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PORTAL

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TAKE OVER



By Jamie White



The sky was a brilliant blue as Princess Isabella walked through the gardens of the Palace. She loved her afternoon strolls. They were one of the few times when she wasn't expected to be anything other than a young girl just having fun. Being the daughter of a King was a huge responsibility; especially since her mother had passed away. As the eldest daughter, she was often expected to play the gracious host for important dinners or to organize the palace affairs. She enjoyed the work most of the time, but it was always nice to get these breaks; she just had to ignore the guard following her. Her father would never tolerate her going anywhere alone. No matter how many times she tried to convince him otherwise, he stayed firm in his decision.

She stopped a moment to sniff the beautiful roses that had begun to bloom now that warmer weather had come to the Kingdom. The flower garden had been her mother's favorite and the Princess made sure it was always meticulously cared for. Her father wouldn't usually let her work on the garden herself (that was beneath her in his opinion) but she supervised. No one could touch that garden unless it was under her watchful eye; often throwing her own input into the process. She knelt down a moment, gently touching a stem as she inspected the flowers. She made a mental note to have the gardener water them later that day before straightening up and continuing down the stone path.

She eventually settled onto a bench beneath a large shade tree to sit for a while and take in her surroundings. Fish and other creatures splashed in the water of the pond while the breeze gently rustled the leaves of the tree. She took a deep breath, filling her lungs with the fresh air. As much as she loved it, the inside of the castle was a bit stuffy. Her mind began to wander, as it often did during her walks. She was suddenly startled out of her daydreams by her guard's voice.

"Princess, it's time we return. Your father will be wondering where you are soon."

She looked around, confused as to where she was. As her eyes settled on the guard

her mental fog lifted. She could tell by the positioning of the sun that it was getting late. He was right; her father would be worried if they didn't get back soon. He had made it quite clear to Isabella over the years about the danger his position, and hers, could put her in. "Of course, Arthur." She got up and started her walk back, the guard following close behind.

When they returned, she approached her father's throne room to personally assure him she was back safely. Her father's guard noticed her approach and opened the door to announce her presence. "Your Highness, the Princess is here to see you."

"You may send her in," he replied, waving the guard away.

"Yes, Your Highness." He opened the door, motioning for the Princess to enter.

"Good evening, Father." She suddenly noticed the other man standing in the room with him. "Good evening, Gavin." Her mood instantly darkened upon seeing the wizard. He had served her father for many years now, but there was something about him she'd never liked. He mostly provided entertainment for the court and had been known to liven up many parties. She found his magic a bit unnerving, but her father loved it. He'd told her once to never underestimate the advantage of having such power at one's disposal.

"Good evening, Princess." The Wizard bowed, turning back to her father. "With your permission, Your Highness, I'll leave you and your daughter to speak privately."

"Thank you, Gavin." As the Wizard left, King Henrick turned to his daughter with a smile. "I trust you had a nice stroll this afternoon?"

"Yes, father. I hope I didn't interrupt anything important?" Despite the fact Gavin's role was mostly to entertain, her father occasionally had him assist in more important matters.

"Gavin and I were merely discussing the ball next week to welcome the King and Queen of—" he assured her. "Speaking of which, I hope everything else is already taken care of?"

"Yes, Father. The preparations will begin tomorrow; the cook will have some dishes ready for your approval tonight."

"Excellent!" He smiled, pleased with her efforts. Nothing but the best would do when he was hosting a neighboring ruler. "Thank you, Isabella. Why don't you go ahead and wash up

for dinner then? I'll see you in the dining hall in an hour."

"Yes, Father." She turned around, her guard following her to her chambers.

Later that evening, she entered the dining hall, her guard and ladies-in-waiting in tow. She breathed deeply, enjoying the smell of the dishes they'd be sampling that night. For all the restrictions her role put on her, there were definitely some good points to her position in society. Their subjects were surely not enjoying a meal like this tonight. She glanced around the room, happy to see the Wizard was not among those dining with them tonight. The rest of the court was there, however, already seated. They stood as she entered, bowing to her before taking their seats again. She acknowledged them with a nod as the guard held a seat out for her near her father. As she sat down, he pushed the seat in for her and she nodded her thanks before turning her attention to the King. "Hello, Father. Where might the Wizard be?" She figured asking was only polite and would be expected of her.

"He was not feeling well this evening, so I excused him tonight," the King answered. "I had his meal sent to his chambers."

"I see." She hated to be so happy about someone's misfortune, but she couldn't help it. Not only did she find his magic unnerving, she disliked how it seemed to dominate the conversation at these meals. Knowing she wouldn't have to listen to any magical discussion relaxed her and she straightened up some, eagerly participating in the conversation.

Once the meal was over and everyone had picked the best dishes, she went back to her chambers, stopping outside the Wizard's room. The proper thing to do was to at least inquire as to how he was doing. The guard at the door nodded as she approached. "Good evening, Princess. How may I help you?"

"I was curious as to how the Wizard is doing now. My father said he was excused from our meal this evening due to ill health."

"I'm not sure at the moment, Princess. Your father asked me not to disturb him while he sleeps."

She considered a minute. Something told her she needed to check on the Wizard, yet she knew the guard would never listen to her over her father and allow her to disturb the

man. "Yes, of course. I'll just be on my way, then." She started to walk away, but froze suddenly, whirling to face the guard. "Did you hear that?" Her face was a mask of nerves and terror. She could be quite the actress when she wished to be.

"No, Princess, I did not."

"It sounded like footsteps down the corridor. Can you please check for me?"

He seemed to consider a second before nodding to the room adjoining the Wizard's. "Go in there and lock the door, Princess. I'll come back and get you once I'm sure there's nothing."

She nodded, hurrying into the room, latching the door. She listened carefully as his footsteps grew fainter. As soon as she was sure the coast was clear, she left the room, carefully opening the door to the Wizard's. No sleeping form awaited her as she scanned the room. She quickly checked every possible spot he could be hiding; nothing. She returned to the other room and latched it just in time for the guard to return. His knock echoed through the hall. "Princess, it's alright. You can come out."

She opened the door, stepping back into the hall. "Thank you. I'll be in my chamber if I'm needed." She left him standing outside the Wizard's door, stopping as she turned a corner. Where was he? According to her father, he should be sleeping right now. She didn't understand it. He shouldn't have been able to leave the room without the guard knowing about it. Not unless he used his magic to leave, but why? She hurried back to her room, opening the secret passageway from her room to her father's throne room. It also would take her outdoors if she wished. Only the royal family themselves and a few of their most trusted advisors knew about it.

She carefully opened the door to the passageway, barely opening it enough to hear what was going on in the room. No one would notice unless they were really looking for it. She saw her father sitting on the throne, speaking with another advisor of his, a man named Xavier. He'd been working with her father since she was about five years of age. She couldn't remember a time when he hadn't been there, advising her father of financial matters of the Kingdom.

"I take it everything is in order?" Her father raised an eyebrow at the man, waiting for an answer.

"Yes, Your Highness. Everything is working perfectly. Soon, I will relieve the guard

watching the Wizard's room. When he returns, I'll tell him the Wizard is feeling better and out for a brief stroll to get some fresh air."

"And what about later? Eventually, someone will wonder where the Wizard is."

"I assure you, Your Highness, that will not be a problem. I'll be called away on business, explaining my own absence. Once I "leave", you'll use a spell to make me look like him."

"Outstanding plan, Xavier! What about Princess Isabella?"

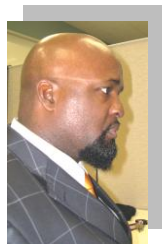
"No need to worry about that, Your Highness. If she becomes suspicious, we'll take care of that as well."

"Wonderful... and what of the King?"

"He's of no worry anymore. No one will ever find the body."

Princess Isabella fought to control her gasp. The Wizard had taken her father's place! She carefully closed the passageway, rushing back to her chambers to gather as much as she possibly could carry with her before leaving through the palace. The castle was no longer safe! She had to get out as quickly as possible and disappear before they did the same to her. As Isabella disappeared into the shadows, she began thinking about how she was going to figure out what, exactly, they had done and how she'd expose it.

MARTHA'S FREEDOM



By Etheridge Lovett

Staring out of the window of her small room lit only by the light of day, Martha Turner sat alone. Her dark-hued hands are wrinkled and callused from years of working odd jobs to create a better life for herself and for her five children. In spite of Martha's grueling sacrifice, loneliness and abandonment in a poorly-ran convalescent home became her only reward from her children.

"Here's your food, Martha," Joe said, a tall, brawny service aide. His deep voice shattered the silence in the room. "Don't just sit on your butt like a bump on a log old woman; come and get this slop before I give it to someone else!" Joe blasted. He placed the plate of tasteless food upon Martha's bed.

Martha gazed up at Joe; then upon the golden rays of sunshine beaming through her window as she replied, "Joe... the Lord's gone free me from my troubles someday. All my children abandoned me, but the Lord's gone take me home soon." Martha's hands were tightly clasped around a small wornout bible. She rocked back and forth in her rickety wheelchair, continuously gazing out of the window.

"Foolish religious old woman... you're as crazy as a bed bug. Why don't you face it? Nobody's coming for you Martha. You haven't had a visitor since your snobby kids dumped you in this stinking hellhole years ago... you can forget about being rescued... besides, where else can you find four star service such as this," Joe said sarcastically, laughing aloud. He exited the room, slamming the door. "Listen up, Martha, the Lord's gone free you when Hell freezes over," Joe mocked, peeping at Martha through the small window on her room's door. He turned and made his way down the hallway, laughing aloud while twirling a large ring of keys around one finger.

Martha's eyes, stricken with glaucoma, peered around the room. Her eyes landed upon a plate of cold mashed potatoes and green beans not fit for a rat to consume. Martha wheeled her chair to the edge of her bed. She dropped her head as tears trickled from her sagging eyes. The thought of her children turning their backs on her swept throughout her very soul. Martha's body shuttered from the mental hurt and pain. She prayed then reached over and grabbed a portion of the mash potatoes with her fingers, stuffing her mouth. The meal was as it has always been, tasteless. Unable to continue eating, Martha wiped her mouth and leaned back in her wheelchair, staring out of the window at the ominous thunderclouds rolling in, overshadowing the bright sunshine like a blackened veil. Interrupted by another service aide entering the door to her bedroom, Martha struggled to regain her composure in the presence of her tormentors.

"Morning, Martha. Time for your bath," the young female aide said. She placed Martha's feet upon the metal footrest of the wheelchair. Martha flinched when the aide passed by her to prop open the door to the room. She briefly thought of a previous bath when the same aide was not so kind.

"How long will you torment me with no care or respect in your heart? How long will you continue to mock me to my face, unaware of the past struggles me, and other elders made to pave the way for young people like you?" Martha questioned, dropping her head and weeping once again.

"Since when did your little sermon and tears ever moved me old woman... Gosh—the morning bath is not that bad, and I thought you enjoyed my company," the aide blurted out. She wheeled Martha down the long hallway to the bathroom.

"Young lady, I got faith to believe that the Lord's gone save me. Lord's gone reach down and take me home to be with him soon... I can feel it in my bones," Martha mumbled between sobs, but the aide only laughed at Martha's words, replying, "You are home Martha Turner. This is the only home you'll ever know, old woman." Laughing aloud, the aide wheeled Martha into the bathroom near a tub of bath water prepared for her. The aide undressed Martha then struggled to lower her down into the tub of bath water. The warm, soothing soap water brought pleasant memories of the past to Martha's mind and spirit. She envisioned times when she was capable of bathing herself for long periods at a time at home before her husband suddenly died, and she suffered a stroke shortly after. Smiling, Martha hummed an old familiar gospel hymn she knew from childhood. She reached for the bar of soap. Caringly, Martha rubbed the sweet-smelling soap upon her weak and weary body.

"Martha—what are you doing?" the aide asked. "I give the baths around here!" the aide shouted. She slapped Martha in the face so hard that blood streamed from her withered lips.

"Why would you hit me like that when I did you no wrong?" Martha questioned between sobs.

"I'm in charge around here, old woman, not you. Whenever you pick up that soap I'm going to slap you again, you hear me?" the aide asked in a cruel tone.

Saddened, Martha stared at the aide with a deep stare, as if cursing the young woman with her aged, tear-filled eyes.

Dumbfounded and shaken up by the stare, the aide screamed, "Stop gazing at me like that or I'll slap you again, you hear me!" The aide reached into the warm water to find the bath cloth she misplaced underneath the soapsuds. The hairs on the aide's arms stood up on end. Despite the aide's threats, Martha

continued to stare at her, not saying another word.

"I swear to God, you're a crazy old woman. I had a grandmother who was just as crazy and silly as you are," the aide continued, laughing. She continued moving her hands about in the tub, searching for the bath cloth.

As the aide pulled the bath cloth upward through the soapy water towards the surface, a powerful bolt of lightning ripped through the roof of the convalescent home. The lightning bolt lit up the room, striking the bathtub with great force, killing Martha and the aide instantly upon impact.

Hearing the loud thunderous blast, other caregivers entered the smoky bathroom only to learn that both women were deceased from the lightning strike.

"Damn it... don't just stand around staring—someone call the fire department and an ambulance—hurry!" Joe screamed. He checked their pulse, but found none. As he turned to walk out of the room, Joe heard Martha's calm voice whisper in a sudden breeze soaring past his ears, "Lord's got me, Joe. Lord's done set me free."

Lights could be seen as far south as Caracas while the Southern Lights were viewed as far north as Lima. When the storm touched the earth's atmosphere, it was all over. Not many lives were lost but the world, as we knew it, changed forever.

We were a planet totally dependent on electricity and that single solar flare plunged us into darkness taking out the entire power grid of the world, which was driven by nuclear reactors. Some parts of the globe were less affected than others; especially areas covered by nightfall when the Flare struck such areas were away from a direct hit by the solar particles. The Flare neutralized the cores of all of the world's nuclear power plants and anything requiring an atomic reaction, including nuclear bombs. Well, at least one good thing came of it.

Scientists could not measure the strength of the Flare since their instruments were damaged beyond repair as a result of the cosmic event. They guessed that it was a type X70 solar flare but no one knew for sure. The only thing they did say with some certainty was that it was larger than the solar flare of 1859. For all practical purposes we were back in 1859, starting over, in a world without a power grid.

Rebuilding began, but not in a place which you would associate with a renaissance; Charleston, West Virginia. Why Charleston people asked? Charleston was located in the heart of the American coal region. The world was once again dependent on fossil fuel for energy and the Charleston region had several coal fired power plants in mothballs, which were not affected by the Flare.

Among the gentry in Charleston was Clay Morrow, a high school math and science teacher. What made Clay stand out was his total lack of dependence on calculators, computers, or even an abacus to do any mathematical equation. He had as his mentor, Alvin Curtis, his old high school math teacher, who pushed Clay only to rely on his own handwritten calculations and his mind for answers. Clay had been an outstanding student and had Mr. Curtis all four years in high school who taught him advanced placement (AP) algebra, geometry, trigonometry, calculus and even physics. Clay's mind functioned with the speed and accuracy of the most modern computers of the day.

Mr. Curtis had retired the year Clay began his first year as a teacher and thus Clay had never worked with him as a colleague. Mr. Curtis moved away from Charleston to a remote cabin in the Monongahela National Forest. Mr. Curtis was lifelong bachelor, who had led a solitary, non-pretentious life. As such, it was no

THE FLARE



By Rick Weber

It had been almost two years since that day in May of 2050 when the world went black. The earth was plunged into darkness after it experienced the brightest moment ever. Solar Cycle 27 would go down as the most climactic time in history and it was all the result of a solar flare. Scientists had been monitoring the sun's activities, but nothing could have prepared them for what happened on that day. Flare Day, as it would become known, began normally enough for the world when solar monitoring stations detected a sudden violent explosion on a sunspot they were monitoring. The explosion sent a solar storm to earth at about twenty million miles an hour. It took almost five hours for the Flare to reach the earth from the sun, not enough time to implement the emergency procedures which were in place. When it struck, the light intensity on earth increased dramatically. The Northern

surprise when he relocated to a place with few people.

The day after the solar flare struck while the town, the nation, and the world were in darkness without communication, the mayor himself came by Clay's house, the boyhood home left to him by his late parents. Clay was an only child who still had not yet met the love of his life. His, too, was a life of solitude. Clay did not know the mayor and likewise the mayor did not know him. The knock at the door would be the start of an arduous journey for Clay but he did not know it at the time.

"Clay, I'm Bill Needam," he said with his hand outstretched. As he reached out to shake his, Clay said, "I know who you are Mr. Mayor. What brings you here?"

Mayor Needam just smiled in a politico sort of way, which made Clay a little uneasy, but without any posturing he answered Clay's question. "We have a lot on our plate down at City Hall. We are looking for all the qualified help we can get to get the town back up and running again. You teach all of the AP math classes at George Washington High School and have gotten a lot of recognition and awards. You also pound it into your students' heads the necessity of having good math skills. You also show it by example. You even do a lot of the complex problems in your head or so my administrative assistant, Nellie Livingstone, says."

Nellie Livingstone had been one of Clay's first students and found her to be among the brightest he ever taught, but what could he as a high school teacher do to solve the problems at city hall, let alone the world he asked himself.

"Clay," the mayor continued. "We're down to scratch. We have to get the town up and running again. Someone in Washington realized that we still had the old power plants, and with the coal mines nearby, knew we could get back up and running before any place else in the country. We need someone who can do all of the calculations with just a pencil and paper. We found out that most of the engineers here cannot do them without some sort of electronic gadget because they let their calculation skills die. The reason I am here is to tell you myself that we cannot recover here without you and that computer mind of yours."

Without hesitation, Clay agreed to the mayor's request and went with him to the Charleston Civic Center, which had been converted into a command post not just for the city, but also for the state. The mayor introduced Clay to the governor who simply asked, "What can you do?" With that, Clay

answered the governor with his own question. "Where do you want me to begin?"

For the next six months, Clay worked with the engineers to get the exact figures they needed to get in order to get the old power stations up and running. He also worked with coal companies to get them the data they required to start up the mining equipment to feed the electric generators. It was a long six months away from the classroom and the students he wanted to serve.

When the first six months were up and the first of the old coal fired power plants came up on line, the governor petitioned the Kanawha County Board of Education to assign Clay to the reconstruction effort on extended basis. Clay had no choice but to stay on working eighty to one hundred hour weeks without overtime. He was somewhat depressed and sought consolation, but from whom?

While he was walking home one night after working late, Clay found his answer; Mr. Curtis. But, how would Clay reach out to him? The man had no phone or internet even before the solar flare hit. In fact, at the moment the entire world was without these services. Mr. Curtis had been a strong supporter of Clay's during high school and even helped him get a scholarship to attend West Virginia University. Right now, Clay was facing burnout just because people could no longer add, subtract, multiply, or divide without electronic assistance.

After the first power station was up and running, the federal government moved into the area to capitalize on this new power source of yore. Electric transmission lines everywhere were burned up during the Flare. As a result, the infrastructure was gone and also needed to be rebuilt. This had not happened yet. The government had to be where the electricity was even if it were only in a remote locale far from DC in Charleston. This did not mean that Clay's job was finished. Many places and institutions needed people with his skills. Clay worked on getting the other power plants on line and as Charleston became the light on an otherwise dark nation, Clay found himself being sent to other places when the local engineers in Charleston could once again use their electronic devices to do their jobs.

Clay became enamored over time with his celebrity status and the perks that went along with it. His house was among the first ones in town to get electricity restored after the Flare. People began to recognize him on the street. Even those who were older and not his students called him Mr. Morrow. As he traveled about West Virginia and the eastern part of the country, his new reputation followed him as if he were Albert Einstein.

Yet, he was still troubled. His soul ached, but he didn't know for why. He would like to get back to teaching, but he was not as excited about it as he was six months after the Flare.

He stopped by the high school once a week just to check in with the principal. During one of these visits, he asked his boss if anyone had heard from Mr. Curtis. To his astonishment, the principal told Clay that he still received an occasional snail mail letter from Alvin as the principal referred to Clay's mentor. Without being asked, the principal wrote down Mr. Curtis's address and gave it to Clay telling him that he should drop Alvin a line.

The next week Clay traveled to Elkins about 140 miles northeast of Charleston to help engineers to get a substation operating. The work went smoothly taking less time than expected. With the town now out of the dark after a two year blackout, Clay was again regaled as a hero. After an impromptu ceremony at city hall in which Clay was given the key to the city, he found that he had some free time before he was due at his next stop, Harrisonburg, Virginia. As he drove east on US Route 33, he pulled out from his coat pocket the slip of paper the principal had given him with Mr. Curtis's address on it. He saw that it was near the town of Bowden about ten miles outside of Elkins. Clay pulled over and looked at the local roadmap. He was only a couple of miles away from Mr. Curtis's home. Clay decided to travel there unannounced since Mr. Curtis had no telephone service. With that, he pulled on to a side road south of Bowden, whose lights were now lit by the Elkins substation.

The road to Mr. Curtis's house was graded and unpaved. Funny, Clay thought to himself that anyplace in the mid-21st century would not have paved roads as he pressed on.

He arrived to a place on the road where a lone mailbox stood with the name Curtis painted in neat block letters on it. Clay turned off the road on to a dirt lane, which went back into the woods. He drove slowly along the lane leading uphill a half mile to a simple one story log structure where the path ended. There was a dim light coming through one of the house's windows. "This must be the place," Clay whispered to himself. With that, he got out of his truck and walked up to the front door.

Clay knocked and then heard someone stirring inside. The door opened and there before him was Mr. Curtis who surveyed him with a cold scan and then looked at him straight in the eye. "I've been expecting you, Mr. Morrow," his mentor said in a flat tone. Clay was taken aback by his reception because he expected something warmer from the man who

nurtured him in school. "Come on in," Mr. Curtis beckoned him in the same spiritless voice.

Clay entered the cabin to see that it had a great room serving as a living room, dining room, and kitchen with only one small light on in the kitchen to illuminate the entire area. The décor was stark; a table, two chairs, and an old wooden roll top desk. Mr. Curtis was showing his age with a mane of now white hair and a shuffle in his step.

"I see you got your lights back on," Clay remarked in order to lift the mood. "I guess that I have you to thank for this?" Mr. Curtis replied in the form of a rhetorical question. "Have a seat," Mr. Curtis continued pointing to a chair next to the table. As he sat down, Clay was unsettled and wondered why his mentor was acting so strangely toward him.

"What brings you here?" Mr. Curtis asked Clay in the same monotone.

"Well," Clay started. "I've been working with the governor and even the federal government to help get the power plants back up and running. I've been all over the East Coast doing the calculations for the engineers..."

Before he could continue, Mr. Curtis held up a hand and interrupted Clay. "I have heard of your adventures. Word travels even without electricity. You have become somewhat of a celebrity. People come to you in search of answers."

"You don't understand," Clay offered. "The governor and the mayor came to me. They needed help and I was able to give it to them. My work helped put the lights back on in a lot of places a lot sooner than they could have without it."

"Is that so," the old man mused. "Then can you tell me what have you gotten in return?" The question rattled Clay.

"You don't understand. I haven't received a thing. I'm working long hours without overtime on my teacher's pay. I still live in the same house I grew up in. I'm still driving my father's old truck. I'm still wearing the same clothes I bought five years ago. What do you mean by asking what I got in return?"

This prompted Mr. Curtis to pelt Clay with rapid fire questions in an edgier voice. "Since you acquire your new status, have you had to wait in any food lines? How long was the electricity off at your house? Did you go long without water service? Have you asked about when you will go back to teaching? Do you remember your students' names? What does the world owe you? Where do you think you will be when this crisis is over?"

Clay recalled that he was among the first in his neighborhood to get his lights back on along with his water service. He never had to wait in a food line. It had been two years since he taught a class. His students had moved on and he did not remember any of their names. It was the first time since the Flare that Clay's motivation had been called into question and he didn't know how to answer the old man.

"I think I better get going. I have to get to Harrisonburg." Clay told Mr. Curtis in a shaky voice as he made his way to the door. "Take care of yourself," the old man said to him sternly and added. "My door is always open to you." Clay didn't know how to interpret his mentor's last remarks or for that matter any of the things Mr. Curtis said to him during their brief encounter. He got back into his truck and headed back to the main road, which would take him to Harrisonburg.

Clay's work with the governor would continue on for another year. Along the way, he was given a permanent position on a state commission involving education. Speaking engagements, television interviews, and even job offers also came his way. He even began a serious relationship with a woman he met on the governor's staff. He maintained high levels in his mathematical proficiency, but never returned to teach in the classroom.

He never reached out again to contact Mr. Curtis. Clay thought that his mentor had just gotten old and lost touch with the real world. Clay watched the lights come back on all over the country and thought that life was good.

One evening as he walked on the state capitol's parking lot to a new luxury car he recently bought, Clay looked up at the sky. In the twilight, he could see storm clouds forming overhead. Clay heard thunder in the distance and he knew that it was only a few minutes before it would start pouring. He had just finished testifying before the legislature on school funding. Clay looked at his shiny new vehicle and hoped that he could drive it home without getting any rain spots on it. As he reached for the door handle, he never heard it coming. There was no sound only a bright flash of lightning. Clay fell to the ground and he was no more.

The media only reported his death by saying that he was a member of the governor's staff. No official press releases came from the governor's mansion. No reporters asked the state's chief executive for any comment about Clay's untimely death at a press conference the following morning. His girlfriend cried at his funeral, which was attended by only a small number of people. Among them were the high

school principal, a few distant relatives, some old students, and his old mentor.

Mr. Curtis gave a moving eulogy, which ended with him recalling his last meeting with Clay at his cabin in the woods. He described Clay's departure driving down the rough lane in his truck to the highway never to be seen by him again. The old man added that Clay's path began with the Flare and ended with a flash of light. Mr. Curtis wondered if any of the mourners had gotten his message as they filed past the coffin at the cemetery.

MICHAEL



By Etheridge G. Lovett

Every school day he'd approach the bus stop alone. Rumor has it that his mother and father were both killed in a car crash and that he now lives with his grandparents. Actually, no one really knew where he was from, or where he lived, nor did they really care. To the other kids, Michael Davis was simply the new kid in town. He spent much of his time to himself, quiet, observant, but always kind and compassionate towards others. But kindness and compassion was something many in the town had forgotten. Sitting at the back of the school bus, Michael stared out of his window at the clouds drifting against a clear blue sky like giant cotton balls. Every so often he'd smile, totally oblivious to the other children on the school bus as his mind wandered. Wrestling about on the seat next to him, two boys struggled to overpower each other. The other children stood up, cheering the boys on.

"If all of you don't sit down and shut up I'll stop this bus right now!" the stout bus driver shouted, peeping through her rear view mirror at the melee.

"Michael started it!" one of the girls blurted out. The other children exploded in laughter at her statement, but the bus driver knew better. She never had any problems out of Michael before.

Looking over at the girls pointing at him and laughing, Michael frowned slightly. He pulled his crutches and twisted legs further underneath his seat out of the aisles. Attention

was something Michael shunned due to his obvious birth defect. Regardless of his efforts, Michael remained the center of attention, of every joke, every jeer. As he endured the taunting, the bus finally reached the school. The children stormed off of the bus, granting Michael some relief from their torment.

"Do you need my help, Michael?" the bus driver asked.

"No thanks, I believe I can make it," Michael responded in almost a whisper. He placed the crutches on his wrist and shuffled up to the front of the bus.

Giving the bus driver a warm smile, Michael placed one leg off the bus, then another and hobbled off to class. The bus driver watched him disappear down the long hallway. She wondered how Michael could maintain such inner strength through all of the mocking and jeers.

The school's warning bell rang. Michael picked up his pace, struggling to make it to his classroom on time. As he rounded one corner, three girls were waiting for him like robbers waiting for their next victim in a dark alley. One of the girls stuck out her left leg, tripping Michael. He stumbled, face-first to the carpet. His notebook and papers underneath his arms flew all about the hallway. Seeing this, the girls exploded in laughter. Michael cried, curling up in the corner of the dimly lit hallway. He wrapped his arms around his twisted legs. Several boys entered the hallway, joining the girls in laughing at Michael. Covering his face with his hands, burying his head between his knees, Michael tried to somehow escape their tantalizing laughter.

"What are you kids doing in here?" the janitor, George Stevens questioned, entering the far end of the hallway. The children ran off to their classes, still snickering and giggling every so often. George reached down to help Michael up, but the nervous child withdrew even more, burying his head further between his knees.

"Hey-hey, son, listen, I'm only here to help, not to hurt you," George said in a calming voice, but Michael remained withdrawn, sobbing to himself.

George reached down, picking up Michael's papers and notebook.

"Foolish silly kids today have no compassion for anyone," George mumbled. He frowned, rubbing his withered hands across his balding head aligned with curly snow-white hair. In his heart he felt the pain of Michael who was still withdrawn on the floor, trembling and crying.

"What is this world coming to?" George questioned. He picked up the final piece of paper, tucking the document neatly into Michael's notebook, placing it at his feet.

"Hang in there, kid. I know it's rough on you, but hang in there. Please, for old George's sake. There are still some good people left in this crazy, mixed up world," George said, walking off.

Before George pressed the handle on the exit door, a gentle voice whispered, "George, I will forever remember your kindness." Hearing this, George turned, looking back, but the boy was gone.

"How did?" – George paused, startled, questioning himself, wondering how the boy got up and walked away so fast. For several minutes George stood there, dumbfounded, trying to make sense of it all, but finding no clear explanation. Shaking his head, George simply walked away.

Later that evening, George prepared a TV dinner for himself while his cat, Fran, purred about his legs.

"I see you're hungry, too. Here, try some of this," George said. He placed a bowl of cat food in front of Fran.

A fierce rainstorm howled outside. George gazed out of his kitchen window at the falling rain.

"Boy, this storm's getting worse by the minute," George said to Fran. He headed towards the refrigerator to grab a cold beer to go along with his evening dinner.

With his beer in one hand, and his meal from the microwave oven in another, George sat down in his favorite recliner as the evening news began. The moment he began eating his meal, the face of Michael flashed across the TV screen. Springing forward in his chair, George's eyes stretched wide in shock. He listened attentively to the news reporter talk about a young disabled boy who never made it home after school.

"I bet those silly kids got something to do with this," George half whispered, gazing at the TV screen. George's heart began to pound like a bass drum. He thought of the young boy he tried to comfort earlier. As George placed his tray of food down upon the small wooden table beside his chair, he rose to his feet. He walked over to the telephone to call the police and tell them about the incident he witnessed at school. As George reached for the telephone, his heart pounded radically. George felt a tightness in his chest he'd never felt before. He

struggled to breathe, but couldn't. His fight to live dwindled with each gasp. Racing near her fallen master, Fran purred over George's body. Only the head-splitting thunder and the cat's eerie meows were heard in the room while the rain continued to fall with a raging fury.

Sensing a presence that only animals could sense, Fran stared at the front door of George's apartment. The aluminum door began to sweat tiny droplets of water. A strange glow encompassed the door as if it was set ablaze by a blowtorch. Then the ghostly hand of a young child was seen protruding from it. Fran watched the young boy, Michael, shuffle through the closed door, soaked from head to toe. As he struggled to walk with his crutches strapped to his wrist, Michael hobbled over to where George's body lay sprawled out on the floor. Leaning against a nearby chair, Michael lowered his frail body down beside George's. Raising his damp hands over George's chest, Michael looked up towards the ceiling, speaking a strange, ancient language that only God and angels fully understood. Fran cowered in the corner of the room while witnessing the miracle of George's resurrection. George sneezed three times and began to breathe again. Opening his eyes, George saw Michael sitting beside him, smiling.

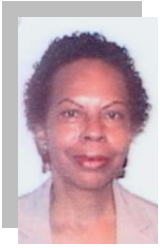
"Because of your heart of compassion and goodness towards me, you're blessed," the humble boy whispered. He gazed over at Fran still cowering in the corner of the room, hissing aloud. Staring at Michael, George rubbed his hands across his chest for he knew that he had died of a heart attack only moments ago. How is it possible that I'm alive again, George wondered.

"Where did you come from, and how did you bring me back?" George asked.

While scribbling something on the carpet with his thin index finger, Michael gazed up at George with a blank stare on his face. Without saying another word, Michael lowered his head and vanished, crutches and all. Heavy thunder followed his disappearance.

Startled, George looked down at the carpet where the boy sat. He wanted to see what the child was scribbling on the carpet with his finger. George was shocked when he read the words, **Hebrews 13:2** -Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares...'

THUNDERSTRUCK



By Margo Mulumba



Sarah was oblivious to the ominous clouds and the darkening skies overhead as she returned home. She soon became aware of the acute weather changes as she exited the taxi. The gust thrust Sarah violently to her front porch. She fumbled nervously in her purse for her house key. Finding it, she hastily inserted it into the keyhole and twisted the knob. The blustery wind seized the door from her hand and banged it against the front of the house. She used all her verve to close the door rivaling the might of the wind.

As soon as she shut it, the rain began pulsating in full force, drumming vociferously against the window panes as if it were attempting to enter her domain. She was deaf to the sound of the taxi's engine as it left her premises and disappeared down the road. She exhaled a sigh of relief at returning home and entering inside just before the rain came down in a furry.

In this weather, the crossroads always flooded thereby becoming impassible. If Sarah had lingered her departure twenty minutes longer her taxi would not have been able to penetrate the swelling water for there was no alternate route.

Upon Sarah's arrival, the house was pitch-black. Jim had not yet arrived home. As she snapped on the light, in the entranceway, a sense of disappointment overcame her. While travelling home, after visiting her sister, she visualized herself entering into a well-lit house, to Jim, who would be unwinding in his armchair listening to soft music after a hard day's work at the office. She had taken pleasure envisaging her husband pleasantly astonished at her sudden appearance, arriving home three days earlier than originally planned. He would turn towards her and his almond-shape eyes would illuminate and a serene smile would appear on his chiseled lips she imagined. He would extend his arms, affectionately giving her a welcoming embrace as she neared him. They would have a short exchange on her visit with her sister, and she, then the visit ended and they returned home, she'd summon him to bed. After all, she

was sure he hadn't received proper rest during her absence.

But sadly Jim wasn't here. She glanced at the clock situated over the armoire and it read nearly nine-thirty. It's possible he had not intended to return home tonight, since he was not expecting her. Habitually before she left, he occasionally socialized with friends after work and with the sudden change of weather; he may have chosen to spend the night in a hotel. If he did not arrive soon, he might be unable to make it home tonight.

She was displeased by the notion. The storm's magnitude was intensifying at an alarming rate. She could hear the wind roaring while whipping the trees about and the howling gale penetrating around the perimeter of the house. For the first time she lamented moving to the outskirts of town isolated from civilization. Originally she and Jim had neighbors located on either side of them, but recently they had relocated and now their houses were vacant.

She had thought nothing of being isolated because she always found something to do to occupy her time. She was a newlywed, only married a little less than a year. It seemed romantic how her husband wanted to keep them in their own private paradise. But tonight she found it quite eerie, being detached from the rest of the world with the storm threatening to thrash its entryway. There was no other resident within two miles in each direction of them. The road that runs by the house ambled past tumble weeds leading into a dense forest a half mile away, then into oblivion.

She hung her coat in the closet and placed her umbrella in its stand in the entranceway. She was unaware of her natural beauty as she patted her curly hair into place. She stood 5' 5", medium-framed, solid with an oval-shape face and midnight brown eyes and full lips.

A sense of uneasiness overcame her as the storm worsened. She began to feel fearful as she did at the age of three when her mother turned the light out in order for her to fall asleep. She had a needy personality, something that attracted Jim to her and seemed to satisfy his cravings.

Tense, she trekked through the house, switching on lights, room by room, using them as a fortress for protection.

The house was meticulously clean, odd for Jim because he never made the bed nor was one to contribute with household chores. A sudden chill came over Sarah. The house was in a refrigerated state. She checked the thermostat. It was set at sixty degrees. That's

why it was so frigid. She reset the temperature to seventy-two degrees and without notice the furnace motor in the basement erupted abruptly, which unnerved her momentarily.

Catching her breath, she walked into the kitchen to brew herself a cup of peppermint tea. As the water was boiling she started to lurk around the room. Slightly agitated, she found it difficult to unwind. Still, she felt content to be in the comfort of her own home. When the tea was ready, she sipped it quickly in an attempt to warm her body. That didn't work so she ran to the linen closet and grabbed a heavy blanket and draped it over her shoulders.

Suddenly a sharp clap, a thunderous bolting of clatter then a low rumbling sound was heard in the distance by Sarah. The wind continued to punch at the door while the window panes rattled from its force. Heavy rains thumped on the roof's shingles while the gushing rain water raced through the gutters. Hearing the treacherous sounds outside, Sarah desperately desired Jim's presence. She had never felt so alone. Being with him gave her a sense of security. He so understood about her spending an extended period of time away. Her sister had just given birth to her first child and there was no one else to help her during her convalescence. He had such a generous disposition. He controlled the whole trip preparation. He bought a layette for her sister's baby and made train reservations. What really surprised her is that he even packed Sarah's outfits for her trip. To be quite frank, he normally insisted in being waited on like a king.

But he was a kind husband. She exhaled audibly. He was quite overbearing, occasionally, maybe because he had served in the military for three years. He often said he had wanted to be an Air Force Officer, but had a change of heart. Sarah justified that it was the reason he was so regimented in his ways. In reality, they were opposites of each other. Sarah was a bit insecure because Jim programmed her to believe that he was her protector and without him her life would be in shambles. Her confidence level began to erode as Jim molded her into his ideal woman. At that moment, in her eyes, Jim could do no wrong.

Sarah viewed a crumbled beige envelope, lying on the center of the floor. She inched towards it, crouched down and then snatched it up with her fingertips. Sarah paused as she read the sender's address on the envelope, 1222 West Charles Street, Boston, MA 02113. She hesitated before her fingers crept inside of it. To her amazement, the envelope was empty. Sarah searched her memory to recall two other times when an identical addressed envelope appeared on Jim's desk, but she knew better not to open it. Instead, she gingerly questioned Jim of its contents during

the course of eating their evening meal and was dumbfounded by his volcanic response to her concerning the subject. At that moment, she vowed to herself never to question him on private matters that irritated him. She became acutely aware to the times of the arrival of the mysterious mail for Jim's mood would change from jovial to morbid. This conflict was the cause of their eroding relationship in the past few months.

Sarah clutched her palpitating heart with her trembling hands. Why do things fall apart so easily? She and Jim were opposites. She was so easy-going and adaptable while Jim was so authoritarian and rigid. It's strange why a simple thing like a letter could cause such a rift in their lives, especially since she had no explanation why.

This envelope was postmarked from two days earlier. If Jim were to return home tonight he should have probably arrived by now, but the snarl of the storm could darken his mood. Even so, she wanted him home.

She ripped the envelope into small pieces and then threw them into the wastebasket.

The gale jolted the house with a relentless force. A large limb snapped from its tree and violently bludgeoned the roof. As Sarah attempted to compose herself she heard a commotion outside the window. She turned towards it and viewed a flicker of eyes blurred in the heavy downpour. She glared at them in disbelief. It had to be her imagination. Nobody could be out in such horrid weather like tonight, nobody. Yet she found herself horribly traumatized. If only Jim would come home. If only she were not so isolated.

She took a moment to compose herself and inhaled deeply. She knew she had to check the doors and the windows. First she darted to the front door, then to the back door to ensure they were securely locked. She raced from window to window frantically verifying each was bolted. She was sure it was just her nerves that caused her to see those haunting eyes.

The blustery airstream grew more combative and intimidating. Sarah, while paralyzed, glared toward the window into the ominous darkness. The rain continued to tap unmercifully onto the sheet of glass that separated her from the elements. The ferocious echoes were the assaulting of trees, gurgling water and the portentous wowl of the tempest.

She fought her own panic to switch off the kitchen light, later inching towards the window. She felt as though she were enclosed in the walls of a tomb. She knew inwardly that

something outside wanted to possess her, yet the rational side of her kept denying it. She snuggled inside her blanket for comfort, but found the solitude insufferable. Her ears strained to hear lurking footsteps prowling outside the window. She was now induced to feel what she heard was not imagined and felt inevitable doom.

Her only hope was to summon for help. She tiptoed into the living room where the telephone was located and gingerly lifted it from the receiver to make the emergency call. She dialed 911 and to her disbelief, the line was dead. Naturally, the wires would be down at a time like this.

Suddenly, there was a blackout in the house. Sarah fought her own panic and reached for the nearest lamp switch to illuminate the room, but nothing happened. There was no reason to attempt to sleep because she would have a nightmare seeing those haunting eyes and hearing those foreboding footsteps, at the window. No, she had to go outside and reset the fuse box to turn back on the lights. The eyes had been the refraction, a prism of light, on the dousing window pane and the echo of footsteps was an illusion, too. Actual footsteps would be inaudible in a blustery gale. Nothing could actually harm her. The squall was contained outside these walls and the daylight would bring calm.

She vacillated on the top of the basement stairs as she toggled the light, but found it deficient. The cement wall at the foot of the stairs smelled of dust and old moisture from an icy airstream and rain seeping inside the basement walls.

It took her a moment to unnerve herself before she ventured down the stairs, extending her hand for the lever of the open door.

Within seconds she was drenched from the projectile of rain. Her wandering eyes could only see murky, trembling shadowy trees flanking outside the house. As the wind forcefully shut the door, she wedged the lock securely with all her might and verified it to ensure it would stay. Sarah's eyes welled as she assured herself that she was now protected against any intruder.

She returned upstairs, shed her wet clothes, showered and dressed in a warm pair of pajamas, robe and cashmere slippers. Now refreshed and relaxed, Sarah headed towards the living room when she observed a steam of light passing under the hallway basement door but found it strange because she had turned it off.

When she stepped into the basement, in the far corner, she found a dim light bulb was

lit. She paused as her eyes raked the cellar. Nobody could hide here. The basement had no obstructions; the supporting beams were too narrow to conceal anybody.

She heard a heavy click near the furnace. Its murmur was human. Impossible! Nothing was with here now, in the basement, but the scowl of the storm.

Just the same, she explored the premises with her eyes. There was a glimmer of light where no light should be. A bewildering fear tugged at her soul. Her eyes protruded, round and somber, like a terrified doe. A trunk sat near the wall slightly ajar sprouting light in the basement's murkiness.

She floated towards it like a spellbound woman. It was just another minor thing, like the envelope in the middle of the floor, the illusion of the eyes at the window, the jarred door, in the basement. There was no need for her to panic.

Still she was certain she had not only shut, but fastened the lid on the trunk because she had stored her summer wardrobe and firmly sealed it to keep moths at bay.

Now the lid was ajar about an inch and the beam of light was passing through it. She drew her breath as she stood gazing into the trunk while its contents were imprinted like an effigy of film, on her brain. It was a body of a dead woman.

Sarah thrust down the lid and flew up the stairs. She had a sudden urge to run out of the house. She ran to the closet and put on her raincoat, rain hat and boots. She could hide in the garage until morning since it was detached 300 feet from the house. In the morning, the phone would be restored and she could call the police to claim the body.

She had to be careful. The killer might be lingering out there in the storm but she had no choice. She first turned off the lights and carried her flashlight with her. To her amazement, the garage door was open and Jim's car was in it. The trunk of the car was open. When she walked to the front of the car, she found the car keys in the ignition and the car had not a single drop of rain on it. How long had it been there?

A livid voice uttered, "Sarah, I wasn't expecting you home until Monday." Its voice was familiar, Jim's. She turned in fear towards a pair of distorted protruded glazed eyes and an agitated frown. It was as though he wore an invisible armoire creating a demarcation. He was like a caricature. "When did you arrive home?" Sarah asked Jim. "I just arrived. You

know it's dangerous to be outside on a night like this," he said wryly.

"I found a dead body in my trunk, in the basement," is all Sarah could say.

"We need to move her to the property of one of the neighboring empty houses to avert suspension from me. You know the police are susceptible to ask a lot of questions. We don't want them to pry in our backgrounds, do we?" Jim asked as though he was possessed.

For once, Sarah knew not to cross Jim with any questions. All she could say is, "You're right." Sarah now knew it was Jim, who was the murderer of the woman in the box. Her inclination told her run Sarah run. She did. She heard a voice in the distance saying, "Sarah where are you? Sarah where are you?" She just kept running.

Suddenly a sharp clap, a loud crackle of bolting clatter then a low rumble sound was heard in a distance. She heard such a gruesome sound like a howling wolf's cry. Yes, it was inhuman. Her mind told her not to turn, but her body could not resist. She turned. Sarah saw him as he struggled like a ragdoll to rid himself from a bludgeoned sword of the tree's limb, as he fell dead. It was Jim.

WRITE AND TELL US WHAT YOU THINK OF THE STORIES AND POEMS:

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THE SWORD AND THE FLAME: THE FORGING



By CP Bialois/Ed White

Chapter 1

"That's right folks step right up and pick something you'd like. Maybe for that special girl, something for your wife... an

anniversary is a terrible thing to forget... or maybe you just want to treat yourselves? We have it all or my name isn't Clay Morrow."

The people of the small city of Hope gathered around him like he'd cast some kind of spell on them. They slobbered over his trinkets like a starving man would a loaf of bread. The Halfling watched the large jovial man work the crowd, amazed at the apparent lack of control these people showed. Janessa had been sitting there for the past few minutes with her arms crossed watching him disapprovingly. *How dare he do such a thing!* It was clear to see his trinkets were shoddy and worthless. She stole far more reputable items from one of the city's officials just the other day. People like this Morrow fellow gave any respectable thief a bad name. At least the barrel she sat on was comfortable.

"Still pouting, Jenny? What's he ever done to you?" The voice behind her belonged to Viola, her lone human friend and amateur mage. Viola always dreamed of becoming a great mage, imagining her name being spoken in the same sentence as Mortikye, Grassimore, or Killdare. Fate could be cruel as thus far her dreams hadn't come close to being realized. Only twenty, she wasn't quite old enough to expand her knowledge beyond the most rudimentary of spells. That was what her master, an older wizard named Poumous, told her. He'd been her instructor for close to ten years before she grew impatient enough to attempt a spell that only the most powerful of wizards could hope to use with any success. Her impatience led to half of her master's laboratory being blown apart when she lost control of the magic. Since she hadn't died in the accident, though none could explain why, she'd been sent home for her summer break early with the rest of the students. She had no doubt she'd be welcomed back, Poumous did appreciate the weight of gold in his purse, but she wasn't sure she wanted to go back.

Master Poumous developed a reputation over the years as running his school more like a boarding house than a magic school. In fact, most respectable mages refused to have anything to do with him or his pupils as they were always behind in their studies, due in large part to Poumous' laughable teaching ability. Despite his reputation, Albia Poumous displayed enough for the conclave to allow him to continue. They preferred to clean up his mess instead of having him stay with them in the Tower within the walls of Tagon Keep. With permission to teach his methods, Poumous would collect the gold it cost to maintain the school, without a care as to where or how it was procured.

The latter would've been of great interest to the Conclave had they known one of

his students performed as an illusionist to afford the scrolls and spell books needed in Master Poumous' curriculum. Thus was how Viola, a street urchin that carried herself with dignity, could afford such a school. With none better for more than fifty miles and no way to travel aside from her own two feet, she'd take what she could from the good master.

Performing illusions for the masses was how she met Janessa, Jenny to her friends. Viola had been performing when she noticed the Halfling making her way through the crowd. Afterwards, she confronted the Halfling and found her pouches full of valuables. The two hit it off from the start and became fast friends, once Janessa knew Viola wasn't going to turn her over to the Sheriff. As close as they were, neither one trusted the other in the beginning. Janessa worried she'd wake to find the city's guards there to arrest her and Viola was as worried that one day her spell components, scrolls, and spell books would all be gone.

Janessa's parents disappeared when she was very young, making her an outcast for most of her life. She never knew what happened to them as rumors spread through her people like wild fire and seemed to have a different twist with each retelling. Some claimed they were arrested while others said they'd been hung for stealing. The third, and the one Janessa decided to be the most likely story, was they just up and left her in the town of Solm. While Halflings were considered many things, they were always responsible for themselves and their family. Some believe it's a lesson learned the hard way as they were one of the smallest creatures on Pyrain. Resembling human children at the age of twelve but with pointed ears, the Halflings never grew to be tall or stocky. The tallest on record stood just under four feet and weighed ninety pounds, quite large for a pure-blooded Halfling.

With their size being a Halfling's greatest weakness, they turned it into a strength by traveling in groups ranging in size up to ten people but ate little more than the average human family of three. By remaining together and moving from one place to the next they were ignored by the other races. Humans thought them to be pests and so they tried to ignore them as much as possible. Dwarves, both hill and mountain, viewed them as insults due to their smaller statures and inability to properly swing an axe or hammer. The Elves treated them like they treated any other race, as vermin they had to tolerate.

Janessa, like the rest of her kind, loved challenges such as picking locks, stealing valuable items without getting caught (though doing so under a Sheriff or Marshall's nose was considered the best), and the adventure of traveling and seeing far off lands. But unlike

herself and others of her kind, Janessa's parents displayed none of those characteristics. They were content to live a peaceful life in Solm until the day they disappeared without a trace. A kind human named Vin Morth adopted and raised her until she was old enough to begin the search for her parents. Morth was a family friend for years until Janessa accepted her "Uncle" Morth as her guardian and grew into a lovely young woman. Though her kind ages slower than humans, some living to be two hundred, their early development is the same as human children with the exception they're full grown by the time they reach thirteen years of age.

It was at the age of ten that Janessa first wanted to leave to find her family, but she hesitated in doing so. While she was certain her parents left her for some unknown reason, she was just as sure they'd come back for her like they always did in the fairy tales Uncle Morth read to her each night at bedtime. Janessa didn't want to leave the one person she felt could be counted on but by her way of thinking, if her parents wanted her they would've been back by then. With her mind made up, she left with a heavy heart and spent the last eight years traveling throughout the Kingdom of Angor in search of her place. Over time, her path led through other kingdoms until finding the small crossroads city of Hope. An interesting name, she remembered thinking as she entered. As with everywhere else she'd been no one noticed her, at least until she did something they didn't appreciate. Using their blindness, she earned quite a comfortable lifestyle over the last few years. Rarely was anyone able to catch her, and if they did she'd apologize and claim she was looking for her mother and father. Several local Magistrates felt sympathy for her and gave her money to stay in the local inn while they make the proper contacts to try to find them. Since many believed she was only a child, and a little crying always helped, she described her parents as they were but as humans. Then she'd run off and it'd be called a tragedy.

There'd been times where it hadn't worked out quite that well, usually in cities or border towns that attracted the different peoples of Pyrain. For one reason or another, she would be identified as a Halfling and thrown in jail. Due to her talents, and other Halflings in the area, she was never expected to remain in jail for long. It was an unspoken rule with the Halflings: Now you have me, now you don't.

Hope happened to be one of those cities where she wasn't seen as a Halfling until an officer named Tavers was promoted to Sheriff. Since then, Janessa made sure to hide anything she stole before being discovered. That was until the young mage Viola happened upon her. Though she didn't know why, Janessa liked something about the human and while Viola's magic needed a lot more work, Janessa decided

having her as a friend wouldn't be something she'd regret.

"What's he ever done to you?" She said. Janessa thought, irritated. The Halfling let out a harrumph. "Guys like him give my kind a bad name."

Viola looked at the merchant then back to her friend. "I don't follow."

Janessa threw up her hands in disgust, "Thieves. He makes all of us honest thieves look bad. 'Welcome ladies and gentlemen' what a load of shit!"

Viola nodded and did her best to hold back her smile. "He offers them something they want. He does seem quite charming."

Janessa glared at her friend with venom in her eyes but that was all Viola could take before she burst into laughter. After a moment she wiped tears from her eyes, "There's still honor among thieves. He's just better at it than we are."

Janessa smiled, letting out a giggle, "But that's the point. He's killing us."

Viola shrugged, "Maybe some warts..." Her smile faded somewhat when she saw the look on Janessa's face. "No."

"Come on."

"No."

"It'll be fun."

Viola turned away, hurrying down the alley to put some distance between them. "Oh no you don't. Last time I tried that it took a month for me to get rid of them."

Janessa leapt down and followed her friend, trying to convince her to try it. "Don't cast it near a mirror this time." Viola gave her a look, but the playful side of the Halfling was coming out again. "It wasn't that bad. At least your dance card was empty." She failed to suppress a snicker, "I'm sorry, I couldn't help it. Wouldn't it be fun to see someone else look like a toad? Viola!" She kept up her efforts until both broke into laughter.

Laughing until both their sides hurt, the pair sat or leaned against something to keep from falling. Viola was the first to speak, wiping tears from her eyes. "Casting spells is very serious, I can't just cast them for fun."

Though Viola tried to make herself sound serious, it didn't come out the way she intended. Janessa understood what she meant, which was why she only teased her. It never

failed to amaze Janessa how much time her friend needed to study each day. It seemed such a waste for one to spend so much idle time studying the same spells over and over each night. Viola explained she needed to reread each spell several times until it accepted her and would allow her to cast it. Janessa never believed her reasoning from the first moment she'd been told that. Why would someone have to state a spell perfectly? She believed it should work anyway; it was an opinion Viola never had any success at getting the Halfling to change no matter how hard she tried to explain it. Viola believed Janessa was unable to grasp the scope of power a mage could wield. Janessa, on the other hand, understood. She just believed life was more fun to live rather than spend it reading a spell book. Nope, you couldn't pay her enough to try her hand at magic.

Janessa chuckled before she responded, "How hard could it be? Two words?" She continued staring at her friend until Viola's smile broadened.

"It's not, a single toad stool would suffice—"

Janessa threw up her hands, "You see? I knew it!" She smacked her friend on the arm. "Even I could do it."

Viola shook her head, this was the same argument she heard every day and she learned to take it as it was meant. She knew if anyone else talked about her passion in such a manner she really would give them warts... if she was in a good mood. Trying to change the subject, Viola motioned to her friend. "Planning on being around for my exhibition later today?"

Janessa took the hint and let the conversation go in a different direction. She never missed Viola's show if she could help it. People tipped her well after seeing her magic tricks, even if they were slight of hand, but not that time. She shook her head knowing it'd hurt the young mage. "A new group arrived late last night. Rumor has it they're pit fighters and the Sheriff has forbidden them to enter the city. They're opening tonight near the southern forest."

As Janessa expected, Viola was hurt, but more disgusted than insulted that her friend would miss her show for something so barbaric. Setting a withering glare on the Halfling she let her feelings be known. "Really Jenny, I thought you had better taste than to watch those things."

Janessa smiled, "All those books and they haven't taught you anything." Taking a deep breath before she continued, she had to repair hurt feelings as well as sell her idea. "Pit fighting is barbaric, but I'm not going to watch

the matches." Pausing until Viola's face twisted into a curious expression, Janessa set the hook. "In a single night one can win a hundred gold pieces if they pick the right combatant.

Viola's mouth dropped open, a hundred gold pieces? In a single night? She'd consider herself lucky if she saw a hundred copper pieces in a year. Just as fast as the amount of gold caused her to lose control she clamped down on those thoughts with the weight of her iron will. "And how would you do that? You're not a gambler."

Janessa's expression changed into one of thoughtfulness, she already had a plan but it'd have to look like she came up with it on the spot. After she felt Viola waited long enough, Janessa smiled as if she just had a stroke of genius. "You could come with!"

Viola looked at her for a moment before a grin broke across her face and she shook her head. "Oh no, I'm not going to use my magic to decide the winners."

"Why not? No one would know!" Janessa's exasperated reaction wasn't an act. Viola guessed her plan, as she hoped she would, but she was supposed to go along with it. The Halfling's mind raced for an alternative idea, Viola could be stubborn and Janessa knew she wouldn't have much, if any, success in talking her out of it.

An idea came to Janessa before Viola could voice her opinion, and by the look on her face it wouldn't have been pleasant. "We don't need your magic anyway." Viola's look turned inquisitive but she knew a "but" was to come. *Such a shame I never thought of becoming a trader* Janessa thought to herself, *I have such a talent for it.* "You study living things don't you? Their physique and all that, right?"

Viola paused for a moment before answering. "Yes, joints and ligaments and their form of locomotion." She knew Janessa was up to something but she had no idea what. All mages studied the way living things moved and grew. In doing so it helped them in their understanding about spell components, healing herbs, and others services. Janessa leaned forward, "All you have to do is watch each fighter before their match and tell me who looks like a winner. It's that easy!"

Various doubts kept eating away at Viola, one after another crept into her mind. "What about Sherriff Tavers? Won't he have something to say about this?"

Janessa snorted, "Gods no, he already made them set up outside the city's walls. His authority ends with the city limits. At worst he may try to catch everyone returning to force

them to pay taxes on their winnings. We'll just be sure to avoid him."

Janessa didn't go on about how everyone else in town would be trying to do the same thing and with only one way into the city, that being the main gate, it'd be a difficult task to avoid him. But then the walls were only ten feet high, just high enough to make bandits and other outlaws wary of attempting anything underhanded.

"What if he catches us?"

Janessa rolled her eyes, "He won't. Trust me okay? You want in?" She wanted, no, needed, her friend to come. Even if they didn't win anything they could still earn something through their talents. Plus it'd be good for Viola to get out at least once in a while. Janessa could tell her friend was about to refuse so she threw in her last card, it had to work.

"Of course they also sell items, like weapons and scrolls. We could always shop for souvenirs with our winnings."

At the word "scrolls" Viola's eyes began to sparkle. "Do they have magic scrolls?" YES! Janessa shrugged as she celebrated in her heart. "I guess. They always have merchants at these things."

"I'll go."

Janessa smiled, "We can leave in a couple of hours and see what they're setting up." Looking back on it, she was rather pleased with herself. Bartering was so easy, although not as much fun as being a thief. One did what they did for more than money, the adventure being where it was at for her.

hummingbirds that flitted in and out all day long. This was hurricane season and there was no telling what damage, if any might have occurred. Anna hoped the sturdy rocks that lined the sides of the stream and the roots of the full grown butterfly bushes, which were now three feet tall, and firmly embedded along the path, would at the very least, provide support for the families of tiger swallowtail butterflies and their young to weather the storm.

The land upstream was contoured to create a mound, from which the water trickled and several times during the day, birds would pause in the shaded area that it provided, and drink from the stream. Anna and her mother enjoyed the view of this natural bird bath from their window, and felt even more encouraged to provide food and shelter for the small birds and insects that stopped to pay a visit.

In addition to the palm trees, which were scattered over the entire property, they planted flower beds of lantanas, and hibiscus of different species, bougainvilleas in red, purple and yellow to attract the butterflies. These were likely to support the butterflies through all stages of their growth, from the larva to pupae and caterpillar stages of their growth and then as moths to full grown butterflies. They knew that butterflies did not have time or the ability to fly to safe locations when there was severe weather, and would either seek shelter under leaves or the bark of a tree. Some species even became dormant and reappeared again when the seasons changed.

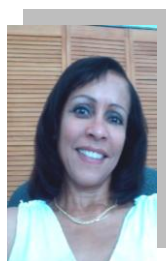
The stream was a natural source of water for those butterflies that required it as well, and it was fascinating to watch clusters of them, as they flitted from flower to flower gathering nectar, feeding and pollinating; then at dusk hovered together on the fronds of the palm trees, like clockwork, as if they had all been called and knew that it was time to tuck in.

It's their amazing ability to sense a drop in barometric pressure that accounts for the survival of birds and insects during storms. They can detect severe weather, usually in time to seek shelter and the hooks on the ends of their legs allow them to grip the leaves and branches during strong winds.

+++++

After she had convinced herself that there wasn't much damage done, except for a few branches from the palm trees that needed to be removed, and a large tree which had fallen across the stream, Anna sat on the fallen tree and was gazing at the butterflies settling in for the evening, when she noticed something unusual. In the distance, there appeared to be a small human form, dressed in white, and with curly shoulder-length hair. The feature which

THE STORM



By Gemma Haynes

The storm was barely over, when Anna rushed out to look around the garden for what structural damage had been done. Her mother had built a small alcove into the garden, at first for the aesthetic pleasure it provided. But as time went by, they felt that it could serve as a shelter for the butterflies and

distinguished this person from most humans, was the tiny transparent wings, that flapped slowly, in the breeze while she sat on one of the rocks that lined the path, contemplating the stream. The water that flowed in the stream was now more than a trickle, since the storm had increased its force and it was now picking up speed, taking some of the sediment from the bottom of the stream with it as it drained into the lake. This person, thought Anna, seemed very content to just sit and watch. Anna was sure she could hear her approaching, but since she made no attempt to move, she must not be easily scared.

"Hello" said Anna.

"Hello to you too! What's your name?"

"Anna. What's yours?"

"Mika. I'm sometimes known as 'the weather fairy'."

"Are you here to watch the butterflies?"

"Oh, I love all of nature. The butterflies are just a small part of the entire environment and I like to make sure that the birds are happy, the insects can thrive and the entire ecosystem is in harmony. Sometimes if there are squabbles because there isn't enough food to go around, then I direct them to new places where they can find more food."

"You must be very busy when the seasons change."

"Especially when there are heavy storms, tornadoes, hurricanes, cyclones and tsunamis and the entire landscape is denuded. "First, let me explain that I have special powers. You see, I am only visible to you since you have been kind enough to create this beautiful garden for the butterflies and humming birds. I do not make myself visible to everyone, but I consider you a very special person, since you spend so much of your time caring for the birds and butterflies in your garden".

"I look out for those small animals who need my help. I try my best to keep up with those areas that have recently been affected by bad weather, and visit as soon as I can, to see what damage has been done to our ecosystem. I give them directions on how to get back home, if it's not too far or new places for them to settle and I show them the paths which will allow them to find food. If they need help, I give them advice on which are the safest routes that they can take. When the environment is again in a state of balance, my work will be over, and I will move on to another area, where I am needed."

"Where do all the birds go when there are storms, Mika?"

"Most of the time, birds can sense that a storm is coming, and they will ride ahead of it.

"Take the pelicans, for example. If you looked for them when your weather forecast was predicting the storm, they would already have flown miles away from here, to a safe haven. They use their strong talons to cling to the branches, or in the case of small birds if they are cavity nesters, they hide in the trunks of trees. The lucky ones are able to withstand the strong winds and will be able to survive; but sometimes the trees snap from the force of the winds and with no place to go for shelter, they may die if they can't find a place to hide.

Some have been known to find themselves in people's backyards, or under garage roofs because they were displaced by weather conditions. If they get caught in the eye of a hurricane, they are lucky, as that's the calmest region and it acts as a bird cage, protecting them from the strong swirling winds, in the eye wall outside it. In this way, they can ride out the storms and when it's over, they land in the closest place that they can find, which may be miles away from their natural habitat. Birds have been riding out storms for centuries, but they still need our help. Now that we have so much land development, if they find themselves in a parking lot and have to forage for food in garbage cans, we can't be sure of their survival. They may find themselves eating trash and fast food, before I can get to them. The fish too, can find themselves washed ashore, disoriented, and far away from their natural environment, and in shallow waters where they cannot survive for very long."

"You are very kind, Mika. I would love to be as helpful as you are. I just wish I could get around as you do, but even with a Global Positioning System to point me in the right direction, I would need to be able to fly to those places, and I don't have that ability. I'm only human, after all."

"You've just made the most important observation, Anna. Yet, it's humans that have done so much damage to our beautiful environment and pay so little regard to the preservation of our ecosystems. I wish they all had your understanding of who they are, then they would realize that they have to share and conserve all of the resources that we are given."

"What can I do to make it better?"

"You're doing a lot. Just keep caring and providing a home and food for the birds and

butterflies. Help in anyway you can to share that awareness; eventually they will be back."

Suddenly, Mika's nose started twitching, "Oh dear, I can feel another storm brewing in the south. I must be on my way before it starts, but I will visit you again. Just promise me you'll keep our visit a secret. No one will believe you anyway!"

"Thanks for stopping by Mika. Do come again!" And off she flew to encourage the broods that awaited her assistance.

The Land Of Fairy



By Narda Mc Carthy



Many people don't know, that is why I have to tell you that somewhere in the north of the earth there is this a beautiful country where the bees make honey all year 'round and there are butterflies of all the colors. Imagine them coming out of their cocoons every day going from plant to plant, from tree to tree and from a child's face to another child's face, kissing their cherry cheeks and foreheads, because you need to know that in this land most children are nice and respectful. All women are very beautiful, and all men are handsome, strong and fearless. In this land everyone is smarter than the smartest scientist we know, but they don't know that because being smart is normal. The children sing since they get up and ask their mothers to take them to school. When they get back from working at school all day, they even ask their mothers to do their homework and if they have no homework they get a little sad but not too much and not for too long because they are nice children and they love to laugh, sing and play. When they go out to the playground they always take turns and help each other if one of them falls from the slide or swing, although they never get hurt because they are strong and very healthy because they eat their veggies and like liver and fish, of course since this is a special land, liver and fish taste delicious.

In the same land, there are others who do not like to see their neighbors happy and are always finding ways to make them sad. They like to steal and gossip. Because they are so busy doing these ugly things, they do not see

the beautiful butterflies and butterflies do not kiss the cheeks of their children because these children are not very nice and they would probably swat them as if they were flies. Although they live next to each other, their worlds are different and they only cross once in someone's lifetime, like that day when Muirgen went out for a walk in the fields and crossed over to the land of fairy. Muirgen's parents had named her Aoife after the famous warrior princess, but after hearing the story of the mermaid, she decided it was a name more appropriate to her beauty and changed it.

Muirgen was a capricious and strong willed woman, but handsome shepherd Loegaire of the fairies did not know that when he saw her walking towards him with the afternoon sun shining on her cheeks and the pleasant day breeze gently moving her dark curls. Her sapphire eyes looked deep into his and that was the last time that he was owner of his own thoughts and will. By the time our herdsman saw her, Muirgen had already decided that she wanted to marry him.

Muirgen had been watching Loegaire hidden in the air of fairy. She had seen him when he woke up with blond curls covering his forehead while he stretched his long, strong arms and opened his big blue eyes that had the image of love in them. She had seen him eating with his parents near the fire on the thick wooden table and then had watched him tending the sheep. Unfortunately, she had also noticed his longing eyes following Adara, the maiden he was to marry, and had determined that Loegaire would be hers or no one's.

If Loegaire had been able to glimpse into Muirgen's heart and mind when he saw her smiling her sweet smile, he would have ran until he'd reached the ends of the earth, but he hadn't and so, he stayed, captured by her beauty.

When Muirgen called him he followed her and abandoned his sheep in the fields. He forgot Adara and his family and would have forgotten his name too if it weren't for Muirgen calling him "Loegaire mine" whenever she talked to him.

The first one to notice that something was wrong was Loegaire's mother when she didn't hear him coming in asking for a bowl of hot soup at sundown. The father wasn't happy when he found out the sheep were not in their pen. Off he went fetching for the son and his flock. The beasts were peacefully together and he drove them home without any trouble. The parents worried about the son for a long time, but not being able to find him finally gave up and became a sad couple who didn't talk nor laugh as before, they would just go about their

chores in silence until their neighbors thought they had forgotten how to talk.

Adara asked Loegaire's parents to let her tend the sheep for she believed that if she took care of the animals just as her beloved Loegaire had done, he would soon show up, and they would marry and live happily thereafter until their time of death. Every afternoon she would look in the distance imagining her lover walking towards her and every night she went to bed crying wishing day break would soon arrive so she could wait for him again. For many years she went out with the sheep every day, even on the day of rest. The sun, the rain and the wind dried her skin. Sadness whitened her hair until she was not the young and beautiful maiden the Loegaire had once loved.

One day an old man came to town walking from the south. He claimed his name was Loegaire and asked for his parents, they told him they had gone to their tomb years ago. He asked for Adara and was sent to the hills of the south where she was taking care of the sheep. Instead of the beautiful maiden he had left, he found an old woman with deep wrinkles woven in her face by her many tears. Feeling the guilt of many years, he fell on one knee before her and asked for forgiveness. Adara looked at him, not recognizing the man she had so deeply loved. She turned her back on him and went up the hills and was never seen again. Some folks say that if you go north and up the hills on a sunny afternoon when the soft breeze from the south arrives, you can see a beautiful shepherdess with searching eyes, as if waiting for someone that never arrives.

Loegaire eventually left the town. Some travelers say they have met him, an old man that likes to tell stories about his days in the land of humans, where he was taken by a capricious enchantress who abandoned him when she met the king of Tara.

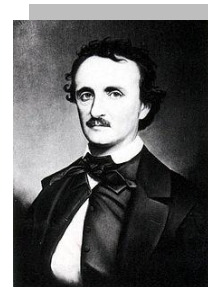
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight
To cool in the peppermint wind.

Let us leave this place where the smoke
blows black
And the dark street winds and bends.
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow
We shall walk with a walk that is measured
and slow,
And watch where the chalk-white arrows go
To the place where the sidewalk ends.

Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured
and slow,
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows
go,
For the children, they mark, and the
children, they know
The place where the sidewalk ends.



"A DREAM WITHIN A DREAM"



By Edgar Allan Poe

Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow--
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand--
How few! yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep--while I weep!
O God! can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?

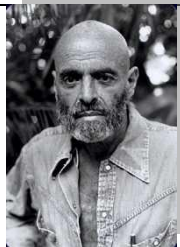


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POETRY CORNER

"WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS"



By Shel Silverstein

There is a place where the sidewalk ends
And before the street begins,
And there the grass grows soft and white,
And there the sun burns crimson bright,

FIRST PLACE WINNER: by James P. Novak

POEM: "MONSTER"

This Monster was not born.
Yet somehow was created.
Heart and stone, mud and soul,
Entwined and integrated.

Set on Earth to wander,
Uncovering what it can.
This Monster is no child of God,
And hardly son of man.

Left motherless so early,
It crawled out on it's own.
Fatherless by twisted fate,
Into this thing it's grown.

Though not hideous to look at,
This monster harbors harm.
Be careful not to be drawn near,
By it's gentle wit and charm.

This Monster does not mean to hurt,
Still it's beast to stay away.
For once it holds you in it's arms
The pains grow stronger day by day.

Emotions are but words of poem,
And love is lost afar.
Way beyond it's bumbling grasp,
Like a brilliant, twinkling star.

Though at times it has been captured,
It can't be domesticated.
A heart that seems encased in stone,
And won't be penetrated.

This thing can't be left to grow,
No more wandering free.
There has to be a way to stop,
This thing, this Monster in me!

•

SECOND PLACE: by Fareeza Rashied



POEM: Potion

When did love ever matter to an uncaring man? My tender heart melted so fast like quick sand. Giving was all I knew how to do. But often I wondered if he wondered too. See there are clues in every woo. Pick up on the red flags I didn't want to. Blinded by

love's blindfolded ties. Fighting with the very vivid "why's." Like a wild lioness I would soak in the sun's kiss. When there was distance you never had to doubt that you were missed. I don't dwell in foolish games for recreational gain. I do however gamble with the insane. Mark my words with passion boiling inside. The rawness of intensity was too much to even hide. Look into my eyes and see that which no one can and has ever seen before. In your hands are the keys to my every door. And still little is known of the extent to my love. Like the one who has recently came out of hypnotism. Hypnotic to the erotic mission. The senses are all in motion. Yet still in your pot is your love's potion. Fragrant is the aroma of the seduction. Submissive is the call to temptation. You often would not find the two tangled so precisely magnificently and indulgent. But I am not of the ordinary client. And still it remains a mere mystery to be solved perhaps. The game pieces are all laid out for you on the board of love's play. Still no words do I say. Lips as soft as cotton and smooth as silk's touch. As the potion of love's ingredients too much. I see there is no relentlessness in your wants and years. As your mind and hands still turns. Playing with fire and trickery in the darkness of seclusion. I await this magical conclusion.

THIRD PLACE WINNER: Alba Otero

POEM: Poetic Profile

Glance at a poetic profile
Within a mist surrounding mountains,
Find poetry over dew's density
Sparkling like the stars in the firmament.

Discover poetry in the glittering
Of the moon, enlightening your steps while
Walking by the beach, leaving foot prints.

Observe poetry through waving palms beside rivers,
Look at poetry over pleated sands on deserts dune
Forming rows of steps from camels' caravans.

Search for poetry within oceans caves
Or in the rainforest, playing melodies
Like harps and violins.

Unveil poetry in the shining eyes of romantic women,
In a smiling child, or, in the slowly walk of an elderly.

Explore poetry within flowers' seeds spreading
Over fields, and prevailing through life journey.

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"THE DANCE"



By Whitney Lovett

You stretch out your hand
And dust the cobwebs from the corners of the universe

"The stars were tired today,"
They yawn opening their mouths
To reveal the lackluster glow
That falls upon you
My sight has grown dim
And behind the window shade
You are a watery shadow
A rough vapor of an idea
I cannot see
May I have?

Might I bathe you in light
That seeps through that weak place in the heavens

I will cup it in my hands
The light

And I will pour it over your crown
That I might know
Even as I am known
What lies behind the veil
Praise-inducing catalyst
Dwell before me

Grace my old eyes
With healing embers
Dance with me on the rings of Saturn
And I might hold your hand
As you call the sun to life
Its daily resurrection
Just like mine
Remember?

Remember when I stood
Naked before you at the threshold
Deciding
You traced my nakedness in the blue light of evening

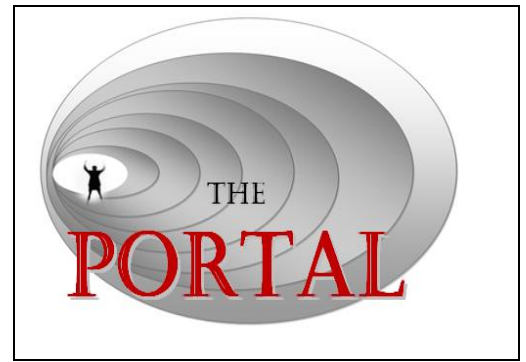
So I became a masterpiece
May I capture your visage
And turn it upside down
Then right side up again
And paint it in the keeps of my mind
Earth itself breathes a heavy sigh
Turns over on her side
Slipping into a deep sleep
But I—

I will remain awake
Standing by the candle in my window
This may be the night
You come to greet me
Like you did when our bodies were young
And we loosed the dust from supernovas
You rolled them out like a scroll
Then delivered my eyes from
The vacuous graves in my head

The hazy grave of a lonely space
Where my soul questions
Can I keep you?
I will wait
In silence, still as the morning
By my candle in the window
For someday
Your voice gentle as dew
Will answer "Yes."



And not with gloom, but eerie cheer
Those carnival masks they gaze right
Through one, a reminder of times gone
By and festivities so fine, that one
Must be a fool not to buy, don't be
Shy, follow the night and you'll not
Regret what you'll find.



"VENICE"



By Emiliano D. Moreno

Those Venice Canals so hauntingly sweet
Her narrow streets so lovely to stroll through
Where window shopping seems just as right as
The right kind of topping

The sun sets and the night comes
Ghosts from the past linger
They're presence can be felt
Like a probing finger, and the
Moon over Piazza San Marco
Shines so bright, yet barely enough
To penetrate the shadows that
Conceal the corners from sight

The past is very much alive here

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