



HEDERA
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2018

Vol. XVI

Literary Journal of Sigma Kappa Delta
The National English Honor Society for Two-Year Colleges



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Plaza College
Chi Delta Chapter

Literary Journal of Sigma Kappa Delta
The National English Honor Society for Two-Year Colleges

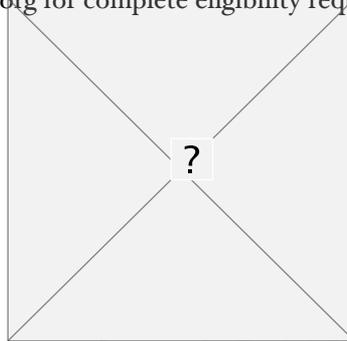


Purpose of Sigma Kappa Delta

Sigma Kappa Delta serves two-year college students who achieve academic excellence in English. Members need not be English majors but must demonstrate an interest and proficiency in literature and writing. $\Sigma\text{K}\Delta$ offers members opportunities for

- Scholarships
- Awards
- Leadership
- Competition
- Publication
- Travel
- National Conferences
- Networking

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Hedera helix—the scientific name for English Ivy and the national plant of $\Sigma\text{K}\Delta$, symbolizes resilience and individual growth. In keeping with the Greek spelling, we use the lower case “h” for helix.

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Editor's Note



As I sit at my desk this summer, I can't help but ponder the journey that has led me here. Even the most active imagination could not have predicted the transition from a military career as a RADAR technician to a community college English professor and *Hedera helix* editor. As the editor, I also have

the pleasure and privilege to thank our sponsors for all the hard work they do day in and day out for our members. That thanks extends to choosing which entries will be showcased in the SKD literary journal.

This year, the *Hedera helix* is filled with our member's imaginations and writing prowess as they walk us through the difficulties of life, death, and physical and mental pain. Yet throughout these amazing stories, poems, and essays, trickles a glimmer of determination to get through another day – to wait and see what tomorrow has in store for us. For sometimes, like my own journey, tomorrow may take us to place we never could have imagined, and yet, once we are there, we could not imagine being anywhere else.

Wishing you all safe journeys through 2019,

Kat Padilla

SKD National Office



2018 ΣΚΑ Scholarship/Award Winners

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Dr. William C. Johnson Transfer Scholarship

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Chapter Awards

Literary Magazine/Journal

Aurora
Epsilon Alpha Chapter
Northeast Alabama Community College

Chapter Activity

Banned Book Scavenger Hunt
Gamma Delta Chapter
University of Wisconsin - Rock County



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First Place Essay

Gaijin in a Strange Land

Joshua Stinnett

A choice of career is one of the absolute most important choices any person will make in his or her lifetime, and few concepts are as frequently addressed in the educational system as the importance of deciding what job one intends to pursue. Knowing that my quality of life and time spent engaging in my other hobbies and interests hinges solely on this major decision was a major source of stress in my high school years. I had no clue as to where a person like me would fit in this world and what career might best suit my interests. That was until I learned of a career that allowed me the satisfaction of everything I could ever want out of a job; I made the decision to teach English as a foreign language in Japan. In doing so, I have set myself on a path that will have a massive impact on my friends, my family, and myself. This choice to travel to a foreign country and teach for an extended period of time will affect my life in that it will change my course of education entirely, will limit communication with everyone that I know and care for, and will throw me into a culture and way of life entirely unlike my own.

The education that is prerequisite for a teaching job in a foreign country is somewhat unconventional. I am required to obtain a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certificate to be accepted to an instructor position. This certificate is earned through a class that is separate from traditional college. Because of this, I may not even obtain a bachelor's degree. Other occupations, whether an individual is accepted for a position or

not, rely almost entirely on the schooling one possesses; my English major will be purely for personal growth and to help me teach a more fulfilling curriculum. I will also need to learn the Japanese language and acclimate myself with some knowledge of the local culture and habits to be able to properly communicate with my students. With all of these factors in mind, this career path offers plenty of opportunities to move to a different major or course of study if necessary. Many other jobs do not allow for such a degree of flexibility, and I consider my time spent more wisely and more efficiently as a result.

While I possess more academic freedom in my prospective job, I will ultimately be limited with what I find to be familiar in my current life. Being on a different continent thousands of miles from my home, I will find a new set of challenges like coping with loneliness and homesickness while unable to speak or interact with friends and family through means other than alternative forms of communication such as video chat, texts, or phone calls. While these breakthroughs in technology will allow me to keep in touch with those I know and love, I cannot ignore the reality that these methods are no substitute for face-to-face contact, and life for me will likely be emotionally strained for some time as I cope with leading a life distant from those I care about. While I do not look forward to the heartbreak associated with such a life, I am also excited by the prospect of meeting new people and becoming wholly independent from the familiar and what is stable in my life to



allow a major change such as this to occur. This anticipation gives me some comfort in the uncertainty that lies ahead.

Although I look forward to the new experiences in this career, I know that culture shock will be a major effect of moving to the other side of the world. Researching the Japanese people and their customs has helped me in feeling more comfortable, but I can nevertheless foresee a degree of alienation, not only because I hail from a heritage unlike most people I will come in contact with and speak an entirely different language in both structure and sound, but I possess ideals and values that are unique and not taught in the country such as the importance of self above the majority and asserting myself to achieve my goals. The people of Japan are taught through culture the idea that they should be more concerned in affairs of their own people and do not become as involved in the affairs of outsiders. With this in mind, I still consider the opportunity to become entirely

immersed in the culture of another country to be a chance to readjust my views of the world by gaining a unique perspective that I would not find at home while offering my own perspective to my students.

I have found that my choice of a career will warrant a multitude of changes in my life. My education will differ from the standard curriculum that many others will embark on to achieve their goals, and I will have to learn to adjust to a life that is almost entirely isolated from familiarity. I will also need to learn to live, learn from, and accept a way of life that I have never experienced before. Many might think that these results of my decision are far more stressful than finding a comfortable and easy job at home. However, in defining my goal for a fruitful career in teaching overseas, I have found that what makes the most sense to the majority will not always apply to all, and everyone needs to find out what makes him or her happy.

Second Place Essay

Living with Half-Assed Depression

Catherine Calderon

Not that I like pointing fingers, but before I went to Knox, I was never concerned about my mental health. One of my brothers and I are the only people (other than my dad, now that I think about it) in my immediate family who are not taking “happy pills” as we lovingly call them. Depression runs in my mother’s family (and maybe even my father’s, I’m not sure), and we all know

how those pesky genetic disorders work. No one is really surprised that so many of us have struggled.

Maybe I’ve been ill this whole time, and my time at Knox has just finally revealed that to me. I was so proud (which is STUPID I know) that I wasn’t afflicted, I guess. I know there’s nothing wrong with mental illness. It’s just, when you’re surrounded by it and not



personally affected, I guess it just gave me this sort of superiority over my siblings and mother. This, I know, is stupid. I never thought myself better than them it wasn't like that. It's complicated.

Anyway, my first year at Knox wasn't awful. I made friends, put up with living in a freshmen dorm (although my suite was filled with students who were all transfers, so thank God), was challenged by the classes, and was able to write and have people say profound things about my work. It was exactly what I had wanted from my "real" college experience. It was what I was looking forward to when I came to Knox. I had found my place with my people, and it was great.

So, what went wrong? Why has my emotional stability (which wasn't that stable to begin with) fallen apart so much, and so fast? Why am I now convinced that I too suffer from depression and Lord knows what else? Believe it or not, it can all be blamed on computer science. For some reason, my classes were a pain in the ass to schedule for my final year. I mistakenly picked a course I had already taken, another was half a credit when I need a whole one, and I lost my job on campus because of this mess, so I had no income for the term (because no one will hire a graduating senior for 10 weeks). I only took the Introduction to Computer Science class that past winter because nothing else would fit, and it was the day classes started, so I didn't have much choice anyway.

For an introductory level course, it sure didn't feel that way. From day one I was struggling, and it had been a long time since I struggled with a class. (It was probably my statistics class at

community college, now that I think about it.) Nothing was sticking, and everyone else in class seemed to be doing fine. I tried to go to tutoring, which was fine when I had a lab partner because I was less anxious. I eventually went to the teacher, which was agonizing for me since I've never had to do it before, and he was very understanding and helped me as much as he could. Once I was doing labs by myself, that was when the dam broke. I couldn't do it; I went to the tutoring center by myself, and once I got there, I knew I couldn't. The tutor helped me, did the problem for me mostly, and I couldn't bear the thought of asking him to teach me the whole lesson, so I escaped to go have a panic attack in my room.

It had been a long time since I had a panic attack, and I can say that I hadn't missed it — paralyzed, sobbing, shaking, hot face, throbbing head. Things at home were falling apart too, as they have been for the last couple years. I just couldn't handle it anymore; the day after my panic attack, I couldn't get out of bed. My comforter was too heavy, and I literally didn't have the strength. I had never felt this way before, and I was terrified. I remember crying about it the day after, panicked over my absolute indifference to life. In those moments in bed, I have never felt so...unresponsive, apathetic. I couldn't care less about my roommate or even myself. If I had somehow died in bed that day, I don't think it would've bothered me. And again, that's terrifying.

I confided this to my youngest sister, who has been dealing with depression since she was a child. She became immediately concerned, telling me that she feels that way almost every day. She



told me that I needed to go see someone to talk about my problems and to see if I'm in need of a diagnosis. My mother voiced the same concerns once I told her (or maybe my sister told her, I don't recall right now), and so I ended up making an appointment to see a counselor here at the college.

As you can guess, I was hesitant. One of my sisters, who is a freshman at Maryville University in St. Louis studying nursing, started going to see someone, and she said it was helping her a lot (her problems stem from a life-long friendship that blew up because the friend is deluded and has a questionably close relationship with her boyfriend; I say questionably close because she cannot function properly without him.) Also, my youngest sister had been seeing someone for a while and only recently did she finally start seeing a more qualified psychiatrist who is actually making progress with her. It seemed to be working for them, and I felt like I had no excuse at this point. Things were bad for me, and I needed to deal with the problems.

I made the appointment, filled out that long form, and gave them the lowdown. They assigned me to a counselor, and I met with a counselor a couple weeks later. The first meeting went well enough; I admit, it was nice to talk with someone other than my family, my best friend, and my boyfriend about my family problems. The counselor did as I expected — lots of nodding and murmurs of “okay, yes, go on.” I felt surprisingly comfortable that first meeting, ranting about my problems for that whole first hour like it was nothing. The counselor had to stop me at one point, assuring me that we'd meet again, and we could talk some more.

I was looking forward to it, and so we met a couple more times. Things were going great, and I learned a lot about myself and my family thanks to this counselor. It wasn't until the end of the term started creeping up that things went bad. At my last meeting before break, the counselor made it sound like I was okay, that there was no reason for us to make a schedule for the spring. I was assured that the counselor would be there if I needed, but it sounded like such a...good-bye. I didn't go back.

The counselor didn't straight up tell me that I was healed or didn't want to see me again; I just want to clarify that point. It was just the feeling I got at that final visit. Whether or not that was the case, it hardly matters anymore.

Things haven't really gotten any better, though. While I still have yet to feel so drained that even getting out of bed was hard, I've still been frighteningly unstable from an emotional standpoint. I have good days, and then I'll have the bad days right after. Even in the same day, I'll bounce around so much that it scares me. I keep telling myself that I just need to graduate, that once I get home it'll all click back into place.

Post-grad doesn't really concern me anymore; grad school was the plan, but after I was rejected, I realized that I didn't even want to go to grad school. I only did it because some part of me felt like I had to — I'll be the first sibling to live at home after graduation.

My eldest sister and her then-boyfriend (and now husband) were living together and she had a job lined up in Champaign, along with the idea of eventually getting her master's degree (which she just finished this past year.) My eldest brother is a bit more



complicated, having joined the Navy and immediately hating it. While he didn't come home right after graduation, he did live at home for a bit after being discharged. The next eldest sibling ended up moving to Pittsburgh to continue his education before dropping out and working full time for the school. And then my youngest brother, well, he went to jail after high school, so I suppose he doesn't really count.

At first, I was devastated with the idea of being the first one to live at home after graduation with no idea of what's next. Right now, though, knowing how supportive and proud my family is of me no matter what, I don't really feel badly anymore. I'll stay at home, find a job relating to writing if I can, and eventually move in with the boyfriend within the next year (between

you and me, I hope he proposes beforehand.) That's the plan, and I'm totally chill with it.

At this point, I just need to graduate. Hopefully, my 300-level Environmental Studies class doesn't kill me. I'm just asking that my mental sanity holds together just a tad bit longer.

Surprisingly, I haven't written a lot this past year. Emotional stress is typically the prime factor behind my writing, but lately, I just haven't felt the urge. Perhaps it's because this is my first term without a workshop class (yes, there's portfolio, but I'm not required to write anything new.) No one is making me write, so I feel no need to. That's messed up, though. I love to write, and I should be willing to write on the fly.

Goddamn, I am depressed, aren't I?

Third Place Essay

The Case of the Tiny Crystals

Kelly Stamberger

It was a Saturday early evening while relaxing alone in the living room watching television when a sharp pain was felt shooting through my back. It was like nothing I ever felt before, and I knew something was very wrong. The pain was so overwhelming I could barely make it down the stairs. I knew I couldn't drive myself to the emergency room, and I didn't want to wait for an ambulance. I contacted my mom immediately asking for a ride to the emergency room at Lake West Hospital. The ride was miserable, to say the least. Every bump in the road caused the pain to rapidly increase. It was only a twenty-minute drive, but it felt like an eternity.

After arriving at the emergency room at Lake West Hospital, the check-in process seemed to go smoothly at first. I was relieved when I was told that I would be placed on the top of the list to be called back, but once the staff realized I couldn't provide insurance or any other method of payment, my experience quickly changed. I was no longer on the top of the list. While I waited, the pain continued to worsen. I sat on the chairs sideways with the wooden armrest digging into my lower back. It's strange, but the wooden armrest gave me some relief. I could feel the eyes of the other patients staring at me when they passed by. Every so often



consumed by the pain, I would crawl on my hands and knees to the restroom to vomit. During this time, several other patients begged the staff to let me take their place, and the staff replied, “that’s not how it works!”

Hours had passed, and it felt like days while the pain continued to shoot through my back. To make matters worse, other patients, curious as to what was happening to me, even started to diagnose my condition. Like a game show, they shouted out different ideas, some stated, “maybe it is your appendix or maybe your gallbladder.” I wondered to myself, “will I need emergency surgery?” Now my mind was racing with worry thinking of the worst case scenario. I never had stitches or a broken bone. The idea of surgery was terrifying. Besides that, I’m at Lake West Hospital, and I’m not comfortable having surgery at this hospital and doubt that they would transport me to the Cleveland Clinic.

I felt exhausted physically and mentally wanting to cry every time they called a name that wasn’t mine. I was unable to cry because I didn’t have any strength; the pain consumed all my energy. About five hours had passed, I had seen several people come and go while I’m still in the same place sitting with the wooden armrest digging into my lower back. I watched a police officer walk into the lobby, and that’s when I realized what I was capable of. Thinking to myself, “if I could get my hands on his gun, they would have to help me.” Desperate for relief, I wouldn’t hurt anyone, but I was willing to scare them. That was the pain talking, and the last thing I wanted was to be handcuffed to a hospital bed, and I wouldn’t do well confined to a prison

cell either. I quickly came to my senses and continued to suffer in silence while I waited to be called.

After a while, I was later wondering if I’m starting to go numb from the pain or maybe I’m just getting used to it. I noticed the pain starting to decrease, my body felt less tense, and I was able to relax and sit straight up in the chair again. Just a few minutes had passed when a nurse walked by. She said, “you’re looking much better.” I didn’t reply. I was surprised she noticed me at all.

After seven and a half hours of misery wondering what’s wrong with me, I finally hear them call my name. I’m transferred to a room. I felt a sense of relief as I hoped to get some answers. The doctor entered my room, and he explained why I was waiting so long, not because I didn’t have insurance but because I’m a female, and it’s important that I learn how to tolerate pain to prepare myself for childbirth. I felt annoyed and thought to myself, “if I was in labor I would have received an epidural.” But I also was feeling relieved that I was still too weak to tell him how I really felt and thanking God that I didn’t get a hold of that gun hours earlier. The doctor requested a urine sample, and the test revealed that I had blood in my urine. I had passed a kidney stone. The doctor wanted to do a scan of my kidneys to see if I had any more kidney stones present. The results showed that I didn’t have any existing kidney stones to be passed. I felt some sort of relief to only to be informed by the doctor that kidney stones could manifest at any time due to many underlying causes. Relieved that surgery wasn’t needed, I was still worried about going through that experience again. I



asked the doctor what I could do to avoid another kidney stone. He replied, “nothing can be done.” Not feeling confident with his response, the doctor said, “you will be released shortly.” Waiting on paperwork, the doctor provided me with instructions explaining that my body has been through a great ordeal, and I will continue to feel some discomfort. He suggested picking up over-the-counter Ibuprofen. I thought to myself, “after all that waiting and pain I experienced, I can’t believe he won’t provide me anything for the pain.”

While I waited for my release forms,

I looked at my mom and said, “I imagine this is what it would feel like to give birth, and I don’t even have a baby to show for it!” My mom thought I was exaggerating my experience, only to discover that she had the same pain only a few weeks later. She was in severe pain for hours until she finally passed the stones. She told me, “passing kidney stones was worse than being in labor.”

Until this day, every time I feel any discomfort in my back, I become totally paranoid. After this horrific experience, I no longer fear childbirth. No doubt, I will be requesting an epidural. This was an experience I never wish to visit again.

First Place Literary Analysis

The Price of Society

Skylor Kitchens

Shirley Jackson dipped into the destructive and cruel nature of humanity in her short story “The Lottery.” Jackson demonstrated murderous and violent societies to be a normal occurrence in the world all because of habitual behaviors and ignorance. The irony in her story is that the characters have no legitimate reason to take the ritual so seriously, yet, the ritual is literally life or death. Specifically, the lottery ritual in her story lacks any meaning to the villagers because they do not know the original ritual, and none of them have any logical reason for having a lottery; all the while, the lottery dramatically cripples the village.

A ritual in itself is a repeated ceremony, and in the case of this small village, the original ritual is lost in time. According to the narrator, “some people remembered, there had been a recital of

some sort” (293). Also, the specific role of lottery officials and villagers is fragmented. Yet, the narration states, “[T]hey still remembered to use stones” (302). Every detail about the lottery is vague and uncertain to the villagers; however, the villagers follow along like a herd of sheep. Some of the lottery has been changed such as using pieces of paper instead of wood for the drawing, the forgotten chant, and the ritual salute. The changes foreshadow the fact that the lottery will continue to change. Their ritual is meaningless because there is no formal ceremony or credible sources for the lottery.

Stupidity takes priority in this story because no villager can disclose a reasonable ideology for the ritual. Seemingly, Old Man Warner is the only supportive patron of the lottery because he calls other villagers “a pack of crazy fools” for quitting the lottery (297).



Meanwhile, Warner's singular explanation for the ritual is a catchy rhyme that states, "[L]ottery in June, corn be heavy soon" (297). The villagers themselves do not have much to say about the lottery, nor do they seem to protest — until they win. The lack of empathy from the villagers demonstrates how much of their hearts they do not put into this tradition. The participants treat the lottery as something that just happens.

The lottery cripples the village in multiple ways. Near the end of the story, Tessie Hutchinson is about to be stoned to death by friends, family, and her small child. Little Davy Hutchinson is given a few stones to throw at his mother. To make matters even more horrific, Mrs. Hutchinson's friend, Mrs. Delacroix, picks out an oversized rock with which to kill Tessie. Unfortunately, there is no protest to the murder, and the villagers do not show any mercy. Tessie

Hutchinson screams, "It isn't fair, as a stone hits her on the side of the head" (302). Strong harmony cannot exist with such atrocities. The village will surely fall victim to its murderous tendencies. The lottery will take future sons and daughters of the village and, perhaps, even the village itself once a few critical villagers are killed off.

Maybe the lottery had meaning at one point in time, but the meaning has dissipated and transformed into a mindless autopilot for the villagers. Any originality that the ritual has possessed is lost to time. The villagers follow this tradition blindly and without any logical fortitude. If the events continue, the village will suffer tremendously from its merciless and violent habits. From any aspect, the event in Shirley's story is ironically horrifying. She told a tale of a catastrophic flaw in humanity—tradition.

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Second Place Literary Analysis

Conflicting Cultures

Taylor L. Johnson

In Louise Erdrich's short story "Fleur," Pauline claims, "They only know they don't know anything" (Erdrich 2570). Her observation illustrates that there is a fine line between curiosity and judgement. Erdrich emphasizes the comparisons and consequences of the human imagination and the actions that imagination might bring forth. She uses personal experiences, symbolism, foreshadowing, point of view, and conflict to reveal various social issues that occurred not only in the early 1900's but exist in modern times as well. Erdrich uses distinct symbolism throughout the short story to establish the theme. A mystical tone is used to create a plethora of suspicious scenarios while revolving around a realistic plot, enabling the readers to attempt to decipher myth from reality. In Erdrich's short story "Fleur" the narrator, Pauline, portrays Fleur from various personal perspectives, ranging from a magical creature to a nurturing mother figure; thus, indicating not only the difficulty of maintaining cultural integrity but also modern issues including sexism and the reinforcement of the need for female empowerment.

Erdrich's theme of women's empowerment and independence is revealed through Pauline's perception of Fleur. "Fleur" takes place on the Chippewa reservation and progresses to a small town called Argus. Towards the beginning of the story, Pauline uses the rumors about Fleur's drownings as a way to portray her as an introverted, distant member of the community; therefore, people's stories create fear and

intimidation in other people due to the fact they simply did not know Fleur. As Pauline works with Fleur at the butcher shop, Pauline's impression of Fleur changes immensely. Erdrich writes, "Her cheeks were wide and flat, her hands large, chapped, muscular" (2565). Pauline uses descriptive words which imply her obvious veneration and slight jealousy of Fleur. After watching Fleur act as an equal to the men, show no reaction to belittlement or danger, and be a highly intellectual and skilled card player (which infuriated the men), Pauline's view point went from fear to admiration very quickly: "I was lifted, soothed, cradled in a women's arms and rocked so quiet" (2566). The nurturing mother-like figure is Fleur. Pauline's own mother has passed, so Fleur acting as this important parental figure for Pauline positively impacts Pauline's ideas about correct parenting styles because her step dad was obviously not fulfilling those emotional holes in her life.

Erdrich's use of symbolism is critical to establishing Fleur as a powerful figure the story. In French, the word "Fleur" means "flower," specifically a lily flower. Pillager, Fleur's last name, means "to strip of goods or wealth." Lily flowers are often characterized as weak, gentle, and beautiful. Fleur being named after a lily flower is both an oxymoron and simply ironic. Fleur is undoubtedly a beautiful mature woman with hips that were "fishlike, slippery and narrow" (2565). Contradicting the lily-type aspects are the opposite personality traits Fleur possesses. For example, rumors flourish around the Chippewa community about the



Misshepeshu waterman wanting Fleur for himself, therefore causing the men of Fleur's tribe to steer clear of her. She repeatedly defies death by drowning and is seen as a complete and utter mystery to the community. Her independent, strong personality traits oppose the "weak and gentle" meaning of her name (2563). While working at the butcher shop, she ignores the sexist views of the men and instead simply addresses the men from a co-worker's stand point, not an inferior one. For example, Fleur presents her beliefs of equality by playing cards with the men, which was typically seen as a male activity: "I thought, she said to the men, her voice soft and stroking, you might deal me in" (2565). She displays unapologetic acts of courage and independence completely defying the lily flower's "weak" characteristic. Fleur's antagonists go insane with rage after continually losing to her in cards. These losses damage their superiority and entitlement, they assume, because of their identity as white men. Fleur wins exactly one dollar each night which makes them absolutely livid. Pauline never actually states that Fleur cheats, but implies with obvious context clues that Fleur is doing exactly what her name pretends she will do, strip others of goods or wealth. Her thirty dollars won at the end of the month was proof of this.

Erdrich uses both mystical and realistic events to confuse readers' direct understanding of Fleur. The first line of the short story begins, "The first time she drowned," and creates immediate curiosity in the readers (2562). People cannot drown more than one time without dying, but Fleur seems to literally and metaphorically avoid her

close calls with death by transferring her death to men. At one point in the story, Erdrich writes, "George Many Women bends over to look at Fleur when she washes up on the shore of Lake Turcot. Fleur curses him saying that he will take her place, so he refuses to go outside but Fleur's magic seems to work nevertheless because he soon drowns in the bathtub. (2563). Furthermore, the Misshepeshu water man is said to long for Fleur. This creature is similar to the sirens in the *Odyssey*; the way it morphs itself to create hallucinations in the victims' heads to lure them in. Fleur possesses other magical and transformative powers according to Pauline who describes Fleur's powers: "She laid the heart of an owl on her so she could see at night, and went out, hunting, not even in her own body. We followed the tracks of her bare feet and saw where they hanged, where the claws sprang out" (2563). Fleur is an outcast in the Chippewa community. She is not as involved in the community as many others are, and as a result, the members of the reservation make accusations, rumors, and draw false conclusions such as Fleur morphing into a bear during the night. They cannot seem to uncover the truth, so they create a mystery instead which in turn makes Fleur an intimidating woman in the eyes of the others. Humans often feel a need to know, and the unknown inflicts fear. To defy the fear, a "fake truth" is formed to settle their minds. The reader, in return, is not certain about Fleur's powers. Does she wield the power held by any outcast to frighten and confuse others, or does she have the ability to control nature?

Fleur acts as the tornado and wreaks havoc, therefore regaining her



independence by inflicting revenge on her attackers. As Pauline states, “She almost destroyed that town” (2564). Fleur’s antagonists (Lily, Dutch, and Tor) attack and rape her as “punishment” for her cheating and defying their entitlement to male dominance. Soon after this attack, a massive tornado occurs in Argus ultimately destroying the town; but more specifically destroying Kozka’s Meats. The town suffers mediocre damage, but the only casualties of the tornado happened to be Lily, Dutch, Tor, and Lily’s dog. Pauline is in the shop while the tornado occurs, and she recalls that she “heard a dull cry building in the wind, faint at first, a whistle and then a shrill scream that tore through the walls and gathered around me, spoke plain that I should move, put my arms out, and slam down the great iron bar” (Erdrich 2570).

Pauline fails to go to Fleur’s aid when she needs it during Fleur’s attack and instead “froze in fear” (2568). Fittingly, the men literally froze in fear and die after Pauline locks them in the freezer.

Erdrich’s short story “Fleur” forces readers to distinguish between fallacy and truth; while accomplishing this, she also creates curiosity in readers due to Fleur’s unusual characteristics. Erdrich defies the norm of society and mainstream views by enlightening her readers about sexism and female empowerment and creating a narrative for these issues. She differs from most authors because she displays these very real controversial issues by using a mythical tone to keep her readers intrigued.

Work Cited

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Sir Edward Dyer's Guide to Living a Better Life

Joshua Stinnett

Nearly all people face a time in their lives when they become a victim to the pervasive depression that results from non-ideal conditions and forces affecting their lives that exist past the grasp of control. It may also seem that there always exists a unique perspective that can ascertain a fulfilling life out of a menial existence just as easily as a person of exorbitant wealth may experience a complete lack of fulfillment in his or her circumstances. Sir Edward Dyer offers his ruminations on this topic in "My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is," a poem prostrate in reverence to the satisfaction and joy that one can find in life through a positive outlook as well as the universal and boundless resource of imagination. This poem is a celebration of the ecstasy that one's own mind can offer above all material things expressed through diction, rhythm, and worldview of the speaker.

One needs to look no further than the title to realize the expert utilization of diction to express the idea that imagination can bring about peace and satisfaction. The speaker compares his mind to a "kingdom" in which the speaker possesses absolute authority and power through imagination. No matter how bad the external circumstances of the speaker may be, his internal situation remains free of physical and emotional torment. The speaker sees his mind as a separate place from the physical world that cannot be infiltrated by malicious entities or unwanted situations because it belongs entirely to him. As a result of this, he does not define property as riches, but states that

"My health is wealth and perfect ease" (Line 44).

The rhythm of the poem also serves as an expression of the speaker's outlook on life. The consistent rhyme pattern that pervades throughout the work from start to finish is uniform and consistent, as if intended to be read in a sing-song fashion. In celebrating the happiness he feels within his mind, the speaker uses a rhythm that evokes a musical aspect to uplift the reader and reflect the speaker's state of mind. In keeping with this song-like quality, the first four lines of each stanza consist of a line complemented by an indented line below it that can serve as a harmony for the first and the final two lines of the stanza rhyme directly and repetitiously, serving as a chorus to the first two verses. The constant occurrence of this pattern throughout the entire poem is similar to the structure to the theme and variation structure seen in a concerto, such as Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. Each stanza creatively illustrates a situation that the speaker imagines that is concluded by the last two lines in a consistent fashion just as a song may tell part of a story then refer back to the chorus to consolidate the thought and draw each verse together.

The language and musical qualities of the poem both work in unison to illustrate the speaker's worldview. While the speaker describes the outside world and the situations of others in detail, little detail about the speaker's own life is revealed in the poem. This is because information about the speaker's situation bears little meaning to him. The speaker is enamored entirely with



his own internal perspective, presenting to the reader the jovial state of mind that the speaker finds himself in. The speaker sees the world as full of sadness and regret by continually mentioning the burdens of man in statements like “plenty surfeits oft” (13) and “They get with toil, they keep with fear” (17) but sees himself as above these situations, furthering the theme of bliss beyond material life.

In conclusion, Sir Edward Dyer proves himself to be a true master of the

use of language, rhythmic structure, and unique perspective to express the joy he finds in knowledge and creativity above corporal fixations and worldly desires. The lofty language, jaunty tune, and worldview of the speaker carefully and deliberately crafted by Dyer has stood the test of time and will forever be commemorated as a triumph of poetic language and lauded as a faultless celebration of the joy of happiness through satisfaction.

Work Cited

Dyer, Sir Edward. “My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is.” *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing, Compact Edition*. Ed. Edgar V. Roberts and Robert Zweig. 6th ed. New York: Pearson, 2015. 10-27. Print.



Jan I. Anderson Black and White Photography Awards



Mountain Goats by Kandice Cook, First Place



Beauty in Harlem by Wendy Almonte, Second Place



Vintage by Jennifer Chaney Fant, Third Place



Headache or Death

Jessica Nichols

He orders it with the espresso because he can't handle caffeine. Usually, when Leo makes terrible decisions in public, it's because he wants to convince himself or a complete stranger standing in earshot that he's actually a badass, but he has different reasons this time. When he's been overthinking too much, he tries to stop thinking for just long enough to do something fun with a potentially fatal fail-safe: i.e., his current plan to drink 200% Daily Value of sugar now while his pulse maybe runs itself into the ground later. It's like how he takes advantage of his mild chocolate allergy every Halloween and eats six snack-size Milky Ways that definitely taste good at the time and also could kill him.

There's something comforting about it. And anyway, he obviously isn't dead. (On the inside doesn't count, Lukas jokes on good days.) Leo stands here at the counter and contemplates the psychological implications of this entire train of thought instead of anxiously waiting to hear how badly he mumbled his name to the barista. Oh, wait, no—he's multitasking.

"Lynn?"

Oh, damn it.

No one else perks up. He certainly hopes that no one else takes their latte with all the shots and pumps scribbled on the side of the cup, so it looks like this one's his. He reaches out, fingers curled into hesitant claws so they won't meet a stranger's nails in the middle of the sleeve. Despite all the time Leo spent bracing himself for all possible outcomes of the handoff, there's no awkward accidental contact. He

strengthens his grip before his drink can spill all over the counter. The employee smiles at him like it's not weird at all for a guy to shakily read his order off a Post-It on his palm and then spend the entire wait time biting black polish off his nails.

She tells Leo to have a good day. Cheerfully, but without half the pressure inherent in the sentence structure, the soft inflection sounding more like "it's okay if you can't, but I still hope you have a good day." He manages to breathe out a "you, too," and he means it.

He takes the bus home and doesn't wear earbuds. It's more peaceful to walk—he's never been afraid to touch air—but it's going to be dark soon and he doesn't want to risk it. And people wear earbuds when they want to be left alone, but somehow, there's always someone on the bus who takes that as a challenge. Leo doesn't want the Hamilton soundtrack to be tarnished by the tenth jackass today asking him whose funeral it is, and more than that, he just doesn't have the energy for anything snappy to end the conversation. ("How about yours?" he likes to reply on good days.)

So he lets the warmth from his cup seep through his gloves all the way to his bones, or it would if the ride was longer or the person in the next seat over could keep his elbows and knees to himself. Then he gets up, gets off, and soon enough gets inside the building. He takes the rickety elevator to their floor, gripping the railing on the back panel with both hands so he won't plummet to his death.

When he walks into the apartment, his brother is in their only chair, hunched over the kitchen table,



measuring one of the dents against his little finger. Lukas looks up to greet him with bleary eyes and a bleak “yo.”

He’s wearing the same clothes as yesterday, jeans and tee, an unbuttoned button-up shirt hanging down to his knees loosely as a secondhand coat. Everything’s black except the one accessory, a rubber-band bracelet on his wrist. Leo wove the set for him years ago as half a gift and half a joke, a set of seven in seven colors, not expecting that they would ever be worn. But Lukas wears one every day, makes sure to wear them all in a week and never in the same order. Today is an indigo day, to match the dark circles around his eyes.

Those dark circles tighten up as he raises his eyebrows at Leo’s right hand. “Real coffee?”

“Is it imaginary?”

Lukas doesn’t miss a beat. “I got three hours of sleep last night, and I’ve been up for twenty since. Nothing is real. The universe is a lie. There’s a blurry line between what’s real and what’s not, and no mere mortal has powers to discern it. In conclusion, I have no idea.”

Right now, Lukas has a voice like the one in your head as you read an ironic joke or a well-done conspiracy theory. That’s to be expected—the intensity of the effect is directly proportional to sleep deprivation.

“Espresso,” Leo tells him.

The flatness drops away like just the word is enough to reverse the effect.

“Thank God, are you sharing?”

“Are you feeling okay?”

Lukas considers it. “Will you hug me or kill me if I respond with a My Chemical Romance reference?”

“Kill. I’m on Broadway now.”

“Then . . . a little.”

If a person says they’re only a little okay, it always means a lot of the opposite.

Leo checks again to make sure he’s bolted the door. Then he takes the nine steps to the table and sets the cup down in the middle. (Probably not the center—he doesn’t know its radius, or if it was ever even a perfect circle.)

He stands on the side opposite Lukas and leans his hip into the edge of the tabletop, letting his fingers splay on the wood in the clearest gesture he can muster for “I’ve got all night.”

It only takes a few strategic glances from pitted oak table to flickering dark eyes and back before Lukas blurts, “I’m staying up until five tomorrow morning.”

He rushes on without any need for a “why.” Lukas knows that Leo will need context.

“Then I’ll fall asleep by six and sleep through the day. I won’t be able to go to class. I’ll have to cancel with Oz, but he won’t mind because he’ll know I slept through class. So, please share, because without caffeine I’ll be asleep by midnight and up by six, and I’ll still have to go to everything.”

“Why are you canceling Oscar?”

For Lukas, his name is Oz, because when they met last year, Oscar wore silver high-tops with everything and only dyed his hair the color of Emerald City. Now it’s snow-white shoes and a particularly violent fluorescent purple, but Lukas doesn’t care. It’s been their joke for so long that he can’t give it up, and Oscar lets him because he can pretend that it’s really a reference to heavy metal or Spider-Man.

Leo likes Oscar. He does everything right: music, movies, politics, pronouns. It took him a little while, but not nearly as long as everyone else, to learn that he



should smile and pat Leo's shoulder instead of laughing and slapping his back. What matters most is that Oscar likes Lukas, loves him, even if it's too early to say it. Being liked-to-loved is good for Lukas. Leo knows that his brother has slept eight hours a night every night for sixteen months, until now.

Lukas still hasn't answered. He is staring at the cup like focus can conduct energy. Leo always feels so small when people sigh at him, so he doesn't sigh at Lukas. Instead, he slides his palm forward across the wood and pushes the cup to his brother's side of the tabletop. Away from his.

"You can have it if you tell me."

Lukas frowns as he weighs his options. He decides to begin. His start is to take off his gloves, pulling each one over itself from the base of the wrist, dropping them in his lap once he's done.

"I have cold hands."

They're brothers. They have the same hands. But Lukas needs reassuring, so Leo tugs one of his gloves off by the longest finger and reaches out, letting his palm lie flat against the table.

"Right, right, and so do you. You don't feel it. But Oz does."

Lukas wraps his purple-tipped fingers over the blue-mottled back of Leo's hand, squeezing to punctuate his anguish.

"He always checks them, and if they're cold, they always are, he won't let go. And I know, in my hands, I can't feel it, but he's warm. I can feel that."

"You told me."

"In the middle of the night! Giggly! Out of my mind!" Lukas has to stop for breath, but it comes too fast, tripping over itself. "Because it's going to be

below freezing tomorrow, and—and—what if he does that there?"

There makes Lukas distraught. As he gasps for breath about there, Lukas is thinking about them.

Lukas has let go. Leo watches where the hands dropped, so bare that no one could ignore how they're shaking.

"He keeps you warm," Leo says.

Lukas leans onto the table, tucks his hands under his elbows, tries to stop shivering.

"Tell them that. That's all they need to know."

His head falls into the hollow of his crossed arms.

"That's all that matters."

This time, Lukas doesn't lift his head, so Leo reaches out again. He combs through black hair, all tangled. Lukas barely slept today—how does he have bedhead?

But he's still now. His breathing is soft. Leo barely catches his shoulders shuddering.

"Do you know why I love your name?" Lukas finally asks. It hangs for a while. His voice is muffled, and even once he recognizes the question, Leo doesn't know the answer.

Lukas waits before raising up, pale lips twitching like he almost wants to smile.

"You're a lion."

"I didn't say anything that wasn't true. Let me help."

"No! No. You are a . . . lion, dammit. With a mane." Lukas is growing agitated. His dark circles wrinkle at the edges now as he squeezes his eyes shut and groans.

"You're a lion, even if I know you don't always believe it, because you think too much. But you are, and that's all that matters, and if anyone tries to argue, then I'll fight them. In the face."



Lion. The meaning hits Leo right in the middle of it. He would smile, but he's not the type to smile. He feels ready to cry, but someone already cried tonight. Instead, he lets the feelings well up, stores them for when he's alone and Lukas is sleeping right.

"Fight their face after you have at least six hours of sleep. And," Leo has to add, "a six-foot boyfriend to hold you back, because I saved your five-foot-four-inch skin enough times in high school."

Lukas mumbles something fierce and unintelligible. It almost sounds like thank you, but Leo has a feeling that it isn't.

"Do you still want the espresso?"

Lukas told the truth, didn't he? So Leo has to ask, even if he hopes he knows the answer.

"I want to sleep."

His forehead drops to the tabletop again.

Leo will let Lukas drift off right here, in their kitchen, monopolizing the only

chair. He doesn't want to interrupt. And in a few minutes, when he's sure that nothing will wake his exhausted brother except maybe the screams of the damned, Leo can slip a pillow under Lukas' head.

He stands straight again, stretches. When Lukas is asleep enough that the hinges won't wake him, Leo finds the only thing in the cupboard with a lid. The thing in question is a plastic bowl, but he pours the coffee into it anyway. One of them can handle caffeine, and eating his cereal with chilled espresso instead of milk sounds like something Lukas would do.

Leo sets the bowl in the fridge and makes sure not to let the door slam. He contemplates the empty cup in his hand, wonders if maybe he should throw it out. This is a recipe for headache or death. He shouldn't let himself remember it.

Then he thinks about the good day someone wants him to have. Leo needs to remember that.

Second Place Short Fiction

The Death of a Preacher

Chase Hawkins

The lot is full, so we park around back in the shadow of an oak tree leaning out of the playground. Colorful twisting slides and white pebbles. We walk across the holy lot. Deacons smoke cigarettes, trade jokes, and wear grey jackets on a concrete stoop. One nods as if to say, "I know it don't make sense, but s'all part a God's plan, and there's no sufferin' where he's gone." He hides the cigarette behind his back and opens the door.

We carry on through narrow halls, her admiring children's drawings and me finding every flaw in the baseboards.

White paint over fuzzy wood. A community effort, no doubt.

We stop at the rear of a line of sight seers snaking through the corridor. I'm assaulted by perfume and flannel shirts and introductions. Hello, yes, it's a tragedy.

Everyone here is certainly underdressed. I shouldn't have worn a tie. Brush strokes and long beads of paint. A dusty cabinet decorated for Christmas. I check my watch. It's October. The line shuffles, and we have rounded the corner and can now see into



the sanctuary. Must be the better place the man in the grey jacket was talking about with that quiet look and the courteous way he held the smoke in his throat. The carpet is a potpourri of wine grapes, and there's a new scuff on my boot. A family of four files in. More flannel.

The line shuffles forward, and we are directed through the doors to a row of half-filled, red, padded pews by a man in a grey jacket. We wait in the pew to enter the second line which encircles the entire worship hall, ending with a crying woman standing in front of a nose poking out of a casket. Photographs of a man wearing various beards and standing next to landmarks in and around the Southeast scroll by on projection screens hanging from the ceiling. Long stories sometimes accompany the photos but flash by too quickly for anyone to make sense of them. To get the whole story you'd have to sit there, staring at that screen, and watch the entire slideshow for an hour.

The stories themselves are made up of a lot of adverbs and are wholly unremarkable. Liked baseball. Excitedly. Played in the band. Musically. Had some kids. Lovingly. Those kids sit in chairs behind their widowed mother while she greets each smiling person. Openly. She gathers herself when one leaves and breaks down all over again when someone else approaches. A preacher looks on, smiling.

They're torturing this poor woman.

High above the stage and the dunk-tank, the lord, Jesus, watches of the grieving wife and her stoic children. He's made up of broken glass arranged in a ten by twenty window. He's wearing purple, as usual, and a trimmed beard. Good skin too.

She nudges me. I lower my head to listen, and there's a cigarette burn in the pew. She tells me this room looks beautiful in the daytime. I ask how long it's been since she came here.

A man in a grey jacket comes and says, "if yall'll follow the pew ahead of ya." We get up and follow the line of people scuttling out of the pews. We land behind a tall man with a crooked nose. Underdressed. Looks like he could use a trim.

Six stained windows flank the hall. Three on each side. Our side, the west, has The Ten Commandments, the Ark of the Covenant, and what looks like Lazarus. The tall man squats to say hello or flirt or gossip with a group of seated ladies. In the center of the back of his head, where the hair spirals outward, there's not much of anything, and I decide that he must have grown so tall as a means for hiding that bald spot. He sort of looks like Woody Harrelson, if he still worked at Cheers and snuck beers on the clock.

A child is coughing into a vent that blows straight up into my windpipe. More beards and fake smiles on the screens. More stories and tears. More shuffling inward.

Our first real attraction in the maze of pews, grey jackets, coughing children, celebrity look-a-likes, and people in various degrees of over and under dressedness, is the ledger. The joy of signing one's name into a ledger is unmatched at events like these. I'll be so excited that the opening "C" will encompass the first "H," and I'll go over the lines in a show of dominance. It's all a big dance around some fire that's forgotten or, in the case of ledgers, probably thrown out.

She signs my name. Plain print. In the



lines.

We shuffle again, and Woody has left the line and is leaning across two rows of pews, trying to join in on the conversation of a group of women that he seems to know personally. The pew he rests his knee on is leaning backwards, teasing, but nothing exciting happens.

The Eastern wall has three more windows. A winged lion, a winged bull, and a winged woman. The woman sits on a rock, playing a harpsichord to a rising sun. The lion, teeth bared, is clawing at a seven-sealed scroll and the bull is resolute, horns held high. The sun also rises behind it. My mouth is dry. She leans into me and says the hall is beautiful in the sunlight. The line shuffles again, and Woody hurries back in place.

The boards in the center creak under the red carpet. Wrath Red. It's almost too thick to walk through. The line moves forward and gets tight as everyone leans away from the stage, and the dunk-tank, and Jesus, and the man's nose sticking out of the casket. All at once, it's a bit overwhelming.

Woody's next, and the widow has lost it again. Maybe she saw his tennis shoes. The preacher goes on smiling. An old man in a grey jacket gets her a chair. Woody doesn't look all that bad. Needs

a little trim. The old man in the grey jacket looks as though he's been wearing grey jackets and getting chairs his whole life. Soft, wrinkled hands. The widow wipes her eyes and sits in the chair brought by the old man who probably didn't know to sand the baseboards before slapping a coat of paint on them.

Woody approaches and the widow opens up. He says something, and she's sent into a violent fit of frowning and nodding. The preacher in the coffin just lies there, hand over hand, eyes glued shut, made up in his Sunday best, listening. The preacher on the outside smiles and thinks about how it could be him.

Woody walks away and finds some women in a pew. The preacher directs us towards the widow. We stand there. Open a palm, let them come to you. Don't overwhelm. She says something soft and rehearsed into the widow's ear. The widow nods and thanks. She nods back, frowning. Happy eyes, dull lipstick. She looks just in this light. True to a fault. The widow takes my hand and asks my name. I tell her, share a silent word, and we turn to go. We wade through the carpet towards the exit. Cold wind bends the thin glass. Men in grey jackets stand, smoking, and nod with solemn mouths and understanding eyes.



Stanley Francis Cleaverheart

Sabrina Ariss

Stanley Francis Cleaverheart paused at the door of the throne room. He was here, just as Izanblaze ordered. Stanley coughed. He fussed with his robe's sleeve. He patted down his beard. He was ready. Or was he? He checked his beard one more time. Sometimes it occurred to him that it was the same color as his great-grandfather's false teeth. Stanley cleared his throat. Enough about that. Izanblaze was waiting. He rapped his knuckles on the door.

Three days ago, Izanblaze had sent a messenger to Stanley's door. A polite enough lad. The boys nowadays were anything but polite. It took him one day to realize that he didn't really have much of a choice in visiting. It was more of an order than a question. He would have come to that conclusion sooner, but he kept falling asleep. It was alright though. The castle was a three-day's journey away, so Izanblaze would have assumed he was walking. Ha. It took Stanley an hour to cook up a transporting spell. He could have done it sooner, but he lost his glasses. Clumsy old things. Who needed them, anyway?

"Stanley my old friend!" Izanblaze bellowed, making no motion to get up from his over-sized throne. He didn't move much these days, mostly had those stronger squires carry him around on a ridiculous stretcher, with ribbons and banners and the like. Stanley shuddered. He would never.

"Izanblaze!" Stanley faked a smile, stepping closer to the bloated throne, "And what may be the occasion of your call?"

Izanblaze laughed. It boomed all around the hall, reverberating in the stone prison they called a castle. The two pages on either side of Izanblaze stood staring blankly and wide-eyed at the wall behind Stanley. He thought they would never blink.

"Stanley my boy, why don't you take a seat? Always rushing to the point, eh? Let's just talk, like old friends!" He kicked one of the pages. "Get him a stool, you lazy swine!" The lad stumbled, then scrambled to his feet and disappeared through a back door. Stanley watched him go. Why do parents send their children off to these great wizards, anyway? That boy was never going to learn any magic from Izanblaze.

"Sit, please!" Stanley sat. The stool was tiny, and his robe engulfed it when he sat, giving the illusion that he was hovering in midair.

"Now," Izanblaze said, resting his elbow on one of his many layers of fat, "I believe you owe me something."

"Pardon?" Stanley said, coughing. He lifted a bushy eyebrow.

"Yes," Izanblaze's smile stretched like a grinning cat. "You owe me. From last year."

Stanley cleared his throat. He did remember. It was nothing though, nothing really. Two small favors. Nothing, really.

"Ah yes," Stanley said, adjusting his robe around his legs. "I do."

Izanblaze leaned closer. "And I already know how you will repay me, old friend."

Stanley's eyes widened. This couldn't be good. "How?"



The next morning, Stanley stood trembling in the far corner of the marketplace. The chattering of the crowd all around him blocked out any noise, but he could still hear Izanblaze wheezing behind him. Did he always wheeze like that? Maybe it's only when he's in the sunlight. He must be allergic to it... he spends so much time in that moldy castle.

People passed by, bowing and curtsying to Izanblaze. Why did they keep looking over here? He looked away, up at the sky, anywhere but at the people.

"Stanley! Stop looking at the birds, and get on out there," Izanblaze said. His head was fairly close for being up on his ridiculous canopy. Stanley looked at the boys struggling to keep Izanblaze aloft. They had it better than him at the moment. Why must he be so humiliated? He didn't even have his staff anymore, Izanblaze took that, too... along with his robe. One would think, that after living for hundreds of years, one would have experienced every embarrassing moment possible. But he had not. And Izanblaze knew this well.

"Go on, you chicken! You owe me and you know it." Owed him. It was a small favor. Really! Nothing too difficult. He looked at the boys again. Their tunics were drenched in sweat, and their hoods kept slipping off their slick heads. What he would give to trade places with them.

Stanley took a step forward. It was hard, without his staff. He was so used to leaning on it that he almost fell onto the cobblestone floor. It was as if he was missing a leg.

Why was he doing this? He could just disappear back into his cottage in an instant... But he didn't have his spell

book. Or his staff. Besides, Izanblaze would find him and then he would really pay. It would be worse. Izanblaze could be terrible if he wanted to.

"Well? Are you going? Or should I have a squire drag you up there?" Izanblaze seemed less amused now. That was worrisome. Stanley started walking.

He passed women with wool wimples wrapped around their heads, gossiping in huddles. They gasped and looked away. He passed men in robes, dignified individuals like himself. They kept him locked in a formidable stare. He passed children darting among the fish stands, who stopped to stare and point and whisper, the more clumsy ones running into barrels as they turned to look, but their small feet kept running.

Stanley gathered all the courage possible of a man in his circumstance and mounted the stage in the center of the marketplace. He turned to face the people, who gaped wide-eyed, butchers mid-stroke, cloth-weavers mid-bargain, bakers mid-loaf...and Stanley began to sing. The wind whistled around his thin legs, ruffling the only piece of cloth Izanblaze allowed him to wear... his undergarment. As Stanley belted out the lyrics to "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen," he could only hope people would sing along. That was Izanblaze's last demand. It was ridiculous, really. Almost rude, to do this to a poor old gentleman. He had to sing a Christmas hymn. On the marketplace stage. In his undergarment. And everyone had to sing along.

Stanley was on the third verse when everyone started to ignore him. The bustle of the marketplace returned, with the women shielding their children's wide eyes. People started to move and talk again. Stanley glanced back at



Izanblaze in the far corner of the market. He was laughing. Stanley felt his voice cracking in desperation. This was impossible. What was he doing? How humiliating. Stanley began lifting his arms and motioning to people, trying to get them to join in. No one sang. No one paid any attention.

Then suddenly, a young man in tattered robes swung onto the stage. He looped one arm around Stanley's shoulder, laughing loudly, and called to the crowd. "Come on! Sing with the old man! Don't we all need a little Christmas cheer in July?"

Another laughing girl jumped on stage, her fluttering dress flashing an array of soiled colors. So many patches had been sewn on it that the dress's true color could no longer be deciphered. Who were these people? Did they think he was a joke? A laughing stock? But then another, and another, and another young someone leapt onto the stage, pushing and joking and tumbling... and singing. They were singing! Stanley almost fainted for joy. It was over. They were singing. The crowd was singing. It was over.

"What could you possibly want now? I did what you asked!" Stanley said. He was standing in Izanblaze's throne room again. The beast hadn't even given him a stool this time.

"Yes, but you owe me for two favors, that only counted for one." Izanblaze stroked his greasy armrest.

"What?!" Stanley said, his face almost as purple as his robe. He gripped his staff. He was not going to lose that again.

"Yes, and you got lucky... that acting troupe came and rescued you. Otherwise you would have been singing

there all day, and the bailiffs would have dragged you off to the pillory!" Tears of mirth sprang onto Izanblaze's fat cheeks as he said this. Stanley shook visibly. What was wrong with this buffoon? Didn't he know a respectable wizard when he saw one? This was madness!

"Well I'm not doing that again, Izanblaze," Stanley started, "If you think..."

"Oh no, no," Izanblaze wiped the tears from his eyes, "I'm thinking something a little more personal. You know, go up to someone, tell them how you feel. Deepest secrets and all of that fadoodle." He started laughing again, rocking back and forth in his seat like the waves of the sea, his oily rolls washing on the shore.

Stanley couldn't stand it any longer. So what if Izanblaze came after him? He would run away. Run away with his spells and his books and his staff... Stanley gripped the staff tighter. He would transport himself all over the world before Izanblaze and his fat, bloated, caterpillar self could find him. He could move in an instant, travel lightly, keep only what he could carry. He could use every spell in the book. He could—

"No, I wouldn't do that to you, old friend!" Izanblaze chortled, "but it won't be so public, I promise! Come now, it'll be funny! You'll love it, too. Ok, this is my idea."

Stanley tensed. His mouth was a set in a firm line. Izanblaze had better be right. No more public humiliation.

"Ok, so you'll have to—" Izanblaze burst out laughing, choked, then continued, "Sorry, you'll have to..." he wiped tears from his eyes again, shaking with delight, "you'll have to... listen to



this... buy someone's livestock with only three beans!"

Stanley gripped his staff. He watched Izanblaze, a mix of oil and tears, every part of him bouncing against the cushions. This was almost worse.

"What? No one's going to—"

"Wait, wait, one more thing."

Izanblaze's belly slowly stopped jiggling. "You have to do it all..." he grinned, "under the guise of a peddler."

As the sun rose, Stanley started out to the marketplace once again. At least Izanblaze hadn't taken his staff this time. One disguise spell later, and he looked like a simple peddler with a cane. Stanley paused just outside the first stall. No one recognized him in his disguise, but he knew their faces from before. He coughed, smoothing his beard with shaking hands. The acting troupe was still there, dancing away on the stage, setting up for another play. His singing had gathered their crowd yesterday, but today they needed to gather their own. Stanley hobbled his way to the first stand selling livestock. Sheep. It was good enough. The sooner he got this over with, the better.

When the shepherd heard that Stanley wanted to buy a lamb with three beans, he laughed so hard he cried. Stanley tried to be reasonable. He asked for the smallest lamb, the runt of the litter. But the shepherd just laughed even harder, gathering his friends around to give them a good laugh too. Stanley left in a huff. Inconsiderate youngsters, laughing at their elder. He would have to sell those beans a little better next time.

The next stall he visited was the butcher's. The livestock didn't have to be alive, did it? But that was even worse.

The butcher was a grimy man with a hard-set mind. You couldn't bargain him down a shilling lower than he asked for, let alone for some beans. He would hear nothing of it, and threatened to throw Stanley out of the market himself. Stanley left quickly.

This went on for quite some time. No one would take him seriously, no matter how he tried to sell the beans. He couldn't even get a half-dead goat for his beans. As the market wound to a close, Stanley knew he would never get that livestock. What was he going to say to Izanblaze? He was probably watching, too, from a distance. Laughing his big belly off. Stanley sighed. He coughed.

"Bless you."

"What?" Stanley said.

"Oh," a small voice said, "I said, bless you. Didn't you cough?"

Stanley turned. He had been standing at the center of the market for so long, dreading his fate, that he hadn't noticed the small freckled boy standing in front of him, scratching his scruffy auburn hair, holding a rope that was attached to... a cow! He had a cow!

"Oh, um, boy, are you selling this cow?" Stanley sputtered, trying to get the words out as quickly as possible.

"Oh sure I am. Mother sent me to the market to sell her, but no one wants her."

Stanley could see why. It was the skinniest, ugliest, deadest living cow he had ever seen.

"Well lad, I'll buy your cow."

"You will? Oh thank you, sir! I've been here all day, and no one will spare a shilling—"

"Well I've got something better than a shilling!" Stanley said, reaching into his little sack, an idea forming in his head. A small boy would be easy to fool.



Especially such a bright-eyed one as this. Foolish child.

“What’s that?”

“I’ve got magic beans.”

“Magic beans!” the boy’s green eyes sparkled in wonder.

“Yes lad! You know what would make your mother so very happy? If her boy brought home some magic beans from the market! And all you have to do is stick them in the ground, water them nicely, and you’ll be the richest boy in the village!”

“I will? What do they do?” The boy was practically leaping.

They didn’t do anything, of course. Izanblaze had handed him some dried-out soup beans from his private kitchen, and they probably wouldn’t even sprout if you planted them. He had just thrown in the magic part to get rid of the cursed things.

“Well you will just have to plant them and find out, lad!”

“Oh boy! Thank you so much, sir! I’ll take them.” He grabbed the beans, thrusting the rope with the pitiful cow into Stanley’s hand, and skipped away.

Stanley watched him go, utter relief spreading over him. He did it. He was done. He got the livestock. He was free. He could go home, back to his cozy little cottage, and never see a single human ever again. He did it.

Suddenly, Stanley felt a slight aching in his heart. An ache for the poor child he just sent off with only three dried beans to feed his mother. Stanley Francis Cleverheart took a long pause.

He fumbled for his staff and cast a quick spell. It was a good luck spell, aimed at the boy and his beans. The

beans sparkled a little in the boy’s hand, and he knew that when the lad planted them, it would give him nothing but fortune. Truly magic beans indeed.

“Pardon, but what’s your name, boy?” he called out into the dusk.

“Jack!” the green-eyed boy replied.
Jack.



First Place Poetry

What I Don't Tell My Brother

Jessica Levine

I know what Daddy did to you
behind that door
across the hall
from mine.
The evidence was a lump
rotting
under the living room carpet.
It drew in flies
who swarmed the room
and filled the space
between us
with their buzzing.

Mama turned the TV up,
but the buzzing got louder
and louder
until I could—and can—hear it
from the other side of Georgia
where I sleep now,
nine hundred
and fifteen
miles
from your Eighth Ave apartment.

The flies come after me when I am alone.
They gnaw through my blouse
and burrow into my chest,
hollowing out a place
where there was once
a father
and
a mother.

But I just want you to know,
even though I won't tell you,
that somewhere in the mess
of that gaping,
mangled
cavity,
there still is
and has always been
a brother.



Second Place Poetry

Lamenting Chapter 10.176

Jessica Levine

You have broken promises to me.

(c) You told me I would fly “aloft and free.”

But it isn’t just the degradation
of being held across stadium fields flat
like a tarp, mere feet from the grass
that puts a tear in me.

How can I fly at all—let alone
“aloft and free”—with lead hearts tied
up in my loose strings?

And yes, I have loose strings.

My edges are fraying
my stars dangling
pieces of me unraveling.

Unraveling with your promises.
The white of me, supposedly for purity,
is turning redder than the red of me.

The red of me, I used to think,
was bright like the blood shed for me.

For me,
black and white blood alike,
all for me.

But what have you really done for me?

Look at what you’ve done to me.

(d) you’ve made apparel of me.
Shirts, boxers, bed sheets of me.

(g) You’ve printed beer logos
and advertisements over me.

Come to think of it,

(i) You’ve printed beer logos
and advertisements over me!

You’ve left barbeque sauce and ketchup
to dry on paper plates of me!

(j) You’ve made football helmets of me,
Halloween customs of a comic hero
draped in me!

But worst of all
is “for all.”

“For all,” you say,
hand on your heart,
fingers crossed behind your back.
It is “for all” that undoes me,



because it makes a liar of me.
It has left me
with my edges fraying
my stars dangling
pieces of me unraveling.
Unraveling with your promises.
Promises like
“liberty and justice
for all”
broken under me.
Breaking with me.
Please.
Did you hear me?
Please.
If for no one else,
if for nothing else,
take a knee
for me.
I, too, am weary.

Third Place Poetry

Syria
Sabrina Ariss

Bombs drop
Gas flows
A Mother's tired eyes
The children here
no longer cry
There is no one left
to soothe them

Bombs drop
Gas flows
The world turns and watches
The cameras roll
The fingers scroll
The children
do not cry