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Manuscripts may be sent to *Prairie Winds*, Dakota Wesleyan University, 1200 West University Avenue, Box 536, Mitchell, SD 57301. All Manuscripts must be typed and accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Along with your submission, please include a short biography and email address, if applicable. *Prairie Winds* welcomes poetry, essay, and photography that are singly submitted. Each volume of *Prairie Winds* is available at: *Prairie Winds*, c/o DWU, 1200 West University Ave., Mitchell, SD, 57301.

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**Dakota Wesleyan University**



**Prairie Winds**

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TURNER'S POND

Unlocking eyes  
circle the earth's stone  
near tall reeds  
a cat gingerly walks  
over other footsteps  
in a ripening light  
by the countryside pond  
mingling at the shore  
by ditch water's edge  
early sparrows tremble  
on anemic saw grass  
by abandoned dark wind  
bird song pierces  
the green liquid silence  
through a border forest  
full of elm and pine  
the feral cat leaves  
the cold waterway  
the daring sky blushes  
by jigsaw sunshine  
at a hazy distance  
for the landscape painter  
drowning in foliage.



## BRANDY BAMBAS

### THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

I am going to Wonderland  
To stay inside that book  
I need the world of nonsense  
To catch me by a hook

I want all the flowers to talk to me  
Then I'll drink unbirthday tea  
So that when I go to bed at night  
Those things are what I'll see

I need to hear a caterpillar  
Give me great advice  
And tell me that the world is fine  
Even if he's not too nice

I long to see the Cheshire Cat  
Grinning up at me  
Because if he's not crazy  
There's no way I can be

I would marry the Mad Hatter  
The March Hare would be best man  
Alice could stand with me  
Because I'm her biggest fan

The wedding would be a disaster  
But none of us would care  
Because we'd be distracted  
When the queen got there

She'll yell orders to card soldiers  
Because she will want our heads  
And I will smile at the sound  
That everyone else dreads

This is why I'm going there  
Not for some cheap thrill  
Yes, I want my life to end  
So I can just be still

My death will be a happy thing  
For me and others, too  
Because I will be smiling  
For me that's something new

I just want all of the things to stop  
That charge right through my brain  
They make me sweat and jump and cry  
Because they cause such pain

I hate going to sleep at night  
Because it will be there  
A haunting vision of my family  
Unable to breathe air

The saddest thing about my life  
Is that I cannot daydream  
My thoughts always turn bad  
And I can't help but scream

I know my nightmares will not end  
That point is far too clear  
I fear this means the end's in sight  
My death must be drawing near

This feeling follows me around  
I just can't get away  
The terror is consuming me  
I am tortured night and day

My dreams are never happy  
And I cannot make them stop  
The people I love tied to ropes  
Die with a sudden drop

I'm left alone at the end of each  
To grieve so many losses  
For some reason I act them out  
My dreams are now my bosses

I've killed so many people  
I lost count quite long ago  
And now my hands are shaking  
Because you're the next to go

That's why I must go to Wonderland  
And make the queen quite mad  
So she will end my so-called life  
And yours can still be had



ANDREW BAKKEN



SINGLE STEM

## DAVID SAPP

### OAK LEAVES

The few oak leaves which,  
just yesterday, escaped  
the rake, lay prone  
on the grass, outstretched  
supplicants, cloaked in the bronze  
and crimson vestments of Autumn,  
and plead to the wind:  
“Give me a pilgrimage!”  
Their kin still cling  
to treetops just as a few  
over-ripe red apples do  
in their barren haven,  
and will stubbornly huddle  
there, denying the transient,  
the inevitable, immutable  
in their high tower, buffeted  
by the ice, battered  
by petulant arctic tempests.  
Their brothers, in whirling  
gusts, let go and roamed  
beyond the fence row,  
creek and ravine to distant,  
exotic lands. Now  
suddenly, where each leaf  
should or should not go,  
to stay or stray,  
is all for naught as  
the sky hurls the first snows  
of winter, hushing all aspirants  
in a thick mantle of silence.

## TWO BUDDHA

One hundred miles west  
of Kabul once stood two  
colossal Buddha cut into  
sandstone cliff when the slow,  
careening caravans of cloth, spices,  
opium, wine, and coin passed  
below on the Silk Road; when  
the sun was not too harsh, the pilgrims  
looked up, overwhelmed, and carried  
the Buddha's gaze to China.

So far from India, so far from  
the *Bo Tree at Gaya*,  
the monks who carved the icons,  
the beloved, hollowed out of niches  
and abided beside the still ones,  
tending to their whims.  
And in our time, the refugees  
of war who sought solace there,  
puzzled at the frescos of angels  
painted above their heads.

When the Taliban, when  
Mullah Mohammad Omar decreed  
the false idols destroyed, explosions  
flung serene smiles into space;  
the sacred returned to the infinite  
grains of sand. The Buddha, now  
more than two at your feet,  
sift swiftly through the fingers.  
All that's left are empty silhouettes,  
shadows in the rock face.

From nations, scholars, and the devout  
arose and outcry. "Why?"  
But at last, after fifteen centuries,  
the Buddha, red in the face, laughs  
a big belly laugh; tears squirt  
from his eyes, and after he slaps  
his thigh and catches his breath  
shouts out: "*Anitya!*"  
"Perfect timing!"





KORAN RICE

## DEAN PHELPS

### THE GIRL AT PARMA CHURCHYARD

What do I do with these two lives  
but bring them both to you, she said,  
since he is gone and unforgiving too.  
She reached to touch the painted robe  
and shivered in the cold twilight,  
belly too swollen to close her coat,  
and stared upward at the sightless eyes  
of the head down towering white Christ  
with one hand raised to bless or strike.

### STONE MEMORY

We learned his name but little else,  
and he remained a stranger in the town  
who would not stay close to hear  
an old man talking of his youth  
or give a penny for a blind man's ease,  
yet he would smile and nod at greetings  
on any side street where he walked.  
Some wondered if he had been scorned  
and so could not bend too easily,  
but most saw that as no excuse, sure  
he was twisted shoot from an unnatural root  
who would not give anyone deference  
because he held himself too far above  
to be bound by anyone's questioning,  
so he could just sing his own praise  
and forgive himself if it came to that.  
So when he died a few did come to watch  
him put down under a small gray rock  
where the mason cut his life in just two lines,  
and we drank his passing but not his memory,  
then stood silent in the October wind.

## SEA DREAMS

One of the children of the sea and air  
you laughed your paper boat away  
and saw it crumble in the tidal pool,  
then lifted the soggy mangled shape  
and held the remnant up for me,  
the disappointment plain upon your face  
at the way the imaginary journey failed.  
So, together we made another boat  
and you engineered the process  
and I folded along the lines you  
told me were the best to make it go,  
then set in on the course you chose.  
But I, a rover too, could tell its fate  
and knew your heart must learn  
that intentions sometimes are conceit,  
and the second trip was like the first.  
You wanted the next one made of wood,  
but I said tomorrow would be soon enough,  
and going home you finally took my hand,  
and there I had to show you the piece  
we'd make it of before you went to bed.  
Now, in the silence of your room  
I see the resolution soften at my touch,  
know what will come has already begun,  
and in your name and mine the sea  
sounds will ebb and flow in dreams  
but leeward you are safe in sleep.



## LACEY REUER

### MY DARK PRINCE

Take your crooked stare  
And turn it towards me  
Penetrate me with your glare  
And make me wander aimlessly.

Unwrap me and turn me into eager gold,  
Make me into pretty adornment  
To wear on your fingers and around your neck.

Heavy with cloying syrup,  
My lids drink you in.  
All of you with your blue, flaming hair  
Ready to set fire to me at any moment.

Flash your red glare at me  
And take my heart as ammunition  
And then, my dark prince, burn me.

### PATIENCE

Patience infuriates me  
Right to the bone,  
So slow and unaware,  
Like a fat old cat walking across the street  
Taking it's time.

Patience sits with my mother when she drives.  
So cautious and snaillike, she waits  
For a squirrel to cross the road  
Five blocks in advance.

Patience, I cannot stand the mention of you.  
My nature is quick and decisive while you  
Are ever so diligent in never rushing.



CHARITY KEAR



NORTH DAKOTA COLD

## ARIEL PTAK

### HOLY GHOSTS

There is a ghost that wanders the river,  
Sailing forth in a papyrus boat  
Forever awaiting the foretold Last Battle  
Which was to take place where she now  
floats.

No longer does her son rule the people,  
No longer do they revere her name.  
So now endlessly Isis sails down the river,  
Looking for the end of earth's days.

The sun still wheels across Egypt's sky  
But not through the motions of ancient Ra.  
The souls of the dead no longer ride with  
him  
For Ma'at to weigh their immortal Ka.

A jackal's a jackal, a falcon's a falcon;  
Anubis and Horus don't hide in these shapes  
They've faded away with Osiris and Seth  
To wander the Nile and aimlessly wait.

Where does a god go when he is forgotten?  
What happens when he is released from  
men's minds?  
Does he linger forever, a fragment of spirit,  
Or disperse into moments of time?

All over the world, lightning still strikes  
But no more does it fly from Zeus' hand  
And it is not Poseidon who is to blame  
When a mighty wave crashes to land.

No longer does Artemis ride with the moon  
Neither does Apollo drive the red sun  
They were forced from their roles by  
humans themselves  
And now Gravity makes our world run.

Once Athena was mighty, both brave and  
strong  
Her wisdom grew Athens an olive tree.  
She's now so withered by time and her  
wrath so diminished  
She could not make a spider flee.

When the Nornes wove fate, could they have  
foreseen  
Yggdrasil's branches withering bare?  
Odin, Freyja, and Thor disappearing forever  
While Humanity could hardly care?

Where does a god go when he is forgotten?  
What happens when he is released from  
men's minds?  
Does he linger forever, a fragment of spirit,  
Or disperse into moments of time?

## THE STORYTELLER

It was nothing special when it was first printed – just another book, one of thousands falling out of the presses and into the little bookshops lining the streets. Like all of its fellow copies, it was dressed up in a smart dark-red fabric cover, with embossed letters glinting golden when it was tilted to catch the light. Its pages were stiff, sharp, and white, with crisp black ink giving shape to the letters which, in turn, gave shape to the story itself.

It was handsome, yes, but it was nothing special.

The story which gave it a heart was a retelling of a popular legend at the time, so it did not wait long on the bookstore's shelves before it was picked up, examined, and finally bought by a young woman, who took it home to read to her children at night. And though the children loved it, they loved other books and other stories just as much – some even more so.

It was nothing special.

Time passed. Pages became worn at the edges, creased at the corners, torn near the binding. The deep red of the fabric faded to a rusty shade, and the glinting golden letters began to flake off in spots, leaving only an impression in the hard cover to tell what the title and the author's name had been. The book changed hands and houses as the woman grew old and the eldest child – a daughter – finally took the book to her own children, who loved it – but loved other, newer books as much or more. The book settled on its new shelf among its board-and-paper bound cousins with a soft rustle like a sigh.

It was nothing special.

It began to sag along the backbone – not much at first, but with increasing severity. The glue weakened; leaves fell loose and had to be stuck back in through methods as varied as tape and rubber cement. The handsome cloth jacket it had been bound in so long ago had faded to a color that hardly resembled the deep red of its original dye, and worn so thin that one could count the threads along a corner with ease. The gold had vanished completely, leaving only smooth

dark indentations in the book's face and spine. This time, the grown children left it behind; they, and their own children, preferred the modern books with their glossy thin covers, decorated with colorful images and titles. Who would want an ancient book with faded ink and torn, taped-up paper?

It was nothing special.

The woman grew as thin as the book's own pages, and it watched as she vanished away, leaving dust to cover the house and everything in it. For a long while she was gone, and the only sign of life was that of rarely-seen relatives coming in to clean now and again and whisper solemnly in the dim light. Then, one day, they came inside, threw the lights on, and began to divide and pack all in the room. The book, with its brown cover and tattered, yellow pages, was placed in a box with several others and sealed up in the dark to wait to be remembered.

None of them were anything special.

When light finally cut through the darkness again, it came to the book slowly, in filtered patches and bits as other books were lifted out one by one and set somewhere outside of the newly-opened box. At last the light shone fully on the book – mottled brown and grey with age and dust, pages dry and brittle from the years, title and author barely legible in the softened cover. But the man unpacking the books paused at the sight, leaned down and, with gentle fingers, brushed some of the dust away, then carefully lifted the book with an exultant cry. The book was swiftly carried away from the box and dusty yellow light to a clean table, laid down there, and meticulously examined. The man tutted over the scotch tape and glue, unfolded dog-eared corners, and stroked a long finger over the faded letters often and happily. Then he closed the book with a sigh, turned off the light, and left again.

The book sat alone in the dark, remembering the feel of hands that cared for its tale more than they cared for its appearance. They were casual, neutral, and turned pages slowly so that the humans' eyes could follow the printed words. But the hands of this new human, though gentle

and caring, never paused long enough for the eyes to read the pages, never allowed a moment to savor the book's heart of words and images. It was as though the tale, the soul of the book, did not exist – as though it had become little more, after all, than faded red cloth and soft yellow paper.

It was nothing special.

The man returned with several others, all in sharp suits and ties and with hands too clean to touch such a dusty old relic, however eager they were to look at it. The book withstood much examination, poking and prodding and pouring over the weave of the cover fabric and the shape of the text. The men treated it like a marvel, exclaiming in awe before finally shaking hands with the first, bringing in a padded crate, and gently lowering it inside to be shut away in darkness again. Again, not one of them had actually taken the time to sit down and read the story that was the book's heartbeat. The few times it had been opened, it was the form of the pages, the blemishes of tape, glue, creased corners, and water stains that were examined with the most intent. The clarity of the type eclipsed the meaning of the tale, and the book knew this.

Now, it had definitely become nothing special.

The tired old book was removed from the darkness again, carefully cleaned of decades of dust, and locked away in a clear, glass case. People came and went, peered inside for a moment before moving on again. Occasionally one would pause to examine a few lines of text through the glass, but none really read it. No hands lifted it, its pages were never turned, and no human voice put its words into the invisible air. Worse, the book knew that no one really cared about the story anymore. It was a block of ancient wood pulp and cloth, too-old ink and the remnants of embossed lettering. Its story was dead; it was dead.

It was nothing special.

Then, one night, a strange glow spread across the wall – a glow that had never been there before. It flickered, bright and orange, growing larger and larger with a steady roar until the

source of the light was finally revealed. Sheets of fire threw themselves into the air, feeding on wooden walls, canvas, and anything else it could possibly consume. The book felt it coming and its pages rustled in anticipation. This was it. This was the end – the true end – of its story.

The fire soon reached it, pausing at the hard walls of glass but soon finding a way around them through the wooden frame of the case. It flicked and snatched at the book's pages, which blackened and curled around the edges, glowing with red embers and smoking faintly. The book welcomed it as much as a book was able. As the fire spread further outside, competing with human shouts of alarm for sheer volume, a smaller fire sparked, wavered, and finally was born inside the rapidly-weakening glass case, and the ancient book, having told its story to all who were willing to listen, finally curled into itself and vanished away.

At long last, the fire's light died away and was replaced by the gentle glow of dawn. A breeze cut through blackened gaps in the wall and danced grey ashes over warped sheets of glass like puppets in a child's story; the last solid remains of an old storyteller. The ashes sighed over the ground, and the breeze dropped them, moving on and letting these remnants rest in peace.

Because, in the end, it was really nothing special.



ANDREW BAKKEN



MIDNIGHT COFFEE

## A PRAIRIE WINDS RETROSPECTIVE

A hundred years ago *Prairie Winds* used to be a section within the DWU yearbook, *The Tumbleweed*. It became a separate publication under the stewardship of then English Professor Agnes Hyde, who was also DWU's first Creative Writing professor. That was in the late 1930s. When I arrived at DWU in 1983, *Prairie Winds* was produced by the members of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society. It was typed on 8 X 11 standard typing paper, folded in half, and covered with construction paper scissored to size. The Sigma students wrote, typed, and stapled the magazine. I am reluctant to call what it was then a publication. I took this nondescript "thing" out of the hands of the Sigma students, who were glad to be rid of it, and found the money to professionally print a journal and set about searching for my first student editor.

That was when this young football player, a freshman, came to my office asking about poetry and creative writing classes. His name was Henry Hughes. We were both "freshman" at that time. I had wrangled enough money to bind and print a journal of some sixty-five to seventy pages. It wasn't too hard a task, since I was named Faculty Advisor to DWU's Publications Board, which received a handsome amount of money to publish the *Tumbleweed*, our yearbook, and *The Phreno Cosmian*. I inserted the *Prairie Winds* into that publications cycle, and from that time to the present we have had a substantial student-produced literary journal of significant merit. Henry Hughes has the honor to have been the first editor of this nationally recognized literary journal.

This "Retrospective" is intended to honor him and another editor, James Van Oort, who piloted the *Prairie Winds* through perhaps its most successful publication years. And now for more about both of these men, their works, and their careers:

### HENRY HUGHES



The editorship of the *Prairie Winds* made a significant difference in Henry's life and career. He took the work seriously, looked upon it as a window into the literary life of the nation, and added *Prairie Winds* to the listings of literary journals in the International Directory of Literary Magazines and Small Presses. He sought out contributions from prominent poets like William Stafford and David Ignatow, who were so gracious as to gift our just-blossoming enterprise with their latest poems. I remember those days when we would sit in my living room with the galleys of the magazine, he editing as I carefully read the poems and

stories, every word and comma and period, as we used to have to do in those days before the advent of the computer. It was a labor of love. And that labor created a bond between teacher and student that lasts to this day.

Henry graduated in due course, and entered the graduate program in English at Purdue University. His experience with *Prairie Winds* earned him the editorship of Purdue's literary journal, *The Sycamore Review*, which was just being founded. Henry was its first editor, as he was *PW*'s first editor. After his Masters degree, he betook himself to teach in Japan in the JET Program. He was so successful, he stayed for a second term, and from there he went to Beijing, China, where he taught in the Beijing Foreign Studies University. Upon his return, he earned his

PhD, also at Purdue University, and then took a job teaching at Western Oregon University, where he is now a tenured professor.

Henry's poems, stories, and essays have appeared in *Antioch Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Malahat Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Harvard Review*, and countless others, and are represented in several anthologies including *Long Journey: Contemporary Northwest Poets* published by Oregon State University Press. His first collection of poems, *Men Holding Eggs*, received the 2004 Oregon Book Award. His second collection of poems, *Moist Meridian*, was published by Mammoth Books in July 2009. Henry's commentary on new poetry appears regularly in *Harvard Review*.

Since moving to Western Oregon University, Henry has continued to travel, most recently to Mexico, South America, the South Pacific, Britain and Germany. In 2003 he organized a Melville conference and expedition to Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands, and in 2008 he traveled with his wife to Peru to do work on Herman Melville and maritime literature. Melville is Henry's "scholarly" area of interest, "But" he says, "I'm really a poet." The link below is to Henry's poetry web page. I encourage readers to check it out.

<http://henryhughespoetry.wordpress.com/>

## JAMES VAN OORT



James Van Oort began his undergraduate work at DWU in the fall of 1995 and immediately got involved with *Prairie Winds*. He began as a staff member during the editorship of Howie Gunston. We still had a Publications Board in those years, and that student body was so impressed with James' enthusiasm that they appointed him as co-editor for the next year, and in the following year, 1997, he became editor and remained editor until he graduated. He had become by that time so identified with the *Prairie Winds* that editors in the next several years continually consulted him for guidance.

In 2002, a year in which I as Faculty Advisor to *PW* was away from campus, James was appointed Interim Editor, even though he was at that time an alumnus. James had taken a job with our local newspaper, the *Daily Republic*, and still lived in town, so he served with typical aplomb and enthusiasm.

James had learned early on in his relationship with *PW* of the College Media Association and its convention, which was held annually in a major city in the US. Our Student Senate had enough faith in him to fund his attendance at this convention for two years. In the fall of 1996, James took the *Prairie Winds* to the CMA convention in Orlando, Florida. This experience awakening him to the aesthetics of design, to the literary values a journal like *Prairie Winds* must pursue in order to succeed, and to the roles of art, photography, and graphics in the overall appeal of such a journal. James returned wiser, more enthusiastic, and more committed to editing than ever. In 1997 he returned to the convention, this time in New York City, with a bundle of *PWs* under his arm that were entirely his own. At that convention, *PW* received the highest praise. "We took 250 copies of the journal to the New York convention," James writes in response to my query for this retrospective, "and set them up for distribution amid tables full of nationally-recognized journals and reviews. At the end of the weekend, the journals around *PW* still had

editions to spare. There wasn't a single *Prairie Winds* to be found in that bazaar—they'd all been hoarded.

James was a double major at DWU. In addition to his work in the Creative Writing program, as poet and fiction writer, he also majored in Theater, specializing in directing. He has been working on a novel which he hopes to finish by and by, and has recently published a chapbook, *The Mass in Red*. He is working now on a second epic-length poetry project based on the Requiem Mass. But it was his work for *PW* that has had the profoundest impact on him. Now a manager for Wal-Mart, James spends his non-working hours managing a publication of his own founding, *Darkling*, which specializes in poetry and in each issue of which, among the many poets who have discovered and love his journal, James honors one in a special feature. *Darkling* represents the fruition of James' dedication to *PW*. We honor him in this retrospective and his special enterprise.

**JOSEPH M. DITTA**



## HENRY HUGHES

### FIXTURES

Kyle and Nina were driving east when it came up again.

"It's not too much to ask? Is it?" Nina said.

Kyle tipped a plastic cup and looked over at her. "No. And it's the way I've been. You know that."

"I know *you*."

"Pour another couple, baby, will you?" Nina looked out the rear window then reached under the seat for the vodka. She poured an inch into each cup and splashed them with fruit punch. "We're outta ice."

"There's a Circle K up here. I gotta get some swivels, anyway. We'll pick up some wine coolers, if you want. Hey, listen, I can't help it if girls want to talk. They come into the store and I help 'em out. There's nothing wrong with that."

"But it's the way you talk to them. I don't know if you're serious."

"I'm not serious with them. I'm serious with *you*."

When they came down the hill toward the Circle K, Kyle said, "Drink up, honey. There's the fort." He felt good, finishing his drink, slowing down as they rolled into the sunny town. There were three video shops, a couple diners, a salon, and a furniture store. They passed a state trooper parked in a blind drive and Kyle bowed, "Afternoon, officer." Nina shook her head and smiled.

In the Circle K, Nina looked at magazines and Kyle picked up a bag of ice and a four-pack of wine coolers. Nina opened the door for him, and when they got to the car he remembered the swivels.

Back inside, he studied the tackle rack. A few feet away, a busty woman came out of the storeroom carrying a box printed with red rabbits. Kyle stared right at her breasts, then quickly refocused on her face and smiled. She was good looking--deep brown hair, amber eyes. She looked at him a little longer than he expected, put the box down and said, "You're Kyle from Stayton Fixtures, aren't you?"

Nina put the heavy cooler in the trunk and wondered what was taking him so long. He gets that way around fishing gear, she thought, finishing her drink and studying the plastic cup for a moment. It was a promotional from the fixture shop where Kyle worked, and it sported a bunch of phrases spoken by light fixtures: "Of Course We Can," beamed a track light; "Not A Problem," assured a ceiling fan; "It's Done," glowed a sconce. That's a bunch of bullshit, she thought

Kyle came out of the store smiling.

"Get your stuff?" she asked.

"Got'em. Hey babe, let's fish right over at Dodge Bend. The kid said they're catching some rainbows there. It's close."

"I thought you wanted to take a nice drive,"

"I do, but if there's fish right here. Let's check it out. If it's not cool, we'll move."

Kyle had never been to Dodge Bend Park but he had a good sense for turnoffs and trails. They drove down Main Street and the wheels were singing a bit.

"You need new brake pads," Nina said.

"You know a lot about cars for a girl," he teased.

They found the park. There were a couple rebel-flagged pickups parked above a gravelly bend in the river where men were fishing. "Rednecks," Nina said. "That sucks."

"Hey, no problem. There's always more water." Kyle drove the circle, stopped to look at the fishermen, then headed toward a faded sign, "No Motorized Vehicles." He drove right on past and Nina laughed, sinking down into her seat. They followed the grassy ruts north under a luxurious canopy of trees for a quarter mile. A small deer ran across the trail and into a meadow stoked with fireweed. The deer stopped, looked at them, then walked off into the green shadows.

"It's beautiful," Nina said.

"Yeah, it is. Let's find a place to pull over. River's got to be right there." The road turned east and a wide opening in the trees unveiled a great blue band of water.

"Would you look at this?"

"Are you sure this isn't private property?" Nina said.

"I don't think so. And I don't care."

Standing in the clearing before the river, they toasted and kissed. Nina tasted wonderfully fruity. He touched her fine blond hair and looked into her eyes. "River eyes," he said. She smiled. They kissed again. When he tried to pull off her shirt she looked wildly at him, but lifted her arms anyway. She had small breasts and he touched them lightly at first, then closed his eyes and kissed her. He squeezed her breasts and ass, then bladed a hand along the flat of her stomach into her shorts. He was with Nina now, but he returned to the other woman from moment to moment.

Kyle walked into the water and howled from the cold.

"Won't you scare the fish away?" Nina asked, lying nude in the sun on the old coat he had thrown down for them.

"Fuck the fish," he said. But she was right. He'd better not make too much commotion. Fish were on his mind again. He soaked his hot body in the cold water, scrubbed his crotch and walked out into the sun.

"You should try it," he said.

"I'm fine."

Kyle put on a pair of thin sweats and his waders. Nina lay in the sun until he was nearly ready, then pulled on her shorts and shirt. She folded his jeans and set them beside her, then plucked one of his sneakers from a bush, neatly placing it next to the other one beside his jeans.

"I'm just gonna work my way up river. You okay here?"

"Yeah, I'm great. You want to carry a couple coolers with you?"

"I better take it easy. I don't know what the river's like up there. But here, give me a sip."

"Be careful."

"I will. You enjoy yourself. Have a party."

"Maybe we can check out that furniture store on the way home. They may have that couch we're looking for."

"Sure."

"Hey," she said. "I love you."

He lifted his pole off a stump, made a few casts from the bank, but gave up quickly, figuring the spot was ruined. He stepped into the water and began casting his spinner upriver and retrieving smoothly in a downward swing. Kyle liked to fish, and he began to concentrate, taking a step or two against the current after each cast. He turned to check on Nina. She picked up a magazine and began to read. Twenty minutes working up the westbank, he looked back again and couldn't see her. He took another step and a small grey rabbit shot from the bushes. He smiled. There was good water ahead. The river bent east and he crossed over to stand on a gravel bar and fish a deep cut on the westside.

Three cranks into his retrieve he felt a solid hit and set the hook into a fish that took off downstream. He worked it back carefully and saw that it was a good trout. "Nice," he said aloud, netting the rainbow--a fine, fourteen-incher. He wished Nina were there to see it. "Ah, what the hell," he said, and let fish slip from his hands into the river. The woman from Circle K returned. What's so wrong with that? he thought. He was putting together an explanation in his head, though he didn't know who he might offer it to.

Last spring a woman had come into the fixture shop. She had silvery hair and some kind of accent. As she and Kyle talked, he learned that she was from Australia, and was now divorced, living alone, trying to fix up her house in Salem. He wasn't sure how old she was. Fifty, maybe. The tan muscles in her neck and shoulders made him think of swimming. She ordered a complicated fixture, Kyle offered to come over and install it. A lot of women had trouble with installations.

"I really want to do it myself," she said. "I'm tired of having men do things for me."

Kyle smiled. "Sure," he said. "I understand." But when her order arrived from the warehouse, Kyle made some adjustments, unscrewing sections for which there were no assembly directions, pulling a wire from its connector. He sealed up the box and called her. "It's a tricky fixture," he said. "You sure you don't want me to install it? Well, if you have any problems--any problems at all--just call. Okay? Ask for me. It's not a big deal. Even electricians call sometimes."

The next day she phoned and he knew exactly what to do. When the light went on she opened a bottle of wine; an hour later they were in bed. She brought Kyle to things he had never done before. Things he had never even asked Nina to try. They got together four or five times before he told her one afternoon, shortly after he arrived in the Stayton Fixture van, that he really couldn't do this anymore, that he was in love with another woman. Nina's name was never mentioned. "I'm sorry," he said.

"It's okay. But you might've told me."

"Sorry," he said again.

Kyle fished upriver for another two hours without a bite. Loops and twists bedeviled his line and he wondered if the swivel he tied on was turning properly. Cheap Circle K junk, he thought. He looked at his watch, considered getting back to Nina--she wanted to check out that furniture store--but decided to press on a little farther, finally coming up on a big hole where the river spilled in from two directions. There was a blue stone shaped liked the head of a fox. This looks good, he thought, tying on a jig. He cast into the heart of the pool, and retrieved slowly, twitching the rod, waiting, hoping. If I get a good one, I'll keep it. We'll cook it tonight. Nina will like that. He made three or four more casts then felt the pickup. Just like that. The fish was taking line, the drag sang. Now this is a fish, he said to himself. And just as suddenly it was gone. He reeled in the limp line, examined the end, and saw the tiny curls of a failed knot. "Fuck. Goddamnit" he said aloud. Slumped in disgust, he let his rod tip fall into the water. "Goddamnit," he said again. He tied on another jig and worked the pool for nearly an hour but there was nothing. Long shadows stretched over the river. His head felt dry and achy. It would be an easier walk downstream, he thought, and started back.

Kyle kept looking for the clearing, wondering if this was the right place, or did he have farther to go? He didn't see Nina. He didn't see his car, either. But that was the clearing; he recognized the stump where he leaned his rod. Stepping out of the water, he wondered. She must've gone into town for something to eat. Am I that late? It was August and starting to get dark earlier than he remembered. Where is she? He walked up the bank and stood at the place where they made love. There was a soft depression in the grass, and what he thought might've been a tissue was a piece of stock memo with the name *Jessica* written in flowing script over a

number. "Shit," he said, stuffing it into his vest. The jeans that pocketed the note were gone. His cell phone was gone. Everything was gone. I'll be walking into town, he thought, shaking his head. He had a few dollars and there was a bar up the road where someone would have a phone. Kyle felt surprisingly good, like something exciting was about to happen. That was hours before the police and the tears, before she smashed their car through the window of Stayton Fixtures, pulled a few lights off the shelf, drove home and installed them above their old couch. He didn't think a woman could do that. He didn't think anything he did could make a woman do that.

## GREAT BLUE HERON

Snake-daggered and slate narrow,  
the great blue aims his hungry arrow.  
Stab, flip and tip—a salamander slides to the gullet.  
When startled, the heron *gawks*, wings yarded, feet dangling,  
and he's up over the trees—pterodactylic—cloaked face coiled  
comfortably on his past.  
Forty miles for food is no problem. Marsh or dry field. Fish, frog,  
grasshopper and snake. The armored crayfish rattles down his tilted lance.  
He sees nothing in autumn's blaze or his smoky reflection.  
He steps past the surface,  
looks, stabs, eats.

## RING-NECKED PHEASANT

Celestial gaud of China, they astound  
our fields with flash-cackle color. Exploding  
from high grass, wild-winged and long tailed—dogs bristle,  
men swing to fire—splash-tumbling October brandy,  
simmering breasts, and salmon hackle. But here, for a moment,  
on a June green  
with the coyote asleep and the hawk stuffed,  
the pheasants open themselves to the sun,  
preen their mottles, scratch and peck across the seedy hill.  
Tan-cheeked hens and scarlet-wattled cock.  
His raiment shimmers copper and gold,  
his white ring *rings*  
like the orbiting grasp of beauty and death.

## TOUCHSTONE

The only voice is Indiana highway  
and a stone you might have touched  
last time we met—I-65, Thanksgiving Break.  
I gave you truck stop earrings,  
and you tucked one under a rock—to *hold on to*, you said—  
lovemaking in the weigh station woods  
as Macks rumbled deer bones  
back to dust.

Grad school was reading, writing and the bars—  
three a.m. and where else to go  
but windowless Heavilon Hall. Our cracked  
wooden desks heaped with ungraded compositions,  
that old green chair smelling of pizza.  
*Piercing?* you asked, holding a stapler to my ear. What I heard  
might've been security  
or the heat. Laughing back into our clothes,  
I pulled stories from your paperweight.  
Page after page you let me in,  
but never your family or hometown Detroit  
where your new husband's fighter returns to base,  
a swallow full of moths.

Letting one stone fall to pick another, there is—*nothing*—  
I think, across our lost bed. Deer tracks, leaves, litter,  
the slick of spiraled snails  
over that somewhere *stone*,  
that listens and holds  
because it doesn't know.

PRINTED IN SPAIN

Bangwalk the sky, baby,  
play blue fountains four nights straight  
and you'll understand what González said:  
*México es una juerga grande*. Hungover Mondays?—  
call coffee, fire some staff, a little coke will lift your ass.  
Take the day, but don't stay home.  
Playroom skills are fine  
for fathers, but you're a smooth suit,  
a diplomat, lover of cigars and cousins cute.  
What happens in that cush cabaña, amigo?  
Who do we call  
when another drowns below  
your salty silks? We missed you again, señor G.,  
walking sidewise toward the sea,  
holding off gulls  
with a claw-bound passport  
printed in Spain.

## VICKI'S GRANDFATHER

The Sonderkommandos  
gulped and guzzled their hearts,  
leading prisoners off the trains  
and into the showers, saying everything's okay.  
Wheelbarrows, smoke. It was do this or die  
sooner.

On Friday afternoon I ride the C train  
to Brooklyn, enjoying the steel sway, the pneumatic doors  
opening at every stop, until I get off and walk  
the leafy streets  
up to Vicki's brownstone.

Sitting around, reading the papers,  
I just ask, *Vickie, does it bother you that I'm not Jewish?*  
*Not anymore, she says. Let's eat.*

Into the flames  
her grandfather slid all his daughters, save one  
who walked on ashes back to Long Island,  
holy sand spit of peaches and roast duck. *It's my mother, she says.*  
*It's hard for her. But she likes you.*

We eat clams  
at a bar between Oceanbeach and Rockaway,  
watching old, graffitied subway cars barged  
and dumped for a reef. Startled fish circle their new barracks.

Vicki's grandfather is buried in Poland.  
No one visits his grave.

IN A RABBIT WAY

Before driving to work,  
Chloë lifts her silver-grey rabbit from his hutch, his little heart  
fast in her arms, his ears perked to every garden rustle,

wide-eyed to wing-shadow and shrub, sniff-twitching  
breeze, breath, bloom and blouse, the long furry feet

itching for purchase and push. But Chloë cradles  
him to his back, the warm cosset of her plush chest,

ears stroked into smooth canoes turned over in the sand  
after a river of listening: car doors, barking, a raccoon

or the neighbor's tom drawn to your tender hops?  
*Oh, sweet bunny*, she says softly, easing his pulse,

feet trackless in air, his eyes slowly, slowly closing  
until there's not a sound, scent, or shape

of what we call fear, as she saves him day after day  
in her own way, in a rabbit way, hugged close in the warm  
burrow of a moment.



## JAMES VAN OORT

### BIKES

Blue and white,  
“The Lion,” it was called,  
a colorful cartoon Leo  
stickered onto the frame of  
my brother’s first bike—  
training wheels barely bolted to  
the frame. And Shaun,  
the dark-hued, dark-haired boy  
that was my brother with  
the devil in his eyes,  
a baby-tooth smile glowing from  
his happy face.

And my bike, a black and yellow thing  
with an annoying squeak at a particular  
notch in each full turn of the rear wheel.

Shaun and I both young lions, we thought—  
kittens, really, thinking we had full manes,  
the tough guys we thought we were.

We sped around the block,  
pedaling faster in the early evening light,  
a late afternoon breeze  
nothing like the wind we made  
speeding on, roaring on—  
our lion selves, and Shaun’s Lion bike,  
hellions of the sidewalks around that block.

At some unknown point,  
the training wheels on the Lion  
spinning themselves right off the bike,  
and Shaun was riding—  
really riding, big boy riding.  
He was riding...

It’s 22, maybe 23 years later.  
Time gets away.  
The first motorcycle I owned,  
sold to a good buddy who,  
scared of being a real biker,  
put it away in a garage to rust.

Shaun comes up with  
a Grand for the title,  
blows off the dust  
from that ’82 Virago 750.  
My first bike,  
now his first bike.

In a concrete parking lot  
I show him the clutch, the gear pedal—  
down one for first gear, up one for second,  
neutral halfway between first and second.  
Give it a bit of gas,  
ease up on the clutch, easy on the throttle  
too.  
The rest will come natural if you got it,  
Brother.  
You’re riding, Brother.  
You’re riding.  
Really riding. Big boy riding.

He is riding,  
that dark-hued, dark-eyed boy  
that is my brother with  
the devil in his eyes;  
we’re riding around the block,  
both of us young boys—  
he and I both young lions,  
kittens really, thinking we have full manes,  
the tough guys we think we are.

I can’t wait to spin around the block  
with him  
again.

ON TRAGICALLY LOSING THE ANSWER TO AN AGE-OLD QUESTION  
—inspired by a brief in *The Daily Republic* slugged  
“*Missing Chicken Found Across Street*”

That’s just fine, but why—  
why *didn’t* they ask that timeless question?

It’s too late now.  
Come to find out, there was a man across the street  
peculiar as a “the-end-is-near” prophet  
blathering about discount chicken prices.  
He preached that Jesus was bringing picnic things  
and that *this* chicken was actually worth an entire \$18.  
We’re getting into illegal chicken trafficking here,  
or something—  
involuntary chicken labor,  
solicitation of “employees” from “chicken ranches,”  
or something like, by God, chicken slavery!  
In any case, the man was mad.

The crazy-man-prophet guy  
took the chicken as a hostage.  
Police were summoned.  
Hotel managers from across the street  
came running, their tear-streaked cheeks  
red with fear and sadness—as it turns out,  
the chicken was of the hotel.

Police battened down the crime scene after  
batting down the crazy-man-prophet guy.  
A crowd gathered. A protest began.  
An ambulance was called in to aid the chicken;  
a second ambulance brought in to tend to  
the under-arrest-crazy-man-prophet guy.  
Police used tear gas and rubber bullets on protesters,  
who refused to disperse by crossing any streets.  
Eventually, National Guard troops were called in;  
FEMA brought some grisly mobile homes and  
stale chicken salad sandwiches  
(feds always doing things in poor taste)  
but Walmart did more to help people recover.  
After a month or so, things quieted down.  
The chicken wound up in in-patient care  
for post-traumatic stress disorder.  
Crazy-man-prophet guy got a life sentence—  
the jury wouldn’t go for the death penalty.

There are so many unanswered questions.  
What about that poor chicken  
“belonging” to the hotel?  
Was the chicken a partner in the hotel,  
perhaps an owner,  
a welcome patron—  
maybe even a visiting executive  
from some far-off farm enterprise  
looking for legal loopholes,  
wishing for a county that would allow  
massive factories for the laying of eggs  
or the production of some  
chicken-fried Soylent Green?

*And why did the chicken cross the street?*

As I said, it’s too late now.  
Released from treatment, pumped up on  
hormones and therapeutic drugs, the chicken  
entered an Ultimate Cockfighting Tournament,  
was killed accidentally in the ring. Investigation is pending.

But now, we’ll *never* know why.

KYRIE ELEISON: DAYDREAM

(part two from the liturgical collection “Requiem”)

—for Beverly Flynn

*“I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord:  
he that believeth in me, though he were dead,  
yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me  
shall never die.”*

*John 3:16*

I daydreamed in a chapel  
where a body  
smooth and still  
rested in a casket of pearl, cedar, silk;  
she was lovely through her life,  
her slaughter, her slumber,  
and there was no pang of infinity  
on her lovely face.

But I daydreamed as I saw her—  
all my focus shifted to  
the lily colored candles in the corner,  
to a solitary flame on a single wick;  
my stare diminished to the center of the fire,  
the heart of the flame,  
the essence of perpetual light.

All sounds in the chapel diminished,  
the faintest din receding into  
quiet corners I didn't know;  
a sound of rippling water,  
hushed and gentle,  
grew quietly to a murmuring music,  
an indiscernible lullabying whisper—  
I heard in that quiet plainsong  
not one but a host of voices,  
and their quiet was marvelous and deep.

The sound and sight  
assembled together in my questing,  
and I saw the slightest swirl,  
a microcosmic vortex of spirits  
welling up from the beginning,  
rising to the end in a heavenly helix—  
the chorus of quiet voices  
offering supernatural song to the sound I heard.  
I knew,  
seeing the wondrous spiral of light,  
hearing the voluptuous chant of serenity,  
that there was such an idea as mercy.

The vision swelled,  
the song crystallized—  
the swirling light a vapor of souls,  
the plentiful chant a plea for mercy.

My vision cleared;  
I saw the flame again,  
the wick, the candle,  
the lovely body in its final bed.

The stillness rushed in;  
my ears heard mourning,  
a hush of solemn voices,  
the clatter of a sleeping funeral chapel.

She was beautiful,  
her pearl earrings, diamond necklace,  
flowing nightgown of silken moonlight  
effervescing the life she lived.

“Mercy,” I whispered,  
thinking on my daydream,  
on the living,  
on the dead.

They would, someday,  
lie together—the living and the dead—  
until all of death was dead  
and all of life was living.

I remembered my daydream  
as I left the chapel—  
“Mercy, mercy. Mercy,”  
the words circling me—  
still, I see that vision with waking eyes,  
hear that blessed song above living voices,  
and I know that there is such a thing  
as mercy,  
even for all the days of my life  
until, and after,  
I am gone.

TOUGH  
—for Gary

Thick and woody fingers  
knobbed at the knuckles  
betray the true heart of the man—  
and seeing how they twist an obtuse way or  
quiver very slightly;  
you can see  
the pain he's in.

He keeps on working though,  
keeping on,  
never complains.

He doesn't dress like the farmer he was—  
doesn't cuss like it either;  
he walks like it, works like it,  
moves in the hard-work-break-your-back steady plowing  
that makes one think of a work horse pulling a stuck implement.  
Now he stocks shelves, moves dry goods around,  
makes less money to feed people from a grocery store  
instead of his own farm.  
You can almost see  
the white needles of pain  
throbbing in his hands.

Arthritis.  
Hearing aids.  
Little sleep.  
Occasionally an aching heart.

Sometimes that was the same on the farm.  
Restlessness.  
Tiredness.  
Weariness.  
Occasionally an aching heart.

Sometimes that was the same in Vietnam,  
where he ran through toxic napalm fumes  
and clouds of Agent Orange  
to fix missiles and gather ordnance on helicopters  
that needed arming or had gone down.  
Pals falling around him,  
rat-a-tats like hail on a hard tin bucket  
blasting his ears apart,  
elephant grass slicing at his farm-boy arms,  
Victor Charlie peppering bullets toward him,  
aiming to blitz his guts out before he could do his job.

He went running though,  
running on,  
never giving in.  
He probably doesn't need the job—  
the sleepless pounding of cans of beans onto a shelf,  
hands aching insufferably,  
knees ground down by concrete floors,  
eyes suffocating under sleepless lights.  
He could go without the pain of nights,  
the going home in the morning to struggle more,  
the long walks he sometimes takes to clear his head  
of whatever memories and demons that haunt  
so hard-working a man.

His boy knows war now,  
his wife knows pain as he does,  
his grandchildren know something of cows and land.  
His neighbors know he's a good man,  
his friends knew he used to be worse than he is now.  
His coworkers see that he's Godly.  
He reminds his boss of Jesus.

He just keeps on going,  
tough,  
keeps on working.

A SIMPLE OBSERVATION

As he sat drinking warm whisky,  
smoke of the bar whorled and whipped  
with music from the jukebox,  
dancing lewdly.  
The smoke and the music became one,  
its narcotic serenade lending  
emotional counterpane to  
the melting ice in his glass.

“I’m so lonesome I could cry,”  
the melody licking at his ear.

“If God wants to knock me down a peg,  
I say knock me down,” he says,  
ignoring the prophecy of Hank Williams  
stirring in the smoky air.

A woman across the bar  
licks lipstick lips,  
sucks an olive out of her beer glass—  
she eyes him with unreadable eyes.

“Stupid guy—”  
she thinks.  
“A peg,  
to God,  
may be to us  
a skyscraper.”



DANNA McCLOUD



STILL PAGES

## JENNA ANDERSON

### WINTER'S CHOICE

“ATTACK!” a voice shouted good-naturedly over the expanse of white snow, the rich baritone echoing off the rising mountains to the east.

Briella barely had time to bring one wing around her body, snapping it open as she ducked her face behind the sleek membrane, allowing a few powdery snowballs to explode brightly against the wing's darkness before she reached out and touched the air gently with her mind, her magic solidifying and forming a firm barrier against anymore attacks.

“No fair!” a chorus of voices chirped as Briella cautiously peeked her head over her wing, rich chocolate eyes searching the undisturbed snow until they rested on the young man, Vaas, standing to her right, hands on hips, a small legion of school children hastily scrambling at his feet to remake the snowballs.

Their eyes locked and she stuck her tongue out at him, eyes twinkling. At his waist, the children finished preparing their snowballs and turned on her, laughing faces red with coolness of the winter evening.

Kavlyier, one of the Shadow Realms separating the Light Realms from the Dark Realms, had just begun its Nurturing Season and was only ten years into the fifty-year winter. For the long lived races like the dark skinned and winged Aryians, the winters were a joyful time to delve inward and contemplate their own internal landscape, while rejoicing and finding peace and calm in the subtle, nurturing harmonies of Kavlyier.

The Shadow Realm sang to its people on a regular basis, the harmonies drawing each inhabitant into the rhythm and flow of the realm, in the same way the moons pulled at the tides. And with the changing of the Summer Lord's power to a new ruler not ten years before, the tides

were once again growing strong, building for the rich and vibrant growing season under the protection and guidance of the Winter Lord.

Nearly all of the races—including the few humans—residing in Kavlyier drew on some kind of power, a requirement in order to sustain and thrive in a realm that, even with a full day moon, didn't brighten past an over-cast and heavily clouded day in the light realms. It was that magic, interlaced with the subtle harmonies of Kavlyier itself, that Briella drew on to give the tree above the ringleader of her would-be attackers a good shake, sending the freshly fallen snow cascading down on top of him.

“Get him!” Briella shrieked laughingly over the high-pitched excited squeals of the children as they turned on their leader, pelting him from close range with hastily made snowballs.

There were pretended agonizing cries from Vaas as he covered his face with his hands and wings, shaking the snow from his shoulders as he bunched his muscles, leaping into the air. His wings snapped open, sending a spray of fine snow across the little ones below him as they scrambled for more snowballs.

Briella followed his movements with her dark eyes, until a glitter over his left shoulder caught her eye. She felt the magic tug at her soul a second before the sparkle expanded outward, quickly and smoothly like shattering ice. She felt the harmony complete itself, drawing her in, narrowing her vision to the fragments before her.

Warm lips, soft words, dark eyes, smooth skin and the sweet feeling of contentment and love slipped through her senses. A gentle laugh and the touch of a warm hand on her skin...

“Briella?”

She jumped, pulled from the magic so suddenly she felt it slide across her shoulders, making her shiver. Just as quickly she felt the alarm slide through his stomach, linking the magic into the crystals of snowflakes, the delicate flakes allowed her to see the future and to sing the songs of nurturing that were meant only for the strongest of Aryians. Briella's magic was strong

and delicate, but hardly that of a Winter Lady, one able to guide the harmonies and notes of Kavlyier into the song which would keep it strong and enhance the coming growing season, one of the few who worked directly with the Winter Lord to nurture Kavlyier in it's time of quiet.

Vaas' fingers wrapping around her elbow jerked her from her thoughts, and she forced a smile up at him. "Are you okay?" he asked.

Pushing the thoughts aside, she flashed another smile. "How could I be okay with such vandals about?" she responded dramatically, gesturing toward the small group waiting to see whether the snowball fight was still on.

There was a heartbeat while Vaas contemplated pushing his concern, but instead he let it slide, his gaze flying over his shoulder to his followers. "It is a risky business traveling at night, Lady," he said, casting a wink at the children watching enthusiastically, "With such riff-raff ready to turn on any particular soul caught walking through the dark streets." Not far from them the children were still watching. A few had dropped down to pat together more snowballs. "A beautiful lady such as yourself should not be unescorted, allow me to walk you home?"

He added the last with a deep bow. Laughing she acceded to his request, sliding her fingers lightly along his arm and tucking them into his elbow as he turned, giving the children an enthusiastic thumbs up, which caused them to laugh and cheer. Then he turned his attention to Briella.

"Why so late tonight, Brie?"

"I had a few extra lessons I wanted to work through with my teachers," she said, shivering slightly in the chilly evening and pulling her cloak more tightly around her.

"Tonight was not so cold you couldn't have flown," Vaas pointed out as she tucked her fingers more tightly against his side in order to warm her gloved hand. Most days were warm enough to fly, but every so often, as winter set in, the upper airs became so cold even the strongest Aryian wouldn't fly for risk of damaging a wing or getting frostbite on a limb.

She smiled at him in the gathering darkness. “True, but sometimes a walk helps to clear the mind.” And the heart, she added silently afterward.

“Something bothering you, Brie?” he pushed, catching her withdrawal.

She shook her head, unwilling to explain the vivid dream snippets she had been having lately, the ones which ended in violence, blood, and the screaming of a voice which sounded familiar. The feeling of a heavy decision weighed on her chest and she realized there may be more to her magic than just the subtle healing art she had been training in. Especially when, more than once in the past few months, she had found herself weaving the harmonies throughout Kavlyier and had resisted the urge to weave her own snowflake into each new snowfall. It could be a long winter, indeed.

“Just lessons,” she replied, somewhat truthfully.

He raised an eyebrow, but otherwise didn’t push her, a trait in Vaas which Briella was suddenly thankful for. “Where to?” he asked, changing the subject lightheartedly.

Taking a deep breath, she squeezed his arm, a silent thank you for not pushing the subject of her over-quietness, and said, “To my parents for dinner.” Her own apartment wasn’t far, but her mother had been especially excited about the idea of Briella having dinner with the family after her lessons tonight. Tired as she was and wanting nothing more than a hot bath and some time to herself, Briella knew she couldn’t disappoint her mother, and so she had pushed aside her worries to make the quick trek across town, and enjoyed her walk.

“Ah, lucky girl,” Vaas said, steering her gently down the street. “Your mother sets a wonderful table. I can only imagine the delight she’ll have for her favorite daughter after a long week of studying and hardship from school.”

If only he knew, Briella thought to herself before saying lightly, “Her only daughter you mean, Vaas, and as always, I’m sure she has plenty for an extra plate, especially for the young man who saved her child tonight from such villains as the park held this evening.”

His eyes gleamed in the semi-darkness, and Briella didn't know if it was from the idea of her mother's no-doubt delicious meal or from some other thought; either way, it brought a smile to her face.

She had known the young man at her side since they were children in school together, learning basic craft, and again as they pushed into adulthood, even though their chosen areas of experience sometimes kept them apart for long periods of time. Vaas was a metal crafter, using his magic to shape, create, and set the precious stones and metals of Kavlyier into beautiful jewelry pieces. Lately, he'd begun working with a blacksmith friend of his on ceremonial blades and gift daggers. The two had, inadvertently, started quite a business, with customers sending requests from across Kavlyier and even into the Dark Realms themselves.

As his business and reputation as a craftsman grew, and her own powers built, Briella had been surprised to suddenly find herself looking at Vaas as more than just a friend. Then winter had set in, her magic had changed, demanding her immediate attention, and her instructors used the power of Kavlyier's winter to help drive their students inward, dissolving all barriers between a student's ultimate potential and what was immediately available.

The barriers had been hard to break through, and Briella hadn't necessarily felt or seen any changes. Then suddenly the snow called to her, the world sparkled, and the future seemed to shimmer before her eyes. The fear of what it might mean kept her mouth shut, and she suppressed the urges and the abilities when her instructors tried to call them forth, wanting to see the magic. So far, no one knew of the power she suspected she had, the power of a Winter Lady, an advisor to the Winter Lord, and one who spent her time in the castle. Briella wanted to heal, or so she told herself. She couldn't do that as an advisor to the Winter Lord. Honorable or not, powerful or not, she only had to resist the magic for another forty years, a skip in time for long-lived races, and she could enjoy herself as a healer.

“I have a delivery to Friath in two days,” Vaas said, his second hand sliding over Briella’s fingers when he stopped.

Looking up, Briella was surprised to see they’d traversed the streets quickly and were standing outside the warmly lit front entryway of her parents’ home. She frowned, processing his words before shaking her dark hair from her face, disturbing the few snowflakes which had settled there.

“I don’t know how long I’ll be gone, but I had hoped we could spend sometime together before I left,” he took a deep breath, his eyes sliding to the front door as the latch clicked. “I have something I’d like to speak to you about.”

Confused, though her heart pounded in her chest, Briella nibbled on her lower lip, before answering, “Okay, Vaas, I’d enjoy that.” She felt the coolness of magic...a premonition perhaps...slide across her skin and she shivered, never taking her eyes from Vaas’.

He seemed to relax, straightening with a quick nod. “I’m glad.” He flashed her a quick smile, then turned to wave when Briella’s mother hailed them from the house.

“You’re nearly late,” her mother fussed as Briella stepped into the house, brushing the snow from her skirts and giving her wings a quick twitch to dislodge any snow which had settled on the membranes arching gracefully above her head. “Vaas, my dear, how are you? We haven’t seen you in nearly a fortnight. Business has been picking up, yes? Briella, please don’t keep your father and his guests waiting. Hustle upstairs and make yourself presentable, please. Hurry, we only have a few minutes.”

Briella opened her mouth to protest when her mother whisked the heavy winter cloak from her daughter’s back, turning her quickly and giving her a gentle shove down the hall toward her old bedroom. Briella barely had a chance to catch Vaas sympathetic look before her mother’s disapproving frown filled her gaze and she was shooed from the hallway.

Pushing the bathroom door open, she heard her mother extend the invitation of dinner to Vaas, and she felt a protest rise in her throat when he graciously declined, but at her insistence, agreed to take a place with her. She managed to catch a glimpse of his streamlined form as he followed the housekeeper into the kitchen, his conspiratorial smile easing some of the disappointment she felt at his departure. Shaking herself from her fanciful thoughts, Briella pushed open the bathroom door and did her best to straighten her appearance before dinner.



“Of course we’ll accept,” Briella heard her father say as she sat across the table, a glass of well-water wine held tightly in her hand to prevent it from spilling all over as she shook.

Across from her sat one of the two Winter Lord’s advisors, a beautiful silver haired woman indicating her heritage from another long-lived race known as the Kemleavers, a bronze skinned, silver-haired race residing mostly in the Shadow Realms, though a few preferred the darker, heavier magicks of the Dark Realms. The second advisor was the Winter Lord’s younger brother, Devlan, a few years younger than Briella. He had a charming smile and a delightful ability to put those around him at ease. His desire for play and life experience kept him constantly involved in some activity or another. At the moment, he was busy trying to sneak a second helping of her mother’s Snow Delight cake.

“Excellent,” Devlan declared, straightening from his attempted thievery to flash a smile at her father and then at Briella, who forced one past the lump of panic in her throat. “A gala at the Winter Lord’s Palace will be just the thing to keep the spirits and the harmonies of Kavlyier flowing throughout the season. Landrayle—” Devlan deftly ignored the irritated look from the second advisor at the Winter Lord’s name, “will be extremely pleased to have so many of his friends and family come to celebrate the passing of the first ten years of his rule.”

“We’re honored that he would think to include Briella and our family in his celebration,” Briella’s father responded, even as Devlan turned his attention back to the piece of cake.

Exasperated, and feeling slightly sick to her stomach, Briella picked up her own plate of untouched cake and slid it across the space between them to settle on top of his plate. Devlan graced her with a smile and dug in.

She forced a second smile back and set her wine down, pressing one hand to her stomach as she heard her father discussing details of her healer lessons, his own trading company, and realm's business in general with the Kemleaver's advisor.

As exotic as two days in Hyaith, the Winter Lord's home city, would be, and at the palace no less, Briella feared she would not be able to hide her blooming talent under the presence of one as powerful as the Winter Lord and the few Winter Ladies he had present. Currently, as far as she knew, the Winter Lord was unmarried and took his role in Kavlyier very seriously, refusing to align with another just for the power she would bring to the throne. Nurturing Kavlyier through the winter season required patience, a gentle touch, and the willingness to draw inward—for Kavlyier would reflect externally whatever was happening internally with the Winter Lord, requiring the Lord to pay attention to his own harmonies.

What would happen, though, if his advisors discovered the power she suddenly feared was flowing through her? Would they make her stay in Ayiata? Would they make her take up the mantle of Winter Lady? Would she have to give up her own dreams of becoming a healer in order to immerse herself in the harmonies of Kavlyier? They were fears she suddenly didn't know how she was going to deal with, and fears she didn't feel she could talk to her parents about, since her appointment as a Winter Lady would only improve her parents' standing in the Shadow Realms.

“Briella?”

Her head snapped up and she brushed a stray strand of hair from her face as she met her mother's questioning look.

“Are you all right?”

“I’m just tired and a bit overwhelmed,” she said honestly. “An invitation to Ayiata is exciting, and it just made me think of all the things I’ll need to get done, I’m sorry.” She offered an apologetic smile to her father’s guests, but otherwise didn’t try to hide her nervousness, letting her thoughts wander as the conversation around her picked up again with talk of the trip.



*She smiled up at the familiar face shining above her. Though she couldn’t quite make out the features, she recognized the touch—both psychic and physical—against her body and mind. She felt the smooth touch of hand slide across her hip, her body responding instantly, as her magic rose to tingle across her senses. A second taste of power flowed across her nerves with another touch. Kavlyier and the harmonies of the Shadow Realm swept through her body in a rush of ecstasy which left her breathless.*

*A soft chuckle followed her reaction, and she felt a smile slide across her face, reaching into the darkness to wrap her hands around the man across from her, one foot sliding up to help adjust her position on the bed. Sighing, she closed her eyes as the second wave coursed through her...*

*...And she felt cold stonework against her back, winter’s chill coursing across her already heated skin. Her eyes snapped open to find the darkness of a side street across from her. Heart thundering in her chest, she pushed her hands against the stonework, shrinking into the shadows as she looked up and down the dimly lighted street, a feeling of urgency following the panic.*

*A noise from the end of the street caught her attention as a figure passed across the street opening, unconcerned with the dimness of the street lighting, wings relaxed, despite the cold, which indicated the upper winds were too chilly for flying.*

*It took her a moment to recognize the features momentarily caught in the flash of light, the movement, and the shape, and the lightly whistled tune. Relief came in a wave, making her*

*legs weak as she pushed away from the wall, opening her mouth to call a greeting a second before a pair of shadows leaped from the darkness.*

*Stopping her movement she pressed back into the shadows, eyes flying to the traveler, then to the would-be bandits. From the wings peaking above the shorter one's head, she recognized him as Aryian; the second one, looking like an upright shaggy dog with four arms, could only be of the demon race, Ghrysel.*

*Mainly hiring out as mercenaries and thugs, the Ghrysel were one of the only threats to the inhabitants of Kavlyier. They were a ruthless race preferring the deepest reaches of seclusion in the caves and cliffs of the mountains. The curved knife in one of the Ghysel's claws only showed the creature's intentions too well.*

*Still hidden in the shadows she saw another shift, a third in the party waited for the ambush. The man didn't stand a chance against three, and if he took to the air the upper winds might damage his wings, his lungs, and anything unprotected.*

*Her throat threatening to close, she pushed herself away from the wall, bare feet scraping across the uneven surface, heart pounding so loud she couldn't hear anything else. The young man had already begun to turn, the smile leaving his face as it was briefly illuminated.*

*Vaas.*

*She opened her mouth to scream, knowing he would never hear her, the growl of the demon reverberating across the walls. She screamed anyway.*

*She broke from the side street a moment before the third—an Aryian—dropped from the building above and pulled his knife smoothly across Vaas' neck. The blood caught her across the face as she skidded to a stop, someone screaming so loud she couldn't think....*



*“Briella!”*

She came awake gasping, her hands reaching wildly, eventually grasping the wrists of the person shaking her. Taking a deep breath she focused and found herself staring into her father's eyes, her mother standing behind him, hands clenched tightly in front of her, though her eyes told a different story. She knew something was wrong.

Taking another shaking breath, she turned back to her father, "I'm fine. I'm sorry. It was just a dream."

Her father sat back, silently watching her for a moment. His gaze told her he didn't quite believe her but was unwilling to push the issue...yet. "Are you sure?" he asked quietly, watching her reaction.

Briella's hand shook as she lifted it to her face to push her dark hair out of her eyes, forcing a smile. "Yes, I'm just over-tired, and with the excitement of the night..." she let the sentence trail off and shrugged.

He met her gaze for a second too long, then finally stood. "I had hoped to fly most of the trip today, but the recent storm will prevent such from happening. The coach will be ready by mid-morning," he said by way of accepting her explanation.

"I'll be ready."

He gave her a quick nod and moved from the room, pausing to touch the chin of his wife as he did. She flashed him a smile and hurried to Briella's bedside, bending to drop a quick kiss on her daughter's forehead, smoothing the hair back. "Don't worry about it, dear. My own magic studies often gave me nightmares. Get some sleep, I'll have the housekeeper gather your things."

Nodding, Briella waited until her mother had left the room before sliding out of bed and drawing a light wrap over her shoulders. Her mind still reeled with the image of Vaas' murder. Premonition, part of the power of a Winter Lady, the ability to see the future and adjust the harmonies as needed.

Trying to steady her breathing, she walked to the window, one long finger reaching up to delicately trace the frost pattern on the outside of the glass. It wouldn't take much to connect it into the five points needed for a snowflake web, a web enabling her to see more clearly. A web which might help her to save Vaas' life.

*It's only a dream*, she told herself as she touched the first point, letting her eyes and intuition draw her finger to the second point. *Only a dream. I can spin the magic to show me the truth of the dream.* The third point lit briefly to her magic senses. *For my peace of mind, I'm not embracing the magic*, she added, closing her eyes as she found the fourth point, her fingers tingling by the time she touched the fifth.

The magic hit her fast, the space between points splashing red with blood. Even as she bit off the scream, two figures appeared, gliding across a dance floor of pure red. A ball? A festival? A gala...at the palace in Ayiata...or a death in Friath. A dark figure crouched over another, the sounds of crying, and the feel of blood on her hands. Laughter reached her ears and a pair of dark eyes turned to look at her as the bedroom door suddenly opened.

Jumping, Briella jerked her hand across the window pane, scattering the magic. One hand to her heart, she tried to force a smile as the maid stepped into the room, a startled look on her face at finding Briella up.

"Oh," the woman said, somewhat unsure, "I was told you weren't up yet, Miss."

"I am," Briella said, trying to keep the sharpness from her voice as she shed the wrap and grabbed at the nearest clothes. "If you don't mind packing my things, I have a quick errand to run."

The maid barely had time to answer before Briella had pulled on a pair of loose fitting pants, slipped a tunic over her head, and bolted for the door, pulling her boots on without socks as she ran.

The winter morning was cold and only a partial day moon was visible through the heavy fog and falling snow. She briefly contemplated flying. It was only a few short blocks to Vaas' shop. At this early hour he would already be there, warming up furnaces and preparing to open the business for the day. The cold bite of her next inhale against her lungs warned her against it though.

Her mother spotted her as she leaped from the front steps and called out, but she only waved, shouting she'd be back quickly, while fumbling to get her coat on, her cold fingers struggling with the buttons as she ran.



She could hear Vaas muttering about impatient customers as she pounded with both fists against the door, bouncing up and down both to keep herself warm and to channel her impatience. She heard the lock click, and the heavy wood swung open, revealing the shock on his face as he met her gaze.

"Briella, what are you doing here?" It only took him another breath to notice her agitation. "Is something wrong? What's happened?" he asked, swinging open the door, catching her elbow and pulling her into the warmth of the shop.

She shivered as he ran his hands up her arms, pulling her frosty coat from her shoulders and moving her toward the fire. "I can't stay, Vaas, the coach will be ready soon and I have to be back."

He raised an eyebrow as he looked over her shoulder. "The coach?"

She nodded, teeth chattering. "My parents and I were invited to a gala at the palace."

He stiffened momentarily before pushing another log onto the fire and straightening to look at her. "In Ayiata?" She nodded. "So, Landrayle has decided to look for a wife," he said quietly.

Briella felt her stomach drop, her mind racing over the events of the night before. She had known Landrayle as a young man for a summer season, before he became the Winter Lord and spent his summers learning Kavlyier under the guidance of the Summer Lord. He had been fun and easy going, nothing much bothering him throughout the day, though when it came to his responsibilities he was focused and intent. She had expected the same from him as a Winter Lord, and was not surprised at all when Kavlyier had accepted him as Winter Lord. He had been strong in magic and spirit.

Now, suddenly, after two seasons of winter, he was hosting a Gala at the palace and she was invited. They had been friends, but not overly close, having drifted apart when he left after the summer and took over the Winter Reign the next summer. Now suddenly he wanted to see her. And with her powers becoming uncertain, she wasn't sure she wanted to be there. What if he knew? What if he had just had the powerful magic workers around the Shadow Realm invited. Her father alone carried power, and she had excelled at her studies, coming to the top of her class.

Shaking her head to stop the worried thoughts as they arose, she took a deep breath. "Well, it won't be me," she informed Vaas firmly. A smile tugged at his lips and he crossed the room to give her a hug.

"Then what is the urgency with which you have pounded on my shop this morning? A bauble to wear to the gala? I'm sure I can find a beautiful piece for you to wear," he gave her a little squeeze and stepped past her to the cases lined with jewelry, his look intent.

"Detain your trip to Friath," she blurted out, feeling the tips of her ears redden as he paused from reaching into a case.

Frown lines appeared between his brows as he pulled a necklace from the case, green stone glinting brightly. "This is a wealthy customer, Briella, and he's paid handsomely for the delivery of his piece. If he's pleased I could begin receiving orders from the larger merchants

across Kavlyier, perhaps expanding my business into a few of the other Shadow Realms. It's an opportunity I can't turn away."

"I'm not asking you to turn it away," she said, "just delay your journey. No good will come of it if you go over the next two days," she met his eyes. "Please, Vaas, trust me on this."

He turned his head slightly, contemplating her in the flickering light of the fire. "There is only one way to know what the future holds...one power which allows such a gift," he said slowly.

Briella felt her stomach roll, her heart pick up speed. "No!" she hissed, stepping quickly across the case and pointing sharply at Vaas to make sure she had his attention. "Do not say it, do not suggest it, do not even think it. I am not a Winter Lady, I am a healer."

He dropped his gaze to the necklace in his hand, voice low. "It's not a bad thing, Briella, it would be the first from here ever, an honor to our home town, to your family. You would be making a difference in Kavlyier, your touch bringing about the beauty of the winter and the growth of the summer."

"I am making a difference, as a healer," she informed him, fear making her voice sharp. If Vaas had guessed, would he tell anyone or would he allow her to maintain her secret? "I'm not a Winter Lady, Vaas, my magic has only been a little off the last few days."

He nodded, swallowing his next protest at the look of fear in her eyes. If Briella wanted to remain in the small town where she grew up, near him, who was he to complain? He stroked the gem in his hand. "I won't tell anyone, Briella, but I can't delay my trip to Friath."



"Briella?"

She jumped at the sound of her name, her hand falling away from the gem Vaas had given her as a gift before she left. The green stone, despite being warmed in her hand, felt cool against her flesh as she turned to look over her shoulder at the young man approaching.

He was close to her age, young, fit, and radiated power and confidence like a second skin. His smile was warm and just for her when he stepped from the double doors into the crispness of the evening air, stretching his dark wings wide before re-tucking them against his back.

She smiled back, surprised by the genuine affection she felt at the presence of Landrayle, the Winter Lord. He had been nothing but a perfect gentlemen since her arrival yesterday with her parents, who had quickly set about re-acquainting themselves with friends and business contacts from the area. She had been mostly by herself until Landrayle had been informed of her presence, and he's been a gentle and enjoyable companion over the hours.

Now, as the gala was within days, and the evening banquet had begun, she found herself worrying over Vaas's trip to Friath. The winter weather had remained cold, and she knew he would be unable to fly, needing to take a coach at least half way. Because the night was warm, he might perhaps fly tonight. If he did, it would put him in Friath exactly at his arrival date, causing her to worry about the premonition she had seen.

As the worry clenched her stomach, running round and round in her mind, she had eventually slipped away from the crowd milling in the great hall, finding some silence in one of the small gardens provided for guests. Now, she sat staring at the iced-over pool of water, her fingers touching the surface lightly, knowing it would only take a moment to check her premonition on the water. But so much had changed in the last few days, she was suddenly scared, and the more so as Landrayle approached and quietly seated himself beside her.

He didn't say anything for a moment, one hand reaching out to stroke the curtain of black hair falling between her wings and over her shoulders. She shivered at his touch, the pleasure only enhancing her guilt and worry for Vaas...she cared deeply for him, didn't she?

Landrayle's eyes trailed down her arm to where her nails idly traced circles atop the smoothness of the ice, occasionally lighting up a small snowflake or two, causing little lights to

wink quickly across the surface before disappearing. Sliding his hand down her arm to grasp her hand, he gave her a gentle smile as she raised questioning eyes to him, content to remain quiet.

“It’s strongly advised against using the gifts of Winter—of premonition—for oneself.” She stiffened at his words, trying hard to hide the shock and fear from reaching her face. Did he know? How silly she had been to think she could hide it from him, the Winter Lord, the most powerful male in Kavylier. Still she said nothing, just watched as he turned her palm over and stroked it with his own rough fingers.

“And yet,” he continued, voice low and soothing, “sometimes our fates are so strongly tied to the actions of another—brother, sister, parent, or lover—we must use the gifts for ourselves in order to protect that which we hold dear.” Landrayle wrapped his warm hands around hers, holding her fingers trapped gently and safely within his. She could feel the hum of his magic as a steady vibration against her skin, the soft psychic touch with which he brushed at her in order to help soothe her, and through it all she could feel the rich vibration of Kavylier, as though the Shadow Realm was buzzing with excitement over their momentary connection.

Fighting the urge to pull her hand away, Briella took a deep breath to speak, but he shook his head, giving her a gentle smile. “And, if we’re honest, Briella, everyone within Kavylier is near and dear to those of us with Winter’s gift, because we know the bright lights of each soul and how each of those lights connect to create what is.”

“And what is, Landrayle?” she asked tentatively, unsure if she was following the conversation correctly.

He took a deep breath and gave her another smile, his dark hair falling forward over his head to give him a boyish appearance. “What is, Briella, is that you are by far one of the strongest Winter Ladies I have met.” She did stiffen then, trying to pull her hand from his, but he held on. “I’ve known it for awhile, since I took my vows and was introduced to the unique feel of a Winter Lady’s magic. You had that feel when I first met you.”

Pulling her fingers from his, she tucked them in her lap and glanced down to the iced pool. "I'm a healer," she told him firmly, though her voice sounded unconvincing even to her own ears.

"Yes," he agreed smoothly, "and from what I know of you, a magnificent one. Kavylier is blessed to have such a compassionate heart eager to heal." He reached out, hooked her chin with the tips of his fingers and turned her face toward him. "But you are also a Winter Lady, Briella, and a woman I would very much like to make my wife." He held up a restraining hand to head off her protest. "Not for your power, though I knew you had it. I had already wrestled with the decision from the first summer I met you."

"It's been two cycles, Landrayle," she pointed out softly.

"Yes," he said, "but that did not stop my feelings for you. It only helped me to solidify them. I would like to marry you, Briella, bring you into my home and heart, but I also know you have duties elsewhere. A training to finish for instance." He reached out and tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear, "Possibly a long engagement? Time for you to remember exactly what we had the summer we spent together."

"I've never forgotten," she said softly, "but so many years have passed."

"What are a few years to the Aryians? Nothing when our lives extend as long they do. We have time, Briella, and that's okay with me." He let his hand slide across her shoulder and away from her skin.

"I don't know what it is you seek in the ice tonight, whether a lover, a friend, or the answers to your own questions. I would merely remind you of the cautions against using Winter's gift for yourself. What we see may not always be...and sometimes our interference is what causes the harm we seek to avoid. Be careful, Briella, in whichever choice you make." Leaning over her he dropped a quick kiss on her temple and rose, tucking his wings tightly into his sides and heading back into the great hall.

Landrayle gripped the door lightly between strong fingers as he opened it, pausing before stepping in to point out, “You can’t deny the magic within you, Briella. Ask it to show you true. No matter what actions you take tonight, something must either be embraced or lost.”

He disappeared into the welcoming warmth of the great hall before the sob escaped between her lips in a soft wracking cry. One hand came to her mouth in an attempt to silence the ones following, even as she knew truth in Landrayle’s words. If she reached to the ice, asked for the truth of Vaas, of the possibilities of her life—her love—with him, of being able to save him, she would have to embrace the gift of Winter, a gift which might tear them apart.

She felt the tears shimmering behind her closed eyes. She lifted her face to the sky, whispering a prayer to the moon, Mother of Light and Darkness, and begged for an answer, even as she felt the bruises forming on her heart and Landrayle’s words in her ears. If she turned from the ice and flung herself into the air, she could reach Friath. The memories of the streets were clear in her mind. She could stop Vaas—or be the cause of his death.

A peal of laughter reached her ears from within the great hall, and Briella turned her face from the moon, breathing deeply and blinking furiously, trying to keep the tears from spilling down her face even as she felt them form on her lashes. Her eyes found the door.

She could leave it to the fates. Walk away. Trust Vaas to take care of himself, trust things would happen exactly as they were supposed too, deny her gift and return home with her parents in two days time. Return to her studies. Her home. Her family. To Vaas and the possibilities rising between them.

Or, if she did nothing, she might be leaving him to die.

Another sob escaped from her throat, and she pressed harder against her mouth with her hand, tilting her head back a second time, blinking furiously as she swallowed hard, trying to grab her bearings.

Or should she accept the offer of love and companionship from Landrayle, embracing a power allowing her to heal on spectacular levels she hadn't dreamed of. Embracing the choice of a love powerful enough to change the realm, to sing the world into a beautiful summer and nurture the shadows into the fullest possible growth.

*Choose. Choose. Choose.*

*Look. Look. Look.*

She felt the magic race through her. The promise of knowing. Though, even in her healer training, she knew some things were just not meant to be known. She could only do the best she could.

*Choose. Choose. Choose.*

*Look. Look. Look. Look.*

Taking a deep, unsteady breath, Briella glanced down, a tear sliding from her jaw to drop onto the ice, the droplet splitting, spreading, and eventually freezing, the crystals forming in perfect symmetry. She noted the shape a second before the magic flared through her with such force she jerked, hands clenching, eyes wide as the scenes unfolded quickly before her eyes, answers and questions overlapping as quickly as her heart raced. Then it was over. The magic subsiding to a quiet hum in her veins, steady hum of a Winter Lady.

Her hand fell away from her mouth and Briella shakily stood, wiping the remaining tears from her eyes while taking a deep breath. The movement of air was cool against her skin as she stood, spreading her wings once to stretch them, muscles tensing, her eyes moving toward the sky, then, slowly, she folded them tightly against her back and moved gracefully toward the double glass doors and the warmth beyond.



ANDREW BAKKEN



COLD ROAD

## TRISHA SCHLEICH

### KARL

I once knew this squid.  
His name was Karl.  
He had the most beautiful squiddy arms.  
Six of them.  
Those squiddy arms danced.  
They whirled and twirled  
and squiggled and did all that fancy squid jiving.  
Karl could move.  
200 feet under the sea,  
Karl blinked like a neon sign.  
Like a bold neon sign during one of those nights when they sky  
was pitch black.  
All you could see was  
Karl dancing with grace and  
blinking with techno colored excellence.  
Like fireworks.  
But although Karl danced,  
He also wanted more.  
This squid man's passion was not blinking or swirling  
it was racquetball.  
I didn't get it.  
I don't think anyone got it.  
But as soon as one of those oozing tentacles wrapped itself around a racquetball racquet  
it was magic.  
All I can remember is  
that jelly smile.  
Karl's neon swirling fireworks was nothing compared to the way he beamed  
playing that game.  
The only problem was,  
you can't play racquetball under the sea.  
There's no nets, no balls, no other players, and certainly too much water.  
So Karl cried.  
That squid cried.  
I swear the ocean got bigger  
with how many tears poured out of that one big squiddy eye.  
Pathetic.  
Until one day,  
Karl had this idea.  
If he couldn't play racquetball, racquetball would play on him.  
Excellent.  
He swam way down.  
He found the darkest water.

And that squid danced because at this point it was the only thing keeping  
him alive.  
Karl danced so fast  
and so furiously that  
his neon lights made the illusion there was this unearthly racquetball game going on.  
Hypnotic.  
It was crazy.  
Karl darted so fast  
From here to there that this entire picture of a racquetball game came alive  
made by him!  
He was the whole thing.  
He flashed the entire game.  
Two teams with four players on each side, a net, a ball racquets, and enough air to play it right.  
Amazing.  
Everyone watched it.  
They came from everywhere.  
I was there every day watching these matches and even rooted for my favorite team  
the neon greens.  
Until this one day  
the fishermen got him.  
Karl was real old by this time and they caught him up in their big fishy nets and  
pulled him aboard.  
But Karl didn't mind.  
He even grabbed his racquet on his way up.  
And I hear they found him with a racquet and a big jelly smile when they  
opened the nets.

ANDREW BAKKEN



BUCHENWALD HALL

## STINKY PUPPY

I remember when you were adorable.  
When your puppy tongue would  
flap in the wind with every  
puppy bounce.  
When your puppy bark  
sang out a call for love and  
admiration to myself and those  
you love.  
When your puppy fur  
felt like a new bath towel  
fresh from the mouth of  
they dryer. On fluff mode.  
And when your puppy eyes  
sparkled like dark polished  
marbles shined carefully  
with Windex.  
Now your bark sound like  
the cry of a deranged hippo  
lost in a storm.  
Now you have a skin disease that  
causes a smell much like  
a mixture of tar and smut.  
Now you stare at me with  
faded milky eyes in a  
Freddy Krueger like style.  
And now you drag your belly to the ground sliding  
into the house whatever foul creatures  
become trapped  
in your folds.  
Puppy I loved you once but now you  
just freak me out. I promise you'll die quickly  
and painlessly.  
But only if you promise that  
you won't whimper when I leave the room  
as you die there.

SUGAR MUFFIN GOOBER

My dearest ball of goo.  
Let me stuff you with sugar.  
Let me squish your face uncontrollably  
and squeeze out all your fluff!  
As I stare into your big  
glass eyes I wonder  
if your stare is one of love  
or one of hate.  
Either way, I will continue  
to smother you with  
chocolates and goodies  
until you ooze with the sweet smell of bumbleberries.  
My dearest ball of goo  
I love you with every strained hug!  
You are all mine and I refuse to let you  
leave me.

## TRISHA SCHLEICH

### BATTLE OF THE BANDS

#### SCENE 1

ADELAIDE Female Mid 60s

BUCK Male Mid 30s

J.A.-RITE a.k.a. RIGHTEOUS FORCE Male 20s

ZACH STACKAH Male 20s

TAHRISTIEGH AYTUNE Female 20s

FEMALE VOICE #1 FEMALE VOICE #2

(A truck stop diner at 4am in the morning somewhere in the southern United States. In the middle of the stage there is a long waist high counter with barstools lining along its front side. Kitty corner from the counter, and on opposite sides, there are either tables or booths suggesting more seating in the diner beyond the action of the counter space. Behind the counter, but off to the side, there is a rectangular shaped opening suggesting an order drop-off and pick up window between the diner and the kitchen, where BUCK, the cook, can be seen occasionally passing the opening as he cleans. He wears a white cook outfit with a white paper hat. He is greasy looking, to say the least. In the center, behind the counter, there is a large sign that reads, "Betty Beavers Truck Stop & Diner" with a female beaver wearing a patriotically embellished dress holding a gas pump in one hand and balancing a plate with a hamburger and fries in the other. The diner is completely empty except for ADELAIDE, the only waitress working. She is behind the counter casually leaning while she files her nails, hums, and chews her gum much like a cow chews on its cud. She wears a waitress outfit mirroring the outfit "Betty Beaver" wears on the sign.)

Enter J.A.-RITE, a famous rap star dressed in a track suite, sunglasses, a gold chain, tennis shoes, and a hat. He runs into the diner as though he is trying to get away from something. He leaps over the counter next to ADELAIDE. Two female voices can be heard from outside. ADELAIDE stands frozen in shock.

FEMALE VOICE #1: OH MY GOSH! LIKE. WHERE DID HE GO?

FEMALE VOICE #2: OH MY GOSH! LIKE. I HAVE NO IDEA!

FEMALE VOICE #1: OH MY GOSH! LIKE. I BET HE WENT TO THE PIGGLY-WIGGLY!

FEMALE VOICE #1 and #2 simultaneously let out a fading scream as though they are fading into the distance. J.A.-RITE slowly rises from behind the counter to face

ADELAIDE who is still standing frozen.

J.A.-RITE: Sorry lady. I'm what they call the Righteous Force. You can call me J.A.-Rite. Heres the short and quick. I got done with a concert and those crazy-ass fans By this time all three stars are standing as they start batting at one another in a catfight like manner.

ADELAIDE: (Gets on top of the counter) HEY YA'LL BREAK IT UP! Not in this diner! You guys want to fight? Fine! But we're going to do it like civilized rock, pop, and rap stars, kay?

Buck! Get the stage and the system ready! (ADELAIDE raises one arm in the air and brings it down slowly in front of her face as she says in a whisper) Its time to karaoke battle!  
Lights fade out.

## SCENE TWO

(Lights up to the same setting for the exception of the additions of a small stage consisting of a 4x8 foot flat raised from the ground, an inexpensive looking karaoke system, a banner that reads, "Betty Beaver's Ultimate Karaoke Battle", and the "karaoke roulette wheel of death". The three pop stars have plates in front of them suggesting they finished the meals that were ordered for them. The stars are staring at each other menacingly.)

BUCK stands in the window wearing the same outfit in the last scene with the addition of sunglasses, red lipstick, white sparkly gloves, and a pirate hat. ADELAIDE enters wearing a bedazzled version of her waitress outfit, sunglasses, red lipstick, white sparkly gloves, and a pirate hat.

ADELAIDE: Okay listen up kids! Now that me and Buck got our official Betty Beaver's ultimate karaoke battle judging outfits on we can start. Heres the rules. First and foremost, no doing your own songs. In fact, Betty Beaver's has here our very own karaoke roulette wheel of death that works very simply. I spin the wheel, it lands on a number, I open up the envelope corresponding to that number, and from that envelope there is a slip of paper that reads your fate- the karaoke song you must sing in Betty Beaver's ultimate karaoke battle. Rule number two. The best singer and performer wins- so technically their ain't really a rule number two except give it your all! Understand?

TAHRISTIEGH: Whats.

ZACH: [Singing] CHHEEEYEEAH!

J.A.-RITE: Aight.

TEHRISTIEGH: Wait. Who goes first because I don't really think its fair if you choose because you'll just choose who you think will either the best or worst at going first.

ZACH: (Singing) That girl is paranoid. Yeah. She's so paranoid. That girl is

TAHRISTIEGH: Shuddap Zach. You're the paranoid one. You were always so- tied up my limo driver and took me hostage. Turning a corner I kicked out a door in my limo, took one of those dive rolls onto the pavement and I've been running since now.

ADELAIDE remains frozen for two beats and then snaps out of it and immediately starts rapping.

ADELAIDE: I'm J.A.-Rite, the Righteous Force and we're going to heat it up like a convection oven. I'm J.A.-Rite, the Righteous Force and baby I'm the closest thing to heaven! Ha-ha-ha! Darling I love you and your songs when I'm in the club! You can stay here as long as you want. Baby, you look hungry. You want something? Hey Buck! Come here! Look who just walked in!

BUCK peers through the window at J.A.-RITE and nods his head in approval.

J.A.-RITE: Yeah, yeah, yeah! That's sounds blastizzle! You're pretty fly for an old lady. I like you're outfit. I'll have me some fishsticks with a side of fries and a little mustard. Just then ZACH STACKAH, a famous rock star, dressed in all black and leather, parades into the room carrying a microphone as he marches up to ADAILADE in a seductive manner.

ZACH:(He sings in a deep rocker voice) Hey girl. You look so good to me. With your patriotic waitress dress. How bout you get me some food for my tummy?

ADELAIDE: Oh Lordy! Have I died and gone to heaven? My first night shift at Betty's Beaver and famous rap star J.A.-Rite and famous rock star Zach Stackah in my diner at the same time in one night? Sit down cutie! What can I get for you?

ZACH: (Sits down next to J.A.-RITE, still singing) Oh girl. My sexy fallen angel from heaven. How bout you get me a Diet Pepsi to start?

J.A.-RITE: [As he exchanges a complicated handshake with ZACH) HEY BOY! How you doin' man? Its been a while. What brings you here?

ZACH: (In a high voice very opposite of his singing voice) Oh, gee-wiz. I was just riding in my tour bus, and I was writing a song about a German girl when I got really hungry for some sausage links. I saw this cute little place and I just had to stop!

ADELAIDE: Sausage links is what you want? Sausage links is what you'll get! Hey Buck! Look who we have now! Its Zach Stackah! (BUCK looks out the window and

ZACH, this time he nods in disapproval.) I'll put you twos sugar lip orders in right away! Just as ADELAIDE writes down the two orders and hands them to BUCK, pop sensation

TAHRISTIEGH AYTUNE walks in. Camera flashes can be seen coming from offstage on the same side the women's voices were heard from. TAHRISTIEGH is wearing an outfit so trendy it looks more like a piece of art then an actual outfit. All in the diner, including BUCK from the kitchen, stare at TAHRISTIEGH in shock and horror.

TAHRISTIEGH: {Directed to camera flashes offstage) Okay you guys. That's enough for one night. Go home. Go home. Shooo! (Turns around to see the others staring in horror) What are you guys looking at. OMG, story of my life. People always looking at me, taking my pictures, following me everywhere. Its like I'm not human or something. Can't a girl just wear 6 inch stilettos and express herself and her problems by means of mainstream pop without being looked at all the time. OMG can someone get me a sparkling water before I fall over?

ADELAIDE: Well hot damn! Three singers in my diner at one time! Did someone wish on a shooting star or something? Buck you wish on a shooting star? (BUCK shakes his head no. He is clearly confused.) Sit down honey. Now I don't need you falling over we've been accident free for two days now- it's a streak! I'll make your water sparkle, doncha' worry.

TAHRISTIEGH: J.A.? Zach? OMG. What are you guys doing here?

J.A.-Rite: Well I was running from some fans, and he had the munchies, so here we be. Why you here shawdy?

TAHRISTIEGH: What I do is secret. Lets just say the paparazzi got in my way, as usual.

ZACH: (Singing] That girl. Oh! She says she doesn't know they'll show but I think she do!

TAHRISTIEGH: Shaddup Zach!

ZACH: You shut up!

TAHRISTIEGH: NO YOU SHUDDAP!

J.A.-RITE: You both shuddup!

ZACH: No you shut-up!

TAHRISTIEGH: YEAH!

ZACH: You're not on my side- you need to shut up too!

J.A.-RITE: Everybody shuddup cept' for me! I AM THE RIGHTEOUS FOOOOORCE!

J.A.-Rite: Chill ya'll! This is the whole reason we're doing this thing, to see who really needs to shuddup. Now Ms, Adelaide. Sweet thing. Suga Mamma. My sparkling little star. My delicious little cookie. (In a soft sweet voice) How 'bout' we just draw straws or somethin'. (He winks)

ADELAIDE: Boy do I look like I'm drowning? Stop trying to throw lines out at me cuz' none of that sweet talks gunna work to sway this karaoke battle. In fact, new rule. Don't seduce the staff. It don't work here. Won't help your game. But that straw thing, now J.A. that's an idea I can use! Listen up! The person that draws the short straw goes first, and we can draw again for the second round.

TAHRISTIEGH: Can you do that? Make up new rules and stuff? That doesn't seem fair.

ADELAIDE: Honey if life was fair I'd be the pop star and you'd be the one looking like the lovechild of Uncle Sam and a hooker pirate. With that said, I make the rules, you just follow them. Lets get this thing started.

ZACH draws the short straw.

ZACH: Hot dog! I get to go first!

ZACH crosses to spin the wheel.

ADELAIDE: Song number five it is! Lets see... You will be singing Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen!

ZACH prepares himself on stage and just as BUCK presses start to begin the song the karaoke machine explodes and starts smoking from the back. TAHRISTIEGH and

ADELAIDE both drop to the ground cover their heads and start screaming.

J.A.-RITE: What the HIZZO is going on here?

ZACH: Yeah this is a true bummer, I was about to sing my song!

J.A.-RITE: I think some one fixed this battle cuz' they were scurred they weren't gunna win!

TAHRISTIEGH: That is like, so right! I bet someone did fix it!

All, except BUCK, suddenly stop and start to circle each other around the room with suspicion for five beats.

BUCK: (Suddenly breaking the silence and with a British Queens accent) Stop this nonsense!  
Twas I THAT SABOTAGED THE KARAOKE BATTLE!

ALL: GASP!

BUCK: That's right, twas I! You see, I have a secret

TAHRISTIEGH: (Over-dramatically)No Buck! Don't!

BUCK: Yes Tahrstiegh, I must! For us! You see, I'm in love with Tahrstiegh and she is in love with me!

ALL: GASP!

BUCK: Yes, tis true indeed. We had no choice. It was either move to the United States to start her pop career or die!

TAHRISTIEGH: BUCK STOP!

BUCK: But darling aren't you sick of living a lie!? The only time I get to see you is when you sneek away to my kitchen late at night! I. Can't. Live. This. Way. Any.  
MORE!

J.A.-RITE: Okay ya'll. Shits getting weird.

TAHRISTIEGH: You're right Buck! You are so right! Everyone! This is the last moment you will see Tahrstiegh Aytune the pop star! (ALL but BUCK and TAHRISTIEGH cheer) Well, that was uncalled for.

BUCK: Nevermind them! Tahrstiegh lets go tell the world of our love!

TAHRISTIEGH: Ok! Hold on a sec. [Opens cell phone and dials] Hey! Ed, I got a great story for you! I'm leaving my life as a pop star to marry an overweight greasy truck stop cook! You're already here? Ok! Great! (Closes phone) Lets go Buck!

As BUCK and TAHRISTIEGH leaves the same camera flashes start flashing from off stage as they walk out.

ZACH: What just happened?

J.A.-RITE: I dunno man.

ADELAIDE: Can't you see? Destiny just happened! If none of you would of showed up here tonight, then Zach wouldn't have pissed off Tahristiegh and she wouldn't of told all you to shut up and you wouldn't have gotten into a fight and then we wouldn't of had that karaoke battle and Buck wouldn't of sabotaged the karaoke battle so he could proclaim his love for Tahristiegh!

ZACH: What just happened?

J.A.-RITE: I dunno man.

ADELAIDE: Its simple boys. Love will happen as long as you have the stomach to handle a truck stop diner.

J.A.-RITE: As crazy as that sounds it really makes sense. Adelaide, Zach, its been real, but you know what I just realized? I gotta let love happen. Excuse me, I have to crazy fans waiting for me at the Piggly Wiggly! (J.A.-RITE exits)

ADELAIDE: That's right J.A! You go get em'!

ZACH: Well. I guess its just us.

ADELAIDE: Yup, just little old me and you.

ZACH: Adelaide?

ADELAIDE: Yes Zach?

ZACH: I've got a big bus, and besides the driver its just me, and it gets a little lonely and

ADELAIDE: Say no more sugar child, I think I know what you're saying.

ZACH: You do?

ADELAIDE: Yes, I do. (Goes behind the counter and pulls out a hand puppet that resembles the Betty Beaver logo) Take this. She's all I got, and now I'm giving her to you.

ZACH: Oh Adelaide how did you know?! (In puppets voice) I will miss you and the diner but I know Zach will take good care of me and never forget you!

ADELAIDE: Get out of here you two and enjoy being rockstars! (ZACH exits merrily with his new puppet friend. ADELAIDE wanders around the stage cleaning things up and then walks to the karaoke stage, and pics up the mic. In a Elvis voice) Thank you! Thank you very much!

Lights fade out.

## TRISHA SCHLEICH AND SETH PEDERSON

BASEMENT

SHANNON 22 Female  
DAD 50 Male  
MOM 50 Female  
NARRATOR

(Int. Shannon's room in her parents' basement. We see a castle made of cardboard boxes, painted pink. We hear Shannon's voice before we see her.)

SHANNON: Today's the day! Today will matter! Today... I make a difference!

(Enter Shannon from the cardboard castle. She is wearing an astronaut's outfit made of duct tape with a fishbowl on her head and pigtails. She pints to a pile of stuffed animals surrounding the castle.)

SHANNON: Today your reign of terror will fall!

(She leaps upon a stuffed duck, holds it in the air, and makes the duck's voice)

SHANNON: (as duck) That is untrue! \*Quack\* you are the one who will \*Quack\*!

(Enter Shannon's mom. She starts cleaning up dirty dishes from around Shannon's room)

MOM: (Thick, mid-western accent) Don't forget, honey, We're going to the Shoenfelder's Christmas party tonight. Iron something nice and brush your hair.

(Enter Shannon's dad. He wears a Walmart manager's vest. He points a finger at Shannon)

DAD: Shannon! What the hell are you wearin'? What are ya doin' down here all day?! You should be out lookin' fer another job! You had a good job at the Cluck and Bucket; then you went in there all talkin' about elves and some crap... I don't know... I must have failed you in some way...

MOM: Oh no, Henry dear... It wasn't you. She just takes after my cousin Bueford.

SHANNON: Mooommm! Dad! Seriously! Get out of here! I'm in the middle of something important!

DAD: Important?! Fer Christ's sake... all you do down here is beat up stuffed animals and I hear a rumpus and quacks and I don't know what all...

MOM: Oh settle down. I think it's great that Shannon is doing what she loves. And it's a comfort that she's living with us again. I worried about you when you were in the big city.

DAD: Big city?! She was only over there in Gopherton. They don't even have a super Walmart...

SHANNON: (whispers to herself) Super Walmart, more like super walfart. Heh heh...

DAD: That's it. This business ends now!

(He grabs a unicorn statue and starts bashing the cardboard castle. Mom starts crying. It is total chaos.)

SHANNON: Dad! That's my fortress of awesome-tude! What the heck, Mom and I spent like a whole week making that! Stop! Stop! Stop!

(He stops, with the unicorn statue raised over his head, a crazed look in his eyes. Shannon rushes into the castle. Dad and Mom look at each other, Mom shrugs. Shannon rushes back out with her laptop. She sits down in the corner and starts typing, reading what she types out loud.)

SHANNON: ... Then the great warlock Glavensprout hypnotized poor Queen Stephanie, the unicorn queen, and used her powers to enslave the wood nymphs and overtake the bejeweled castle...

DAD: What the hell?! I can't take any more of this!

(Dad storms upstairs.)

MOM: Honey, I think your books are great! What is this? Your third book?

SHANNON: Fifth book, Mom.

MOM: Five whole books! I'm so proud of you! And about the same thing?

SHANNON: (smacks her forehead) Duh!

MOM: You're so creative! You're going to make it big someday, I just know it.

(Enter Narrator)

NARRATOR: And Shannon did make it big, ten years later her "Pink, Fancy Castle" series of books, reaching 120 volumes, took its place among the other fantasy greats. She finally moved out of her parents' basement and into crazy Cousin Beuford's basement. The movie of her first book "Sparkles and Blood" is currently filming on the Paramount lot. So take a lesson from Shannon, you parents probably won't charge you rent and cardboard is the building block of dreams.

(Puts on a cardboard helmet, pulls out a cardboard laser gun, and runs out of the theater shouting)

NARRATOR: Pew! Pew! Pew!

End.



ANDREW BAKKEN



DUSTY LIGHT

## Contributor's Notes

**Jenna Anderson** is a graduate of Dakota Wesleyan University and a sci-fi writer now living in Montana.

**Andrew Bakken** graduated from of Dakota Wesleyan University with a multimedia major. He travelled to the Netherlands where he took a photography class and decided his life would take him overseas.

**Brandy Bambas** is an English major at Dakota Wesleyan University.

**Charity Kear** is a senior at Dakota Wesleyan University with a major in communications. She dabbles in painting, writes an online blog, and loves photography.

**Danna McCloud**, an artist from South Dakota, creates literature and art reflecting on organic appreciation, personal spirituality, and introspection. She explores the link between the spiritual and the physical.

**B.Z. Niditch** is a poet, playwright, fiction writer and teacher, as well as founder and artistic director of The Original Theater in Boston. His work is widely published throughout the world, including *Columbia: A Magazine of Poetry and Art*; *The Literary Review*; *Denver Quarterly*, and others.

**Dean Phelps'** work has appeared in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, France, Cannada, and the United States.

**Ariel Ptak** is a sophomore at Dakota Wesleyan University. She is working toward a major in English with emphasis in creative writing and a minor in the fine arts. This will be her first publication, though she did win an honorable mention in a poetry contest two years ago and second place in a fiction contest last year.

**Lacey Reuer** is a sophomore at Dakota Wesleyan who is majoring in creative writing. She is from Gregory, SD and has one daughter named Finola. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, writing, decorating, and spending time with her family.

**David Sapp** is a writer and artist living near Lake Erie. He teaches at Firelands College in Huron, Ohio. His poems have appeared widely in venues across the nation. He has a chapbook, *Close to Home*, and a novel, *Flying Over Erie*.

**Trisha Schleich** is a fourth-year theater BFA at Dakota Wesleyan University.