



***KINGS***  
***RIVER***  
***REVIEW***

**REEDLEY COLLEGE**  
**FALL 2021**



The logo for 'KRR Review' features the text 'kings river' in a small, vertical, orange font on the left. To its right is a large, stylized 'KRR' in blue, with the 'K' and the first 'R' having a unique, flowing design. The second 'R' is a standard serif font. To the right of the 'KRR' is the word 'Review' in an orange, serif font. Below the 'KRR' and 'Review' text are three wavy blue lines representing water.

kings river  
KRR Review

**FALL 2021**

The *Kings River Review* is published each fall and spring semester by the students in English 15J, Literary Journal Publication. Our desire is to produce a journal that reflects the emerging voices and visions of community college students, designing a space for their creative expression. The journal is named for the Kings River which runs along the western boundary of Reedley College.

The *Kings River Review* is made possible by the support of the Reedley College administration and Title V Grant funding.

We welcome submissions from two-year college students from across the United States. Please visit our website ([kingsriverreview.com](http://kingsriverreview.com)) for submission guidelines

Kings River Review  
995 North Reed Avenue  
Reedley, California 93654  
[kingsriverreview.com](http://kingsriverreview.com)



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Number 1  
Fall 2021

Editors

Luis Barba

Anavela Estrada

Karley Kemble

*Kings River Review* logo courtesy of Steve Norton.  
Printing by Dumont Printing, Fresno, California.

## Letter from the Editors

All members of the *Kings River Review* editorial team are very passionate about all the aspects that come with creating this journal. We like to help creative writers and artists find a way to showcase their works because we want to create a community where all the works are shared. We want to spread art and writing pieces to a community that will bring positivity and support. We hope this would bring people together and bring a discussion about the entries published. We look forward to how it will encourage others to participate and share their pieces. Hopefully this may inspire others to find their voice and not be afraid to share it with the public. We want to spread a cheerful message to the people, where everyone can find something they like. The idea that the creative works will receive recognition and inspire others to be more creative motivates us to work hard in the *Kings River Review* team. Many of the writers and artists work hard on their pieces and we want to give them the proper gratitude they earned. Without them, we wouldn't be given this special opportunity. A lot of passion, creativity, and effort went into all the aspects of creating this journal and in selecting the different types of creative literary works and arts. We hope you enjoy this first edition.

Luis Barba

Anavela Estrada

Karley Kemble



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HOUSTON SASSELLI

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## THE THREE KNIGHTS AND THE KING'S WEB

I should begin by telling you that what is lost cannot always be reclaimed; the most dangerous paths that we follow are the ones that we *wish* to take.

There was once a king whose throne nested in the dark, in the possessions of his past, which now collected dust and moths and spiders with hollow eyes. This king bore no sons nor daughters nor nephews nor nieces, for his family was killed by the savages in the desert, in a war long ago. As such, when it came time for an heir, he was left in ruins. The ghosts of his sons had haunted him in the night, staring at him without word as their wounds seeped their blood deep onto the King's pillow. Soon, the ghosts looked less like his sons—their faces seemed to melt into blankness, though the blood never left. The King grew tired of this, for he could not sleep; his ears had filled with hair, his eyes had overflowed with smoke, his skin drooped in a ghostly solemnness, and there seemed to be no ambition to his breath. As he felt his memory of his family trailing, he called to three knights: a Green Knight who had yet to prove his honor, a Crimson Knight who bore no name, and a Golden Knight who held no journeys in his sagas.

The King told them of a spider beyond the desert, where the Arkanians slept within the sand. The horrid, decrepit beast nestled in a cave in the dark and was said to have lived there since the moon first shined. Her name was *Erilsid* and she had killed the King's second son, whose name the king could not remember.

To the knights, the King choked out his query, pushing his foul face into the light like a rat sniffing from its hole, and he said to

them: “Go upon this journey, and something of which I have will be yours,” and then his cheeks hardened around his lost, stone eyes, “but bring me the legs of the spider and the body of my son, and my kingdom will be yours to rule. Only one of you will claim this reward. This I know.”

Then the king had retrieved a dagger from his belt. He slit his shivering, thin palm open, and blood dripped from his clutches. He choked out again, eyes squinting in the light, “But all of you who accept this journey will be bound to me through blood. Do you accept my query?”

The words were simple, but the knights did not know just what he had asked. The Crimson Knight, who carried no family name, quickly cut his palm, and shook the king’s hand. Walking out of the throne room, he looked like a dog trying not to beg for food. The Green Knight went next and when he dealt with the king, his eyes had changed to his—from a deepened green to a sickly grey. War seemed to be burning within him, and cloud of smoke had been the result.

The last knight, the Golden one, did not go forward. He had yet to make a journey and was still afraid to go. Back home was his straw bed and a farm overlooking the kingdom. It would warm him for the next winter and the winters to come. He told the king he did not accept his offer, yet the king still beckoned to him. Sitting like a child on the throne, the sad king shook the cowardly knight’s hand, and the blood print was stained unto them until their flesh would turn in their graves.

Each knight would inherit the qualities of the king, but only one would reclaim his throne.

The first knight wandered through the desert for four moons. Even with the companionship of his steed, he’d felt a loneliness like none before. He used the moon and the sun as his compass to the cave; but when he caught the planets above glimmering a faint blue, red, and gold, the Crimson Knight had felt as if his had no color.

One night, when a sandstorm had covered the sky, the knight wandered too far from the moon. He rested on the highest dune and tried to remember the faces of his father and mother. Though, when there was nothing to remember, he fell asleep, lost to the sound of the wind. When the storm was over, he found his horse gnawed on by snakes—now flesh turned to bone. Alone, then, he wandered through the desert. His armor burned in the day and froze in the night, and he doubted if there was anyone left in the world but him—he thought maybe his life was all there was, and that his life was cruel. When his water went dry and his lips had gone pale, a serpent had come near him. For the first time on his deadly journeys, the Crimson Knight grew cold with utter fear. His fear grew to anger, and his anger became a compulsive, pounding hunger—and he killed the serpent. He had eaten it, too. And as lay in the caves that night, he watched as the sand floated like snow.

The Arkanians found him sleeping thereafter, in the sand with blood still on his cheeks. The red and orange suns divided his two eyes in their light. One of the deserters challenged him for his weapon, and the knight had killed him. The Arkanians gave him water, destroyed his armor, clothed him in rags, and healed him with mud. He became their warrior. The daughter of the Chief, Aurea told him that everyone should call somewhere “home” and that the desert was theirs. His blood became hers, and he led their people. The knight’s eyes turned white. His sons would go on to wander the desert and tame the beasts who ruled it. Never once were they alone. When the wolf eats the moon, it will be the white eyes who last remain.

Yet the Crimson Knight had never returned to the kingdom. His blood mixed with that of his enemies, but he had still accepted that fate with pride.

The Green Knight took to the desert, too. It was strange for him to be seen with the eyes that the king had given him. He felt as if something strange had grown in them, but it was pure—it

seemed—and good. He found a guide who would take him across a river divided from the loose grains of sand. The knight found the bodies of the native people lying within the sand, bursting into dead flesh opened only by the Heradian cannons...the war weapons of his home. The dead bodies seemed to become one with the desert: he had mistaken many hands for cactuses, and many faces for pillows. The desert was a dune of decomposers—all that which was dead was there, waiting to be buried.

For miles they trudged on their camels and met a new people they had not known, who celebrated their arrival and welcomed the Green Knight, too. The knight had killed a man for them and then another. His bones began to feel heavy, and war had felt an easy thing to do. Yet, a faint glimmer in his eyes seemed unknown and innate. But his ambition to kill the spider went on, and with-it madness began. He would not sleep in the night, often starrng at the fire and telling the guide stories—or saying nothing at all, merely watching the world as it were. They followed the river down, where willows and bushels and birds chirped through the trees, until they heard nothing but a humming twinge. Roots once protruding from the edge of the beaches now broke out into stringy, beating nets. A jungle of webs welcomed them at a mountain's feet, and small spiders roamed along the edge, binding to the string in the quietest, drumming way. It seemed at this time that the knight was the most boastful, telling his guide that they would be rich. The guide stayed behind as the knight pushed forward. His chest pushed forward, ready with pride. Of all the sagas he could have, this would be the one that crowned him king!

The plump, giddy guide had gone grave when they reached the spider's web. The mazes around—they had looked elaborate, planned, and welcome to change. Yet, there was so much order in the chaos of them. He found all of this frightening, and he went no further. The Crimson Knight, in his pride, didn't dare to look at the webs. He traveled only where fortune had taken him. His most no-

ble action was to not fulfil his duty.

The Knight entered the caves of the beast, where bodies cooed in the cavern looked down upon him. The pincers from giant, frost spiders nibbled near his head as they danced across the web. They had crawled on his skin, preparing him for the wicked beast. Suddenly three were on him, then seven, and then nine...all encircling him with their silk. He pried with his sword and pushed with his palms, and yet there was no escape. One had jerked his sword right from his hand, then carried him to the mother. But the knight could not see this. This he did not remember.

The Green Knight awakened to a silver fox, dancing on the strings of the cave. It cut him out and led him through the caverns—where he slashed and killed every pincer he could find. Then he reached Erilsid, whose shadow reigned in the dark. Her sad, little breathes retreated as he pushed near her. The venom in his back seemed to pop as he moved closer, and she retreated into the light. She held her eggs behind her, crying in little, horse squeals. The knight pushed his sword forward—right onto her eye. Then, he noticed the slight glimmer of green in them, and he remembered the eyes of his father and mother—and of his own. He had remembered who he once was, before he sought honor, and suddenly his blade felt heavy. The Green Knight watched as the little spiders—the ones just the size of a rock—moved backwards in the cave, to where a grey light pushed above. Suddenly, his pride had fallen, and his mind roamed away. The eyes which the king had given him faded. He left the cave without the spider's legs and returned home mutilated with scars. They welcomed him back in shame, branding his head with a mark, yet he held nothing but pride. When the king's men beat him, he spat on the king's face...only then realizing what a poor prize the king had offered him. The kingdom was built in a maze of terror, he had found; nothing could escape foul fate of power.

The Green Knight did not win the kingdom; he did not kill any

beast. He had accomplished something greater on his journey. He found something of other gain; and it was not of gold or wine or power, those that are of idle profits. It was courage which he found—that which is not half-regained. Like a flower blemished through stone, he lay still between cracks. Yes, his name was courage. Courage was his name. He sings at night, and not all do so.

Yet this knight did not fulfill the king's quest, and it seemed no one would.

But you will remember that there was a third knight questioned by the old, lost king. This wearied coward held a spineless journey—and yes, there was a journey for him, too. After having a son and losing his wife, the knight isolated himself from the world. He was like a spider spinning its webs in the dark, whose spinneret tossed his silk back to home, where the corn grew stocks each season. The knight harvested and took his wealth in boredom. His lamps tangled and snared in silk. Soon an entire web consumed his cabinets; then they shut his doors; then they piled on his porch; and they ate all the insects that garbled on his grass. No man for miles had questioned him for queries. The knight heard no voice for seven very foolish winters. He grew old with wrinkles, and his face took the imprint of a thumb, and then a hand, and then a body. His blue eyes turned to black. The marking from which the king bound on him kept its crimson red. It infected his arms and turned them black. Roots began to grow from him—but they were not roots—they were legs. He dreamt of flies and of squeaking birds and mice. Soon, fangs sprung from him, and then eyes. Silk covered his house. He crawled like a spider—among the webs and in the dark—spinning and hissing and twiddling his fangs with a vile venom that only produced when he eyed the Kingdom. The knight built a maze without a thought as to why, and every nocturnal dusk he reflected on the king's question. Outside his window, his crops were covered in webs so thick that any man would become stuck if they dared to enter. Only once, his son had visited him to tell him of good news,

but he had not recognized the monster that his father had become. The recluse. The Golden Knight's son looked up at the webs of his father's home and heard only silence. This was the kingdom of which the Golden Knight had ruled: where nothing could enter, and nothing could leave.

When he heard of the Green Knight's return to the kingdom, the coward tried to escape his maze to seek the journey, but his webs were too thick to crawl through. He searched and searched to the end of his house, but he, like a spider's prey, could only squirm while he reached for the door. And so, he remained within his home and turned blind. He soon forgot everything his father had taught him. Then went his memories of his family. He had forgotten to speak; then he had forgotten to sleep; all until he had forgotten to dream. Gone were his memories of the sun—of the times when honor was true—and with that were his ambitions. The world was but a black, hollowed nook which his eight eyes could not see.

The old king went mad without the spider's legs. He had forgotten the very look of his son's face. All that he could think—could dream—were of her pincers. He drank wine until his eyes filled with red, just to wash out the beast. Eternally, he thought of nothing—and that had angered him. All his blame went onto the spider, who kept him awake in the night. Knowing that it still lived—somewhere in the deep caverns—meant that it had still existed in his mind.

The Golden Knight's son was asked by the now aged, bored king to slay a beast beyond the desert with eight legs. The knight had accepted, though with a devious smile. He had gone to his father's home, where he knew his now father nestled in the dark, creeping without light in the misty rooms. His father's eight legs bent like hollowed swords. He breathed in little, sad breaths, that no one could hear. No one could take pity on him...none but himself; and when the time of his death had rung like a bell, not but one soul could hear it. Not even God.

The Golden Knight's son slew his father, and he took his legs to the king. He was rewarded a kingdom, where he spun his webs all about. Soon, the sky was covered in darkness, and no one could see. Upon the end of his days, he crawled to his father's craggy labyrinth, and gave himself to the webs. This would succeed for generations; so is the noble journey of all cowardly knights. All those who are vain will remain in the hollow, poisoning their cave.

This is but of one recount of my village's story. Another tells of fourth knight, whose name I do not know. He, too, was asked to leave his home. Of what path that hero had taken, I don't recall. Because a knight's journey is not of his reward or his triumph, it is of his failure to stay the course and his willingness to accept the call. But those who stay idle will *always* remain in the dark, unable to regain their past.

There are many of us who are asked of great fate, but fate denied is destined to die: all those lost by retreating are muddled to make a maze.



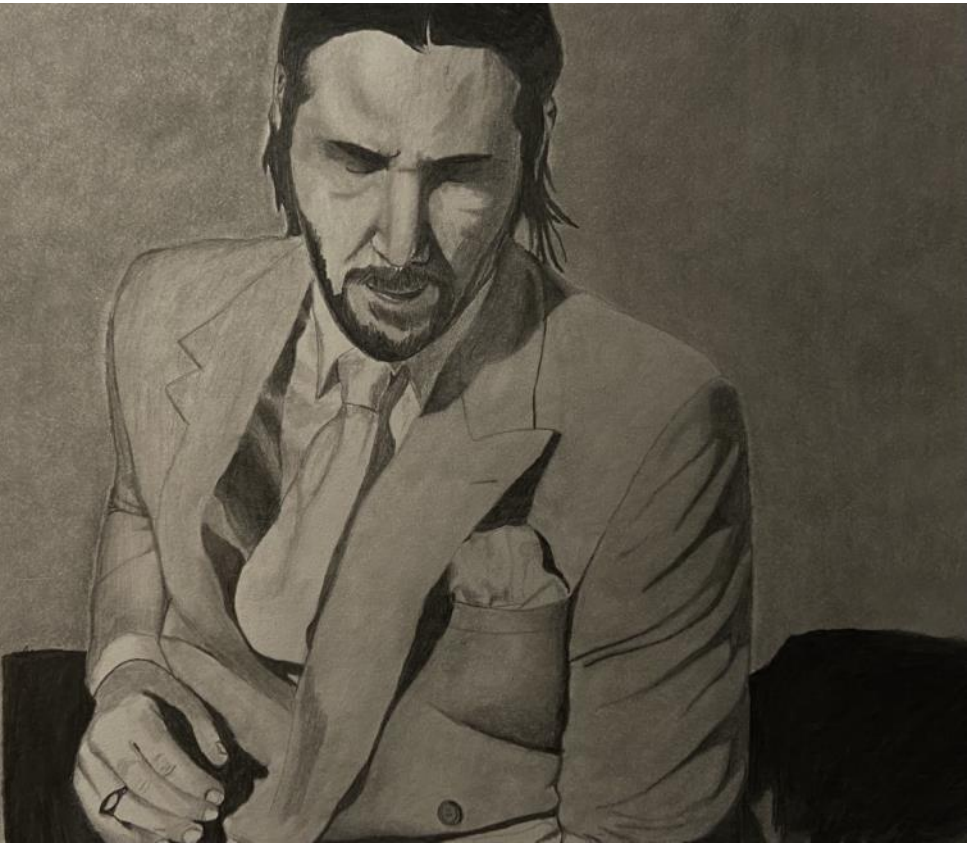


REEDLEY COLLEGE FEATURE ARTIST

IVAN MEDEL

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STILL LIFE PORTRAIT



## BACK IN VIETNAM

My mind is full of scribbles. My imagination sings to the tune of the colors—if you can call them that—black and white as I sit in a tea shop with an old friend. By the time I’m writing this, I have written over six pages of various rough drafts that have since been abandoned and will never see the light of day. I don’t know how to write anymore. Last night, I thought that these scribbles on my screen, these thoughts that are supposed to be an in-depth representation of myself, were good enough.

It’s bizarre to think this is where I am now. It’s exactly where people expect me to be. I’m sitting in a teashop—boba one at that—and drinking a tea called *Autumn Bloom*. The pretty name says nothing about the taste. Herbal chrysanthemum tea tastes refreshing unlike pumpkin spice, cinnamon, and apple cider. Autumn tastes different for America. When I close my eyes and pretend for a moment longer, it feels like I’m at Luc Dinh Ky, a restaurant in Little Saigon I would beg to go to as a child. I’m eight again. It’s a drink that belongs in an Asian-American tea shop.

As I sit adjacent to my friend, my eyes take a tour through every crevice of the shop. It’s my first time here and my lack of drive to do any homework spreads from my head to my fingertips. On my left, my green and white tote bag hugs me in the way I always imagined tote bags do. My heart pounds while my fingers itch to check my phone again. *Did he text? Are my parents worried? What time am I going home? What time is it right now?* For now, I can’t worry about it.

The only part of this experience that is familiar outside of the herbal tea is Kien. He’s about 5’10 and in the same year as me. We’re the same and yet so vastly different. When he came to pick me up in a small grey car, I already knew we dressed for different

occasions. He's wearing what he always did in high school: shorts and a white T-shirt. I'm wearing clothes that crawled out of a Pinterest mood board titled *some-sort-of-academia*. I'm a knockoff of a white person in dark academia. When Kien drinks tea, he takes gulps and he finishes much faster than I do. On my right, my cup is still more than halfway full. It has become sweaty with droplets of water that trickle down toward the base of the container and onto a napkin I'm using as a coaster.

It's pretty obvious we're both Vietnamese though.

Sitting on the cushioned, red seat, my fingers clack away at a tiny keyboard. The sounds jump between rapid taps to prolonged empty silences. I write words and then, when the sentence is deemed too ugly, I take it all back. Scribbles fog up my brain as I desperately try to find the right words to say. Those scribbles, pulsing and running in repetitive circles, isolate me from my friend. I wonder if I should tell him. As we sit together, my legs crossed and posture more than inadequate, he types with a steady rhythm. My mind jumps back to high school constantly when I'm sitting with him. Those days when we were fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, persist in my mind and my favorite among my great gallery is a night full of stars, jellyfish, and dancing.

I can't help but notice how everyone in this tea shop is Asian. No one *looks* out of place either, not even me. Yet with this singular common trait between each and every one of us, there's a world of difference at this table between me and my friend.

On the way to see these hanging lights and hear mellow music, we spoke in the car about a multitude of different subjects. It's the first time in the last two years that we have talked one on one. Together we explored the deuteragonist of the T.V. show *Bojack Horseman*. We entered the freeway as I retold the story of Diane Nguyen, a Vietnamese-American woman so detached from her culture that when she puts on ao dai, she feels like she's wearing a costume.

I laughed saying, "I'm glad I can't relate." *But every other aspect of*

*her story I understood in a way I was afraid Kien would laugh at.*

But would he laugh? We're alike in our tastes in music, tea, food, movies, shows, almost everything. When I make jokes, he laughs the same way he did when we were freshmen in high school. On the ride to the chrysanthemum tea, we wander down every road of memory lane and reminisce about every hour we spent on a voice call playing one game after the other. The inside jokes we share about MMORPGs and every other aspect of our high school lives carry their impact to this day.

He shares the last name of my mother. He shares more similarities to my parents than I do. They all immigrated to America and know a world beyond Little Saigon. They know more than what Saigon looks like—more than pictures and a foggy memory. They all know more of Vietnam than I have ever seen or can. When he comes over, he speaks to my parents in Vietnamese. It's something I should be able to do but don't.

When I talk about Diane Nguyen, I speak of her fondly. Despite the fact a white woman voices her, and maybe that's the reason why Diane has so much trouble speaking Vietnamese, I love her. I project myself onto this fictional character that is clad in glasses, adorns long black hair, gets good grades, and falls into the feminist archetype. I project myself onto a fictional character that goes to Vietnam and clings onto anything American. I'm not as disconnected as she is from her identity as a Vietnamese woman, but *I see her in every part of my life.*

One of the running jokes Kien and I have is a phrase he said maybe once or twice in high school: "Back in Vietnam..." The original statement was an insightful anecdote from Kien about how he used to swim and earn money from it when he lived in Vietnam. Today, I make a joke about how he has a basketball sticker on his laptop since he most definitely doesn't play.

He laughs and says, "Maybe I played in middle school."  
"Maybe, back in Vietnam."

At the same time, we throw our heads back and snicker. It's a funny joke I love to reference, but it highlights the greatest difference we have. I will never understand what it is like to grow up in Vietnam. Sure, I've been to the country—my parents' homeland, but I don't know what the schools look like. I have never seen the interior of a theatre there or a church. I don't know where my parents lived or where I belong when I'm in Vietnam. It's not my homeland. I don't speak Vietnamese. I am a foreigner.

Something I think we both share, and we discuss this together at the tea shop, is the feeling of difference that occurs when we're in college. Suddenly, there are fewer Vietnamese, or even Asian, people than we thought. I'm not sure if I can speak for him on this aspect, but I do know I feel like an outsider when I leave this small, Asian-American bubble in Little Saigon. When I look past the horizon I've always known, cowboys and red and white and blue and red, so much red, cover America in a gilded blanket. It's a fog that leaves me wondering if I belong.

But I can't relate to the phrase *back in Vietnam* because it feels like a complete lie. Now, while I sit in front of my friend, surrounded by Vietnamese-American people, drinking tea, I know this is someplace that should be normal for me. It's not. This is where people expect me to be and I realize I have always been a tourist everywhere I go.

It's not until we're going home that I feel a well-known wave of shame rush over me. We're talking about supermarkets and how they smell. Kien is driving, calm and steady, while I blabber on about the differences between H-Mart and other stores. We describe the streets they're on, trying to piece together if we're talking about the same places. I want to say the name of the supermarket, but I opt for street names. This would be so much easier if I spoke Vietnamese. *All the ones I know are Vietnamese.*

"It's on Magnolia, right?" We both conclude we're talking about different supermarkets.

The name of the supermarket sticks to the roof of my mouth. The name belongs to a grocery store that has watched me from the beginning of my life. The smell is exactly the way we described with its fishy produce and boxes upon boxes of imported goods. Inside, among the many aisles, I remember the smell of cardboard and the pungent, nostalgic scent of lobsters battling in their tanks that floated above my head. We both know the store like the back of our hands. *I* know the store like the back of my hand and yet in the five years of friendship we share, I am hesitant to whisper one word of Vietnamese.

When I say “Thuan Phat,” I say it quietly. My voice, normally loud and abrasive, is suddenly stressed and my heart thunders in my chest because I know, *I know*, that he noticed.

“Oh! Yeah, Thuận Phát!” he exclaims in recognition. And just like that, it’s over. The shame, guilt, and anxiety are gone but it will return the next time I speak and someone doesn’t understand me. It will return the next time I am questioned about my heritage and who I am. It will return when my parents reaffirm that I don’t speak enough Vietnamese.

I have written over two thousand words about my life in the past twenty-four hours and only a few hundred of them get to stay. I’m so worried about how to write in English I forget I don’t even know how to speak Vietnamese. With the entirety of these words I’ve written, for this class and the last and the one before it, I have only written nine words in Vietnamese and only two of them wear the correct accents. All of them are the names of objects and places and none make up a sentence. My mind is nothing but scribbles. And all of it is in English.

## I'M A WALMART CASHIER AND A ROBOTICS ENGINEER: WHICH JOB IS BETTER?

March 12, 2020: I'll never forget that day. At the time, my whole life — housing, academics, employment, and extracurricular opportunities — depended on my university. I needed to study for my final exams that week, but I was also tired from a full day of scientific research. I took a nap in my bed and woke up to a couple of students running and screaming in the dorm hallway: “School’s canceled!”

With the university closing, every aspect of my life evaporated in the next week. I was forced to move twice with 48-hour notice, first to another dorm across campus and then to my home 3,000 miles away. Within a month, I adapted to new routines and hobbies that didn’t rely on the university. I remember joining a Zoom call with friends who were explaining their new craft and reading hobbies.

My response surprised everyone: “My new fun hobby is that I work as a Walmart cashier. I got to speak to a customer in Portuguese today!”

My friends, well familiar with my workaholic personality, replied with a slight laugh, “Hannah, you are the only person who would put ‘working at Walmart’ on a list of fun hobbies.”

At the time, I was thankful to have my Walmart job because few were hiring during the height of business shutdowns. I remember spending my Walmart lunch breaks in their break room: a plain white, windowless room with a few folding tables, mismatched plastic chairs, two sofas, and a large TV that often played the Dr. Oz show or a nature documentary.

A lot has changed in the past year. It's now October 2021, and I'm a full-time surgical robotics engineering intern. Every day in the office, I open a tall glass door with stainless steel handles to enter the lobby. The California sunshine pours through the two-story-tall glass on one side of the building, reflecting from the white walls and geometric art forms to create a bright and inspiring environment. Every room of every floor has something exciting to see: fancy coffee machines, free food, surgical simulation labs with millions of dollars in equipment, intricate 3D printing machines, deconstructed robot parts showing intricate electrical components, seven-foot-long robots rolling through the hallways, adjustable standing desks with ergonomic office chairs, and breathtaking views overlooking the San Francisco Bay. As I look out at the bay, I wonder why I deserve to be a Silicon Valley engineer when just a year ago, I was thankful for a cashier role.

My current role as a JnJ engineering intern pays above double that of my minimum-wage Walmart cashier job. Considering the pay discrepancy, I'd pick the JnJ engineering role over Walmart in an instant. However, there is so much more to evaluate in a job than just the pay. In some ways, I miss my cashier job.

### What were the best parts of my work day at Walmart?

Customer compliments are the best. I had dozens of customers — usually at least one instance per 8-hour shift — who complimented my Spanish. I'm ethnically 100% Japanese, so most people look at my East Asian facial features and immediately assume that I speak only English and maybe Chinese or Vietnamese. But I went to a predominantly Latino high school and have taken seven years of high school and college Spanish. I'm conversationally fluent, and I love interacting in Spanish.

My first interaction with most customers at the cash register was, "Hi! Would you like to buy any 10 cent bags?" to which most



people responded “yes,” “no,” or “they’re free with my food stamps card.” For Spanish speakers, the response was a bit more complicated. I either watched kids translate the statement for their parents or I watched the adults get a bit nervous because they have no clue what I just said.

There was one time when the customer said to her friend: “[in Spanish] I don’t understand! Do you know what the cashier just said?”

And her friend responded, “[in Spanish] I have no idea. She said what?”

Their facial expressions and vocal tone were comparable to that of two shocked telenovela girls discussing a newly-discovered secret affair. It was satisfying to watch their quickly-induced panic subside into relaxation when I interrupted by repeating myself in Spanish. I had a few customers who specifically came to my cash register because they knew that I could converse in Spanish. I also met customers with limited English-speaking skills who knew Arabic, Vietnamese, Portuguese, or American Sign Language. Interacting with diverse people on a regular basis was enlightening.

Aside from Spanish compliments, there were some customers — about once every other week in frequency — who would compliment my friendly and professional service. I greatly appreciated it when one customer said that I resembled a manager due to my high-quality service. Another thanked me for providing her the best service that she’s had at Walmart over the many years that she shopped there.

One creative customer asked me, “Do you want to take a walk around the block with me?”

I replied, “Um, I can’t do that now.”

She then threw a small wooden block on the floor, and we walked around it together. She said, “Now you have a funny story to bring home today.” I didn’t think much of it at the time. Reflecting back on the experience, however, she’s correct: I’ll never forget her

clever pun that was a short, laughable break from my focus on barcode scan speed.

Twice I was recognized for my work by my managers: once when a customer mentioned my friendliness to them — which resulted in “Hannah: customer compliment!” going on the central whiteboard — and once when I was featured on the employee Twitter page for preventing a few hundred dollars in theft. In my mind, I didn’t do anything heroic for the theft prevention story. It was a common part of my job to insist on a valid form of payment after being handed counterfeit cash, invalid checks, and/or empty credit cards. While interacting with this customer in particular, I noticed that the head of Walmart security was looking over my back, watching my work. She eventually intervened, and the man left. She later explained to me how his shopping cart — many small, valuable items hidden under a large teddy bear — was specifically designed for theft and I did a good job taking inventory of the small items. Apparently, it is extraordinary for a new, inexperienced cashier to catch all of the small items.

All in all, Walmart work was constantly engaging, which I preferred over jobs that involved staring at the wall when there was nothing to do. One day, I heard my manager say, “Look! There’s a pig!” and I turned my head to see a customer pushing her full-grown pet pig in a toddler stroller as she shopped. I saw many acquaintances from school, family, and extracurriculars who I had not seen in years, so that was rewarding too. Items that a customer is buying from Walmart can tell a story about them: a teaching career, an upcoming camping/beach trip, new apartment, outdoor BBQ, or hobby in gardening, painting, sports, or auto repairs. I loved starting conversations with customers about their adventures with simple questions such as “Where do you go to the beach?” and “What do you like to paint?”

### What are the best parts of my work day at JnJ?

Most of my engineering job involves writing software that collects and processes sensor data and carries out robotic motions. Consequently, the best parts of my day are usually related to software troubleshooting. Corrections as simple as moving parentheses around can make the difference between a software script running smoothly instead of raising many errors. Finding and fixing small issues makes me feel satisfied and happy for the day. It's also exciting when a senior engineer approves my code to be added to the company-wide repository. When this happens, anyone in the company can use and build upon my software.

Overall, while the predictable process of JnJ software development is fun, I would say that the thrill of working with diverse Walmart customers is more suspenseful and interesting. I'll start tallying a score on the better workplace: JnJ 0, Walmart 1.

### What are the undesirable parts of my work day at Walmart?

Some customers do annoying things. I had to hand count \$40 in quarters for one transaction and \$2 in pennies for another. I've dealt with customers who are drunk and high. A young woman had a heart attack in our store; I watched her go to the ambulance as the police arrested her boyfriend for drugs. Another day, I watched a man argue with another customer in line and spray disinfectant at him. Every day, people like to put random merchandise they decided not to buy — "go-backs" — in places that it doesn't belong, and it's annoying to pick it out of random places. I much appreciate the people who hand me their go-backs so that I don't need to pick them out elsewhere. It's also annoying when people take a long time to pay because their wallet is unorganized and/or their cards don't have money on them. This slows us down a lot, especially when it's compounded by multiple people in a line.

Being belittled by customers is the worst. Multiple customers yelled at me for unreasonable circumstances such as when I accidentally overcharged them, asked for their receipt on pre-paid items, or enforced limits on disinfectant purchases. I once had a customer who asked me with a subtle demeaning tone, “Working as a cashier is *really* an enjoyable job?”

Understanding all of the different payment methods is a bit of a chore. WIC and EBT are two different forms of food stamps, and WIC is more restrictive. HSA/FSA are pre-tax funds for health-related expenses. A debit card or cash is required for purchasing gift cards. Customers can also pay by credit card, gift card, check, or mobile pay. It gets confusing when customers want to do split payments. We also have to authenticate any bill \$20 or above. I found at least one fake \$20 and one fake \$100, and I denied many more bills that I was unsure about. Pre-2000 era \$100 bills, in particular, can be difficult to authenticate because they don’t have the security features of the newer bills.

Standing for hours at a time is exhausting, even for me when I was a prime age 19-year-old. I don’t understand how the older associates can last the whole day on their feet. I also have a lot of respect for the cart pushers who go out in the parking lot to pick out carts between cars in every weather condition, including the rain and blazing summer heat. I did that job once for a few hours. Pushing heavy carts in the summer heat is as extenuating as going on a hot uphill hike. Every employee gets 3 breaks in an 8-hour shift, which means 8 hours of standing broken into 2-hour chunks unless you’re lucky enough to have access to a sitting stool. On the contrary, one of my favorite privileges in my engineering job is that I can sit or stand whenever I want.

It can be noisy and dirty sometimes. It’s difficult to communicate with people when a kid is crying, a wheelchair cart is beeping to signal that it’s in reverse mode, an ice machine is rumbling, and there are announcements on the intercom, all at the same time. My

hands would quickly get dirty from handling hundreds of items and touching cash all day. I'd wear gloves and constantly spray them with disinfectant to try and keep things clean. I sprayed enough disinfectant on my hands that some of it would diffuse through the gloves and slightly erode away my nails to a rough texture.

### What are the undesirable parts of my work day at JnJ?

Sometimes, I'm unmotivated to trudge through an endless list of software error messages, sit through a 10-hour clinical lab while recording dozens of robot errors, or tediously format 1,000 lines of code to perfection. I'm also a night owl and have an hour commute to work, so leaving home at 6 am for 7 am clinical lab doesn't put me in the best mood. But it's cool to see the entire robotic system in motion and a nice break from the monotony of my small-scope software development. Additionally, the company provides a decent catered breakfast and lunch for clinical lab days, so that makes the experience better. Evidently, there isn't too much to say about undesirable parts of JnJ work. JnJ 1, Walmart 1.

### What are the employee benefits at Walmart?

The greatest perk that I participated in was the company stock program. I invested \$2100, Walmart contributed \$270, and the stock is now valued at \$2895. I was also given the opportunity to start a Roth 401k, so by age 19, I'm proud to say that I had already invested \$850 towards retirement. The Walmart employee card gives me 10% off most merchandise still to this day. There are a number of benefits that I didn't use: subsidized health care, limited options for taking free accredited online classes, and getting paid early through the Even app.

## What are the employee benefits at JnJ?

There's always a surplus of fun, free stuff. We get a free pre-packaged lunch every time we come into the office, which apparently is common among Silicon Valley tech companies. Free snacks and drinks are always available; I enjoy the trail mix and La Croix in particular. There's a free on-site gym that has large touch screen ellipticals that even my university doesn't provide. Every few weeks, the work culture squad organizes something fun like a free taco food truck, free fancy cupcakes/cookies, or free company merchandise. JnJ pays me to carpool with a coworker. I have \$400 to spend per year on exercise expenses, which could even include an Apple watch "fitness" monitor. I know that there are good health insurance and retirement options for permanent full-time employees, but I'm not familiar with these benefits as a temporary intern. All in all, comparing JnJ and Walmart benefits is comparing apples to oranges: it's difficult for me to say whether Walmart's financial benefits are better or worse than JnJ's benefits that facilitate a fun and healthy workplace. I'll give a point to both workplaces: JnJ 2, Walmart 2.

## What are the career advancement opportunities at Walmart?

To my surprise, there are many opportunities for career advancement at Walmart. Cashier is one of the lowest jobs: within a year, cashiers generally leave permanently to work elsewhere, leave temporarily to attend school, or advance within Walmart. Most people strive to work at the customer service desk. I don't understand why. Maybe it pays more? I personally have no desire to work with customers who are irritated by return policies and/or the occasional long lines. I'd much rather quickly scan and bag dozens of items, even if it's a heavy case of water bottles on the conveyor belt or 20 individual cat food cans of 5 different flavors that Walmart needs to be individually scanned for flavor inventory. Customer service work-

ers can advance to become customer service managers and then enter the never-ending hierarchy of management, so maybe that's the appeal of the role. Cashiers can also advance to be greeters or work in a particular department (outdoor, electronics, etc.). Both of those roles looked interesting to me. It's inspiring to see that our store's head manager started as an overnight packer and our HR lead started as a cashier.

### What are the career advancement opportunities at JnJ?

It's possible to be doing similar engineering work like me, even without a college degree. These are technicians. It's somewhat difficult to advance without a college degree, though, and it helps to know basic physics, computer science, and engineering design college concepts in my daily work. A step above interns and technicians are associate engineers who are fresh college or master's graduates with minimal work experience. After a couple of years of work and/or graduate school, one can become a (no prefix, standard) engineer and then a senior engineer a few years after that. Senior engineers get to pick their own adventure: they can continue doing heavy technical work, they can directly manage other engineers to do the technical work, or some combination of both. Senior engineers can advance to become managers and become a part of the never-ending hierarchy of management, or they can move horizontally to join a different internal team such as software or electrical engineering or a different company altogether. At the end of the day, advancement opportunities are structured similarly between JnJ and Walmart, but I'd much rather be advancing through technical roles than retail roles. JnJ 3, Walmart 2.

### Who wins?

Okay, so no surprise, JnJ wins. Ironically, I'm working in robotics development, and robots are predicted to take over the cashier-

ing profession as a whole within 20 years. However, my transition from Walmart cashiering to robotics engineering isn't a simple rags to riches story where engineering is the obvious winner. Working as a Walmart cashier is not simply characterized by the monotony that people might assume: printing receipts, scanning items, bagging items, and watching people insert credit cards. I love my engineering career, but there are also some aspects of cashiering that I miss. If there's anything that I want you to learn by reading this far, it's this: make an effort to spend a few seconds to compliment someone and ask how they're doing. This small action can make a difference in someone's day in whether it's a good day or a negative, stressful one. At Walmart, my positive interactions with customers are what made my job enjoyable and fun.





## RAVENOUS SHADOWS

“Turn off the headlights.” Trey requested, gently tapping Darren on the shoulder. His friend did not respond, instead staring ahead, wearing a mask of unease.

“I dunno about this.” He said, voice steady. Trey grew impatient, turning off the headlights for him. He twisted the keys out of the ignition next, all while Darren was still frozen in his seat. Owen and Jude sat in the back of the RV, gearing up.

“This is...what, our sixth, seventh abandoned hospital we’ve explored? And this one isn’t even that big. Tiny, in fact.”

“Doesn’t look that old, either.” Replied Darren. One final attempt to dissuade his friends, as if urban exploration was only for noticeably dilapidated locations.

“Abandoned during its construction.” Jude answered with beaming alacrity. “Guess the funds and money for the hospital ‘disappeared’. Construction workers did likewise after the news came out.”

Trey smiled, ribbing Darren. “See? Not even half as bad as the usual places we’ve been in.”

Darren sighed, pushing past Trey.

With a sly smile, Trey slid on his gloves, double and triple checking that he had all his gear.

*Flashlight, backpack, phone, gps... respirator, goggles, medkit...medkit?* He tapped around for it, rolling his eyes a moment later. *In the backpack, idiot.*

Trey fell onto the stained couch, making a mental note of cleaning the damn thing when they got back from their roadtrip. The gang had been cut in half, with only four able to actually make time for the adventure. *No matter*, Trey thought. *Can always make a return trip.* Owen and Jude were properly suited up, batting their eye-

lashes at each other. Trey bit his tongue to keep from making a comment. That mental focus allowed him to see Darren slide a pistol into a holster on his hip, a long jacket thrown over to keep it concealed.

Trey cocked his head to the side. “So it’s junkies you’re afraid of?”

Darren’s eyes shot daggers at him. “Hell yeah I am. You remember what happened to Andrew? He was in the hospital for weeks. Sixteen stitches! I’m not risking that.”

Owen frowned. He didn’t like his brother being used as a prop, even if it was for a good cause. “Ever heard of the twenty-one foot rule? If someone has a knife, and-”

“Man shut up.” Darren snapped. “Let’s just get moving.”

Trey bounced to his feet, walking over to Owen, whispering “Listen to the man with the gun.” The four of them were out the door, heading into the dead of night. A simple chain link fence tried its best to keep them out. Trey stared at the hospital as they approached. It looked nearly completed, with only the third and fourth stories left bare and unfinished.

*Looks are always deceiving...*

Trey’s flashlight cut through the darkness like a blade of sunlight. Once stark white walls had turned a dingy yellow, littered with holes and graffiti plastered on every inch of them. His boots splattering against the slick grime on the floors. A fleet of gurneys lay dormant in the corner, lined up against the walls like makeshift beds in times of emergency. Each was covered in filth.

“Place is in terrible shape.” Jude said, scanning her flashlight across the walls. “Was only abandoned a few years ago. I guess squatters and the homeless took up refuge not long after.”

Jude had taken care of the reconnaissance for this adventure, as she always did. Being such a newly abandoned location meant it didn’t have all the history an old morgue or manor house would.

*Still just as creepy though.* Trey's stomach twisted into a knot. The air was thick and stale, lifeless as the hospital itself. It struck him with a vertigo he couldn't easily shake.

An old receptionist's desk was in broken tatters, smashed to bits, chairs flung all across the hall. All of the doors were ripped off their hinges, hospital rooms littered with food wrappings and all manner of junk. Clothes, broken bottles, some of the garbage so messed up Trey didn't even know what it had been at some point.

"Definitely used. Someone used to live here." Owen said, kicking around an empty beer bottle.

"Lots of 'someones'." Replied Darren just as quickly. The group split off, never moving too far away, but each exploring on their own terms. Mostly. Owen and Jude were near impossible to separate. They took pictures of the graffiti, the flash making Trey jump. He knew he shouldn't be so damned shaky. He'd been on explorations like this dozens of times before.

Trey's gloved hands ran across some graffiti on the wall. It clung to the surface like decaying vines, crumbling to sanguine dust in his fingers. Frowning, Trey rubbed his fingers against the graffiti again, the paint chipping until there was nothing but dark brown smears left on the wall. He watched lights dance all across the hall, Owen and Jude taking pictures of each other in front of some of the more ramshackle rooms. Darren meanwhile moved like a ghost through the halls, his hand always close to his side.

"Ever since Andrew got attacked..." Trey shook his head. "Shoot some junkie. Then what? Gonna live with that the rest of your life? If the cops ever found out..."

His voice trailed off as he became more aware of it. The hospital was still silent as ever. He didn't like hearing his voice in places like this. It almost felt disrespectful, in a sense. Like hiking. Don't shout, don't blare music. Leave no trace. Worse than merely disrespectful, it simply put him on edge. Every noise was louder than it should be...

His jumbled thoughts vanished as a rat scurried across his path, stopping for a moment to stare at him. Trey glared at it, watching the little pest burrow into a gap in the wall. Passing by it, his head snapped to the side. He stared at a small crater in the wall, raising an unsteady hand up towards it. Bigger than his fist, some of the dark paint inside the crater had been picked off with a knife, or something just as sharp. Frowning, he continued his ambling.

A crash exploded behind him. He whipped around, nearly falling on his ass in the process. His eyes ripped open in fear, flashlight cutting across the hall. An air vent cover lay on the dusty floor. The sound reverberated in his mind like a clap of thunder. All the while, black, beady eyes shone out from the vent. Breath flowed like a warm fog from his respirator. He tossed his light up, knives of fear thrusting into his spine. A swarm of bats flew out from the vent. Trey yelped, his pupils the size of stars.

“Trey? What the hell is going on down there?” Darren demanded, marching down the hall with Jude and Owen in tow.

Trey spluttered out a weak answer, the trio staring at him like he spoke in tongues. Eventually he gave up trying to explain, pointing at the vent.

“It fell. The ceiling it-, the vent! The vent-bats!”

“Shh!” Jude cut in. “You don’t need to shout. Christ, Trey, you’re shaking like a leaf.”

Owen shined his light on the open vent, sucking his teeth with a deep inhale. “That’d scare me shitless too.”

Darren spoke up, startling Trey. He didn’t even know he went over toward it. “Thing was probably holding on by a thread. Fell at the best possible time.”

“Worst.” Trey corrected, his heart still racing.

Darren shrugged. “Now you’ll be jumpy like me. Keeps you alive.”

“Go to hell, man.”

Another careless shrug. Darren wore a smirk that’d make the

devil blush. He'd found his sangfroid that so often bubbled underneath the surface.

Somehow, Darren and Trey switched places. The timid and the cocksure.

*Maybe this is what he felt before we went in.*

He puffed up his chest, blood still pounding in his ears.

“Whatever, just a freak accident. Let’s go.”

Owen slapped Trey on the back, damn near giving him a heart attack in the process. “Atta boy.”

As they made their way to the stairs, Trey caught sight of another hallway nearby. Dim threads of silver moonlight emanated from it. Trey shined his light down the hall.

“**FIRE EXIT**” The sign read.

Thinking little of it, he continued on Darren’s path, backpacks rustling in the silence between footsteps. The rhythmic cadence of boots striking the stairs echoed in Trey’s ears. Darren stopped short, Trey slamming into his back. He coughed something foul, raising his respirator to spit a thick loogie onto the wall. Trey smelled it a moment later. A thick, noxious stench hung in the air like a swarm of flies.

“Need better respirators.” Trey coughed, finally able to clear his throat.

As they made it to the second floor, Trey saw a shadow pass beside him. He shouted, spinning to the side. Light reflected back at him, blinding him. Panic lanced through his body, shouts echoing beside him. A firm hand fell onto his shoulder, he thrashed about, Darren’s voice cutting through the mania.

Christ almighty, man! It’s just a goddamn mirror.” He snarled, pointing with his light. Trey’s vision cleared, focused. Though he did not know it, the trio’s faces fell just as quickly as Trey’s.

“More than just one.” Jude breathed.

“Holy hell...”

Trey swallowed, the beam of his flashlight shaking horribly.

Dozens, hundreds of Trey's did the same in the myriad maze of mirrors that bestrewed the room. Their reflections stood terrified in their dingy, iridescent midst.

"That's where all the mirrors went." Owen whimpered. Darren pressed him, demanding an answer.

"The rooms. All of them had their mirrors removed. The convex ones were taken out of the halls, too."

Trey shivered. "Why?"

Darren stepped forward, his reflection marching alongside him in a hundred different places. This looked to be a waiting room of some sort. Every inch of it was covered in mirrors, your every move reflected back in a murky silver ocean.

"Creepy, but...damn if this isn't kinda cool." Jude smiled. She took Owen by the hand, snapping pictures of the place. The camera light flashed, Trey spotting a door slightly ajar. His head spun trying to find it, but at last he did, dizzy as all hell. Lights danced behind him, his friend's voices like the susurrations of demons in his mind. The stench grew worse the closer he got. Cold bit through his gloves, fingers trembling as they touched the door. Every muscle in his hand tensed. It took an act of God to push that door open, and Trey practically called out for Him as his flashlight slid out from his hand.

The light struck onto the bloodless, desiccated corpse of a police officer, skin pulled taut over his bones. Trey's jaw unhinged into a silent scream, his fear choking him as the flashlight rolled further and further, shining across pallid corpses that nearly piled to the ceiling. The walls were stained sanguine with human rot and offal. Every inch of the floor covered in congealed mounds of dried blood.

His breath flowed like hellfire out from his lungs. Trey's chest grew impossibly tight, tears welling in his eyes. He stepped backwards in slow, terrified horror, one hand reaching out to grab at his

friends.

His flashlight remained motionless on the floor, the light growing dim until it went out.

The door moved, squeaking forward until it returned to its slightly ajar state. A choked cry left Trey's throat, Jude noticing something was terribly wrong. Trey stood in the dark, hyperventilating. Jude and Owen raced toward him, reflections moving like an army in their wake.

"Trey!? What's-"

His mouth quivered, words blubbing out. He pointed a shaking finger at the door.

Darren came out of nowhere, his back facing toward the shadows. "What the fuck is going on?"

Owen shrugged, his eyes wide. "Trey's scared shitless, man. The door, I think there's something in there."

Trey's eyes met with Darren's, a sudden cold descending upon them all. Something stirred in the darkness behind Darren. Trey saw it for only a split second, a towering niveous figure stepping through the shadows. Trey screamed, Jude and Owen doing the same as their lights went out. Darren spun, a deafening salvo roaring in the hospital. The creature lunged forward as muzzle flashes lit up the room like bolts of lightning.

Darren shrieked, a stream of crimson jutting into the air. The pistol struck the floor, his hand still gripping it. A final bullet screamed out of it, the flash showing Darren's feet lifted off the ground.

A sludgy rending split through the screaming, Darren breathed a short, haunting sigh. Someone pushed past Trey. He grabbed onto them, frantically running. They broke free, taking one of his gloves with them as footsteps slammed all across the floor, sending blaring echoes in all directions. Trey could barely see, only a few glimmers of moonlight cut through the windows, reflecting off the labyrinth of mirrors. His feet gave way, slipping over something warm and

sticky. He'd lost his backpack in the scramble. His hands clawed at a nearby desk, throwing himself under it.

He held his breath, covering his mouth to keep from screaming.

*Darren...oh my God... What the FUCK is happening?*

Something scraped in the dark silence. Trey froze, petrified he had made the sound. Only when it happened again did he realize it was something else. He didn't know if Owen and Jude were still alive. They had to be. He didn't hear anyone else scream. Or had he? His blood pounded so loudly he wasn't sure he could hear-

His blood ran cold, freezing inside his veins. The scraping continued, much closer than it had been before. It had a slick, grimy sound that followed it. Trey's eyes watered, fear entangling him like vines crawling up an old stone wall. He could see just a little from his position. The desk hid him, and no mirrors reflecting his huddled, horrified face back at him.

An alabaster leg stepped into his peripheral and into the moonlight, though it cast no shadow. Trey didn't have the courage to move his head even an inch.

It stepped across his vision, dragging Darren's body by his mangled leg. His ribcage was split open, gored from groin to gullet. The bloody stump of his right hand left a trail of blood that shimmered in the shadows of gleaming moonlight. The reflection of dozens of his friend's body made Trey's skin crawl and his heart wrench.

Yet, just before the creature left his field of view, Trey noticed something. Horrified, he bit his tongue until he tasted blood.

The creature did not reflect in the mirrors.

Trey watched the creature disappear into the shadows.

*This is a nightmare. It's not real, it can't be...* The words screamed in his mind so rapidly that they became mere sounds and nothing more.

He summoned every ounce of strength he had to move his



foot an inch. It slid across the ground. He moved again, and again, crawling out from under the desk with paralyzing slowness. A soft slurping hissed like the trickling cascade of a nearby stream. Then chewing, snapping, gnawing, the clicking of teeth and tearing that reverberated like razors across glass in Trey's ears.

Trey crouched among the chairs and debris, the moonlight rapidly fading. He saw the stairs for a split second, the only chance he had.

Something shifted in the darkness. His head snapped to the side. Owen snuck around a series of mirrors, reflecting in a few nearby. Trey signaled to no avail.

Owen had the same idea, sulking toward the stairs. The monstrous sounds grew fainter as Trey pressed himself forward. Owen's head twisted, eyes wide, staring at Trey like a deer in headlights. Trey raised a finger to his lips.

"Where's Jude?" Owen whimpered, lips quivering.

Trey shook his head, mouthing: "We have to leave. Darren is dead."

Black metal coruscated in Owen's hand. Darren's pistol.

A woman's shrill cry clawed into his ears.

"Jude!" Owen screamed, racing off into the darkness. Trey went to grab him-

Bullets fulminated, lighting up the hallway in blazing light. The creature stepped out of the shadows, its limbs poking out from a bloody shroud. Claws hissed through the air, sundering flesh and bone. Owen clung to life, screaming alongside the roaring bullets. In the flashes of light, Jude's body reflected in the mirrors, lying still against a crater in the wall, her skull shattered. A mouth of fangs like thick iron nails clamped down onto Owen's neck. A gaunt, pale face glared at Trey, unblinking eyes searing with hatred.

He ran, tearing down the stairs and toward the fire exit. Slamming the door shut behind him, he barred it, tripping into the wall. He'd struck a light switch, illuminating the hallway. He ran, stum-

bling as the lights went out, a towering shadow standing at the end of the hall. Trey screamed, throwing himself backwards, hands fumbling on the wall.

The lights roared on, the hall empty. He cried for a God he didn't even believe in, somehow mustering the courage to charge down the hall again. Once more the lights went out, the shadow was closer, arms outstretched, claws shrieking across the walls. Trey fell back, shielding his face.

The lights went on again, the claw marks on the wall still present. He crawled to his feet, scrambling toward the door. It was so close, so very close. Just a few more strides.

Again, the shadows emerged, this time, Trey kept on running, his lungs screaming in exhaustion.

When the lights flickered on again, he saw the bulbs blare above, but the hall remained smothered in otherworldly darkness.

He felt the door's cold metal one palm, just as claws slid between his ribs.

The vampire's fangs plunged into Trey's neck, a cold hand clamped over his screaming mouth.



## WHITE SPACE

A single, homogenous, white void stretches in all directions around me. The void extends downward as well, and the only thing telling me I'm not falling is the push back against my boots. My gut drops when I look down. The unsettling lack of a shadow doesn't help my disorientation either. So, this is what the Seraph had called White Space. I didn't expect the name to be so literal. A blank slate. The Doors don't seem to be close by- I decide it is better get moving towards... somewhere. I begin to wish that Seraph had told me where I could actually *find* those Doors.

I take a deep breath and clutching the spade-shaped amulet around my neck. The dent I fumble under my thumb is a brutal reminder of my goal. I slap my cheeks with my gloved hands twice. Time to focus. During times like this, there's always one solution: tossing Grace into the air. The chrome revolver somersaults in the air three times before landing onto the non-ground. Only then do I realize that this White Space is also devoid of sound. Grace's barrel points about forty-five degrees to my right. I make my way a couple of miles without much fatigue; the years of traveling are paying off in strides. This definitely tops the list of strange places I've been to. Sorry, Cheese Canyon, your charming gouda walls just can't beat this.

A ripple in White Space catches my attention. Maroon steadily colors the blank canvas above me like a wine spill bleeding onto carpet. The Seraph emerges.

"Have you located the Doors?" they ask, their voice booming suddenly in my mind.

"Take a look around, there's nothing here for miles," I say mentally.

"I am unable to peer too far into this realm lest I go mad. I am

afraid I have to keep my sights on you, solely.”

“Lucky you,” I say, winking up at the Seraph. Their angelic eyes remain unblinking.

“Before I sent you here, you held me at gun point,” they say.

“Yeah, because you scared the living hell out of me. Beauty acted on their own.”

“Did I not say, ‘be not afraid’ when I first appeared to you?”

“You’re a giant floating face with wings.”

“Regardless, you can tell ‘Beauty’ that actions have consequences. Even revolvers are not exempt from this. Especially not one of its... current status.”

“Okay, we had gotten off the wrong foot.” I clear my throat. “Hi, nice to meet you. I’m Mir, a simple bartender turned multi-dimensional gunslinger on a journey to find my son. What’s your name?”

“If I were to reveal to you my name, your eardrums would explode before your soul is set aflame,” the Seraph says.

“You are making this unnecessarily difficult.”

“Fine. You may call me Selen. It was once a name given to me by another human.”

“What were they like?” I dare ask. Selen’s expression hardens immediately.

“Irrelevant. For now, focus on finding the Doors. I will credit you with one thing, Mir, I am able to tell that you are already heading in the right direction.”

I pat the revolver holstered on my right thigh. Grace never makes any mistakes. “A deal is a deal. I find the Doors, cross one, and you get to use the other for... whatever a Seraph needs destiny-altering portals for.”

“Remember, you must stay alive for the second Door to be used. They will not appear for me,” Selen says and begins to fall back through the maroon tear.

“Hey!” I call out, and to my surprise, they actually halt their retreat. “I know what it’s like to lose someone close. I overstepped.

I'm sorry." They retreat out of White Space without saying another word. It wasn't a smart idea to ask an ex-guardian angel about their human.

After walking a few more miles, I take off my pack and begin to unload camp supplies. In these past seven years I've been to strange places, met strange people, and interacted with strange technologies. My chest plate was one such piece. Not only does it offer protection, but also adapts to surrounding temperature. Next to the fire, it shines so brilliantly that I must cover it with my hat.

Sleep comes quickly.

The familiar rustic browns of my wooden saloon fill my vision. I'm polishing glasses from behind the counter when the thumping of a pair of boots step through the doors, bringing a cloud of sand in with them. "Sorry, but we're not open yet, sir. First drinks are served at sundown," I say without looking up from my glass.

"I'm not here for drinks," replies a young man's voice. The boots step to the end of the bar and halt. "How much would a conversation cost me?"

"Fifty cents," I say, finally finishing my polishing. What a stubborn stain. I open a cabinet below when I hear something rolling down the bar. *Clink. Clink.* I see two quarters sitting next to the glass. My guest laughs and I can't help but let out a bit of a chuckle myself. I grab a second glass and pour some orange juice into both.

"Thank you," he says, nodding.

"Mir," I say, extending a hand.

"Caleb Kapers," he says, extending his in return. He then pulls out a deck of cards. "How good is your memory, Mir?"

"Not so bad for someone my age. I have this saloon to thank for that. Gotta memorize a couple dozen drinks." I gesture to the deck. "What kind of memory game do you play with cards?"

Caleb shuffles the deck, splits it in half and presents the two halves, face up, indicating that I must choose one. The eight of clubs or the ace of spades. I choose the ace. "The kind that makes

you think back to choices made early on,” he says. He shuffles the cards and once again presents me with two halves. The eight of spades or the ace of clubs. I choose the eight of spades.

“Are you gambling man, Mir?” Caleb asks, shuffling the deck again.

“No.”

“Didn’t think so,” he says, seemingly satisfied. “Can you recall the last two cards you chose?”

“Of course, there were only two,” I say raising an eyebrow.

“Why do you reckon you chose those cards?”

“It reminded me of some old memories-” I pause. Did he say his last name was Kapers? *That* Kapers?

“Have you ever heard of the Twin Spades, Mir?” Caleb says as he calmly reassembles his deck and tucks it into a vest pocket.

“Ranger and deputy. Together they kept order in the early days of this land. How about the First of October fifteen years ago? They raided a supposed bandit camp. Nothing really special about these particular criminals, just a bunch of thugs and robbers. Or at least, that’s what the papers said.

“Truth is, we were starving. We were people from a different realm-- we weren’t welcome here even if we were as human as anyone else. No one would take us in so we did the only thing we could do to get food,” Caleb continues. “Do you remember the leader of that group? Do you remember the child you found hiding underneath the carriage after you killed their leader?”

Behind those golden eyes of his, I can see a burning vengeance. Caleb pulls out a revolver, a golden one. “You didn’t kill him instantly, Mir. He was comatose for years. But I finally saved him from that fate. Now we’ll both be dealing out justice.”

The stairs to my left creak. Caleb snaps his revolver in that direction. Both of our eyes widen- his in surprise, mine in panic.

“Dad? What’s happening?” Artur asks, rubbing his blue eyes with the palm of his tiny hand.

“Nothing, son. Go back upstairs,” I say with as much calm as I can muster. “You can sleep in my room. Lock the door behind you. Don’t open it unless you hear Daddy’s voice, okay?”

Caleb turns his eyes back at me. “Please,” I plead with him. “This is between you and me. Let’s go outside. Don’t let him see.”

Caleb’s mouth drops. “You have the *audacity* to say that to me?” He turns the golden revolver at me and fires.

I wake up screaming Artur’s name, but the sound is swallowed by White Space. The light of the void outside is blinding when I open my eyes. I wipe a tear away and fumble my spade amulet in my fingers. It had taken the bullet for me, but I was still knocked unconscious. When I had woken up, Caleb and Artur were gone. I pack up and only after I have walked for an hour do I notice maroon once again present in the void. Selen hovers some distance above me.

“You’re here,” they say in my head. Two tiny disturbances appear like a heatwave and slowly take the shape of solid, titanic doors. To the left is a beautiful, pristine door nearly as white as the void surrounding it but lined with gold detailing. This Door is Revenge. To the right, a worn-down door- it had seen better days. This Door is Justice.

I made the decision about which Door I would choose a long time ago. With each step closer, a muffled ringing progressively grows louder in my ears. Sound. The disappearance of White Space’s is matched by the appearance of an abandoned town on the other side. The sun hangs high, and a single figure stands in the middle of the dirt road. Caleb.

“Let’s see. I was in my kitchen but now I’m suddenly in the middle of nowhere, the person I thought I had killed is standing in front of me, and there’s a portal behind him. So, you’ve gone and done it, Mir? Gone through the Doors? You should’ve just kept mixing drinks,” Caleb says with a wry smile.

“Last chance, Caleb. Hand Artur over or I’m going to be mixing your face with the dirt.”

“Really? That’s the best you got?”

“I’m working on it.”

“Well, offer refused. It can’t end simply after all the hard work you’ve done! Once you’re six feet under, maybe I’ll go grab a nice dinner.”

“Have you ever been to Cheese Canyon?”

“I’m lactose intolerant!” He pulls out a cobalt blue revolver and fires. Beauty acts quickly, firing to deflect the incoming bullet, allowing me to roll behind a building... made of wood. I duck before two more bullets fly through. Pulling out Grace, I risk a peek around the corner. Caleb has also taken cover behind his own wooden wall. He tauntingly waves the cobalt revolver. “This what you came for, Mir? Come and get it!” Caleb grabs a second revolver, the golden one, and fires.

Under a hail of bullets, I kick in the backdoor of the building-- a boutique judging from the mannequins scattered on the ground. I stand next to a broken window to survey the situation. I reload Beauty and fire three shots at positions where he could be hiding. He returns fire, missing wildly, and shattering the window on the far side of the room. The glass falls like confetti.

Odd. He’s been spot on with his shots until now. I decide to take a risk. I step into the middle of the window, in clear view, and wait.

No shots come. More perplexed, I take yet another risk and stick my body out to get a better view. The sun’s light hits my eyes and makes me wince, forcing me to retreat to shade just as two bullets whiz pass.

My hat should’ve protected me from the sunlight. I look down at my chest plate. It’s shining.

I rush outside, stick to the shade, and sprint to the building at the end of town. On the second floor, I get to work. I undo my



chest plate, and fashion it and my hat onto a mannequin I took from the boutique. If this doesn't work, I'll have to fight without any armor. Then I flip Grace into the air. Their barrel points straight ahead. Caleb is just across from my building. Here goes nothing.

I let out a shout. Then I kick the mannequin out the window. The sunlight reflects off my chest plate beautifully. Caleb fires and it strikes the mannequin multiple times. It falls lamely onto the dirt.

Footsteps signal that Caleb has left his building. I glance outside.

"Poor, Ranger. That was quite the final act, leaping out of there like a cornered animal. You even sounded like one in the end," he says, approaching the mannequin. He inspects the cobalt revolver in his hand. "Ironic, that your son was the one to do you in."

I toss my spade amulet into the air outside. "I'm not dead yet!" I shout. The sunlight bounces off its reflective surface. Caleb fires at it, and just like it had years before, it takes the bullet, metal scraping metal. I waste no time. Taking out Beauty and Grace, I drop outside, approaching slowly. Caleb lies still. The bullet had ricocheted straight back to him. I kick his golden revolver away before scrambling to find the cobalt one. I smash the crystal at the bottom of the handle. And it begins to tremble. Light escapes from cracks forming across its body and climaxes into a brilliant flash before subsiding. A new weight presses against my arms. Artur. The tears come.

Seven years. Seven long years of trying to find him but never once did I forget his face. Yet here it is somehow so different from the last time I saw him. So much older. I cry out of relief, I sob because of the pain I've pushed down finally bursting to the surface, and lastly, I weep because for seven years I couldn't watch my son grow up to become a young man.

Through the tears, Beauty and Grace catch my periphery. They are on the ground awaiting their turn. A deal is a deal. After setting down Artur's unconscious body atop my bedroll, I shatter the crystals of my revolvers. When the light dissipates, twin angels emerge.

Unlike Artur, they are conscious.

Then I break the crystal of the golden revolver and the body of an old man emerges. Caleb's father isn't breathing. I turn to Beauty and Grace. "I have a final favor to ask." They return with a shovel after flying across the town. I dig two graves.

The four of us make our way back to the Door, Beauty and Grace by my side and Artur lying unconscious in my arms. After giving Beauty and Grace blindfolds to protect themselves, they step through. I follow and lay Artur down to the side. Behind me, the Door slowly begins to shut, and I call out to Selen. A deal is a deal. I wave a third blindfold.

"The other Door is yours, Selen," I say.

"Good. I must congratulate you, Mir," they reply. Their gaze turns to the twins who are trembling. They seem to recognize Selen's voice. Selen sighs. "As I am no longer a guardian angel, I have no authority to punish you two for entering the human realm. And... I would be inclined to believe that you have suffered enough.

"Mir, although I am hesitant to do it, I must thank you. You have given me an opportunity at redemption."

"Don't thank me. I didn't do a good thing back there," I say gesturing to the Door. "Now the Kapers are resting in a place far from their home."

Selen's eyes widen. But they aren't staring at me.

I turn around in time to see Caleb emerging from the closing Door, covered in dirt, and once again brandishing a golden weapon, but this time it's only a knife. He charges forward. I reach for a gun but only manage to grab air. I'm defenseless.

With a cry, Selen descends and pushes me to the ground. Beauty and Grace, still blindfolded, become confused at the sudden outcry from the Seraph and embrace each other. Selen takes a human form with two wings stretching from their back. They struggle against Caleb, but something is wrong. Selen's eyes are burning. The effects of White Space are settling in.

“Who the hell are *you?*” Caleb demands through gritted teeth. Selen wraps their wings around my ears, but I can make out the words they say next.

“MY NAME IS-” I look away from their mouth at the last moment. When I look back, Caleb is consumed by holy fire.

I rush to give Selen the blindfold, but they raise a hand. “My fate was sealed the moment I entered,” they say, sitting down. They turn to the twins who are still trembling. “Bring this man and his son with you. I won’t be able to transport them out anymore.” Then Selen points to me. “Don’t let your second chance go to waste. Protect your son. Take care of him. But most importantly, be there when he needs you. Do your job as a guardian.”

I open my mouth to make a promise, but once again they raise a hand. “I need not a reply. Leave me, it seems I am out of time. Go, before the madness sets in.”

“I could take you to the other Door before that happens,” I say, moving towards Selen. They push me away with a wing.

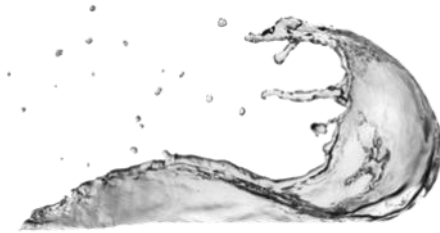
“I do not believe a Seraph gone mad could make use of it. Perhaps I could never have used it in the first place. Now go! Allow me to depart in peace.”

Before I can protest, Beauty grabs Artur and Grace lifts me from underneath my arms. We ascend upward, and I see the Door Revenge at last close. True to Selen’s word, the Door Justice remains unopened.

**THE BROKEN PROMISE,  
NEVER AGAIN**

I am going to try to share,  
What my perspective is from here.  
I grew up with my great grandmother,  
She was like no other.  
She was special, because she chose to continue,  
And not let the Jewish nation discontinue.  
She chose to remarry, have more kids, and pass on her traditions,  
She lived her life trying to forget those horrible conditions.  
I wouldn't blame her if she was angry and chose anything else,  
But she was special because she put procreating ahead of herself.  
She knew that so many Jews were lost,  
So, to build those numbers back up, she'd do what it cost.  
She put aside her trauma and started over,  
And I can't verbalize where she got that strength that drove her.  
As a kid in a Jewish school, everyone I knew,  
Descended from the few surviving Jews.  
We were taught the horrors of the camps and what happened with  
in,  
And how spiritually, they refused to give in.  
But at the start of it all, there were little Jewish attacks,  
And they were so small, so people turned their backs.  
They grew little by slowly,  
But nobody seemed to look that closely.  
It grew into the monster it became,  
The brutality and cruelty were insane.

Now, today, there is anti-Semitism roaring through humanity,  
And again, no one's reacting, this is again insanity.  
The world promised us Never Again,  
That they didn't realize then.  
That they didn't know what was happening within,  
Or they would've never let it begin.  
Little bits of hate are cropping up,  
Haven't we been through enough?  
The generation that survived the Holocaust is almost gone,  
But the Jews who remember-it's everyone.



## FROM THE FIELDS TO THE CITY

At the age of thirteen I became a mother of ten. The year was 1930. I remember that night so well. Rain was coming down hard against my window, but it was like a lullaby that put me right to sleep. A loud crack of thunder woke me out of my bed, it was as if I could feel the entire house shake. It was common to have thunderstorms during the summer months in South Carolina. I rolled over in my bed and went back to sleep. It wasn't long before I woke up again, this time I was coughing, my throat and eyes were burning. The room was filled with smoke. I ran around the room to wake up all 10 of my little brothers and sisters. The entire time I was screaming for my parents. All the kids were coughing and crying. I gathered them all together and we ran outside of the house. The entire roof was ablaze. Without even a second thought I ran back inside to find my parents. After that everything went black. I woke up in a bed surrounded by all my siblings, that's when I found out my parents had died in the fire.

That fatal storm would haunt me well into my old age. During every thunderstorm my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren would have to endure me turning off all the lights and TVs, all while having them huddle together into one room in silence. They thought I was a crazy old lady clutching her Bible in fear. If only they knew the devastation and trauma that storm had caused me. Later in my life they put a name to that trauma calling it PTSD.

My siblings and I were never a stranger to hard work. We were a family of sharecroppers. When our parents were alive, we toiled in the fields after school until quitting time. I quit school in the sixth grade to work in the fields supporting my brothers and sisters. Sharecropping was just a legal form of slavery. I detested the south and it's stifling heat and overbearing sun.

One day I got a letter from my Aunt Rosa who lived in New York. She would write me and tell me tales of her life in New York City. Aunt Rosa's letters told tales about rich black lawyers, doctor's, musicians, and artists. She had met a wealthy man there and they got married. This time her letter was an invitation from her and her husband for my brothers, sisters, and I to come stay with her. She said they would make enough room for us in her brownstone. At the time I didn't even know what a brownstone was. I just knew she was out of her mind to take in the 11 of us. Nonetheless I saw this as an opportunity and offer that I couldn't refuse. It took my siblings and I a whole year to save up enough money for bus tickets to New York and off we went. Goodbye Jim Crow.

When we got off the bus, we were amazed. I had never seen buildings so tall and lights so blinding. We were greeted by Aunt Rosa with her arms stretched saying, "welcome to Harlem". We walked down the streets with eyes wide as silver dollars. We oohed and aahed at everything. There was a man playing a saxophone on the street corner. A large group of colored men who looked very official, even with their funny hats walked by us. Aunt Rosa said they were called the Prince Hall Masons. The streets were filled with beautiful brown people dressed like movies stars. We passed by a building that said 'The Cotton Club in dazzling lights. I said to Aunt Rosa, "that is no club I want to be a part of. My cotton-picking days are over. I'm a city gal now". Aunt Rosa said, "the only way they would allow you in there, is if you're singing or dancing". They didn't patronize coloreds, but they would let us perform for them. Aunt Rosa said the Savoy Ballroom is the place for us to go. Everyone was welcome there as long as you could dance. She said she would teach me the Lindy Hop. She told me she saw Josephine Baker perform at the Apollo Theatre. This was a whole new world for me. I had never seen a traffic light before moving to New York.

I never had the time to learn that dance or partake in the fabu-

lousness that Harlem had to offer. I had children to take care of. The kids started school and I continued to work. I refused to let my siblings work anything but an odd job. I wanted all of them to focus on their education. I worked in a factory. The work was tedious but nothing like working in a field under the blazing sun. One Sunday after church Aunt Rosa and I ventured out to Coney Island, Brooklyn. That's when I met George, the man who would become my husband. He was standing in line behind me while waiting at a hot dog cart. George sparked a conversation with me telling me how these were the best hotdogs in New York. When I got to the front of the line he said to the man, "Nathan, I'm buying for the young lady". Usually, I would have refused but he was so handsome. His skin was like chocolate, and he had teeth like pearls. I was mesmerized. From that day on we were inseparable. That nice man Nathan later went on to become famous for his hot dogs. Coney Island became the backdrop for many firsts for us. We had our first kiss months later at Dano's Wonder Wheel. Several years later our daughter Carolyn would take her first steps for one of Nathan's famous hot dogs. Yes, after getting married we had a daughter. One child was all I wanted after raising so many.

In 1935 a riot broke out in Harlem. A young Puerto Rican boy who had stolen from a store was rumored to have been killed by the white store owner. Tensions were already at an all-time high due to the Depression and lack of jobs. The Blacks and Hispanics of Harlem were outraged, and violence ensued. The newspaper headline read, "*4,000 Riot in Harlem; One Killed*". It was mainly colored homes and businesses that were destroyed. One thing that I could never wrap my head around is why we would destroy our own neighborhood. The crazy plot twist is that the boy was never harmed. The entire riot was sparked from a lie. Life in Harlem had never been the same.

George decided to move the family to the Bronx. We lived in a small building on Boston Rd. We regularly took Carolyn to the



Bronx Zoo. She said, “Ma, this is the best zoo in the whole wide world”. When she grew up, she took her children and grandchildren there. They loved it too. George became a Yankees fan and attended the games at the stadium on 161<sup>st</sup> Street. I think it was an unwritten rule that if you lived in the Bronx you had to root for the Yankees. Over the years the neighborhood declined.

We worked hard and saved our money. Around 1940 we moved to a beautiful neighborhood in Addisleigh Park, Queens. We lived on a tree lined street in a big house with a backyard. The famous actress and singer Lena Horne was our neighbor. We became instant friends. I would bring her flowers from my garden, and she would always say, “it’s so nice to get flowers while you can still smell the fragrance”. Not only was she beautiful and talented she was very smart. I was glad to have her friendship. We had other affluent neighbors, jazz musician Count Bassie, boxer Joe Louis, and saxophonist John Coltrane. We were by no means rich; I would say middle class. At the time not many neighborhoods sold homes to African Americans. Not even the wealthy ones. This was an originally all white neighborhood and they tried to keep us out. A case was brought all the way to the Supreme Court in 1947 to prevent more African Americans from moving in and to kick the rest of us out. A judge ruled in our favor claiming that racially restricted covenants were unconstitutional because they violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. I never thought I would see the day where the law would work in our favor.

I’m proud of myself and the life I made for my family. Their successes were mine too. I didn’t do bad for a sharecropper from the South with only a sixth-grade education. Carolyn became a nurse. All my siblings went on to be successful and so were their children. We had a few doctors, lawyers, musicians and even writers in the family. It warms my heart to be able to sit back in my old age and think of how far we’ve come. The move to New York changed not only my life but the lives of generations.

## PARTNERS

### INT. AUTO REPAIR WORKSHOP - NIGHT

The owner of the establishment, GARY, decides to sweep the floor before closing up. LEON, a professional thief, can be seen walking through a door behind Gary. Gary carefully turns around, but then grins with relief as his partner in crime for over ten years walks up towards him. Leon has an annoyed look on his face.

GARY

Oh hey, Leon!

LEON

Gary, why you always got to do this to me? You know I am going to be here at the same time every week. Just leave the front door unlocked.

GARY

(confused)

What are you talking about?

LEON

Man, that's like the tenth time I've had to break into your place.

GARY

Oh I'm just uh... testing your skills, buddy! Gotta always sharpen your lockpicking expertise. Haha!

Gary lightly hits Leon on the arm. Leon awkwardly stares at his arm, and then back at Gary.

LEON

You forgot didn't you?

GARY

(surprised)

What! Me? Naaah.

Leon crosses his arms together.

LEON

You know; ever since you got hit by that falling stone on the mineral rock heist, you've changed.

GARY

(outraged)

What! What are you trying to say? That a mere stone is just gonna put me out like that. I've had kidney stones worse than that! Have some respect.

Gary turns around and goes back to sweeping.

LEON

(shrugs)

I don't know, man. That stone was pretty big though.

GARY

Shut up, Leon. What do you know about size anyway? Those cookies you baked last month were petite.

LEON

Don't you mean the cupcakes?

GARY

Cookies, cupcakes... All forms of pastries you could never get right.

Leon slowly uncrosses his arms.

LEON

Look. I'm just saying if your

(lifts hands to air quote)

“absent minded behavior” gets any worse, we may not be able to properly work together again.

Gary hastily looks up at Leon with disgust. He chucks the broom aside.

GARY

Listen to yourself. If you wanna terminate a ten year partnership over a pebble, then go ahead.

LEON

Gary, you know I would never hope for us to split up. I'm just concerned for you is all. But hey look, I'll drop it for now. I didn't come here to interrogate you about it anyways. I came here to know where you've hidden the diamonds so that I can pick 'em up.

GARY

What diamonds?

LEON

What?

GARY

What?

LEON

Did you just say what diamonds?

GARY

No no, I said uh... what dialysis! Man, my kidneys have never been the same ever since those cookies.

LEON

Cupcakes.

GARY

Right.

LEON

(angrily)

Wait, forget about the stupid cupcakes! Where did you drop off the diamonds!

GARY

Well, I was getting to that part.

LEON

Well, go ahead.

GARY

You see um... The diamonds are...  
(clears throat)

Ahem.

LEON

(frustrated)

I swear if you forgot.

Gary quickly snaps his fingers.

GARY

Ah see, I remember now! They're...

(whispers)

N o w h e r e .

LEON

What?

GARY

(whispers)

N o w h e r e .

LEON

What do you mean they're nowhere?

GARY

What do you mean what I mean? They're...

(whispers again)

N o w h e r e .

LEON

Yeah, but why you gotta put emphasis on it like that? Is it at a village called Nowhere or something. You mean Norway?

GARY

Nah man, they're just nowhere. Don't overthink it.

LEON

Alright then.

Leon pauses for a moment.

LEON (CONT'D)

Wait, WAIT WHAT DO YOU MEAN THEY'RE NOWHERE.

GARY

I thought we already went over this.

LEON

(angrily)

You better tell me right now where they are.

GARY

Yeah see, about that.

Leon sets his hands on Gary's shoulders and looks him dead in the eyes.

LEON

Gary! That's FIVE MILLION dollars worth of diamond jewelry! And you're telling me right now. At this very moment. You don't know where they are!

Gary brushes Leon's hands off his shoulders.

GARY

Don't you get it? It's all a part of my plan.

LEON

Your retirement plan?

GARY

No, my master plan!

LEON

(shocked)

Oh! I see how it is!

Leon shoves Gary to the floor.

LEON (CONT'D)

So you are going to betray me in front of my face,  
huh?

Gary slowly backs away as he gets up.

GARY

(nervously)

Leon, hey. Take it easy man.

LEON

Oh, I'm done taking it easy! I should have known  
this was coming.

Leon cracks his knuckles.

LEON (CONT'D)

Ever since you spat out those cupcakes,



you were a dead man to me.

GARY

They had too many sprinkles Leon. You don't understand! The strawberry frosting didn't pair well with-

LEON

Shut it.

Leon slowly takes a step forward as Gary takes a step back.

LEON (CONT'D)

It took you ten years to finally decide, huh?

GARY

Leon, don't. That's not what I meant by master plan.

LEON

So what did you mean?

GARY

I meant that my plan was to... purposefully forget where I put the diamond!

LEON

Now why would you want to do that?

GARY

You know... so I would never confess the location! In case I ever got arrested by the cops. Or even kidnapped by "diamond thieves"

thieves!

LEON

“Diamond thieves”... thieves...

GARY

The worst kind of thieves I'd say.

Gary's back hits into one of the auto shop's garage doors. Leon stops; just a few feet away from him.

LEON

The worst kind of thieves are the ones who steal another man's trust. Only to pawn it off for a couple of diamonds.

GARY

You know I wouldn't do that Leon. Please. Fine I'll admit it... that stone impaired my memory. Caused me to forget many things, but it did not erase the things we did together!

Leon stays silent.

GARY (CONT'D)

I still remember many of those moments. The Scotland Bank heist! The Train Cargo heist! The Casino Dice heist! The Meteorite Mice heist! The Jasmine Rice Nice heist! The Fight Night Plight heist! The Impolite Copyright Moonlight Snakebite Electrolyte heist! Twice! Come on Leon! The decade we spent should be evidence of my loyalty to the partnership. I wouldn't betray you.

Leon pauses. He grows anxious with thought.

LEON

But the diamonds, Gary...

GARY

They're gone.

LEON

Don't say that.

Leon begins to grow more restless.

GARY

Leon, don't do anything rash. Think about the consequences here.

LEON

Consequences? You forgot where five million dollars in diamonds went.

GARY

(sighs)

What am I supposed to say Leon?

LEON

Where the diamonds went for starters.

GARY

Yeah true, but what else? The truth is I just don't remember.

Leon steps aside and rests his hands on the workbench.

He lets out a deep breath before finally calming down.

GARY (CONT'D)

How about this. We've both made a lot of money over the years. I'll wire you five million of my own to make up for this error.

Leon turns his head towards Gary.

LEON

(dismayed)

No. Just keep it. The problem isn't the money. The problem is I can't rely on you anymore. I think it's for the best that the diamond job be our last heist together.

Gary takes a second to think of a way out, but realizes what Leon was saying was inevitable.

GARY

I guess so...

Both men were silent.

GARY (CONT'D)

Well, then that's it?

LEON

I suppose it is. This might be the last time you'll see me here.

GARY

Alright then.

Gary and Leon walk towards each other and firmly shake hands. Leon slaps Gary on the back.

LEON

(sincerely)

Take care of yourself.

Leon steps past Gary towards the door to make his leave. Gary walks over to the fallen broom and picks it up. He watches as Leon just about reaches the door frame.

GARY

Leon.

Leon turns back to face Gary.

GARY (CONT'D)

It was an honor working with you.

LEON

Likewise.

He exits. Gary looks down and sweeps the floor for the final time today. Leon returns.

LEON

Hey, Gary.

Gary looks up at Leon.

GARY

Yeah?

LEON

Take back what you said about the cupcakes.

END



## POETRY IS HARD

Poetry is hard,  
like digging up gold  
or maintaining a yard.

Why must we rhyme,  
for our story to be told?  
Who has the time

to pluck out allegorical gems  
from the firmament  
by their argumentative stems?

Thus it is, I sit and pluck,  
in sour lament,  
at my brain's feeble muck

searching for words that sound  
like one another, make sense,  
and do not confound.

Poetry is hard, but someday I might get good  
at diction, meter, imagery and syntax.  
Until then I'll just be in a mood

about poetry. Thankful I'm not Paula Nancy Millstone Jennings of  
Essex.

# MATCH BOX





## ADHD

Starve until dinner/eat all the food in the house!

Omigosh, so exciting!/God, this is boring/Holy crap, is it four a.m.?!

Gotta trick that brain into learning things/Omigosh, I need to know positively everything there is to know about this one thing!!

Omigod, I have a doctor's appointment at 4... I should do some homework... but I have a doctor's appointment at four... I should get some lunch... but I have a doctor's appointment at four... I should pay some bills... but.../Shit! It's 3:45, and I have a doctor's appointment at four!

GOD, I'M EXHAUSTED! Let's go to sleep... I forgot to take my plate out to the kitchen... I should really do the dishes before I leave tomorrow. Oh, we're almost out of dish soap. I should go to Target in the morning. I should make a list and just get everything we need tomorrow. I should set the alarm for an hour earlier. I wonder if they'll have Halloween decorations up yet. What should I be this year for Halloween?Remember that haunted house we went to a few years back?I wonder how long it takes the employees to-putthatkindofmakeupon.God,Ishouldhavegone toschooltolearn-stagemakeup...  
alksdjfoaiengho;ivhnsfofvna'klsdfborigy'[a0dilkcvnsn.....

AISHA FRAMPTON CLERK

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# AUTUMN



## HEADACHES

Missing the bus is a terrible thing  
Being late for a job interview is even worse  
The receptionist looks at you like you have horns sprouting out of  
your head  
You smooth down your hair just to see  
The manager that ushers you back into his office is frowning  
It's safe to say you didn't get the job

When your mom asks if you have gotten yourself a job,  
You wish she would drop the whole thing  
It just leaves you both frowning  
And she sends you home with pity brownies, which is even worse  
It's the bigger picture your mother struggles to see  
And that's metaphorically, not literally, because she's shorter than  
you by more than a head

When you walk beneath a pine tree on your way home, it drops its  
sticky needles on your head  
Maybe you wouldn't be so unlucky if you found yourself a job  
You log on to all the usual job sites to see  
This just isn't your thing  
But if you don't try, your mom's baking will only get progressively  
worse  
You remember the last time she baked, when she pulled a burnt  
cake out of the oven, frowning

That seems to be her constant state of mind, frowning  
Or maybe it's all in your head  
Like the pain in the back of your eyes that keeps getting worse  
Maybe you could afford a doctor's visit if you had a job  
But that's the thing  
You'll just have to play the game you've gotten so good at, wait-and-  
see

But you don't want to see  
Your mother and everyone that interviews you frowning  
Like you're not a person, but a thing  
An injured dog that hit its head  
Heck, even dogs can get a job  
Working with the police and what not, which makes you feel worse

Speaking of worse  
Your mom said there's a movie in the theaters that she wants you to  
see  
Never mind the fact that you don't have money from a non-existent  
job  
When you text her back that you're busy, you can imagine her  
frowning  
She'll think that you're not right in the head  
All of us are mad here, that's the thing

The pain behind your eyelids gets worse as the doctor walks in,  
frowning  
When he moves closer to see into your eyes, you can see the top of  
his bald head  
He says you're fine, that spending so long on a computer looking  
for jobs isn't the best thing

AISHA FRAMPTON CLERK

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NY





AISHA FRAMPTON CLERK

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## UNTITLED



## ALL AROUND US

They are all around us

Those who wipe their tears away with masks,

Then put them quickly back on to breathe in the salt smell now  
permeating the fabric

With rage, and emotions that cannot be identified

Swirling around, sheltering head from the light and providing  
shelter.

Who struggle to feel alive in a world of interconnectivity, and

Wallow in self-pity, who can't get out of their own sewage of  
endless cants and wonts

Who sit at their desk a stone's throw away from their "friend"

And when they sin will happily pick up a stone

When loving your neighbor means little at all,

Who feel nothing when, pleading, a young mother claws at their  
feet

Who kicks them, and walks into sermon with blood on their shoes

Blind hate, blind ignorance, justified by paper whose words have  
faded long ago

Pompous and regal, flaunt their confidence, yet shrink and shiver,

Covering their face when walking into the walls where insecurities  
are barred,

Where they release their filthy beliefs and words, which leave the  
room smelling rank and rotten

And then leaving with a smile and scheduling their next  
appointment, as fast as possible to avoid being seen.

Who's hardened hearts slip into ignorance, a weak attempt to shield  
themselves from pain

Pills, weed, drink, euphoria, masking deep insecurity with free mind

and body

What damage is done can be seen by the scars on their arms, but  
even deeper cuts are hidden

The heart bears the scars that refuse to heal on their own, festering  
under the surface,

Begging to be validated, but their eyes burn to look at mistakes  
They turn mistakes to pillars of salt under their gaze, thinking they  
can't hurt them anymore

Until the wind blows hard and eyes feel the sting of salt,  
Yet they have to continue, trudging aimlessly away from the city,  
from their childhood burning down.

Alone in their house cold dark creeps invading their space,  
crowding out any space to breathe

Struggling to exhale they scream obscenities and throw themselves  
against the floor until sobs Wrack their chest to seemingly no  
end, until their tears run out and their head pounds

Hands reach down to heal and arouse, yet they bat them away and  
cry out, questioning the Morality of society.

We never see them

When their heart beats fast and fills their head as the wheelchair  
clicks against the tiled floor

And the sign reads "Psych Ward 1" with an arrow pointing along  
with the front of the wheelchair

Down a whitewashed hall, as the bell tolls six times sending shivers  
down their back every gong.

When their parents laugh at their jokes about overdose attempts as  
they visit them, and buy

Them drugs to fuel their pain, when their parents deny their  
existence as a "he" not a "she"

When their parents blame them for getting raped, when they don't  
have parents

We never see them.



## WATER BOTTLE



## THE END OF SUMMER

Deep green turning to yellow,  
In the cheerful whistling of the breeze.  
Each leaf that falls takes its own path down  
Twisting and turning, dancing in the wind,  
Until it lays peacefully on the grass.  
Through the cold season they sit  
Slowly wasting away.  
Although they may be gone  
When the spring melts away the snow,  
And the sunlight razes their remains,  
They will leave behind a soil that welcomes life.



MUSAAB B. MUGHAL

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# THE BEAUTY OF PAKISTAN: BLUE LAKE



## MOUNTAIN LAKE

The stream slowly wound  
Flowing  
Falling gently  
Slowly  
Down into the valley lake.

Cold water from the snow capped peaks  
Flowing into each other  
Combining, growing,  
At every confluence.

Past the nursing fawn,  
Past the blooming edelweiss,  
Past the green grass,  
Providing for all.

Carving through the soil and rock  
Embracing every piece of sediment  
That it sweeps away.

Gently swirling and mixing  
It comes to a rest in the symphony,  
The serenity, and simplicity of the  
Mountain Lake.

ELIZABETH HEINRICHS

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## IN ON THE OUT



## LYING ON A BED OF NAILS

What am I running from  
Is it religion following me like a thief in the night  
Is it my gender and the hate that I feel towards myself  
I don't feel anything at all but my heart beat  
Thumping through my head while my eyes fog over  
What do I need to fix this without tearing myself to shreds  
The only thing I feel is sickness coursing through blood  
Mud covered shoes in the corner when I walk into my brain  
There stands the warden with his stick and cane  
Beaten within two inches from life  
I'd like to fall back onto something but the bed I fall on is made of  
nails  
I hate my own angst filled words dripping with emotion  
Emotion that I can't handle so I throw it on others  
I'll read back and want to scratch the slate clean of the shitty writing  
prose and style  
There's a pit in my chest that needs to be filled  
With money or drugs or cheap fucking thrills  
The worst part is I know it won't help but it's better than the wind  
blowing freely through my chest  
So my heart is protected and no one can touch it  
So I can't reach in and tear it out for being so loud  
The sting of emotion wells up in my throat  
The darkness is closing in ready to choke  
But I'll retreat back into my brain to cower  
Wallowing in my self pity and lack of power

Why do I have to show what I write in the dark  
Is it selfishness, helplessness, ego, or an internal attention whore  
Everything is cyclic in nature but the walls in the padded rooms  
    aren't nature  
But still like the forest it beckons me  
Like clockwork my brain will lose all control  
Spiraling down into a bottomless hole  
Where anyone who reaches out gets pulled in  
Where all is hell and darkness and life is death and death is life  
Where sins are forgotten and so are good deeds  
Where nothing matters and yet that fact drives you deeper  
I am my own hell and there is no escaping  
I've been banging on the bars and there's no sign of breaking  
But I've broken down many times like a faulty machine  
I have a better life than most and I squander it with my lack of  
    coping skills



ELIZABETH HEINRICHS

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# CALIFORNIA MY OWN

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## LET ME OUT

Let me out  
Let me out of this hell  
I don't recognize myself  
My body I'd sell  
If it meant that I could love what I see  
When I look in the mirror, it's not me  
Not me with the prickly fuzz on my jaw  
Not me with the hair on my forearms and chest  
Not me with the shoulders too big to be good  
I'll cover my face with a hood and hide everything  
Under thick cloth, it's hot but it's safe  
I hope I'm not too late, to wipe the slate  
I missed every road sign because of a new bandwagon  
Speeding down the religious road  
Pulled by a horse and on its back, death  
Death to all who question the words  
Death to all who find themselves in the dirt  
Death to all those who are trapped inside  
Death to all

If I wanted attention this is not what I would do  
I would scream at the top of my lungs from the roof  
And say fuck you to the religious zealots  
Who turn a blind eye when a blow is dealt to the "sinner"  
And yet I choose to find my attention,

In the disappointment of all I looked up to  
I'll shave my face until the skin is red and raw if it means I can see  
    myself in a picture  
Without wanting to tear it up and never look in a mirror again  
I'll take myself down to the well at noon  
When no one is around but the reflection in the still water  
All I am is a brain in a body not meant for me



ELIZABETH HEINRICHS

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# MISCHIEVOUS GOSLINGS



SAMANTHA MELLO

---

## AN X-RAY OF THE ROTTING RING

My eye zooms out  
so all of Earth is in my frame-  
and I can see each layer  
through to the core.  
My favorite lies beneath  
the surface-  
A ring of roots  
and corpses.



SAMANTHA MELLO

---

## DREAMING IN THE GARDEN

Here is the fig grove-  
wash the fig in the fountain  
and lie beside me.



**MORNING THROUGH THE EYES  
OF THE DRYAD**

Lilacs and dewdrops meet at dawn-  
fairies make the introductions  
and toads judge the event,  
looking for the softest shimmer.

Fairies make the introductions-  
doves and owls compare their notes  
looking for the softest shimmer,  
gazing on a pool hugged by elderberry bushes.

Doves and owls compare their notes-  
a doe brushes against the bark of an oak tree  
gazing on a pool hugged by elderberry bushes,  
the glint of the sun in the eyes of all that walk beneath it.

A doe brushes against the bark of an oak tree-  
fairies make the introductions  
the glint of the sun in the eyes of all that walk beneath it,  
gazing on a pool hugged by elderberry bushes.

MUSAAB B. MUGHAL

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# THE BEAUTY OF PAKISTAN: PASSUCONES



## MIRAGE

everything is a  
dream with you and none of them  
come true. do you?

solemnly I stand  
in the street where you  
left me shivering.

do not return, oh  
mirage, dream someone else  
into the deep dead ground.





MUSAAB B. MUGHAL

---

# THE BEAUTY OF PAKISTAN: SLEEPING LAKE



## MY DEAR CAPTAIN

I once heard a story of a woman  
with two hands and nine fingers- with white teeth,  
long hair, and a lovely disposition.  
So ethereal, she was called, so loved,  
I am told- but strangulation she found  
in love- with a man she could not breathe- If  
escape was to be hers, there could be one  
way: she took her sharpest knife and sharpened  
it some more- then placed her left hand on the  
board- and with a clean bright slash- removed that  
finger sought after by many- they say  
she placed it in a blue basket, and said  
anyone who wanted it now may have  
it; for it no longer had a thing to  
do with her, and neither did they. Her hair  
grew longer still and her smile always  
brightened, true freedom she acquired, and  
all the freedom more... since we do not know  
her name, or the name of the lovers she  
abandoned, she peacefully escapes another  
pirate: reputation. What a master,  
she was, a captain of her life!

MORGANA FAYE

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# THE CURSE OF DREAMS

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## CLOSER

Do you remember the space we once shared,  
where the moon glossed the sea in its light?  
For the sea, whose lullaby sang to the stars,  
shone the errors of our youth in the night.  
The real world seemed like the land of dreams  
encompassed in a kaleidoscope of wonder.  
Now, I find you on this monochrome stage-  
A doll left abandoned, its strings asunder.  
We dreamt of a blossoming cloud of petals  
streaking the twilight sky in a thousand shades.  
Yet, underneath that grandeur of happiness  
masked turbulent feelings sharpened into blades.  
Among the river of silver, I find the one like you,  
glittering distant melancholy in the dark sky.  
As time went on, these broken days grew distant;  
years flew by, and my tears since long dry.  
Pleas of desperation wrecked my trembling soul,  
But I knew you longed for a life beyond this place.  
Somewhere far more extravagant and grand-  
Somewhere more real than this tiny space.

MORGANA FAYE

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## RAID OF DREAMS

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*InSomNia*

## SUN

In your hands my soul to keep  
In my heart, your love to last  
Upon the sea of tears  
The storm of years wages  
Upon the mounts of sleep  
I wake up on the dreams of ages  
While I stand amidst the sun  
I see the creatures run  
Always going, never slowing

Upon the sun, I see the ages  
In my heart, I feel it waging  
Life or love, pain or death  
All is naught beneath my breath  
Upon the sun, I stand no more  
Beneath the sky, the light grows dark  
In my heart, I fear the dark  
Where dark things lie unsung

Then like gold, the sun appears  
Raging war against the fear  
In my heart, I know no fear  
Upon the sun, I stand once more  
Upon the sun, I dream once more  
Beneath the sun, all things lie  
In its truth, none can hide  
Casting doubt from my mind

No more fear can I feel  
No more pain can I feel  
All is naught beneath the sun  
With its glow so ever shone  
All is lost to the sun  
Upon the sun, I stand so high  
Upon the sun, I dream of life  
In my heart, I feel its warmth  
In my heart, I feel her love  
In my heart, I know it true

Upon the sun, I stand so high  
Upon the sun, I never cry  
Upon the sun, I know no fear  
Upon the sun, beneath all things lie  
Upon the sun, my cry rings out  
To seek the ears of those who doubt  
From the sun, they hear me true  
Upon the sun, I dream once more  
Upon the sun, I die no more  
Upon the sun, I live evermore

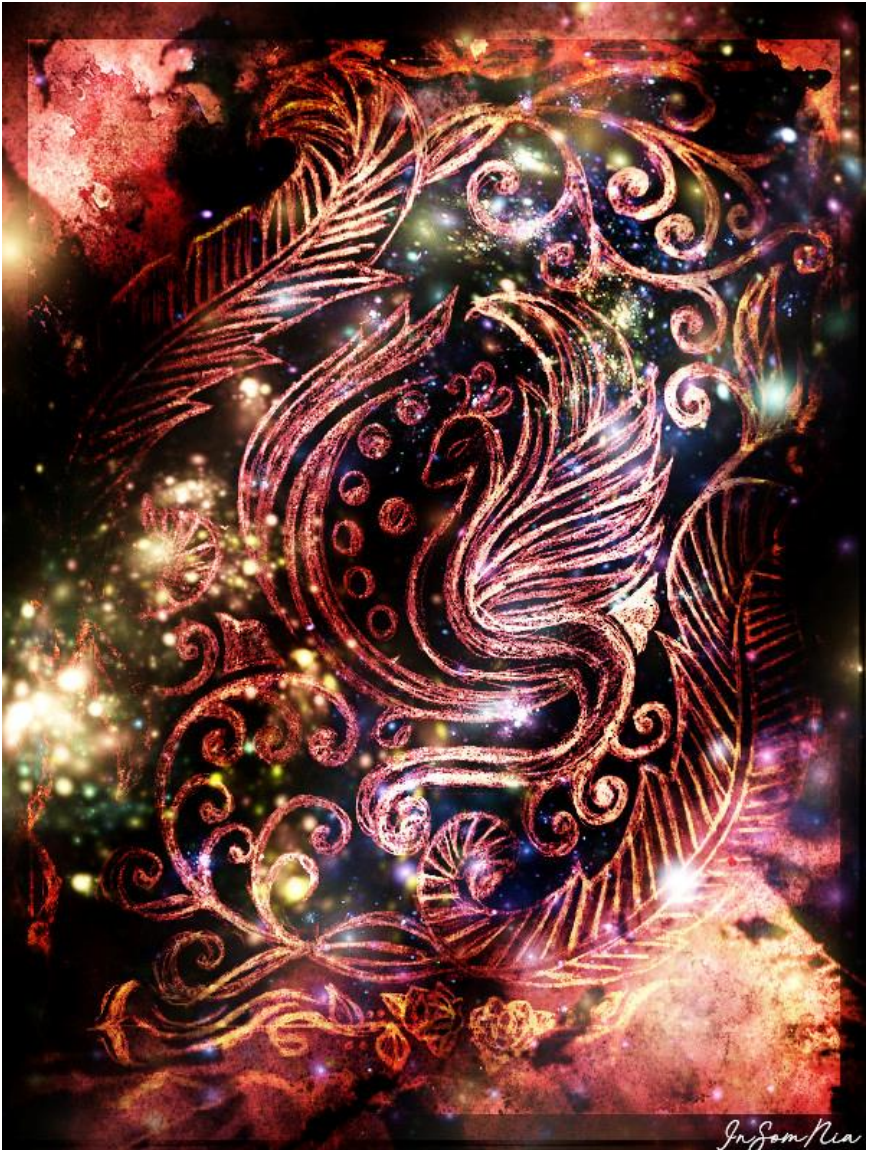


MORGANA FAYE

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## PREQUEL'S LULLABY

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*InSomNia*



## DREAMS

Pray the Lord my soul to keep  
Pray the pain no more  
Should I sleep, the pain persists  
will it never cease?  
When I lie in my sheets  
The dreams I dream never cease  
Dreams of hope, dreams sung true  
Dreams that never seem so blue

While I lie feeling sublime  
I never felt so rude  
Dreams make lies  
The feelings I feel  
In my mind never to be true  
While I lie about the time  
I know it to be soon  
Should I dream  
Of coffin things  
Never do I decide

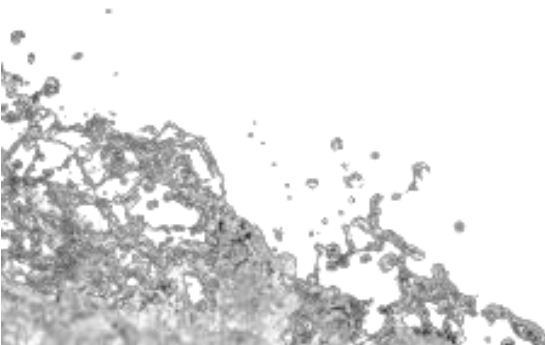
While I breath  
not much to see  
Do I think of me  
Should I find solitude  
Dreams of fire  
Raise my ire  
Like never before  
Dreams of knights

Fight like lights  
In the dreams,  
I'm thinking of  
Dreams of Light  
Escape my sight  
Never to be seen

While I lay, I might slay  
The dragon, I'm dreaming of  
Or the knight I wish I was  
I think I might  
Be open to fright  
O'er what I'm dreaming of  
Never known what'll be shown  
When I'm dreaming, love  
Always dreaming, never seeming  
The dreams, I wish I was  
Always going never showing  
The hope I'm thinking of

I'd be moaning  
Must be groaning  
If the life I'm thinking of  
Was a dream,  
but one in the stream  
No more to be thinking of  
I must be going  
Not sure where I'm going  
The place I'm thinking  
Maybe sinking  
Or maybe rising  
I may never know  
what I'm dreaming of

Pray the Lord my soul to keep  
Pray Lord my dream to keep  
I shall sleep into the deep  
I really must be gone  
Now I lie in my sheets  
The dreams I dream never cease  
Dreams of hope, dreams sung true  
Dreams that never seem so blue  
Dreams of love  
Dreams of life  
Dreams that never cease



UNTITLED



## BIOGRAPHIES

**Audrey Bergen** is a student attending Clovis Community College. She is working towards getting a Bachelor's degree in English with a minor in Creative Writing.

**Daniel Celaya** is a student attending the College of the Sequoias as an English Major. He has enjoyed reading from a very young age, and in recent years, has found equal enjoyment in creative writing.

**Johnny Che** is twenty-one years old, and this is his first time submitting a fiction work titled Partners. He attends Golden West College as a Psychology major. His ethnicity is Chinese, and was born in America.

**Aisha Frampton Clerk** is a multimedia artist mainly focusing on miniature and model making but she also likes to work in acrylic and collage. As an architectural technology student, she creates pieces that are tangible or textured. She feels that pieces people can experience and imagine themselves in or physically connect with are more impactful. Aisha is a student at Queensborough Community College in New York.

**Brianne Datiles** is an aspiring writer of fantasy. Since the fourth grade, she has written short stories and has recently decided to major in creative writing. She is currently studying at Clovis Community College, Reedley College, and Fresno City College.

**Nikki Do** is a second-year student at Golden West Community College where she is an English major planning on transferring into the UC system. Her greatest aspiration is to become a storyteller, whether that be in a classroom or through her writing.

**Bethany Estavillo** is a bookseller, and a sociology major at Gold West College in Huntington Beach, California. She lives with her partner, two rambunctious sons, and a mangy mutt somewhere near there, as well.

**Morgana Faye** is a second-year student at GWC. She is currently majoring in Studio Arts and plans on transferring to Cal State Fullerton or Long Beach to complete her Bachelor's Degree in Packaging Design.

**Lucas Hall** is 18 years old and goes to Corning Comm. College.

**Elizabeth Heinrichs** is a college student at Reedley College and Fresno City College. Like many of her creative classmates, she has been drawing since she could hold a crayon (and not eat it). She is an aspiring artist in film, theatre, and the fine arts.

**Aliza Katz** is submitting her poem because she thinks she should share her voice. She wrote this for her English class last semester in Queensborough CC. Her professor sent out an email urging her to submit her "Acts of Creative Resistance".

**Ivan Medel** is majoring in studio arts and hopes to major in Art when he transfers to a UC or CSU. His goal is to be an art director for a major brand, small brand, or fashion designer/house. He wants to continue working on being a better artist because it is his passion and wants to be the best that he can be. He hopes to one day also work in fashion and live happily and comfortably.

**Samantha Mello** is an English and Fashion major at the College of the Sequoias in Visalia, CA. She is a native of the Central Valley and holds her hometown (Hanford, CA) near and dear to her heart, as she is from a farm. She enjoys reading, writing, gardening, and studying literature, linguistics, and fashion history.

**Musaab Bin-Tariq Mughal** is a student of creative writing at Golden West College, and considers himself an observer of fine works. While he doesn't have a career path in mind, he believes God will guide his hand wherever he is led. He hopes to be in a career to influence people to become better humans through his writing and believes in his inner spark that'll eventually unlock the story within.

**Andrew Ramos** is a student at Reedley and Clovis Community Colleges. This is his first year in college and he's proud to be a first-generation college student.

**Houston Sasselli** is an English major and tutor at Reedley College with a focus in creative writing. He has been writing stories ever since he was a little kid, and since then he's worked on some personal creative projects such as novels and screenplays. With a heavy background in fantasy and a wide interest in psychoanalysts like Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, he likes to explore complex themes of the human mind along with myth and legend.

**Hannah Takasuka** is a medical technology researcher and published scientific author in tissue regeneration and orthopedic surgery medical devices. She is currently studying biomedical engineering and Spanish at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD, and Golden West College in Huntington Beach, CA.

**Christine Williams** is a student at Queensborough Community College and is pursuing a degree in Sociology. She has a love of creative writing and her piece in *Kings River Review* is a historical fiction story inspired by her great grandmother's life.

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