

L I T E R A L

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*“Mommy, Help! The box is stealing the words out of my brain!”*

# L I T E R A L I N E S

## S T A F F

### P R O D U C T I O N   E D I T O R

S A R A H   C U M M I N G S

### E D I T O R I A L   B O A R D

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D E B B I E   S E X T O N

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### S T A T E M E N T   O F   P O L I C Y   A N D P U R P O S E

The *Literalines* Editorial Board considers original works of fiction, poetry, photography, and line drawings from students at IUPU Columbus and IUPUI. Each submission is reviewed anonymous by at least three members of the student editorial board and is judged solely on artistic merit.

### C O V E R   A R T

By: Kim Lesley

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## MRS. POTTER

Mrs. Potter carefully made her way up the narrow, snow-covered sidewalk to the three steps that led to her front door, the air wheezing in and out of her chest like a train whistle. Although it was the dead of winter, beads of sweat stood out on her forehead and upper lip; the underarms of her dress were ringed with concentric stains from the funeral service earlier that day, and new ones were spreading under the light coat she wore. Pausing at the top of the porch to catch her breath, she rooted around in the depths of the bag she called a purse. Her pudgy fingers groped among the lipsticks, Kleenex, pens, lint-covered candies and mints until they closed around the familiar shape of her door key. Still puffing, she inserted it into the lock and pushed open the door.

“Eugenia?” a ghostly voice echoed down the hall. Startled, she drew back against the door, the lock clicking into place, then shuddered, remembering that Everett had died the previous winter. The sound came again and she realized it was just one of her cats yowling from the depths of the house. Leaning heavily on the door, she drew in a few deep breaths to calm herself. “Jesus, Eugenia,” she laughed to herself. “Scaring yourself like that, you stupid old biddy.” She pushed her bulk off the front door and began to carefully make her way down the hall to the kitchen at the back of the house. Her progress was hampered by the piles of papers and rubbish that had accumulated over the last year and a half. It was further impeded by the growing number of cats that began to appear from the recesses of the house. Winding their way around her ankles and legs, they meowed and purred at her as she waddled through the narrow hall. Stacks of newspapers, reaching half way up the walls, supported more cats. Her favorite, Chester, a sleek muscular black tom, eyed her from his perch atop the hall cupboard. As

she neared the kitchen, the noise from the cats grew. They jumped from pile to pile, causing small avalanches of papers, magazines and junk mail to scatter across the floor. Walking was difficult and by the time she arrived at the kitchen sink there were about thirty cats milling around, meowing and begging to be fed. Females and their kittens, pregnant ones and toms, long haired, short haired mixed, and purebreds all clamored for her attention. She toed and shoved them out of her way with feet and ankles swollen and overlapping her shoes. Only Chester remained where he was.

Pausing at the sink, her hands on the cool tile of the basin, she looked out the window while she tried to catch her breath. She was unmindful of the stench that emanated from the house. Living alone for the last year had dulled her senses, but passers-by wrinkled their noses and wondered what could possibly issue such an overpowering smell. As strong as the odor was outside, it paled in comparison to the smell inside the house. Redolent of cat urine, stale food and overflowing litter boxes, the sink, table and counters were covered with filthy dishes (some more than a year old) that testified to the origin of the odors. The carpets were slick with dirt; the curtains were filthy rags hanging over opaque widows smeared with years of accumulated grease. She did not notice these things, as she had not noticed many things over the last year. Still gasping for breath, her thoughts turned instead to the events of the day. Nadine's funeral had been spectacular, she mused, her gasps turning into a twisted cruel grin. *The little bitch finally got what was coming to her*, she thought. Hallelujah Jones had been in rare form too. Mrs. Potter didn't particularly care for the man, but she had happened to overhear the conversation between Mr. Henry and the girl that day the previous summer. Of course she had been eavesdropping; the exhaust fan from the store was on that wall

and when she saw Mr. Henry confront the girl and take her around the corner she turned it off. Although she didn't know *exactly* what had happened, she could make a pretty fair guess.

Shaking herself from her reverie, she finally became aware of the cats crowding around her, jumping on the filthy counters and tables, positively howling to be fed. Kicking Babbette squarely in the head to get her out of the way, she shuffled the three steps to the cabinet and reaching, into the cupboard, began to pull cans of food from the shelves. She took a dozen tall cans and a dozen paper plates from its depths. *Owning a store has its advantages*, she thought. She ordered and paid for her cat food and other household supplies in bulk through the store and had them delivered directly to her house. She used to let the delivery driver bring them in and stack the cases by the basement door, but over the last few years her housekeeping skills had deteriorated and it had become too dangerous to allow him to enter. Not that he wanted to anyway. They were both relieved when he told her he would have to start dropping her order off at the back door. Besides the unbearable smell, the driver didn't care for the way Mr. Potter would wail from the depths of the house whenever he heard someone moving around. To him it sounded like a ghost. The high ceilings and tall stacks of paper and debris seemed to channel the sound through the house. The old lady could manage the short walk from the counter to the door and back, he consoled himself.

That was a chore taken care of once a month, but glancing toward the door she noticed that the cans on the counter were the last of her stock. *Jerry should be coming today*, she reminded herself. She grabbed the first can and put it in the electric can-opener and pressed the button. There was a high-pitched whine, followed by a whiff of

ozone and a crackling noise, and all the lights went out in the house. The dim winter sun cast its gloom across the filthy sink and linoleum. “Dammit!” she cursed out loud.

The truck tires skidded on the slick street as Jerry pulled up to the house. Slowing, he pulled forward past the drive, and then backed into it until the rear of the van reached the edge of her side porch. He hated this run. He had delivered to the Potter’s Five and Dime for almost fifteen years, and when old Mr. Potter took sick he started dealing with Mrs. Potter. Her immense bulk always made him nervous when she leaned over him as he unloaded the truck at the back of the store. He got the feeling she was checking him out. He shuddered to himself, refusing to let his imagination even consider what she might be thinking when she fixed her beady little eyes on him. He slowly rolled to a stop and, leaving the engine idling, opened the door. His foot slid on the slick driveway as he exited the vehicle, and he only managed to keep from busting his ass by grabbing the door handle. *That’s weird*, he thought. Mrs. Potter always kept the driveway clear. He knew how afraid she was of falling. She had fallen once in the store while he was off loading the truck and he’d had to go next door to the fire department to get a couple of the guys to help him lift her. She hadn’t been hurt, but it reminded him of a TV show he had seen about beached whales. No matter what the rescuers tried to do for the whales they wouldn’t cooperate. That was Mrs. Potter. She made the three men lift her to her feet by wrapping their arms around her and pulling and shoving her. They all three had felt soiled by the time they were finished; it seemed as if she had enjoyed feeling their hands and arms squeezing her breasts and ass cheeks as they heaved and pushed her to her feet. Shaking his head to dispel the memory, Jerry again planted his foot on the drive, this time more slowly and carefully. He slipped and slithered his way

to the back of the van and, amidst the fumes of the exhaust, opened the rear doors.

Pissed at the house, at Everett, at the cats, at everyone including God, Mrs. Potter turned toward the basement door. Since she knew the fuse box was at the bottom of the stairs. She had bitched at her husband to replace the old electrical service for years, but he stubbornly refused to update it. It was one of the few things she had never managed to bully him into doing and now her anger toward her husband resurfaced like a cork bobbing to the surface of a lake. “You old bastard,” she muttered to herself and the cats surrounding her. “You knew this would happen . . . you did it deliberately, you son of a bitch.” She shuffled toward the door at the end of the kitchen. Pulling it open, she reached inside and flicked on the light switch. When the staircase wasn’t immediately illuminated, she was puzzled, but then remembered why she had to go down in the basement in the first place. “Dammit,” she muttered again. Her breathing had eased somewhat as she stood at the sink, but now, faced with the prospect of descending the darkened stairs, she began to pant again. She thought briefly about trying to find a flashlight, but dismissed the idea as quickly as it came. It was just a dozen steps after all and there were only three fuses to be reckoned with. She thought there would be enough light from the stairs for her to see what she was doing. Holding tightly to the door frame, she slowly lowered her left foot to the first step. It creaked ominously as she settled her second foot and full weight onto the plank. Transferring her grasp to the handrail that hugged the wall, she slid a cautious foot forward, carefully feeling for the edge, then, just as slowly, lowered her foot to the next step. Big beads of sweat stood out on her forehead as she repeated the process. Left foot . . . right foot . . . slide . . . left foot . . . right foot . . . slide . . . . At the fifth step she paused, her chest



heaving with the effort. Stopping to wipe her greasy hands on her stained dress, she thought to herself that at this rate it would take all night for her to get to the bottom of the stairs. She thought about turning around, but the narrow stairwell barely offered enough room for her to pivot. She would have to back up the stairs and she knew there just wasn't any way she could traverse them backwards. *Hell, it's killing me to go down front ways*, she thought, and resumed her painstaking journey.

As Jerry swung the van doors open, he thought he heard a noise coming from the house, but with the engine still running he wasn't sure. He glanced over toward the door, to see if Mrs. Potter was waiting for him and when he didn't see her at the window, he pulled out the first case of cans. Slowly and carefully, with the case in his arms, Jerry walked to the steps. He debated for a moment whether to just leave the cases outside the door but, realizing they would freeze, decided to finish the task the way he was supposed to. His breath puffed in little clouds around his head as he climbed the three steps to the side door. Shifting the first case under one arm, he knocked on the storm door.

The first thing that usually hit him when he entered the kitchen was the stench. It was so strong he could smell it before he entered the house. It almost always made him gag, but today, outside in the freezing air, it wasn't so bad. What he did notice, however, was the sound level that increased inside the house in response to his knock. A cat owner himself, Jerry could tell the sound of hungry felines and cupping his free hand to shade his eyes from the sun's last rays he leaned forward to peer into the kitchen. His vision was obscured by a tattered, greasy lace curtain that hung over the kitchen door, as well as by the grime that had accumulated over the last few years, but he could see dark figures milling in the kitchen on the floor, counters and table top. He knocked again, calling out.

“Mrs. Potter? It’s Jerry. I have your delivery.” He stepped back from the door, expecting her to shuffle through from the darkened interior of the house, but when she didn’t appear after a few moments he banged on the door a little harder. *Hell*, he thought, *maybe she fell and can’t get up*. His mind couldn’t help but imagine the scene of Mrs. Potter, her immense panties around her ankles, struggling to get off the bathroom floor. *Uh uh*, he thought. *No way am I going there*. He knocked on the door a little harder and tried to hear a response over the intensified screeches and yowls in the kitchen. Peering in again he looked more closely, but all he could see were the cats and the filthy kitchen. The basement door looked like it was open, but the house was rapidly darkening as the sun sank lower on the horizon. *Maybe she’s not home*. The thought brought him a sense of relief, but he was still concerned about where to put her stuff. *Hell*, he thought, *I’m not waiting for her to get home*. Pounding on the door hard enough to rattle the window in its frame, Jerry waited for a minute, and then placed the case of cans on the porch.

As she took another tentative step down toward the fuse box, Mrs. Potter thought she heard someone banging at the kitchen door. *Jerry!* Relief washed over her. *If I can get back up, I’ll get him to change the fuses*. Cautiously, she shifted on the stairs, trying to squeeze her shoulders in the narrow space. She had to release her death grip on the handrail to turn. Her feet were close to the brink of the stair, the heel of one ragged shoe almost over the edge. Finally, she faced the doorway, and looking up toward the fading light in its frame, she saw a large, dark silhouette perched at the top of the stairs.

“Chester!”

As soon as the word was out of her mouth, Mrs. Potter knew what he was going to do. The dim light suddenly afforded her perfect vision and in slow motion she saw the

muscles under his shiny coat ripple as they bunched to jump.

“NO!” she screamed, and threw up her hands to deflect him. When she did, her heel slipped off the step, and as she flailed to grab hold of the handrail, his weight hit her in the chest. Falling backwards, she felt his claws digging into the tender flesh of her breasts, ripping them. The bottom four steps, rotted with water and termite damage, splintered under her weight and she crashed to the concrete floor. The back of her head smacked the cold cement as Chester jumped off her chest and disappeared into the dark recesses of the basement. As consciousness and the light from the basement door faded, Mrs. Potter heard Jerry pounding at the door.

As Jerry unloaded the ten cases of cat food, litter, paper plates and other cat related items to the back porch, he made up his mind. *First thing Monday morning I'm telling Gordon he can find someone else to take this run*, he thought. *I've had it*. The fumes from the van, as well as his breath, had created a fog that enshrouded him as he moved in the now darkened driveway. Stacking the last case near the door, he looked to see if maybe the old lady had appeared while he was unloading the van. Still seeing no lights or sign of life, he slammed the doors shut and walked around to the driver's door. *I ought to at least make one more effort*, he mused, his hand on the door handle. He wasn't entirely comfortable with leaving her stuff out in the open, so he thought he'd try the front door this time.

Slowly making his way around the front of the van, he broke through the snow piled against the house to get to the front door. Maybe she'll hear the doorbell, he thought. Sinking nearly up to his knees, he waded to the cleared sidewalk. Stamping off the snow, he climbed the steps and rang the bell that did, indeed, exist. He didn't just

ring it; he sleaned on it, the ding-dong chime repeating like a skipping record. He couldn't see through the tall sidelights that flanked the door, so with a final shrug, he gave up and trudged his way back to the van. *Yep, first thing Monday morning.* The warmth of the van was welcoming as he swung up into the driver's seat. Putting the van in gear, he slowly moved down the driveway, turned into the street, and began the trip home. "Goodbye, Mrs. Potter," he spoke out loud.

Dazed, cold, and feeling very strange, Mrs. Potter began to regain consciousness about the time Jerry was stamping the snow off his boots. She tried to lift her head from the pavement and groaned as a sharp pain radiated from the back of her head down her neck. Her head was swimming and she felt as though she was going to throw up, so she settled on moving her eyes instead. She couldn't see; the last of the light had gone while she was unconscious. She tried to move her arms, to see if she could feel any blood on her head, but they seemed to be frozen. She tried to shift her legs, but they didn't seem to work either. The fall had cracked a vertebrate in her neck and the fracture was pressing on the spinal cord, paralyzing her. She could breath, but that was all. Her limbs frozen and her mind dull and slow from the blow, it took a few minutes for her to realize what had happened.

The cats upstairs, hearing Jerry go around to the front door, all ran to the front of the house, their feet thundering on the old boards. When she heard the doorbell ringing Mrs. Potter thought, *Thank God! He's going to try to get in anyway.* The sound went on forever, echoing through the house. The sudden silence when he stopped ringing was deafening. "Jerry!" she cried feebly. She tried moving her head again, and this time did vomit when a wave of nausea washed over her. Gasping as she tried to spit out the foul

remnants of her lunch, she heard the sound of his van pulling away. “Jerry,” she whispered wetly. Large tears welled and rolled down her fat cheeks as she realized she was alone.

She wept for a few moments becoming aware that she wasn’t really alone after all. Turning her eyes toward the dark interior of the basement, she saw a green glow emerging from its depths. As it neared her, she saw that it was really two small spots of emerald green floating in the air as they drew closer. Finally she recognized the deep rumble she had been aware of since she first awakened. It was Chester, purring. Forgetting that he was partly responsible for her condition, she began to whisper to him: “Chester, kitty. Here Chester. Here baby. Come to Mama.” She wheedled and whined to him. His purr grew louder as he came almost within arms reach. “Good kitty, good kitty. Come to mama, kitty. Kitty, kitty, kitty.” He advanced a few more steps, and when an angry hand did not descend to smack him, he moved closer, extending his head to smell her.

Mrs. Potter began to weep again, feeling the warm breath of her favorite cat. *Good kitty*, she thought, wishing he was a dog that could at least bark and alert the neighbors. “Good kitty,” she sighed aloud, to which he responded by rubbing his face along hers. His purrs grew louder as he rubbed his head up and down the side of her face, and he even nuzzled her ear as he used to do when he was a kitten. His purr raised a notch in volume as he placed his front feet on her shoulder and rubbed his face across her eyes. “No,” she breathed, aware of what he was going to do, just as she did earlier. Terrified she tried to raise her voice, “No, Chester, no!” but her voice was weighed down by her body and the words came out as a murmur.

Chester put his front feet on the center of her chest, between her still bleeding breasts, and lightly jumped onto her. Mrs. Potter was surprised. She couldn't feel his body or his feet pressing into her flesh. He circled as if he was going to settle down, and then facing her, began to knead his paws on the fabric of her dress. His claws drew fresh blood as they nicked the skin, and he began to get heavier. Mrs. Potter's breaths began to come in small gasps as he sat back on his haunches, his green eyes glowing in the darkness. His weight deepened as he curled his front feet under him and settled deeply into her chest, still staring at her. "Chester!" It was a whispered wheeze as she struggled for breath. Her chest felt compressed. She couldn't draw in deeply. "*Chester,*" she hissed, in a small panting gasp, as the last of the air wheezed out of her body.

## FUTURES: ITS A TIME-MACHINE

I only remember one thing about that semester, and that's the shoebox graves. I can recall that specific morning when we buried who we were and told everyone about it. *What an assignment.* I remember that there was a light in the corner of the room that wouldn't stop flickering. I was sitting next to Holly Phillips. Holly Phillips would always talk to me about stupid stuff like sports and the weather. When it was rainy, she always made it a point to ask me if I liked it when it rained.

"Yes, Holly Phillips, I like it when it rains."

She was burying a leather-bound book that morning. She made sure to point it out to me. Evidently, Holly Phillips liked to read. The one thing that was cool about Holly Phillips is that at the end of the semester, she baked me a peach cobbler for Christmas. I didn't even ask her to. And honestly, I don't ever think I told her how much I loved peaches. Looking back, she probably baked that cobbler for a reason. I guess this means that I remember two things about that semester.

You were no one on that cold October morning, though. I was very tired, and I suddenly became interested in class for the first time ever as you explained to the class that you were burying your dancing shoes that day. Suddenly, you became more than nothing.

"I like to dance-dance-dance..."

*She likes to dance-dance-dance...*

"I like to read-read-read..."

**Shut-up** *Holly Phillips...*

The room was so cold. All of the windows were cracked open, and I remember watching as tears fell from the branches of nearby trees. I don't know why those trees were crying. Maybe they heard the awful news...  
You were burying your dancing shoes.

## TRUST

Trust is being thrown into the air, caught again safely. Feeling free for a moment, then gathered securely again into arms. Those same arms carrying gently to the couch, and settling down into an empty lap. Burrowed deeply into their warmth, eventually carried into the next room, and put to bed as evening falls and sleepiness comes.

Trust is in the surgeon's hands to successfully get through surgery regardless of the fear that runs rampant through the family and his patient. Some believe the doctor will make them well. Others believe he will only do his best. Looking for someone to believe in during the recovery.

Trust is putting faith in friends that lift her out of a wheelchair, and carefully place her in the wagon for a hayride. She is happy because she is included in the fun, and being surrounded by people who do not have a second thought about helping her be one of the gang. Friends and family swaying with the wagon as she enjoys something she always thought beyond her ability.

Trust is being given the responsibility of taking care of a classroom of children for a few hours. Nervousness racing through veins. Waiting for the children to quiet down enough to be heard over the ruckus. Getting them to their classes on time, and watching over them until their teacher returns.

Trust is being toted up stairs by four friends, because there is not a ramp around to use. The heart skips a few beats while knowing very well that being dropped is a possibility. Onlookers breathe a sigh when finally the last stair is passed. Placed safely back on solid ground and four wheels.



## PIECE BY PIECE

Dozens of Shapes in different colors  
 Form the Puzzle  
 Each Necessary

Tiny sky blue boxes dot the surface  
 Clustered together  
 Cold as the polar caps themselves

Orange rectangle runs vertically along  
 In pairs of twos or threes  
 Larger than their cooler counterparts  
 A sense of warmth is given off

Shades of grey sparsely appear  
 Plain squares of neutrality  
 Fewest in number  
 Most important to the whole world

Intersecting lines of black  
 Separate orange, grey and blue  
 Make each their own individual

Holding the pieces together



# LYES BULL

## Part I

Fourth Street was pretty much the way it had always been---humid and suffocating. Time had worn away much of what was during the day of the father, such as when warm rains and frigid winds weather the appearance of houses; the pretty facade is worn away to the bare bones that everything needs to keep it from falling down. However, life moves on in much the same way it needs to, deep in Brooklyn. But if a person were to fall with the rain onto the tar roofs, down the rain chutes, and into the dark gray rivulets running in great veins, then he would likely drain into the unusual green dip of Mr. Hensley's garden.

Now a garden is as unlikely in Brooklyn as a cow coming from old Dixon's Butcher Shop to contently graze and bawl under the bare moon. In the eighties, Hensley's garment factory burned to the ground on that spot, and feeling sorely about the affair of losing his business and putting most of the Fourth Street wives out of work, he gave them a green, adorned park, reminding everyone of his past benevolence. So now the "old fat lipsies" bray night and day, not from the top floor working the sewing machines or by the black monsters weaving the threads deep in the brick basement, but under his fourth story window. Mr. Hensley retired free of worry with his insurance money from the fires to a little four-story brick next to the park that had been renovated 20 years ago from the Star Hudson Bank into a comfortable tenement. Here he would squeak as much as his collapsing seventy-year-old body could at the kids playing a little too loudly, or a little too oddly in the park. On the summer mornings, his long sharp nose poked from the

modest penthouse and, facing the dying night on the horizon, he hawkishly sought among the children the most wicked, ill-looking, and ill-gaining to brood upon and harass much of the day, until he retired to lunch at a glimmering steel and glass deli owned by his nephew on Fifth Street. “It’s not just that it’s family,” he retorted, “They use more salted butter in their croissants.”

This was much the feel of Fourth Street. It comfortably made a nest from the outside world, keeping itself in a dream, saving the old days where living was better, as everyone had a habit of saying, day upon day. On occasion, there was a change of name in the neighborhood; maybe a marriage brought in a new bit of blood, or a death made way for the young. But it was a static world for the most part.

Three months before his tenth birthday, Lye’s family moved to Fourth Street on a mild May Saturday. His father had been a philosophy professor at the Community College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, while his mother tutored the rural poor deep in the red pine clay flats of the county. Today, he stood quietly in the Roman arch of the Brooklyn tenement, his willowy arms and legs bent to an oval head, dejected, feeling the world was sure to end in this red-walled trap. In the South, the boy had grown bronco wild, feeling his way through childhood, scouting about the rivers, letting nature show him the path, while his parents were busy about their calling most of the time. They left him alone, and in this small sphere, he grew, noiselessly. His thin, red lips said little, but his teachers said his mind was the brightest in the class.

Lye’s move to Brooklyn tore him from the only world he had known and wished for. Lye was sure it was easier to move to Mars than from Mississippi to Brooklyn. His brassy, strong father fit in well at the Brooklyn College, teaching about a metaphysical

nothing in the world, stroking the corners of his black moustache, combing his hair forward, poorly hiding the diminished hairline of the middle-aged man. Lye's mother slipped into every poverty-wrought family as easily as her subtle, girlish body could fit into the broken doors of the abandoned tenements, where she now fevered in saving the poor of Brooklyn.

Lye's family came to Fourth Street on the first week of summer vacation. So as the family settled, in a commotion of voices and noise, he set out from the stoop and sat among the rocks and shrubs of Mr. Hensley's Garden. Most of the children of the neighborhood were fast to run the alleys and find the arcades and theaters a few blocks away. Occasionally, a passing boy would call out, "Ello, there!" But Lye would shy away from the other Brooklyn boys, into dreams of hilly pines, where he raced their roots along the red clay to the sandy shallows of the Mississippi rivers. There crickets called to him in the warm blaze of the falling sun, and he answered chasing, the south breeze through the cattle fields to the idle back porch outside his family's pine house.

By the end of the first month, the family was getting together plans to meet some of his father's colleagues for lunch, and in the growing dusk, Lye sat in the part of the garden that made him most content. A row of white pines sat on the four sides of the garden, so Mr. Hensley could watch the doves and blue jays gather. Here, as things came into shadow by twilight, the pines reminded Lye of his life in the wild country before, and the warmth radiating off the sun baked bricks made him sweat as if in the summer furnace of the South. Supine between the pines, he watched the tenement lights glow. Far above, the same constellations he had known in a different place gave off the same heat, here on Fourth Street.

Mr. Hensley's cane felt like a little steel snake poking Lye in the leg. "What are you doing here, child, when all the other boys have gone in for the night?" asked Mr. Hensley as he bent forward, his hawkish head crooked back showing a prominent Adams apple on his vulture neck. "Nothin,'" Lye shrugged, curling up his arms about his legs and sitting up to keep an eye on the old man. "Nothing, huh?" Hensley retorted. "Seems that's the answer most little boys have when they have something. Just that they're not sure what it is or not willing to let others know what it is, humm? What do you got to say to that? And it better not be nothing, you understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well now, that's something, but it's telling me nothing. How about you try again, humm?"

Lye scratched his head a mite, but a supply of words was not his to give to the ample lip swaggering of an old man. "I jus' felt like bein' out here, is all."

"Ahhh," Mr. Hensley smiled, sitting upon a granite stone by the pines dyed in colors of coral reef seas. Cocking his old, shrinking head, "It's alright, you'll learn to make more noises when you get as old as I, child," the old man said, stamping his cherry wood cane into the grass near Lye. He then sniffed around the air, keeping one dark eye, shrunken into his ivory brow, on Lye. "I thought so; I smell a Southern soul here in my Brooklyn garden."

"You can't smell that!" Lye puffed out, pulling his legs tight against the brass buttons of his overall straps.

"Now we're talking a bit more aren't we? Well, now, you need to know, child, us old men get kind of a sixth sense as we ripen on the vine, so to speak. We know how

much rain the clouds are going to give before a cloud even thinks of wasting a drop. We see the seasons as life starts making the adjustments in the World. We can also see into the heads of little boys, kind of like Santa Claus, knowing what they've done and where they have been." Mr. Hensley grinned. "He's one of us, you know."

"There isn't a Santa Claus, *you know*," Lye retorted.

"You don't say. Know, why is that?"

"My pap's a professor of everything, and says there is nothing of the kind."

"Well, now, I have heard about your father the philosopher. A man who professes everything, and sure there is nothing. My, my, I'm not sure what to say to that. What about your mother?"

"She's a God-fearing Christian, mister. And that's sayin' she's knows a lot and is good 'bout it, too," Lye stood up with his hands in his overall pockets, chin up, looking as much like an imposingly adult as he could. The humidity put a sprinkle of dew on the blond head, and his bright blue eyes twinkled favorably in the hour between light and dark. Mr. Hensley waved his hands up and down, dropping his cane into the grass. "Now, now, gentle boy, there is no need to be hasty here in my garden. I have met your parents, child. I believe, from what I can see on my part, and that is saying a lot, they are a fair couple. And you, well, I can quickly admire the very young."

"I'm almost ten," Lye said hurt. "I'm not young at all!"

"But you are. And what is so damning to be so far from death's grasp?"

"Nothin', I suppose, mister."

"Ahh, there we go again, but you are quite right, there is nothing."

Lye's mother called from the family's first floor apartment window into the

garden, and seeing Mr. Hensley, she give a little Southern bow. “Hello, Mr. Hensley,” she called down. Wobbling to his feet, the old man returned the greeting. “Hello, to you, Mrs. Stone.” As Lye ran up to the white concrete porch, stained with red and blue geraniums, the old man stopped him at the door. “I hope to see you, tomorrow, Lye. I have some grand things to show you in my garden tomorrow. Will I be expecting you, then, child?” Lye shrugged his shoulders and disappeared into the building. “What they say as nothing in words,” the old man whispered as Mrs. Stone closed the window, “they emote much with a bend in the shoulders.” After the old man went through the main door, the yellow porch light drew low and night moved quietly in the dark.

The following morning came and Lye hid within the apartment until his mother ran him out, as old church women streamed in for a meeting to rally a war on the evils of being homeless. Slinking out the door, he made it to the street as Mr. Hensley called from the garden, “I was a boy once, too, child.” The old man smiled as Lye slumped into the grass by his feet. “Mothers and old men are your greatest enemy,” he added with slyness in his coarse-wrinkled face.

For some time, each sat in awkward solitude, looking upon the large lot with its rows of yew bushes inside the blue cedars and pines wrapping against the outer black square of a cast iron fence. Kentucky bluegrass was boiling away its dew under the June sun. Awakened in the heat, blue jays and doves bounced about the granite slabs scattered about the center of the plot, where a shallow pond with a diameter no greater than the height of an average man moved in a light southern breeze. Here they sat in silence until Mr. Hensley began recalling Mrs. Stone’s ramblings about the Mississippi clay flats that had been Lye’s home since his birth. “Your mother tells me a lot of interesting things she

caught you doing about those lands....”

“Yes, sir,” replied Lye, his ears reddening about the verge.

“The best one seems to be about an old bull that walked up your drive going from one field to another. Tell me about that, would you, child?” leaning back with Lye in the grass at his feet. “Well, not much to tell, really,” Lye stammered, looking in the grass. “Your audience is the judge of that, Lye. If I feel I’m being taken, then I will surely rap you across the shoulders with my cane.” Lye wasn’t sure if it was an authentic threat, but he had learned a good deal about old men, and a boy just could not take chances, so he told the old man of the old tame bull that he jumped on and rode as it passed through his yard walking from the neighbor’s barn to the far clover pastures. The big, brown beast, a Jersey bull of about 10 years, moved on like a train, never changing its track of point A to point B through the day. Never angered with the little passenger, it simply regarded Lye as a cowbird to keep the flies away. Lye’s tightness moved a bit from his throat as this old man took regard to his hidden life. Now Lye looked kindly on the old man. He connected to the old man, as boys usually do to their opposites on the line of life. Lye was giving back to Mr. Hensley a bit of youthful innocence towards the end of things.

“Well, now, that was one of the most amazing of tales, Lye. That is saying much when someone as old as me says so,” Mr. Hensley pointed out. “Let me show you something that might kindly remind you of your bull, Lye.”

Lye followed the old man up the main stairwell of fine-sanded walnut to the rarely approached solitary penthouse door on the fourth floor. Creaking the heavy door open into the dimly lit apartment, Lye recognized the old man’s dim, cluttered home as the standard fair for old, lonely people: trinkets were stashed away hastily into boxes,



nooks, and corners, stacks of newspapers pushed against the ceiling, and the stale air compacted in the saving of everything acquired over a time with a story always hid beneath. Mr. Hensley pushed into a corner and revealed to the sunlight a brass bull three feet long and two feet tall, and wrapped in gold leaf. It dazzled before Lye, radiating away the shadows. “I’ve been thinking about putting it on that granite slab in the garden to remind people of my little factory that once was. This here,” Mr. Hensley pointed, “was the figurine above the door of my factory before it burned down long ago where the garden now is. How do you like the idea of having a bull out in the green, Lye?” the old man asked.

“I’d appreciate it a great deal, Mr. Hensley,” Lye said in meteoritic fascination of the great golden beast.

“I shall move it out to the garden tomorrow, then. But I ask in return, child, just a little conversation with an old man in a garden, yes?” Mr. Hensley asked. The boy returned with a genuinely excited, “Yes, sir!”

## **Part II**

The following day workmen placed the statue in the garden, and from then on Lye would sit in the grass listening and sharing with the old man in a communication and appreciation he had not had with another human being before. It was truly turning into a home for Lye.

Awakening after the exhaustive excitement of the July 4th holiday with the neighborhood boys in revelry and merrymaking, Lye stepped out into the garden with a blueberry muffin from the bakery across the street. He expected to see Mr. Hensley to tell him everything of his adventures, as had been the two’s habit for more than a month.

Instead, he found the golden bull gone and the old man not back from his nephew's bakery. He ran to his parents, childlike, begging them to do something. His father called the police, but nothing came of it, as his father expected, and his mother gave one prayer, but thought it foolish to waste the Divine on the silliness of a golden bull. Even Mr. Hensley seemed to pull back into his apartment, despairing and sullen upon the people under his window. Lye would not have it, though. He could not simply let it stay as it was. Destiny was made, not a maker. So, after waiting three weeks for the statue's return, he set out one Sunday morning into the Borough in hopes of finding it.

Lye made it 40 blocks before his heart and legs gave out at a little diner in the north of Brooklyn. Here he went in and sat at a table far from the most notice of people. He sat in a dark alcove drinking his milk, watching the white bubbles. Imagination drew him away from the plain light of the city day. Lye sat as a child without hope of regaining the golden bull. In the reality of things, the statue had been taken by some passersby in a green Volkswagen van, who pawned it in Queens.

Lye's odyssey though, of not so far and not so dangerous, had a plan of its own for the boy, and not merely the return of the golden statue. Other agents were at play in the diner. Since things are still good in the world, and innocent, meaning is out to be found and a bit of cosmic tinkering to the reality of probability occurs in strange, whispering forms. And what is unlikely becomes much its opposite.

At that moment, an old man emerged from a crook in the far side of the diner. A tight and willowy male frame gave the false appearance of a misshapen, gangly adolescent. This youthfulness was seemingly true except for the white halo of hair helmed about his top, and a much identical beard thinly straddling a sharp hawkish face.

The old man took no invitation and sat facing Lye. “‘Ello, little pup. What be your name, now?’” Lye recoiled from the booming words in his dark affair of dreaming. But his reluctance was quick to abate, for he immediately recognized the fondly familiar regional dialect of the southern Mississippi Cajun. The song of the Cajun’s voice took control of his despair, and the high pitch of the old man released Lye from recoil.

“Lye,” responded the boy.

“A howdy do, Lye. Call me de Cajun, pup.”

“A pleasure meetin’ you, sir,” Lye chirped.

The Cajun leaned back in the seat, intent with his dark eyes on Lye. “What wind brings you to dese parts so solitary like?” Lye finished his milk and the spell moved to a whisper, as his previous morose manner surfaced, again. “I lost something,” Lye just barely croaked. But his wide blue, almond eyes opened to the dark-eyed Cajun.

“Somet’ing of importance it would be, *non*?”

“My golden bull,” chirped Lye.

“How could dis be, pup? You must tell de complete event to de Cajun, *mon ami!*”

And so over the next hour, Lye hastily retold of arriving in Brooklyn, the garden, Mr. Hensley, and the taking of the golden bull. On certain parts, the Cajun calmed the boy’s recollection to get a greater understanding of the affair. Even though Lye thought the Cajun was not paying attention to what *he* thought was the most important issues of his story, he had learned that the thoughts of men always seemed not quite what they should be. Night had its head above the eastern horizon as the boy finished his tale.

“*Non, non*, such a t’ing should not be put on de head of one so young!” exclaimed the Cajun. Lighting his pipe, and calming to reason in the waft of black cherry tobacco,

he continued reflection and decision. “Men should make amends to de young for sins not dere own. Yess, yess,” he hissed, drawn to his secrets. Sharply, brassy, he jumped upon his timeworn, brown work boots, pulling his flannel shirt tight into his loose, dull blue jeans.

“Come, pup. I will replace dis golden bull of yours with a most particular, precious t’ing dat can’t be takin’ from your presence. Come, come, pup, de night is comin’ high, and it approaches!” he raved, as Lye followed very jovially in the promise of his bull’s immediate resurrection.

Walking erect, youthful, as if a mere reflection of a being could resurrect greenery into the old, shrunken flesh, the Cajun led Lye to an alley behind a shoe store across the street. Here he had a little shanty of a large cardboard box and a green army sleeping bag. He brought Lye to sit down by his side on the thin covering. Once settled, the Cajun looked deeply into the boy and then pointed a twiggy finger towards the northern heavens as the sun sank into the World’s oceans. “Look, dere, pup. Taurus! Taurus! Taurus! Thieves and trickery of life can’t hide away de heavens.” Lye followed the finger as it traced down from the two bright stars, the horns, to the cluster of the forehead, and finally the remaining blue grouping of the bust. Once the Cajun’s arm had fallen back to refill his pipe, Lye giggled, showing his bliss with a bit of clapping and rocking his small shoulders.

“What is it, pup?”

“Why, back in the country, I always thought that was an arrow put up by God to show me home when I wander into the south county’s woody hills,” Lye confessed. The Cajun sat against the soot-stained brick wall, pondering what was said. After a few puffs

on the dark finger of his pipe, he chanced a confession of prophecy, “Dey might of been pointin’ to a home much further dan de clay flats of Mississippi, pup.” And internally scheming, the Cajun realized Brooklyn had not shown itself to be worthy of such a spirit, yet. The Cajun’s thoughts blistered against his temples, and he emerged from his depths, preparing for redemption of past wrongs. He then startled Lye without punctuation; he lightly jumped to his feet, even though greater weights settled on his idle shoulders as his mind was hot with secret plans. “ I will take you home, now, *mon ami*. And I promise you dis: Dat starry bull will stand on de floor of de garden jus’ as de golden one had. Now, pup, let’s get a’ goin’, yes, yes?”

Lye return to the tenant house around 9:30 without punishment or worry upon him by his parents, as his father was out lecturing to his university colleagues about his certainty that there is *nothing* in the world, what so ever. As most nights, his mother was in quiet, pious prayer, *again*, for the woe begotten all around, not hearing Lye sneaking up the stairs to his bedroom. All that was heard was the low talking of the Cajun and Mr. Hensley sharing a pipe near the pond of the garden.

The following morning came without anything magical, or noticeably odd on Lye’s street. Or the next, or the next. Saturday took on a decline for Lye as hope came out of his fingers and began to lift above the roofs in a summer breeze until he heard workmen leaving the garden in the afternoon. Mr. Hensley greeted Lye at the cast iron gate leading from the street. “Hello, child. You seem to have strange friends here you never expected, and stranger benefactors, as you might wish to call them. Yes, yes, strange as Northern Lights.” Lye ran to the flat granite slab that once the bull had surmounted next to the pond. But just a brown indentation in the black earth remained

where the weighty stone had been. However, Lye caught Mr. Hensley's eyes, as the old man looked fondly amazed upon the little pond. Lazily sticking up three feet out of the water, directly in the center of the 6 foot diameter pond, a Greek column had been set to support a highly polished silver disk. As Lye approached it, he could see the stars of Taurus embossed in the metal, with lines faintly outlining the constellation. Mr. Hensley stood behind Lye at his shoulders. "Tonight will be a grand showing, child. This is the time of magic."

After the old man left, Lye jumped about, grossly swinging himself in dance, blissful, again. And there, sitting in the grass, he passed the day into night as the ancient beings rose out of the far ocean to the underbelly of the cosmos above. Mr. Hensley sat in his window, in front of the blue glow of his television, pensively watching Lye. As the brightening constellations herded upward on the Greek Pantheon, the silver plate glowed bluish white as all the stars passed over the silver mirror. Once the bull was overhead, Lye then stood to the west of the column looking down on the mirror. There, Taurus's reflection was walking on its path to his home. The heavenly constellation matched up with the embossed silver bull. Unknown to the boy, but revealed to Mr. Hensley, the Cajun stood in the shadows of the butcher shop across the street. Lighting his pipe, he whispered, "How do you feel, now, pup?"

"Everything is wonderful!" spoke the spirit of Lye onto the streets, and rising as an integument of shining joy upon the back of the black bull.

As Lye stayed transfixed in the rolling of the universe, the Cajun hummed into the shadows of Brooklyn, his pipe glow leading the way.

## THE WORDS OF ANOTHER

Reading words not intended for me  
 But for someone else  
 I never met  
 never knew their favorite drink  
 Or how they sneezed  
 Was it light and polite  
 And how do people sneeze like that anyway?  
 Graceful even when bacteria are spewing from their mouth.

And the words you wrote for them  
 The ones that must have batted their eye-lashes so much more than I do  
 Were they just more sensitive?  
 Did they better understand your drama, your contradictions?  
 Why was there no poetry of woo or woe  
 To one I thought "loved you the most"

So I sit back, I let sunlight melt on my skin  
 Like butter on corn, golden oil of nostalgia  
 Imagining cupping between my fingers  
 a margarita  
 and falling on the beach  
 Letting the waves surround me in a whispery hug  
 while writing in my mind  
 a tearful letter to you  
 Of why I do not mean more or enough  
 To your heart, except I don't.

And for once, the allergies leave me  
 The need to react, the defense  
 That was built along my nerves  
 like an electric fence  
 Always prepared for a shock

And I release the tug-of-war rope  
 I let you tumble backwards,  
 Or whatever it is you do  
 While I put on my tank top  
 Go out into the dewy grass that clings to my skirt  
 For no other reason than that it does  
 And I smile as I realize that I walk outside

For no other reason than that I do  
And isn't that reason enough  
To be me, to go out, to smile right now  
As I gaze at the lemonade sunshine,  
The sweet and yellow juice that seeps into my skin  
Tingling in my pores  
And giving me bittersweet shudders



OCTOBER 1, 1999  
 A JOURNAL ENTRY OF DARIAN  
 WALKER

I

Why do people hate Mondays? Could it be that Mondays signify the end of the weekend? Or, could it be that people hate Mondays because it starts the work week? Everyone hates Mondays for their own special reason. I hate Mondays because many things have happened to me on Monday. This particular Monday, however, changed my life forever.

I should start from the beginning, Monday, October 1, 1999. Everything was going as normal as any Monday can. My father came in and woke me up so that I would not be late for school. I didn't understand what the hurry was because I only lived two blocks from school. I guess it was his nervousness about starting a new job. Nonetheless I got up and staggered into the kitchen. My mother had designed our new kitchen. Everything had its little spot. If you saw my room you would know that it was a little too perfect for me.

As I walked into the room, Dad was reading the newspaper over a plate of eggs and bacon.

"Morning, Champ," Dad said. "What's going on after school?"

"Nothing," I said.

I guess I got Dad's attention, because he put the paper down. "You need to get involved in some after school activity. I know we just moved here last week, but I couldn't pass up this job opportunity."

"I know, Dad. It's just that I don't fit in here."

"You just need to find a friend."

I looked around and noticed that Mom wasn't in the kitchen and I didn't hear her in the washroom.

"Dad, where's Mom?"

"You know, I think she is still in bed," he said. "Why don't you go wake her?"

"Okay," I said.

I knew Dad was in a hurry to get to work. He really liked his new job, but this was one time that I wish Dad would have woken Mom up. Now every time I close my eyes I remember the blank look on Mom's face. I remember walking into their bedroom and seeing Mom lying so peacefully. I didn't want to wake her.

"Mom, you need to get up," I said. "You are going to be late."

When I didn't get a response, I went to wake her. That is when I saw it.

"DAD!" I yelled.

"What, what is it, son?" he said as he came running in from the kitchen.

"I think mom's..."

He ran to the side of the bed and saw the same look I did, the blank lifeless stare of someone whose life had been stolen. Dad kneeled down, grabbed her up into his arms, and started to cry uncontrollably. I was still in shock. I didn't quite know what was going on.

“Dad, is she...” I asked.

He was too broken up to talk.

They say that Monday is the worst day of the week. Now, I truly knew what this meant, but this was just the start.

I didn't go to school that day. Instead I just wandered around town, because I couldn't stay home. I felt like a zombie trying to analyze what had just happened. But I couldn't.

As I was walking I stumbled across a book store that I never knew existed. I am a big book fan. I love to read, so when we moved here last week, I found out, as I had thought, where every book store was in this town, but I didn't know about this one. So I stood there and examined the pictures in the window. There were posters that advertised sales and pictures of new books.

I read so much because of a character that I fell in love with when I first read about him. His name was Briq. He was the coolest. He is a character in a fantasy novel. I owned and had read every one of them. Or a least I thought I had. In the lower right window of the bookstore was a picture of Briq on a new book cover. This didn't seem right, because the author of the novels passed away just last year on October first. I went in to find out what all this was about.

“Excuse me, Can you explain the picture in your front window?” I said.

The man behind the counter barely looked at me. “What,” he said. I guess the newspaper was more important.

“Yeah, we just got those in yesterday,” he said as he looked over at the display in the corner.

“That’s not what I mean. The author died last year.”

“So, they decided to print his last novel on the anniversary of his death.”

He pointed to where they were, and I went over and picked one up. I had to buy it.

“RING! RING!” I was right in the middle of reading the back cover of the book when my cell phone rang.

“Excuse me, you’ll have to take that outside. No cell phones allowed in the store,” he said.

“RING! RING!”

“Okay, but first I want to buy this.”

I purchased the novel and went outside and answered my cell. It was my dad.

“Where are you?” he asked.

“I’m about three blocks from home.”

“Well, come home. Some of your aunts and uncles are on their way. We need to talk about arrangements for Mom.” I didn’t want to go back there, but I had to. Talking to my family was the last thing I wanted to do right now. I just wanted to be alone.

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When I arrived home, it was like I was reliving it all over again. The smell of eggs and toast was still in the air. Grandma and Grandpa were there talking with Dad. I just went straight to my room and closed the door, because I really didn’t want to talk to anybody right now. I sat on the side of my bed and looked over and there was a picture of the family on my night stand. That’s when it hit me. Mom was really gone. I cried.

Through my tears, I heard Dad’s voice outside my door.

“Son, are you there?”

“Yeah, I’m here.”

“Well, Grandma wants to see you.”

“Not right now, Dad.”

I just wanted to be alone. So he let me be. I cried myself to sleep. It was about six in the evening when I woke up. I heard my aunts and uncles in the living room talking, and I didn’t want to face anyone right then. I just turned on my lamp and began to read my new book. The cover showed Briq with his sword encased in flames fighting off what looked to be evil elves. I must have read half of it before I fell asleep again at my desk.

## II

When I woke up, I found myself in a forest. I was lying on some animal fur next to a fire where a rabbit was cooking. I didn’t know where I was or how I got there. I turned and noticed that the sun was just coming up.

*“Morning, young one.”*

I was startled to hear another person’s voice. I jumped up and saw a man standing just above six foot tall with blond hair neatly kept and green eyes that were as dark as the forest I was lying in.

*“Morning,”* he said again.

“Who are you?”

*“My name is Kaz the leafling of the house of the fifth moon.”*

“I’m sorry. I thought I just heard you say that you were Kaz.”

I looked and saw that the talisman of the house of the fifth moon hung around his neck. It was proof of what he’d said, but I needed a little more proof. “If you are who you say you are then show me the scar.”

Kaz was another character in a novel that I owned that included Briq. In this novel Kaz and Briq were fighting back-to-back to protect Kaz's home town of Ribam, and Kaz was injured by the corrupt blade of Eldamada, so not only would he have the talisman for proof but he would have the scar as well. He raised his brown shirt to expose the scar-that-will-forever-burn that ran across his stomach.

I was dumbfounded. I didn't know what to do. "Where am I?" I asked.

*"You are in the kingdom of ribam."*

"What am I doing here?"

*"I found you lying in the middle of the meadow. you have been asleep for some time now,"* Kaz said. *"Not to be rude, kind sir, but, now that you have the proof you need, we should go to the temple. there are many questions that need to be answered,"*

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We arrived at a large building that was built into the side of an oak tree. I had read about this place, but to actually see it was great. I knew that it had to be over two stories tall because my house was that tall and this building was almost double.

*"we have arrived. you are wanted inside,"* Kaz said.

I didn't know exactly what they wanted, or what was going on. Kaz was just a character in a book I had read. I wasn't sure how he could be standing in front of me, but I followed him into the temple. I needed to find out how to get home. Dad was probably worried sick about me, and with Mom gone he didn't need all the stress. I started to miss home and Mom. I wanted to find out what exactly had happened to her.

We walked a path that ended at a long wooden door that led into the temple. Where two men wearing leather armor and armed with bows standing guard. I thought

they were elven, but I wasn't sure. The oak door was inscribed with a language that I could not understand. Kaz looked at one of the guards and said something in a foreign language, and then one of the guards opened the door for us. The inside of the temple was much like the outside, more writing everywhere. Paintings hung on the walls of elven warriors. I guessed they were a memorial to those who had fought for their clan. I had followed Kaz and some other elves through many winding corridors, until we came to the back of one of the halls.

*“wait here,”* Kaz said.

There happened to be an old wooden table there so I sat down and tried to piece together the situation to see if I could understand what was going on. All I could gather was that my day was going normally until I found my mother dead in her bed, then I found a book store and saw a book that I had never seen before, and now I was here. Nothing was adding up.

*“stand up,”* Kaz said.

I stood up and turned around to see Kaz with a man standing in a black tunic with black hair and green eyes. That's when I knew who it was.

“You're Briq. Aren't you?” I asked.

“Young one, how do you know that name?” the man asked with a slight smile on his face.

“I have read a lot about you,” I said.

“From what you are wearing, I can see you are not from around here, are you?”

“No, sir. I fell asleep at my home and I woke up in the woods with Kaz. He told me that we needed to get to the temple. Now that I am here, I would like to understand what is going on.”

I didn't know what to make of it all; first I met Kaz and then Briq. I didn't know where I was when I woke up, but at that point I was starting to put things together.

“We need to talk in private,” Briq said.

They led me into a nearby chamber that had nothing but a big wooden table with chairs around it.

“To understand what you are going through I need to know what you know. What can you tell me?” he said.

“I know that you are Briq, the psionic warrior from the badlands, and the elf sitting next to you is Kaz the leafling, from the house of the fifth moon. I also know that you two fought back-to-back against Eldamada.”

“You know much for being so young. You are right on all accounts. I am Briq. You said earlier that you have read about me. How have you done this?”

“Where I am from there are books full of stories of all your adventures.”

I barely got out that last sentence when another elven warrior came running into the room. He went to Kaz and said something in elven that I couldn't understand. Kaz looked at Briq and then ran out of the room.

“You are still battling Eldamada's forces, aren't you?” I asked.

Nodding in agreement, Briq answered, “You are smart for being young. What is your name?”

“My name is Darian.”



“We have to put you somewhere safe, Darian. Eldamada is not someone to take lightly, and for some reason you are here and she probably knows about it.”

Briq got up and headed for the door. He didn't look pleasant. Eldamada's forces were attacking the temple and I was likely to be the cause of the attack.

“Is there anything I can do?” I asked. I wanted to know why I was here, but while I was here I wanted to help where I could. I wanted to be brave in front of Briq, but inside I was a little scared.

“The best thing for you to do is to stay safe,’ Briq said as he left the room.

An older elf came in and led me to another room that appeared to be a guest room. Everything was dusty, as if they didn't get too many guests. I sat on the firm bed and waited for Briq's return. If Briq thought it best for me to be here, then that was where I would stay. As I sat in the room, thoughts of Mom came rushing into my head, memories of my childhood and how she was always there when things got rough. I wanted her there right then to ease my worrying.

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Much later, an older looking elf with green robes walked into my room, “Master Darian, Briq has requested your presence.” he said.

I followed him back to the master hall, where Kaz and Briq were sitting at a table talking. They were both in full battle attire, Briq wearing a black finely woven chain mail shirt that had to be mithral, and a buckler with the emblem of Jakra strapped to his back, while Kaz had on leather. They looked up as I walked into the room and motioned for me to come and sit with them.

“Do you have any idea why Eldamada would be after you?” Briq asked.

“I have no idea. I am not even from here. Why would she be after me? I didn’t do anything.” Why would an evil sorceress be after a kid who is not even from here? What did I do to her?

“Well, her welcoming party is still out there and they keep yelling your name.”

“I swear to you both, I don’t know anything.” I looked over at Kaz and he looked deep in thought.

He got up from the chair he was sitting in and walked over to Briq. “*briq there is someone that can help find out what we need to know,*” Kaz said.

“Alleron the Sage of Mindell,” Briq said.

I didn’t know what was going on. I was starting to think that Briq thought I was a spy. That is why he would want me to go see Alleron. Alleron was known for his earlier years for fighting in the “Great Split”, as I had read at home, but now that he was older he helped defend the city of Mindell. Alleron was also part of the ruling council that oversaw the government.

“We must leave through the back way out. I need all the archers to watch our backs as we leave. Kaz, you will come with me,” Briq said. “Darian, you ride with Kaz. We must make haste. The ride to Mindell will take several days.”

Although I still didn’t know what was going on, I felt that if I was with Briq I would be safe.

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“Darian, are you in here?” Dad asked as he walked into my room. “Did you fall asleep at your desk again? Well, this day has been rough on all of us. I’d better put you in

bed or you will get an awful neck ache. In the morning, we have to go to the funeral home and make arrangements for Mom. Sleep tight, Son.”

### III

A beast, bigger than any human, marched down a dark, damp corridor toward a chamber. This beast was no ordinary beast. It had the body of a human, the upper torso of a bull. He was a Minotaur, a creature of great strength, but lacking in any other attribute.

As he entered the chamber he could hear the moans and groans of the tortured souls in the possession of Eldamada. The hair on his back rose, as a scream of one of the tortured souls cut through his ear canals like the blade of one of his adversaries. He looked to his left and right, and then he stopped and looked over his back. In the underground, even the lights that the torches gave off were not safe. He found what he was looking for when he saw a woman standing looking over a table covered in scrolls and tombs. The beast bowed at her feet.

“Mistress, we regret to inform you that the boy got away,” the beast said.

“Why is it when I need something done, none of you livestock can do it for me?” Eldamada said.

The dark sorceress Eldamada had been a member of the great council. That was almost a century ago. She had been banished from the position of honor because of her evil tendencies. Alleron of Mindell had helped the council overthrow her.

“Alleron, now I will get my revenge. And I have the perfect thing to get your attention,” Eldamada said as she looked across the cavern to a cell made of bones. “Your weak spot, old friend, is the fact that you help the helpless. Not this time.” She looked

back at the beast. “General, I want you to take twenty of your best fighters and keep Briq from reaching Mindell.”

“Yes, Mistress.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Since we had left Ribam, we rode as fast as we could toward Mindell. The forest was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. This was my first time on a horse and after we rode out of the forest we rode into the Plains of Elanthur. The long desert plains were rough and I was growing tired.

“Briq, how much longer till we reach Mindell?” I said.

“We should be there in another day or so,” he said.

I was so tired that we stopped at an oasis just on the border of Amir, the capital city. The oasis was lush and full of vegetation of all kinds.

“*stop!*” Kaz said. “*I heard foot steps up ahead.*”

Kaz reached behind him and grabbed his longbow. He took two arrows from the quiver at the side of his stallion, and notched them both.

Briq slid down the side of his horse, pulled his sword from its scabbard and said, “Jakra, give me strength.” The blade of the sword engulfed itself in flames.

Kaz handed me a short sword and said, “*use it for protection. whatever eldamada wants with you we will not allow.*”

“Kaz, look out!” Briq shouted.

At that moment a spear went flying at Kaz. I looked ahead and there were about twenty Minotaurs waiting to ambush us. They must have been hiding in the deep vegetation of the oasis. Kaz dodged at the last second and then let the two arrows fly

from his bow. One found its mark between the eyes of a Minotaur and the other a shoulder. Briq was concentrating on something and mumbled words I could not hear. Even though I couldn't understand it, Kaz must have been the one the message was intended for, because at that moment he jumped off the horse and pulled three more arrows out and took down two more Minotaurs. I looked over to check on Briq and he was already in the middle of the bunch fighting them off.

A couple of the beasts slipped through and grabbed me from behind. Struggling I shouted, "Briq, help!" I dropped my sword. "Briq, Kaz, anyone, help!" I cried again.

After that I don't remember much. All I could remember was the time when I was five, and was playing outside and fell off our front porch. Mom came rushing outside when I was yelling and crying. That's what I wanted to happen now. Inside I was that five year old yelling and crying, but this time I knew that Mom couldn't rescue me.

When I came to I was in a chamber with Kaz and Briq. "We got away?" I said.

"If it were not for Alleron hearing your plea and blinding the minotaur we would not be here right now. Kaz and I owe you great thanks," Briq said.

"Don't thank me then. Thank Alleron."

*"you need to get your rest. you were hit in the head. Tomorrow we have a meeting with the great sage. He has many questions for you,"* Kaz said.

.....

*"Darian, wake, Alleron wants to speak with you. You have been asleep for almost a day. we must speak with Alleron now,"* Kaz said.

"I didn't do anything. Why does he want to talk to me?" I said.

Inside I still thought that Briq, Kaz, and Alleron thought that I was a spy for someone. I guess if someone was to look different in my world, or someone from a different country was at my house, I would think they might be a spy. I wasn't, and I hoped Alleron knew that. All I wanted was to get home.

*“he wants to help you and he thinks he knows why Eldamada is after you.”*

I had been trying, since I got there, to figure out why I was there. If anyone could tell me why, Alleron could. I didn't want them to think that I was there to spy for Eldamada-or for anyone else for that matter.

*“We must make haste”* Kaz said.

All I wanted was for this bad dream to end. I wanted to wake up and have Mom alive and everything back to normal. I knew that wouldn't happen because Kaz was still standing in front of me. I hoped Alleron was as good at what he did as he seemed to be in the books I had read.

*“Darian, make haste, Alleron is a busy person,”* Kaz said.

Kaz started to look impatient so I got up and followed Kaz through many different corridors. All the hallways had paintings and maps of different worlds. There were a few maps that looked familiar but Kaz didn't give me time to investigate.

We finally came to an iron door. Briq was standing there waiting on us before we spoke with the sage.

*“Darian, just tell the truth. If you don't tell the truth Alleron will know. All he wants to do is help,”* Briq said.

I nodded at Briq and we walked into a room that was lined with book shelves and scroll racks. The books had so much dust that it smelled as if they hadn't been touched in

years. There was a big table in the middle of the room and it too was covered with maps and open books. On the south side of the room a fire was going in the fireplace and two chairs stood next to the fire. In one of the chairs sat Alleron. Alleron was ageless. He was wearing a red robe, the color of his deity, and had a white beard that reached the middle of his chest. Beside his chair was a long wooden staff that had a claw of an eagle holding a diamond.

“Master Darian, come sit. We have much to talk about,” Alleron said.

I was nervous, but I sat down. Alleron looked at me and what I was wearing. I knew that he was studying me.

“Darian, I know that you are not from here. I had a dream a week ago. In that dream, Jesika, the goddess of wisdom and sorcery, came to me and told me that a young one was coming and was in need of my help. I also know that Eldamada is after you. Do you know my past with Eldamada?” Alleron said.

“Yes, sir. I have read many stories about you,” I said.

“Then you know that in the battle that I had with her, she lost her immortality. The only way for her to get it back was to digest two souls that are connected by true love. Darian, what is the truest love?”

“The love between a man and his wife.”

“Close, but there is one even truer. The love between a woman and her child. Eldamada has gone to your world and has stolen your mother’s life force. Unfortunately you had to see the aftermath of what someone looks like when their life force is stolen. However, she cannot devour that life force until she has yours as well. Your mother is not

actually dead. That is the good news. The bad news is that we have to get her life force back without losing yours.”

I was awe struck. I didn’t know what to say. I knew that the map on the table looked familiar, but I hadn’t looked at it long enough to realize that it was a map of the United States. Alleron had been doing his homework. All I wanted was to get Mom back.

“Why did she pick me?” I asked.

“I can’t tell you why Eldamada does what she does. I don’t understand it myself.”

“What can we do to get my Mom’s life force back?” I asked.

“As you can see, I have been working on that. I haven’t come up with a plan yet, but we can come up with something,” Alleron said. Then he looked over at Briq, and said, “Briq, we have been together for some time now. You and I both know that we cannot let Eldamada go on a rampage now. We almost have her contained.”

“What do you have in mind?” Briq said, folding his arms.

“Hold on a minute. What happens if we get Mom back? Can you send me home? Is she going to be okay?” I asked.

“Darian, everything will be fine. We need to worry about getting her life force back first,” Alleron said.

*“Alleron, what if we take his mother by force? i can get an army of some of the warriors of Ribam, and Briq, do you know anyone?”* Kaz said.

“Kaz, thank you for the idea, but we should fight magic with magic. There is one thing that we could do, but for this to work we would need one life force to take the place of Darian’s mother,” Alleron said.



“Alleron, are you saying we could get her life force back without even having to go underground? All we have to do is find a life force to replace his mother's?” Briq said.

“Not just any life force, but one that is true.”

“How are we supposed to find that?” I said.

I didn't want anyone else to die just because of my family, but I really wanted my mother and my life back. Briq went and sat down at the table. He took off the necklace that he was wearing. It had the emblem of Jakra on it. He stared at it as if he were contemplating something important.

“Briq, you can't do what you are thinking.” I said. I knew what he was thinking because I was ready to go fight and possibly lose my life to get her back.

“Darian, I have been here for more than my time. I have done many great things as well as some terrible things. Maybe giving my life to save yours and your mother's will make up for some of the evil things I did when I was younger,” Briq said.

I began to cry. I didn't know what to say. He handed me his necklace and told Alleron to do what he needed to do. Alleron asked for Kaz and me to leave the room.

“Briq, do you really know what you are doing?” I said.

“Darian, live a good life. I want you to help the helpless and remember everything you have seen and heard. Live your life to the fullest that you can,” Briq said. “Alleron, when you finish, Eldamada is defeated, right?”

“This was a desperate attempt for her. She is running out of ideas and the little power that she was left with will fade before the next full moon,” Alleron said. “Kaz, please take Darian back to his room. This process could take a little time.”

Before Kaz could guide me out of the room, I ran and hugged Briq, “Thank you for everything.” Briq hugged me back and said, “Never forget.”

“I won’t,” I said.

Then Kaz took me back to my room in Alleron’s tower.

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Hours later Alleron came to my room.

“I have finished. It is time for you to return home, young one,” he said.

He touched me and then I must have fallen asleep, because I don’t remember what happened.

#### IV

“Darian, wake up, Son. You’ve got to get ready for school,” Dad said.

“Okay, Dad,” I said.

I walked out into the kitchen and smelled the pancakes we were having for breakfast.

“Morning, Champ,” Dad said. “What’s going on after school?”

“Nothing,” I said.

“You need to get involved in some after school activity. I know we just moved here last week, but you know I had to. I couldn’t pass up this job opportunity.”

“I know, Dad. It’s just that I don’t fit in here.”

“You just need to find a friend.”

“Dad, where’s Mom?”

“You know, I think she is still in bed,” he said. “Why don’t you go wake her?”

“Okay,” I said.

It was at that point that it hit me. I looked down and I was wearing the emblem of Jakra around my neck. I started to cry. I went in and ran to the side of the bed.

“Mom, get up,” I said.

I saw her roll over in bed, and then I looked at her face and all I could think of was the sacrifice that Briq had made.

“What? I don’t have to work today,” she said.

“I am so glad to see you again.”

“What do you mean? You just saw me last night, Darian.”

I reached out and hugged my mother as though I had not seen her in a year.

“I don’t know what I mean, Mom. I just want you to know that I love you.” I knew there were other people who loved us too, people my mom would never meet.

## CIRCLE

An old man walked a mile,  
Passing a child with a smile.

Day by day, at the bend,  
Came their passing with no end.

Until one day, he called by no delay,  
“Child, what is it that you do today?”

“Old man, I must say,  
It is nothing new from yesterday.”

Then the old man called again,  
“Again and again, yet still you grin?”

The child stood, walked his way,  
“Isn’t fine to be so gay?”

“Fie! Fie! It is a shame,  
Always being much the same.”

“Would the sun be our Sunday bread,  
If it stuck to our head?”

“Would our Spring be so dear,  
If our Autumn wasn’t near?”

The child scratched his head a might,  
“Old man, you may very well be right!”

“But, old man, wise I think you be,  
But I ask three questions of this to thee.”

“Does the sun swoon  
To the mantle of the moon?”

“Does the Fall locust  
Smother the Spring crocus?”

“And if I frown

Would it be your crown?"

"Nay! Nay! Would I make of thee,  
To come to such a travesty."

The child smiled at the old man's reply,  
And from the mouth he had great supply.

"When my Spring no longer smiles,  
I come to walk your many trials."

"And when your miles come to end,  
Tomorrow you smile at the bend."

A REQUIEM FOR PAST LIFE  
MANNEQUINS

Thoughts are swishing about my brain  
like mouthwash  
that I can't spit out  
but only burns, deeper, deeper

I shouldn't have opened the box  
of her things,  
the dress purple with golden lace--  
a gown of royalty  
put on while writing her poetry  
and studying meditation and chakras  
and so...

I thought you were  
reliving the same women, like  
we are mannequins  
plastic molds you requested--  
confident enough to be creative  
needy enough to accept a Savior

Savoir--that's what she wrote  
after her husband left her  
and her chin scraped the gravel  
while all I can think of  
is that she is older and heavier  
and I hate that I realize this

So I remind myself  
to let her go in the rain  
and the wind  
and the air that  
licks out the candle flame  
by the window, in a storm

I must keep the past  
where it is, let the dust collect  
over already bumpy scabs

So I closed the box

I tip-toed away  
And I blew a kiss to the sad alcoholic I never met  
except in occasional shots of Yaegermister  
and college drunken binges  
where my legs dance by themselves  
and my head feels like it floats, on a string

She is what I could have been

And I hear her scream to change  
I see her sobriety countdown  
and I picture piles of tissue paper by crumpled poetry  
and open diapers  
like blossomed flowers on the floor  
that broke open like drops of water--  
tears hitting the floor  
and I thrash my mane about  
not in anger,  
but in awakening, in release  
to become empty, in order to be full  
to breathe in again recycled air made new  
Nothing is truly separate  
and I need to get on birth control  
and maybe leave my own box behind--  
a requiem for past-life mannequins.

## FORSAKEN

When the sirens wail again they'll come for me. I know they're coming... those creatures... the other world. It all started with a blaring siren, after all. I'd heard it wailing outside my bedroom window, climbed out of bed, and when I stepped outside my front door the world shifted. With the sirens had come darkness, fog, the streets had begun to cave in suddenly, people lost their faces.

There is no other way to describe it, really. I'd stepped out the front door and the world I'd always known had changed. Rusty fences had grown up over everything, blockading certain streets and alleys, forbidding entry to any of the surrounding homes and businesses. Those things, those people who'd become faceless, scuttled along the crumbling roads like snakes with legs. They'd darted out from under the parked cars, they'd hobbled along on their wobbly knees, their malformed bodies convulsing.

Naturally, I'd been much too fearful to call out to them or touch them. I didn't even want to *look* at them, you see. I'd turned to go back into my home, only to find that it was gone. Well, not completely *gone* but the house that waited for me was not the home that I knew. Its outer walls were now covered in a tar-like grime, the windows boarded over, the porch sad and weak as if aged beyond use.

The fog thickened around me as I stood gaping at my transformed home, its icy fingers creeping into my nose and chilling my throat. The fog was dense, white and thick like a stretched cotton ball, hovering about the area like a sentient being. It seemed to hunger, to desire to devour all it could, but I'd not let it have me.

So, I began to run. I'd run blindly through the streets, able to see only the white of



the fog. The scuttling creatures had followed me, clicking and screeching, communing with one another as they tracked my movements. They had all seemed to know me, what I'd done, but I hadn't understood how that was possible. Why should they want to follow me, anyway, I'd not done anything wrong... nothing *really* bad....

I bet I'd run a mile or more before I heard the splitting whine of the sirens and the fog lifted suddenly. In the blink of an eye the world had been restored, the ugly rust-ridden wire mesh retracted from the streets and buildings, the scuttlings became silent. I'd found myself standing in a fountain, in the park near my home. I knew the park well, it was only a ten minute walk from my house, but how had I ended up such a short distance from where I'd started after such running? Where had the scuttlings gone? Confused? So was I....

That encounter, which I'll call the first day, occurred two days ago. On the second day, I'd gone to my doctor and I'd told him how the world had shifted. He'd had the nerve to suggest I go back on medication, thought me crazy. Crazy. So quick people are to use that word, that judgment....

The radio upon the doctor's desk had begun to go wild about the time I'd finished explaining to him that I didn't need medication (I didn't see why he couldn't understand that I was not out of my mind). The radio station it had been set to vanished, replaced only by jolting, dead static. Then the sirens had come, screaming, tearing into my mind, forcing me into their reality. The doctor shifted right before my eyes, along with the walls and the floor and the furniture. He became faceless, his features malformed, shifting like hot, molten tar. Then it'd made sense to me, he'd not believed me because he was *one of them*. He'd like me to believe myself insane so I'd not learn the truth.

I'd run from him, of course, only to discover that the entire building had become infested with scuttlings. The once pristine wallpaper had been replaced by discolored, soiled sheets of cloth that seemed to pulse along the walls as if someone was standing behind them... breathing against them....

I'd fled the building, I'd run like a madman down the foggy streets, occasionally bumping into the rusty wire barricades; the fog had become so thick that I'd not even been able to see my own hand before my eyes. All the normal people in town were gone, missing, leaving only the scuttlings to keep me company. I'd run for at least an hour before the sirens sounded again and again I found myself standing in the exact same fountain once the fog lifted. Confused? I was getting a bit irritated.

They next wailed during the night of the second day, blaring and drilling their way into my brain. Already I'd grown to loathe them, a hatred born from the way the sirens violated me, dragging me into their world. The sirens, the call of the scuttlings, but this time around I'd discovered that I was no longer alone with them. I'd run into a man close to my age, a human - or so it seemed.

A man of fairly average height and build, dressed in dark blue jeans and a pale gray shirt, he had appeared trustworthy enough. I'd guessed him to be in his early thirties, his sandy hair cut fairly short, his eyes a murky blue-gray. His features had struck me as quite sharp but the simple fact that he *had* a face at all was enough to win my trust.

I'd first noticed him as he walked down the street, moving through the fog almost in sync alongside me. He'd turned his head just as I did, staring at me as I'd stared at him, both of us looking curious and a bit confused.

It hadn't been his first time to be called into the world of the sirens, either. I'd been

able to tell by his demeanor, the way he was walking calmly just as I was. Neither of us had seen much reason to take off in a mad rush at this point, the scuttlings were fairly quiet, the fog dangerously thick.

We'd eventually come across a bench, covered in the same rust-colored stain but unencumbered by the wire mess that confined the majority of the town around us. I'd sat on the left side and he'd sat on the right, I'd crossed my right leg and he'd crossed the left. "So," he sighed, speaking as casually as one friend might to another. "What sort of killer are you?"

I supposed I'd gotten quite a flustered expression upon my face because he'd begun to laugh at me almost immediately after asking his question. He'd reached into his pocket, offered me a cigarette, but I refused; I'd quit months ago.

"What sort of question is that?" I'd asked, sounding defensive.

"I killed my brother," he'd replied, slowly exhaling a puff of smoke that had immediately become assimilated by the hovering fog. "He wanted to die, he told me he did, so I gave him what he wanted. What do you have to say about that? Noble or cruel?"

"Y-You're for real?" I'd gasped. "You're telling me that you really killed your brother?"

"In a fountain," he'd said without a shred of concern or remorse in his voice. "You know the one. In the park by that statue that got its head knocked off a while back. Stupid punks."

I'd felt my heart skip a beat, unable to take my eyes off the man's face. The fountain. That damned fountain that I'd found myself in each time the sirens recalled their fog and the scuttlings. This man had killed his brother there? Murder. How could anyone murder someone they cared about... not that being related necessarily guaranteed

affection between two people.

"Everyone knew he was trouble," the man had gone on to say. "No one really questioned his death. He'd had a lot of drugs in his system, they assumed he'd fallen into the water and drowned. No questions asked, just shipped him off to the morgue."

"How could you live with that?" I had asked sharply. "You didn't confess to anyone?"

"I've just told you, haven't I? *You* know all about it. You'd have done the same," he'd said.

"I'd been forced to take care of him for years - five *long* years. I was... tired."

I'd adamantly shaken my head at him, my face fixed in an expression of disgust. I'd never be able to live with myself if I'd done something so terrible and then tried to hide it. The audacity of that man to have compared me to him was infuriating, what I'd done was nowhere near as sinister as what he'd just described. What I'd done... what *was* it that I had done? I wondered at the time why I suddenly felt so afraid.

That man, that murderer, had simply begun to sneer at me in between taking puffs on his smoldering cigarette. He'd been so smug, so unremorseful, so uncaring. I refused to see anything of myself in him.

"My brother was sick, you see," he'd eventually said lightly. "Messed up in the head and body. He was going to get himself killed eventually, he said so himself. He was over it all. He wanted a way out... but... he was a weak kid, you know. I cared for him, but he wanted to die. He asked me for help."

"And so you *killed* him?" I'd squawked.

"You say it so negatively," he'd chuckled. "What else was I to do? Part of me wanted him gone since it seemed he'd never be well, I don't deny that, but death is what he wanted. I mean, we'd already tried all the treatment plans and medications. You know

how well *meds* work."

He'd snickered a bit at that last statement, a wicked gleam of wry delight in his eyes. He'd enjoyed toying with my mind, I realize that now, but at the time I allowed myself to fall into his game. He'd stared as if he knew all about me, staring with the same knowing that all the scuttlings had seemed to have. I'd begun to wonder if he wasn't somehow one of them, in disguise, perhaps.

"Who are you?" I'd asked.

"Oh, come on now, Mason," he'd replied with a dry laugh. "Don't tell me you've gone that far off the deep end. You know me as well as you know yourself. Well, judging from how you've behaved so far, that doesn't seem to hold as much weight as one might think, eh?"

"H-How do you know my name?" I'd gasped.

"You don't know even that?" he'd sighed; he'd seemed disappointed. "No wonder you're lost in the fog. Your dad always said you weren't the brightest... maybe he was right after all. You're certainly not the bravest. Always whining, afraid of finding out the things you've allowed yourself to forget. I don't know why I'm even here talking to you, it seems a waste of time."

He'd gotten to his feet by that point, standing before me, his face obscured by the fog. I'd remained still, uncertain of what I should do. He'd tossed his cigarette to the ground and sighed, breathing in the turbid fog that swirled about us both. A scuttling darted out from behind the bench, screeching as it slithered along. I'd shouted out in terror and the murderer had simply laughed.

"They know you better than you do," he'd chuckled. "Look at their faces, Mason, maybe

it'll all start to come back to you.... I wonder, though, if you'll be able to handle it when that cloud over your memory clears."

"Shut up!" I snapped; I'd heard enough. "I'd rather be alone than listen to you! You're insane!"

*"I am insane? The judged now becomes a magistrate? That's a good one, Mason."*

Slowly the sirens began to cut through the air, calling out with their piercing song. For once I was slightly relieved to hear them, eager to get away from this man, this killer, who claimed to know me so well. He'd stared into the fog almost as if able to spot the source of the sirens' cries, then he his head at me.

"Callin' it quits already, huh," he sighed. "Well, I suppose you are feeling a bit overloaded at the moment. I won't leave you alone, though. The sirens won't stop, the scuttlings will always be ready to come for you... always until you realize what you are."

The fog had begun to lift and I soon found myself standing in the fountain in the park. The man had disappeared, along with the fog and the grime and the wire mesh; I'd never been so relieved. It was to be a short period of relief, however, for as I made my way home from the park something strange had occurred... I saw a scuttling....

It'd been underneath a car parked outside my home, a car my neighbor had never bothered to move after vandals had slashed its tires. First I heard the screech, a click, and then I'd seen its seething head worm its way out into my sight. Gasping, I surveyed my surroundings, but it was clear that I was not in the siren world. I dared to get closer to the car, to stare down at the hideous creature....

It could not have lasted for more than a few seconds but I swear to you that as the scuttling flopped its head up toward me I saw a face buried beneath the many layers of

horrid, molten deformity. It'd been a familiar face, one I instinctively knew that I should recognize, but names failed to come to mind. Fair-skinned, pale blue eyes, dark blonde hair, young... frustratingly familiar....

Both the face and the scuttling itself were gone after I'd briefly closed and re-opened my eyes. I found solace in blaming an overactive imagination for the sight and had planned to enter my home, eager to climb into bed and hope the hellish sirens would never again call out to me - it was a solace that would prove to be futile.

As I approached the front steps of my home I'd turned briefly, to peer back at the car one last time, and when I did I saw him there. That man. That killer. I'd run toward my house, through the front door, I *knew* he was following close behind. I'd charged up the stairs and entered my bedroom, planned to reach for the telephone, but already knew it was too late; the murderer was already in the room with me.

In the bathroom, he stood in front of the sink. Average in height and build, short sandy hair, murky blue-gray eyes. He stared at me just as I stared at him, slightly angry and at the same instant a bit startled. As I began to walk toward him, my eyes warned me that there was something amiss despite the fact that my brain could not ascertain what that might be, and as I approached, he had seemed to do the same....

That was when I realized that there was no person standing before me, only a mirror. That man's face, that killer's face, was my own. It sounds ludicrous, I know, to talk as though one could forget their own appearance.... I stand here now looking into my own eyes and wondering why they seem so alien. I see myself but I see that man as well, the man who had killed his brother in that fountain, the man who had been too cowardly to admit the deed even to himself. I did it.

That scuttling had carried the face of my brother, Gary, the young man I'd decided to kill in order to stop the sufferings in this life. Had I known the other scuttlings as well? Had I done something similar to each of them? I can't tell you... I don't quite have that kind of grip upon my own memory yet. It is a... disturbing thought, to say the least, isn't it? Lying to others was easy for me, lying to myself had proven to be not much more difficult though far less permanent. Lost in the fog, yes, I had been, but now I at last see....

Suddenly, today, I understand. I hear the sounds of the world fading as the siren begins to beckon to me this one last time, offering an invitation I have the choice to reject. All this time I had been wondering around, refusing to see what had always been before my eyes. Now that I have gained clarity, I know I have a choice to make. I don't dare speak the truth aloud; I'd sooner dig my own grave. I close my eyes, turn away from the mirror, and I focus on the lonesome wailing outside my window and inside my head.

Today when the sirens finish their song I'll enter their world with some insight into what I've done and who I am. I needed them to remind me of what I really am but now... now I hope they will grant me a reprieve... a chance to allow that fog to embrace me... consume me... ease my mind. The sirens finish their lonesome wail... I feel them coming to take me under....



**USA**

The fast-food eating,  
Garbage reading  
Americans.

The super size,  
Extra fries  
Consumers.

The pocket feeding,  
Mind depleting  
Obese.

The happy meal,  
Young, ideal  
teens.

These are the things  
That America is made of.

## WHERE IS MY DADDY

I remember going for a drive very late at night. The air was crisp and I could hear the snow scrunching with each footstep as my Mommy carried me into a huge building with a lot of bright lights. A stranger came and took me into a big room filled with many large machines that flickered with small flashing lights. It smelled funny in there; not like my bedroom. They put me down onto a large, cold bed and began to take my warm pajamas from me. I was beginning to get very scared and started to cry. Where are my Mommy and Daddy?

People started coming into the room and to look at me. They hurt me as they stuck needles into my arms. I saw blood come out into small tubes. I noticed a big bag of medicine above my head dripping into long tubes attached to another needle in my arm. A big scary man came into the room and told me that he wanted to take pictures of my arms and legs. When he finished, a pretty lady took me for a ride in the bed down long hallways. She took me to another cold room that was very dark. This man said he wanted to take pictures of my head and belly. They put me inside of a big tube and it started making funny noises. I was so scared and nobody seemed to care. I finally went back to the brightly lit room where there were a whole bunch of doctors and nurses. I still could not find my Mommy and Daddy.

I began to cry again and the doctors decided it was time for me to go to sleep. I watched with fear as they put medicine into the long tube in my arm. The doctors put tubes down my throat. They hurt me so much, but I could no longer cry. I just wanted my Mommy and Daddy to take me home to my own warm bed.

I was put into a big ambulance with bright flashing lights and loud sirens roaring to a place they called Indianapolis. When we arrived, a lot of new doctors and nurses started touching me. Why are they doing this and please God, where are my Mommy and Daddy? I scanned the room

looking for a familiar face and saw none. I want to cry but I still cannot. Please ,somebody, help me find my parents. Where is my Mamaw? She *always* makes me feel better.

It is early morning and again, they take me to a new room. Through the long cold hallways, in and out of elevators, I finally stop in a blue room with more machines and flashing lights. Other machines are beeping different noises and they hook all of them to me. As I look around, I finally see my Mommy and my Mamaw! They seem so sad. Why are they crying and where is my Daddy? I want my Daddy to come and take me to all the places we used to go. He took me to Mommy's work and her school. He took me to his work but my favorite place was my Mamaw's house. We have so much fun together.

The next day is here. It is so cold outside and I can see the snow falling outside my window. It is so pretty and full of sparkles. Mom and Mamaw have stayed at my side all night long. My Mommy keeps reading books to me and my Mamaw is telling me to open my eyes and talk to her like I used to. I am trying... but they just will not open. I am so confused. I began to see many other familiar faces in my room but I still cannot find my Daddy. My Mamaw kisses me and tells me she will be right back. I watch her leave the room with all the doctors that had been looking at me. She asks a lot of questions and I heard them tell her that I was hurt real bad. They told her that I had two broken legs, several skull fractures, a broken arm, several fractured ribs, and that my brain was bleeding. Mamaw began to scream and cry. She asked so many questions and nobody could answer them.

"I have waited for you, Daddy, and you have not come. I cannot hold on much longer. You see, there are other babies out there that need to go home to their parents and I can help them. You taught me to be very generous to my fellow man, Daddy, and that is what I must do. Today, I would like for all the pain to be gone. I have talked to God and we have decided

who needs my heart, liver, and kidneys. We want them to get better and feel all the love my heart has been blessed with. You, Mommy, and Mamaw, gave me the greatest gift anyone could ever have. You gave me so much love that I knew I had to share it. So, it's ok now... unplug the machines... make the hissing and beeping stop. Turn out the lights... I need to see you, Daddy."

My Mamaw holds me as I expel my last breath. She promises me she will find the truth. I know my Mamaw, and she WILL find the truth. I drift away. God takes my tiny hand and now I get to see my Daddy!

"Mamaw, please stop crying, this was not your fault and you are filled with so much pain. Please, God, help my Mamaw. She cannot hold her head up anymore and she is forgetting how to breathe. She made a promise to me and you must help to guide her and show her the truth. Give her the strength to understand *how and why* this happened. Mamaw lost Daddy and me on the same day but she is only burying one of us. I am so confused. Where is my Daddy, God? You promised. There he is! I finally see my Daddy. Oh no, he is so sad too. What is happening? Daddy, please hold me. God, why won't you let my Daddy hold me?" *My dear son, your Daddy is not with us yet.* "If he is not here with us, then where is he? *He has been accused of murdering you, my child. He is in jail. That is why your Mamaw made you that promise. I will give her the strength that she needs to go on with her life and to find the truth. I gave her the autopsy report. I am so sorry that the doctors cut you all over your body just to prove that your legs were not broken, your skull was not fractured, and you were not hurt like they said. Unfortunately, in today's corrupt world, one is found guilty and must prove their innocence.*"

Then, God, can you please tell me why they still think my Daddy murdered me? We both know the truth. *"Yes, child, we do. And soon, so will everyone else."*



## SOUL POOL

There are stories all around  
 like mirrors in a madhouse  
 slanted by perception  
 but maybe with some form of truth underneath  
 some basic shape of sanity  
 and meaning, existing alone

But the stories live to be told  
 to show truth  
 relative to the speaker.  
 And maybe that's all there is  
 So we have to live to hear  
 and die to tell  
 Our story that is only one, but part of a longer saga  
 with billions of soul-whispered tales  
 intermingling in a pool in the air...

The tree undresses itself  
 releasing its scent, peeling its bark,  
 like withering pages from a Bible,  
 leaves collecting in the wind  
 gathering by a fellow fallen tree  
 who'd been around before cars were a thought  
 before flying was more than sleep  
 in a dreamer's eyes  
 before a park was built around it  
 and its dead trunk was cut to clear the sidewalk...

The treestump is its own tombstone.  
 And if you stand on it  
 and imagine what it's like to see  
 without your eyes  
 you might feel a trunk  
 encapsulating your body  
 with leaves blowing from  
 your fingertips

which the wind so likes to  
work from your grasp  
separating your branches with teasing whispers  
while a river passes nearby  
and you wave to each current of water  
as it gathers in the lakes  
and heads on into the ocean.

## HERO

A man takes the mound.  
 The leather tightly wrapped around his hand,  
 And the ball in the other.  
 The morning sun beats down on his head like a hammer.  
 Yet he presses on.

He stares in to get the sign.  
 He shakes it off.  
 I guess he didn't like the call.  
 Or maybe something else is wrong.  
 He looks again,  
 And agrees to what he sees.  
 He grips the ball by the seams.  
 Ready to uncork the power from within.  
 "BALL FOUR," yells the man behind the plate.  
 Yet he presses on.

He grabs the bat and walks toward the plate.  
 Grinding his cleats into the dirt,  
 He spits toward the mound,  
 As to say, "Give me all you got!"  
 He stares at the opposition  
 Here it comes!  
 The pitch he has been waiting for.  
 He hits the ball deep into right field.  
 His teammates, one after another, battle to get on base,  
 But they can't.  
 Yet he presses on.

He checks his blood sugar in between innings,  
 Forty-six.  
 He grabs a drink and heads to the mound.  
 He knows he could pass out at any moment.  
 Yet he presses on.

The sun is still hammering,  
 The pitch count is 166.  
 The game is over,  
 The game not won.  
 Yet he presses on.



## BIOS

### KIEFER MARVIN R

Marvin is a 32 year old senior majoring in English. He is a resident of Columbus, Indiana. He has an Associate's in Science from Vincennes University, a Bachelor's of Science in Journalism from Ball State University. His plans are to teach English as a Second Language in Europe, or going to graduate school at IUPUI or IU, or returning to Alaska.

### LAY POLLY

Polly Lay is currently a full-time student at IUPU Columbus. She works in the Writing Center, is a student mentor, orientation leader, and serves as treasurer of student council. Polly is majoring in social work, with a minor in criminal justice. Her plans include attending law school at IUPUI.

Polly is considered a non-traditional student, but feels very much at home here on the Columbus campus. Polly is the mother of three sons, all over the age of 18, and is a grandmother of one.

### LESLEY KIMBERLY

Kim is a senior in the photography program at Herron School of Art and will be graduating next May. She currently works at the Central Public Library in Indianapolis. After graduation, Kim plans to take a year off from school to work and travel before pursuing a masters in Photography, and possibly a masters in Library Sciences as well.

### PEARL ALLEN

Allen Pearl has been writing stories and poetry for most of his 22 years. Being a freshman at IUPU Columbus, Allen enjoys the stress that comes with college life. He is an English major, and hopes teach and will attempt to write a novel or two. In his spare time, Allen likes to read and write, plays poker and other games of the sort, and spend time with friends. This is his first time in Literalines, and he hopes it is not his last.

### PHILLIPS JENNIFER

Jennifer graduated from IUPUC in May with a BA in psychology. She has an interest in the nature of people, figuring out what makes them behave as they do from an early age so writing about it seemed like a natural step for her to take. Pursuing a career as a published author, she writes in her spare time, and currently has a novel being considered for publication.

### SCHOEMETTER JESSICA

A senior Psychology student, Jessica wanted to end the semester by submitting some of her poetry here to Literalines. She hopes that this compilation, of her own poetry, and the works of others, brings intrigue, satisfaction, and delight. Happy and blissful readings to you, as you open your hearts and minds to all the glimmering possibilities of art.

### SEXTON DEB

"Mrs. Potter" is the second in a series of stories interlinked with the life of one young girl, Nadine.

The author, Debbie Sexton, draws heavily on the people around her (and most often herself) for her characters. Debbie is currently on sabbatical from her duties as Writing Center tutor and Literalines Editor while she freelances and overdoses on home improvement shows and back to back episodes of *Law and Order*.

**STORM CHAD**

Chad Storm successfully completed Dr. Katherine Wills' W206 Creative Writing class during the fall of 2003. He plans to continue writing, reading and enjoying his life.

**WETZEL RANA**

The author lives in "nothing but cornfields" Indiana with her family. She has been writing poetry and short stories for the past few years between college classes. Now majoring in Psychology, she looks for ways to combine her love of writing with a psychology degree, and is an avid reader of a variety of topics. In her time in a wheelchair, she has learned not only who to trust but how to trust them as well. Sometimes to see the world one needs to be held in the arms of Giants or carried to another level in life.

**WOLF SHAYNA**

Shayna is 22 years old. She is an English major, and hopes to have a writing career after college. Her pastimes include writing, reading, and attending various musicals. She is close to her family and appreciates their support immensely.