dropping them as she sees me. She moves slowly toward me while the rest of the gang emerges from the hunt. Some stare at me with empty expressions not knowing what to feel, some encouraging me. "She wouldn't want you to do this, not for her," she says softly.

She's right. Harley would not want me to do this. Kill for her, but this is not for her. I have been waiting for this moment since my parents were killed. To silence the voice and the nightmares. To stop my depression from holding me down, clamping onto my wrist with its fanged teeth. This person kneeling in front of me, has beaten thousands of people and killed hundreds. He is not human, he is a poppet, who doesn't think for himself.

"May your soul find the heavens and your body lay in peace within the earth," I whispered as I pulled the trigger.

# ***PHARMAKIS***

by

Zlata Steeves

We were being hunted. Again.

I could feel the eyes on us, watching, tracking, trailing but nothing seemed amiss. Kismet and Dawn led us into the residential street near downtown we were looking for, always on high alert. Only Aegle, who trailed close behind me, wasn't aware of the sudden countdown pushing our heartbeats faster.

Kismet approached the door of the third apartment to our right, and glancing around, proceeded to quickly pick the lock and beckoned us in. Her straight black hair hung behind her in a high ponytail as we walked up a dark stairway towards the second floor. We paused on the landing outside the door, and when she looked at Dawn, he spoke to us quietly. "Stay silent and keep close no matter what," he warned. "We need to get out of here as quickly as possible, so keep an eye on her alright?" He motioned to Aegle, who then stepped up and took my hand in her little seven-year-old grip. It was my job to keep her safe, and by the gods I would make sure that not one hair on her precious golden head was harmed. Total cliché, I know, but true.

We call ourselves pharmakis, or 'witch' in Ancient Greek, and as descendants of the *first* gods, the Titans (or second, after primordials like Gaia and Ouranos) that's the closest word to describe what we are, similar to Circe, Pasiphae, and the sorceresses of old, but basically watered-down versions of them. Together we form mu'uat, the foundation of our ancestors' thrones here on modern day Earth, except now descendants of the other gods were hunting us down, the so-called Kobold, horse-riders of the Olympians, dispensers of truth and justice (or so they say). As Theia Richards, I'm a 14 year old, and resident of Vancouver, Canada; but as Kóri tou Cronus, I am Daughter of Cronus, to be hunted down and scourged from the planet like some groundhog. So yeah, that's not happening, but back to the story at hand.

We had been looking for another pharmakis like us for weeks, but apart from one boy, who was safely stashed away, the others had vanished. This girl had better be who we thought she was. If yes, then we had to move fast too, since the Kobold wouldn't be far behind.

The apartment beyond sounded silent, and that didn't waver when Dawn raised a hand to knock steadily at the door. No way was that a good sign. It swung open after his air magic did the trick. A foreboding feeling smothered us the second I stepped in.

We were too late.

God knows I wasn't going to be a coward, so holding Aegle tight I observed the home where an innocent girl had lived, and been slaughtered. A pale yellow carpet covered the entrance hall, with a living room to the left where the cheap, cracked TV hung, and my eyes traveled to the right where a simple wooden table was just dented enough for the possibility of a body being smashed against it seemed likely. Yes, whoever had lived here was not coming back. The silence stretched.

Kismet headed towards the back where we assumed the bedrooms would be, but a split second before I realized what the look on her face meant, a faint whistling sound announced the dagger that sailed expertly towards her head.

The doors exploded behind us as she whirled and flung it right back into the face of one of the men who charged in after us, cracking it open like a watermelon.

"Balcony!" yelled Dawn, "Theia!"

He didn't need to ask. In the middle of Chaos (with a capital C) I stilled with my hands in front of me and inhaled, reaching out my unfurling senses, and *pulled*, curving my fingers into claws. Time slowed to a thin trickle, obeying my will alone, and e-very-thing switched to slow motion. My mind sighed, but common sense kicked in and I grabbed Aegle and ran to the balcony. Drat. No fire escape, and two stories was a hell of a way up when you needed to jump. What now?

Kismet slashed an attacker down and running past me grabbed my hand, never slowing.  
"Jump!"



Whoa, my brain complained, but sud-den-ly momentum propelled me after her and I sailed into thin air. I got a snapshot of Dawn hoisting Aegle into his strong arms, before a sheet of wind whooshed from those very same arms. I think I short-circuited because the next thing I knew I was lying on my back on the grassy lawn and I had to get up and *run* because no kidding, those were guns up there. Our feet flew.

Two blocks later we skidded round a corner where the motorcycles were. Kismet leaped on hers and revved the engine (God did she look cool while doing that), and scarcely had I awkwardly climbed on after her when we took off.

“What about Aegle?” I clutched her shoulders and yelled into the wind. I couldn’t see her or Dawn, but my panic was at least somewhat at bay because I knew he could take care of them.

“They’ll catch up.” She kept her eyes trained ahead, steady as her controlled voice. There was nothing we could do for now so we headed towards the ferry terminal. Hopefully we’d see them there because heading back to Vancouver without half our team was something no one wanted to contemplate. Not an option.

I shut the door behind Kismet and walked into the living room. Dawn was practically conked out on a couch; Aegle perched next to him, all of us resting from our daring escapade. I plunked down on the other couch and looked to our head-honcho.

Kismet was a member of the Order of Hekate, the HQ of which we were staying in now on Cardero Street. Though technically the offspring of Titans and a Titan herself, Hekate (or Hecate) had always been lumped in with the gods she had sided with during the war against Cronus and his supporters (the Titanomachy), and thus her followers were in no great danger from the Kobold. Even if they were, there wasn’t much they could do with the Order being so well sourced and organized as well as numerous. The Kobold conveniently thought like that. Part of the huge family that had originally started the Order, Kismet’s long dark hair and bronze skin were traits she shared with her kin. She was tall and slim, with eyes just a bit too narrow for her face, but yeah, not a bad looker in my book. At eighteen and the oldest of our group, (though I wasn’t sure if Dawn was seventeen or eighteen) she was our group’s de facto

leader, and her cool factor (according to yours truly) was pretty darn high. Basically a ninja with those knives of hers.

Dawn, who was currently distractedly sprawled on couch numero 1, was our very own resident pretty-boy. Scratch that, he was gorgeous, and I mean that as a non-obsessed fan-girl, though it's pretty darn hard not to be at least a little bit compulsive about his good looks. With blue-black waves of hair just ruffled enough to make him adorable and golden-hued peachy skin, he made the hearts of little girls and old ladies alike swoon (trust, it's worth paying for). Pretty handy if you thought of it, since people just about fell over themselves to help him. Apparently (and unfairly too) that's what ran in the family. Though not very powerful, with a mix of Eos (the dawn, who was also actually a Titan but like I said, when it was convenient...) and Aura (light breeze, early morning wind) in him, I wouldn't be surprised if he sometimes literally glowed. Okay, maybe I was a little infatuated, but sigh, those gorgeous blue-grey eyes...

Actually he was somewhat of a rarity, as one of the only Kobold who rejected their teachings and managed to escape their military style academy. He rarely talked about it though. Made sense, since part of his family could be hunting us even now, especially after he had then run off to help his sworn enemies. Aegle and I partially owed our lives to him for that. I sometimes think she was what convinced him that this was right, that he had not turned away from family for nothing, or a lost cause. Even now, I often see him just watching her, and his thoughts shine so clear through those eyes, thoughts and knowledge of what had been done to others like her, what *could* have been done *to* her, that his pain can be felt from meters away.

Aegle was our little golden bunny. Almost literally. We'd found her a few short weeks after the other two took me in, with a mother sadly all too willing to give her to us. I don't think it was a lack of love that did it, though certainly something had fallen short in that department, but the look of bewilderment and maybe even pain in her eyes as she watched her daughter convinced me that some switch must've flipped in her brain. Her daughters' abilities must have been too much.

Named after one of the original Heliades, Aegle was one too, the direct offspring of the sun Titan Helios. She was the most adorable of kids, a bit chubby, flaxen-haired and with the

golden gaze of a baby lion seizing up the dangerous world around and starting to reason with it. The only thing marring her was a sizeable round disc of a birthmark starting just past her ear and covering a large portion of her left cheek. She didn't know anything about it, just that it marked her as different from other children but was remarkably nonchalant about it. She still sniffled for her mom sometimes but otherwise was the brightest thing and probably more perceptive to our situation than we gave her credit for.

We currently did not encourage the use of her magic abilities yet, but what a powerhouse she would be in a few years. I don't think the Kobold even came close to understanding just how rare direct children of the Titans were, even less so than the gods, because if they did, they would know that they need not hunt us down, that we were no threat, that our lives were hard enough as it were. Most of us were a good bit off from our original godly (or Titanly?) ancestor, having only a lick of useful power and had been hunted and slaughtered with ease by our eradicators, sometimes without even knowing why.

But they hadn't caught on to me yet. Well trained they were, but for now, my identity was safe.

# ***KINGDOM OF LIES***

by

Lola Weinzettl

## **Prologue**

The room was on fire, literally, and it was all Sapphire's fault. She had just been trying to stop the bullies from sending mean notes to her, but she had no control over her power. She had set the entire room on fire just by flicking her fingers and wishing they would pay for all the mean notes sent to her. Students were running around screaming and it was chaos in the room. She wished she could turn back time and ignore those bullies.

"Students, remember fire drills please. Line up and go to the door." The loud speaker with the principal's voice could barely be heard over the screeching fire alarm and the crackling of the spreading fire. Sapphire could hardly see and choked trying not to inhale smoke. Someone grabbed her hand and pulled her up. She turned around and sighed with relief when she saw her best friend, Alice.

Alice pulled Sapphire out the classroom door and into the school hall where students were lining up. There was a siren and the fire department rushed in. Sapphire dropped to the ground, tears streaming down her face. This wasn't the first time her power had gotten out of control, and she was certain it wasn't going to be her last.

## **Chapter 1**

Sapphire plopped onto her bed with a sigh. She really hadn't meant to go to the principal's office and get in so much trouble. It just happened. Her magic was like that sometimes, and when it appeared, well, let's just say that meant bad news. It didn't help that magic was a rare thing to have nowadays. It used to be that everyone had magic, but now after all the wars, only two or three people had magic and all of them were adults. Except for her. She also happened to have two types of magic: fire and healing. Fire was worse and less easy to control. So she got in trouble a lot, but she lived a normal life, mostly.

So now she was home two hours early from school with a three day suspension. The principal said it was so she could think about what she had done. Sapphire heard the door open downstairs and sat up. That meant her mom was home which meant bad news. Her mom had tried to be patient with her magic, but she could get pretty mad. Sapphire was also fairly certain she wouldn't be too happy about the suspension.

“Honey! I'm home. We need to talk.”

Sapphire trudged downstairs knowing she was about to get a lecture on controlling her magic. Her mom was sitting at the kitchen table looking very upset.

“Mom, what's wrong?” Sapphire asked, even though she was pretty sure she knew what was coming. Her mom looked up at her and then started crying, burying her face in her hands. Sapphire looked at her mom in surprise. “Mom, look at me. I'm sorry I got a suspension, but Olivia and her friends were teasing me again and I couldn't help it.”

Her mom looked up at her and dried her tears with a tissue, “Oh no it's okay, I'm sorry I am such a wreck it's just...” Her mom stopped abruptly and sobbed loudly.

Sapphire walked over to her and rubbed her mom's shoulders.

Through heavy tears, her mom said, “It’s not your fault you inherited magic, but that’s not the problem. The thing is, I received a call from your principal today. She told me that your magic has become uncontrollable and that you need to leave home.”

Sapphire looked at her mom in horror. She did not want to leave. She had lived in this house ever since her dad had died when she was 2 years old and they had had to move.

“Mom no, I don’t want to leave. I’ll try harder not to get in trouble anymore. Please, just let me stay.” Sapphire looked at her mom imploringly.

Her mom shook her head, “Sweetie this is probably for the best. I mean, you’ve been having more problems with your magic lately. Also, I haven’t told you where you’re going. You’re being sent to the royal palace to serve the king and learn how to control your magic better. There are two people with magic there that can help you.”

Sapphire felt like there was a giant pit in her stomach. “What? But mom, I don’t want to go to the royal palace, I want to stay here.”

Sapphire’s mom looked at her with a weird expression on her face and said, “Honey aren’t you at least a little excited? You’re going to meet all the royalty of the castle and you’ll learn to better control your magic. This is a rare opportunity and I want you to take it.”

Sapphire looked at her mom confused “Mom, you were just sobbing about the fact that I am being forced to leave my home, and now you WANT me to leave? I don’t understand! Why?”

Her mom grabbed her hand and squeezed it. “Well, I’m going to miss you so much, but you’ll be happy there.”

Her mom didn't understand; she didn't want to leave. Now she was being forced to go to the castle. Also, she didn't have the slightest idea why she had to go to the castle. Why not some other place like a room full of bricks so that if her fire became wild then at least she couldn't set the bricks on fire.

Finally she gave up and asked, "When do I have to leave?"

Her mom looked at her with a face that Sapphire knew so well as: I know you will not like this but... "Well, the person on the phone said they are going to send a royal carriage for you tomorrow morning and..." Her mom winced as Sapphire froze and then blurted out, "It's not fair, you can't just send me away like this. I don't want to leave!" Then she ran to her room, sobbing. She slammed the door and threw herself onto her bed, tears running down her face. She put her face into the pillows on her bed and drifted off to sleep.

She woke up with dry tears staining her face. She glanced at her clock. It said 4pm. She must have fallen asleep for a couple of hours. She yawned and pulled herself off the bed. She glanced in the mirror. Her long blond hair was still in the high ponytail she had put it in for school that morning. Her pink t-shirt had lots of creases in it. She pulled open the door to her room and slowly made her way downstairs. Sapphire heard her mom talking and ducked into the corner by the first set of stairs so that her mom could not see her. Her mom was on the phone and was speaking in a soft voice.

"But May, she is so young, I can't just send her off all on her own. I feel so badly about this situation. When I told her, she ran off crying and hasn't left her room. No, I did not warn her about him and no, I am not going to tell her. She's my daughter and this is my decision. You cannot come over. No, I am hanging up, goodbye."

May was Sapphire's aunt and her mom appeared to be super angry after their conversation. Her mom sighed and put the phone down. She sat down at the table and put her head on her hands. Sapphire walked down the rest of the stairs and sat down next to her mom.



“Mom, I’m sorry I acted the way I did earlier, it’s just hard for me to understand why you are so willing to send me away on such short notice. I will go to the castle and learn to control my magic the best way I can.”

Her mom looked up at her sadly and said, “The truth is, the principal has been asking me to send you away to a different school for a while. She doesn't want magic students at her school. But that isn't the only reason you're leaving. The king needs your help. His son, Prince Aiden, is ill. He's dying and medicine is not helping. The king is hoping that you can heal his son. You're his only hope since you're the only one who has ever had healing magic. The prince is the king's only known heir and he is very worried about him. You are their only hope.”

Sapphire stared at her mom in shock and asked, “They want me to heal the prince?”

Her mom nodded and then sat up and said, “Since this is our last dinner together for awhile, I will make your favourite meal. You get packed up for tomorrow, after all, it's your big day.”

Her mom wiped a tear from her eye and then walked to the kitchen to start making a big meal. Sapphire took a moment to collect herself and then went upstairs to pack.

## **Chapter 2:**

Sapphire yawned, stretching luxuriously while pulling her covers off. Suddenly she remembered the day before and the nightmare she had just woken from. She dreamt that she had been attending a royal ball at the palace when all of a sudden everyone turned to stare at her. She looked down at herself and she was wearing rainbow pajamas. She looked back up and something in a big black cloak charged at her. She had run out onto the royal patio and over to the railing.

Then she realized she was trapped and the man in the cloak was coming closer and closer. She looked down and saw a huge drop. She knew that was her only chance so she got up on the railing and jumped, just as the entity in the cape threw a dagger at her. It hit her in the stomach as she plunged towards the ground. She woke up gasping and sweating.

Sapphire looked at her stomach, remembering the pain, but it was fine and the pain was gone. What did that mean? She thought about her nightmare as she pulled off her pajamas which, by the way, were green not rainbow. She finished dressing, grabbed her packed bags and dragged them down the stairs.

Her mom was finishing stacking pancakes on a plate when Sapphire sat at the table. Her mom placed the full plate in front of her. “Oh wait,” she said and ran up the stairs. She came back with a smile on her face. “Sapphire, I want you to have this.” She showed Sapphire a necklace, it was a blue heart with flower petals surrounding it.

“Oh mom, this is beautiful,” Sapphire said as her mom placed it around her neck.

“Your dad would have also wanted you to have this. It’s one of the two reasons you got your name. The first is from my love of sapphires. The second is your sapphire coloured eyes. If they had not been that colour, who knows what your name would be?”

Her mom finished clasping the necklace and backed away, “Oh you look lovely.” Sapphire smiled and then sat back down and dug into her pancakes. By the time she finished eating, she heard a commotion from outside. She cleaned her dishes and then walked to the window. Outside was a huge carriage with three guards standing next to it in the royal uniform. People outside were staring since it was parked outside their house. Her mom walked over to her and put a hand on her shoulder.

“Take a deep breath Sapphire. Everything will be okay and you’ll be fine.”

Sapphire nodded and then heard a knock on the door. Her mom glanced at her and then walked over and opened the door.

The guards smiled at her and said, “Good day Madame, we are here for your daughter.”

Her mom nodded, “She’s almost ready. Can you take the bags we packed for her?”

The guards came in and grabbed the bags. Her mom turned around and handed a bag to Sapphire, “Here, take this. It has letters for you to read once you get to the castle and some treats for the carriage ride.”

Sapphire smiled and then hot tears started to run down her face, “Aw mom, thank you.”

One of the guards walked back to the door and waved a motioning hand over at her. Sapphire hugged her mom tightly and then walked outside, took a deep breath and stepped into the carriage. The carriage was lined with velvet and it had jewel covered seats. She looked out the window just in time to see it move. Her mom receded farther and farther into the distance and Sapphire waved until she couldn’t see her anymore. Sapphire sighed and sat back in her seat. She was really nervous, she had never thought anything like this would happen. She slid the package her mom had handed her into her purse.

### **Chapter 3:**

The carriage ride was very long and she had eaten two of her mom's treats by the time they got to the castle: a decadent fudgy brownie and a slice of lemon meringue pie. Sapphire jumped out of the carriage, stretched her legs and then looked up and up and up. The castle was huge and beautiful!

She jumped as someone lay a hand on her shoulder. "Miss, we have someone here to escort you to your room, we will be taking your bags up."

Sapphire nodded and said, "Thank you for taking them. Is my escort arriving soon?" The guard pointed to a stairway leading out of the grand castle. Sapphire gasped. The girl was dressed in a long pink gown with a small golden tiara on her head.

"This is Princess Charlotte." The guard pointed at the princess and then bowed to her. Sapphire looked for a second and then bowed as well.

The princess smiled graciously, "You may call me Charlotte, no need for princess."

Sapphire gaped at her, then asked, "Not to be rude or anything, but doesn't the king only have one child?"

The princess laughed and said, "Yes, the king only has one heir and child. I am the prince's friend from the kingdom of Arnella."

Sapphire winced realizing she should be careful about what she said. "Sorry I didn't mean... I um, I'm new here and..."

The princess just shrugged, "It's fine, now let's get you to your room."

The princess led her through many hallways each more beautiful than the last. There were guards everywhere patrolling the hallways, giving orders, and training. It was incredible. They went through two more hallways and then stopped in front of a silver door. The princess opened it.

“Here is your room. There is a list on the desk of your schedule and lots of other information, including a map of this entire castle. A guard will arrive soon to escort you and show you the castle. I hope to see you around. Bye..”

With that, she closed the door.

Sapphire looked around the room; it was huge. There was a big bed with *lots* of pillows, a closet, trunk and desk, a big bookshelf and lots more. She noticed that the guards had brought her luggage and had left it in one of the corners of the room. She sat on the bed pulling out one of her mom’s letters.

*Dear my lovely daughter:*

*I wish you had not had to leave, but I just want you to know that I love you and you will do great things. I had no say in this decision even though you are my daughter. I also forgot to warn you that there is a prince at the castle who is visiting with his sister Princess Charlotte. You can befriend the princess but **STAY AWAY FROM THE PRINCE**. He means bad news. Stay safe and be good.*

*Come home soon, love mom* ❤️

She teared up a little but was confused about the prince part. Why was he bad news?

# ***THE EPIC OF LILY***



by  
Jakob Wiebe

## Prologue

“See those, Lily?”

“Yesp,” Lily spoke with a lisp.

“They’re called starflyers,” Jack explained, “Every hundred years a bunch of them pass the planet. It’s likely you won’t ever see them again.”

“Wow,” Lily replied, incredulous. In her eyes, her brother Jack was the smartest person in the world.

The two were lying down on the castle roof. Jack was ten, Lily was six. They’re the children of King Jeremy of Autilus. Autilus is the largest human country in the continent, with twenty cities. In second place came Cliffsdane, with seventeen, and then in dead last, Vakorie, with just seven.

But not just humans inhabited the continent. While they were certainly the most widespread of races, another highly intelligent species also lived here, in dewdrop forest. They were large and furry, almost like a cross between a monkey and a human. They did not wear clothes, simply because of the amount of fur on them. There had been many wars between humans and savages in the past, but a war hadn’t happened in over a century. There was still tension between the two races, but mostly, everyone got along great.

Practically everyone in the city was watching the starflyers. The only exceptions were the guards guarding the city, Tom and Nick, and even they looked every now and then. What were the chances of an attack happening the second they looked away?

“Thanksp, Jack,” Lily began, “For showing me the starflyers.”

“No problem,” Jack said.

Then, Jack heard a noise. It was a small noise, from far off, but it was enough to make him take his eyes off the starflyers and see something moving in the distance. It was so far away that he couldn't tell what it was. He squinted his eyes, thinking rapid thoughts about what it could be. The thing moved closer, becoming clearer and clearer. But Jack could still not make out what it was. His pulse quickened, nervous and excited at the same time. He could feel goosebumps tumbling down his spine as Lily looked to see what he was doing.

Jack still didn't know what the thing was, but the guard named Nick noticed. "It's the savages!" he exclaimed.

The city was confused, unsure of what to make of this. King Jeremy walked into the street below the castle. "I'll handle this," he said in a gruff and agitated manner. He got up onto the guard tower, and began shouting at the savages. "What is the meaning of this?" he shouted, "Why have you interrupted this once-in-a-lifetime moment?"

The king of the savages, King Cedar II, stepped forward and responded, also gruff. "We have had enough of your rule!" he shouted, "Let us bring down the humans of Autilus!"

King Jeremy was mad now. "You think you can waltz in here and declare war on us?" he asked, pugnacious. "I'm sorry, but that just isn't happening! We have Cliffsdane and Vakorie to help us! You have nothing!"

King Cedar just laughed. "You may have Vakorie," he shouted, "But Cliffsdane has aligned with us!"

The king of Cliffsdane and many soldiers then walked into view. "Hello, old friend," said King Ivan of Cliffsdane, smirking, "It's been a long time..."

"Traitor!" Jeremy shouted at the top of his lungs, "You betray your species, for what? For glory? For payment?"

"For justice," Ivan said.



“If you call this justice, you have a strange mind, my friend,” Jeremy spat out.

“I see,” Ivan said, turning to Cedar. “Let us begin the siege now, Cedar.”

“Agreed,” Cedar said, smirking slightly.

“Charge!” shouted Captain Flytrap of the savages, and Corporal Dan of the Cliffsdaneians repeated it out to the Cliffsdaneian army.

And so, the two armies charged at Autilus’ capital city, Varklon. The soldiers of Varklon, unprepared for an assault, quickly got into battle position as many citizens, shrieking, ran inside.

Jack and Lily were watching the whole thing intently. Jack suddenly felt a pang of worry for his friends. He turned to Lily. “Lily,” he whispered, “I’m going to see if my friends’ families are okay. I’m going to need you to head inside the castle, lock all the doors and windows, and hide, okay?”

“Buh-buh...” Lily started.

“Please, Lily.”

“Buh- Jack, don’t go... I don’t wanna lose you.” Lily started crying, and her tears reflected the pure sadness and worry and fright inside her. Jack hugged her, then, with his hands on her shoulders, he explained to Lily that he needed to go.

“I’ll be fine, I promise,” he said, smiling. “I’ll be coming back, and I’ll be alive. No force on the planet can keep me from you. But I can’t go if you don’t go inside. My friends might die if I stay with you, protecting you. But I’ll be back as quick as a bunny, and twice as funny.”

Lily nodded, her tears stopping. She went inside using a window, scared and sad, but understood that Jack needed her to do this. She locked all the doors and all the windows, and hid in the most remote area of the castle, the attic. She fell asleep listening to the horrific noises outside. She had terrible nightmares.

In the morning, Lily expected to wake up and find that it was all a dream. No such luck. She woke up and looked out the window, seeing a blood-stained battlefield that no 6-year old child, heck, nobody, should ever have to see.

She went down the stairs to the castle kitchen and found King Jeremy sitting alone, glaring. “Dada?” Lily asked, confused, “Where’s Jack?”

Jeremy turned and picked up Lily, and without changing his expression at all, he told his daughter, with utmost certainty, “He’s missing, child. Presumed dead. Now leave me be, you little brat. I have important things to do.”

And in that moment, Lily didn’t cry. She was numb. She just stood, and starred, too sad for words. Too sad to even think. The most important person in her life, as her father was distant, and her mother had died long ago, was dead. And in that moment, she became less happy. Less carefree. She was still happy and carefree sometimes, sure, but this, this moment, had changed her. Forever.

## Part One: The Journey

### Chapter One: Lily

Six years. Six years was such a long time, but such a short time in the grand scheme of things. Does the universe care if you age during that time? If you grow during that time? If you become more mature? No, no, of course not. But do you care? Do the people around you care? Yes, yes, of course they do.

Meet Lily. She's 12, has blonde hair, blue eyes, and almost always had a serious look on her face. Her personality was serious too. She'd changed in those 6 years since her brother died.

And what of the war between the savages and Cliffsdane, vs. Autilus and Vakorie? Well, that had continued all this time with no hint of stopping. There had been attacks on Cliffsdane, Autilus, Dewdrop Forest, Vakorie, everywhere! King Jeremy was still very focused on the military effort and the economy of Autilus struggles because of it.

Lily woke up, stepped through her room, changed out of her pyjamas and into some clothes. She walked downstairs, and saw the head servant, Jerry, preparing breakfast. "Oh," Lily said begrudgingly.

"Mornin' miss," Jerry said. "The king's busy planning an attack on Dewdrop forest, so 'e sent me to prepare your breakfast."

"No, thank you, Jerry. It's... It's just been a while."

"Natch, miss. Me father was like this too, ya should know. E'd be busy for days, and when e stopped bein' busy, e'd be distant."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Lily responded hungrily.

"Oi, miss!" Jerry replied, energetic, "So sorry ta keep ya hungry while we was talking, the hashbrowns are jus' about finished."

“Thank you, Jerry...”

Lily sat down. She acts serious around servants and citizens, because the future heir to the throne has a responsibility to uphold. Around her best friend A.J, she’s totally different.

Lily ate her hashbrowns, excused herself, and went outside to take a walk. She did this every morning, and Jerry was accustomed to it. The king was too busy to notice if Lily left the castle a bit every day. King Jeremy did worry that she would be attacked by spies, or at least he looked like he did, but Varklon was such a heavily guarded city that there were practically no spies. And besides, Lily didn’t go far, only to a little forest and creek area in a little park. Every morning she met up with her best friend A.J and the two would share jokes, talk about what’s happening in the war, and anything else they decided to do.

A.J was also twelve years old, male, had red hair and freckles, and was always wearing pilots gear. In pilot class, he passed with flying colours! However, his age prevented him from joining the air military, which was what he wanted to do. As he stepped into the clearing, a comedic look that displayed his personality exuberantly, was on his face. “Sup, Lil?”

“Aardvark Joker!” Lily exclaimed, as the two had little nicknames for each other, “So good to see you!”

“So,” A.J began, “How’ve things been going?”

“Okay,” Lily replied, “I haven’t seen dad for days.”

“Ugh,” A.J said, “Hate when that happens. Hey, do ya wanna hear a joke?”

“Sure,” Lily responded, smirking, “It’ll probably be total trash, though, since you’re telling it.”

“Har har har!” A.J laughed, “You’re a riot. Anyway, knock knock.”

“Who’s there?” Lily asked.

“Knock knock.”

“Who’s there?”

“Knock knock.”

“WHO’S THERE?”

“KNOCK KNOCK!”

“Oh...” Lily responded, suddenly realizing what A.J was getting at. “Knock knock who?” she said.

“Knock knock jokes are lame,” A.J replied, grinning.

“Okay, that WAS trash,” Lily said, smirking.

“Whatever, Lil. I’ve just been busy lately.”

“About your plan?”

“Y-yeah, about my plan.”

“Still going through with it?”

“Course.”

“Good.”

The two of them walked and talked like that for a while. A.J’s greatest dream was to become the youngest pilot to fly in the war effort against the savages and Cliffsdane. If A.J could make it to the Autilus airship base, it would be too deep into the battlegrounds to send him back to

the city. And since there wasn't a lot of room for extra visitors, they'd basically be forced to let him fly in the air military.

A.J had been working on the plan for quite a while. He'd planned the safest route with a lot of fruit plants and streams, that wasn't too far into enemy territory, wasn't in too dangerous territory, and had to scrap it. The route he'd planned would take so long, and would require constant turning and just too much time to reasonably expect him to make it there in one piece, even in safe territory. So, he started over, and prioritized. Water, definitely. Food, he could always bring a lot of rations. Fast route, a must. And so, he made a dangerous but fast route. It went into crystal wolf pack territory, but only on the outskirts and only for a short time. Still... it would be dangerous. And it would require a lot of running, jumping, climbing, and maybe fighting. Which is why A.J spent the past few months training. Lily, of course, knew of this plan from the start, and she knew there was no stopping him. Anyway, she wanted him to go pursue his dream. A.J had asked if she wanted to come along, but she said that Autilus' forces would just catch them if she went along, because she, of course, was the lone heir to the throne.

And so, A.J was planning to leave the following day. He would miss Lily, and she, in turn, him. But the two both knew it was for the best. A.J needed to pursue his dreams, and Lily, as much as she wanted to help, would get in the way, as she would be pursued by the soldiers of Autilus.

A.J would be leaving first thing tomorrow. And Lily needed to get back to the castle before her father found out she was missing. So the two said goodbye. It was not a long goodbye, but long enough to be a heartfelt one. They wished the other well and Lily headed back to the castle .

Lily took her time, as she wanted to stop and smell the roses. She wasn't actually, but she felt drawn to a small meadow. A little field. In fact, she found she could not stop herself from walking towards it. She could almost hear a voice calling to her. She wasn't sure which voice, however. It was eerie, and as she stepped through the rough, coarse wheat, she could hear a blackened crow caw-ing something that sounded like sorrow.

“Lily.”

The voice caught her by surprise, and it seemed eerily familiar. “Who-who’s there?” Lily called out.

“I’m going to see if my friends’ families are okay.”

“J-” Lily whispered in a saddened tone.

“I’m going to need you to head inside the castle, lock all the doors and windows, and hide, okay?”

“Jack, don’t go...” Lily spat out, falling over and crying.

The voice seemed to be coming from the middle of the field. Lily pulled herself up and walked towards it.

“Please, Lily.”

Lily’s tears slowed her down, but she still moved through the wheat. It stung, just as she could hear the crow cry again. “I’ll be fine, I promise.”

“No you won’t!” Lily shouted, falling down and burying her head in her hands. “You’ll die!”

“I’ll be coming back, and I’ll be alive. No force on the planet can keep me from you. But I can’t go if you don’t go inside. My friends might die if I stay with you, protecting you. But I’ll be back as quick as a bunny, and twice as funny.”

“Liar!” Lily shouted, “Big, fat, stinking liar!”

“Lily...”

Lily started. This was past the last words Jack had said to her. “...find the relic. It is the key to everything. Use the power it gives you... to destroy the savages. Forever. Avenge me, Lily.”

It was Jack’s voice, but it didn’t feel like Jack was the one speaking. Lily was too sad to notice, however, and crawled into the middle of the field, and saw a shining, small, circular relic. It had a lightning bolt, and two black claws with red fingernails gripping it. She picked it up.

“That’s my sister. Took you long enough, baby sis.”

It still didn’t sound quite right. But yet again, Lily was too sad to notice. A pity. She was focused on the relic. Ah, the relic. An interesting relic, at that. It had a symbol. She wasn’t quite sure what it meant, but it certainly meant something important.

The thing that took Lily out of her trance was realizing that her father would notice she had left the castle soon. So she grabbed the relic and headed home, just hearing Jack saying: “Good... good...”

She reached the castle, where Jerry was waiting for her. “Ello, miss!” Jerry said enthusiastically, “Yer jus’ in time!”

“Good,” Lily replied. She really didn’t want her father to know she’d been gone.

“Is majesty the king is in the ‘itchen,” Jerry responded.

Lily walked to the kitchen, holding the relic in her shirt pocket. Her father was talking to general Arun from the city of Ordavos.

“I just don’t see how this plan of yours is supposed to work, your majesty,” Arun stated. “The poison ninja shall surely attack the caravan, as he attacks all forces moving that way.”

“It is guarded well enough,” King Jeremy said, distantly. “It will be fine.”



“No, it won’t!” Arun shouted suddenly. Lily edged back at the sudden shout.

“IT WILL NOT WORK!” he continued, “IN NO UNIVERSE WOULD A SUCH POORLY DESIGNED PLAN WORK!”

Jeremy glared. “How else are we supposed to get the generals to Daughtberg?”

“And that’s another thing!” Arun continued. “If we want to deploy forces at Vakorie, which we most certainly do, why Daughtberg?”

“Because I say so!” the king exploded ragefully. “Varsmath or Kanberg would be too obvious! Get out of my sight!”

General Arun, grumbling, walked out of the room. King Jeremy sat down with a frustrated look on his face. He didn’t seem to notice Lily, at least not for a minute or so. Then, he casually glanced in Lily’s general direction. “So, have you come to argue with me too, child?” he asked.

“No, I-” Lily began.

“Don’t lie to me, you little brat,” the king remarked. “I never taught you how to lie, and I don’t like you doing things THAT I DIDN’T TEACH YOU!”

Lily didn’t say a word. She just walked upstairs to her room, sat on her massive and cushiony bed, and took the relic out of her pocket.

Lily knew it didn’t make sense, but the relic felt to her like what a magic 8 ball is for a superstitious person. She felt like she could ask it anything, and it would give her the right answer. “What should I do now, Jack?” she asked.

“Go with A.J, sis,” the Jack-voice responded. “To discover your magical power. I mean come on, sis. Is it really that hard?”

Lily started. This didn't feel right. "But-" she began, but was cut off.

"You can do magic. Destroy the savages. You need to discover it on this journey." the Jack-voice interrupted.

"Magic? Me?" Lily responded, shocked.

"Course, sis. Now go out there tomorrow and begin your crusade against the savages!"

"But-" Lily began, then realized that the Jack-voice was gone. Lily wasn't sure what to do now. Should she go with A.J on a whim to discover her "magical powers"? Or should she stay here, sneaking out occasionally to walk around?

Once she really thought about it, however, the answer became more and more clear to her. In fact, she really didn't know why it was so hard for her to decide. She felt trapped in the castle. She needed to go. To be free. And maybe even avenge her brother and discover this "magical power" of hers along the way.

And so Lily made a plan. She would join A.J tomorrow.

# ***BARRIWALLOW'S REVENGE***

by

Nikolai Zarrikoff



### **Part One: The goblin thief**

It was early that morning when Cadmus Vaevictusear finally decided to roll out of bed. After about half an hour of laying there thinking about the day ahead of him, he hobbled down the flimsy stairs, strapped his pack to his side, and was ready to go out searching for his father. Cadmus had short brown hair and long legs to go with a lean body that was very skinny. He was pretty much generic for Berriwallow and loved colourful clothing.

Every morning, Cadmus's dad went out hunting early with his hand crossbow, (a relic from Cadmus's basilisk-slaying grandmother), both for food, and to sell the meat. It had been the Faenodel/Vaevictusear family's job in the village of Bromtops to scavenge through the wood in search of nutrition.

It wasn't as though the king hadn't been letting the Bromtops have their share of food. No, the king was fine, if you ignored that he used to be an assassin who let no-one out maneuver his eldritch ways. The problem was no one did.

His targets had always been found paralyzed in such a way as to never be revitalized, save for a most extravagantly pricey potion. The thing most people didn't realize is that the king or queen was just a figurehead. It didn't matter who the figurehead was as long as they looked good and at least pretended to be smart while their advisors did the real work. If you wanted to have power, be an advisor or chief cook: they are more important than anybody else. That was Cadmus' father's insight.

Cadmus now stood in the back doorway of the cottage that led into the woods, breathing hard as he started to sprint into the dark bushy tangles of the wood. The kingdom of Berriwallow prided itself on its vast fields and incomparable farms, but the wood made up most of its landmass.

The thirteen-year-old boy was now dashing through the woods towards his family's old glade in the north. Cadmus had made this route so many times, he didn't even hesitate to avoid the burglars' guild hut, even though he saw a cloaked black figure rushing towards the town. That was not unusual for this area of the woods.

If the king had a fault, it was in letting the wrong sort of guilds be formed. It had started with the criminal guild, which was presumably where reformed criminals who wanted to be a help for society went for refuge, but then escalated out of control. Authorized thug and bandit hideouts were springing up all over the country, and not many respected the rules Lord Crowley-Aewel had set up for them. However, those he simply judged like any other criminal. Some good guilds were formed as well, like his mother's retired adventurer's guild, where old adventurers sought the thrill of adventure, without the danger.

Cadmus slowed his long-endured sprint. Almost at his father's meet up point, he glanced around an oblong boulder and shouted out the words, "I'm here, dad!" His shouts met silence as Cadmus rounded a corner to the clearing.

“Dad?” said Cadmus slowly. His father had never failed to respond to his calls before. In fact, Draco was a very reliable, organized person, except when hunting where it was all the instinct of his monster-slaying relatives.

“Dad!” cried Cadmus, a horrific sight had caught his eyes: his father lay on the ground. His clothes and bags were pillaged and rifled through. Cadmus darted forward and shook his father violently. Nothing.

“Dad!”

No response.

The world went upside down as Cadmus flew into a panic. Not being nearly careful enough, Cadmus laid his head against his father's chest. It heaved soundlessly up and down. “*Alive*”, thought Cadmus, suddenly exasperated, but not as much as scared, and too deep in other emotions for an explanation.

What to do now? Cadmus’s mother was on business in Cumberlee working at the retired adventurer’s guild. (Guilds were good for employment at least. Cadmus’s mother was scheduled to return to Bromtops in one week’s time. Cadmus thought he might just have to survive for that long.)

Gathering his father’s bags, he searched them to find all sorts of the usual prey, bows, and arrows. Nothing was missing.

Lastly, he searched his father’s body for any point of contact with any weapon. Nothing on the legs, nor over the chest or back. What was that near the head? Cadmus went in for a closer look. There was a small dart coated in some blackish-blue liquid.

Slowly, Cadmus pulled the sharp-ended metal out with a cloth so as not to touch the abhorrent substance. He placed the dart carefully in his father’s quiver and began to gather all

the hunting supplies so he could begin the long trek back to the village with his father's body in tow, unsure what else to do.

The village of the Bromtops had the best markets in all Berriwallow. Shipments of produce and metalcraft came into the port daily. It was Melf's job to see these shipments from the dockyard down the short road to Bromtops.

Melf was a thoroughly dishonest goblin. He would steal just about anything that could fit in his haversack or cart. Melf didn't care about revolutions: he didn't gain or lose anything under the regime of the current king. So it was just his luck when a small boy stumbled out of the woods lugging a body behind him.

"What ye got there?" asked Melf curiously. He thought he remembered the body from Bromtops.

"My father." said the boy acidly. *'Ah, that's who the body is'*, thought Melf, *'Draco the hunter.'*

"I bought his meat sometimes," he said, thinking *'before the shipments started to bring in beef and I could knick some while carting it.'*

"That means that ye are Cadmus. Why's 'e like tha'?" asked Melf curiously. He didn't know what was good for him at all.

Cadmus didn't know what to say, so he decided on the truth, and put on the angriest tone he could muster, trying to cover up how scared he was.

"I found him at the usual clearing in this state with this dart in him. His stuff had been searched. Not that I want you getting involved, I've heard stories about you, you know."

Cadmus showed Melf the dart with just as much anger, now directed at Melf, as well as

whoever had poisoned his dad, and said, "I'm taking it to Heimera the alchemist to see if she knows what it is that's on the dart."

"Weil, it so happens tha' I'm travelling towards the Bromtops as weil," said Melf "let's make ourselves into a little caravan, eh?" Cadmus tried to refrain from agreeing, but Melf was tricky and charismatic. Soon they were on their way. Soon they had made their way down the well-trodden path that was the main road joining Bromtops and the port side of the forest. They had put Cadmus's father in Melf's cart, and were walking slowly, Melf's mule in the lead. Melf cowered: the forest was dangerous for anyone who didn't know it well enough, even on a sunny day like this.

Melf stumbled along on his short legs, too proud to ask for Cadmus to slow down, too scared of Cadmus's anger because of his father's unconsciousness. Instead, he tried to slow Cadmus down by putting his mind on something else.

"So are all yer family named after dragons 'cause ye used to slay 'em as a profession?" he inquired.

"I don't think so. My grandmother did slay a basilisk though, hang on, I've got the necklace as souvenir."

Melf gulped and exclaimed, "Nae need to do tha', I believe ye, me brother is a bit weird an' takes trophies back from all the campaigns he goes on, in Adelsia."

"Nonsense, I've got it here somewhere." Cadmus was too busy to realize that Adelsia is a peaceful country. Melf swallowed and silently pulled out the necklace he'd nicked earlier to pretend that he'd found it on the ground.

"Here tis, I think it must 'ave fell out o' yer pocket."

"I didn't keep it in my pocket."



“Ach, weil, it mae ‘ave fell into yer pocket out o’ yer hunting bag as well den...”

Cadmus’s eyes narrowed. “You stole it off me, didn’t you? How else could you know it came from my hunting bag? Of all companions, why should it be you, to travel with me? I should leave you right now!”

“Please, mister, I am now obliged tae serve ye one faver now, see? Ye have found tha’ secrete o’ me trade, it is goblin law that I ‘ither serve ye a faver, or else loot an’ pillage ye an’ tha’ place ye live tae. An’ it just ‘happens tha’ I live in Bromtops too so please don’t refuse. It would be ‘ard tae blow up yer house widout blowin’ up me house tae.” Melf stopped here because he was both out of breath and trying to catch up to Cadmus, with many failed attempts. Cadmus froze in his tracks, which made it a little bit easier for Melf to catch up.

“Alright, I take pity on you, but first, what exactly does ‘faver’ mean?”

Melf looked shocked, “Ye know, favers are tha’ things tha’ ye get if ye be nice tae someone.”

Melf’s face contorted into a shape that might appear on an extremely small mouse trying desperately not to be mauled by the large were-wolf suddenly in its way, all the time trying to figure out what two and two make together.

“Ye know, favers are tha’ things tha’ are like a kind act towards someone.”

“Oh, you mean favours, yeah, okay, you have a deal.”

“Shake hands tae make it official?”

Cadmus held out his gloved hand, and Melf held out his spindly ring-covered one. Together they shook.

“Hey! Were those two crowns disappearing up your sleeve?” yelled Cadmus, irritably. “I suppose I get another favour for that?”

Melf handed Cadmus back the coins and muttered something that sounded suspiciously like *I'll get 'im one day!* before saying aloud, "Sorry, sir, just checking to see if your defences were up. Yes, you get another favour."

"You weren't going to take advantage of it if my defences were lowered, I hope?"

"No sir!"

"Good. Have you ever considered a career as a thief?"

"No sir"

"Don't start, and the world will be a better place!"

"Yessir."

They walked the rest of the short walk to the village in utter silence, with Cadmus occasionally grilling Melf about whether or not he had stolen from anyone else. It was almost night time when they got back to Bromtops. They both decided they simply could not continue travelling to Cadmus and Draco's hut in the country outside of Bromtops, but should instead take a night in the local tavern.

The village of Bromtops consisted of one street and the main square. The tavern's name was the Jovial Jester, and it resided on this street. It had no reputation at all since no one bothered to go to Bromtops.

Melf paid for a small room with a window that looked out at the wood. The wood gave Cadmus pleasant dreams and Melf unrelenting nightmares. No one knew why, but the wood gave a strange feeling to some individuals. Melf looked out the window and shuddered at the sight of tall pines bending in the soundless wind. It was uncanny.

A dwarvish figure cloaked in dark clothes ran across Melf's line of sight, towards the tavern entrance.

Cadmus had nightmares after dark though, about his dad being attacked by ogres, which are a group of people dumb enough to follow commands from Lord Vaeytion of Grand Ovalin. The Island of Ire, the City of Evil, and the Ugly Dot were only a few of the place's most pleasing titles. Out of all ogres, Vaeytion's evil and enchanted minions were the worst, but thoroughly void of the ability to think, few had escaped. Extremely few came into his service willingly, and those for a vast sum; these were usually commanders.

When they finally awoke, Melf and Cadmus left Draco in the inn room, while they went down for a breakfast which consisted of dry porridge and toast. The cloaked figure was in the Jovial Jester bar room too.

Melf and Cadmus then took Draco down to the alchemist's shop. The shop was eldritch: enchanting, and oddly familiar to both Melf and Cadmus, neither of whom had ever been in such a place. The shop's name was Heimera's herbs, potions, and oddments. Heimera was long-legged and tall, the usual build for someone from this corner of Berriwallow. As the elders of Bromtops knew, she used to work as a healer and a travelling herb dealer in Gehenon, until she moved to Berriwallow for more peaceful society. Apparently Gehenon wasn't all that nice. The shop was inside the old thatch watchtower. When Heimera moved in, she lined the walls with bookshelves so that it looked like the inside of a leather-bound kaleidoscope.

When Cadmus and Melf entered her workshop, there was already another goblin inside. The goblin resided on a long ladder that led up to a section of books labelled 'Necromanteion Guides and Guilds'. He was arguing with Heimera, who was sitting behind a desk and searching through vials and bottles of all types.

"Hello to you, dragon's son," said Heimera when Cadmus and Melf entered, "and hello trader. How may we help you?"

“We’d like ‘elping with this man,” said Melf, showing the alchemist Draco.

“Yes, alright, bring him up to my desk.” Heimera was always like this; very straightforward.

Cadmus gently put his dad down on a wooden table at the side of Heimera’s desk. His necklace showed in the hunting bag; its black-red centre stone, covered in moss, shone as black as ever. “I just found him like this in the forest, his bags were searched, and I found this dart on him,” said Cadmus as he brought out the quiver that the dart was kept in.

“Meep, come here and examine this arrow, will you? Good boy.” Heimera’s eyes gleamed at the sight of the stone.

Cadmus got the distinct impression that Meep was Heimera’s apprentice, and that Meep wasn’t the one to make his bizarre name.

Meep climbed grudgingly down the ladder to collect the dart and he took it slowly off through a door to another room.

Heimera turned back to the body and said, “The only time I’ve ever seen this condition is when Lord Crowley-Acwel was still active as an assassin.”

“But that’s impossible, Lord Crowley-Acwel would never do that unless he didn’t care if a revolution came or not!” exclaimed Cadmus.

“Believe it or not, that’s what I think.”

Just then Meep came back into the tower room holding a sheet of parchment and muttering under his breath. “Master, I just did a quick examination and I believe the poison to be a potion of reversing paralysis. More commonly known as the only cure to this slight and magical immovability, except he reversed it so it gives that condition.”

Noting the blank look on Melf's face, he added, "Oh, I mean that he is paralyzed. You're lucky that I and Heimera happen to have some of that potion. We can cure your dad. Given enough time and money. You should know about it; all your family make it for a living."

Cadmus looked at Melf weirdly. Melf ducked his head in resignation.

Cadmus sighed, he didn't like things to be complicated, but he'd do anything to get his father back in working order.

"How much money?"

"Oh, give or take a hundred crowns and about a quarter fortnight to administer it."

"Oh."

"Yeah, that stuff is expensive."

"Can you keep him alive for a few days so we can rustle up enough money?"

"Sure, you have a week, and no more. And I understand Lord Crowley-Acwel is the suspect. I'd be happy to help you prove that, as I've got a quarrel with him myself." Melf sighed, he didn't want to be associated with those over-grown toad revolutionaries. He was obliged by goblin law to stay with his master until both favours have been dealt. He wondered whether Meep was working with Heimera for the same reason he was working for Cadmus. Probably not, Meep didn't look the type. Melf let out another sigh and turned to walk out the door after Cadmus.

"Alright, here's what I think," whispered Cadmus excitedly. "You pick-pocket people—only the richest, so it's justified—and I'll try and earn a bunch by hunting all day—"

"Now wait a moment, yer not going tae get interested inna revolution like Meep suggested are ye?" Melf knew immediately that he'd said the wrong thing.

Cadmus's eyes lit up and he exclaimed, "Right, to catch the rogue assassin would be perfect!"

Melf groaned, he knew, even with his minimal time with Cadmus, that Cadmus would say that. "Well, I'm not interested in helpin' ye, and especially not do anything tha' is against tha' law, tha's what you caught me doing, and why I'm doing favers."

"Agreed, now we still have some time left before night. Let's finish the journey to my cabin. And what did the goblin mean? I thought only ogres could make that medicine"

"It's nothing, just another secret that my family stole."

# ***REVENGE OF THE IFRES***

by

Mia Zolbrod

## **Prologue (one year ago)**

Waking up, I gasp in panic and wipe sweat from my clammy forehead. I walk into the dingy bathroom, barely recognizing the dishevelled figure in the mirror in front of me. I grip the light blue porcelain sink and look at the mirror again.

Slick sweat glistens on my nose, coating my upper face in a thick sheen. The droplets of perspiration fall gently off my eyelashes onto my tear-stained face, dripping onto the drab grey tiled floor. I breathe in sharply and exhale, repeating the process to calm myself.

It was only a dream, I think, trying to convince myself that he didn't wreck my life. It was his fault my oh-so-perfectly created life - a web of intricate information - had broken. But what do spiders do when their webs break? They build them back, eating the silk and reproducing their work, hopefully stronger than before.

I was almost settled into my new life, but of course he had to come and wreck everything. After all, it was fate.

He shouldn't have told the world my secrets, but I also shouldn't have built a relationship with him. After all, that was the first and most important rule for my kind, and of course I had broken it.

Here's the thing: it's all my fault. I shouldn't have told him anything. He's notorious for not only being a heartbreaking player but also for figuring out people's deepest darkest secrets.

I should have known that he would spill my secrets. After all, it isn't every day that the world discovers that supernatural powers exist, in fact not only do they exist, they're thriving. At least until now...



## **The Mistake (Celeste)**

I silently sling my worn bag over my left shoulder, slipping my feet into my running shoes. I grab a granola bar from the cabinet and sneak out the back door. I close it stealthily behind me, a small gust of wind emitting from the air-tight house.

The sweltering sun beats down on my bare skin, roasting me to the bone. I look around quickly, making sure no one else is nearby. Then I skilfully flick my wrist and a small sphere of icy blue hail erupts on the palm of my hand.

This skill is just one of many I've attained in the past years. I'm what the others call an Ifres. Capable of controlling earth, water, air, fire, and aether. But my powers stretch beyond those capabilities. Some of the other Ifres, myself included, can control minds, body, speed, emotions, temperature, and vision.

These powers come in handy. They allow us to have conversations within our minds, levitate, become invisible, teleport, regulate temperature to keep us warm in the coldest regions, or vice versa. Of course, there are also the smaller little things, like fast healing, stamina beyond compare, incredible sense of balance, amazing hearing and vision, and more.

Even though I'm young, I'm in charge of finding and recruiting the new twelve year olds who have just manifested their powers. The abilities take years to master, starting when you're twelve and continuing for the rest of your life. Of course, I'm supposed to bring them back to the Ifres headquarters, but I have plans for the new ones.

Another thing about Ifres is that about half of them have one power that will outshine all others. My kind calls them Veysifs.

All of these powers are very helpful, of course. But for a sixteen-year old girl, just trying to get through high school, they wreck everything. I shouldn't have relationships with any non-Ifres because of the risk of being revealed. I've always been a rule breaker...

I stretch my arms and sprint full speed ahead of me, which is extremely fast. I stretch my mind beyond the humid air and delicate flowers, focusing on where I want to be: my best friend and past boyfriend Luke's house. He lives in Australia, practically halfway across the world from my home in Mayville, a small town in North Dakota.

I enter the void, a blinding path of light, shimmering with all the colors of the rainbow. I concentrate, but find myself dropping onto Luke's porch, falling right through the wood boards onto the scratchy grass.

"You really have to work on those landings, Cee," Luke laughs. His trademark smile melts my heart instantly. He's the only one who can shorten my name from Celeste to Cee without getting punched.

Luke and I have been friends for as long as I can remember. Our parents were best friends and now we are too. We tried being boyfriend and girlfriend a couple years ago, since distance doesn't matter to us. But, after a few months we realized that things just got awkward between us.

That doesn't mean that I still don't have feelings for him, feelings stronger than a normal friendship. I try to shake them, convincing myself that it's pointless, that he doesn't like me, but a little part of me is convinced that he does. Convinced that we're destined to be more than friends.

My parents died when I was just twelve years old. I had manifested my powers the night before and woke up in a bed of flames, glowing red hot in the night.

The rest of the house had already erupted in an explosion, yet I was left unscathed. I was put into foster care, bumped from couple to couple, all looking for the perfect child, who wasn't me.

Luke is my partner in crime, he's even more powerful than me, his main power was harnessing lightning and thunder, controlling the storms and weather. I would teleport us to

huge fields with gentle swaying grass, where we would learn to control our powers, but this all ended when Luke and his family moved to Australia...

“Earth to Cee!” Luke yells, bringing me back to reality. I look up and blink rapidly, trying to focus on now, and not the past. After all the past was at one point the future, wasn’t that how the world worked? The future turned into the present, then diminishing into the past. Nothing lasts forever, forever can’t be measured in time because no one lasts forever. But I had made a pact with Luke that we would be best friends forever.

“Sorry Lukey, just thinking,” I replied quietly, dropping my eyes. For some reason the idea of forever made me sad. Everyone makes a promise about forever, but it never lasts.

“So, Cee, why did you make the oh-so-long journey over here?” Luke teases, what I like to think of as a flirtatious smile not quite reaching his eyes. He knows that something’s up, he always knows.

“I got a new Ifres alert, a thirteen-year-old girl this time. She’s extremely powerful,” I say somberly. The powerful ones are always in more trouble. If they don’t contain their powers, the government will find them and kill them, courtesy of the first and last human being I ever trusted.

Hunter was my first friend at Pine Ridge High School, which surprised everyone- he was the football team captain, a player, and a heartbreaker.

When he asked me out a few months later, I accepted. After all, why wouldn't I? Oh right, because an Ifres can’t be friends with a human. Dating relationships are completely out of question.

Our relationship quickly escalated, and soon I told him my secret - that I was an Ifres. I told him all about how I was in charge of tracking down new Ifres, and that his brother was one of our newest members.

Hunter broke up with me and sent in a tip to the government that his brother and I were different. Eli, Hunter's twelve-year-old brother, got tortured until he finally revealed his powers, only to get killed.

Suddenly, I had a death warrant, and Hunter told the whole world through the news that superheroes existed. Except they weren't heroes - they were villains.

Hunter revealed all of my secrets, and now I will stop at nothing to get revenge on the world, even the Ifres organization.

"Oh no, Cee, has she done anything bad to anyone yet?" Luke asks, snapping me back to now. I nod at Luke. After all, the new girl had killed another kid using density manipulation.

"We need to go find her before she does anything worse," I say with grim determination, grabbing Luke's hand, and entering the void.

Next stop, Hartley, Delaware, population: 74 people. Oh, joy...

# ***ABOUT THE AUTHORS***

## **Kahlan Arnold ~ *Excerpts from the Isle of Loss***

Kahlan is a lover of stories, nature, learning, and chickens. She's a proud weirdo, pacifist (although she enjoys debating and standing up for what she believes in), and budding environmentalist. She would love it if you found out where she lived and mailed her candy. But that would be creepy, so please don't do that. But also, maybe do.

## **Serena Ball ~ *Collection of Poems***

My name is Serena Ball and I am eighteen years old. I love reading, writing, idiosyncratic socks, and exploring cemeteries.

## **Christian ~ *Sanguinum***

My name is Christian Banos, I'm thirteen years old and I've been writing for quite a while. I enjoy writing because I get to create worlds where anything I want can happen. I'm inspired by Derek Landy and his work with Skulduggery Pleasant and Sui Ishida, who wrote Tokyo Ghoul.

## **Rowyn Card ~ *Reflections***

My name is Rowyn Card. I live on Vancouver Island and I love exploring it. Some things I also love to do is read, draw, and write.

## **Liz Darroch ~ *Charmed Lives***

My name is Liz Darroch and I am an undergraduate student and long-time West Coast inhabitant, although I was born in Toronto. I didn't discover any magical

worlds as a child, so I'm constantly reading or writing about them instead. Characters are my favourite part of literature because I enjoy living vicariously through fictional people. I'm currently studying creative writing and humanities, and am beginning the process of revising my first novel as well as several short stories.

### **Liliya Evdaeva ~ *Collection of Poems***

My name is Liliya Evdaeva and I am thirteen years old. In the future, I would like to pursue a career in medicine whilst becoming the next Agatha Christie. I love to read thrillers and murder mysteries and I am very interested in fashion. My favourite subject in school is math. If I could go anywhere it would be London, England.

### **Kira ~ *Skies and Stories***

My name is Kira, which means both dark and light- a theme I try to bring into all of my writing. At fourteen years old, I've written a number of poems, (unfinished) stories, and too many papers for school. I'm a reader, writer, instrumentalist and all-purpose nerd. I love nature, especially forests, listening to music and hunting for new books by old authors. My current projects are story writing, keeping up my French and Spanish and solving a logic puzzle which I've been stuck on for months.

### **Sophia Herrington ~ *Untitled***

My name is Sophia Herrington and I am a sixteen year old writer, adventurer, and dreamer. This story is inspired by many things, but most of all by the people and places who keep my life interesting! It doesn't have a title, an ending, or even a middle, but I hope it will someday.

### **Freya Hoskins ~ Untitled**

I play basketball and swim and do Irish dance. I have two guinea pigs and fish. I have a younger sister and I love to read.

### **Astrid Kim ~ *Aeternum: A Collection of Poems***

My name is Astrid. I started writing because I just think it's a fun creative outlet. I write poetry more because it comes naturally to me. I enjoy drumming, playing video games and rock climbing in my free time. This was a really bland biography, thanks for reading my poetry.

### **Soren Kim ~ *Collection of Poems***

My name is Soren Kim and I am fifteen years old. I love to read/write poetry and listen to music, preferably at the same time. When I graduate, I want to get published, become a music producer, and tour with a band. I will somehow accomplish and procrastinate on all of these at the same time. This summer, since I went nowhere, I got to spend more time with friends and family: I have found Thesaurus.com makes wonderful company. Among my inspirations are magical people, of both the real and imaginary variety.

### **Maisha Klette ~ *Child of the Revolution***

My name is Maisha, and I am thirteen years old. I have been writing stories and poetry since I was eight and am currently working on completing the rest of this novel! Besides writing, I love to read, sing, play music, bake, and research history! History inspires me and is the basis for many of my stories, even ones that are set in fantasy worlds. I find Marie Antoinette and the Court of Versailles to be especially fascinating, and I have gotten many story ideas from researching that topic; including the basis for this story! I don't know what I would do if I

could do anything, but seeing a Broadway musical and travelling through Europe (and seeing Versailles!) are top contestants. One day, I hope to be a writer and an actor, both careers where your job is to tell a story.

### **Tia Landry ~ Breathing Blue**

My name is Tia Landry. I am sixteen years old. I enjoy snowboarding, ziplining, reading and writing. I often get inspired by connecting with people and hearing their stories. If I could do anything in the whole world, I would travel to outer space and study black holes.

### **Annie Tali Opal (McClure) - *Writings of Annie Tali Opal***

My name is Annie Tali Opal and I'm quite new to poetry but I find it to be a wonderful way to express my mental health issues and connect with others! I'm almost eighteen years old and just recently got hired at my first job! For my future I hope to be able to perform and write more poetry! I post one of my poems every day on Instagram at annies.poetry which I hope people read and enjoy!

### **Annika ~ Odie's Text**

My name is Annika. I am fifteen years old. I really like to read. Some books/authors that inspire me are Harry Potter, Jane Eyre, A wrinkle in time If I could do anything, I would just keep on writing.

### **Kasha Ross ~ *I Could Have Saved You***

My name is Kasha Ross. I have just turned nineteen. Writing has always been the one thing I have stuck with and loved my whole life. It's my safe haven,



allowing me to take my racing thoughts and put them on paper to empty my mind. Writing has taught me that, when it stops raining, a rainbow doesn't always brighten the sky. In simpler terms, my artwork can't be 100% all the time; it's just not humanly possible. Creating this book is a very up and down process. Sometimes it is easy to put words onto paper, making them flow. Other times I couldn't even put two words together. This taught me to keep working until I get it right. I aspire to publish a book even if it doesn't do as well as I would like it to, I still think it would be fulfilling to say I did it and never gave up. I am not done with this book yet; this is what I have so far. My goal was to get the rough draft done before school started but life gets in the way sometimes. To warn you, I have dyslexia and ADD, so I was only able to edit up to chapter seventeen in a week. Thank you so much for taking the time to read my story.

### **Zlata Steeves ~ *Pharmakis***

I'm thirteen years old and live in France but I'm Canadian through my family. Reading is something I love because it's immerses me with awesome characters and ideas and worlds, especially anything related to fantasy or general coolness. All the ideas and inspirations floating around is what turned me towards writing, even just taking notes which I'm really grateful for.

### **Lola Weinzettl ~ *Kingdom of Lies***

My name is Lola Weinzettl and I am twelve years old. I love writing stories and reading books. I play competitive tennis and I love animals.

### **Jakob Wiebe ~ *The Epic of Lily***

Jakob Wiebe was born in Vancouver, but moved to Victoria when he was three. He is a firm believer in craziness, a true supporter of wildness, and just overall

into the idea of randomness. However, he hates zaniness and has never owned a massive rubber chicken. For years he's known he was born to be a writer- in some form or another, and this project is his longest typed novel yet! He also likes drawing comics, making funny YouTube videos, but not zany ones, because as you know, he hates zany stuff!

### **Nikolai Zarrikoff - Barriwallow's Rogue**

My name is Nikolai. I am twelve years old. I really like to play board games, read and write! I am inspired by all art. If I could do anything in the world I would change English spelling so it was phonetic, I find that confusing.

### **Mia Zolbrod - Revenge of the Ifres**

My name is Mia and I'm thirteen years old. I love reading, running and writing. When I'm older, I hope to be a writer, professional runner or pediatrician.

