

Morpheus

Literary Magazine



Spring 2017

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Senior Bios

Morgan Brant

Morgan is a senior political science and english writing double major. She will be graduating May 2017 with her bachelors of science and attend The Ohio State Moritz College of Law in the fall. She is also in Student Senate and Model United Nations of the Far West through Heidelberg University. Inspired by her two passions, political science and writing, Morgan chose to create a poetry collection based on the news-filled year of 2016. Each poem is inspired by a newspaper article. There is a wide variety of topics within the collection to represent the varied world we live in, something Morgan wishes to bring to her audience's attention.

Anna Freidin

I am an English Literature and Writing minor. I grew up in West Virginia and have traveled abroad since I was an infant. After graduation, I plan on going to graduate school or/and getting a job in the UK or Ireland. My capstone project is a critique of the world (mainly in the past but could be applied to any time). I included name symbolism to further my point. For example, Amien (the world) is the name of one of the oldest Gothic cathedrals in France, Ingrid (the protagonist) in Sweedish (or old Norse) means "daughter of the fallen", and Niccolo (the villain) was named after Niccolo Machiavelli. I continue to work on this piece in the hopes of one day getting it to book length.

Debbie Fultz

Debbie is a senior English major with a concentration in writing. After graduation she hopes to attend graduate school and eventually become a book editor while writing romance fiction on the side.

Mikayla Gray

Mikayla Gray is an English Literature major who enjoys writing. She loves to blog in her spare time.

Anika Maiberger

Anika Maiberger is a senior honors student, majoring in English Literature with a minor in German. She studied abroad in Heidelberg, Germany and Oxford, England her Junior year and has an overwhelming passion for travel. Upon her graduation in May 2017, she hopes to find a fulfilling career in publishing.

Sarah Miller

I am a senior at Heidelberg, double majoring in English writing and environmental science. When I graduate, I hope to use my writing major to benefit the environment, such as by writing grants. Before graduating, I am staying to complete the MBA program and I hope to open a small business. Most of the pieces that I entered into the Morpheus contest centered on a theme of nature, as these are the easiest for me to write. My favorite piece that I have written is "Every Tree has It's Enemy, Few have an Advocate", which is an ecocriticism of The Lord of The Rings. Most of my poetry also centers on the natural world and its fleeting beauty. I enjoy being able to combine my love for writing with my love for the environment, and I hope that someday I will be able to use it to bring about some positive change.

Senior Bios

Rachel Redolf

Rachel Redolf is an English literature major with a particular affinity for Canadian historical fiction, Puritanism, and Shelley's *Frankenstein*. A self-proclaimed nerd, she enjoys crocheting, watching *Jeopardy!*, hanging out in libraries, and the occasional trip to Taco Bell. After graduation, she will be working as the office manager for her family business with plans of becoming a certified birth doula. She hopes that you enjoy her first piece of creative fiction!

Hannah Taulbee

Hi! My name is Hannah Taulbee, I was an English-writing and Political Science double major, and I graduated in December. During the Fall Senior Capstone, I worked on a children's story that, one day, I would love to revisit. Before graduating, I found a job with the newspaper back home in Logan, and now I work full time as a reporter and occasional photographer. In the fall, I plan to move to the Boston, MA area and pursue a career in grant writing, or generally something with in the non-profit sector.

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A Moment of 2016: My Response

Morgan Brant

A response to The Guardian's "Global Carbon Intensity Fails as Coal use Declines" by Karl Mathiesen

2.8%

But that is not enough.

Forest fires,
Coal smeared faces,
Hamburger joints,
Old light bulbs,
And overall,
Neglect.

Climate change is real.

Melting glaciers,
Sea level rising,
Famine spreading,
Reefs vanishing,
And overall,
Destruction.

Our earth is revolting.

Convincing bribes,
Convenient trash pickups,
Cash flow,
Cheap labor,
And overall,
Greed.

When will we be 100%?

A response to “Islamic Extremists celebrate Trump Victory: ‘US Struck with Disaster at the hands of its own Voters.’” By Laura Bult

Not Me

“I’m going to bomb the s- -t out of them.”
Is that what you will do?
Because that is how you solve problems,
Using profanity and hateful words.
Generalizing and accusing.
Don’t you know you represent us?
The face of America,
Those who hate the Muslims.
But that is not me.
Never will be me.
Or my friend down the road.
Or my friend across the country.
They have it wrong.
Partly because of you.
Thank you Mr. President Elect.

A response to USA Today's "Chicago Cubs, World Series champions: Game 7 provides excruciating final test" by Bob Nightengale

Two Celebrations

It is wearing the same jersey for two weeks—
Old, ripped, and sour.
It is standing in front of the television or in the parking lot—
Praying and pleading.
It is watching your old signed baseball sit on the shelf—
Because why dust it off.
It is endless heartbreak year after year—
More like 108 years.

It is jumping up and down in the streets—
Rejoicing with the crowd.
It is wearing that brand new jersey—
Because your others are put away.
It is buying three thousand dollar tickets—
Because you like the fireworks.
It is eating hot dogs and drinking beer for weeks—
Because you like the taste.

The fireworks,
The jerseys,
The signatures,
The beer,
The hotdogs,
Are all deserved.
They broke history
And the curse.

A response to BBC News' "Teenage magazine sparks anger over 'victim-blaming' rape advice"

You are what you say you are not.

Don't get me wrong.
Be who you want to be,
But say who you are.

Say what you said.
And know what you said.
Own up to what you said.

The English language,
171,476 words.
But you didn't say four.

We all are biased
Toward ourselves,
Toward our perceptions.

But put yourself back
When you were 15.
Who were you?

A response to CBS' "CBS Exit Polls: How Donald Trump won the U.S. Presidency" by Stanley Feldman and Melissa Herrmann

Shimmering Shatters

She is a woman.
Hidden under thick glass
Screaming for the voiceless
Who don't have room to stand

It is not made of crystal
But of the malleable type
Molded in many forms
Always keeping her below

She can be seen
She can be heard
She can be prodded
She can be defeated

She is an advocate
Who never gave up
Except when America happened
And voted against their values

Democracy allows oppression
Democracy allows hate
Democracy allows ignorance
Democracy thickened the glass

And I am furious.
Concealed with her,
I know next time,
There will be shatters,

Shimmering shatters.
Coating those underneath.
So bright they will blind;
A gleam in the little girl's eye.

It will be a wonderful time,
But meanwhile,
We must accept
That 'Donald Trump won the US Presidency.'

Response to NBC News' "Al Gore Meets Donald Trump for 'Extremely Interesting' Conversation" by Andrew Rafferty

Lying with Dogs

It's quite an honorable thing,
To talk the talk
And still walk the walk,
To provoke the nemesis,
After such a beating.
Ever so quite civilly.
I would still be hiking,
Or suchlike he was doing.

My mom once told me,
If you lie with dogs with fleas,
You will catch those fleas.
This dog doesn't catch fleas.
A champion—
A hero in my book.
I hope he plays his cards right,
Cause he was dealt a dud.

A response to BBC News' "Beyonce Scores Nine Grammy Nominations" by Mark Savage

Up Against Who?

Yes please,
I'll take some Lemonade.
Grammys?
Yes Mammys!
Win them all Beyoncé,
I won't protest
Like the Kanye.
Find a Formation
For all the trophies—
In their twenties.
Slay Beyoncé.
Behind you,
The other small townies.

A response to Huffington Post's "Fidel Castro Dead: Cuban Revolutionary Leader Dies at 90" by Dominique Mosbergen

A Different Kind of Brilliant

From sugar cane to the mighty gavel—
Now death.
Another wicked leader,
Replaced by another.
Which is worse,
To stay or to go?

My grandmother died at 47—
90 for him.
She was a brilliant woman,
And he was a wretched man.
So is it fair,
That he lived to be 90?

So much potential—
Wasted.
Went to law school,
Became an activist.
A path taken by many,
But ended by few.

Dictators are brilliant—
Like him.
He accomplished total rule
A difficult triumph.
I will be brilliant
But not like him.

A response to The Washington Posts' "Israel's controversial 'roof knocking' tactic appears in Iraq. And this time, it's the U.S. doing it" by Adam Taylor

Pie

A death announcement,
A phone call.
People are not disposable.
Not to be tested
Like lab rats
Or circus animals:
Which way will they run?
Civilians are human people
And Israelis are not role models.
Do not tell me roof-knocks
Are a kind gesture,
Because you are not
Greeting them with a pie,
But a bomb, or rather death.

A response to BBC New's "Samsung Recalls Washing Machines in the US"

Keep Your Receipt

Hold on,
Let me pick up my burning phone.
But first,
I gotta throw this in the wash.

A catastrophe in my pocket,
I better sue.
Put the washing machine in the basement,
It scares me.

Millions of dollars lost,
I better call my lawyer.
And then call my doctor,
To heal these burns.

A response to BBC News' "New Zealand hit by aftershocks after severe earthquake"

Malfunction

Once a leader,
 Guider,
And passageway.
A loyal path to reach loved ones.
 Broken,
 Crumbled,
 And severed.
Streets now walked upon
 By tourists,
 Townsmen,
 And tweeting-men.
Leaving messages for us and them.
 "Driver out and safe,"
 "Pulled out alive,"
And "The aftershocks keep coming."

Tourists and townsmen:
 Humans.
 Now all the same,
 Seeking a care package,
 A home,
 Or their family.
A life that takes decades to grow,
But five minutes to collapse.
 Swallowed up
 By the landslides,
 The debris,
And the grocery store isles.
 Stranded,
 Like the three cows,
 Who cannot function.

Three Haikus in response to BBC News' "Supermoon' lights up sky around the world"

Radiant and Bold
A still façade looking
Over all of Earth

Deceptively far
A glow that has no distance
Drawing me closer

Like a candlelight
Charming constant comforting
A shield for the world

A response to The Guardian's "Michael Gove raises question of 'quickie divorce' for UK from EU" by Rowena Mason

A Separation

Are quickie divorces real things?
Can a bell make two different rings?
Or can an atom be split in two?
Yes, just like there is the color blue.

Do two things really make any sense?
So do partners have independence?
How easy is it just to exit?
You can never neglect the nexus.

Can a single decision be absolute?
Can a deaf man play the flute?
Can a marriage ever conclude?
The ripple effect changes a family's mood.

It is just like a Russian Roulette.
Worse than making a terrible bet.
Buckle up for a new recession.
'Cause much was out of bad intention.

A response to BBC News' "Amazon unveils plans for grocery shop with no checkouts"

An Unsociable Solution

I remember when I was a kid and played store with my sister.

We had our own cash register.

I loved to ring up each item then say "Have a nice day mister!"

Working hard was a real pleasure.

I was confident that I would be the next top retailer.

Now Amazon is changing the game of checking out.

It is all about a new application.

You can pick your broccoli without making a route.

Do it all while sitting on a couch cushion.

After you learn what the app is all about.

It's all an unsociable solution!

A response to BBC News' "Caesarean Births 'Affecting Human Evolution"

Future Trends

Darwin, Oh Darwin,
I believe your theory has evolved.
Because,
Thank God for C-sections.
Thanks to the nurses and doctors,
Thanks to science and textbooks.
Who proved Darwin right
And give us more life.

A response to BBC News' "Us government asks: How much Nutella do you eat?"

Nuts for Nutella

Finally, a delicious spread.
Perfect with some bread.
Or paired with your dessert.
Just don't get it on your shirt.

Tragic, the calorie count.
The FDA has changed the amount.
You better make it worth your while.
And then run another mile.

Since 1964 humanity has fallen in love.
Better than the chocolate called Dove.
We have fallen into the chocolate rush.
So disregard the food label fuss.

One tablespoon is not enough.
Two tablespoons is still pretty rough.
Eat the entire jar.
And still hit the bar.

A response to New York Times' "Aleppo Bombs Leave Quarter Million 'Living in Hell' and Without Hospital Care" by Alissa J. Rubn and Hwaida Saad

I live in Ohio

I walk outside to an open field of radiant sunlight and green grass.
I fear of a tornado that will tare a few shingles off my roof.
I worry about getting my sweater back from my friend's house.
I can go to a hospital only eight miles north and south.
I have a president who signs peace agreements and wins a Nobel prize.
Nobody says "Ohio is no more."

You walk outside to dusty air and machine guns in hands.
You fear of chlorine attacks burning your lungs.
You worry about getting back to your home safely.
You cannot call an ambulance from the north, south, east, or west.
You have a president who bombs your hospitals and ensues terror.
Everyone says "Bye, Bye Syria."

We know the feeling of a drink of water on a warm day.
We have felt sweat bead off our faces after hard work.
We have danced around aimlessly for the fun of it.
We know what it is like to laugh at one another.
We know how contagious a simple smile can be.
But what we don't both know is the scary part.

A response to CNN's "Rwanda's Catholic Church says sorry for its role in 1994 genocide" by Deborah Bloom and Brianna Duggan

An Apology

Forgiveness,
A strange thing.

Mercy,
Nothing can compare.

Pardon,
A difficult feat.

Amnesty,
Ever so debatable.

Justice,
A human right.

Religion,
Not an exception.

Accountability,
Same for all.

A response to the guardian's "OPEC Doesn't Hold all the Cards, Even After its Oil Price Agreement" by Phillip Inman

Losers

Isn't it strange? I had to Google what a barrel of oil looked like,
even though I don't ride a bike. I am one of the pigs of America.

I leave a mark on Earth just like the rest of the world,

All while sitting back, reading in the dark. Who are the winners?

The thick black liquid runs through our leader's veins, giving them life.
Digging into the ground finding wealth and indecency. I'm not trying to be crude,
but it would be rude to say it's okay to have winners when we are all really losers.

Outputs and inputs, rising and falling, oil prices define politics and economics.

How about we take that "production squeeze" and make a windmill?

And we will still get our fill,

Without paying the bill.

A response to The Washington Posts' "Netherlands and Belgium to end lawless border oddity by swapping land peacefully" by Adam Taylor

We have all seen a Globe

Congratulations!
An unlikely contract,
Land has been swapped,
For better, not worse.

Ill trade my missiles for kites
And my hand guns for flowers.
How bout my car bomb for a Sunday drive?
Better yet, chemicals for bird seed.

Mountians for miles,
Fields for rivers,
North for south,
And tomatoes for tomahtoes.

Arbitrary lines and jagged maps,
We have all seen a globe.
Whose land is it anyway?
It must be all of theirs.

A response to NBC News' "Dakota Pipeline: Protesters Soaked With Water in Freezing Temperatures"
by Tim Stelloh, Molly Roecker, and Chiara Sottile

So Much for Free Speech

A cup of pure, clean water.
More powerful than ice blasting a crowd,
Or the stings of tear gas,
Maybe even a hypothermic leg,
And camping for months.
Those rubber bullets can't shake the crowd,
Because without water, what will survive?
Certainly not human dignity,
Respect,
Or Sympathy.
Humanity will dry up,
And be nothing.
Everything that is left can feed off of the poison.
Because we will not drink it.

A response to PBS Newshour's "National Geographic's Green Eyed Afghani Girl Arrested"

Green

I see those green eyes
Everywhere.
Not in the newspapers,
But in the green grass
Or my mothers emerald ring.
I find a four-leafed clover
And see you.
All thing green
Remind me of you.
What I'm trying to get at
Is that you go beyond
The simple photograph.
And if I could ask you
If that little passport
And that single photo
Was worth it, I would.
And I know
You would say yes.
Because this goes beyond
The single sentence
Or the unjust fine.
No, it is just
One blade of grass.

A response to “Doors Slam Shut for Afghan Refugees” by The Editorial Board

I have a Spare Bedroom

I have a spare bedroom
It is pretty useless
Fluffy pillows and lampshades
A cat to keep you company.

I have a spare bedroom
It is better than a tent
Warm in the winter
I won't slam my door on you.

I have a spare bedroom
But you are so far away
I reach my arms out
But I cannot reach you

I have a spare bedroom
Ample room for a few
A family of five,
But not 1.5 million

I have a spare bedroom
But you are there
And I am here
So what can I do?

I have a spare bedroom
But that is not enough
National Geographic is not enough
Tents are not enough.

The Difficult Choice: A Short Story

Anna Freidin

Chapter One

Ingrid, having just left work, walked along the crowded streets with emptiness in her heart. The cold rain fell violently against her, as her beige trench coat flapped against the back of her calves. Dust and debris wafted through the air suffocating everything in its path. Her lungs and feet throbbed as she tried to find her way back home through the smog and weeping masses. After what felt like eternity she reached her tiny flat in the cellar of an old red brick home. Without hesitation, she made her way to her bed passing her tiny kitchen and so-called living-room. She slipped under the covers, fully clothed, and tried to sleep as the vibrations of bombs shook the room. The smell of moist mold penetrated her already assaulted nostrils. In a few moments, she was fast asleep back in Alion, free of fear of death and pain from watching innocent lives being squandered for one man's selfish avarice.

The next morning her alarm screamed and she thrashed about trying to somehow smash the annoyance. She had been happy in her dreams, but as she saw the harsh sun bleeding into her bedroom she realized that they were, alas, dreams.

"Alright, alright, I'm getting up you bloody pest," she said as she left her warm, safe bed. Soon she became aware that she had slept in her clothes and changed. Without looking in a mirror or showering she gulped down some milk with buttered toast. She left her apartment and was greeted by the overcrowded streets. She soon could see the M.D.I building and walked faster towards the glass doors encased in concrete. Once inside she was greeted by a swarm of working people. After a year of experience, Ingrid knew this was abnormal and hurried to a man pensively sitting at his desk.

"What's up with people today? Anything happen?" She said as she tried to downplay her concern. She didn't want him to think she was overacting to something that could be as simple as the office running out of printing paper.

"Niccolo wants to see you," he said without looking up. She signed knowing this was an apt reason to be running.

Unconsciously she quietly uttered, "Where?" Before he had the chance to answer, she heard her voice being angrily called. Without showing her ID she strolled to where she heard the voice behind the sliding doors down the five steps that lead to the portal room.

"You called, your maliciousness," she sneered as she entered to see Niccolo dressed in all black leaning against the desk with a gun holstered to his hip; which he often referred to as his "insurance policy."

"Watch your tongue you ingrate," he said, pronouncing every syllable, ignorant that she was trying not to rudely retort. "Have you found any weaknesses in Alion or do you still have nothing to show for this past year of work?"

"No, but I'm still looking," she said knowing it was a complete lie, but she believed lying was not a sin if it protected people.

"Well, if I were you I'd hurry it up," he whispered as he fiddled around in the breast pocket of his suit as if trying to find something he lost.

Ingrid knew him well enough to know what it was he was searching for, and knew the mention of it would make him angry. "You still carry that picture of her, don't you? I bet it has wrinkles now, unlike her," Ingrid whispered loud enough so he could hear.

He whipped around to face Ingrid. As the whites of his eyes became more apparent he shouted, "Shut your mouth you...you..."

"What? The big mean dictator isn't brave enough to stand up to a woman. Have you forgotten we are the same breed?"

"We are not the same breed. One day you're going to regret that," he glared at Ingrid.

Without hesitation, she exclaimed, "You've threatened me before. What could you possibly do to me that's worse than what you've already done?"

"You remember what happened to your parents, don't you?" As the words came out of his mouth her heart raced in her chest. It had been fifteen years, but Ingrid held on to the memory of her parents as tightly as she could in fear of forgetting. Niccolo had never physically abused her, but the fact that she was forced to obey the man who murdered her parents killed her every day. With a sly smile he turned and headed for the door, but not before he said, "Be a good little girl and get to work before I have to use my insurance policy to convince you."

She was human enough to be afraid and went through the secret door that was concealed behind a tapestry of Niccolo. There she found the usual scene of about forty high-tech computers and in the middle of the room there stood the portal. She was hardly in the room for ten seconds before someone gave her a first-aid kit, instructing her to report back as soon as she had anything of importance. Before stepping up to the platform next to the portal she took motion sickness pills and ten deep breaths as her diaphragm began to tense. Once mounting the platform, she looked into the portal and wondered what would happen when she stepped through. Two men stood on either side of her ready to drag her away if she refused, and with a glance, at either side she nodded. She moved her right foot so it gently grazed the portal opening and then, she took another deep breath, closed her eyes, and threw herself into the portal.

The portal opened in Alion and spit Ingrid out as if she were disagreeable food. As she got her bearings and stood up she began to realize that the motion sickness pills had not worked. "You've got to be kidding me," she gagged. She spent the next hour hunched over in a bush hoping it would end and, like all things, it did.

Chapter 2

Ingrid knelt on the red and brown fallen leaves feeling as if the trees around her were somehow protecting her. Ingrid was adamant that she needed to speak to the leaders to warn them about Niccolo's intentions. She hadn't told them, creating a sense of guilt which intensified with each day. Slowly she stood up as the leaves crackled beneath the weight.

While she was trying to figure out if she needed to go North she began to feel the hairs on the back of her neck stand up as if someone were watching her.

"Ingrid," a strong male voice sounded, breaking the silence and causing her to whip around only to see Amien, a gray wolf with black smeared along his spine like soot and eyes as black as the night.

"Thanks for the heart attack! I needed one," Ingrid gasped as she caught her breath.

"No problem," he couldn't help but grin, "need to go somewhere?" This was not unusual as Ingrid suffered from a lack of direction and she knew that Amien could navigate Alion in his sleep. Ingrid had been told by citizens of Alion, when she first arrived, to trust Amien because, as the alpha wolf, he had the knowledge and strength to help her.

Ingrid nodded and answered, "The palace, it's important" as she noticed that he had blood stains around his mouth. Amien turned and began to walk in the direction opposite the one Ingrid was certain they should be taking. As he led the way Ingrid once again noticed scars which had created rough patches of fur, each one a medal of honor.

"You coming?" Amien asked, turning his head to see Ingrid where she stood, still watching him.

"Yep," she said jogging to where he stood, "lead the way." They walked side by side for many minutes before Ingrid started to feel that the silence was a bit too tense.

"Do anything fun while I was gone?" She didn't want to talk about everything going on and hoped this would provide a needed distraction.

"Not much, except the pups are starting to learn to hunt...it's not going very well," he said laughing.

Ingrid had never heard him refer to pups before, "Are any of the pups yours?"

Amien suddenly became serious, "No...I've tried, but it never happened. I was in a fight a few years back and..." Ingrid thought that he was going to say something else. Instead, he did not tell her what had happened, he simply said, "Let's just say I can't have them."

Ingrid felt as if she had intruded upon a sore point. She tried to apologize by saying, "I'm sorry, I didn't know."

Amien nodded and they continued walking in silence. As they walked Ingrid became aware of a few fresh wounds and wondered how he had gotten them. During the year she had known him she had learned that he would do anything to protect his pack and assumed that these wounds were a result of doing so. They walked along the river and then up an incline towards the palace.

After a long while, Amien asked, "Do you have children?"

"No," Ingrid said passively. She had never thought about having children because she couldn't imagine bringing a child into the world in which she lived.

Soon they were outside of the palace which stood steadfast in a clearing surrounded by forests and meadows overtaken by wildflowers. "I won't go in with you. I have some business that needs attending." As he saw her fearful expression he added, "You'll be fine." With one last look at Ingrid he howled to his pack and ran full speed into the dark forest.

Alone Ingrid walked up the stairs into the palace, unsure about how to tell them of Niccolo's plans. As she entered the tall glass doors a guard confronted her, "Can I help you miss?"

"Yes, I am here to see the leaders Keeva and Andre. Is there any way I could see them now?" Ingrid decisively asked.

"Yes, go on through to the main circular area," he said pointing down the long hallway, "I will tell them to meet you there promptly."

She walked down the hallway into the room she had been told to wait in. As she stood trying to decide how to save both worlds she realized that it was impossible. She hoped that Keeva and Andre would offer some advice.

Quietly Ingrid began to talk to herself, “What if I...no...that won’t work. Could I...no...that won’t work either. I just need to face it, don’t I...people will die regardless of my choice,” she let out a deep sigh, “my parents would have known what to do, they always did. How will I know what I’m doing is right or wrong? I wish I just knew what I was supposed to do.”

As she stood in silence she questioned everything and tried to think of every scenario. Just as her mind began to grow tired the glass doors swung open. From a golden room came the two leaders. Keeva, wearing a dress of red silk, walked with her head held high. Next to her was Andre who wore a white three-piece suit. To, Ingrid, they seemed majestic and, almost, angelic; however, she knew that behind the softness and beauty they were tough, resolute, and not easily fooled. Ingrid walked towards them with hesitation in her step and, noticing this, both smiled to ease her.

“My, dear, why look so frightened? Has anything happened?” said Andre as he calmly placed a hand on Ingrid’s shoulder whilst trying to read her. He could not. Ingrid sensed what he was trying to do and blocked him off as her defenses gained control of her senses.

“Not exactly,” Ingrid said dodging his penetrating gaze. “I have to tell you both something, something you won’t like. You may hate me for it. Nevertheless, I have to tell you because if I don’t my conscious will kill me.”

With a rough, yet, gentle voice Keeva said, “If we hated all those who tell us what we do not like, we would like no one. Even though we don’t agree or like what you say, you have a right to say it, regardless of the opinion of others. Tell us what’s wrong. We will listen and, in due course, we will judge.” Both paused waiting for Ingrid to speak. Ingrid was afraid to speak because she could sense their unspoken fear which magnified her own.

“The man, Niccolo, who ordered me to come here wants me to tell him your weaknesses so that he may invade and kill you all. He wants to bring the wealthy here and leave the poor to starve in my world. I have to choose between Alion and my world,” she whispered her eyes cast downwards in shame.

“Why do you need to choose?” Andre said caringly.

“If I go back to my world and shut the portal then nothing will have changed. People will still be suffering. If I tell Niccolo what I know he will invade Alion and kill you all. If I refuse to tell him and close the portal then he will kill me and who knows who else,” Ingrid blurted out nervously, “I must choose because there are people in need of saving. If I don’t choose then people will die in vain, all because I couldn’t make up my mind.”

Andre looked at Keeva and she stared back. For a moment, they seemed to read each other’s minds and with a nod from both it seemed they were decided on a verdict. Keeva spoke, “I know you want us to tell you what you should do and how you should do it. Alas, we cannot tell you what to do. One thing is certain: you must choose between your world and ours. You alone must decide. We can prepare as much as we are able, but beyond that, it is up to you.” After speaking, she smiled at Ingrid and left the room to prepare for battle.

Andre stood silent for a minute, straightened his collar, pulled down his waistcoat, and then whispered calmly to Ingrid, “We all have a destiny to fulfill, it is up to you what your destiny will be. Whatever you do, don’t do it with hate, malice, or in fear, do it with kindness, wisdom, and love. If you do that, then you are doing what is right. Remember kindness isn’t weakness, it is the greatest strength you have as a human being.” With these final words, Andre followed Keeva leaving poor Ingrid standing very much alone in a vast empty room.

As the sound of footsteps faded, Ingrid began to pace across the room. "I can't go back and close the portal leaving the poor innocent people to suffer because of me. I also can't let Niccolo murder these kind people," she mumbled as her mind started to clear.

"Okay, so I have to save the people here and try to save people in Dorcas from Niccolo. How?" There seemed to be no answer, no logic, no morals to guide her. She closed her eyes in the hopes of summoning some brilliant idea. Nothing worked. Then, as sunlight filled the room, she remembered the kindness of Andre and Keeva's.

"That's what I should be...kind," as the words escaped her lips she thought about the desolate masses in the streets of Dorcas. She thought of the weeping children and how people would walk by them as if nothing were happening. From that seed sprung her resolution: she had to be kind to the people of Dorcas by bringing the poor to Alion and giving them a chance at a better life, and close the portal in Dorcas once they were all safe.

Relieved Ingrid ran out of the palace and into the crimson forest to find Amien. Her wool white dress became phantom-like in appearance as it flowed in the wind as she moved faster and faster. As she ran the understanding of what she was going to do caught up with her. She knew that once Niccolo found out she was as good as dead. This thought kept her running, running away from what she thought would happen. She ran until her legs lost their strength. Exhausted Ingrid collapsed onto a bed of leaves under a canopy of birch and redwoods. There she lay unable to stand. She remained in her broken state as the snow began to fall violently on top of her. To remain warm, she curled into the fetal position, which only seemed to release her emotions and fears. Tears began to stream down her face for the first time since her parents died. The knowledge of what she was going to do had knocked down her defenses and barriers releasing all her past emotions. It would be lying to say in those moments on the cold ground curled up she did not consider dying there, but, alas, her natural fear of dying forced her to hold onto her dwindling will to live.

From the darkness of the forest came a wolf with its jaw clasp the severed leg of a deer as its blood dipped on the newly fallen snow. Suddenly, the leg dropped and the wolf exclaimed "Ingrid, INGRID!" It was Amien. Ingrid had rolled over onto her torso with her face buried in the snow. Amien ran over to her, seeing her face down, and nudged her with his nose onto her back so her face looked up towards the sky. From touch, he could feel the coldness of her body, so he laid across her chest warming her core, bringing her color back. Amien, reacting on instinct, licked her until her eyes opened, lifted himself off her, and helped her onto her feet. "What happened to you?"

Ingrid updated Amien by telling him, "I told them about Niccolo's plans and they told me that I had to choose for myself. Then, I realized that I just had to be kind. I decided that the only way I can do this is by bringing the poor people from Dorcas into Alion."

"Right," Amien paused, "you do realize that once Niccolo discovers what you've done, he will kill you."

"Yes," Ingrid answered seriously.

Amien adamantly stated, "I'm coming with you" in response.

Ingrid rolled her eyes in objection, "No, you're not."

Amien forcefully retorted, "If you go by yourself then it's a suicide mission. Plus, going alone into a confrontation is not how to do things."

"No...it's not how you do things," Ingrid said, aware of the fact that wolves hunted in groups and are rarely ever separated from their pack for any reason.

Amien scoffed, "Fine, do what you want, but know I do what I want. I am an animal after all."

Ingrid laughed as she said, "As am I."

Just then a large group of howling wolves sounded, startling Ingrid as the howls were louder than she had heard before. She turned to see Amien with his ears erect, "What's wrong?"

Before he answered he howled in response and after a minute the other howls softened. “They wanted to know where I was and that I was okay.”

Ingrid was touched by how much the other wolves cared for Amien, “You should go to them. They’re your family.” As she said this she became envious of him because there were wolves who missed and cared for him.

“Not until I help you,” Amien said adamantly. Ingrid was about to object but Amien interjected, “Without you, without stopping Niccolo, I wouldn’t have a family to go back to. So yes, I am going to help you. What do you need?”

Ingrid understood she couldn’t argue with the stubborn wolf, so she surrendered and said, “Go to the leaders and gather the other animals. Tell them that I will be bringing in people on the North side of the forest near the stream. I don’t know how long I will be. Just make sure there are people to get them out of the way should anything happen. They will be hungry and cold so bring blankets and provisions. If I don’t come back within an hour, after they have all come through, leave. I will take care of closing the portal. It won’t be visible on your side, so you’re just going to have to trust it’s closed. If I don’t come through, go, it’s too late for me.” Ingrid spoke quickly as she began to walk back to the portal.

“I will,” Amien shouted after her. “Be careful.” As Ingrid headed further towards the portal she accepted that she would have to sacrifice herself for the sake of others. She wasn’t sure if she was being brave or stupid. She eventually found solace in knowing that Amien would tell all the animals and leaders about what would happen. It wasn’t long before she realized the portal was farther away than she thought. She quickened her step and before she knew it she was running.

Ingrid ran as fast as she could back to the portal, flying over the earth taking no notice of her surroundings. Within a few minutes, she was back at the portal and throwing a pebble into--what seemed like air-- the portal which shimmered when it was hit. Determined to stop Niccolo she ran into the portal, which gobbled her up and expelled her into Dorcas in the late hours of the night.

Chapter Three

Exhausted Ingrid fell head first into Manifest Density Inc. HQ making an audible thud as her body met with the platform. As she looked around the room her heart raced. No one was there. Empty. From her left, she caught a glimpse of the clock, which read a quarter past ten at night. No one would be in for another four hours. Hurriedly, she gathered herself and sped out of the room determined to find as many people as she could to bring to Alion if they so wished. Outside of MDI, the smog had lifted and there, along the streets, were the desolate masses of people too poor to have a place to call home or too sick to find work. Ingrid ran to the first person she saw, a woman surrounded by three young children whose stomachs were bloated, hoping she could save someone.

“I am sorry to trouble you. I know this sounds odd and that there’s no reason why you should trust me, but I can help you. I can take you to the MDI which has a portal leading to a place where people are kind, where you can be healed, and where you might even be happy,” Ingrid whispered as she got on her knees to face the woman whose face was nothing but a skull draped in skin.

The woman spoke with a weak and mild voice. “It’s too late, whatever you can do, it’s too late for me,” she paused as she looked pensively into Ingrid’s face, “do I know you?”

Confused Ingrid said, “No, I don’t think so.”

The woman’s face lit up in recognition, “Are you the daughter of Lillian and Gustav Varg?”

Shocked to hear their names, Ingrid could barely answer, “Yes.”

“Ah, my names Ernestine. Good people they were, your parents, very good. Went to school with your mother, you know? Shame what happened. How old were you?” She asked earnestly.

“Eight,” Ingrid breathed deeply. “I was eight when they died.”

Nodding, Ernestine looked around at the young children. “You said you could help?”

“Yes,” Ingrid confidently replied.

“I won’t go, there’s no use. If I give you my children, where will you take them?”

“It’s a place called Alion. The people there are cared for by their leaders. They have plentiful food and your children would want for nothing.” Ingrid tried to reassure her, although she wasn’t sure if it was working.

Ernestine took Ingrid’s hand in hers and asked, “Will they be safe?”

Ingrid took her hand from Ernestine’s and placed it on her boney shoulder. “Yes, on my life, they will be safe.”

“I don’t know you, but I knew your mother. I knew her kindness and how much she loved this place. If you are anything like her, and you must be because you’re here, then I trust you with my children.” With that, Ernestine turned to the children and told them to go with Ingrid. Reluctantly they stood up with tears in their eyes. “It will be okay,” she said with a smile. Ernestine kissed her children one last time and one by one she passed them to Ingrid. After Ingrid took the small hands of the children in hers, Ernestine turned and told the others around her about what was happening. As Ingrid walked with the youngest child holding her hand, she became aware of how small the child’s hand was.

Ingrid looked up from the tiny hand and said to Ernestine and her friends, “Tell everyone who is able to come to MDI within the next two hours and I will meet them.” With that, the women nodded and began their rounds.

The smallest child in Ingrid’s care began to scream as the mother moved farther and farther away. Acting on instinct, Ingrid picked her up and began to walk down the streets telling everyone she met the same thing she told Ernestine. The message was passed from mother to sister to niece to uncle to father so that the message burned like a wildfire among the masses. Ingrid, having done what she believed was her duty, ran back to MDI with the children in tow.

When she got back there was already a line of people. As she opened the doors she checked to make sure it was still empty, and with no one in sight, she told them to be quiet while she ushered them through to the portal room. Once near the portal, she realized that she had to find a way to close the portal once everyone was through. As she saw the masses of people piling in she panicked. She had been in the portal room often enough to know that they kept a manual for the portal. She rushed to the main computer and searched through the files by typing in possible names for it. Nothing. Then, in a desperate attempt, as she could feel the restlessness of the people beginning to mount and fill the room, she searched “Manifest Destiny Incorporated Portal Manual.”

“You stupid boys,” she whispered when the manual popped up, thinking how they could have been so thick. She looked at the index and found what she needed. Then, she found the small device hidden underneath a cloth in the upper drawer of the Head of Portal Maintenance’s desk. Once it was in her palms she froze, time stopped, as the reality of what she was going to do struck her. It’s one thing to think about doing something but it’s an entirely different matter to act upon those thoughts and plans. In that moment, looking at the people and holding the young child in her arms, she felt the most profound sensation of love which radiated from her core. Then, reality reappeared in her peripheral vision when she saw the clock telling her that a significant amount of time had passed. Hurriedly, she told the people to start going through.

“Now, you may feel some motion sickness. It may not be pleasant but once you’re through it’s worth it. I promise,” she said with a smile. As if under a trance, every person piled into the portal one by one. She kept the line moving and made sure that the women and children went first, including Ernestine’s children. After about two hours, the final, remaining men stood in the room, preparing to enter the portal with ease.

Just as she was leading the last two more men to the portal, there came a booming voice, “YOU, sly, little, ungrateful minx.” Instinctively, she pushed the two men through the portal before she turned around to see Niccolo standing in the doorway with his “man-slave” beside him. This tiny, entitled boy said smugly, “I told you, sir, I told you, she’s bloody smuggled those wretched people into the damn portal.”

“Just like your father, aren’t you? Too much heart and not enough obedience!” With the last word, he pulled out his gun and advanced towards Ingrid, who did not move. She could feel in her hand, behind her back, the cold metal of the device that would close the portal. All she had to do was throw it and the portal would close; but she saw the worried faces of the men in the room and she had to keep it open for them. As Niccolo walked towards her, she motioned to the men to keep going on through, and in fear of death they ran full speed ahead. Niccolo paid no attention to them. He had his eye on his victim.

To distract him, Ingrid said the only thing she could think of: “What happened to you? What happened to the man who played with me when I was a child? What could have turned you into such a wretched, angry man?”

Without moving the gun, he firmly said, pronouncing every syllable, “My sister died.”

Angrily, Ingrid retorted, “You’re the one who killed her.”

With a grimace he raised his voice, “It was an accident, she jumped in front of the man I intended to kill.”

“It was her husband,” Ingrid said as she was overwhelmed with a nauseous feeling, “what did you expect?”

Niccolo squinted his eyes and his lips thinned as he advanced towards Ingrid. Years seemed to pass before Niccolo was face to face with Ingrid and she was staring down the barrel of his gun sure that in a moment it would be over. She couldn’t help but see the last five men jump through the portal, leaving the room empty with only the three of them, Niccolo, his slave and herself, there to witness what was going to happen next.

She closed her eyes as she remembered her parents and all they had fought and died for. She remembered the scent of fresh pine and the way Amien's fur felt. She remembered love, peace, but, most of all, she remembered hope. She remembered the fragile little hand of the girl. She thought about the kindness of people and she knew that there was hope for humanity, even if there was no hope for her. She accepted she would die, that she would never be able to think again. Now, as she stood facing death she was calm because she knew she would die doing what was right. She had done all she could and helped all she could. For her, that was enough.

Chapter Four

A bang echoed causing Ingrid to open her eyes. There on the platform was Amien and Niccolo was on the floor at the bottom of the platform looking up. Amien seemed to have grown a foot as his head was lowered and his teeth dazzling in the light that radiated from the portal. With one little nod at Ingrid, as if to tell her his plan, Amien growled in a primitive, animalistic way that scared both Ingrid and Niccolo. Niccolo pointed his gun on Amien but before he could pull the trigger Amien followed through. He leaped in the air and drove his white teeth into Niccolo's left shoulder disarming him. Once Niccolo was unable to move, Amien detached himself and stepped away from the body to lick away the blood from his fur.

Ingrid ran over to Niccolo, whose blood flowed from his core, and knelt beside him. Carefully she took his heavy head in her arms. "I don't... I don't want to die. I'm...I'm not ready," Niccolo gasped as his chest rose slowly. As she began to remove the hair from his face he lifted his good arm so that his hand could frame her eye. A faint smile appeared on the dictator's face as he looked into the eyes, the familiar eyes, of the only woman he ever loved. With all of the power he could muster he faintly said, "Your mother, my sister, my poor sister...I never meant to hurt her. I never meant to kill her." Ingrid seeing the pain in his eyes, felt sorry for him and remembered that her mother had always forgiven him for everything he had ever done or could ever do. Her mother's words came back to her as she held her dying uncle in her arms: "Family is family, you forgive them for everything they do, even if you don't want to...family means loving one another unconditionally." Ingrid forgave him because she knew her mother would have forgiven him, she always had. Softly she whispered in Niccolo's ear, "I forgive you." She did not forgive him as the dictator he was, but as her uncle, as the last living thing that reminded her of her mother. As the dying man looked up at his niece's face he faintly whispered, "I... don't... forgive... myself."

As he increasingly worsened, Ingrid placed her forehead on his and whispered as soothingly as she could, "Hush now, everything will be okay." Soon his breathing accelerated and it was not long until he breathed his last breath. Ingrid, now covered in blood, continued to hold her uncle and sang her mother's lullaby to him even though she knew he was gone. Slowly she got up and gently rested Niccolo's body on the cold ground as Amien watched from the other side of the room.

Ingrid frantically searched the office. Eventually, she found a blanket on one of the spare cots that the workers sometimes used when they were there overnight. She held it close to her chest and draped the white sheet over Niccolo.

Once she had done what she believed she needed to do for her mother's sake she stood up and walked over to Amien.

"Let me help you," Ingrid said as she grabbed a nearby towel, dampened it with warm water, and began to wash the blood from Amien's face.

"You loved him, didn't you?" Amien asked hesitantly.

"I wouldn't go that far," Ingrid smiled, "but he was family. You wouldn't understand, I suppose you think I should hate him."

Amien muttered, "I understand. You hate him for what he did, but you love him because he's family."

"Yes, exactly," Ingrid said wondering how he could understand. She supposed there was a reason, but was clever enough not to ask what that reason was.

As she washed his fur around his mouth she asked, "Before we go I need to do something. Do you want to join me?"

"Yes, I'm not letting you out of my sight until you're safe," he said seriously.

"Come on, let's go," Ingrid said tossing the towel to the side as she made her way to the door.

They walked to a house about two blocks away which was now the mere echo of what it once was. Staring up she saw what was left of the only place she had ever called home. She fell to her knees as the weight of her memories intensified. As she knelt on the hard ground, Amien stood resolutely by her side.

After several minutes, she rose stronger than before, and said, "Let's go" to Amien who had not moved. Amien began to walk back the way they had come. Before she joined him, she faced the old house. With a tear in her eye, she whispered the hardest and cruelest word she ever had, "Goodbye." She wasn't saying goodbye to the house. No. She was saying goodbye to the laughter, to the peace, to her childhood, to past loves, but most of all she was saying goodbye to her parents for the last time. With a deep breath, she checked her pocket, before she rejoined Amien at the end of the street, to make sure the device was still there. It was.

They walked back in silence to MDI HQ as the thickness of the air increased. Ingrid wondered what Amien was thinking. She often had but understood that there would always be more to him than she knew. All she needed to know was that he was on her side and an ally that she could trust, even if he was incapable of following orders. She was thankful that he had come to save her, even though she had directed him not to, because it was nice to have someone who cared if she died. In no time at all they were outside the building, and as they entered Ingrid felt like she was free for the first time.

The instant they entered the room Amien ran and jumped into the portal. Ingrid, however, walked slowly towards the portal realizing that the world behind her was no longer her own and, in many ways, it had never been. She turned around to face the room behind her and once again said, "Goodbye" as she walked backwards into the portal.

She landed in Alion on her feet in front of a mass of people, both natives of Alion and Dorcas. When they saw her she seemed to be a vision, her white dress spattered with Niccolo's blood. Ingrid turned to face the portal. She grabbed the device from her pocket and with all her strength hurled it into the portal opening causing it to collapse in on itself. Once closed she knew it was over. As she turned she saw the smiling faces of the poor who were being given food to eat by the people of Alion. Andre and the other healers were hard at work mending the broken and feeble masses.

From the Beginning

Debbie Fultz

I place my hands on the keys and close my eyes, taking a deep breath. Everything becomes non-existent, everything but the music. My fingers move along the keyboard making some of the most beautiful sounds that I have ever heard...aside from professionals that is. I open my eyes as the words from my mouth join the melody of the music. I see people watching me with smiles, people eating their dinners, drinking beers, and people standing around talking to each other. My eyes close as the high note approaches, and everything disappears again. I feel completely immersed in the music and it makes me happier every time it happens.

Every Tuesday and Thursday evening, I play at Bryan's Cafe right outside of the heart of New York City. People actually enjoy my music and I enjoy playing for them. It gets my mind off my actual job as an editor at Big Apple Publishing. This night is just like the rest; the weight on my shoulders from my relationship, and the fact that I have to talk to Nate about us afterward. I love him so much, but I know in my heart that I could be happier.

I don't know how to tell him how I feel. I don't even know if I really want to, because the thoughts will come to life and I won't be stuck in this crazy world where I have a job, a boyfriend, and an audience at a cafe...still feeling alone. Also, saying something to him will either go really well, or it will end our relationship, and I don't think I want that just yet. I want to try to work things out because it's not worth throwing away a relationship that's almost two years old without giving it some work first. At least that's how I feel.

I close my eyes as the music takes control of me again. I have a flashback of the very first night that Nate and I met. It was a Tuesday night when I had first been hired at Bryan's Cafe, which was when I'd just moved to New York with no other job lined up. I was fresh out of college, twenty-two and looking for myself. Nate walked in the door and made me forget every word that I was singing for a solid five bars of music. His snowy dress shoes left puddles on the rug, his nose was slightly lighter than Rudolph's, and his smile made his green eyes sparkle as he looked to see the culprit behind the music. After the performance, he approached me at the stage saying that I had the voice of an angel. The flashback begins to get a little blurry as I come back to the present moment. I forget that I'm still performing until Liz, my best friend and roommate, enthusiastically stands up and claps for me, which is always my signal to get off of the stage.

Here we are, sitting on our couch in our three-room New York apartment. The entrance room containing the kitchen and living room, and two small bedrooms separated by a closet-sized bathroom hidden by a blue and white chevron curtain. Liz and I are watching *Young and Hungry* with cups of hot chocolate and bowls of popcorn. Our typical nighttime treat, though the hot chocolate is sometimes replaced with Seagram's and the popcorn with pizza. That's usually on rough days. I look at the clock on my phone for the fourth time within twenty minutes of the show and notice Liz looking at me.

"Nate is supposed to call at ten," I reply to her unsaid question.

"Again?" I turn my attention back to the show. "Emma, you have given that douchebag so many chances and I just hate seeing my best friend treated like shit. You..."

"Aren't myself anymore, thanks for reminding me."

“Well it’s true. You’re so much better off without him. You’re heading in different directions anyway.” I don’t say anything because I know there is more coming. “You are always going to love him and he’ll always be in your heart, but one day you’re going to meet someone who takes up so much more space in there than he ever has. That person is going to make you so happy and love everything you love just because you do.”

Being with someone else is such a scary thought. I have enough of Liz’s lecture and walk into my bedroom to hide. My electric blue walls try to pick up my spirits, but fail. Maybe I’m waiting to end things because I’m afraid of how I’ll feel without him, and maybe staying with Nate will hurt me more in the long run, but I want to try to work things out before I decide that this is true. My phone is ringing, and I stare at it while his name dances across the screen.

“Hey,” I answer while laying on my bed.

“What’s up?” He always answers his phone like this, and personally, I’ve never been a fan. I mean, what does he expect me to say?

“Nothing.”

“What’s wrong?” He always asks this too.

“Nothing.” I reply again. He pretends not to believe me before the typical minute of silence. I sit up and begin, “Nate, I’ve been thinking a lot about our relationship.”

“Yeah I think we should break up too.”

“Ha. Ha.” I say sarcastically.

“Oh darn,” Nate replies.

I start to tear up because this is something he always does, and quite frankly it hurts a little bit each time. I truthfully don’t know why I want to stay with him, but I do. I think of the words I want to say and begin to let everything pour out.

“I just feel like we’re drifting apart and I hate it. I hate the way you treat me but I know you’re under a lot of stress from your job and everything, so I’m trying to ignore it.”

“Sooo, if you don’t want to break up what do you want to do? You’re obviously not happy, and I’m not either.” I cry a little harder from hearing this. I think about not being held by him again and not seeing him anymore and I hit a new low. There is a moment of silence while I swallow back my sobs.

“You’re not?” I faintly ask.

“I mean I love you and you know that. I love you so much. I just miss the way we used to be, and I miss looking forward to talking to you. I miss being excited when I see that I have a text or call from you.”

“Same here.” I gather myself up before I move on. I realize that the beginning of our relationship was so good, so I think of the only solution that makes sense, to start from the beginning. “I think that we should start over.” No reply. “I think that we should go on a first date, and fall back in love with each other. Start on a clean slate, you know?”

“That might work.” I wait for him to say something more, anything. “I’m not sure though. Who’s to say that won’t lead to being right back where we are now?”

“I think that if we want it to work, it will work. If we end up back here again then at least we’ll know for sure. I just don’t want to lose you and obviously you don’t want to lose me.” There is a long pause. “Nate?”

“How about Saturday at seven?” A smile grows through my dried up tears, and I tell him that it sounds perfect.

“One more thing,” I say before our goodbye, “I need you to try a little harder and show me that you actually love me if this is going to work out.”

It's Saturday night and I'm getting ready for my first date with Nate. For some reason it truly does feel like a first date with the butterflies, the nervousness, and the trying on of six different dresses before I finally settle for a green strapless with a gray cardigan. After putting on some makeup and spraying myself with my perfume for special occasions, I sit on my bed. I do just that, sit on my bed. I don't know what I'm doing, trying to impress a guy that I shouldn't have to impress anymore. The girl that I look up to see in the mirror looks lost, but has hope that she will begin to be found.

Liz walks in with a bowl of Rocky Road ice cream in her hands as she sits next to me on my bed. "You're making a mistake."

"Yes, I know you think that."

"No, I know it," she insists as she shoves a spoonful of ice cream in her mouth.

I stand up and walk to my cabinet of a closet to put on my black heels, "You would be doing the same thing if you were me." Liz shrugs as she walks out licking her spoon upside down. What am I doing? She is so right, but I have to give it a chance.

There is a knock at the door, and I freak out because I don't feel ready. I probably forgot to do one eye's mascara or am wearing two different heels, but instead of checking everything I quickly grab my small, black, over-the-shoulder purse. I hear the door open and quickly throw in my wallet and other essentials from the last purse I used, and then run out before Liz can say anything rude to Nate. He looks at me with admiration saying that I look beautiful, and I have to admit, he doesn't look so bad himself. He hands me a bouquet of assorted flowers of bright colors, which makes me so happy because he has never gotten me flowers before. Things are definitely going in the right direction.

We make it out to his car and drive off when Liz texts me, "He didn't open the car door for you."

"He never has, and I don't really care about that."

"Well he should." I don't reply.

I'm shocked as we pull up to a fancy restaurant, but I guess I should get used to it since he has been spending more with his new position at work. The problem is, though, that he usually spends the money on himself. I guess I should just accept it and be happy that he's spending it on me for once. As we walk across the street to the door, the crisp old leaves crunch under my feet and a chill goes through my body. Nate asks me why I didn't wear a coat, and I tell him that I like my outfit and that a coat would obviously ruin it. He laughs as he puts his hand on my lower back, leading me through the door before him.

We sit at a candlelit table for two by the front window with a dim light hanging above. Nate and I awkwardly glance at each other from time to time until finally we stare into each other's eyes. He smiles at me and I laugh shyly, looking down. He then asks me a couple of random questions that someone would usually ask on a first date, and I laugh at each one. "Hey, you said you wanted to start over, so I'm trying to get to know you, Miss. Larkin."

I smile, "Yeah I know. You're doing good Mr. Boyer. What did you say your name was again?" I take a sip of my lemon water as I wait for an answer.

"Nathan, but since you're so attractive you can call me Nate."

"Is that what you say to all of the girls you bring here?"

Both of us laugh as he grabs my hands around the candle and pulls me closer, "Miss. Larkin, you are the only woman that I have ever brought here, and I'd like to keep it that way if you'd allow me."

"Well, Nate," I tilt my head forward towards him, "we'll just have to see how this date goes now won't we?"

Nate chuckles, "I suppose so."

Nate and I talk and laugh for another hour-and-a-half while eating. Halfway through, I look out the window and see small snowflakes begin to fall from the sky. The first snowfall of the year. My heart fills with even more glee than it already is from Nate. All of a sudden I can picture our future together again. Happily married with great jobs and the most precious children, it all seems so perfect again. When I get home, I look at Liz and simply say how perfect my night was. I then go to my bedroom and change before lying in bed staring at the ceiling with an unbreakable smile. Nate sends me a text saying that he loves me and adds the heart-eye emoji at the end.

It is now eight days later and I am getting ready to go on my second date with Nate. We are going ice-skating in Rockefeller Center, something that I have always wanted to do. I keep my outfit a bit more simple...and warm. I don't have much time to get all fancy with it since I got home from work late. I am very thankful that Liz is not home to give me her usual speech about how much she disapproves of me going on another date with him. It's so tiring to hear the same reasoning over and over again, and she doesn't listen when I tell her that he has changed so much. To her, no one can truly change that easily. To me, if you truly want someone or something you are going to do whatever you can to get it or keep it. I throw on a pair of skinny jeans with cute winter boots to match my black sweater. I then add a silver statement necklace with a touch of gold, and when I see a text saying that he's there I throw on my black petticoat and white gloves, hat, and infinity scarf and run out to his car. Wait, why didn't he come to the door again?

When I get in his car, I notice music quietly playing as he leans over to give me a kiss. "You look nice," he tells me as he drives off into the busy street.

As his hands turn the steering wheel to the right I notice that he has on a new pair of black leather gloves, and then I notice something shining from the opening between his gloves and coat sleeve. I reach over to lift the sleeve quick and he smiles asking, "Do you like my new watch?" It's a brand new, glistening black, Rolex watch. I just smirk and shake my head while looking back at the never-ending line of cars in front of us. "I got my second paycheck the other day, and I have to say I'm liking this new pay!"

"I'm glad." I wish I could say what his new position is at work, but I'm not the best with business terms. All I can say is that I hate how much he spends on things that he believes will make him look better. Not only does he already look perfect to me, but I also don't care for people wearing expensive clothing and accessories just to show that they have money.

We finally step onto the ice, and I must admit that I haven't ice skated for a very long time. I'm doing good for the first five seconds, but then as Nate takes off in front of me I lose my balance and fling my arms around until I'm suddenly on my hands and knees embarrassed to look up and see strangers laughing in the distance. "Have you never been on ice before?" Nate asks while laughing as he comes to a fast halt in front of me.

I grab onto the hand he has out for me, "It's been a while." He pulls me up and continues holding my hand as we begin to join in the circle of skaters again.

"Well you don't have to be upset about it. We'll go slow."

"I'm not upset."

"Em, your face is telling me you're upset. Come on, cheer up."

I look at all of the couples and families around us with their red noses and cheeks and brightly colored jackets. There is one thing that really strikes me about all of them, they're all laughing and having a blast. It puts a smile on my face. Nate and I then look at each other smiling as his upper body leans over to kiss my forehead. We go around the rink three times before he asks me if I want to go faster.

"You did see me on the ground, right?" He speeds up a little to get in front of me and I ask, "What are you doing?" He looks back with a smile and soft eyes, as I put my hands on his waist to clasp onto his coat.

“Do you trust me?” He asks.

I take a moment to think but reply, “Yeah.”

He speeds up even more, pulling me along with him. At first I’m a little afraid of the speed, but soon after I’m laughing and my body steadily lets go of the tension. Before I know it, I’m letting go of Nate’s sides and start to go on my own right beside him. Without saying a word, we agree to race each other. I start out slightly ahead of him but after half of the circle I begin to lose momentum and catch him coming ahead of me out of the corner of my eye. Once he gets a couple of glides in front of me I reach for his arm trying to pull him back but almost lose my balance because of it. At the end of the circle he makes it to the wall before me, and I’m laughing as I struggle to stop, watching the wall quickly approach. Nate then steps in front of me catching me in his arms, and after the both of us hunch over laughing we stand up straight face-to-face. I look in his eyes and feel love and chills go through my body as his hand touches my lower back pulling me closer. He kisses me. I feel like I’m on cloud nine.

We skate over to the exit and after turning the skates back in we go to a coffee shop to warm up with some hot chocolate. Everything is great as Nate and I talk about our families, what we plan on doing for the holidays together, and other random conversations.

“Since when did you learn to ice skate like that, and why have we never gone before?” I ask Nate after taking a sip of my hot chocolate.

He leans back stretching and flexing his arms, acting like he is important. “Well I don’t mean to brag, but you’re looking at the most valuable player from my high school hockey team.”

“Of course I am,” I say quietly as I give a quick half-smile and look down at my cup. Nate was the best at everything and everyone loved him, yet he always talks down on himself and then I end up taking myself down while building him up.

“What’s wrong?” He asks me.

“Nothing.”

“I told you he wouldn’t change,” Liz utters.

“He’s going to show up, he promised.” I get a bottle of water from the kitchen to put next to the piano. Bryan’s Cafe is a little more packed than usual with it being the first of four Christmas specials that my boss wants me to perform. Nate promised me that he would show up, but as I’m being introduced I look in the audience and see no signs of him. Liz buys a beer before sitting with a man at one of the front tables, and when we make eye contact she shrugs and then chugs a few sips of the beer. I hear my name being called and muster up the best smile possible before taking my place on the stage.

Sitting on the piano bench, I pull down the microphone to my level and look out at the audience. “Hello, and welcome to all of you here tonight! It has truly been an honor to be able to play at Bryan’s Cafe for two years now, and I’m especially honored to be here tonight to help add to your Holiday spirit. The spirit that I see all around this room right now. I just want to start off by telling you to have yourself a merry little Christmas.”

I begin playing the introduction to “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” as I take a quick look at the door. Still no sign of Nate arriving. I find it hard to lose myself to the music because all I can think about is Nate and how he lied to me just like before. Maybe Liz is right, maybe I am giving him too much credit; maybe he is never truly going to change. If he was, he’d be here right now, wouldn’t he? If he loved me, he’d want to see me doing something that I’m passionate about. Now that I think about it, Liz is right. Yet I find it so hard to imagine my life without Nate. He was my first long-term relationship, my first true love, my first for so many things and without him I’m nothing but Emma Larkin. Lonely Emma Larkin.

Even though Nate isn't showing up, I still feel a little moved by all of the spirit in the people around me and all of them joining in to sing with me. After singing some Christmas classics I end the show with "Last Christmas." A song that I do not need to be singing at the moment. Surprisingly, I get through the song without an outburst of emotions. However, while singing the last verse I close my eyes, and the only thing I can picture is Nate sitting with Liz at a front table enjoying my performance. The words end and the piano continues as I squeeze my eyes to keep the tears in. When I open them back up I look over at Liz who is looking at me with a sincere look, she knows what just happened. I glance above her head when I see the door open. He's here. A tear escapes my eye and rolls down my cheek as I finish the song. In the midst of everyone clapping, I quickly give my thanks and exit the stage straight to the kitchen.

Pull it together, I tell myself. Do I go out there and end everything right now, or do I see how the night unfolds? If I were as bold as Liz it would be the first option, but unfortunately I'm not. I grab my coat and purse and head out to the dining room where Liz is still at her table talking to the man she was sitting with, and Nate is still standing right inside of the door almost like the misfit.

"Hey Em," he says with a flashy smile. "What's wrong?"

"Are you seriously asking me that right now?"

"I'm sorry I was late, I got held up at the office."

"Held up at the office." I take a step back, "is that how your life is going to be now? Missing important occasions, missing promises, because of your job?"

"Emma you know that it's different with this position," he pulls me in for a hug. "We can still have dinner at my place and have fun tonight."

I feel a hand tap my arm, "Em I'm heading home." I turn around after realizing it's Liz. "Do you need anything before I go? Maybe a ride home too?"

"No, I'll be fine."

She smiles and begins to walk out of the door, but then turns around to Nate. "You're an asshole."

"Liz," I beg.

"No, Em! Someone has to say this and I know you're not going to. I hate seeing my best friend hurt over and over by the same dick." She turns back to him. "You have no idea how lucky you are to have her in your life."

"Liz please stop!" I yell over her.

She takes one more look at me before walking out the door. Shortly after, I follow suit with Nate on my tail to his car.

Once arriving in his apartment Nate begins to cook dinner without saying a word. I can't help but to imagine what is going on in his head, though there is so much going on in my own. It is so awkward to be here; I feel as though we are suddenly two strangers in the same room. Two strangers who once had nothing but love for one another.

We sit on the couch with glasses of wine resting on the coffee table in front of us. Nate turns toward me bringing a leg up between us and asks, "Em?"

"Yeah?"

"You don't actually feel like Liz does about me, do you?"

I look at my glass of wine like it's going to give me all of the best answers. "Not exactly," I end up replying.

"You know I love you."

I pause a moment before repositioning myself, "I'm not a priority." He tries to claim that I am but I cut him off, "If I were you would've made sure to be there for me tonight. You would have planned ahead. Your job obviously came before me and I don't want to live my entire life like that."

“You wouldn’t have to, it doesn’t happen that often.”

“It happens more than you realize Nate.”

“Well, I’m sorry that you feel my job isn’t as important as yours. Even though mine makes more money.”

Nate grabs his glass of wine taking a few sips. I have nothing to reply to that comment. He hit a target that made my heart and thoughts simultaneously explode. I spend the next few minutes unable to speak or move until I watch him leave to the kitchen area to check on the food. My body begins to have the complete opposite of butterflies, inside I begin to shake and have this feeling of emptiness. I don’t cry, there is nothing to cry about because there is nothing there. At least that’s how it feels. It’s okay, or so I tell myself, because as soon as we are done eating I can go home and handle this another day when my emotions are in a better state.

Fifteen minutes fly by until Nate yells that dinner is ready and we meet each other at the kitchen table. He has the delicacy of spaghetti and Texas toast on white porcelain plates.

“I hope you like it,” he remarks.

“I always do.”

“This time I added something a little extra.” I take a bite and notice no difference from any other time he had made me spaghetti, but I give a quick smile and complement it. “Do you taste the difference?” He then asks.

“Not at all actually.” We both laugh as I apologize

Both of us continue to eat until both of our plates are nearly spotless. “I’m so full and tired now,” I comment.

“But we didn’t even get to dessert!”

“There’s dessert?” I question.

“Right there on the platter,” his eyes point to the silver platter with a lid sitting to the side of the table. “Go ahead, open it.”

I give him a look saying that I don’t want dessert, but take the lid off of the platter anyway. Immediately after doing so, I stand up with my hands covering my gaping mouth as tears fill my eyes. In the middle of the platter, there is a small red-velvet box opened to show a ring with the biggest diamond that I have ever seen. This can’t be real; this can’t be happening.

“Emma Larkin...” He begins

“Nate...”

“Just listen to what I have to say before you say anything.” Nate stands up to walk over and grabs my hands. “I love you, Em. I love you and I can’t imagine spending the rest of my life without you, which makes me believe that I should marry you. You are everything that I need in my life, and sure I messed up tonight, but I can do better.” Then why has he never done better? “Our dates were great!” I look over at the ring, the ring that looks as though it would be heavy on my finger. Our dates were great, but only greater than what they had been in the past. “Will you marry me Emma?”

My body starts to sweat and the pulse of my heart gets faster. I just found out not too long ago that he played hockey in high school; after dating for two years, I just found out. He wants everything to be new and fancy; God that’s a huge, gorgeous ring. He thinks that just because his job is the one that makes more money, it should matter the most. Money trumps passion and love. It’s hard to get through the tears and the loss of breath, but I manage to get out, “I’m sorry, I can’t,” before letting go of Nate’s hands and rushing to gather my stuff carrying it out the door.

“Em, wait!” I hear him yell behind me. I shut the door without turning to see him one last time. Once it is shut, though, I only get halfway down the hall before I rest my back against the wall and slide down to the floor with tears pouring out. “Fuck!” I hear from the other side of his door.

Getting out of the taxi, I rush upstairs to my apartment where I find Liz sitting on the couch watching TV, pizza box and hot chocolate nearby. “Emma,” I fell on the couch laying my head on Liz’s lap, coat and purse still on, “what did he do?”

“He proposed.”

“I sit here waiting for Prince Charming to knock at the door and you’re crying because a man proposed to you.”

“Liz this is not a time for joking!” I cry out.

She begins to caress my hair out of my face to comfort me, “I know. I’m sorry.” She pauses for a moment. “So what exactly happened? I’m assuming you said no or something. I hope you said no.”

“I don’t even know why I went honestly; I guess I just wanted to know what I wanted for sure. I didn’t expect this to happen.” I sit up and the next few sentences come out rather quickly. “Then we had dinner and it was fine, everything felt fine but then he told me there was dessert so I opened the dish and there was a ring. A big, shiny, gorgeous ring and he proposed to me. But you know me and my stupid mind always having to assess everything, so I remembered all of his wrongs and little nit-pick things I don’t like about him and the fact that he said his job is better than mine because it pays more...”

“He said what now?”

I wipe the tears off my face with a tissue that Liz hands me. “The point is, I realized that I don’t want to spend the rest of my life with someone when I can make a laundry list of dislikes about them. I told him I can’t and just walked out, but I don’t know if I’m going to survive because I already want him.”

Liz grows a smile and pulls me in for the tightest hug she has ever given me. “I am so proud of you for recognizing this, Em, and for walking out. It may not have been the best way, but it’s what you had to do.” She backs away from the hug grabbing my shoulders and continues, “You were strong! Trust me, you are going to want him for a while, but I know in my heart that you are going to find someone so good to you.”

Liz wipes a stray tear from my cheek she has me take off my coat and purse and have some pizza and hot chocolate. After watching an episode of *Young and Hungry* and crying a few more times, I finally fall asleep.

A month-and-a-half later and I’m just now starting to get over being lonely Emma Larkin. I’ve put my focus on my career and discovering more of New York City on my daily walks. Liz and I even go to Yoga twice a week.

My alarm goes off and I get up to get ready for work. I’m feeling really good today so I decide to wear a lacy olive-colored dress with a gold statement necklace. Today is going to be an amazing day. I go to the mirror on my dresser to fix my hair before grabbing my coat, and feel like my face is too bare for being dressed up. After putting on some eye shadow and mascara, I look in the mirror one final time and see something that I haven’t seen in the longest time. I see a woman, a beautiful and strong woman.

The Note

Mikayla Gray

December 15th, 2016

Aspyn

Lying in bed I close my eyes

So tight that I can see thousands of Tiny stars dancing around in my head. They beckon me to stay up longer

But I can't, I have a big day tomorrow. Tonight I defeat the clan of tiny stars.

Dawson

Lying in bed I close my eyes

So tight that all I see is darkness. I can never escape it.

It's 3 a.m. Why do I have to be a night owl? My Xbox is calling my name.

Tonight I defeat darkness.

December 16th, 2016

Aspyn

I wake up five minutes before my alarm. Heading to the shower I put on my Michael Buble Christmas album.

"It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas" I belt out as I'm finishing my daily routine.

If I leave at 8:45 I'll have plenty of time to grab my morning coffee.

I swiftly pick up my already prepared bag for work and head out the door.

A taxi arrives right on schedule.

Dawson

I wake up to the annoying sound of my alarm clock, Shit, I'm already fifteen minutes late...as usual.

Quickly brushing my teeth I pull on jeans and a sweater. There's no way I'll be out of here by 8:45.

I run outside to catch a taxi; there isn't one in sight, just my luck.

Great, looks like I'm walking today.

I somehow manage to arrive on time, 9:00 on the dot.

As I take a seat by the window, my usual spot at Crema Coffee House, A light snowfall begins...I hate snow.

Aspyn

My taxi slows to a stop and drops me off across the street from my favorite coffee shop.

Crema Coffee House. The owners always have my order ready for me. Caramel Macchiato with an extra caramel drizzle.

9:00, a light flurry of snow begins to fall as I cross the street. The bell chimes, announcing my entrance.

The warmth engulfs me as I smell the coffee aroma.

I walk over to the counter and Rory hands me my order, perfect timing.

As I leave a familiar face glances up at me.
We exchange nods and a smile.

Dawson

Eating my slice of toast, the bell chimes.
9:00 she always shows up, never late, never early.
Her order is always the same, she always looks the same.
Mid-length blonde hair, the right side tucked behind her ear.
Bright blue eyes, her cheeks dusted with color from the cold. Always dressed as if she's going to a funeral.

We share a nod and a smile as she walks out into the falling snow.

Aspyn

Laying in bed I think about my new promotion.
It's something that I've always wanted, my biggest dream.
The stranger's face flashes across my closed eyes.
His sad brown eyes and soft smile linger in my mind.
He must be a writer, I envy him.
Turning towards the window I look out into the dimly-lit street at the glittering snow.
Thinking about all the sleep I'll be able to catch up on this weekend.

Dawson

Laying in bed I look out my skylight,
The snow is still falling...Gotta love Denver in the winter, not.
An idea sparks in my head.
I get out of bed and sit down at my cluttered desk, pushing the old papers to the ground.
Grabbing a piece of new paper I begin writing, the words flowing out through my pen.
Looks like I won't be getting much sleep... what's new. Thank God for the weekend.

December 19th, 2016

Aspyn

I leave shoe prints as I cross the street, fresh snow crunching beneath me.
The warmth welcomes me as I step into the coffee shop.
Rory, as always, is standing behind the counter with a big smile on his face.
We've become great friends since I started coming here.
He hands me my usual and asks about my weekend.
After our brief chat I make my way towards the door. The familiar face is nowhere in sight.
I feel my smile fall slightly as I walk outside to my taxi.

Dawson

I'm not woken up by annoying alarm clock.
I look at my phone, 11:36.
Shit.
Without thinking I pull some clothes on, grab my notebook and a pen and head out the door.
I make my way to Crema Coffee house...damn traffic is backed up.
The bell chimes as I walk in, Rory greets me with a hello.

I order a sandwich instead of toast, it'll have to do.
Pulling out my notebook I begin to write, not noticing Rory standing beside me.
He tells me I missed her, I roll my eyes at him.
Clearly, I mumbled as he walked away.

Aspyn

Work seems to be dragging today.
Endless phone calls, irrelevant meetings.
I just want to go home.
Just as I'm about to leave I get sucked into a last minute meeting.
Finally, 6:30 and I'm out the door.
Stepping outside I breathe in the winter air, my eyes light up as I look around.
The streets are covered with Christmas lights, the sidewalks coated with snow.
This is my favorite time of year.
A cab pulls up.
A glass of wine and a bubble bath is calling my name.

Dawson

It's 3:30, I should head back home.
I wave to Rory as I head out the door.
Pulling up the collar of my coat, I walk towards Target to get a few groceries.
I take a taxi back to my apartment.
After unpacking my purchase of frozen meals, I plop down on the couch.
Stanley, my cocker spaniel, joins me.
Time to unwind and watch Game Of Thrones, my guilty pleasure.

December 20th, 2016

Aspyn

Standing across the street from the coffee shop I can see him.
Sitting at his usual table, with his plate of toast.
He doesn't look up as I walk in, he's absorbed in the notebook in front of him.
Rory hands me my coffee and I smile and whisper to him.
He nods at me with agreement, a huge grin on his face.
Waiting for my taxi I watch Rory set the coffee down at his table.
He looks at Rory with a confused face.
I smile as I slide into the taxi.

Dawson

Writing has come so naturally lately, something's inspired me. I get the feeling that someone is walking towards me.
Looking up I see Rory, I'm confused as he places a cup in front of me.
From her, he says.
I nod and take a sip.
Damn, that's delicious.
The rest of the morning I stare out the window drinking my coffee with a smile on my face.

Aspyn

Thoughts kept flowing in and out of my head.
What if he doesn't see it? I thought to myself.

My stomach twists in knots as I tap my fingers on my desk
Gnawing at the tip of my pen I inhale sharply.
Whatever happens, happens.

Dawson

Sipping on my coffee I finish my final sentence.
Setting the cup down, I pick up my things and head towards the door.
Rory gives me a bright smile and I wave as I exit.
My phone starts to buzz, looking down I frown at the name— Great, what the hell does she want.

December 21st, 2016

Aspyn

Light dances across my light gray walls and onto my face.
I quickly begin to get ready.
After a long debate on what to wear,
I decide on dark skinny jeans and a cream cable knit sweater.
First impressions are everything.
Anxious, I leave earlier than scheduled.

Dawson

Why am I up at this God forsaken hour?
Oh right, I have to meet my sister, who I hate.
I told her to meet me at the coffee shop close to my apartment.
It's been four years and now's the time she decides to see me?
Four years of no contact, not even a "Happy Birthday kid".
Angry, I leave later, hoping to keep her waiting.

Aspyn

It's the normal hour of 9:00. I don't see him anywhere.
Sitting at a small table I pull out my tablet and begin reading.
Fifteen minutes pass and still no sight of him.
A new barista approaches me with a cup of coffee, just what I needed.
Looking around the coffee shop I spot a woman, a little older than me. Sitting alone.
Sadness takes over her face, looking as if she's waiting for someone.
Just like me.

Dawson

Ah, as expected she's already waiting inside. Dread enters me with every step I take.
The bell chimes as I walk through the door and make my way to her.
She stands awkwardly, ignoring her hug, I sit down.
"Hello Heather"... "Hello Dawson".
No more words are spoken.

She reaches out for my hands, I pull back hesitantly.
Finally, I let her place her hands on mine.
She releases a sigh of relief.

Aspyn

As I'm reading I hear the chime of the door and look up.
The stranger walks in, I perk up and beam a smile in his direction.
He heads to another table, the one where the woman is sitting.
My smile slowly fades as I see her reach for his hands.
Looking away I clumsily begin to pack up my things.
Walking to the counter I order another coffee to go.
As I exit the coffee shop I look at the stranger and he gives me a smile.
Completely embarrassed I run towards the end of the street, Waiting for a cab.

Dawson

"Heather, what are you doing here?" I ask.
She tells me that Christmas doesn't feel the same without me.
Well no shit it doesn't.
Christmas was our favorite holiday growing up.
It's also the time of year that our parents passed away.
And the time that she abandoned me without notice.
She says she's sorry for the last four years and that she regrets it.
I remind her that she left me on my own.
As she begins to sob I squeeze her hand.
After all, she is my sister, but she's not forgiven.

Aspyn

Winston, my goldendoodle, greets me as I walk into my apartment.
Why do I feel like I just got rejected?
I didn't even know the guy...
Grabbing a tub of Ben and Jerry's, I make my way to the bathroom.
Lighting candles as I go.
I pull up "friends" on my laptop as the bathtub fills with hot water.
Slipping into the bubbles, I close my eyes and take a deep breath.
Don't think about it Aspyn, I tell myself.
Monica's voice interrupts my thoughts.
I glance over at Winston who is sleeping beside the bathtub.
At this moment I'm content.

Dawson

Three hours later and we are still in the coffee shop, Catching up on everything lost between us.
It feels good to talk to her, it feels like the old days.
She invites me to have Christmas with her and her boyfriend.
I decline the offer, she of course doesn't buy it.
Rory begins walking towards us, grinning ear to ear.
What the hell is wrong with this guy.
He asked me how my date with Aspyn went.
Aspyn? I looked at him with confusion.
He told me the entire story, the coffee cup with the note. Shit, I'm an idiot...a blind idiot.

December 22nd, 2016

Aspyn

I was woken up by a faint lick on my arm.

Rolling over I glance at the time, 12:54, I was exhausted.
I shoot up from bed, only to remember I'm on my holiday vacation.
After making a quick breakfast, I put on some warm clothes.
Grabbing Winston's leash, we head out into the frigid cold air.
Snow slowly drifting down around us as we walk to the park.

Dawson

I had to explain this girl to my sister...Aspyn.
Heather and I begin to make our way to the coffee shop.
Walking in, I basically sprint to the counter.
Has she been here yet? I ask Rory.
He tells me she hasn't come at her normal time.
I grab a piece of paper that has "I'm so sorry" written on it.
Rory takes the paper, I don't even have to give him instructions.
My sister insists that we go Christmas shopping..oh what joy.

Aspyn

The park looks so beautiful this time of year.
Especially with a fresh coat of snow on the ground.
We begin our trek to Crema Coffee House to warm up.
Entering through the door I'm welcomed with warmth and cozy lights.
Winston and I take a seat by the window, he's a people watcher.
Rory comes to say hi, along with my favorite drink.
I feel a tiny piece of crinkled paper touch my skin.
Confused, I open it up
"I'm so sorry", written in cursive, stares up at me.
From Dawson, says Rory.
The stranger has a name...
I take Winston's leash in my hand and exit.
Leaving something behind on the table by the window.

Dawson

I can't stop being pissed at myself.
What if I would have seen the note...What if?
Heather's voice brings me back to reality.
She tells me she's finished her shopping.
Thank God.
I get the sudden need to go to the coffee house.
Grabbing Heather's arm, I bolt out of the crazy outlet mall.
I take a deep breath and walk in, the same old chime going off.
Of course, Rory is there giving me a childlike grin.
He points to the table by the window.
Underneath a used coffee cup a small piece of paper sticks out.
My heart begins to beat with anticipation.
Scribbled on the paper was "Dawson, apology accepted".
That's it? I ask Rory who is now beside me.
He just shrugs his shoulders and walks away. This has to be a joke? I mumble to myself.

December 23rd, 2016

Aspyn

Christmas is right around the corner.

This is my first year alone on Christmas Day.

I head to the kitchen to continue the tradition of baking cookies.

Pulling out my grandmas old recipes I begin the day long process.

Sprinkling out flour on the counter, I roll out the dough.

As I do this I wonder if my family is doing this back home.

Right on cue my phone begins to buzz vigorously.

Hi mom! I nearly yell at her through the phone.

After almost an hour of chatting we hang up.

My mood is instantly lifted and I smile as I frost the cookies.

Winston looks up at me with his puppy dog eyes.

I give him a piece of an unfrosted cookie.

“You’re absolutely spoiled”, I say, as I lean down and kiss his head.

After the baking frenzy is over, I head to the sofa.

Wrapping myself in a big blanket I turn on a Christmas film.

Winston joins me in this usual tradition.

Dawson

Two days before Christmas, the day I get my Christmas tree.

A little late, but it’s tradition.

Heather and I walk down a few blocks to a local who sells trees.

After searching for the perfect one, we walk back to my apartment.

My sister decided that she would stay with me for Christmas.

Our first Christmas together in four years.

We decorate the tree as the movie “Elf” is playing in the background.

One of our all time favorite Christmas movies.

My doorbell rings, a large pepperoni and cheese pizza is delivered.

Heather and I make ourselves comfortable on the couch.

Stanley places his head on my lap as I eat my pizza.

“White Christmas” comes on the screen after I push play.

Our usual family tradition.

December 24th, 2016

Aspyn

I’m woken up to the sound of my doorbell chiming.

Who could that possibly be at this hour?

Pulling on my robe, I walk to my door and am greeted by the mail man.

I thank him and wish him a Merry Christmas.

I rip open the package, inside are four individually wrapped gifts.

One of them says “Open on Christmas Eve” in my moms handwriting.

Already knowing what it is, I open the package, smiling ear to ear.

I look down at the pajama set and matching slippers, still smiling.

Another family tradition, new pajamas to wear on Christmas Eve.

Inside is a matching sweater for Winston.

After making a cup of hot chocolate, I head to my sofa.

A lazy day relaxing and watching movies is in store for me.

Dawson

Heather wakes me up...it's way too early.

I forgot about our tradition of eating out for breakfast.

My parents never liked to cook on Christmas Eve.

As we walk down the street to a local diner, A light snow begins to fall.

Gotta love a good white Christmas. I hope it lasts.

Sitting at the diner booth, we order hot chocolate.

As we wait for our food we talk about our last Christmas', When we were all together, before the accident.

We each order our childhood favorites.

Pancakes, french toast, eggs, hashbrowns and bacon.

Stuffed, we walk back to my apartment.

A day full of chinese food and board games await us.

December 25th, 2016

Aspyn

Walking out into my living room I can't help but smile.

Gazing out the window the ground is covered with a blanket of snow, A white Christmas.

Sitting on the wood floor by the tree I pull out the gifts I was sent.

The first gift is a framed photo of my family, my mom, dad, and brother. Another traditional gift, one that I cherish each year.

The second gift is a knitted scarf, my mom probably made it.

And the last gift is a Denver Broncos ornament, my favorite team. Tears filled my eyes as I stood up to hang it on my tree.

Feeling surrounded by love and warmth I call my family.

"Merry Christmas, I miss you all and love you", I say as I hang up.

Dawson

Looking out the window I can see that the snow didn't let up. The ground is covered, I shake my head in annoyance.

Making my way to the kitchen, I find Heather already there. She's too busy whipping up breakfast to notice me.

I place a small wrapped box in front of her.

She opens it and begins to cry, I embrace her in a hug.

Holding out her arm to me, I place the dainty chain on her wrist.

"I had no idea you had moms bracelet", she says, holding back tears. She tells me that she didn't get me a gift and feels terrible.

"You being here was enough of a gift for me", I say to her.

She jokingly punches my arm, "Didn't know my brother was a softie". We both laugh and eat breakfast together on the couch.

Watching the falling snow swirl around with the gusts of wind. "Merry Christmas Dawson"... "Merry Christmas Heather", I reply.

December 31st, 2016

Aspyn

The sun begins to set as I finish up the dishes.

Winston runs over to me with his leash in his mouth.

"Okay", I say, "we can go for a walk".

I put on my parka and snow boots, preparing myself for the cold.
A gust of brisk air floods around me as I open the door.
Snow is still falling, big, fat flakes surround me.
Winston and I head towards the park.

Dawson

Heather left the day before, it's now just Stanley and I.
Sitting on the couch I can see him looking out the window.
"Want to go for a walk"? His ears perk up and he runs to the door.
Great, what did I get myself into.
Grabbing his leash I pull on my winter coat and gloves.
We head outside into the cold.
The sidewalks are covered with snow.
We make our way towards the park.

Aspyn

The park is lit up with christmas lights, it's stunning.
There's hardly anyone in the park, which doesn't surprise me.
I stop by a vendor who is selling coffee and buy one.
Just as I'm about to take a sip, I feel a tug.
Winston spots a squirrel, his pull is too strong and I let go.
I yell after him. He never acts like this, I think to myself.
Still yelling his name, I chase after him.

Dawson

New Year's Eve and I'm walking my dog...what a party.
There are barely any people here, no surprise, they have lives.
I see a vendor selling coffee and pick one up.
As I'm sipping, Stanley's leash breaks away from my grasp.
Stanley! I yell, leave that damn squirrel alone!
Stumbling in the snow I chase after him,
Spilling my coffee all over me in the meantime.
God I really do hate snow.

Aspyn

Stopping to catch my breath I see Winston sitting with another dog.
I walk over to the two of them, kneeling down I grab his leash.
As I stand up I see a figure running towards me.

Dawson

I finally spot Stanley and run towards him.
As I get closer I can see another dog .
And another person? I slow my pace.

Aspyn

A man approaches.
The snow is falling heavier than before and I can't see his face.
I hand him his dog leash.

Dawson

It's a woman.

I can't make out her face as she hands me my leash.

"Those damn squirrels", I say to break the ice.

Aspyn

He says an ice breaker and I laugh.

The snow begins to slow and I see a familiar face. "Dawson"?

Dawson

She laughs.

The snow isn't falling as heavily, I can make out her face.

"Aspyn"?

The Problems of Avoiding Racial Diversity and the Solution for Seneca County High Schools

Sarah Heindel

High school literature classes are created to give students a valuable education that is purposeful in their personal lives and future, making them into productive and knowledgeable citizens of Ohio. However, there are many who have different opinions on what content can be considered valuable to a high school student to help them reach this point. In the area of literature classes, content has always been a debate among scholars and educators, especially towards the issues of diversity and representation of culture. Literature content is highly dependent upon the literary canon and any learning standards that Ohio has adapted. As educators it is important to consider the type of education we provide to high school students as they will represent the Ohio with their values and beliefs, many of which are structured while they are adolescents when they are more open to new ideas. Because of this it is important to introduce them to the ideas and values of multiple cultures that are represented in the United States. Although there have been leaps and bounds made towards adding racial diversity to education, much more can be done in order to prepare Ohio high school students to function in this country of many diverse cultures.

The literary canon has changed through the decades as it attempts to reflect the cultures that it is representing. The literary canon in America is certainly no exception. Many argue that American Literature is always one step behind, especially when considering the aspects of racial diversity, it fails to represent and people become very discouraged by this. Even though there are people of different races that are an active part of our society their voices and opinions seemed to have been ignored for quite some time. America, as a country, has held a mixture of cultures and races from the beginning of its founding. The problem of misrepresentation in literature seems to be caused by the fact that the literary canon was created by ‘economically secure, traditionally educated, socially privileged white men’ (Bates). Because the canon was created by a limited type of people it resulted in the canon being limited because they chose texts that reflected the race, gender, social standing and perspective similar to the early canon-makers” (Bates). Because the canon makers only choose texts that reflected what they were familiar to, it created a canon that only represented one part of American culture. Eventually, the literary canon added more racial diversity to accommodate to the changes of the country, but it often feels like it is still lacking.

Because literature classes in high school usually reflect the canon, it results in a lack of racial representation in the school system. This is partially due to the pressure of adhering to the standards of Common Core (adoption by Ohio in 2010) and a lack of knowledge and training for teachers in racial diversity (Academic Benchmarks 2015). Common Core setup a standard that all schools must follow in order to be sure that all students are reaching the expected mark throughout their education, making them “college and career ready (“Ohio’s New Learning Standards: English Language Standards” 2016). The only problem is that the standards for literature are rather vague. Below is one of the most explanatory standards of reading instruction, it is however still very unclear:

“To become college and career ready, students must grapple with works of exceptional craft and thought whose range extends across genres, cultures, and centuries... these texts should be chosen from among seminal U.S. documents, the classics of American literature, and the timeless dramas of Shakespeare. Through wide and deep reading of literature and literary nonfiction of steadily increasing sophistication, students gain a reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge, references, and images” (“Ohio’s New Learning Standards: English Language Standards.”, slide 41).

This standard presents the most specific standard that Common Core provides for educators is the instruction of literature is requirement of Shakespeare works. The other categories, U.S. documents and “classics of American literature”, contain a wide variety of texts and subjects to choose from. The options are overwhelming. It requires that students gain cultural knowledge, but this too is rather vague. Due to this ambiguity, too often racial knowledge is left behind. This standard does not give any instruction to teachers as to what novels that they should be teachings, only that they should be “classics of American literature”. This also can react panic among teacher who feel the pressure of choosing the perfect novels for their classes, or lack the knowledge of different racial groups. I argue that racial conversations should become closer to the forefront, especially in areas where students experience very variety with different races and cultures. Seneca county for example, is predominately white community with the next racial group being African American. How are these students being taught about the multitude of culture that lie outside of their personal experience? I have proposed a unit that will help solve this very issue after researching the current instruction in Seneca and surrounding countries.

Survey of Culture Diversity in Northwest Ohio 2016

After requesting information from teachers in the areas of Seneca, Hancock, and Sandusky counties, I found that most novels that are taught in these areas are primarily written from the white experience such as William Golding (Lord of the Flies), George Orwell (1984), and Mary Shelley (Frankenstein). I was surprised that of all the novels that teachers told me they read with their classes, only one third of them contain experiences outside of the white experience. The novels that did include an experience from a minority group within the United States or a different culture outside of the United States were as follows: Night, a story on an experience within the Nazi Germany concentration camp; A Long Walk to Water, a story of a boy in Sudan separated from his family after a school shooting; The Kite Runner relates the experiences of the author in Afghanistan and America; The Book Thief, a story of a young girl experiencing the change of Germany after Hitler took over, The secret Life of Bees takes place during the civil right movement, and Their eyes were watching God reflects on life for African Americans and the aftermath of slavery. Although I was pleased to find that if teachers did focus of racial diversity, they seemed to represent it well by including a multitude of different races rather than just reading one during black history month. The information that I got from the questionnaire was limited but it did support my theory that there is the idea of adding diversity among teachers in this area but it may not be as fluid as it should be.

Through this survey, I propose that racial diversity should be more prominent in literature. I developed a unit after looking at the demographics by race in Seneca county. The unit focuses on the experiences of white and African-American. According to the United States Census Bureau, white population takes up 94.6% of Seneca’s racial representation. The next largest is African-American population with 2.6% (July 2015). I choose to represent this two groups in my unit so that an educator from this area can ensure that their African-American students are represented in their classes. This is the second most likely race that will be their classroom. I also choose these two groups for the purpose of encouraging understanding of each other cultures and appearances. While it is very important to read a variety of text that discuss a plethora of races, it seems the most important to be able to communicate and understand a group that you are in the classroom with. Once students begin to understand one group of people their eyes can be open to other races and the discrimination brought upon them.

Unit with Racial Cultural Diversity Focus

Subject(s)	History, Language Arts (English), Reading
Grade/Level	Grade 11, Grade 12
Time Required	Approximately 20 days (four week)

Objective(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To become familiar with the African American experience. 2. To identify and/or sympathize with characters within novels. 3. To look at a different point of view. 4. To diversify our perspective of American literature. 5. To study a culture of unfamiliarity. 6. To create conversation among students about similarities and difference.
Learning Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hairy Tales 2. Through Lula's Eyes 3. Voting then and now 4. Mock Trial (entailing brainstorming, planning, preparing and then the final performance)
Resources, Materials, and Handouts	<p>Novels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their Eyes Were Watching God Zora Hurston • To Kill a Mockingbird Harper Lee <p>Poems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Sympathy" Paul Laurence Dunbar • "Caged Bird" Maya Angelou <p>Short story:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Liars Don't Vote" Junius Edwards <p>Handouts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jim Crow (p.13) handout • New York Times Preparing for a Mock Trial

<p>Procedure of Activities</p>	<p>Hairy Tales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone in the class finds a partner with hair as different to them as possible. This can be coarse compared to thin, long to short, dark to light, etc. • The teacher then provides a set of questions about their hair that will stimulate story (What is the first things that happened to your hair? What is your favorite style?). • Students then begin to share stories and experiences. • (This type of activity can be adjusted to whatever your students are interested in. Just as long as the discussion relates back to racial differences so students can learn from each other and relate to each other even if they are different. Another example might be a discussion about the type of music the students like/dislike)
	<p>Voting Then and Now</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After reading Edward’s short story “Liars Don’t Vote” have students get on this website. Here is the link to follow. Let them work with a partner so that it encourages discussion. • Students will read short amount of text from PBS that describe the issues African-American men faced as they tried to vote. They will then be prompted with a question whether they will give up or continue trying. Encourage students to go as far as the can through the virtual experience but recognize certain decisions that would be hard to make. • Student should go all they through the trying to vote process. • Have a group discussion about how Edward highlighted this part of history through his short story.

Through Lula's Eyes

- Students will reread the portion of text in To Kill a Mockingbird where Scout and Jem visit Calpurnia's church and feel unwanted by Lula (Chapter 12).
- Students will get into different groups and be assigned a character from this scene. Lula, Scout, Calpurnia, Reverend Sykes, and Zeebow.
- Student will then evaluate what the perspective of their assigned character is in this scene with textual evidence to support it.
- Teacher will then point out how in every situation there are different points of view. Point out that these character are able to get through the service without any more fighting because they recognized they had different point of views and left the issue alone.

Mock Trial

- This activity requires a lot of planning and it is encouraged to let the students be a part of this process.
- For the Brainstorming session, have students get into groups of 3-4.
- Set questions for them to answer.
- After they have done some research on some major trials during the African-American civil rights movement and become introduced to some fictional trial in Their Eyes Were Watching God and To Kill Mockingbird, which characters do they think should go under trial. To begin the brainstorming, it may be helpful to help students think about any conflict that ended in a way they did not like. Maybe they could set up the trial before the result happened and fix it. Students could also think of any unresolved conflicts in the novels.
- Essentially during this brainstorming session, students will help decide what issue will be on trial, who is against who, which novel to engage in, and what part of novel that they would like to see at trial.
- Once students help teacher decide this, it allows time for the teacher to prepare for the trial.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A couple days later give students the hand-out for preparing for a mock trial. Read this aloud, explaining areas that are confusing • Make sure that student understand the setup of a trial and the common language used. • If the teacher is limited on time, students could also be assigned various words commonly used in a trial to bring to class with a full definition and explanation for the word(s). • After this, students should be divided up into the two groups • Once the two groups are divided students can decide who will play what role and develop their arguments. (Students will need a couple days to do this. I suggest 2-3). • Once all the planning is done, let the students have fun as they role play. • The teacher would observe carefully, making sure they are sticking to the facts of the novel and being civilized.
	<p>Reflections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should get out a piece of paper and write about another character. This can be either development and point of view. Encourage students to journal about another character besides the main character.

Sample Reading Schedule and Assignment due dates

Day 1	Reading in class: “Sympathy” (Paul Laurence Dunbar) and “Caged Bird” (Maya Angelou) Reading due: Their Eyes Were Watching God Ch. 1
Day 2	Reading in class: “Liars Don’t Vote” (Junius Edwards) Reading due: Their Eyes Were Watching God Ch. 2 In class: Voting Then and Now Activity
Day 3	Reading due: Their Eyes...Ch. 3-4 In class: Hairy Tales Activity
Day 4	Reading due: Their Eyes...Ch. 5-6
Day 5	Reading due: Their Eyes... Ch. 7-8
Day 6	Reading due: Their Eyes... Ch. 9-10
Day 7	Reading due: Their Eyes... Ch. 11-12
Day 8	Reading due: Their Eyes... Ch. 13-14
Day 9	Reading due: Their Eyes... Ch. 15-16 In class: Research trials during the civil rights movement

Day 10	Reading due: Their Eyes... Ch. 17-18 In class: Reflection Journal
Day 11	Reading due: Their Eyes... Ch. 19-20 In class: Read handout (p. 13) Jim Crow
Day 12	Reading due: To Kill a Mockingbird Ch. 1-2
Day 13	Reading due: Mockingbird Ch. 3-6 In class: Reflection Journal
Day 14	Reading due: Mockingbird Ch. 7-10 In class: Brainstorming activity for mock trial
Day 15	Reading due: Mockingbird Ch. 11-15 In class: Through Lula's Eyes Activity
Day 16	Reading due: Mockingbird Ch. 16-19 Introduce Mock Trial Set up in New York Times Handout and make teams.
Day 17	Reading due: Mockingbird Ch. 20-23 In class: Preparing argument for Mock Trial
Day 18	Reading due: Mockingbird Ch. 24-27 In class: deciding roles for mock trial
Day 19	In Class: Mock debate Reading due: Mockingbird Ch. 28-30 In class: Prepare for mock trial
Day 20	Reading due: Mockingbird Ch. 31 In class: Mock Debate

Purpose of Material and Activities

Representing racial diversity is extremely important in high school classes as these students are searching for their place in society, especially as they come nearer to graduation when they are face to face with the decision of what to do after high school. Creating literature to be a place where they can search for their identity is important. This can be done by choosing text that represent people of their cultures. When they cannot relate to anything in the literature they have read, or do not see anyone that represent their racial, they will feel like they do not belong in the class and possibly society. Students can also become bitter and resentful if they are misrepresented. Parker explained there is a misrepresentation of certain races based on whether they are "half or full blood" (Parker). If students find they are misrepresented they often feel discriminated against. These are not the feeling that an educator wants to create within their students. O'Donnell stressed the importance of educators to think critically about the types of novels to include in instruction because it affects how adolescents see their race represented within society, not just the classroom.

If a student sees things they can relate to in literature their performance improves. This idea is supported by the idea of prior knowledge that if you "consider cultural backgrounds and incorporate the culture knowledge into their teaching" their performance will improve because it relates to something they already know (Pan 23). Seeing their race represented in literature sparks their interest and opens their mind for learning. "It goes without saying that background knowledge is contextual and culturally construed" (Campbell 12). When a course includes their race, it provides an additional space where they can analyze their identity and deepen their background knowledge. Adding racial and including all groups represented in the class can help tear down any walls they might have built up from being excluded by the past choices of novels in the classroom.

When diversity is included in literature classes it introduces students to different ideas and

cultures that they may not have encountered before. This creates a new challenge for high school students, but a good challenge to encounter as they begin to enter a diverse world. When students are introduced to these ideas they start to see stereotypes as negative and develop understanding for other cultures. “Asian American students had much more empathy for African American after reading books such as Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*. Student who read Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* were outraged at the U.S. government’s role in the destruction of Native American cultures” (Pan 26). This is the type of classroom environment that welcomes new ideas as students begin to understand one another as they accept the idea of diversity. This is the type of environment I created through this unit by allowing both groups of students evaluate their part in discrimination. Through most of the activities, students are encouraged to look at another point of view beside their own. With novels that focus on white experience and African-American experience, I created a place where they could explore these groups and create understanding for people that are ‘different’ than they are. Additionally, this unit allows for similarities to show as students are constantly working together, creating a team of students that will be valuable to society because they can work together.

Each poem, story, or novel was chosen as they present a struggling time for African-American through the civil rights movement. (With these texts it would be beneficial to do team teaching with a history teacher at the same school. It would allow for the conversation to be more detailed because students would be more knowledgeable about the civil rights movement). These text can create sympathy toward characters that went through trying times because they were black and possibly relate to any bitter feeling that are still left in society from these struggles. This also allows for African American to view authors that look like them and allows them to feel pride in their culture through the successes of the authors. These text allow all students to understand the type of discrimination that black people faced and hopefully will help them identify and recognize discrimination the societies that they are a part of when they go home or even after graduation.

The Hairy Tales activity served as a way for students to communicate together. Through this activity, students realize that though all their hair is different they all have hair problems or hair horror stories. This is the first activity of the unit and it serves as a great way for students to make connections to people who might be different to them. Once they have made a connection, they become more willing to listen to one another. This allows for student to learn something about each other’s different races by how they care for their hair, popular styles, and possibly common activities. What is truly great about this activity is that you do not have to be a different skin color to have different hair. So all students can participate fully and learn about different hair types and what race they originated from. This activity begins to accomplish one of the objectives of the unit: to become familiar with different racial experiences.

Through *Lula’s Eyes* is an activity similar to the one above, in that it encourages students to view situations from someone else perspective, but this activity is more focused on the novel than the students themselves. It encourages students to sympathize with different characters in the novel, and emphasizes Lula, who might be an identifiable character to students who are bitter about racism. This activity brings out a scene where hatred is extended to white children rather than African Americans, which is a rather different scene than is usually depicted. What is truly appreciated about this scene is that it shows the point of view of a young white child. In this unit it is important to bring this scene to attention since the white perspective is not strongly brought out in this unit, except through *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The Voting Then and Now activity is done after reading “Liars Don’t Vote”. Through reading this poem the reader truly senses the frustration of that Will Harris is experiencing. Edwards brings out frustration and annoyance by not summarizing the conversation, but my showing in details of repeated questions that are only used to trick will into lying. The activity provided by PBS allows student to further experience the frustration of having the freedom to vote, but still not being able too. This activity takes students through a series up predicaments that virtually stops them from voting.

After each one they have to decide if they want to keep trying. This activity truly shows the frustrations of African Americans during the time of Jim Crow laws. This virtually activity allows students to become educated on the experience but also to also experience it for themselves.

The mock trial activity was chosen because a trial appears in both of the main novels of this unit, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. A mock trial is a great way for students to consider unresolved conflicts of a story or to change the outcome of a particular character. This activity causes students to think about how some people at trial were treated unfairly and to identify discrimination. Because of this, students will make a conscious effort to act fairly in the mock trial. Above all this activity requires true teamwork, which seemed to be the most important outcome of this whole unit. Through the process of preparing for the trial and executing, students have to work well together by clearly explaining idea and certain perspectives.

There are many benefits of adding diversity to a literature course. However, often educators run into issue with adding diversity to a course because of their own lack of experience. The advice given to these educators is to immerse themselves into these different cultures and to take multi-educational courses (Pan 23). This is probably easier if you are in a diverse community where you will come into constant contact with different groups of people. The other suggestion is to do your research about diversity and to think critically about the choices you make for the classroom (O'Donnell). Different text will be better for different groups. If you live in an area that represent a certain majority, it may be necessary to include texts that they can relate to. Perhaps there is a lack of diversity in your community, in this case a teacher may want to add as much experiences to the classroom and the students can receive. Every classroom is different and every community is different. It is very important to evaluate units and text for class. In my unit, I evaluated a classroom based simply of the demographics of Seneca county, however, my unit choices might change once I learning about the students and their past experiences. The important thing is to always think critically as you plan a unit, but always keeping racial diversity in mind. The power teachers have to choose what novels to teach in a classroom room is a huge benefit for everyone, but it is very important to choose wisely so that the most impact can be made on each student.

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Post World War Two Plays

Anika Maiberger

Art is often a reaction to crucial historical events that provides an accurate representation of the people who survived in the new reality created by them. Instead of receiving statistics and factual information, art depicts a narrative that employs the facts, which especially holds true for art created in reaction to the second World War. Plays were especially forthcoming about including realistic details about the era through characters and their attitudes which can be found in the German play *Draußen vor der Tür*¹ by Wolfgang Borchert and the American play, *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller, each of which depict their respective country's post-war society. *Draußen vor der Tür*², includes extreme despair, guilt, a palpable lack of hope for the future, a crawling economy and the callousness of the German people. The rather bleak German culture is only highlighted by the arguably lavish post-war life the American people were living which Arthur Miller's play, *All My Sons*, is focused on. Thanks to the G.I Bill and the booming economy, the American people were generally content with their lives. Comparing these two plays is ultimately a means by which to measure the opposing post-World War II lives and mentalities of the American and German people, which can be evaluated by examining the incongruities of death, financial stability, the perception of the future and guilt within the works.

Death is obviously a crucial part of war, but it is also extremely important to the post-war climate because it exposes one of the ways that the German play differs greatly from the American play. The main character of Borchert's play, Beckmann, is a soldier who has just returned after three years in Siberia and comes home to find his wife in bed with another man. Immediately, he attempts to commit suicide by jumping in the River Elbe. After the river spits him back out, a figment of his imagination named, "Der Andere"³ attempts to convince Beckmann that life is worth living. The action of the play is centered around Beckmann visiting people while he seeks purpose, love, shelter or food. Each time he ends up with the door shut in his face as he stands outside alone, no better off than he was before. Beckmann believes death is an escape from the treacherous world that remains. The theme of death is so crucial to the overall play that he is introduced as a character in the foreword. God himself tells Death that he has it good because everyone believes in him. Nobody can avoid him. Death should be the new God because everyone worships him instead of the real God because he failed them when he did not answer their prayers during the war. He says, "Sie erschießen sich. Sie hängen sich auf. Sie ersaufen sich. Sie ermorden sich, heute hundert, morgen hunderttausend. Und ich, ich kann es nicht ändern"⁴ (Borchert 10). In this passage alone, we see that death is the most praised figure or deity in this society. People no longer have faith in God because it appears as though he has failed them. Death is dependable, and people find comfort in that fact. They could take nothing for certain, expect that death would eventually come to claim them. In order to show how busy Death has been in recent years, the work describes him as a belching, obese undertaker because he is "überfressen"⁵ with all the lives he has been claiming lately. Borchert takes away the need for interpretation

¹ The Man Outside or "outside in front of the door"

² Translations made by the author

³ The other

⁴ "They are shooting themselves, hanging themselves, drowning themselves, murdering each other. Today, a hundred, tomorrow a hundred thousand and I can do nothing to change it"

⁵ overfed

by making death a character and having God himself explain how he is unavoidable and practically worshipped.

The constant presence of death makes it so common to the German people that they are almost desensitized to it. This appears in the beginning of Borchert's work when the River Elbe rejects his suicide attempt and a young woman finds him along the riverbank. As she approaches him, she says, "Ich dachte erst, da läge ein Toter, als ich den dunklen Haufen hier am Wasser sah. Hier liegen nämlich jetzt oft Tote abends am Wasser. Die sind manchmal ganz dick und glitschig. Und so weiß wie Gespenster" (Borchert 15). She states this as if it is fact and is more shocked that Beckmann is alive rather than by the idea of a body washing up on shore.

This numbness towards death appears again at the end of the play when Beckmann himself says,

Und dann liegt er irgendwo auf der Straße, der Mann, der nach Deutschland kam, und stirbt. Früher lagen Zigarettenstummel, Apfelsinenschalen und Papier auf der Straße, heute sind es Menschen, das sagt weiter nichts. Und dann kommt ein Straßenfeger, ein deutscher Straßenfeger, in Uniform und mit roten Streifen, von der Firma Abfall und Verwesung, erfroren, liegen geblieben. Im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert. Im fünften Jahrzehnt. Auf der Strasse. In Deutschland. Und die Menschen gehen an dem Tod vorbei, achtlos, resigniert, blasiert, angeekelt und gleichgültig, gleichgültig, so gleichgültig. Und der Tote fühlt tief in seinen Traum hinein, dass sein Tod gleich war wie sein Leben: sinnlos, unbedeutend, grau. Und du-du sagst, ich soll leben! Wozu? Für wen? Für was?" (Borchert 54)⁷.

Beckmann is disgusted with how the German people treat the dead. They have no empathy for them, rather their bodies get swept up off the streets like orange peels and cigarette butts. Their corpses litter the streets, quite literally. The reader is under the assumption that these people are like Beckmann; they want to be productive members of society but aren't given a chance and, even in death, they are treated like garbage. If someone's death is perceived as such a nuisance, what does it say about their life? For many, the only welcoming figure is death, especially in Beckmann's case. He is utterly isolated from everyone he ever cared about, and by the end of the play, has no one to care whether he lives or dies. His absence in the world will affect no one, with death having just as much significance as his life: none.

Meanwhile, the American play *All My Sons*, is entirely focused on a family grieving the death of their eldest son Larry went missing in the war more than three years ago and his mother, Kate Keller, still has hope that he is alive and could return home at any moment. This hopefulness is what drastically sets Miller's play apart from Borchert's. Kate may be in denial, but she has real hope that Larry will be like one of those stories she has read in the paper, whereas, Beckmann is only twenty-five years old and has no hope for the world or his future. Larry's death mattered to people. He was loved, and still is, even though he is most likely dead. His fiancée, Ann Deever, did not marry anyone else after she found out Larry went missing. Kate Keller says, "I'll always love that girl. She's one that didn't jump into bed with somebody else as soon as it happened with her fella. [...] Most of them didn't wait until the telegrams were opened" (Miller 19). Kate mistakes Ann's celibacy for mourning and waiting for Larry to come home. Ann knows that Larry is not alive but she did not marry anyone else because she is in love with Larry's younger brother, Chris. Ann's respect for Larry's death means that she truly cared about him. Larry's death meant something to her. Death is mourned in the American play, which represents an entirely different mindset from the German people.

⁶ At first I thought there was a dead person lying there as I saw a dark heap by the water. These days, there are dead bodies here at night quite often. Sometimes they are very fat and shiny. And white as ghosts.

⁷ And then he is lying somewhere on the street, the man that came to Germany, and dies. Cigarette butts and orange peels and papers used to lay on the street, and today it is people. Then the streetsweeper comes, a German streetsweeper, in uniform with red stripes, from the waste and biodegradables company, frozen, left behind. In the twentieth century. Fifth decade. On the street. In Germany. And the people walk past the dead, carelessly, resigned, smug, disgusted, indifferent, indifferent, so indifferent. And the dead feel deeply in their dreams that their death is the same as their life, pointless, insignificant, petty, grey. And you- you say I should live! Why? For who? For what?

Larry's disappearance is not the only instance where death is an issue in this play. Twenty-one pilots died because their planes crashed due to cracked cylinder heads that were made in Joe Keller's factory. He knew those cylinder heads were cracked but did not want to slow down production, so he ordered his workers to weld over the cracks and ship the parts out anyway. When this was discovered, Joe and his partner, who just so happens to be Ann's father, Mr. Deever, went to trial. Joe used Mr. Deever as his patsy and pinned the entire cover-up scheme on him. Mr. Deever went to jail and lost everything, including the support of his family. Everyone in town knows that Joe Keller is to blame for the deaths of those pilots, and they hold that grudge with them. Ann recounts, "The last thing I remember on this block was one word-- 'MURDERERS!' Remember that, Kate?... Mrs. Hammond standing in front of our house and yelling that word... She's still around I suppose?" (Miller 30). Not much has changed since the last time Ann was home. Five years later, people are still obsessing over what Joe did. A family friend of the Keller's tells Ann,

SUE: [...] Everybody knows Joe pulled a fast one to get out of jail.

ANN: That's not true!

SUE: Then why don't you go out and talk to people? Go on, talk to them. There's not a person on the block who doesn't know the truth.

ANN: That's a lie. People come here all the time for cards and...

SUE: So what? They give him credit for being smart (Miller 45).

To the people in this town, death matters. Those twenty-one pilots were murdered by Joe Keller and they refuse to forget it. Their lives mattered just as much as their deaths, which is in direct opposition with the attitude the German people have towards death.

Death, unlike in *Draußen der Tür*, is not a main theme of *All My Sons*. Money is the central focus of the world the Keller's live in. Because Joe evaded prosecution, he is now the sole owner of the company, meaning his family is very well-off. Nothing is more important to Joe than money, not even the death of his son, Larry. He says, "Well, that's what war does. I had two sons, now I got one. It changed all the tallies. In my day when you had sons it was an honor. Today a doctor could make a million dollars if he could figure out a way to bring a boy into the world without a trigger finger" (Miller 11). In Joe's mind, stopping war and murder is not as important as the money that could be made from that discovery.

The difference in financial situations between America and Germany is arguably the largest factor separating the two societies at the time. An aspect as simple as the setting of the play gives away the astonishing divide between the German and American financial situations. *All My Sons* opens with a description of the family home. It reads, "The house is two stories high and has seven rooms. It would have cost perhaps fifteen thousand in the early twenties when it was built. Now it is nicely painted, looks tight and comfortable and the yard is green with sod, here and there plants whose season is gone" (Miller 5). The family is gathered in the back yard reading the want ads in the paper and sipping coffee. It isn't an early, sunny, Sunday morning in suburbia for Beckmann. He has no home, no family, no friends; nothing. His parents committed suicide by suffocating themselves with gas before he returned home from war. His wife cheated on him and does not want him back. His entire existence is spent in hopeless isolation with no visible way out, and the Keller's are planning their night out on the town. Everything in the American play seems so trivial compared to what Beckmann is struggling to endure.

While Germany was being split into pieces and given away to various allies, their productions were stripped, and they had no means to provide for themselves. Because of the Morgenthau Plan, America stripped Germany of their military and economic resources leaving the German economy in a virtual standstill (Judt 105). The damage that had been done to their homeland left 75% of their buildings uninhabitable, meaning that over twenty million Germans were homeless and twelve million more were refugees in other countries (Judt 17). Germany was completely broken and this fact shines through in Borchert's play. Beckmann is starving, homeless, and crippled. As if that weren't enough,

the lucky few that did have money took no pity on those who were withering away.

On several occasions, Beckmann begs for a place to lie down and something to eat, but nobody helps him. He goes to Obersts in seek of closure for what he did during the war and says to him “Thre Fenster sehen von Draußen so warm aus. Ich wollte mal wieder merken, wie das ist, durch solche Fenster zu sehen. Von innen aber, von innen. Wissen Sie, wie das ist, wenn nachts so helle warme Fenster da sind und man steht draußen?” (Borchert 21) Beckmann spent six years in Siberia fighting in the war and something as simple as seeing warm windows from the inside was denied him all that time. In an attempt to rid his guilty conscience, Beckmann tells Oberst what happens in his recurring nightmares. He tells Oberst about the millions of corpses that scream his name and blame him for their deaths, and Oberst laughs at him as if his dream were a comedy skit. Oberst tells Beckmann he is truly a hilarious man and should perform for people. Beckmann is obviously taken aback by the fact that his horrifying war experiences are funny to Oberst and he storms out. As he leaves Oberst’s house, he steals a loaf of bread off of their table because during his entire visit, they never offered him anything to eat or drink from their dinner table. Once the family realizes the bread is gone, Mutter¹⁰ asks what he wants with half a loaf of bread. The daughter points out that he probably intends to eat it, and Mutter responds, “ Ja, aber-- aber das trockene Brot?”¹¹ (Borchert 28). The mother has no grip on how much suffering is happening around her. It is shocking to her that a person would eat a dry loaf of bread, when to Beckmann it is a delicacy.

While Beckmann is sitting in a damp alleyway eating the first solid food he has had in months, in *All My Sons* the Keller family is preparing to go dancing and have dinner at the shore. Joe complains that his wife works too hard for a woman that has a maid and then tells Chris, “I’m going to build you a house, stone, with a driveway from the road. I want you to spread out, Chris. I want you to use what I made for you [...] There’s gonna be a wedding, kid, like there never was seen! Champagne, tuxedos...!” (Miller 39). Keller’s dirty money is being thrown around like candy at a Veterans Day parade and Beckmann does not have a cent to his name or a single possession that wasn’t assigned to him during the war. In the play and in reality, Americans did have a more stable financial economy than the Germans, largely due to their rampant production industry. Judt writes, “By the Spring of 1945, America accounted for half the world’s manufacturing capacity, most of its food surpluses and virtually all international financial reserves” (Judt 105). Because of America’s immigration policies, some of the brightest minds in science in technology came from Europe to America, advancing the United States far beyond any other country, leaving America with immense power and financial stability, two things Germany was sorely lacking.

The effects of political policies appear again in both plays through the ideas of education and employment. When Beckmann was nineteen, he was drafted into the war. He is trying to find a job in order to feed himself, so he goes to the theatre in the hopes that Oberst was right and his “performance” really was something people would pay to see. Direktor asks Beckmann, “Was haben Sie denn so bis jetzt gemacht?”¹² to which Beckmann answers, “Nichts. Krieg: Gehungert. Gefroren. Geschossen: Krieg. Sonst nichts!”¹³ (Borchert 31). The war defines him. Direktor then advises Beckmann to make a name for himself and learn about the world, be somebody, then come back and maybe he will give him the job. Irritated, Beckmann retorts,

8 Colonel

9 From outside, your windows look so warm. I wanted to remember what it’s like to look through those windows, but from the inside. From the inside.

Do you know what it’s like to see such bright warm windows at night when you’re standing outside?

10 Mother

11 Yes, but--but dry bread?

12 What have you done up until now?

13 Nothing. War: Starved. Frozen. Shot: War. Otherwise nothing.

“Und wo soll ich anfangen? Wo denn? Einmal muss man doch irgendwo eine Chance bekommen. Irgendwo muss doch ein Anfänger mal anfangen¹⁴” (Borchert 31). This is a prime example of how returning soldiers were treated. They weren’t viewed as heroes that deserve respect, they were nobodies. While Beckmann isn’t given a single chance, Chris comes home from the war without any crippling injuries or horror stories, in fact, “in the Battalion he was known as Mother McKeller” (Miller 24) and has an entire company waiting for him to take it over. Chris reaps the rewards of a booming American economy while Beckmann gets the door slammed in his face no matter how hard he tries to be a productive member of society.

Furthermore, the education associated with the differing countries is also drastically different in the post-war era. There was no mention of schooling or higher education in *Draußen vor der Tür*. Beckmann can’t get a job because he is a beginner with no experience, yet at Keller’s company he complains about his staff being overqualified. He gripes, “Everybody’s gettin’ so Goddamn educated in this country there’ll be nobody to take away the garbage. [They laugh] It’s gettin’ so the only dumb ones left are the bosses. [...] Go into our plant, for instance. I got so many lieutenants, majors, and colonels that I’m ashamed to ask somebody to sweep the floor. I gotta be careful I’ll insult somebody. No kiddin’. It’s a tragedy: you stand on the street today and spit, you’re gonna hit a college man (Miller 48).

This mentality is the counterpart to the way veterans are treated in Borchert’s work. Miller writes a character that will not ask his employees to sweep the floor because they deserve more respect than that. He does not want to offend them or undermine their capabilities, yet Beckmann gets told he needs to experience the world before he can be employed. Joe Keller, although exaggeratory, is correct; college graduates were abundant at this time, largely due to the success of the G.I. Bill. The G.I. Bill was the foundation for remarkable American growth. It gave eight million veterans education assistance, more than two million of those received a college education that was paid in full, and it allowed over two million to buy new homes with the discounted loans provided by the G.I. Bill (Winkler). Other than the fact that since World War II was not fought on American soil, therefore there was no structural rebuilding to do, this bill is arguably the main reason the American society was much more privileged and optimistic.

There was very little optimism in Borchert’s play, especially in regards to the future. He has no desire to live because he feels there is no hope in the world. The figment of his imagination, *Der Andere*, tries to convince him to give living another chance. He says, “Diene Straße wartet. Und hin und wieder kommen Laternen. Bist du so feige, dass du Angst hast vor der Finsternis zwischen zwei Laternen? Willst du nur Laternen haben? Komm, Beckmann, weiter, bis zur nächsten Laterne.¹⁵” *Der Andere*’s encouragement fails. Beckmann replies, “Ich habe Hunger, du. Mich friert, hörst du. Ich kann nicht mehr stehen, du, ich bin müde. Mach eine Tür auf, du. Ich habe Hunger! Die Straße ist finster, und alle Türen sind zu!¹⁶” (Borchert 39). The bleakness of Beckmann’s situation makes it impossible to see any hope that may lie ahead. He has no hope for the future. He wants to die and escape the world where people look on corpses with contempt, wives cheat on their husbands, where no one gives beginners a chance and people laugh at his terrifying experiences in the war.

The opposite can be said for the characters in *All My Sons*, specifically Chris. He is the foil to Beckmann’s character. Chris has his whole life ahead of him and the opportunity to acquire everything Beckmann desires; food, love, shelter, a future. Chris tells his father, “If I have to grub for money all day long at least at evening I want it beautiful. I want a family, I want some kids. I want to build

14 And where should I start? Where? Somewhere someone must be given one chance. A beginner has to be given the chance to begin somewhere.

15 Your street awaits. Time and again lanterns come. Are you so cowardly that you are scared of the darkness between lanterns? Do you want only lanterns? Come, Beckmann, onward. On to the next lantern.

16 I am hungry. I am freezing, listen to me. I cannot stand anymore. I am tired. Open a door. I am hungry! The street is sinister and all doors are closed.

something I can give myself to” (Miller 16). Chris has the ability to see what he wants to achieve and where he wants his life to go. He wants to marry Ann, move to New York if he decides he does not want to take over the family business. He has the resources to make all these aspirations come true. Beckmann has no means by which to find a job, a home, love, a purpose. He is hopeless, and for good reason. He is faced with the task of rebuilding his entire life, just as Germany is faced with the task of building up from the rubble and starting from the beginning.

Just as Germany and America’s economies and mindsets differed after the war, so do these two texts. However, as opposing as these may seem, they are both categorized as post-war literature because of more than just their dates of composition. There are some common aspect within the two works, specifically the notion of guilt as a driving plot point. Beckmann goes to Oberst to give him his “verantwortung¹⁷” back. He explains,

Haben Sie das ganz vergessen, Herr Oberst? Den 14. Februar? Bei Gorodok. Es waren 42 Grad Kalte. Da kamen Sie doch in unsere Stellung, Herr Oberst, und sagten: Unteroffizier Beckmann [...] ich übergebe Ihnen die Verantwortung für die zwanzig Mann. Sie erkunden den Wald östlich Gorodok¹⁸ und machen nach Möglichkeit ein paar Gefangene, klar? [...] Und dann sind wir losgezogen und haben erkundet. Und ich-ich hatte die Verantwortung. Dann haben wir die ganze Nacht erkundet, und dann wurde geschossen, und als wir wieder in der Stellung waren, da fehlte elf Mann. Und ich hatte die Verantwortung¹⁹ (Borchert 25).

Beckmann has those eleven deaths on his conscience and because of the immense guilt he feels for losing those men, he goes to Oberst to give him that responsibility back. He has these gruesome nightmares of millions of bloody, shriveled corpses screaming his name, which keeps him from sleeping. All he wants is to give back the responsibility and the guilt so that he can finally get some rest. He asks Oberst, “Wieviel sind es bei Ihnen, Herr Oberst? Tausend? Zweitausend? Schlafen Sie gut, Herr Oberst? Dann macht es Ihnen wohl nichts aus, wenn ich Ihnen zu den zweitausend noch die Verantwortung für meine elf dazugebe²⁰” (Borchert 26). All he wants is to sleep. Finally, the guilt of those eleven deaths and the news of his parents’ suicide becomes too much for Beckmann and he kills himself.

A similar situation occurs in the Keller household. Joe Keller carries immense guilt with him, but not for the obvious reasons of causing the deaths of twenty-one pilots of framing his best friend for what he did, but rather for being responsible for Larry’s death. In a letter Larry wrote to Ann, he admits,

Yesterday they flew in a load of papers from the States and I read about Dad and your father being convicted. I can’t express myself. I can’t tell you how I feel--I can’t bear to live anymore. How could he have done that? Every day three or four men never come back and he sits back there doing business. [...] I’m going out on a mission in a few minutes. They’ll probably report me missing. If they do, I want you to know that you mustn’t wait for me. I tell you, Ann, if I had him here now I could kill him (Miller 83).

When Joe found out that Larry really never went missing, but killed himself because of the unbearable anger and shame he felt for him and that his family no longer supported him, Joe could not take it. He went into the house to call the police and turn himself in for sending out those cracked cylinder heads, but he shot himself instead. In the end, the money did not matter. The new refrigeration

¹⁷ responsibility

¹⁸ Gorodok, Russia

¹⁹ Did you forget, Colonel? The fourteenth of February? In Gorodok? It was 42 degrees below. You came to our camp, Colonel, and said, Petty Officer Beckmann [...] I am giving you the responsibility of taking twenty men to scout of the forest East of Gorodok and if possible capture some prisoners, am I clear? [...] And then we left and we searched, and then we were fired at, and once we reached camp again we were missing eleven men. And I had the responsibility.

²⁰ How many is it for you, Colonel? A thousand? Two-thousand? Do you sleep well, Colonel? Then it won’t matter to you if I add the responsibility for my eleven to your two-thousand.

and car made no difference. The guilt consumed Joe just as it did the penniless Beckmann. Joe's only consolation was that his faulty parts did not kill Larry, because Larry never flew P-40's, but ultimately, Joe's greed and cowardice killed Larry by proxy.

Borchert highlights the idea of *Die Deutsche Wahrheit*²¹ but mentioning it directly during the multiple interactions Beckmann has with other characters. In the German play, and therefore in post-war German society, nobody wants to talk about the truth anymore. In this case, the "truth" the Germans want to avoid is not that of the concentration camps, because the evidence and facts about what really happened there had not yet been released to the public, but rather the truth about how awful life was after the war came to an end. Beckmann is just now returning home from Siberia because he was being held as a prisoner of war. It has taken him many years to get home, and in that time, everyone else began starting their lives over. They have moved on, but Beckmann has just begun to come to terms with how little of his former life remains. When the people in the play see Beckmann with his prisoners hair cut and his gas mask glasses, it reminds them of the struggles they endured right after the war and they want to ignore it. They want to ignore the truth, and by closing the door in Beckmann's face repeatedly, that is how they shut out the truth.

An example of Beckmann, and thereby the German truth, being pushed aside can be found in the conversation between Beckmann and the Direktor. After the Direktor tells Beckmann that he will not give him a job at the theatre and that he should wait another year. When he tells the Direktor that he can't wait because he needs a job to feed himself. The director replies, "Ja, aber Kunst muss reifen. Ihr Vortrag ist noch ohne Eleganz und Erfahrung. Das ist alles zu grau, zu nackt. Sie machen mir ja das Publikum böse. Nein, wir können die Leute nicht mit Schwarzbrot füttern, wenn sie Biskuit verlangen. Gedulden Sie sich noch. Arbeiten Sie an sich, feilen Sie, reifen Sie. Dies ist schon ganz brav, wie gesagt, aber es ist noch keine Kunst²²" (Borchert 33). Beckmann then explains that it's not art, it's the truth, to which the Direktor replies, "Mit der Wahrheit hat die Kunst nichts zu tun! [...] Mit der Wahrheit kommen Sie nicht weit. Wo kämen wir hin, wenn alle Leute plötzlich die Wahrheit sagen wollten! Wer will denn heute von der Wahrheit wissen?²³" (Borchert 33) Essentially, the Direktor tells Beckmann that the people do not want something dark and depressing, but sweet and uplifting. Truth and art are two separate things because nobody wants the truth. The German people do not want to dwell on the horrors of post-war life anymore, but rather avoid it at all costs.

Arthur Miller projects his own idea of the American truth in *All My Sons*. The American truth seems to be that all the houses, cars, and college educations in the world cannot erase the aftermath of the war. Having money does not erase the unforgivable things Joe Keller did during the war. Despite the fact that Kate Keller had a maid, a nice house and all the food she could want, she still struggles with the loss of her son, Larry. Chris has every opportunity to make lots of money with the family business and live a happy life with Ann Deever, but must still cope with the guilt of the deaths of almost every man of the company he was in command of. What Kate Keller says holds true in both the German and American society, "Honest to God, it breaks my heart to see what happened to all the children. How we worked and planned for you, and you end up no better than us" (Miller 58). No amount of financial success separates the Keller family from Beckmann. They all suffer from guilt, loss, and despair. The American truth is that behind all the money, people are still unhappy and struggling. The Keller's clearly aren't the "Holy Family" (Miller 45) that their neighbors refer to them as. In reality, that white picket fence and the fancy cars is only a mirage to distract everyone from the disfunction that lies behind it.

²¹ The German truth

²² Yes, but art has to mature first. Your performance lacks elegance and experience. It is all too gray, too bare. You will anger my audience. No, we cannot feed the people black bread when they demand biscuits. Be patient. Work on yourself. Smooth out the edges, and grow up. This is not bad, like I said, but it is not art yet.

²³ Truth has nothing to do with art. You will not get far with the truth. Where would we be if everyone suddenly wanted to tell the truth! Today, who wants to know the truth?

Both cultures, although very different in terms of how these two examples of Post-War literature display death, financial stability, the perception of the future and guilt, are similar in the fact that despite these oppositions, both Beckmann and Joe Keller committed suicide in the end. Beckmann ends his life because nobody will speak the truth, but Keller kills himself because the truth about him was finally exposed. Neither society wants to admit their wrong doings or revel in the horrors that ensued during the war and the Post-War era. The German truth is concealed behind closed doors no matter how many times Beckmann knocks and the American truth hidden is behind money and false happiness regardless of how many times Joe denies denies involvement.

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The Symbolism of Birds: The Roles of Plumage, Behavior, Flight, and Song

Sarah Miller

Found even in the most inhospitable of regions, from the frozen tundra of Antarctica, to the scorching heat of the Sahara, birds are truly a biological marvel. They have long enamored humankind with their vibrant plumage and constant liveliness. Avian species are capable of performing amazing feats of flight every migratory season, when they have a mass exodus to warmer climates. Another marvel of the bird is its song, which is often inspirational, and a bright reminder of springtime and new life. The otherworldliness of the avian species has caused humanity to attribute more to birds than just their physical characteristics. Peter Watkins said that birds were “messengers of spontaneity and grace, a vivid symbol of the freedoms to which humankind aspires” (Watkins ix). Indeed, the existence of a species with great variability in color and song, and the ability to fly high overhead, has been very influential in the mythology and folklore of humanity.

Early civilizations did not have the level of scientific knowledge that is readily available in modern times. They did, however, possess the scientific mindset of observers of nature. Many of the myths and fables involving birds are directly based on what people saw, or believed they saw. The observations were often faulty, but they did lead to some very amusing stories and misconceptions, such as the belief that small birds rode on the backs of larger birds during migration. This myth was based on the kingfisher, an aggressive bird that would latch onto the backs of large birds of prey in order to dissuade them from returning to the kingfisher’s nesting area again (Hudson 23). Misconceptions like these find their way into the mindsets of people, and eventually into their stories. Birds are common in mythology and religion, because past civilizations of people connected them to their belief in deities. One author explains this by saying, “Birds – which seemed to belong to the celestial spaces overhead where the gods manifested their variable moods, were inspired messengers of the gods, and required reverent attention” (Ingersoll 212). The ability to soar above the other species on earth is awe-inspiring and earned birds their seat in prominent places in nearly all religions.

Birds are also used as symbols because they are common in every environment on earth and have awe-inspiring characteristics. Ernest Ingersoll noticed that “Certain kinds of birds have become symbols of popular ideas, or even significant badges of persons and events, and are thus more or less conventionalized accessories in art, by reason of their appearance (form, color), or their habits, or their connection with some historic incident or fabulous tale” (Ingersoll 127). Authors write about the birds they are familiar with, whether through observation, religion, or the works of other authors. They then use this knowledge in their own writing when using a bird as a symbol for a concept, mood, or theme. The symbolism of birds in literature and mythology is based on observations, not always correct, of their plumage, song, behavior, and flight.

Some species of birds are more prevalent in literature and mythology than others. This is due to multiple reasons, the most notable of which are the range of the species, how they interact with humankind, and how easily they can be differentiated from other species. Any hobbyist can tell apart a hawk and a sparrow, but it takes true knowledge of birds to determine if the bird is a song sparrow or a tree sparrow. For the purposes of this paper, the species of birds have been generalized. It is not always stated clearly in literature which exact species of bird is being referred to, and the nomenclature of modern times did not come about until the early 1800s. Mythology and folklore involving birds is based on knowledge gained visually and audibly. Consequently, birds that were more vivacious, large, colorful, or loud were observed more frequently. Because species names were often unknown or

unspecified, birds in literature are more often than not categorized into generic groups, such as black-birds, songbirds, ducks, and birds of prey. If a bird was noticeable or important enough to be called by name, it was due to some outstanding quality or qualities. From these criteria, a few species arise that are more common than others in literature and mythology. This paper focuses on the symbolism surrounding canaries, nightingales, owls, swans, doves, and ravens.

Canaries are in the family of birds classified as songbirds. They usually have distinctive bright feathers, oftentimes yellow, which is uncommon in European and North American birds. They are very small, and weigh only a few ounces, making them easy to handle. Canaries are one of the species of birds most frequently kept as pets, due in part to their vibrant color. Unlike the other birds that will be discussed, when referred to in literature the canary does not mean a wild bird, but instead the domesticated bird that has been bred to be a light lemon color. Due to breeding, and because it is a songbird, the canary has a sweet temperament and does well indoors and will continue to sing even when in a cage.

In the play *Trifles*, by Susan Glaspell, the character Minnie Wright had a pet canary. The canary was symbolic of life and happiness, and when Mr. Wright snapped the neck of the canary Minnie took his life, by strangling him. When the women from town search the house for clues, Mrs. Peters states that it “seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why would she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it” (Glaspell 90). The extermination of the life of the colorful little bird also ended two lives, Mr. Wright’s by strangling, and Mrs. Wright’s by metaphorical suffocation. The bird was the only light and joy in her life, and it is what kept her sane until the point when she snapped. Canaries are described as “happy birds that spread joy and a sense of well-being” (Mascarenhas). In *Trifles* they have the power to determine the quality of life for one woman. The story would have been much different if a raven or dove was the pet bird, and only a canary can evoke the emotions of a vivacious ball of light encased with feathers.

Canaries have one of the most chipper songs in the bird kingdom. The song is described as a “bright per-chick-o-ree, also rendered as potato-chips, delivered in flight and coinciding with each undulation” (Audubon). The notes are fast paced and varying, and full of joy. One writer said, “One cannot listen to the full song of a characteristic singer without laughing involuntarily at the unmistakable glee in which it is executed” (Mathews 79). Indeed, the notes of a canary’s song make it one of the most enjoyable finches. It is fitting that a group of finches is called a “charm” (Watkins xiii). The happiness delivered in its song is what makes the canary a favorite pet. In *Trifles*, Minnie Wright’s canary was symbolic of her character. They were both kept in cages that they could only escape through death. They both used to be lively and sing beautifully before being trapped in a literal cage, or the confines of marriage (Glaspell 90). The symbolism of a canary is often feminine because of their bright plumage and high pitched warbling song.

Canaries are one of the most active and vivacious species of songbirds. When searching for food they “forage actively in weeds, shrubs, and trees, often climbing about acrobatically on plants such as thistles to reach the seeds” (Audubon). The small birds have a lot of energy in one small package. Their bright plumage and trilling song add to their liveliness, which is what attracts people to purchase them as pets. As seen in *Trifles*, the presence of the canary in the home can add some happiness to everyday life. Overall, the song of the canary seems to have the most sway over its symbolism of joy and life. When the bird in the play is killed, its feathers are still bright. It is the extinguishing of its song that causes the most pain for Millie Wright.

The nightingale is also a member of the songbird family, and may in fact be the most well-known for its song. The range of the nightingale spans Europe and Asia, but it is not found in the Americas. This limits the amount of literature it is found in, because it is not present in many cultures. It is a drab looking bird, smallish in size, with no distinctive markings or colors. In fact, the nightingale would be almost invisible were it not for its habit of singing complex songs nearly continually, even after dark. The nightingale has become symbolic of heartbreak and longing, as well as worship

and love.

Nightingales are the central jewel in the crown of birdsongs. More than any other bird, they are praised for their song above all else. According to Audubon, the nightingale “frequently sings at night as well as during the day,” which is how the name came about. “The song is loud, with an impressive range of whistles, trills and gurgles. The most characteristic feature of the song is a loud whistling crescendo” (Audubon). There is no set pattern to the song of the nightingale, which makes it seem as if the bird is singing simply out of enjoyment. This theory on its ceaseless song led to the bird becoming a symbol of worship. Watkins summarized, “the nightingale’s constant urge to sing illustrated how worship should perpetually ascend to God” (Watkins 192). The nightingale also came to represent men suffering heartbreak. A lovesick man was the bird, and the woman they sought was the rosebush that was full of thorns. When the nightingale would come too close to the beautiful roses it would be pierced by the thorns. This theme was common in Renaissance literature, as well as the symbolism of the nightingale as the poet. “The poets saw the nightingale as a natural representation of the poet’s condition and inspiration” (“Birds in Literature”). To be endlessly lost in song came to mean many things, including a creative mind, a worshipful spirit, and a lovesick heart.

The nightingale is also a symbol for love and tragedy in mythology. In Greek mythology there is a story about a girl named Philomela, who was raped by her sister’s husband. In the aftermath, all of the characters were turned into birds, Philomela becoming the nightingale. Because of this myth, the nightingale in literature is used to represent sorrow and a song of lament. Alfred Tennyson sought to break this stereotype, in poetry specifically, and claimed that the nightingale sang a happy song. He wrote, “We may not thus profane Nature’s sweet voices always full of love and joyance! Tis the merry Nightingale” (Tennyson). Tennyson believed that nature was beautiful without all the personification and symbolism added to it. The endless singing of the nightingale has led to many interpretations, but the song is beautiful nonetheless. The nightingale’s song is also said to drive away evil. In Hans Christian Andersen’s story, *The Nightingale*, the sweet bird attends to the dying emperor of China and drives away death with her song. Andersen writes, “And as she sung, the shadows grew paler and paler; the blood in the emperor’s veins flowed more rapidly, and gave life to his weak limbs; and even Death himself listened, and said, ‘Go on, little nightingale, go on’” (Andersen). It is the song of the nightingale, above all else, that secures its symbolism of extreme passions of the heart. Be it worshipping God, pining over an unobtainable love, or reveling in the beauty of life and literature, the song of the nightingale can encompass the emotion, whether positive or negative.

Owls are unlike both the canary and the nightingale, in that they cannot sing. They instead have two sounds, the hoot and the screech. Neither sound is particularly pleasant. Owls are large, solitary birds that hunt mainly at night. They have sharp talons and beaks, as well as modified wing feathers that allow them to fly in near silence. The predatory role and solitary behavior of owls led to an interesting combination for their symbolism. In Greek mythology, the owl is the symbol of Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war, and owls were seen as both bad omens and intelligent messengers.

During the night, the sounds of the owl are reminders of death. In a children’s rhyme titled “Death and Burial of Cock Robin”, a group of birds holds a funeral for their dear friend. The author described the actions of the owl;

“Who’ll dig his grave?
I, said the Owl,
With my pick and shovel,
I’ll dig his grave.” (Opie 112)

In this rhyme the owl seems to embrace death, and be comfortable with it. They are also described by their flight and raptorial status. Owls have very distinctive wings, with primary feathers that are tufted and allow them to fly with little to no sound. This aids them in hunting at night, when they “watch from high perch, then swoop down to capture prey in their talons” (Audubon). Their near silence coupled with a heightened sense of sight and smell makes them a “tiger among birds” (Mathews 13). The

haunted owl symbol that is connected to witches and all things mysterious is “because it is a feared night hunter”, that flies silently through the night much like the witch (Hudson 59). In Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors*, a character says, “We talk with goblins, owls and sprites” (Shakespeare, 1.2.127). This series offers insight on how the owl was perceived, which was as an otherworldly creature. Goblins and sprites were frightening and crept about at night. Because of limited knowledge on owls, their nocturnal hunting on silent wings made them seem like ghosts and led to them becoming a bad omen and symbol of misfortune.

The calls, habits, and diet of owls all lead to their status of an omen of bad luck. The sounds of an owl are interpreted as eerie and haunted, and are symbolic of negative emotions. The owl is seen as a sign of misfortune in many cultures and mythologies, potentially because of their nocturnal habits, but also due to their status as a bird of prey. Owls eat smaller birds. One writer described, “They are raptorial, and their voices convey to the ear a very tolerable idea of their character” (Mathews 10). The theory behind this quote is that owls are a “bad bird” and they do not fall into the same category as the beloved songbirds with bright colors and lively songs. The screech of an owl may sound blood-curling, but the hoot sounds a question and conveys knowledge. Hudson states, “Listening by night to their concert, the many notes that come from far and near, human-like, yet airy, delicate, mysterious, one could imagine that the sounds had a meaning and a message to us” (Hudson 61). As often occurs in mythology, a story was created to explain the phenomena of the owl’s inability to sing.

A Spanish legend claims that “the owl was once the sweetest of singers; but that, having been present when Jesus died, from that moment it has shunned daylight, and now only repeats in a harsh tone Cruz! Cruz!” (Ingersoll 112). This story implies that the owl is important enough to be at the crucifixion, and intelligent enough to understand and mourn the event. The owl is also popular as a symbol in literature. In Shakespeare, King Henry exclaims to Gloucester, “The Owl shriek’d at thy birth - an evil sign” (Shakespeare, 1.3.47). This was a curse to his foe who was trying to kill him, because the shriek of an owl was one of the most telling sounds of death or misfortune. It was sometimes thought that owls were predictors of death, or even the cause. For this reason they were often associated with witches, who were also thought to possess the ability to curse their enemies. While the owl can neither give wisdom nor predict death, it still remains a symbol of all things haunted.

Of all the characteristics of the owl, the screech is the most damning. Although people are leery of nocturnal creatures, the nightingale is also active at night, but it is seen as a symbol for love and worship instead of death. This leaves the voice of the owl, because its plumage is nothing remarkable to create legends about. The owl’s screech has a legend all to itself to explain why the bird does not sing, and hearing an owl is considered an ill omen just as certainly as seeing one. Much like the nightingale, the owl has been categorized symbolically by its voice. However, the symbolism of birds is not limited to perching songbirds.

The swan is one of the largest waterfowl, and is very conspicuous both in the air and in the water. The swan has snowy white plumage, enormous white wings, and a long neck which it uses to forage underwater. Their feathers are extremely soft and were once commonly used for down in clothing and pillows. Swans are monogamous, and usually mate for life. They are some of the most dedicated parents, because young are dependent on them for more than 3 months after hatching (Audubon). Overall, they have positive symbolism. One writer states, “Swans, with their beautiful white features, refer to inherent spirituality, the purity of soul, and innocence” (Mascarenhas). They are most commonly used as a symbol of love and femininity. The swan frequents poetry and Shakespeare as an example of mortality. The death of a swan in literature is usually a tragedy because a beautiful creature has reached the end of its fleeting life.

Contrary to some beliefs, swans cannot sing. The swan song that they supposedly sing when they are dying is a myth. Swans only have two sounds, calling and hissing. The call of a swan is often called a bugle or trumpet, because of its loud, lower pitched, two note sound. They use this sound to communicate to each other when in flight. Because of their graceful bodies and romanticized symbol-

ism, literature has attributed to swans the mythical ability to sing in their last moments of life. Tennyson writes of this song;

The wild swan's death-hymn took the soul
Of that waste place with joy

Hidden in sorrow: at first to the ear

The warble was low, and full and clear. (Tennyson 21-24)

The song of the dying swan has been inspirational in not only literature, but also ballet. It was assumed that such a beautiful, graceful bird could not go its entire life only creating loud clashing sounds, and so the song was created. The mythical lament of a swan better fits the image of the majestic animal that symbolizes love and purity than a bugle-sounding call.

Although there is a lot of mythology based on the song of the swan, it is not rooted in facts. The myth most likely is based on a combination of observations on plumage and mating habits. Of these, the white plumage of the swan seems to be the leading factor for their symbolism. White is the symbol of purity and youth, and is the perfect color to represent innocence and femininity. A bird with similar symbolism to the swan is the dove.

The dove in literature and myth symbolizes love and purity. Its downy plumage is usually shades of white to tan, and the markings on some species of doves have metallic sheens. The most common form of the dove in symbolism is the white dove, which “has always been a figure of purity by reason, no doubt, of its whiteness, as of unstained snow or light” (Ingersoll 140). The purity of the white dove has led to its use as a symbol for holiness, specifically in the Christian religion. Doves became a symbol for the Holy Spirit, specifically from the book of Matthew, where it is said that the Spirit of God “descended like a dove” (New International Version Bible, Matthew 3.16). The dove is also used as a symbol of love in the Bible. In Song of Solomon the lovers eyes are described as doves. Doves are also symbolic of love in Greek mythology, where they are the symbol of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The ring of dark feathers around the neck on some species of doves is seen as its chain, because it is viewed as a servant of love (Ingersoll 130). The light colors of the dove are important in its symbolism of love, purity, and holiness that is seen in literature.

The song of the dove is described as a “low mournful coo-ah, coo, coo, coo” (Audubon). The mourning dove received its name from its sad song, which is memorable because the notes are usually heard at dusk and dawn, when there are not as many other sounds. In the silence the song of a dove sounds very ethereal, and also slightly haunted. The tormented call of the dove led to the belief that it was a sad spirit. One name for a group of the birds is a “piteousness of doves”, meaning that they arouse pity or compassion (Watkins xiii). In the Bible, doves were offered as sacrifices to atone for sins. Only animals that were viewed as clean were acceptable sacrifices, and the dove was representative of the Holy Spirit. The consoling tones of doves aided in their use as sacrificial animals, along with their docile nature. Besides the mournful tone, the dove has come to represent all positive things. “The dove has embodied beauty, hope, gentleness, peace, and love in the world” (Watkins 35). The sad song can be caused by extreme beauty and hope, a plea for peace, or a lament for lost love. The symbols attributed to the dove are directly correlated with its mournful song.

Also in Genesis, Noah releases a dove to search for land. The first time it returned and had found nothing, so seven days later it was released again. This time it returned with an olive branch, so Noah knew that there was land. The third time the dove was released it did not return, which meant that there was somewhere to land (Genesis 8.8-12). A white dove holding an olive branch became the symbol of peace, and of God's promise to never again flood the earth. As stated by one author, “The early Christians appropriated the dove, and transformed it into a symbol of the love of God and of the Holy Spirit” (Willette). The behavior of the dove in the story is easy to understand, because doves are very docile creatures that will return to a single roosting area. They are in the same family of birds as homing pigeons, and behave similarly. The dove is considered holy in many religions due to its behavior and the stories it is included in. The roosting habits of the dove led to thinking such as, “Any bird

that seeks its rest and makes its nest about temples and holy buildings must not be disturbed” (Ingersoll 135). The religious connotations of doves made them a perfect candidate for the symbol of love and peace in literature. For example, Shakespeare refers to the dove many times in his works, comparing them to demure female figures, young love, and piety. One example of the dove as a symbol of love is shown in *Henry VI*, when a couple is described as inseparable, like a pair of turtle doves;

“Like to a pair of loving turtle-doves,

That could not live asunder day or night” (Shakespeare, 2.2.59).

Doves are monogamous, and raise their young as a pair. They can have up to six successful broods, or nests in a year. The mating habits and roosting habits of the dove adds to its strength as a symbol of love and fertility, as well as purity.

The symbolism of the dove is a combination of its mournful song and light color. Combined together, these create some of the most emotional symbols, such as love in the religious sense rather than the romantic sense of the swan. The white color also symbolizes peace, which is aided by the cooing sound of the dove, because it is very somber and non-confrontational. Doves are homebodies and family birds, and their behavior sets them up as symbols of fertility and promise, as seen in the story of Noah. The plumage color and song of the dove seem to have the largest impact on its symbolism.

One of the most prominent birds in literature is the raven. It can be viewed as the antithesis to the dove. Ravens are the largest of the birds classified as perching birds, known as passerines. They stand out not only due to their imposing size, but also their piercing calls and shadowy color. While there are many types of blackbirds, none rival the raven in wingspan and beak size. In fact, the raven is closer in size to a chicken than it is the rest of the passerine songbirds. They are inquisitive in nature and one of the most intelligent species, causing them to be both clever and playful. Ravens are generally found alone or in pairs, and occasionally in small flocks. When in a group, they work together to find food, and are often very playful (Audubon). Ravens are one of the most interesting birds to observe.

The color of ravens makes them stand out in the snow of their northern habitat. The raven is a perfect example of the color black being symbolic of death and all things evil. One author states on the nature of dark birds, “When they were black..., or were cruel night-prowlers, or uttered disconsolate cries, they were thought to be inhabited by dread, malignant spirits” (Ingersoll 25). Also, because of its dark color it was associated with demonic things, which led to mythology and folklore such as that of Yorkshire, where parents threatened children with the maxim to behave or “the raven will get you” (Watkins 136). Black colored birds pervade literature as dark figures of terror including. In the familiar nursery rhyme, “Sing a Song of Sixpence”, the maid is in a garden hanging laundry when, “down came a black bird and pecked off her nose” (Opie 57). This children’s rhyme is dark enough to require an alternate happy ending where the nose is sewn back on. Birds with dark feathers had negative connotations in societies, which entered into the stories that they told and the literature that they wrote.

The raven does not have a song, and instead pierces the silence with its strange, noisy calls. The call of a raven is described as a “deep, varied, guttural croaking; a hollow wonk-wonk” (Audubon). The most significant characteristic of the raven’s call is its ability to sound humanlike. Hudson describes; “The Supreme Artist had fashioned it with bold, free lines out of the blue-black rock, he smote upon it with his mallet and bade it live and speak; and its voice when it spoke was in accord with its appearance and temper – the savage, human-like croak, and the loud, angry bark, as if a deep-chested man had barked like a blood hound” (Hudson 168-169). The croaking sound of the raven, as well as the vocalizations of birds in the parrot family, led to interesting beliefs in the calls of birds, mainly that they could speak and understand language. “Traditions in all parts of the world agree that every bird had this power once on a time if not now” (Ingersoll 3). Ravens have the ability to imitate male human voices, as well as other creatures such as dogs. This ability comes into play in literature, specifically in Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Raven*.

The speaker of Poe’s poem has lost his love to death, and is shut-in and mourning for her when

a tapping is heard at the door. At first nothing is to be seen outside, but after another round of tapping it is discovered that the noise is coming from a raven. Throughout the poem, the raven speaks one word repeatedly, and that is “nevermore”. The word drives the narrator insane, because it brings finality to his broken heart. The raven in the poem is described as ghastly, a nightmare, and a prophet;

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—
Is there—is there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!”
Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.” (Poe 85-90)

Poe used a raven because it was already synonymous with death, and made for the perfect imagery of a prophet of the devil. The raven plagues the narrator with only one word, which at first is dismissed as having been learned by an ill-natured master. As time passes and the raven continues repeating its message, the word seems to sink in and send the narrator into despair. Doubtless, the delivery of the message had something to do with its impact. Had a parrot or other colorful bird said “nevermore” it would not have sent fear and dread into the narrator’s heart. It was the croak of the raven’s voice that aided in the delivery, which paired with its “grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore” to make it a truly frightening messenger (Poe 44).

Symbolism of birds was highly based on observations of their behavior. For the raven, these observations included a large dark bird, jealously guarding its meals of carrion. This type of observation led to the belief that the raven brings misfortune. It was believed that ravens did not care for their own young, and that they fought each other frequently. In actuality, ravens are some of the most dedicated birds in the avian community. They are monogamous and spend most of their time in mating pairs, searching for food and building a nest as a team. However, there are some habits of the bird that earned it the group term of “an unkindness of ravens” (Watkins xiii). They are opportunistic eaters, and will eat young chicks of other bird species. Also, because of their status as scavengers, ravens frequent battlefields and are seen as omens of death because of their association with war. Watkins referred to the birds as “carrion eaters of high intelligence” (Watkins 136). The birds were further demonized because they eat the eyes of their prey first. One author explains, ravens have a “habit of deliberately revealing the whereabouts of deer, so that wolves can find their quarry, and leave spoils, which the ravens could eat” (Puplett). Their roles as spies and battlefield observers led to their prominence in Norse Mythology. Odin, the All-Father of the Nordic gods, had two ravens, Hugin and Munin, who were spies for him. Their names stood for thought and mind respectively, and they “symbolized his ability to see into the future” (Ingersoll 72). Odin gouged out one of his own eyes as a sacrifice to obtain more wisdom, so it is fitting that his symbol is the raven, a bird that also removes eyes. Ravens are often seen as prophetic, most likely due to their extreme intelligence and their association with Odin.

Ravens are also present in the Bible, during the story of Noah and the flood. In Genesis the Bible states, “After forty days Noah opened a window he had made in the ark and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth” (Genesis 8.6-7). The raven did not perform the duties it was supposed to, which were to look for land then return to the ark. Because of this, some people believed the raven was cursed by Noah to only eat carrion from then on (Ingersoll 100). Despite its intelligence, the raven did not perform as expected. Since the times of ancient literature, the raven has become a negative symbol, usually relating to death or misfortune.

The raven has a strange habit of playing during flight. As described by Hudson, they “tumble down, as if wounded, when two or more are seen toying with each other in the air” (Hudson 162). The playful habit is unique to only a few species of birds, and it became a part of the folklore of the raven. The birds became known as tricksters, which can be seen in the Native American fable, Raven and the Box of Daylight. In this story, the raven tricks his way into the household of the old man who possess-

es all light in a box, and plots to steal the light. The story goes; “The Raven quickly took the box and rolled it about until he had it outside. Then dashing the box to pieces, he took the sun in his beak and placed it in the sky, where it has been giving light to the world ever since” (Morgan). The symbol of ravens as tricksters arises from their high levels of intelligence, as well as their playfulness when in flight.

Raven symbolism is due to a combination of plumage color, their hoarse call, and their playful and cunning nature. Of these, their intelligence and voice combined, which gives them a slight ability to speak, is the most impactful on their symbolism. It pervades Biblical literature, as well as mythologies from different parts of the world. The raven’s superior intelligence gives it one of the largest roles in mythology above any other bird species, because it becomes a character. While other birds symbolize concepts just by being referenced, the raven is often a manifestation of the concept, such as the symbol of death in Poe’s *The Raven*, or the actual trickster in *Raven and the Box of Daylight*.

Plumage, song, behavior, and flight play important roles in the symbolism attached to species of birds. Not all birds have distinguishing characteristics in all of these categories, but sometimes the presence of just one unique characteristic is enough to leave an impression in the mind of the observer. Oftentimes, one characteristic stands out above the others as the reasoning behind the symbolism. The most common case of this is in bird song, as seen with the canary, nightingale, owl, dove, and raven. As explained by Dossenbach, “Be its plumage ever so beautiful and its flight ever so marvelous, it is the song of the bird, above all, that gladdens the hearts of men” (Dossenbach 27). No creature sings as much as birds do, and even when they are hidden their song can still reach the ears of humanity and plant the seeds of legends that will last for thousands of years. Birds as symbols are still used today due to “the fruitful influence of story-tellers and poets who utilized ancient legends and beliefs for literary advantage” (Ingersoll 27). The symbolism of birds in literature still persists today, and they will remain a versatile literary construct for many more works to come.

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Grace

Rachel Redolf

As the sun slowly sinks below the majestic mountains, vivid colors splay out across the wide Colorado sky. A light breeze comes and ruffles the piece of fabric on my lap, reminding me of my long-neglected sewing project. With a sigh, I pick up my needle and thread. I set my rocking chair going again with a slight push of my slippered foot. From my perch on my front porch, I can see the golden fields of wheat, ripe for harvest. The well-worn dirt road in front of my cottage leads into Blythe, a small town nestled in the crook of the Rocky Mountains. As my needle works its way in and out of the pale calico, I try to savor the warmth of the evening. Soon the harsh winter will make sitting outside nearly impossible. Putting my sewing back into my lap, I slowly close my eyes, basking in the dwindling rays of sunshine.

“Hiya Widow Mitchell!”

My eyes quickly snap open and I see little Tommy Baker scurrying by. I lift my hand in a wave and form a smile.

“Hello Tommy! Would you like to come in for a piece of pie? I have blackberry – your favorite.”

His feet come to an abrupt halt. “Oh gee Widow Mitchell, I wish I could. But Ma says I gotta get home ‘afore dark or else I’ll get a whoopin’.”

I chuckle lightly. “Well I certainly don’t want to hold you up then. Say hello to your folks for me”.

“Yes ma’am!” He takes off again, this time at an even faster pace than before.

As I watch him disappear around a curve in the road, I lean back into my chair and resume my sewing. Tears slowly well-up in my eyes. Although it has been nearly ten years, I still have not gotten used to being called “Widow Mitchell”. I’ve tried to push the memories of that horrendous day from my mind, but they keep returning – with a vengeance. I quickly squeeze my eyes closed, hoping to block out the images. The rash. The writhing in pain. The puffy faces, florid with fever. Stray tears begin to roll down my face. I can see my dear Johnathan, lying in our bed, trying to be strong. I can see our three young children lying nearby, crying out for me. Smallpox took a quarter of the people from our village that year. Myself and one other lady were the only caregivers who were healthy enough to care for the sick and dying. Among them, our own families.

Choking back a sob, I open my eyes. Looking down, I see little spots of red scattered on the calico fabric. My pricked finger is steadily oozing blood. Curious, I watch the blood slowly drip down my finger and onto the tainted cloth. I feel no pain. Any pain that I might have had has been dwarfed by the immense pain in my heart. Clamping my wounded finger, I gather my things and go into my empty house, shutting the door behind me.

As I walk into the Blythe General Store, a small bell chimes above my head, signaling my entrance. I look around the room and see that no one else is in the store. The strong smell of peppermint and tobacco assaults my nostrils. The walls are lined with shelves of canned goods, tools, and kitchen utensils. Several small tables are scattered around the room and are topped with a vast array of blankets, shoes, and the latest fashions. At the very back of the store is a wide wooden counter lined with jars of brightly colored candies. Making my way across the uneven wooden floor, I pull out my short list of needed items. Just as I am placing a package of buttons into my basket, Mrs. Kirby appears from the back room and greets me with a warm smile.

“Ah, Matilda, dear, I’m so glad to see you. We’ve just received a new shipment of fabric all the way from Chicago! You must see this new chiffon. It’s absolutely stunning!”

She beckons me over to the counter and begins unwrapping a large bolt of scarlet-colored cloth. A piece of Mrs. Kirby’s graying hair falls out of her up do and onto her glistening forehead. With a huff, she sweeps it back into place with a chubby hand. As she works to straighten out the fabric onto the counter, she talks rapidly, barely pausing for breath.

“Did you hear that Mr. Collins bought a horse from Mr. Wilkens? Well, it turns out that the horse has rotten teeth and a poor disposition. Mr. Collins tried to take the horse back to Mr. Wilkens to get a refund, but Mr. Wilkens told him that it wasn’t his problem anymore. I told Mrs. Collins that her husband should have checked the horse’s teeth before finalizing the purchase, but that man is just too stubborn to listen to anyone. Of course, he couldn’t have known about the horse’s disposition. Anyway, I think Mrs. Collins is almost as bad as her husband when it comes to stubbornness. She told me that how she and her husband spent their money was none of my business. Can you imagine the nerve of that woman! Well, it serves them right. Now they are stuck with a bad horse. There, what do you think?”

I look at Mrs. Kirby and see that she is gesturing to the chiffon, her beaming eyes awaiting my opinion.

I clear my voice and fix a smile into place. “Well, it is a beautiful fabric Mrs. Kirby. But I’m actually here to make a different purchase. I’d like five pounds of flour and some lard please.” Seemingly unaffected by my dismissal of the fabric, she quickly begins to re-wrap the bolt.

“Now, Matilda, enough of this ‘Mrs. Kirby’ nonsense. Call me Agnes.” She then moves to fill my order.

“So have there been any more babies?” she inquires.

“Well, Mrs. Johnson had a little boy last week, her fifth.”

“Merciful heavens,” Agnes exclaims. “That poor, poor woman. If any of them take after Mr. Johnson, she’ll really be in for a handful.” She hands me a sack of flour and a small container of lard. I hand her the exact amount of change and collect my purchases, hoping to make a swift exit.

“At any rate, I’m just glad that both she and the baby are healthy.” I respond.

“Of course. I tell you what, if it wasn’t for you Matilda, I don’t know how the women around here could do it. We’ve needed a good midwife around these parts for years. You are a wealth of knowledge and a comfort to the ladies of Blythe.” She reaches out and places a warm hand on my shoulder.

I smile, this time with genuine pleasure. “I’m happy to do what I can to help, Mrs. Kir – Agnes. Good afternoon.” I walk across the store and out into the beautiful fall day.

I can hear the wind ferociously beating against the side of my one-room home. Night has fallen long ago, and I am finally preparing for bed. Although the cottage is small, it meets all of my needs. A large bed looms in the back corner of the cozy room and is adorned with a beautiful patchwork quilt. There is a small trunk at the end of the bed that houses extra blankets and my heavy winter clothing. In the opposite corner, there is a small wooden table with two matching chairs. A pitcher of water and a large basin sit on a small pedestal nearby. A large fireplace is centered on the back wall. The three windows are dressed with cream colored lace curtains. Along the right wall sits an old bookshelf, sagging in the middle beneath the weight of my books. Finally, there are a few hooks and a small mirror next to my front door.

Looking in this mirror, I hesitantly study my face. A few wrinkles are beginning to form on the corners of my eyes. I look at the few gray hairs on my head that are rapidly multiplying. Sighing, I begin braiding my knee-length hair with skilled hands. Tying the end of the braid with a ribbon, I make sure that to bank the fire and blow out the lanterns before climbing into my chilly bed. I lay in the darkness and pull the blankets closer around my shoulders, eagerly accepting the warmth. Just as

my eyes begin to slide closed, a loud knock on my front door startles me.

“Widow Mitchell!? Widow Mitchell!?” A man’s voice, dripping with anxiety, yells above the roar of the wind.

I immediately get out of my bed, shivering when my feet touch the bare floor. “One moment,” I reply, grabbing my cloak from a hook and wrapping it around myself. Opening the door, I see young Charles Tyler, wringing his hat in his calloused hands. Charles, barely 21, had married 17-year-old Silvia Wallace nearly a year ago. They were now expecting their first child together. One glance at the young husband’s face told me that the time had come.

“It – It’s Silvie. I – I – I think the baby’s gonna be here real soon. She’s hurtin’ somethin’ awful, Widow Mitchell. We – we need to hurry!” The poor young man stammers out.

“Did you ride your horse here or did you hitch up your wagon?” I inquire, already moving to collect my supplies and place them into my bag.

“I have the wagon outside, ready to go.” He exclaims, glowing with pride that he had managed to think ahead.

“That’s fine Charles. I’ll be out in one minute” I say calmly, smiling at the nervous father-to-be. Many years of experience have taught me that first-time mothers often labor for a long while, and that first-time fathers are often overly anxious. Maintaining a sense of calm, especially for these young first-timers, is a valuable quality in a midwife. I shut the door and proceed to slip out of my well-worn nightgown and into my navy gingham work dress. I pin up my hair into some semblance of order, grab my supply bag and my warm cloak, and head out the door. Charles is already in the wagon, reigns in hand. I manage to climb up onto the front just as Charles gives a hearty “Giddy-up!” and the wagon takes off at break-neck speed. We careen down the dark road and I clutch desperately at the side of the wagon.

“Charles, you’d better slow this thing down or else we won’t make it back to Silvia in one piece!”

He glances over at me and hesitantly manages to slow down the team of excited horses. Soon, we approach their small farmhouse. Charles pulls the team up to the front of the house and jumps out of the wagon. He ties the reigns to the front post of the wide porch in a sloppy manner before running into the house, leaving the front door wide open. I let myself out of the wagon and go inside, closing the door firmly behind me.

Upon entering the warm house, I follow Charles back into their bedroom. Young Silvia is perched on the bed, a smile on her face and her hair neatly pinned into the latest style. She is wearing a beautiful nightgown with lace detailing around the neck. Not a drip of sweat or flushed cheeks appear on her youthful countenance. If it were not for the rounded abdomen underneath the blanket, one wouldn’t know that she is 9 months pregnant, and certainly not know that she is in labor. Nevertheless, Charles immediately goes to her side and clasps her hand, whispering encouragement into her ear.

“Widow Mitchell, I’m so glad you’re here!” Silvia exclaims with a bright smile, opening her hand toward me.

I make my way over to the other side of the bed and reach out my hand to meet hers.

“Please, call me Matilda. How are you feeling?” I ask as I pat her small hand.

“Oh, I think I’m doing all right. The contractions are painful, but that’s to be expected I suppose. I’m not sure if –”

Her comments are interrupted by a contraction. I immediately take out my pocket watch. She closes her eyes and bites her bottom lip. Charles’ forehead crinkles with concern. I glance back and forth between Silvia’s face and my watch, keeping track of the length of the contraction. The seconds tick by. A log in the fireplace pops, startling Charles. His eyes never leave Silvia’s face. I can hear the wind suddenly pick up speed. A storm must be coming, I absentmindedly think to myself. Then, Silvia’s eyes open and she begins to relax her face.

“Wow, that one really hurt!” Silvia breathes. Charles licks his lips and gently rubs his hand up and down her arm.

“Is – is there anythin’ I can do for you Silvie?”

She looks at him with loving eyes. “Well, I sure would like some water.”

Charles nods his head and leaves the bedroom.

Silvia turns her head and looks at me with big eyes. “Matilda, I’m awfully scared. I’m trying to be brave for Charlie, but I just don’t know if I can do it. It’s gonna hurt a lot, isn’t it?”

I give her a sad smile. “Yes, Silvia, it will hurt a lot. But you just have to remember that you’re not alone. I will help you through it. And Charles will be by your side. Just remember – there is a purpose to your pain. You’re going to have a little one, very soon.”

This brings a girlish smile to her face. “Ever since I was a little girl, I’ve wanted a big family. Charles does too – he says he wants a dozen sons,” She chuckles lightly, “but maybe he’ll be able to settle for a few less than that.”

Silvia’s labor continues overnight and into the early morning. After her water breaks, her contractions become much stronger and closer together. I guide Silvia through some breathing exercises to help her stay relaxed. As the contractions get more intense, Charles’ anxiety becomes more apparent. He paces around the small bedroom hundreds of times, wringing his hands. He continually asks if the baby is coming and if it should be taking this long. He even boils enough water to bathe an entire family – twice. Patiently, I try to calm Charles’ nerves by reassuring him that everything is normal and that we really don’t need that much water.

Watching Charles reminds me of my husband, Johnathan, during my first labor. I remember how Johnathan waited outside of our one-room cabin. As the contractions came, I could hear his boots thudding back and forth across our front porch. Every five minutes, he would cautiously open the door and poke his head in to see how I was doing before the midwife shooed him away. When I finally delivered our baby, the midwife allowed Johnathan to come in. I will never forget how the unchecked tears rolled freely down his face as I introduced him to our son. He kneeled down beside the bed and gingerly offered his finger for him to grab.

“He is one of God’s greatest creations. Thank you for bringing him into the world, Tillie.” He whispered into my ear. That is a moment that I will treasure for the rest of my life. The moment of sweet remembrance is swiftly pushed aside as I remember that my husband and son are both gone. My brief moment of joy is replaced by the hollow feeling of grief. In order to distract myself, I turn my attention back to Silvia and Charles.

An hour later, Silvia is fully dilated and ready to push. Knowing that the time is near, I calmly give the young couple some directions, “Charles, I’d like you to hang a blanket in front of the fireplace to warm. Take these scissors and place them into the fire until the metal is glowing red. This will sterilize the instrument.” As I am talking to him, I am laying out clean rags, string, and a small vial of iodine. I look at Silvia, who is now covered in a thin layer of sweat. “Now Silvia, when you have your next contraction, you’re going to push. I’ll be checking you to see how the baby is progressing.” She nods and prepares to push. The next contraction comes and as she bears down, the top of the baby’s head appears. I give her encouragement and she continues to push with each contraction. I take the iodine and pour a small amount of it into my hands and rub the solution on my forearms to kill any germs that may be present.

Turning my attention back to the imminent birth, I support her perineum and gently help guide the baby’s head out. I quickly check to make sure that the umbilical cord is not wrapped around the baby’s neck.

“This is it Silvia. The head is out. One more push and you’ll have your baby!”

With the next contraction, a large baby boy slides out and into my arms. Immediately placing him up on his mother’s chest, I work to clear his mouth of any mucous or fluid. I vigorously rub his back, urging him to cry. There is a moment in every birth when time stands still. The room goes silent, breaths

are held, hearts pound, eyes focus. Mothers look from the baby to the midwife to the father. Furrowed brows form. Silent prayers are prayed. The father gulps. A clock ticks somewhere in the distance.

Sweat begins to –

A cry erupts from the baby on Silvia's chest. He turns from pale to pink. His chubby arms flail out to the sides as he takes another deep breath and lets it out in a wail. Silvia holds her baby with tired arms and begins to laugh. She carefully lifts one of his legs to one side.

"Charlie, it's a boy! It's our son!"

Charles, standing at the head of the bed, covers his mouth with a weathered hand. As he looks at the scene before him, large tears flow freely down his face. In an instant, he's gone from being a young man to a father. His shoulders shake slightly as he tries to control his sobbing. Silvia reaches out a hand to him and he kneels next to the bed beside his new family. He gingerly kisses Silvia on the forehead. She carefully wipes the tears from his cheeks. The new parents now look down at their son.

"I – I have a son." Charles whispers with disbelief. A smile lights up his tear-streaked face. He reaches out and places his large hand on the top of his son's head. He snuffles and swipes his sleeve across his wet eyes. The baby hesitantly opens and closes his blue eyes. I gently place a warm blanket on top of the baby. Silvia's peaceful face turns into a grimace. Charles looks at her with concern.

"What's happenin'? Is there a – another baby?"

I chuckle as Silvia delivers the afterbirth into a small pan. "No, Charles. She has to deliver the after-birth, remember?" I say as I tilt the pan so that he can view the contents.

He pales. "Oh. I – I forgot about that."

Taking the string, I tie it around the umbilical cord and retrieve the scissors. After cutting the cord, I help the new parents wrap their son in a blanket. Then, I assist Silvia and the baby with breastfeeding.

"So have you two decided on a name for this little guy?" I ask as I begin packing up my supplies.

Silvia and Charles look at each other. "I was thinking we could name him Charles. Charles William Tyler, after his papa and his grandpa" Silvia whispers. Charles leans over to place a kiss on his wife's lips. I look at this precious family before me and feel another twinge of loneliness. I see the glow of joy on Silvia's face; I see the proud twinkle in Charles' eyes. Johnathan and I looked like that once, I muse. Once, a long time ago.

Several days later, I am sitting next to my front window, watching the families drive past on their way to church. On this Sunday morning, a layer of snow covers the brown earth. Families are huddled together, wrapped with blankets as the teams of horses trot gaily by, their chilled breath making clouds of fog in the air. I see heavily-clothed children sitting contentedly in the backs of wagons, while the mothers sit primly in the front with the family Bible resting on their laps. Everyone is dressed in their Sunday best, with freshly-scrubbed faces and carefully combed hair. People in Blythe love going to church. Not only is it a time of spiritual refreshment, but it is a time of fellowship and community support. Mrs. Kirby especially loves Sundays, as she gets to hear all the news that has occurred in the previous week.

I let the curtain on my window drop back down and I rise from my chair. Going over to my fire, I lift the kettle of water from the hook and make myself a cup of tea. I notice my disheveled appearance as I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror. My hair is thrown into a lazy bun at the nape of my neck, with strands poking out from every angle. Even from several feet away, I can see the deep circles underneath my weary eyes. My tattered flannel nightgown hangs over my body. I grab my cup of tea and head to my bookshelf. I have read all of these books from cover to cover. All except one. My wondering gaze lands on the Mitchell family Bible, now coated with a thick layer of dust. It has been years since I have last opened this family heirloom. The last time I opened it was to record the deaths of my husband and children.

In a frame next to the Bible is the only picture that I have of my family. It was taken a few short months before the smallpox outbreak. Johnathan had arranged to get the family picture taken for my

birthday. I look at this picture often, trying to remember a time when everything was perfect. Back when I was happy and my life was full of laughter and love. The photographer had us stand outside underneath a large willow tree. I remember how antsy our children were. Thomas, at age 7, was more interested in catching large bugs than standing still for the photograph. Little Della kept fiddling with her hair bows. Our youngest, Laura, only 3 years old, wouldn't stop twirling around in her new dress. After the picture was developed, Johnathan and I couldn't help but laugh. Thomas had both of his hands clasped in front of him, likely squishing some poor bug, with a mischievous look on his face. Della's hands were in the middle of ripping out one of her hair bows. Laura's twirling caused her to come out blurry, except for her face, which was glowing with happiness. Johnathan and I were both looking straight at the camera, with big smiles on our faces. This picture is the perfect representation of how our family was. Chaotic and messy, but with so much love and joy, that we couldn't help but smile. Setting the picture back down on the shelf, I feel the tears come once more.

"Why, God, did You take them from me?!" I spit out angrily. Feeling the rage bubble up inside, I grab my pillow from my bed and scream into it. Flinging the pillow across the room, I collapse to the ground. Sobs come pouring out of me.

"How can a loving God take away the love of my life and my children? How could You make them suffer? I sat with them for two weeks while they were dying, praying the whole time! You didn't answer me! You left me on my own! You could've healed them! You let them die!" I scream. Burying my face in my hands, I let the resounding silence fall over me.

"I was with you the whole time. I am still with you."

I immediately lift my face from my hands.

"Come to Me and find rest. I will make you whole again."

Feeling a wave of peace wash over me, I slowly stand up, wiping the tears from my eyes. Going over to the bookshelf, I tentatively pick up the Bible and blow the dust from the cover.

The first big blizzard has arrived to Blythe. For the past two days, the snow has fallen non-stop. Temperatures are well below freezing. Warm in my cabin, I feed my roaring fire another log. I go back to my crochet project. This warm blanket will make someone very happy, I think to myself. The soft red yarn makes me think of the fast-approaching Christmas season. Smiling, I hum some Christmas tunes as I continue crocheting. A knock on my door surprises me.

"Who in the world could that be?" I mutter as I head to the door. A large burst of cold air enters my cabin as I open the door. A strange man is standing on my doorstep, icicles forming on his raggedy beard.

"You the midwife?" He barks.

Taken aback at his rather brash demeanor, I manage to stammer, "Yes, I am. What can I do for you?"

"There's a woman o'er in Branam who's fixin' to give birth." He grumbles. "I come to take ya to her."

Branam is nearly 20 miles away, I think to myself. "Is there no one with her?" I ask the man.

The stranger gives a throaty chuckle. "Ain't no one but me tend to her. And I ain't no midwife."

"I'll gather my things. Just bring the wagon up close to the house." I tell the man, moving to extinguish the fire and prepare for the arduous journey ahead.

"Didn't bring no wagon. Couldn't get through all them snow drifts. I got a horse."

I pale at the thought of riding 20 miles with this gruff stranger. Nevertheless, I manage to maintain my composure, thinking instead about the mother and baby. In no time, I have my supplies and several wraps and blankets to keep me warm on the trip. I leave the safety of my cabin and mount the large brown horse. The man climbs up behind me and gathers the reins. We take off, the frigid wind biting at our faces. Within seconds, my nose begins to run and my eyes water. I wrap my scarf tighter around my lower face. I can feel the man's warmth breath on the back of my neck. Chills, unre-

lated to the temperature, run up and down my spine.

“How long has the woman been in labor?” I inquire, thinking I might as well try and gather some information while in this predicament.

“Don’t quite know. She just tol’ me to go an’ get a midwife.” He replies.

“Do you know how far along she is? Has she had any medical care up until this point? Is this her first pregnancy?”

“How’m I suppost to know?”

“Well, aren’t – aren’t you the father?” I falter, feeling my cheeks redden.

He gives another one of his chuckles. “Now that I do know. I ain’t the father.”

Confused, I decide to hold my other questions for the mother. As we head toward Branam, the snow continues to fall. After a couple of hours, I finally spot several large buildings through the snowy haze. We pull up to one of these buildings and the man helps me down.

“She’s inside, on the second floor. Her room is the first on the left.” He hands me my bag and then takes off down the street, disappearing around the corner. Taking a deep breath, I enter the building. Immediately, the overwhelming stench of beer causes my stomach to recoil. The large saloon appears to be empty. Perplexed, I see a set of stairs in the corner of the dark room. It dawns on me that this woman must work here, and my heart begins to break. Then, I hear a woman screaming in pain. I bolt up the stairs and into the room on the left. The smell of beer is replaced with the smell of blood. I see a small woman curled up on the bed. Dropping my supplies to the ground, I rush over to her.

“I’m here to help you. I’m Matilda, the midwife.” I smooth her sweaty hair back from her forehead and begin taking her pulse. She looks at me with teary eyes.

“Ma’am, you gotta help me. This baby’s comin’!” The desperation in her voice is clear. I notice the large amount of blood on the bed sheets. Going over to my supplies, I quickly grab some clean linens and a tincture of shepherd’s purse.

“I’m going to give you a couple of drops of this to go under your tongue. It will help control your bleeding. Then I’m going to check you to see where the baby is.”

After administrating the herbal remedy, I discover that the baby’s head is crowning. The woman begins to have another contraction and she lets out an ear-piercing scream as the baby’s head emerges. Soon, the rest of the baby slips into my hands. The mother breathes a sigh of relief as I place her baby onto her chest. A substantial gush of blood emerges from the woman. I place the clean rags between her legs in an attempt to stop further bleeding. She has already cleaned out the newborn’s mouth and the baby is now crying loudly.

“Oh, my baby! My baby!” The woman cries out as she gently runs her hand over her child’s head. Looking at the baby, I see that it is a healthy little girl.

“She’s beautiful, isn’t she ma’am? Oh, just look at her!” She declares, her voice filled with admiration for her daughter.

“Yes, she is beautiful. Is she your first baby?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Please, call me Matilda. What’s your name?”

She looks up at me. “I’m Sally.”

After making sure that the baby is okay, I cut the umbilical cord and prepare to deliver the placenta. Because Sally is still bleeding profusely, I give her another dose of the tincture. Soon, she delivers the placenta into a large basin. Another wave of blood follows. She is losing too much blood, I think to myself. I quickly wedge more clean linens between her legs, hoping to block any additional blood flow. Then, I encourage Sally to drink from a cup of water. Removing the soiled bed sheets, I try to clean up as Sally begins to breastfeed her daughter.

“Sally, I don’t mean to pry, but who is the baby’s father?” I gently ask. She pulls her glance away from her daughter to my face. Big tears well up in her eyes and her chin begins to tremble.

“I don’t rightly know,” She whispers, “I’ve been working here for almost a year. It could be any number of men.” A lone tear drips down her cheek. She reaches up a hand to swipe it away. “It don’t really matter to me anyways. All I know is that I have a beautiful daughter.”

“Who was the man that you sent for me?”

“Oh, him. He’s my boss, Joe. He took me in after my parents died.”

“Do you have any family around here?”

“Nope. It’s just me.” She continues breastfeeding her daughter, with a glimmer of joy in her eyes. “And you? How many children do you have?”

Swallowing, I whisper, “Three. I had three, a son and two daughters. They died along with my husband in an outbreak of smallpox about 10 years ago.” Sally’s head snaps up and she looks at me with wide eyes.

“I’m so sorry. I can’t imagine how painful that was for you.” She brings her baby closer to her heart and wraps loving arms around her. “How did you ever make it through?” She questions.

“Truthfully, it took me a long time. Too long. For many years I was a bitter woman, angry with God. I let hurt overtake my life. I distanced myself from my friends, loved ones, and even God. There were times where I wanted so badly to just be with my family,” I pause and glance at Sally to see a large tear running down her face. Forming a light smile, I continue on, “But then I realized that my husband and my children wouldn’t want me to be living that way. Most importantly, I knew that God didn’t want me to live that way any longer. So I reached out to Him, and I am in the process of healing. It’s not easy, but I can feel an unexplainable peace in my life again.”

“If only I could have that peace” Sally says slowly, her voice barely a whisper.

“Oh Sally, you can have that peace!” I exclaim.

“No ma’am. I’m afraid not. I mean, look at who I am, what I do. After my parents died, I turned my back on God. I didn’t want anything to do with Him. I’m sure God doesn’t care none about me.”

Reaching out, I place my hand on top of Sally’s. “Dear girl, you’re mistaken. God always cares. He cares about you, and He cares about your daughter. He loves you both more than you know.” A sob catches in Sally’s throat.

“Would you like to pray with me?” I ask gently. She nods and we bow our heads.

I stay with Sally for the next several hours. Her bleeding has still not slowed. She has bled through nearly all of the linens. She is beginning to pale and her eyes are slowly taking on a sunken appearance. I root around in my bag, trying to see if there is anything else that could be used to help her. She must sense my worry.

“Matilda, what is it? What’s wrong?”

I turn to her and sit on the edge of the bed. Taking a deep breath, I tell her, “You are having an abnormal amount of bleeding. I’ve tried all of the herbal remedies that I have and nothing is helping. Is there a pharmacy or doctor nearby where I could find some medication?”

She slowly shakes her head. “No, there ain’t nothin’ like that around here.” We look at each other knowingly. Clearing her throat, she hands me her daughter and asks,

“Do you have paper an’ somethin’ to write with?”

“Of course.” I go over to my bag and pull out a notebook and a pencil. By this point, her strength has begun to deteriorate. While she is writing, I walk around the room with her sleeping daughter in my arms. Long eyelashes rest on her porcelain skin, and her tiny hands are folded neatly under her chin. A thick head of brown hair resembles Sally’s. I smile down at the angelic baby in my arms. I place a delicate kiss on her smooth forehead. Walking over to the window, I notice that it has stopped snowing and that the sun is beginning to set.

“Matilda,” Sally summons me over to the bed. “I want you to listen to me.”

I sit down on the bed and carefully place the sleeping baby next to her mother.

“When I die –,” She struggles to take a deep breath, “When I die, I want you to take my daugh-

ter.” Tears begin to fall in rapid succession. “I know that you’ll take good care of her. I want you to make sure that she gets plenty of learnin’, that way she’ll never have to end up like me. Raise her to be a good Christian lady. I want you to remind her everyday how I much I love her. Here, I wrote here on this piece of paper that you can take her.” She summons the strength to lift the piece of paper. In disbelief, I take the paper from her.

“Sally.” I whisper, the tears falling freely.

“Here, take this too. This is for her to read when she gets older.” She hands me a folded piece of paper. Her hand falls back down on the bed and she closes her eyes, her breathing becoming increasingly labored. I reach down and take her hand. I can feel her pulse begin to slow.

“Sally!”

Struggling, she opens her eyes. “What – what is her name? Your daughter?”

She forms a weak smile. “Grace. Her name is Grace.”

Choking back a sob, I pick up Grace and put her next to Sally’s face. She manages to place a kiss on her daughter’s cheek. “Mama loves you.” She says, faintly a whisper.

With that, Sally’s eyes slide closed for the last time. I pull the sheet up and cover her face. Standing up, I hold Grace in my arms. Sniffling, I take a shaky breath and say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

The Adventures of Willow and Gerald

Hannah Taulbee

Dragon in the Tree

Backyard as Willow plays in the playhouse.

The small dragon hid in the big tree in the backyard whenever the little girl came out of the house to play. As she played, the little dragon snuck further and further away from the leaves.

Gerald in the tree; she's surprised. You can blue of his scales through the leaves.

While the girl played, the small dragon inched forward, leaves brushed against his snout, tickling him. Much to the surprise of them both, he sneezed!

"Bless you!" Willow shouted at the tree, looking to find the source of the sneeze. The little dragon raised his head and met her gaze quickly before hiding again.

"You don't have to hide." Willow called to the shy dragon. When he didn't come out from behind the branch, Willow decided to keep talking to him, anyway.

A while later, Willow's father brought out a small plate of pretzels and apple slices. He sat in a chair beside the small table under the tree

Willow and her father watch the dragon as they eat their snack, laughing because the dragon refused to come down.

Her father suggested trying to see if the dragon was hungry enough to come down from the tree, so he left two pieces of apple on the table before he took the plate inside.

Suddenly, the dragon leaned too far and fell on top of the apple pieces, scaring Willow out of her swing! Quickly, he grabbed the apple slice and hid under the slide.

"You came down!" Willow spoke as she sat down just beside the swing. "Dad said you might be hungry. Did you get a piece?" She looked to the swing and noticed that one of the apple slices was missing, and heard the dragon bite into something.

The dragon finished his apple and looked at the girl from under the slide, his eyes occasionally darted to the second apple slice on the table behind her. Willow noticed and stood up to retrieve the snack.

Willow and the dragon both sat by the slide, and waited for one of them to make a move. Finally, the
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dragon's belly grumbled, he poked his head out a little farther, and carefully walked to Willow's outstretched hand to grab the apple before darting back under the slide.

"Willow, help Dad pick up the yard before dinner, please." Her mother called before stepping back into the house.

Willow's father walked to the slide and pulled Willow to her feet. "Okay, kid, let's clean up!"

Willow and her father began to walk around the yard, picking up toys and taking them to the toy chest close to the house. As Willow cleaned, the dragon started to follow her, inching closer and closer.

"You have a shadow, Willow," her dad told her as he picked up a truck and carried it back to the chest. He looked around the yard and made sure that everything was put away. "If you want, you can stay outside for a few more minutes."

"Ok!" Willow agreed as she put the last of the toys away. When she turned back to the yard, she noticed the dragon standing right behind her.

Willow picked a ball out of the chest and threw it toward the slide. The dragon simply watched it fly through the air and land just behind his tail, before looking back at Willow.

"Well, anyway, now you need a name!" Willow explained as she tiptoed closer to the dragon.. She leaned forward until she was looking right at the dragon's face, squinting to get a better look.

"Gerald!" she decided excitedly. The dragon startled and jumped, before he cautiously moved back to stand in front of her.

Willow giggled and ran to the house, waiting by the door. When Gerald had difficulty climbing the stairs, she bent over, laughing as he licked her cheek, and scooped him up around the waist and lifted him into the air. Instead of setting him back down, she waddled over to the open door as her parents looked on in disbelief.

Willow now had a pet dragon.

Grandma's Gift

"Look, Gerald!" Willow nudged him awake as she pointed out the window. "There's Grandma's house." He looked up lazily at the house before closing his eyes again and enjoying Willow's warm lap.

As they sit together in the living room, Grandma hands Willow and Gerald each a present. Hurriedly, Willow opened her present and then helped Gerald open his to reveal two homemade sweaters.

Willow quickly pulled hers over her head before pulling Gerald into her lap and crammed the smaller

sweater over his head. Laughing, Grandma lead the two into the kitchen to start baking cookies.

Like every other Christmas, they made a gingerbread house, Christmas tree cut-out cookies and sugar cookies, with lots of frosting.

As she tried to stir the bowl Willow spilled flour all over the counter and over Gerald's new sweater. Grandma picked Gerald down and pat him down as the flour went everywhere.

Grandma helped Willow sit on one of the chairs, and asked her to start putting sprinkles on some of the cookies, and fetched the broom to sweep up the flour.

While Grandma cleans Willow talks about all of the presents she wants for Christmas. "There's a new set of markers at the store and a pink scooter that I really want!"

Grandma took the last batch of cookies out of the oven to cool. To wait before decorating the rest, they went into the living room.

"Do you play with the presents you get every year?" Grandma asked Willow. Willow paused but did not answer.

"Christmas is a time to get together with loved ones and remember how lucky you really are." Grandma continued, taking Willow up onto her lap.

"Like spending time with you?" Willow asked looking up at her Grandmother's wise face.

"Yes, it's just like that. That's why the sweaters are so important," Grandma whispered as she held Willow close in a warm hug.

Gerald curled up at Grandma's feet snug by the fire as she continued, "They are special because I only see you a few times a year, so they carry all the love I have for you. When you wear them you are wearing my love around you, keeping you warm."

"When you get toys you get them because you want something not because they mean everything" she said looking into Willow's eyes.

"So if I make you something it means more than getting you something?" she asked quietly as the fire began to dim.

"Exactly like that, I love it when you make me things" Grandma said as she smiled.

"What if I make things for everybody?" Willow said happily, as she jumped down and ran for her coloring things.

Grandma laughed, "That would be a wonderful Christmas present, Willow! I'll make us some hot chocolate." Gerald perked up at the mention of something sweet to eat, and followed them both into the kitchen, the bells on his sweater jingling.

Lightning Bugs

Willow and her pet dragon, Gerald, ran around their backyard as the sunlight began to fade. Tonight was special because they were sleeping outside in a tent. As they played, Gerald's scales caught the light and shimmered in blues and greens.

"No!" Willow cried as Gerald closed his mouth around a lightning bug. "Spit it out, Gerald! Spit it out!" She grabbed the dragon around his belly and shook him up and down until his mouth opened, letting the bug fly free.

"What's the problem, Willow?" her mother asked. "Did Gerald eat something?" She walked over to the two, the dragon still dangling from Willow's arms.

Her mother checked to see if Gerald had any more bugs in his mouth, but didn't find any. While her mother finished putting up the tents, Gerald and Willow went back to playing.

It was almost time to sleep when the neighbor's dog started to bark. The sound echoed and made Willow worry that the dog or something else might wander into the yard while she slept. She started to cry and Gerald, who didn't know what else to do, wrapped himself around her legs.

Her mother came over to see why Willow was crying. When Willow said she was afraid of what could be in the yard while she slept, her mother hugged her.

"Well, just be thankful that Gerald didn't swallow the lightning bugs; they have an important job to do."

Gerald waited to learn why these bugs were bad to eat, looking between Mom and Willow. "Lightning bugs protect us at night, so we don't eat them," Mom explained.

"When it's cloudy or the moon isn't very bright, like tonight, or you're alone, the lightning bugs come to check on you, to make sure you're safe."

Gerald was very confused. "Lightning bugs are what take care of us when we're not inside the house, or when we stay somewhere else for the night. The stars watch over everyone every night, but sometimes they need some help, which is why lightning bugs twinkle; they're like stars."

That night, while Willow was sleeping, Gerald went exploring and found a group of lightning bugs patrolling the yard, creating a circle of light around the tent.

He joined in, walking with them for a while before being happy that Willow was safe and curling up beside her.

In the morning, Willow woke up to find Gerald beside her with a small lightning bug sleeping on his nose.

“Come on, Willow, it’s time for breakfast!” her mother called as she crawled out of her own tent and headed to the house. “I’m making pancakes!”