

2025 Southeastern Iowa Short Story and Poetry Writing Contest Anthology

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What happens to Wingsy

By Elizabeth Hadlandsmyth

Hi, I'm Wingsy, and right now I'm a caterpillar. My life is perfect. What kind of caterpillar you ask? I'm a monarch caterpillar. So that means I have to eat a lot of milkweed. When I hatch from my chrysalis I will be a butterfly, but my wings won't be ready for one or two minutes.

And now I'm forming my chrysalis phase. Hurray! It's going to take ten days for me to hatch, so be patient. I'm feeling a little bit scared, because when I wake up out of my chrysalis I have to migrate to Mexico.

Here I come! I'm hatching! It's time to migrate. I'm excited but also a little scared, but I get to fly with my butterfly friends so that makes me feel better.

Here we go, we're getting in formation. It's time to fly!

Woohoo! We took off!

Now we're flying through the sky, still going up, we need to be very far up high. Now we're flying over a city, it's so cool, there are so many people down below. Now we're flying over a forest. Look at all those animals. Wow, I never knew there were so many animals in the world. Now it looks like we're passing a desert, there's some cowboys I can see. Now we're into a nice meadow of milkweed flowers. We can stop and drink some nectar and then we'll be ready to fly again.

Now we're taking off again, and getting ready to fly over what I think is one of the biggest lakes in the world, but it might even be an ocean. Oh no, waves are picking up, wind is blowing hard, some of us butterflies might not make it. But luckily I'm the youngest flyer on the team so the others are going to help me extra. Some of us didn't make it. But all of my family and friends made it because we stayed strong together.

Now we're past the ocean, or the lake I don't know what it was, and we're almost at Mexico. Just a

little more flapping to do.

Now we're at Mexico. We settle down and start to sleep.

Now we're just all waking up. But what's that!

Are those humans? They're trying to take us away! Quick, butterflies, flap away!

Great job butterflies, we fought off the humans!

But we won't make it back home.

Our babies will continue our journey.

MagicBy Asha Mihalopoulos

One day I found a sparkling golden key. A hidden door in the wall appeared. I see a beautiful, magical land. There's floating castles and cotton candy clouds but the magic is fading.

But I met a stranger that could help save the land from fading away. We find a mysterious library. I find this magical spell book. It says right here, the spell to take away evil magic from the land.

First, we have to find magic mushrooms. We walk into the enchanted forest. I found the magic mushrooms. We put the mushrooms in the pot.

Now, we have to find golden nuggets. We start digging and digging. But we see a kittycorn guarding the golden nuggets. It scooches them to me. I tame it.

We get the golden nuggets, and put them in the pot.

"Oh, no, the page is ripped. How do we find it?"

We look around everywhere in the library. It was on the page before. My friend is gone now, too.

What happened to everything?

The kittycorn is eating it! I look down and I see a sparkling bracelet. Part of the page is cut off, but there's still one part left. It says, "one bracelet."

I put the bracelet in the pot. Blue and pink smoke starts bursting out. It forms into words, and the pot says: "Find something that rhymes with a horn..."

That's easy - acorn! Nope, it's still a horn. You got me. Now I'll check the forest.

A kitty - aaaahhhh! That looks just like the kittycorn, but without its horn.

Why are you holding your horn? OK I'll put it in the pot. Anyway, wowww... I think the potion is done. Time to dump it out.

Now, to go home. Time to sleep.

Maybe I'll visit tomorrow. (Pulls key out of pocket.)

THE END

Rufus Escapes

By Juliet Welsh

I am Olive, an 11-year-old girl who lives with her identical twin sister, mom, dad, and terrier dog. One school morning, I woke up and went out to feed my dog, Rufus, before breakfast. I looked in his doghouse, but he wasn't there. I looked around our lawn, but he wasn't there or anywhere else in our yard either. Oh, no! I thought. What if something had happened to him? At least he was trained to not go past our property, so I decided to go into the forest behind our house. My sister, Olivia, came out and helped me search. Finally, we came out into a large clearing with rolling hills. "I'll search the hills," I said. "You look near the trees." Olivia nodded and ran of to the way we came. I hoped we'd find him soon.

I saw something brown and floppy that the wind was whisking overhead. "Huh, I wonder what that was," I said to myself.

We searched and searched for about an hour. I was getting hungry. Suddenly, loud barking came from a nearby hill. It was the hill with the cave, I realized.

A small, brown bear prowled out from it. If a baby bear was there, then there might be a mama bear nearby... I shrieked and ran to my sister. "AHHHHHHHH, THERE'S A BEAR OVER HERE!" I yelled. Suddenly, barking came from the direction of the bear. We turned and saw something bouncing around inside the bear.

"What?" Olivia said. "Olive, what's going on?"

"I don't know," I said. We walked carefully over to the bear. We peeked around a rock and noticed the bear's fur looked shiny, and it had beady black eyes. And there was something hanging from the side of its mouth. It was shiny and silver.

"Oh no," Olivia whisper shouted. "That's Rufus' collar. The bear must have EATEN HIM!" "That's not a collar," I said. "That's a zipper."

I walked over to the bear.

Olivia yelled in a whisper, "What are you doing?!"

I came over and grabbed the zipper and pulled it back. A terrier's head popped out of the bear's mouth. "Rufus?" my sister said. "WHAT?"

"See, Olivia, it's just a costume," I said, relieved and excited we'd found him. "It was the brown thing flying overhead earlier. I bet Rufus climbed into it and got trapped." Rufus barked cheerfully and bounded around me. We'd done it. We'd found him!

"Come on, let's go get ready for school," I said to Olivia and Rufus, carrying the bear costume over my shoulder.

The end.

Protectors

By Alena Hadlandsmyth

The Deep Dark Woods is known as a place of pure evil. But right in the center is The Mystical Forest. Within The Mystical Forest there are many magical beings, but the most important are the Elemental Dogs. They are dogs made of fire, water, clouds, or earth. Depending on their element they also have special powers, but most importantly they are the protectors of the forest. Ash Flame is a young fire pup, and he is the son of the general of the Mystical Guard.

The water by the Enchanted river rippled and splashed gently onto the shore. Beside it,

Ash lay peacefully in the warm forest sand. It was a beautiful spring day in The Mystical Forest

and everyone was enjoying it. Everybody except Tsunami. For him it was just another day

without having fulfilled his dream. All his life he'd wanted to be on The Mystical Guard. He

wanted to help those in need. So, when he saw Ash sleeping on the sand, about to fall into the

river, he knew what he had to do. He leaped out of the river and onto the sand leading a swarm of

water droplets behind him.

"Help, help!" Ash howled. Tsunami didn't understand, he had saved Ash, hadn't he?

That's when he realized the droplets had hit Ash's leg with a simmering splash. Ash no longer had a front left leg!

A few moments later the whole forest was at Ash's side. Tsunami tried to explain what had happened, but no one would listen. They all turned away as Ash was carried home on his father's back.

When they got to Ash's house they laid him in his bed. "Father, may I go to The Fire of Healing," sniffled Ash. The Fire of Healing was an ancient place that could fix any wound a fire dog could have. "No Ash," his father barked sternly, "It's right in the middle of The Battlefields of The Deep Dark Woods!" "But Father," Ash started but his father interrupted him. "Many dogs have lived happy lives with only three legs," and with that he left the room. "No," Ash thought to himself, "I am going to the Fire of Healing."

So, Ash set off into the Deep Dark Woods. He walked for a long time before seeing a light in the distance. Finally, he reached The Fire of Healing. "Wow!" Ash whispered at the amazing sight of the miraculous glowing fire. He was about to dip his leg in when he heard a raspy voice. "Come pack. I heard something. Towards the fire!" A whole pack of raven-black dogs stepped out of the bushes. Dark Dogs! They were dogs made of black fire with hearts of pure evil. Ash's father had battled them many times, but Ash had never seen them in real life until now. "Well look what we have here," growled one of the dogs. "It seems to be a Fire Pup, Boss," barked another. "I know, Snarl," growled the leader. "Dark Dogs! Attack!"

At that moment Tsunami burst out of the bushes leading the entire Mystical Guard behind him! "Heal your leg Ash! We got this!" he howled. Fire flew through the air as Ash's father began the battle. One of the Dark Dogs countered the attack with a black flaming ball of his own. The battle was on. The Dark Dogs leapt, each taking a member of the Guard to fight. As the battle continued the leader of the Dark Dogs hung back. He started creeping towards Ash!

"I'll save you, Ash!" Tsunami howled as he pounced onto the leader. Suddenly Ash felt freezing and steaming hot at the same time. Then when he pulled his limb out of the fire, there was a brand new leg attached to his old stub. As soon as Ash stood up he leaped onto the Dark Dog that was on top of his father.

Then finally, after the long grueling battle the Dark Dogs ran back into the forest.

"How did you find me?" Ash asked Tsunami on the way home. "I saw you leave so I ran after you to try to explain what happened at the river. When you were sleeping you almost rolled into the river," Tsunami replied.

"Sorry I overreacted. Thanks for rescuing me" Ash said.

"No problem!" Tsunami barked happily.

When they got home a ceremony took place. Tsunami stood on a rock next to The Enchanted River, except this wasn't just any old rock, this was The Rock of Beholding. Some of the greatest Mystical Soldiers in the history of the forest stood in that exact spot.

"Tsunami, you have come so far since we first met" General Flame said as he walked toward Tsunami. The entire forest was there watching the ceremony.

"This" General Flame announced, "this is what a true hero looks like. A true hero you may ask, is someone who is brave in the face of danger even if they're terrified. That is what this young pup showed today." Tsunami was so happy he was about to cry.

"Tsunami, welcome to the Mystical Guard." As General Flame said those words the entire forest cheered. And as for Tsunami, it was the happiest moment of his life.

The Midnight Zone

By Brooke Lynn Mader

Hi, I'm Linus. I didn't write this book, but a really awesome kid did... let's call him "Bobby." This story is crazy, and I think it's best if I start at the end.

I snuck downstairs and grabbed the kosher salt from the kitchen pantry. I tiptoed back to my room and poured salt on top of the blood stains that remained soaked deep into each strand that makes up each thread that creates every loop on the carpet. Once all the blood was absorbed, I got up and did my usual morning routine as if none of this had ever happened.

I walked back downstairs and plopped down onto an open seat at the table. As my mom cooked breakfast for me I could smell the salty, slightly meaty, comed beef hash and I could hear the shatter of the new eggs my mom bought from the store yesterday as they started to sizzle in the pan. And I could see the sight of... BURNT TOAST?!

"MOM!!! " I screamed. "THE TOAST!"

Mom grabbed the toast and unplugged the toaster. "Sorry Bud," said Mom. "It's ok".

I went to the pantry, grabbed a box of Fruit Loops, a bowl, and a jug of milk, and made myself cereal. I gulped it down, grabbed my backpack, and rushed out the door. "SHOOT!" The bus was gone.

I ran three blocks before the driver FINALLY noticed the screaming teen chasing his bus banging on the door. He came to a full stop and opened the door. I marched up the steps and gave the driver a stern look. He gave one back, and mine wasn't nearly as horrifying as his was. I walked to the closest empty seat and sat down. After about 3-4 minutes, the bus arrived at the middle school.

I didn't think I was walking that slow, but I entered the building just as the bell started to ring. My face turned red and my walk turned into more of a run. Once I got to my locker, I grabbed my notebook and some textbooks. I tried to open the door to the classroom, but my hands were so

sweaty from running that they repeatedly slid off the handle. Soon I got hold of it, or I could say it got a hold of me. I fell through the door! The whole class stared in silence for exactly four seconds and then burst out laughing! All I could do was get up off the floor and sit down at mydesk.

I sat next to my best friend Robert (not to be confused with "Bobby"), but across from me was Chuck Derkins — the biggest bully ever.

"Nice entrance, Lame-us. You're such a foozler!" said Chuck. I just rolled my eyes and turned to Robert.

Ya see, on a normal day, I'd have this really good comeback, and everyone would be all like, "OOOHHH!" and "AHHHH!" But not today. Not after the morning I just had.

Let me explain. Did I mention I am NOT crazy? By the way... once you started reading this book you unknowingly agreed to a secret promise that says that you can't make fun of me or what I say and write... I mean, Bobby... because you are the one who decided to read it. So, this is how it went down.

I was laying in bed when a cold breeze blew in the open window and across my face. The soft touch of the frigid air caused my whole body to shiver uncontrollably while the soft whistle coming from the window sent shivers down my spine. I stood up and slowly approached the window. I pushed it down and pulled the blinds shut. I hobbled over to my bed and gracefully fell right into it. I pulled the covers up over my arms and my eyes slowly drooped shut.

After about an hour, a noise awakened me. It was a voice calling me. It was highly pitched and ghostly-like. It was screechy. It was imitating nails on a chalkboard almost perfectly, but worse. "FOLLOW ME" The voice screamed.

It repeated the sentence over and over, each time in a different pitch.

"Follow me" "FOLLOW ME"

My eyes shot open and I sprung up. My head swung around my room rapidly. As I turned to my left, I noticed a small glowing orb floating beside my bed.

I stood up and slowly approached the strange, ghostly object. Suddenly, it whipped around my room.

"FOLLOW ME," the voice repeated once more.

Then, it quickly zipped out of my room. Without thinking, I chased it into the living room and watched as it floated toward the front of the door. The door slowly creaked open in anticipation and the orb flew into the dark, cold, airy world. As I followed the orb, it led me into a dark forest that now seemed to surround my entire house.

The orb kept going deeper and deeper into the darkness of the spooky woods. After seven minutes of walking, its glowing light brought me to a cave. I didn't even have a moment to see where I was when the orb's light flickered, just for a second. When the light came back, it revealed a woman with sharp blood stained teeth, bound in chains in the center of the Cave. She was so tall that she would be able to kiss the top of the tree that sits outside my bedroom window. She rushed toward me and jumped on me. I closed my eyes in terror, rolled out of bed, and looked up at the clock. It was a new morning. This morning.

I stood and looked around. My heart practically stopped as I read the message written in dark red blood on my carpet "This is just the beginning."

The words echoed in my head. Could it have all been real? I imagined that scene... but it couldn't have been real... right?

The Heart of the Ancient Wood

By Skylar Chen

Long ago, in the forgotten corners of the world, there existed a forest so ancient that it predated all the kingdoms and empires that came to be. The **Ancient Wood**, as it was called, was not a place one wandered into lightly. The villagers who lived on the outskirts spoke of it in whispers, fearful of the mysterious forces that lay hidden deep within its thick canopy. They said that only those who were pure of heart could reach the **Heart of the Forest**, a mythical place where the true magic of the world was born.

Sylvia had heard the stories since childhood – stories of the great tree at the heart of the forest, whose roots stretched so deep into the earth that they could touch the very soul of the world. It was said that anyone who reached it would be granted a single wish. But no one had ever returned from their journey to find the Heart, and those who tried were never seen again.

Yet, Sylvia could not ignore the pull. For as long as she could remember, she had felt the presence of the forest calling to her, especially at night, when the wind carried voices through the trees. It was a longing she could not explain, a deep yearning that felt like destiny.

One day, when the moon was full and the air was thick with magic, Sylvia decided to venture into the forest. The villagers begged her not to go, but she could not resist. She packed only a small satchel with provisions and set off toward the ancient trees.

As she ventured deeper into the wood, the forest seemed to come alive around her. The trees whispered secrets to one another, their trunks covered in glowing runes that pulsed with an ancient magic. Strange, ethereal creatures flitted between the branches—beasts of light, shadow; and mist, creatures who had long forgotten the touch of humanity. The air grew thick with magic, and every step she took seemed to take her further from the world she knew.

After days of walking, Sylvia reached the Heart of the Forest. It was not a tree, as she had imagined, but an enormous **stone circle**, a sacred space where the earth seemed to hum with power. In the center stood a single stone, impossibly tall, glowing with a golden light. The air here was charged, and the world felt as though it had paused in anticipation.

As Sylvia stepped forward, the earth trembled beneath her feet, and the stone in the center of the circle cracked open. From within the earth, a voice, ancient and wise, spoke.

"What is it you seek, child?"

Sylvia's heart raced. She had come for a wish, of course, but now that the moment was upon her, she was unsure what to ask for. The pull of the forest, the whispers of magic—it was all overwhelming. But then, she remembered the dreams she'd had for years—visions of her mother, who had disappeared when Sylvia was just a child.

"I wish to find my mother," she said, her voice steady. "I wish to know what happened to her."

The stone pulsed with a brilliant light, and Sylvia felt a rush of warmth wash over her. For a moment, the world seemed to disappear, and then she saw it: a vision of her mother, standing in the center of the same stone circle, smiling at Sylvia as though she had been waiting for her all this time.

In the vision, her mother spoke, her voice echoing across time. "The Heart of the Forest grants not wishes, but truths. I am here, Sylvia, because the forest is part of you. You will never lose me, for you are the forest itself."

Sylvia gasped. The truth was not what she had expected. Her mother had been a guardian of the Heart, a part of the forest's magic. And now, Sylvia had inherited that role.

As the vision faded, the stone sealed itself, and Sylvia understood her purpose. The Heart of the Forest was not just a place—it was a part of her, a part of all those who listened to its call. From that day on, Sylvia became the new guardian, keeper of the forest's secrets and its ancient magic.

And as the moon rose high in the sky, the whispers of the trees seemed to welcome her, their voices soft, knowing, and proud.

Northern Dawn

by Lorelei Rex

I run, clambering over a pile of snow, fingers clawing desperately for purchase, so numb that everything feels like frozen plastic. My feet find food holds all on their own. I leap from the top of the pile, ducking my head as an explosion rocks the earth. I'm thrown through the air, not even having touched the ground after I jumped, crashing down on my side hard onto the ice. The wind is knocked out of me. My breathing is strangled, coming out in harsh whines. I shove myself back up, pushing aside the pain. Then I'm back up and running for my life. I hear the faint deathly whistle of a bomb as it drops from the sky. People are screaming. I push myself harder. I hear my own breathing catch and wheeze in my throat.

I wish I could do something. I see a leaning brick wall ahead of me, maybe 20 feet tall, the remains of a building, crumbling but somehow still standing upright.

I hear my feet pounding out the seconds in the eerie silence before the bomb hits the ground. I dive behind the wall and curl into a ball, tucking my knees and chin to my chest and wrapping my arms around my legs.

I see smears of red on the pant leg that is digging into my face. I brush my fingertips to my nose. My hand comes away scarlet. I press myself against the cold brick. And wait.

The silence shatters like glass dropped against a stone floor, resounding in my mind so many times I think I've gone mad. KABOOM! KABOOM! KABOOM! The fiery breath of the bomb tears at my hair and stands it on end. Shards of wood and rock flying through the air in my mind like it's all just a recording on T.V. But it's real

it's real

it's real.

I hear a groaning, grinding noise. My eyes fly open and I look behind me in terror. My eyes bulge. The brick wall is collapsing. Scramble to my hands and knees, I lunge towards the sunlight-patched ground beyond the shadow of the wall. I fall short. My foot is caught under a pile of heavy looking rocks. Those weren't there before!! A metallic taste floods my mouth. My heart hammers out of my chest. I yank at my foot, desperation tightening a rubber band around my chest and sending my head on an endless merry-go-round ride cranked up at full speed. The bricks at the top of the wall are coming loose, tumbling to the hard ground and cracking. Another cluster of bombs rain down in the distance, looking like black birds dropping limply from the sky. There is a

muffled chain of explosions, and the whole wall sways.

I give up and flop onto my side. It's hopeless. Maybe I'll finally be able to leave this miserable reality. Hopefully I leave peacefully. With that thought in mind I close my eyes and allow myself to relax for the first time in months.

I glimpse the blue sky, feel the frigid winter air crinkle the inside of my nose. I think of when the sun shines on the white snow and turns everything into diamonds. As I crack one eye and see the brick wall giving out I smile and say,

"Thank you."

"Wake up, Aana." Someone shakes me and I lash out. Why is it so dark? Is this what it's like to die? The hands grab my shoulders and haul me upright from my position on the ground. I

blink rapidly, staggering as the world spins. I wait for everything to stop moving so I can see properly. I make out a tanned face in the dark framed with wavy dark brown hair and black eyes. For a moment I have no idea who it is. Then I recognized him as Iluuna's older brother, Inuk. Iluuna is one of my closest friends.

"I'm not dead?" I ask, confused. Inuk gives me a strange look.

"I guess not," he replies. He doesn't look at me, though, and bends down to pick up a rope, coil it, and stuff it into a rucksack at his feet. I cock my head.

"What happened? The brick wall..." I'm so confused I feel dizzy again.

"You were dreaming," Inuk says sharply. "You were unconscious inside of a toppled building when I found you. If I hadn't dragged you under this rock before the bomb hit, you would be dead right now." Inuk begins to walk away from me. I suddenly realize that something is missing. No. Not something, but someone.

"Where's Iluuna?"

Inuk freezes midstep. What I thought was a permanently unswayed figure sags. "Iluuna...?"

Inuk's voice cracks and I nearly get knocked over by the tide of grief that pours from the gaping hole.

"I couldn't get to her. It was either to try to get to her and be too late or save you. She would want it, but I don't know..." Inuk's voice drops to a rasp and trails off. He's in too much pain to say anything else. I sink to my knees. Feel the lump forming at the back of my throat. I swallow the tears threatening to spill uncontrollably behind my stinging eyes. Iluuna was always such a risk

taker. I should've known. There's no time to mourn her now, though. We're in too much danger. Inuk climbs to the top of a boulder to get a better view of the terrain. He faces away from me as he surveys the land. Crying for Iluuna won't bring her back. I stand, and for the first time get a good look around me. I draw in a breath that sends a stabbing pain through my lungs.

The rock Inuk dragged me under is to my left. Its better half is buried in the ground, locked in place by permafrost. There's a hollow beneath it where an animal must have lived in at one point. We're surrounded by typical greenlandic landscape: Sloping, stony hills with little vegetation other than grass, dotted with houses and farms, some of them only heaps of shattered wood in the middle of giant craters. To my right, a quick jog down the hill we're on top of is the Labrador Bay. It glistens in the sun, a blinding dark blue strip that seems to stretch on forever in all directions. The navy water laps at the narrow sandbed that has accumulated over the years from the melting ice sheets.

Right now I'm sandwiched between jagged, blue hills on the edge of every horizon. Not 50 feet away is the skeletal remains of a house that has been pummeled by bombs. I look past the oncepretty house and see more like it, identical in the means that each one had been reduced to rubble. Twisted metal sticks up from the ground like gnarled fingers. The colorful wooden houses have been turned into heaps of faded popsicle sticks left out in the sun for too long. Bodies are strewn about carelessly, facedown on streets after bullets have ripped through their backs, heads lolling, eyes lifeless and sometimes eaten clean out of the socket by the ravens

crowding any exposed flesh. The sky is a dusky reddish color like a sunrise - a northern dawn. The sickly orange light is reflected on a large body of water, my guess is from some giant fire burning miles away. Dirty straw from farms is strewn about, clogging the edges of the nearby bay. The usually clear water is slick with oil from an oil tanker that had been blown up in a recent explosion. "Nanortalik," I whisper in shock.

I turn a full circle, feeling lost in the town I've lived in my entire life. I have absolutely no idea what to do next. Neither does Inuk, it seems, because he climbs down the boulder with a face that mirrors exactly how I feel. Scared. Neither one of us wants to lay our utter confusion into stone, though. Concreting it in our already unstable reality would be paving on quicksand. Any more weight and we'll crumble under the already crushing load that the war has chained to everyone. Inuk joins me and stares, confirmation barely registering in his eyes at the sight of the ruined town. "Where were you when the bombs hit?" I ask numbly, anything to break the chilling silence.

"I was evacuated a week after the U.S. planted explosives in Qorlortorsuaq Dam and sent most of Greenland into darkness..."

Adam's Intervention of the Supernatural Entry 243 By Missy Alwali

Hey guys, welcome back to my notebook it's AD and as you all know I've been visiting universe 6142011 otherwise known as **FYEART** and it's pretty cool over here, so glad I was able to get permission from the council to traverse. Thanks so much to GhetiLo32 for recommending my visit.

Anyway. I was visiting a tea shop, and the shopkeeper recognized me! (She was a phoenix, btw — so cool!) She told me there was a bridge in the forest, something wandered over there that only ever attacked men.

I think she's pulling my leg, but you guys know I can never pass an opportunity to intervene in the supernatural, so if you're down-ready, buckle up!

I smile as the words in my Notebook disappear, instantly being uploaded to the InterSpace. No matter how long I'll be out here, I don't think I'll ever get used to small things like this.

Ironically, I came here to escape human nature, but the same things still happen out here.

The old bag at the tea shop was probably just saying stuff to make me look like a fool, she even taught me the three things to say when it approached. I shouldn't have uploaded that first part of the entry.

I pause.

I pause because the FYEAK? birds have stopped calling. It's replaced by a new sound. I haven't heard it in a long time.

Tap tap tap

A memory from the overworld resurfaces. I was holding a blue sippy cup tightly in my hand to make sure I wouldn't lose it. Someone was with me, we were looking for something.

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It wasn't important.

I saw it. A red-bellied bird with a long beak, tapping against the tree it so comfortably perched on. When the hole was deep enough, it stuck its beak deep inside, looking for a snack.

Tap tap tap

"A woodpecker." Said the person when they caught my eye.

The grass is green. How did that happen!? I turn around but the trees around me are closing me in, my heart is pounding in my head, my legs hurt, I need to leave. I'm going to die. I'm dying I'm sure of it. It's so foggy, an—and damp! Its almost like . . .

It's almost like I'm back on earth.

Tap tap tap

I smell the bridge before I see it. Like a hundred bugs climbed into my nostrils, I already know how it looks before I turn around.

I wouldn't walk on it if you offered a million Grenga. It looks like it'd collapse if a bird came too close.

It's not even a bridge, just some wood and string covered in moss, soon to be blown away in the wind. I can't even see the other side!

Tap tap tap

She's not real.

I can barely see anything over the mist but I can see her. It looks like she's floating, like a ghost. Though she doesn't look like any ghost I've seen before. The bridge isn't even moving under her weight! Her dark tendrils of hair are billowing in the wind behind her, she looks so sickly. . . I—How is she still standing!?

"Are you lost"?" The words from the Phoenix resurface.

I recite my words carefully. "I-I'm not lost." God, I sound stupid. "I'm finding myself."

Her eyebrows furrow, unsure of how to respond.

the bottom of the lake. Her skin, It's less pale now. More . . . grayish? And oh god her skin! It's aging, no! I—rotting! Her skin is rotting and I can see the inky black goo hiding underneath!

"It's not, help, you're offering. . . " I can feel the bile rising in the back of my throat, she—she's melting! Her flesh is turning her into. . . What the heck is that!? Her face is stretched out and deformed on the floor like dough. One spindly thin thing that might've been her arm reached out with what looked like tremendous effort and grabbed my ankle, pulling my leg.

"Do you yield?"

I grab its weird doughy arm thing and somehow manage to unhook it from my ankle. I lean forward. I feel bad but my voice is stone cold as I recite the final line.

"Do not wake again."

Adam's Intervention of the Supernatural Entry 243 Pt2

Hey guys it's AD and I have been cheated

I spent all yesterday in a forest and saw not one, not two, but ZERO Ghosts!!!!!!!!

No ghouls, no demons, heck, not even any aliens! And those guys are literally everywhere!

Worst part is, on my way back, the bridge collapsed! I can't swim!!!! If it wasn't for some

Nymphs I would be drowned! Phoenix, if you're reading this that was an assassination attempt!! I'll have 25

your flames detained by tomorrow morning!

I only ask for one thing in return for my kindness, bookmark me so you can be updated whenever I post another entry, I'm almost at 10 million markers and I'll be releasing something special when I do.

All that being said, I might not post tomorrow because, yknow, almost died.

But if I do, it is totally gonna be on Nymphs because even though I can't see them, (I wish I wasn't human!!!! :() They're so cool!

I take a deep breath as the words disappear from my notebook.

It's not like me to lie to them.

Some old-timey songs are playing on the phonograph. It doesn't fit the vibe of the tea shop but it doesn't matter.

The phoenix burns so brightly it hurts my eyes, but like moths to a flame, no one can take their eyes off her. The man who's closest to her has eight eyes (That I can see.) and he's staring so intensely that he's probably blind now.

Everybody's watching her and she's looking at me.

She smiles.

It's not like her to lie to me.

Weightless

By Adeline Goeken

They all carried different weights, but the same things. Canvas backpacks and broken pencils and the dirt from outside. Some carried water bottles, energy drinks, electric blue concoctions in a disposable plastic cup that would buckle if you gripped a little too hard. They were always moving-going from home to school, class to class, class to class, class to class, room to room and building to building. Every day passing by in a watercolor blur of brickbrickbrickbrick. Pockets and pouches and bags all full of as much as they could carry, stiffening shoulders and knotting necks to get to the next bricks a little faster.

I was always moving, always carrying as much as I could. Five pencils-none with any erasers, two pens in pieces-my bag was always crashing to the ground due to its weight, one plastic-wrapped pastry breakfast from earlier this week. I remember staring at it, looking at the creases in the bread and the sheen where the light bounced off. I couldn't bring myself to eat it. In the end, it became more weight, and my stomach stayed empty. I don't drink as much water as I should-I know this better than anyone-or rather, I can never *remember* to drink as much water as I should. Even when I would bring my tall black water bottle, scuffed and scraped from years of being carried, rarely would I drink from it. In the end, it became more weight, and my throat stayed dry.

The heaviest thing was the papers. I still have some of them, stuffed in closets and under beds, sheets of memory that I can't toss away, even if it would lighten the load. My middle school math homework at the top of the shelf, every Spanish packet I've ever received, an assignment a friend folded into the shape of a frog that lives in my social studies folder. Hours and hours of my time-of my memories-lived in each piece of parchment. When I pulled them out and flipped through them, one by one, I could still see the faces of everyone I'd known and unknown. People fade in and out, come and go, move a little faster than you can follow, but sometimes you'll find a paper with both of your names, and remember the brief moments in which you carried pieces of each other. Maybe it's the days with no papers-that slip by and fade away into the gestalt of my existence, of my general being-that leave me feeling the heaviest.

To carry weight is a tiresome thing. But to be heavy, to have weight pulling down the strings of your heart and settling into the pit of your stomach, is what anchors you to this world.

I'm not blind to the bliss of oblivion; some Summer nights I gaze out my window at the fields turned dirt turned houses and wonder what it would be like to live in silence. To melt down from the tip of my tongue to the bottoms of my feet, and to float up into the air and become one with a passing storm. To rain down and float up again and again and again, to exist in one moment everywhere, in every time. But, I am no summer rain. I am no eternity. I am flesh and bones and blood and weight. One day, the weight of all you've been will seep out through your veins and into the Earth, spiraling down into the soil and being absorbed up into waiting roots. With each step, you'll carve a groove deeper and deeper into the ground, until you've sunk through the core and come out the other side. In this way, I'll live forever, in that I'll share what I carry with everything I touch.

I've always wanted to do well, to succeed, to prove that people were right to think well of me. So often was I afraid of not meeting the expectations of others-as well as myself-that I nearly crushed myself completely. Grind out the love and what do you have left? Sullen flowers with no color or scent, drifting dust that never settles, and a hollow feeling that weighs more than anything. But gaps can be filled, bridges can be built. In time, dust is repurposed into something new, even if it never finds a home. Flowers can bloom again under sunnier skies. And I can let go, and try again. I'll carry all my love, all my hopes, and all my dreams; I'll slip them under my skin-so tight that they'll never fall out. I'll take everything with me, as much as possible, and I'll hold on to as much weight as I can carry in my heart.

I may never see your smile again, we may never inhabit the same time again, we may drop the shards of each other we'd held between our fingers, so that we can grab hold of something new. But even then, I'll sew your sorrows between my ribs and tuck your laughter behind my ears, so that I never forget its sound. I'll slide your memory behind my eyes so that your silhouette always dances in my mind. I'll take you with me, forever and always. Thank you, for letting me hold you, and to all of you, who burden my heart: thank you, for holding on so tight.

The Sun and the Moon

By Phoenix Sims

The sun said, "the solar eclipse is happening in a few hours." "No," said the moon.

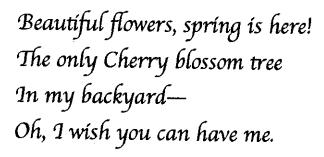
The sun says, "come on, the humans wait for so long." "No!" said the moon.

Two hours later, the sky is dark. The humans are waiting. The humans are confused. The sun goes out. The humans are sad. Then, the moon comes out and the humans are happy!

Cherry Blossom

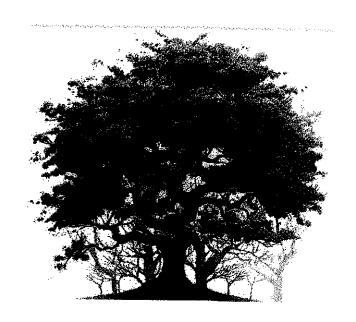
Oh, beautiful cherry blossom
How I wish I could have you!
But I Knew I couldn't hurt nature,
For what a wonderful view.

I'll do anything to help you grow, With your cotton pink color. But I must go home, For I must not lure.



Please take me,
For it only to you
Oh, I will help you go
For what a wonderful view.

- Hrísha Patel



I AM POEM

By Isabelle Lu

I am gentle and kind

I wonder when I'm going to grow up

I hear the scratching of blades on ice

I see the movements of skaters

I want to have a pet

I am gentle and kind

I pretend I am an Olympic skater

I feel like floating on the ice

I touch a spring flower

I worry about losing everything

I cry for family

I am gentle and kind

I understand love and joy

I say that world peace will be true

I dream about equality

I try to win

I hope for a phone

I am gentle and kind.

The Howl of the Cry

By Laina Nelson

Blue, Blue, oh the Blue cheese,
The loss of the sauce
The pain fell over me
Cry, cry, almost died
The pain fell over me.
Like tsunami pain drowned,
Me, grabbed me hassled me
Growing on me. Locked
Me up, chained me down
Caged and prowled
Smushed and soured
Those demons are taking
Over me

Forward-Backward

By Skylar Chen

Forward

My doubts drown my dreams,
I walk through the shadows,
Fighting the weight of the world,
But not today.
I've struggled, I've fallen.
I can't keep going.
Tomorrow, maybe.
But today.... I give up.

Backward

But today... I give up.
Tomorrow, maybe.
I can't keep going.
I've struggled, I've fallen.
But not today,
Fighting the weight of the world,
I walk through the shadows,
My dreams drown my doubts.

THE WAY FROM ONE THING TO ANOTHER THING AND BACK

$\mathbf{B}\mathbf{y}$	Mazzy	Sleep
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There is enough time. There is just a dearth of moments to fill it.

Spring still coiled in the branch, a red ribbon waiting to be extracted from the earth—

And all animals gone, vanished into the barbed

green banks where we would prefer to imagine them-

There is enough of everything, there is only a lack of language to communicate this.

These women, these girls, with their hands to their hearts, their hearts fastened outwards to the trees—

It is not about blame, as they think it is, or time; delaying the end of winter behind the thicketing white wall of what they call remembering.

Neither is it actually about death, or dying, which is only the pit life encircles, the finger within the ring.

If it is about anything, it is about what we forgot, not what we wish to hold onto.

The movement of an eye beneath an eyelid a long time ago, so long.

It is about looking, seeing.

Speaking through the lushness of the world, crossing it, negating it to send your message, white diving through the red.

The way from one thing to another and back: an impossible thing indeed.

Undefined

By Missy Alwali

Actually no.

That last part isn't quite true.

I can't be underrated because I'm actually not much I am simply something someone who isn't worth much.

Actually no.

I don't think I'm being fair to myself either.

I think most of the time I try to be a useful member of society.

undefined unrecognized underrated

I think most of the time I try.

I think most of the time I try to be a good person.

undefined, unrecognized.

Wait no.

That doesn't make sense.

I can't be unrecognizable because the never changed.

I've never matured

tve never questioned

My morals and priorities are cold frozen in place.

I hope they stay that way.

Wait no.

Sometimes the smallest things can make you unrecognizable.

Like the words you shout in the heat of the moment that you regret before they even leave your mouth.

The voice of someone talking about you when they think you aren't near.

The smallest action, a choice.

Perhaps I have become unrecognizable.

Perhaps I am still the same.

undefined

Loren Barjis

The Lyre Strums

39

39

Mama's tongue strums of our ancestors like the lyres in my Greek poems,

She says, "The Tigris and the Euphrates separate our land,"

Running green with moss that sinks into the mud we sprouted from like words on tongue,

Does it divide me too?

From my flesh forged in flames,

And a soul that aches,

Until my tendons are as bare as the sunburnt skin of those who drank in what I drown in,

Will I ever reach a dazzling zenith and burn like Icarus?

Or are those heights landlocked too,

Behind passports as ebony as the charcoal that beats in my chest,

And green cards like the za'aatar Bàba sprinkles his breakfast with,

Was navy not strong enough?

I'll try again,

22

23

Mama graduated top of her class,

And I am still in geometry,

Inscribed by man-made lines like a circle,

Am I ahead of myself if I am ahead?

Too dull or too loud?

Is it too early to think of university,

Or have I missed the starting gun because something has started me?

Must I catch your eye,

bulging like the poppy flowers in jido's gardens?

Must I blend in, Or should I bleed through, Like the glittery ink in my cheap, sequin diaries, Pages untouched, for I feared I would regret wasting them, On meaningless days, "Basit," Mama called them, I'll try again, 14 18 Mama sleeps just as I, Does she dream, too? Desiring white picket fences, And Starry Night replicas hanging from lustrous wallpaper, Not white boxy refrigerators, And finger paintings that remind me, That even on the tips of my fingers. I can never run away from myself, I'll try again, 1 2 14 Mama was bilingual at my age, She tells me each time, My words fall out of line, Stinging her over and over until she is accustomed to it, Like the wine my schoolmates gloat they drank at church, Arabian jasmine, I think it was my nana's name, I am afraid to ask as I trace neglected memories like the moon's contours,

And craters,

A low-hanging moon so plump,

Kissing its beautiful, broken expanse,
As how I wish to be,
Hoping,
They will light up,
And I will have something to carry,
When there is no more me,
I'll try again,

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10

Mama writes stories in Arabic,

"Basit," she says in our forked native tongue,

Brief, it means,

Simple,

Our life drapes between the sliver of moon and sun,

It is all "Basit,"

Melding into the ink-splattered timeline,

as the moon's dark side,

in the night sky,

I'll try again,

0

She tells me of our religion and it makes me rue,

Fantasizing in buying that spaghetti-strap top from American Eagle

With the red and white strips,

When my heart drowns in this life,

I dream to burn eternal in the slumbers of death,

And I do not desire to try again,

She reminds me that before my flesh was forged in the flames,

Allah asked my soul,

If he could let it burn in me,

If he could bring life to my cumbersome figure,

Let me touch thoughts and turn them gold,

Like Midas,

And I do not believe it until she tells me that if he asked me for the length of,

Venus to Mars,

Love to rage,

Aphrodite to Ares,

I would cry out for mortality every time,

I would always choose this sliver of sun and moon,

To suspend myself in its film strips,

To star in

The Secrets We Keep

By Kaisha Hawkins

Beneath the smiles, beneath the pain

I feel no shame, secrets I keep

But like a zombie, I'm awake but asleep

Do I ever dare to tell the truth?

They shall not believe cause I have no proof

So I'll call a truce

Friends with a demon

But the demon is not my friend

My life has just begun, but it's like they're dragging to my end

I show no love because sometimes it feels like a sin

But at the same time I've lost so much so I'm eager to win

So I fight, my fight

Cause I know I can survive

So I let my secrets out, and that's when I started to thrive

So you can keep your secrets

Or your secrets can keep you

But at the end of the day, you gotta do what you gotta do

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