

*UConn Avery Point Literary Journal*

***The  
Creative  
Point***

*Prose • Poetry • Photography • Artwork*

## Table of Contents

### ***Artwork***

Watercolors by Elena Morgan.....	2
Artwork by Erin Turban.....	3
Photograph by Isabella Calcagni.....	4

### ***Short Stories***

Obsidian Chapter 1.....	5
Where the Sun Never Sets.....	11
Paradiso Cafe.....	16
Slipping Away.....	17
The Doll in the Kimono.....	21

### ***Poetry***

Corroded Cabin and Promise Me One Thing.....	37
Heavens Touch.....	39
Kore.....	40
Poems by Ari Skelcher.....	43
Oh, Chute!.....	44



Watercolors  
Artist: Elena Morgan





Artist: Erin Turban





Photographer: Isabella Calcagni

Obsidian  
By: Isabella Calcagni  
Chapter 1

Blue Crow Year: 875; Present Time.

Month: July 25th.

Time: 2200 5 years after the incident.

Blue Crow's P.O.V.

Not much could be seen in the darkness within the ship. Instead, the prisoners' senses were assaulted by the scents of salty ocean spray and rotting wood. Outside, waves splashed against the hull and drunken laughter could be heard in the distance. The moonlight from the small porthole window sealed shut with thick glass, was their only luminescence in the blackness. It was a thick paned glass that prevented an escape. Sirens attempted to sing their songs, to lure the sailors into setting them free but saw no avail, their mouths are covered with muzzles crafted of metal, tarnished with age. The constraints left a copper taste in their mouths; a taste that will last for days on end. The Siren's feathered wings are bound with ties, hindering them from flying away. The fairies were linked together with heavy shackles and chains, enchanted to cancel out their magic. There was no hope in sight for any of them. The marauders that kidnapped them did not see them as people. Instead, they were reduced to objects to buy and sell. Food and water were scarce around the bilge. Most of it was going to the young ones aboard. There were thirty people trapped in the bilge, crowded and knocking into each other every time a wave rocked the ship. Disease and death ran rampant. The smell of rotting bodies caused many people to become ill. Everyone accepted their fate, knowing that there was nothing they could do to save themselves.

"Where are we going, mama? I-I want to go home... I'm scared..." One of the small fairies was crying... and clung to his mother's arm with as much strength as he could muster.

"Soon my star, we will be home soon," The mother whispered, stroking her son's hair, "You just have to be brave right now. I will make sure you're safe."

She tried to soothe her child with the words, but it proved no benefit. The child and everyone there within the bilge was petrified. Fear stopped them from escaping or even doing anything to fight back. The fear of meeting a cruel fate lingered in their thoughts. Panic coursed through their veins. This was true for all except one — a hooded figure with beady red eyes. The figure was unmoving, so much so that one could mistake them for one of the dead. Only the steady rise and fall of their chest proved otherwise. The figure stared directly at the sealed porthole — if waiting for something to happen as if the figure knew something was going to happen. Red eyes burned through the darkness as if a fiery gaze alone can set the ship ablaze.

Abruptly, the sound of wood splitting came from outside the porthole. Thirty fearful faces turned to face it. Someone — or something was climbing on the side of the ship. The noise sent a chill down everyone's spine. Appearing through the porthole, a silhouette of a monster's head gazed inside to the people within. The creature broke the glass on the porthole, and quickly climbed inside, shards of glass scraped at its torso. The monster's predatory blue eyes looked

around at all of the victims inside the bilge. The creature's claws were long and sharp. The steel surrounding the porthole had five gouges where its claws dug in. The creature had the upper body of a man and a tail that began below his waist, with scales that glistened in the moonlight. Every inch of his body was covered in scars, marks that showed he had seen the battlefield multiple times. He wore a mask that looked like a bird's beak on his face, hiding the lower half from the world — but a telltale smirk could still be seen. On his hip, there was a brown leather sheath that held a dagger and a small canteen.

The creature took the dagger out of its sheath and cut some rope and seaweed that he had gotten tangled in. The dagger's blade shone brightly in the moonlight. The magnificent blade was made out of titanium silver and steel, while the shaft was crafted of the blackest Obsidian. It was a notorious dagger that was widely known to be held by one of the most dangerous assassins in the nation...

There were also four visible brands on his skin. There was a crest of a snowflake on his right ribs, which appears to have suffered an attempt at being scratched out. A pair of crossed swords on his right forearm, a set of luna moth wings on his left forearm, and a Pisces brand over his heart. The brand labeled him as part of the most elusive and dangerous assassin group on this side of the globe. The person right in front of them, whom they could see with their own eyes, was the infamous Pisces, also known as the Blue Crow. The prisoners did not know what to do. Were they about to be rescued or sent to a watery grave?

"Who-who are you? What are you? Are- Are you here to rescue us... or kill us?" a beaten fairy coughed out.

The fairy's wings were tattered and broken, and her ankle was purple and swollen. Her eyes had a glaze of hopelessness in them; just waiting for the inevitable to come. A low chuckle came from the creature. Then, with a loud crack, he began to change before their eyes. Thirty pairs of eyes watched the creature with an uneasy stare. The tail slowly transformed into a pair of human legs. The scales remained and attached themselves to his legs, forming a glistening, scaly, pant-like covering. When the process was complete, the creature stood up and twirled the obsidian dagger in his hand. Blue Crow looked around the bilge and scanned everyone in there. The red eyes from the mysterious hooded figure looked at him with curiosity and astonishment, as if this man was a mystical being. Something that should not exist, as if she *knew* who this man was.

"I bet none of you have seen anything like me before," he snickered, sharpening his claws with the dagger.

Walking over to the fairy that was badly beaten, he crouched down to her level and handed her a canteen, "It has fresh water. Drink." He whispered, putting the canteen in her hands. "What's your name kid?"

"Eve." The name escaped her lips in a short-staggered breath. She took the canteen, and slowly brought it to her lips, taking a small sip, embracing the refreshing chill of the water.

“You can call me Blue Crow,” the man said, giving Eve a comforting smile. “I am apart of the group Cecidit Stellae, and I’m here to rescue you,” Blue Crow reassured the victims after he stood up. He flashed them a bright, toothy smile.

After this was said, the red eyes that were watching him opened wide in surprise, then turned into a look of annoyance. The figure stood up, and the chains that bound the figure together turned white-hot. The metal started to melt off but did not bring harm to the figure. Blue Crow looked at the figure up and down, a smirk appeared on his face; that smirk turned into a laugh of disbelief.

“Would you look at that —, I didn’t know a salamander would be here. *Really* puts a dent into this rescue op.”

Once the shackles were melted, the hooded figure took one of their throwing knives and threw it. The knife hit Blue Crow in the shoulder. The victims gasped in terror at what had just transpired. They were fearful of how Blue Crow might retaliate, and even more terrified of how the hooded figure would respond. Blue Crow remained completely unfazed as he pulled the dagger out of his shoulder and dropped it to the ground. Blood oozing from his shoulder. Then he stabbed his dagger into the side of the ship, proving to the figure that he meant no harm.

“Well, that’s a nice way to say hello,” Blue Crow sarcastically replied, while he bent the water coming in from the open hole to clean his wound.

“And here I thought all Atlantean Mer-People were wiped out for good. Looks like one of you slipped through the cracks. It’s just my luck that I happen to run into the cockiest one of them all... on my mission,” the figure retorted, pointing a white-hot sword in his direction. “What is your name and your purpose for being here? I demand an answer.”

“So, the salamander does speak!” Blue Crow shouted while bending the water to move the sword pointing at him to the side, and keeping the water from rushing in.

“I asked you a question, fish-boy. I expect an answer!” the figure shouts back. “You’ve compromised MY mission. You better hope no one here dies, because I will personally send you to Hell if that happens.” The figure seethed and the air around them turned into flames

“I already said that my name is Blue Crow. I was one of the lucky ones. I survived the massacre that day. Now, I’m making sure that no one suffers as I did. That is all you are getting out of me. I do not have to tell you anything else about me. That is all you need to know!” he seethed.

As Blue Crow yelled, behemoth waves started to form outside of the ship fueled by his anger. The waves violently hit the ship and everyone on board felt the backlash. One wave was so strong, it knocked a marauder down into the bilge. Once Blue Crow noticed that it was him who caused the disturbance, he breathed in deeply and began to calm. The waves outside reducing to a gentle current once more. When the marauder regained his balance, he looked at Blue Crow and the hooded figure with widened eyes and pointed his bayonet at them.

“Thar are two stowaways on board! They're in th' bilge, 'n they 're armed! WE'RE UNDERATTACK!”



Before the marauder could shoot anyone, Blue Crow picked him up by the collar and threw him through the side of the ship, creating a marauder sized hole in the hull. Water started to rush inside the bilge. The ship would surely sink with them in it if something wasn't done soon. BlueCrow walked over to the hole, reached out and grabbed a thick rope. Hand over hand he pulled up two wooden skiff boats that were anchored to the side of the ship.

"Dammit! You should have been more careful, fish-boy!" The figure scolded him. Blue Crow shrugged at the figure. "Stealth really isn't my forte," He said.

"This is so stupid. With us pointlessly bickering, we're just going to get everyone killed. You don't like me, and I certainly don't like you. But for now, I'll tolerate you, and accept your help until everyone is safe. Do we have a deal?" the figure proposed, holding out their hand.

"Deal." Blue Crow replied and took the figure's hand and shook it.

Releasing Blue Crow's hand, the figure held up their dagger, showing a crest of a Phoenix made out of sparkling red rubies on the hilt.

"I am Inferno. Once everyone is safe, we go our separate ways. Do I make myself clear?!"

"Crystal."

Both Inferno and Blue Crow rushed around the bilge and released everyone from the chains, moving as quickly as they could so there were no casualties. Inferno took Blue Crow's dagger out of the side of the ship and tossed it to him.

"Blue Crow, I'll take the upper deck. You get everyone out down here."

Blue Crow nodded and Inferno broke through the floorboards with a red-hot flame that engulfed all of the upper deck. Blue Crow guided everyone onto the boat anchored next to the ship.

"Eve, I need your help," he said, stopping in front of her.

"What-What do you want me to do?" she gasped.

"I need you to scream as loud as you can to lure the sailors here. Then get on the boat immediately."

Blue Crow left her and finished guiding everyone onto the boat, only then he motioned for Eve to scream. After a few seconds of silence, Eve let out a hair-raising scream. Suddenly, the marauders rushed down into the bilge, with bayonets and swords pointing straight at her. BlueCrow stepped in front of her.

"Get on the boat, NOW!"

Blue Crow roared. Eve immediately complied and ran to the boat, jumped in and huddled close to everyone. With a sly smirk, Blue Crow put his hand into the water that had flooded into the bilge. Slowly the water turned boiling hot and started to burn the marauders. Blue Crow walked up to the struggling men and stabbed them in the chest, all except one. The steam of the hot water caused the sailors to bleed out faster. One by one the marauders' screams of pain fell silent, and nine bodies laid motionless in the water. But before the last one died, Blue Crow lifted him up by the collar and looked him dead in the eye.

“Where is the missing Prince of Belywn?!” Blue Crow questioned and his tone demanded an answer.

"Yer a monster fer doin' this t' us! I don't know who ye be natterin' about! But even if I did, why would I tell ye! Ye should let me go if ye know what's best fer ye lad. If ye scuttle me, ye jus' prove how much o' a monster ye really are." The marauder screamed.

Blue Crow held the marauder's shirt so tight, his knuckles turned white.

“You expect me to just let you go after you hurt these innocent people? You expect me to let you go after you scarred these poor people for life?! You want me to just let someone like you walk free after what you've done?! These people are still people no matter what they look like! You and your crew are the monsters here!”

Blue Crow dangled the marauder above the boiling water for what seemed like an eternity. He looked back at the boat to all of the tear-filled eyes of the victims. No... survivors. These people are survivors of death... just like him. “Th' Prince be bein' held at th' end o' th' world! That's all I know, I swear!” the marauder croaked.

“How do I know you're not lying to me? I have no reason to trust you.”

“Take me word fer it or nah, doesn't matter t' me, I've got naught t' lose here lad.”

With an angry huff, Blue Crow took a black feather from inside the shaft of the dagger and stabbed it into the marauder's arm. The man let out a horrific scream.

“You tell Captain Murdoc... if he isn't burnt to a crisp yet... that I will find the prince if it is the last thing I do. Give him the feather, and say, ‘this is from the last one. I will find him.’ He'll Know what it means.”

Blue Crow threw the marauder upwards to the upper deck, through the hole Inferno had made. The man landed on the second level with a loud thud.

*Splash!*

Blue Crow turned to the direction of the noise, only to see the survivors pull someone out of the water. Upon closer inspection, Blue Crow realized that Inferno had just been pulled out. Inferno's hood and cloak had been torn to rags, however, the mask that covered her face was still intact. Inferno had snow-white pale skin, and hair as white as ice. Blue Crow pulled the boat closer to the sinking ship and crouched next to it, swiping the wet hair out of Inferno's eyes.

“You're a girl?!” he surprisingly exclaimed.

“And you're too stubborn to die.” Inferno weakly smiled at him. The fire in her piercing red eyes had not gone out.

Blue Crow quickly took a piece of a torn flag and used his power to draw the water out of it, leaving it dry. He draped the fabric over her.

“Nice speech,” she weakly laughed, “Hopefully letting him go doesn't come back to bite you in the ass.”

“It shouldn't, but if it does, I'll handle it,” he reassured her. “You're pretty strong for taking out Murdoc's men.”

“Thanks...?”

“My team could use your strength; you’d make a strong asset. Consider the offer, I’ll be in the docking port in Earmas, wearing a similar mask. Give me this,” Blue Crow took a black feather from the shaft of the dagger and handed it to Inferno, “So I know it’s you. Meet me if you want to talk.”

She took the feather and with a smirk Inferno said, “Maybe I’ll meet you... who knows, but I’m content with working alone for now. Thanks.”

Before Inferno could pull the flag closer to her body and shield herself from the cold, Blue Crow noticed she had a brand on her arm as well. It was a small flame embedded within a circle. It was the same symbol that the Trixivia royal family uses.

*“No, it can’t be her... she was taken two months ago?!”* he thought to himself. *“She might know what happened to Eclipse that day... If only you told me your real name in the letters Eclipse...finding you would have been ten times easier.”* Blue Crow sighed and turned away; he jumped into the water and his tail reformed. He broke the surface of the water, holding a rope that connected to the boat, and looked at everyone sitting in it.

“I’m taking you all to a safe haven. You will be safe there until we can get you back up on your feet. Hang on tight, keep low, and stay quiet. I’m going to be pulling you all as fast as I can. You’re going to be okay. Inferno save your energy. I need to talk with you when we get on land.”

## Where the Sun Never Sets

By: Sarah Moynihan

I didn't have a problem with assassinating people, but every morning when I looked in the mirror I saw the word killer branded across my forehead. I would remind myself of who I was and chant my name over and over again until the word disappeared. This morning was no different.

"Guinevere Una Michaels," I mumbled, staring my reflection down, daring her to contradict me. I stand there staring at my reflection for so long that my vision blurs causing my green eyes to appear abnormally large and my auburn hair to turn to fire. And finally, the word disappears. I go through the motions of getting ready for work, and once I reach headquarters, I want nothing more than a steaming mug of coffee.

"Gun we got a new assignment for you," my creepy boss, who insists I call him Richie, waves me into his office. I stopped short, usually, I had at least a cup of Joe pumping through my veins before I had to talk to him. I stare longingly at the break room before turning into his office. I plop down into one of the chairs positioned a little too close to his desk.

"What's up Richie?" I cringed internally at my casual use of his name. A smile breaks his rat-like features as he stares at me for a beat before sliding a file across the desk.

"A middle-aged couple decided to dance with the law; they got access to classified information and have been acting a little seedy." I fight the tingle crawling up my spine. Every day I thought about walking out these doors and never looking back. I hated the way we operated. Killing people who accessed classified government intel. Intel that only a few people had access to. I should know, I had a list of people granted total clearance, but I also knew that the list of people who shouldn't have had access was far too long. Sure some of these people were criminals and selling this information to terrorists but many of them were simply guilty of knowing too much. Hell, I'm pretty sure Richie was more of a threat than some of these people. I flip mindlessly through the file staring at the couple's names. Something about them seemed oddly familiar.

"There are no pictures of them, how the hell am I supposed to know who to kill?" I asked sharply. Richie rubs tiredly at his eyes, clearly, he had been the one to throw this file together, it was half-assed just like him. His tie hung crookedly and partially undone, and he had arranged it in an effort to hide what appeared to be a giant coffee stain on his shirt, and he was dare I say confidently sporting a scruffy four-day-old beard.

"Gun, that's why I hired you, to figure it out." For a moment I thought about what it would feel like to wrap my hands around his neck and squeeze. To watch the life slowly drain from his eyes that always lingered a beat too long on my chest. I push that thought away. If he wanted me to find them. Fine done. He wanted me to kill them too? I could make that happen.

"Anything you need Richie," I smiled sweetly before walking out of the room. All I could think about was getting that cup of coffee. It was my ammo that helped me get through the day. I had a similar relationship with the FBI, they were the ammo and I was their loaded gun.

I begin the long and tedious process of finding Callum and Amber Salitz if those were even their real names. By the third day, I begin wondering if these people exist. I've tried just about every single form of stalking possible. I've scoured the Internet, went to the listed address only to find it abandoned, and even bribed a tech guy to try and find him but it was to no avail. By the time one week had passed I had little faith I would ever find these people. When I walked into headquarters on the seventh day Richie called me into his office again. I swallowed down the groan as he waved me into his office. At least he caught me after I had a cup of coffee in my hand. This time instead of sitting in the chair I stood confidently, holding my ground despite the nagging doubt that kept crawling into my mind.

"So how's the case going?" He asked, steepling his hands underneath his chin.

"I've been surveying them and tailing them the past couple of days," the lie slips effortlessly from my mouth even though I had jackshit. He raises his eyebrows in surprise.

"Well, that's great to hear but the higher-ups are telling me they want the process sped along. They want to send someone from the New York office to help out," he leaned back in his chair and stared up at me. Suddenly I was regretting my decision to stand, but I'd be damned if I let him see me falter.

"I don't need help, I have everything under control," I managed to respond evenly.

"I know that you have everything under control but I got the higher-ups breathing down my neck telling me something's gotta give."

"Tell them I just need more time!" I raise my voice, becoming irritated.

"I have."

I lean down on his desk so I'm at eye level with him, "Well, tell them that I need more." He seems to shrink in his chair. Good, he should be afraid of me. A knock at the door breaks the silence.

"Come in," Richie calls weakly. A tall guy pokes his head in before entering.

"Who the hell is this?" I direct the question at Richie but it's the other guy that responds.

"I'm Seven" he sticks out his hand for me to shake but I don't reciprocate.

"As in the number Seven?" I scoffed. I couldn't believe that one, they already sent someone down, and two, that they sent someone whose name is a number. When I simply stare at him he shifts uncomfortably before filling the awkward silence.

"My full name is Reed James the seventh, but everyone just calls me Seven." Part of me wanted to call him Reed just to piss him off but I also wanted to get on his good side so he would leave.

"Well Seven, I'm sorry that you flew out here, but we have everything under control here, don't we Richie?" I shoot daggers at him, nonverbally communicating that we should get rid of him, but he doesn't say anything. Instead, he proceeds to scribble something on some paperwork, without so much as a word, before kicking us out.

Seven saunters out of the room ahead of me with a smug look on his face. I chased after him, determined to get rid of him, so I could take care of this on my own like I always do.

“Reed, Seven, whatever your name is!” He turns at my use of his names with an expectant look. I bit back the laughter I felt bubbling up inside; this guy really thought he was going to stick around. “Look I’m sure you’re a decent person or whatever but I’ve managed cases thus far just fine on my own” he rubs a hand down his jaw in an attempt to hide his smirk.

“Are you done?” He asked demeaningly. I glared at him and fought the urge to add something more. I merely nod my head not trusting myself to speak. “Good. Now Guinevere, if you don’t mind me asking, have you found the Salitz couple?”

“If I say yes, will you leave?” I smiled up at him sweetly.

“I don’t think you’ll want me to go after I tell you what I know.” He has a knowing glint in his eye. Dammit, he knows who these people are. How did he find them? Just because I didn’t know who these stupid people were didn’t mean I wasn’t going down without a fight.

“How much money will it take you to tell me who they are and leave?” I asked snidely.

“Are you trying to buy me off?” This time he doesn’t try to hide his smirk; he blatantly laughs in my face. And then he bends down real close so we are eye to eye and I’m staring into the depths of his unnaturally blue eyes. “No amount of money is worth this job and making you squirm.” He straightens back up to his full height so he can look down on me again. I knew that I had played all my cards, and no matter what, he wasn’t going to go away. But that didn’t mean I was going to make his job easy.

“Fine I’ll work with you,” I say through gritted teeth. “Can I see who these people are now?”

“All in due time,” he grins before sauntering away, leaving me to shoot invisible daggers into the back of his head. If this man were on my hit list I’d take his life without a second thought.

...

When I get to work the next morning not only do I find the coffee pot empty, but I find Seven sitting at my desk with a steaming mug in his hand. I want nothing more than for him to spill it all over himself. He hasn’t seen me yet so I took a moment to take him in. He’s put together in an obnoxious kind of way. His shirt is freshly steamed, and his pants have creases in the pant legs, and his hair was so perfectly styled I wanted to ruffle it to mess it up. He catches me staring and holds my gaze as I slowly make my way over. When I reach my desk I awkwardly stand there as Seven finally hands me the file he has compiled. I seriously don’t think I’ve ever felt this excited to open a file. I eagerly pull out the photos but the second I do I nearly scream. I feel the color drain from my face as the photo flutters to the ground. This had to be a twisted joke. I look at Seven, but he only looks confused and reaches out to me as I stumble away. He’s saying something to me, but I can’t hear him, I need air. When I crash into the bathroom I head towards the sink, breathing deeply before splashing water onto my face. I hear the door open and quickly wipe off my face.

“Guinevere” I whirl around at the sound of Seven’s voice reverberating off the tiled walls. I close my eyes feeling dangerously close to losing it.

“Get out!” I yell, but he proceeds to come around the corner with his eyes covered. I roll my eyes. “I’m not naked, dumbass you can open your eyes.”

“Are you okay?” He asks far too sympathetically.

“I’m fine,” I answer, before swiping a fresh coat of lipstick on. He walks over to where I’m standing and leans against the counter, watching me attentively.

“I know you’re not fine; Casper has more color than you just did” he crosses his arms. I calmly cap my lipstick and look up at him.

“I have a pale complexion,” I explained evenly, and turned to leave, but he grabbed my arm.

“Do you think I’m stupid? You better tell me what’s up or else this is going to be a very long case.” I try to pull my arm away but he only holds onto me tighter. When I try to swing out my other arm he pulls both my arms behind my back and leans down to whisper, “stop being so goddamn stubborn; I’m here to help.” When I stop squirming he loosens his grip but doesn’t release me. After a moment of unbearable silence, I finally cave.

“The people that you found, they were my parents,” I mumbled. He immediately let’s go so I can face him.

“Were?” His face scrunches with confusion.

I sigh before continuing. “They were killed ten years ago in our home.”

“I’m so—”

“Don’t you dare say you’re sorry, I’ve had enough of those to last a lifetime.” He clamped his mouth shut.

“Are you positive they are your parents?” I couldn’t think of who else they could be unless they both had some long-lost twin I didn’t know about.

“No, I’m not positive but you questioning me isn’t going to make me find the answers any quicker,” I rub my forehead in frustration feeling a migraine coming on. I knew as much as I didn’t want to, I needed to look at that file again.

“Do you want to continue pursuing this case?” He asked uncertainty, coating his tone.

“I sure as hell am not going to leave this case to you” I tossed the paper towel I used to dry my face and make my way to the door. “You coming?” I turn back to look at him. He doesn’t respond, he just nods his head, following my lead.

We spend the rest of the day dissecting the file piece by piece. By the end of the day, we have a whiteboard filled with more questions than answers and an indecipherable letter. Everyone had already gone home, but Seven refused to leave despite all my reassurances that I was fine by myself. I urged him to go home, but the only time he left me was to go pick up the pizza he ordered for us at the pizzeria down the street. I stared down at the papers splayed all over the conference room table we had overtaken and sighed. I had stared at these papers, particularly the letter, for so long the words were ingrained in my mind, a jumbled puzzle of words. I needed a break.

I got up to get myself some fresh coffee and freshen up in the bathroom, and when I returned I noticed something out of the ordinary. I stood there laughing at myself for how

blatantly obvious it was. They had left behind a series of clues, and it was all to get my attention. A letter that they had sent to the FBI had been sealed with a ladybug stamp; they used to call me ladybug as a child. My heart races with anticipation; this letter was intended for me. Standing above the letter allowed me to see that the last letter of each word was to be strung together to create something else entirely. Seven and I had tried just about every other combination but that. By the time I make it to the end of the letter, I have the answer.

*We're so sorry; we had to do it. Come find us where the sun never sets.*

So many questions were running through my mind. How did they find me; why did they leave me; and why did they want to see me now? I heard the elevator ding signaling Seven was about to show up. I quickly shove my findings away just as he steps off the elevator. I watched intently as he made his way back towards the conference room. He surveyed the room as if he was expecting someone to jump out and attack him; he would have zero problems eliminating a threat. It was at that moment I realized one of two things: Seven was going to kill my parents, or I was going to have to kill him.



## Paradiso Cafe

By: Michael Arbelaez

Days with her were magical, the hours and minutes would disappear underneath our laughter. We came from two different worlds yet it was perfect. She made sense of the world around me, grounding me, allowing myself to grow in ways I couldn't before her and I dared her to dream.

She agreed to join me at the Paradiso Cafe where one of my favorite musicians was playing, Antonio Fernandez. It wasn't the typical place she'd be seen at, but nothing about us is typical. My friend Frankie was working that night and was able to get us a table in front of the stage. Her body language says she felt out of place, but she tried to mask it as best she could with her smile, and I loved her for it.

Lights dim and the room is filled with the echoes of the guitar. Reverberating off the walls and into the hearts of everyone there. In that moment, her mind was nowhere else, she was lost in the music and I, lost in her.

Slipping Away  
By: Katherine Hynes

Prologue

All I could feel was a sharp pain to the chest.

And then, it was lights out.

I heard beeping.

I saw blurry white coats.

I felt the defibrillators trying to shock me back to life.

But it was too late.

And that was the end of my short life.

Chapter 1

*“Jason,” I whisper. I am lying beside you, looking at your perfect face sleeping soundly despite the morning light filtering through the blinds in your bedroom.*

*“Jason,” I try again, this time more loudly. I reach out to touch you, but it is as if my hand is made of vapor. I try again and again, but my fingertips filter right through you, never making contact.*

*Finally, you startle awake. You must have been having a nightmare. I feel as if I am in the middle of one right now. When you roll over to check your phone, you roll right over me, but I can't feel you. It's like I'm not even here.*

Dejected, I got up and stood beside Jason's bed. It was the same routine every single morning: wake up, look over at his beautiful face that hasn't worn a smile in months, try to touch him, fail, get frustrated, and try to go about what will inevitably be a horrible day.

The first few days were absolute hell. I had no idea what had happened, where I was, or why. With the accumulation of tears shed by my parents, my boyfriend, and my best friend, it didn't take long for me to realize I was dead. It took much longer to accept it, and it was nearly impossible to figure out why I was still here. I didn't know if this was the afterlife, or if I had some kind of grand purpose. If it was the latter, I hadn't found it yet.

And it wasn't for lack of trying. I'd never been religious, yet I believed there was meaning to life. Although I wasn't sure that applied to whatever state I was in now. With each passing day, I became more and more discouraged.

At first, I tried to help my parents move forward. I'd learned that with enough willpower, I could occasionally manage to move objects. Although using a pen felt like lifting a 30-pound weight, I wrote a chicken-scratch note on a napkin my mother left out from dinner that sort of looked like, "I love you, I'm okay. - L". I wanted to finish writing my name, but as if time were up on my connection with the physical world, the pen fell right through my hand and rolled under the liquor cabinet (better stocked in the past three months than it ever was when I was alive). So when my mom discovered the napkin, the pen nowhere in sight, she immediately tossed it. Just like that, any proof of my continued existence was gone.

Communication with my father was simply impossible. He was always in his office, working or sleeping, distracting himself from reality. He wouldn't have noticed me if I grabbed hold of his shoulders and shook him. Even so, I knew that touching people was out of the question. I'd determined it was because they were always moving, breathing, self-regulating. I figured this one out with Jason, because I was convinced that if I spent enough nights with him I could eventually get him to feel my touch. I could move his blankets, some things around his room, but when it came to his body... No dice. (I was still working on a plan for a note when I could just find a single writing utensil in his bedroom- he wasn't the academic type).

The funny thing was, the biggest mystery in all of this was *how* I died. Not a single person didn't refer to it as "the accident," but I never received further details. Was it a car crash? A drowning? A fire? I feared I would never know. My memories blacked out from about a week before I found myself like this.

No one wanted to talk about what happened to me, although it was clear everyone thought about it. Now, the last thing I want is to appear self-centered... I guess you just don't realize how much people care about you until you're gone.

...

After striking out with Jason once again, I decided to head over to my parents' place. To my surprise, both of them were in the living room, watching television together. I sat down between them on the couch. I couldn't remember the last time we did this; it was nice. They were watching a show I'd never seen before, but I didn't mind. What I did miss, however, was how much we used to talk to each other while watching T.V. While some people hate when others talk during a program, my parents and I loved poking fun at characters and crappy plotlines—it was half the fun. Watching television in silence was almost unbearable, and I knew they felt it too.

Suddenly, I felt the couch shift and my father cleared his throat. "I think I'll head into my office for a bit. I have a review to write." Dad was an editor for a popular literary magazine. When he wasn't reading, he was writing, and vice versa. He was the one who inspired my love of fiction.

"I really wish we could spend more than five minutes together without you making an excuse to get up and leave," my mother sighed, refusing to avert her eyes from the television.

Dad threw his hands up. "Well, Karen, I don't know what you want me to say. Things aren't okay and I don't know when they will be again."

“It’s not that I expect things to suddenly be okay...” Mom trailed off. “It’s just that since the accident—”

My dad cut her off. “God, will you please stop calling it that? ‘The Accident’...” he mused. “It wasn’t an accident!” Dad raised his voice, something he rarely did. I was intrigued, though, because it was the first time I’d ever heard something like this. It was the first time anyone had *ever* said something like this.

“I know, Ron. I know it wasn’t an ‘accident.’ Is it so strange that I prefer not to use the word ‘suicide’?”

I felt my nonexistent blood rush to my face, and my stomach dropped. Had I...? *No! Of course not. Why would I do something like that? I wouldn’t.*

My father put his head in his hands and dropped back down onto the couch. “That’s just it; I refuse to believe that’s what happened. Lulu didn’t take her own life. Someone did something horrible to her.”

*Yes, Dad, you’re right! I didn’t do it. I know I didn’t. Tell her!*

“Okay, this is just ridiculous. You heard what the police said, it was straightforward.” I didn’t understand how my mother could believe that. She should have known there would have been no reason for me to end my life.

Dad shook his head. “What if the police were wrong? Karen, it was her Senior year of high school, she was about to graduate. Her course load was lightening up and she got into Brown. Jason’s a great guy, and she and Kelsey had all of these plans to room together at school... Lucille was happy.”

*Oh, God. Kelsey.* The one person I hadn’t visited since the funeral... I wasn’t sure I could bear it. We both got into Brown Early Decision and were so excited. All this time, she must have thought I left her on purpose. That’s what everyone thought. I couldn’t believe this was happening.

My mother was in tears now. “Then how do you explain the note?”

*Mom!* I yelled. *What note? What note?* I demanded, but it was no use. I was shouting into the void.

“It’s not difficult to copy handwriting when you have an entire journal as a sample. And it wasn’t long,” my father offered, his voice cracking.

After a few moments of silence, Mom stood up. She was hysterical, and she could barely form a coherent sentence. “That’s it. I’m-I’m going back—” she grabbed her phone and crossword book roughly from the coffee table. “Upstairs.”

I stayed seated next to my father and watched him for a few minutes. He knew there was something wrong with this picture, just like I did. Although, he’d had three more months than me to ponder it.

I felt like someone was playing a huge trick on me. All of these people thought I *chose* to be like this. Everyone in my life thought I didn’t want to be with them anymore. Even Jason...

Dad finally stood up and walked towards his office. I followed him. I wanted more than anything to reach out and pull him in for a hug. He'd always known me better than anyone, even in death. He'd finally said something to prove that, and I didn't want to lose him again.

When we entered the dark office, he shut and locked the door behind him, turning on the lights in one motion. He hurried over to his cherrywood desk and began throwing papers around, looking for something. He looked so determined that it made me want to help. Instead, I just stood there, waiting to find out what would happen next. It was so miserable, the waiting, the wondering. Never being able to ask a question or learn anything until people finally felt like talking about it.

Dad breathed a sigh of relief when he found what he was looking for, which was evidently a key. He brought it behind his desk and turned it in the lock of the huge lower cabinet. I craned my neck to see what was in there, like I always used to do as a child. He knelt down, reaching into the cabinet, and used both hands to extract a large corkboard. I held my breath while he displayed it up on the wall and took a few steps back.

What I saw made me blink repeatedly. There were photographs of me, and everyone I knew connected with strings. It was like the kind of board the police use to catch a killer. *That's exactly what he's trying to do*, I thought. Little notes were pasted all over the board explaining the connections and listing motives each person would have to off me. *My God... He's gone crazy.*

While we both stared at the board, I realized my father and I were reaching very different conclusions. His mind was undoubtedly running rampant with possibilities of what may have happened as he scribbled more notes on a piece of paper. I, on the other hand, realized that he didn't have nearly enough resources or knowledge about the people I knew to make this happen. I needed to get Jason or Kelsey to see this.

Just as I was about to will myself back to my boyfriend's house, my eyes caught something in the corner of the corkboard. It was a half-ripped piece of lined paper, exactly like the kind in my journal, with just a few words written on it. I approached the board and read:

*I'm sorry. I love you all. -Lucy*

The Doll in the Kimono  
By: Matthew Cheetham

It's been about two months since Auntie told me to get excited for a special occasion involving my new spouse. He's a suitor who requested that I arrive at his luxurious residence for lunch. I'd never met him prior and had no idea what he would look like, if he was around my age, or even if he had a kind heart. I imagined him as the son of an heir to a vast amount of fortune. He could have a good personality and be a good-natured gentleman, or he was just looking for a wife to depend on. If he's looking for me to cook for him, then he may be disappointed in my skills.

This man lived in the mountains near Osaka, which seemed close by, but it still took a two-hour drive just to reach his front gate. It was rare for our family to be summoned by such a wealthy individual, so Auntie had me put on Granny's old kimono which had a nice floral pattern and a light blue color with tints of yellow inside the petals of the flower. The red belt complimented the oceanic color scheme, but I didn't want to wear it. They were just grooming me to be the ideal housewife, but I had to comply with every request. However, I also knew I was just inviting everything that would come next.

This was the same outfit that Auntie showed my sister (Kya) and I when she took it out every once in a while to keep it clean. It sat in her closet for years, but we both liked the design. We always imagined ourselves twirling and dancing around in it, but Auntie said we would only get to wear it when we were old enough. I guess that time has come. If the kimono didn't fit, then I assume I would have had to wear Mama's old wedding dress.

Granny looked so happy when I came out with the kimono on. Her eyes were filled with tears and she kept smiling as she gave me a hug. As I got into a seated position, she took out a picture of Mama in the same outfit and she looked almost the same as me (except with darker hair). Granny said that I looked more American than Mama, but I couldn't understand what she actually said. Auntie was our sole translator since Granny didn't speak a word of English, but neither Kya nor I could speak Japanese. We would always communicate with gestures and facial expressions, but never with words.

Auntie and I were ready to leave, but Granny insisted that she had to fix my hair and make-up. I kept my hair in a bun and Auntie didn't mind, but Granny remarked that it looked too simple and plain. It was not acceptable for someone like the man in Osaka. I felt more comfortable with a bun since my hair wouldn't get in the way, but I had to unravel it and let her turn my hair into something she considered "more presentable."

My hair was a little short and only went down to the middle of my neck, so she couldn't do as much as she may have had in mind, but she ended up just braiding it around the back of my head with the rest flowing downward. She then took some of Auntie's make-up and used as much as she could on my face. I coughed a few times as the powder got closer to my nose, but Granny stayed concentrated on her work.

After Granny put on the final touches, I looked at my face in the mirror and saw someone who looked entirely different. The person who used to wear street clothes while taking the subway in New York was concealed by a doll. A toy that was dressed up and sculpted to look like a housewife.

Granny and Auntie both had smiles, but I just gave a slight sigh and got up. Granny wanted to take one last photo of me and I went into the same position as my mother did in her photo. I held my hands together in front of my body with my head tilted towards the camera and my body angled to the side. I knew I wanted to run away from this decision; my eyes looked broken and soulless, but we were about to leave to meet my new spouse.

We initially came to Granny's house as a part of our annual family trip. Auntie, Kya, and I would go to her house in Kyoto every year to keep her company for about a few weeks in the summer since we rarely get together as a family.

The house was a small cottage which had been built three-hundred years ago. Even though it had a small tube TV plugged in the corner, her house was very traditional. It had tables (chabudais) that were so low to the ground that we needed to sit on our knees to eat, sliding doors, and lots of cultural antiques. There were replicas of old palaces, lion-dog (Komainu) statues, and photos of the family all over the place. She even kept old art she bought from a friend that passed away.

She usually tended to the garden while Kya and I just explored the city. We couldn't read the signs or the menus, but we found our way. Seeing the prices was always a weird experience since something worth \$10 may end up as 1000\*, and I would always forget that the currency was different. Kya always said Kyoto was like visiting one of Mama's old photo albums since it was filled with the same traditional buildings from decades to hundreds of years ago.

Auntie may have wanted to engulf us in the culture of Japan by bringing us as often as she did, but I always treated it like it was more of New York. Even back home, Auntie would try to give us a taste of the Japanese lifestyle by occasionally feeding us traditional food or bringing us to restaurants that served traditional dishes, but it wasn't very often. While in Kyoto, I still wore my "I <3 NY" sweatshirt around and dressed in what was most comfortable. I only wore kimonos and dresses during formal events. It felt less like a second-home and more like a recurring vacation.

During the first few days of our latest trip, Auntie kept hinting that something special was going to happen during our stay, but she kept her clues vague. We kept quessing about what could be so exciting, but she only said "One of you is incredibly fortunate to get this upcoming opportunity."

Our uncle was also staying over during the first week of our visit, and he was less vague about the previously-exciting news. He knew a little English and seemed to think the news was more humorous.

He had a slight chuckle as he said, "You lucky. You are married to rich boy. She says you are a good age to wed."

I first thought he was delusional, but Auntie rushed in as she overheard his slip-up and confirmed it as the truth.

Her face was as red as the Japanese Camellias in Granny's garden. There was a level of distress in her voice as she replied, "I was going to wait to tell you during dinner, but a gentleman requested your hand in marriage when you were of a ready age. Now seemed like the perfect time."

I initially stood in silence as I heard her say the news. I originally had plans to be the first in my family to go to college, but now I had to abandon that endeavor since my fate was already predetermined by this arrangement. I asked if I could still go to school or wait a little longer before doing something so sudden, but Auntie insisted that I commit to her plan during this trip.

"Please understand. You have such a good opportunity. He can provide you with everything you will need to live a satisfying life; a life of luxury and wealth. I need to go back with Kya to New York on Friday, and you will stay with your grandmother until all the preparations are made."

I stood motionless as she discussed her plan, but then Auntie spoke with a more authoritative voice, "Do you understand, Ichika?"

I gave a slight nod as a response to her question, and she seemed satisfied. After our confrontation, I went to the room we were staying in and put my face on the blanket. I laid there for a minute as my face became red and my vision got watery. Kya looked from her book to ask what was going on, and I didn't want to tell her. I didn't know if she could handle knowing that I was going to be married soon, especially since it was difficult for me to cope with that information. I just said I was getting homesick and she replied "We've been here for a while. It's probably time for us to head home."

I just nodded in agreement and went to sleep hoping that this was all some strange fantasy. When I woke up to see Kya and Auntie packed up, I knew the wedding was going to follow. I went downstairs to find them saying goodbye, and I stood next to Granny as they parted ways. Kya asked why I wasn't coming with them, and I told her that I wanted to stay a little longer. She must have been confused when I had said I was homesick the night before.

They took a taxi to the airport and I was stuck in the house alone with Granny. She set some rice on the table and went out to the garden while I tried to figure out what I should do next. All I could do was sit and wait until the wedding arrangements were finalized. Other than that, I had nothing else to do.

I went back to the bedroom and looked out the window for a few hours. The falling leaves and passing strangers kept the time going as a feeling of helplessness overtook me. I wanted to hear the news that my fiancé would cancel the proposal and I could be freed from the stress. Every second that passed made that desire seem more like an ambition.

As I stared outside, questions poured into my mind. Would I enjoy my life with this stranger? Cooking, cleaning, and bearing children in a country I barely knew. It would be an easier decision if it was my choice, but it was instead my destined hell. All I could do was see what would happen, and if I felt miserable, then I had to find an alternative to being trapped in



the suitor's grasp. I don't want to make such a difficult decision, but it's the difference between 3 decades of suffering, or a shortcut to the end.

When I looked around the room, a picture of Mama stuck out to me. It had a slip of paper sticking from the back of the frame and it was all in kanji. I assume Mama wrote it for Kya and I with the expectation that we learned the language by now. I would normally ask Auntie to interpret it, but I had time to kill so I began to translate it using an old English-to-Japanese dictionary on Granny's shelf.

I don't remember much about her since she died when I was really young, and all I know about her is based on Auntie's stories. She was kind-hearted but reckless, and she always lived her life like no other. Auntie always described her with a sense of rivalry. She admired her good traits, but discredited Mama's flaws by comparing them to her own.

I went through every symbol and got the message after a few days of on-and-off work that felt like a year. The message was short, but it was sweet. There were some words I was not keen on, but it began to read like a poem.

It was roughly:

"Hoshiko (my aunt),  
give this to Ichika and Kya when you think they are ready.  
The moon watched with  
a fresh gaze each night.  
Not a whisper could be felt. A peaceful sight  
that could never satisfy her.  
Quiet was absent when she went to sleep;  
There was always something  
happening. She imagined  
a party that never ended; celebrations  
which only went into slumber when the sun fell.  
She yearned to join, and knew that day  
would come. She could join the festival  
when the sun and her become one.  
No matter the length of delay,  
that hope gave her comfort.  
Aiya Nakajima (Mama's Name)"

I don't know if Mama intended to have me read it now, but it was nice to have a personal message around. It's like she was trying to indirectly encourage us to keep staying strong. I'm sure Kya would want to read the poem next time I see her (which is hopefully still a possibility)

After a month-and-a-half passed, Auntie remained absent since her departure, and it seemed like I was just waiting for something that was less and less evitable. Was I anticipating a wedding that would never come? The flight to Japan was beyond expensive, but it's strange for her to keep her niece in foreign country for so long. I ended up helping Granny around the house

and did most of her chores (since it helped pass the time). I tried exploring the town on my own, but it got boring not being able to laugh off my inability to read the kanji with Kva.

When I woke up to the outline of a person knocking at the door, I hesitated to let them in. I was expecting the silhouette to either be Auntie or someone related to my fiancé. Auntie would have just used her key, so I knew this person was here because of the engagement. The knocking continued for another minute before Granny opened it. An older woman, whom I did not know, came through to give her a letter. She looked very high-class, with a traditional robe and fancy shoes. I watched from the top of the stairs until Granny waved to have me come down. When I approached her, the woman bowed, exited the room, and went to ride in her expense carriage. The horses attached to it made it seem like she jumped out of the 19th century.

Granny went to the couch to open the envelope, but she treated it gently. It had a bright red seal that looked like it had a family crest on the back, and contained a thick piece of paper. The katakana looked carefully handwritten throughout the letter, but had a sloppy signature on the bottom.

Granny looked ecstatic after she finished reading, but only communicated her excitement through a long hug. It was like she had been reborn, but it was a more somber moment for me. My meeting with the mysterious suitor was up and coming, and I just had to wait for the moment when the clock strikes twelve.

With the letter here, I was assuming Auntie would shortly follow, but it took another two weeks for her to arrive. As I waited, I expected her to enter through the front door at any moment.

After two months of radio silence, I saw Auntie getting out of a taxi when I got home from getting groceries. She brought two full suitcases and began to get soaked from the rain. I had my umbrella with me and put it over her head as she was getting her stuff from the trunk of the taxi. She seemed more sincere than when we last said goodbye.

We went inside together and she asked me if she could see the letter. After she finished reading it, she had a similar level of excitement as Granny. I wish I could feel the same as them, but I was dreading what the letter may entail.

"Everything has been completed. The suitor would like to meet you during lunch this coming Wednesday. You must be thrilled to finally meet him. Your mother would be so proud to find her daughter married to such a successful individual."

I gave her a slight nod, but it was an empty gesture. I would prefer to do anything to prevent becoming some stranger's wife. Even though I despised what the letter implied about my future, I still wanted to know what it said, and Auntie responded with a rough word-for-word translation:

"My dearest fiancé.

It is time we meet at last. I have waited the last ten years for your arrival at my palace. Your picture has driven me mad, and I can not delay much longer. Your dearest aunt has made me wait until she believed you were ready, and it is time. We shall celebrate our greeting on the last day of the month with a glorious feast."

That letter was something which bothered me since I heard it aloud. While I had little details about this man to go off of, I knew he was obsessed. If I had the option, he would be the last type of person I would want to be with.

By the time we arrived at his front gate, the house looked like it was owned by an aristocrat. The property had flowing water that led to a large garden. The house had a stone base with architecture from an estate in England. It looked less like a Japanese-style building and more like the definition of wealthy.

We got out of the car and Auntie fixed up my kimono one last time. She wanted it to look perfect, but it felt like she was grooming me for a tea party. When we reached the front porch, a well-dressed woman came to greet us. I was expecting to stand around not knowing what was happening, but she spoke with a mix of Japanese and English. She had a strong accent when she spoke English, but her words were clear and sophisticated.

"It is great to meet you. My husband says you are here for our son?"

I asked her how long she spoke the language, and she said since she was a child. She grew up in Wales, but now lives here.

A much older man came walking forward, but he was far less well-dressed than his wife. The raggedy dress shirt was much less formal than his wife's floral attire. He gave us a formal greeting, but seemed to think that Auntie was me. As he spoke in Japanese, I just stood there and nodded every once in a while.

The young women let us into the corridor, but the husband seemed to focus his attention on me. He kept talking, but I did not understand a word he said. He asked me a question and I responded with silence. He might have assumed I was shy. Some people in expensive clothes came in with plates of food, and it all looked delicious. The large plates of meat and lines of fruit all looked recently prepared. I wanted to eat everything, but Auntie kept giving me a glance which told me to continue showing manners. After a while, it got a little tiresome keeping up this persona.

I sat next to the woman who greeted us, and she was extremely nice to me. She seemed to empathize with my difficulty in communicating with the locals, and she would always speak in English after she said something in Japanese. When I talked with her, she seemed to be unaware of my arrival until yesterday. She mentioned how her husband first offered marriage with his son to Mama when I was little, but she refused his request. He seemed to keep sending small gifts to her overseas, but they did nothing to change her mind. After Mama passed away, he made the same request to Granny and Auntie, and they both seemed to accept without much hesitance.

The young wife mentioned how he asked every family in Kyoto for a suitable spouse, and he settled on me as one of the bridal candidates. His wife kept saying how it was for her son, but I had my doubts. Her husband's demeanor made it seem like he was looking for someone else to keep him company.

When the husband stood up from his large throne on the other side of the table after finishing a large plate, he went into another room by himself, and Auntie told me to follow him. I tried to stay at the table near his wife by pretending to eat a mouthful of rice, but I felt the

pressure from her gaze. She looked unafraid to do something crazy in front of our hosts. Upon entering the living room, there were two chairs, and only one was empty. I sat down and the husband began to talk. He kept going on and on, but I did not understand anything. After a while, he didn't utter another word.

He began to stare at me and nothing was said for a minute. His clothes looked grimy, as if they were never washed, and pants were covered in stains. The buttons on his shirt looked like they were about to break if he moved his body forward. His arms could only reach so far before he needed to get up, and his skin had a glossy coat on his face with an uncut beard. His room was spotless, but was filled with stains on the carpets from his meals. It was difficult to imagine him as the mysterious suitor from the letter.

I couldn't handle the pressure of the silence and accidentally broke into English. Auntie said to be careful when speaking since my voice sounded too American, but it was too late. She said some older folk had bad experiences with Americans, and never liked to hear that accent. When he heard me speak in English, it made him jump out of his chair. I tried to be respectful and ask if he was alright, but I just kept speaking in English. When I said, "Are you having a breakdown?," he left the room.

After his departure, another person came in to escort me out of the room. I was taken outside and was left by myself on his front porch. I assume he didn't want to continue the engagement, but it didn't feel like a victory. It was exciting to be freed from such a disheartening future, but I was worried how Auntie and Granny might feel. They were so happy to see the letter, but now I have been rejected based on my voice. It was a very bittersweet moment.

Auntie and Granny eventually came out and we said goodbye to the young wife. I asked how her husband was feeling, but all she said was that he was upset.

We went to the car and I was ready to feel their disappointment. Auntie held a firm composure as we drove off, but it broke when she turned around to tell me, "Some men are blinded by the war. They can not tell a good spouse from another. He lost his chance for sure."

I wanted to ask if everything was alright, but she kept smiling as she laughed. "He said the marriage was off and that he never wanted to see an American face again. Your grandmother was singled out for having an American granddaughter... When you spoke to him, you acted just like your mother."

I was going to ask why he had such a strong distaste for Americans, but the war was probably still relevant in his mind. He was old enough to have fought during it.

Unlike him, I felt more relief than anguish; I felt a level of fear lifted from my body. I was no longer obligated to a sorrowful future, but I felt like I had betrayed them. What if I stayed quiet? My accent isn't something which I could hide forever, and he would have learned eventually.

Granny didn't seem to be as delighted by the response as Auntie. She just looked disheartened and depressed that I was no longer going to be with him. I thought about trying to comfort her, but I didn't know how. Granny did not make a lot of sound during the whole ride back, but she did say one thing that I did understand.

Her only words during the ride back to the cottage echoed what Auntie said, "She has become like her mother."

Auntie ended up responding that "If your mother went out and married an American soldier again, then Granny would never invite her back."

I remember that Mama loved the American lifestyle, but she always held Kyoto close to her. The culture was what made her feel at home when she lived somewhere that did not share that same style. It was hard to imagine she would give up her way of life to become part of the enemy's culture, but she always took risks. That was just one of them; no wonder she said America made her feel alive.

Also by Matthew Cheetham:  
Here Lies The Tulip's Grace

I didn't realize how difficult it would be to watch my sister stay behind as I went home. Her shoulder was always by my side, and if I didn't have her to lean on, then I don't know how I would have handled getting through the difficulties of life. Mama's death and going to school for the first time would have been far more strenuous without her. She helped pass the time and kept me company, and now I was on my own.

We went together to Kyoto on one of our regular trips to see our family, but now it was just Ie (short for Auntie) and I on the airplane back. If we were lucky, the trip might only take 14 hours, but it was always a long expedition. This time the trip home took 16 hours, but the lines when boarding and exiting took even longer. It moved so slowly that I could finish a chapter of my book while standing in the same spot, and it was the length of a highway.

The trips always required preparation to force the clock to move faster, so I brought a ton of books onboard with me. I could normally switch between reading and talking with Ika (the nickname for my sister), but that wasn't an option now. Her absence made the trip feel even longer since I had to keep looking through the window to pass the time. I'd return to reading after about five minutes, but it got boring after a while.

It was strange when I was the only one packing up in our room since we all were taking a round-trip. I went downstairs to say goodbye, but when Ika came down, she was standing next to Mika-san (my grandmother). Hearing her address me with "See you next time" was off-putting. I tried asking why she wasn't coming with us, but her response was unusual. She mentioned how she had something important she needed to fulfill and needed to stick around a little longer. She wouldn't go into any more detail, so Ie had me continue the farewell remarks. When I asked Ie if she knew what changed in Ika, she didn't give me a response.

I trusted that this was just a temporary stay. She probably wasn't ready to sit on that flight for so long. I can understand that. Whatever she had in mind, it was probably better for her to extend the stay until she felt satisfied that she did everything she wanted to do. She did mention a few days before that she never got to see the local flower festival.

Ie seemed to keep to herself for the whole ride back. She looked around aimlessly in her seat and ignored my questions. I'd keep asking and asking, but would only get silence. When the question "Where's Ichika?" (which was my sister's full name) came out of my mouth, she would react differently, but it didn't change the answer given. It felt more and more like there was no one to talk to.

When the plane landed, it was Saturday. The only interesting thing that happened during the whole trip was the plane seemed to drop out of the sky for a few seconds when we flew through a storm. Everyone remained calm except for one person that got out of her chair and acted crazy at the back of the plane. I remember being completely confused by what she was doing, but I can now understand why the woman jumped up so spontaneously. I'm surprised no one else did the same thing.

When we got home, the apartment looked the same as when we left it. Nothing moved around and the plates were still dirty from our last dinner here. When I put my stuff down so I could clean off the table, Ie finally said something, but she kept her message vague. All she said was that something exciting was happening to someone close to me. I knew that she meant Ika, but I didn't understand what she was implying. Exciting could have meant anything.

I went to my room to put away everything from the trip, but I saw Ika's side was empty. It began to feel as though something was missing; as if the room was incomplete. All that remained was a desk filled with books; Ika had to read some for school, and I remember wanting to read the ones with the interesting covers. She said I could read them when she no longer needed them for her classes, but her stay in Kyoto would definitely delay it. I walked over to see the top of the pile had a story called Hamlet. I knew the name of the author, but I had no idea what the inside looked like.

I didn't want to take anything without her consent, so I compensated by keeping the book firmly on the desk. When I opened it, I found that it wasn't just a story, it was a play. It had characters to portray as, but I couldn't understand a single word. "Doth" just looked like Shakespeare couldn't write "moth" correctly. Everything made no sense, but I thought about having Ika and I perform something when she came back. Since Hamlet was supposed to be a girl, it was a good fit. If not this play, then there are plenty of other options.

Her return was supposed to be a matter of waiting. It seemed like Ika was going to come any second and we could perform like we were on a stage. She could even tell me how to say every word in that ridiculous language.

A week passed and I was still alone in my room watching the clock tick. I had to stop worrying about Ika after a while since school was going to start soon. I was finally going to middle school. I just assumed Ika would be in bed by the time I got home one day.

I got dropped off at my new school and I was ready to meet someone new. I was a newcomer to the district, but no one wanted to talk with me. When I approached them, they would just look and stare. They all acted so strangely around me and I couldn't figure out why when they acted completely normal around each other.

A couple of days passed, but I couldn't find anyone who wanted to have a conversation. People would keep their distance and whisper "Jap. It's a Jap." I assume they knew my name, but they never used it. Instead, I just got nicknames like "that Asian girl," and "traitor." It was odd when they said my home was at an "Internment Camp." They either didn't want to get to know me, or they thought they already did. However, all I knew at the time was that no one liked me.

What stuck out to me was that during a class we were talking about a war which took place about a decade ago. When the conversation turned to something which happened at a port in Hawaii, the whole class (even the teacher) just turned towards me, then turned back to continue the lecture. It was weird getting so much attention when I initially got ignored, but it didn't feel right. It wasn't being given for a good reason, and I was stuck wondering why.

School continued like this for a few weeks, but I stayed optimistic that someone would eventually try to converse with me. It was like a repellent was being spread; people would leave whenever I got close. I spent every lunch at the edge of the table waiting for the period to end.

I tried asking Ie why people seemed so hostile towards me, and she finally answered one of my questions. She breathed for a moment, then said “Some people are still recovering from a great tragedy that happened around when you were born. People will move on, but give it time for them to accept the past.”

I didn’t understand what that fully meant until a few years later, but I got the gist: my classmates were afraid of me and I needed to wait until they were comfortable in my presence. Over the next few weeks, I tried walking up to people to see if things changed, but their reactions were no different from when I started school. The distance being kept between us made me feel even more left out.

On one Friday afternoon, I assumed Ika finally came home. Ie’s car was gone and her expression seemed far more happy recently. She had a far more gleeful tone in her voice, and her face was more ecstatic than ever. It was as if she won the lottery three times over. However, a part of me didn’t believe that Ika had finally returned. I had imagined her coming through our bedroom door for so long that it seemed like a dream.

When I went inside, however, I noticed something peculiar. Ie’s suitcase was filled and her room was missing some distinct items. The mirror was missing some of her jewelry, and there was a lot of empty space in her closet. A fair amount of her makeup was gone, but my room was about the same as before. The only thing missing was from Ika’s desk; she had a catalogue with a list of schools she wanted to tour, but that magazine was no longer there. I remember she showed me some pages filled with photos of the schools, and they were huge. Each one looked like a mansion that was owned by a millionaire. I asked if we could ever own one, and Ie just said “If things work out.” I didn’t know what that meant, and Ika was just as confused.

I tried to figure out what Ie was planning, but I didn’t want to make any assumptions. I thought about looking inside the suitcase to see if she was preparing for a flight, but it wasn’t my place to look inside. I couldn’t invade her personal belongings, but I knew the suitcase would help me understand the truth. I had some theories about her plan, but they could easily be false and I might be stressing over nothing.

When Ie’s car pulled into the building complex, I only saw her silhouette in the vehicle, and not Ika’s. I felt a fluster of speculation of what could be going on, but the wait was nearly over.

When the door opened, I rushed to the living room and flashed the TV on. I pretended to be engaged with whatever appeared, and it landed on some news station I didn’t recognize. It had a man in a fancy suit who was reading at a large table. Ie went to me and said that he was someone called “the President.”

She tried to explain who he was and why he was addressing the country, but I didn’t understand what she meant by “electoral college” or “Republicans.”



After she finished, she changed the subject to her current plans.

“I need to take an unexpected trip somewhere and I will need to leave later today.”

I had no idea where she planned on going or why she needed to leave so soon, but it all felt suspicious. Either way, the weekend was coming soon, and I was hoping we could go to the town fair together.

She continued, but said nothing about the purpose of her trip. “I will be gone for a while, so you will need to stay with some family friends. You probably do not remember them, but they were friends of your mother.”

I was caught off-guard when she referenced what was happening to me and I got concerned about what she had in mind. I was going to leave home, stay with some strangers, and miss seeing Ika’s arrival home.

I wanted to object to her proposition, but she already decided what she thought was best. Ie continued a little longer and said “The couple is very kind and will take you to school, but you have to walk to their house after it ends since both of them work until 7.”

When I asked who they were, she just said they were “family friends.” I asked her if I could stay home and wait for Ika to come back, but she finally confirmed what I feared.

“Ichika is not coming back to New York, and she will stay in Kyoto from now on. I got a call that finalized an arrangement between her and a lovely gentleman, and she will be married by the end of the month. I need to go back to make sure everything is all set since my mother is not the best reader.”

The words “not coming back” stuck out to me. I didn’t know if it was Ika’s choice or not, but all that mattered was that she was no longer going to be a part of my life. She had moved on and left me behind.

At that moment, it felt like everyone was leaving me behind and I was alone. I began to show tears, and Ie tried to remedy the situation but it didn’t work. All I wanted was Ika to come back, and now that dream will never be fulfilled.

If I felt as lost as I did at that moment, I normally would have turned to Ika. She would hold me and whisper that she was always there to care for me, but not anymore. It felt like I lost Mama all over again, but now I had no shoulder to lean on.

After Ie left the apartment for a little bit, I went back to my room and gathered what I would need at my new home. I knew that since Ika was not coming back, I could take some of her books. When I looked at each cover, the pile felt like the only thing which I had to remember her with.

I didn’t expect her to be engaged at a young age, but I guess she did mention wanting to start a family at some point in her life. However, something didn’t feel right about the marriage since she would have mentioned having a lover while in Kyoto. I wanted to feel happy for her, but I just couldn’t. Things were happening so fast, and I wasn’t ready to grow up.

When we arrived at an apartment in the next town over, I walked up the stairs to find a large room with two people sitting on a couch waiting for us to come. The first was a tall, older gentleman with a face that was starting to age. The other was a shorter woman of an older age.

Despite their appearance, they both looked much younger than they seemed. They could say they were fifty and I wouldn't question it.

They were very nice and had a good attitude. They talked about how much I had grown and complimented my good nature. It was almost enough to distract me from Ika's absence. I was taken to a room on the other side of their kitchen and put my suitcase on the bed. I was told to get comfortable, but I just laid on the bed for an hour after they left. He came into the room and said her goodbyes.

"See you in a little bit. I promise I will come back and things will be like before."

She seemed more sympathetic, but I just grabbed her arms and hugged her. It was the longest embrace I had given, and I waited to make it last.

She left the room, and I watched her car leave from my window. I tried to get up to put my stuff away, but I just fell back on top of the bed. When I looked at the pile of Ika's stories, most of them sounded like places to visit; lands of fantasy, discovery, and community.

I grabbed a random book from the pile, which was called "Animal Farm." I thought it would be about animals on a farm, but it took a different direction.

After a couple of months passed, I was having breakfast with the couple and they brought up something which led to a new sense of hope. They said they always wanted a family, but never got the chance to have kids. I felt really bad for them. They only had each other to turn to.

What stuck out to me was when the husband said, "Kya. You are much nicer than your mother. If she came over, she would be jealous of her daughter's manners and skill."

I had a spoonful of eggs in my mouth and stopped chewing when I heard him mention Mama. For some reason I began to assume he may have seen her recently even though I was told that she died a few years back.

I took the couple by surprise when I said "Did Mama come here earlier? She's alive? Where is she now? Take me" in a rushed manner.

The wife tried to calm me by holding onto my hand and said "We can go and visit her after lunch. Does that sound nice?"

I nodded my head and began to eat faster. The couple had a level of concern in their eyes and had looked at each other's faces with doubt in their decision, but I began to become ecstatic. I could finally talk with Mama once again and tell her about everything she missed. She would need to know that her other daughter lives in Kyoto now, but she is going to be so surprised to see her child at her doorstep.

I imagined walking up and knocking on her door. She would look down and see me older for the first time. I can picture the excitement and surprise in her voice, and how her face would glow with joy. It kept me excited all morning.

After lunch ended, I rushed to the car, but realized I was going too fast. The couple walked at a slow pace and showed less enthusiasm than me. They asked if I really wanted to see her again, and they began to discuss how they weren't fans of Mama's husband (Papa), whom I did not think much of until that moment.

I wish I could remember Papa, but he wasn't around for very long when Ika and I were younger. Mama said he died when I was two years old. I tried picturing his face, but it had been so long that I forgot what he looked like. I knew he was a Vet (Mama would always correct us when I said that it involved pets), so I imagined a tall American soldier like the ones on the posters.

As we got closer to our destination, the street had many buildings which I recognized. It was my old neighborhood, and everything looked the same except for the people. Some were older, but others were new. It even had the old convenience store near the playground.

The husband parked the car on the sidewalk, but it was in front of my old house, a place I hadn't seen for years. I hesitated moving forward, and I began to worry how Mama would respond to me.

I was always compared to her, but I didn't really remember how she was. Was she as kind-hearted as I imagined? Would she even be excited to see me?

I came all this way so I had to move forward. This chance may never come again, so I began to knock. When no one answered, I knocked again. As I readied my hand for another knock, someone came to the door, but it wasn't Mama. It was an older gentleman who looked like he lived here for a millenium.

He looked down at me, but drew his attention to the couple. He turned his body towards the wife and yelled, "When did y'all adopt her?"

The wife looked back in perplexity as he continued. "She's mo' 'merican than I expected. Why didn't y'all bring her sooner? I've been beggin' for a grandchild for years."

The couple explained my desire to see Mama and he got confused about what they were thinking.

"That ain't possible. I've been livin' here since her death. Why would y'all want to see her as a corpse?"

I began to look disappointed when I heard him reconfirm Mama's death, and the couple looked concerned for how I would react.

The husband ran towards the front door to comfort me, but I just stood with a blank stare. I was heartbroken inside, but it was since Mama wasn't actually able to see me. I guess I got my hopes up for disappointment. The husband went up to the man at the door and bowed spontaneously. It was like he was programmed to respond that way, but his step-father just stood there expecting this reaction.

The husband stood bowing and loudly apologized for inconveniencing him. Their father mentioned how Mama was buried in the cemetery down the street, and we went back to the car. The couple explained how they were unaware that I already knew about Mama's death and they thought I wasn't ready to handle the truth. The husband looked at me and began to feel sympathetic, "We did not mean to offend you. Would you still like to see your mother?"

I didn't know what to say, so I just nodded. The car made a sharp turn and we went to the local cemetery. It looked really spooky, and I got scared of if something would come out. Ika and

I always avoided the cemetery since it was just creepy to be around. We usually went there for Memorial Day, but I was always freaked out when we entered.

We looked around and saw my father's family name on a stone. We pulled up to a group of tombstones, and I went to find Mama and Papa.

I saw their names on the front and I forgot any of my fears. I looked at the quote underneath Mama's name, and it said "I have planted my Tulips and they will grow to be strong and independent." I knew she was referring to Ika and myself, and it felt like she was sending me a message. I wanted to continue our conversation, so I sat down and said in my head, "It's nice to see you again."

I pretended that she was saying things like "You look so much bigger," or "How have you and your sister been?," but I worried that she wouldn't actually say any of those things. Just going off the quote she left for us, I think my conversation with her was probably realistic.

The couple asked if I was ready to leave, and I said that I wanted to leave them something before I left. I saw a pasture of flowers near a pond, and I asked the gardener if I could take some of them. He spoke gently and said "Take whichever one you desire."

I thought about the flowers that Mama had in the apartment, and she always had a couple of purple tulips in her windowsill. We didn't get much sunlight, so they withered away quickly, but she always put a new one up. She said on her grave that she put some tulips in the ground, and I wanted to plant mine.

The gardener dug up two of the flowers and brought them to both of their stones. He went back to work and I planted them into the ground. The purple color fit well, and I think they would have loved how it looked.

As I got up to go back to the car, I whispered in my head, "I promise Ika and I will be back to see you soon." I didn't think it was true, but I wanted to give them hope. Even if Ika is happily married, I was going to bring her and her husband from Kyoto to see them again.

As we drove back, the wife told me to gather my belongings. "I hope you enjoyed your stay, but your aunt called us and said that she was coming home. We can take you back later today."

After so much time had passed, I had gotten used to walking home to the couple's place, but I was excited to go home. Ika was still gone, but the room was now mine. I could rearrange it and add a new bookshelf with a flower pot on top. I could even take the top bunk for once. It was still going to feel lonely without Ika, but I got used to relying on myself.

I filled my suitcase up with my clothes and had a stack of books in a plastic bag. I looked inside and saw that I had read through every single one of them. They were what kept me company all this time. I ended up reading through "Animal Farm" three times, and it took until the third to realize the pigs may have been Russian.

Even though they were Ika's, she at least left me something to pass the time. It would be nice to give them back in person, but I can wait until my next visit to Japan.

As I walked up the stairs and reached my apartment's door, I thanked the couple for their hospitality and went inside. I yelled that I was home, but I just told myself to stay quiet. I went

back to my room, but there were some extra unpacked suitcases on the side of the door. When I climbed up the ladder to the top bunk, there was somebody in the blanket: Ika.

She seemed to be in a serene slumber, so I just went back to the kitchen and kept quiet. I wanted to ask Ie why she was back, but I knew Ika could tell me herself. I can wait until she's ready. I grabbed a new book which Ie left on the counter and sat on the couch reading until I fell asleep.

When Ika laid her head on the pillow, I could see the tired expression, despite her being unconscious. I ended up making her some noodles when she woke up. She will always be around, but I can handle myself. She's probably been through a lot, and it's better if I can take off some of the pressure off her shoulder.

Corroded Cabin

By: Mikey Chmielewski

Your absence speaks to me:

We are the children of worms

nourished by dripping, soaking lips and  
skin that hooks onto permeating mist.

Yet I keep looking and looking and looking and  
pleading: tell me the looming floodlight will stall, please  
give me another day before supposed ghost-stories  
find home in our

stained cushions,

our paisley tablecloth,

our patched curtains that'd dance to  
the morning draft's ingress,

the cold, sooty floors we neglected,

the fireplace we cheerfully haunted,

the wax we speckled on bedroom linen,

each of her ascending pencil ticks,

our crowded cabin-garden, its roots that'd tangle and thicken until  
only you fit in—too perfectly.

Please, grant another day of looking for  
sufficient decay to compose  
our earthly reunion.

Promise me one thing:

That yesterday won't end,

that indents in my head mean more to me than  
the transient tendency of light to cascade upon  
melodramatic fallacies.

Promise me

that reverberating bedtime stories

reach ears other than mine

and that their children, born in sleep,

play with my indents in a way that's unique.

Put on a show! A Play!

What character will we birth today, only to gut and twist

until streaming forth a flow  
from which leaves Lethean lynching ponds  
for patient leaches to swallow and populate in.

What story can I end today?  
Maybe one of limbs meant to stretch  
until mistaken, not for arms or legs (those silly, heavy things),  
but for steams that look as if they would shudder in daybreak.

Or instead of a dreary orchestra, conducted by winding hands  
and armed with instruments that sound like  
skin snapping off snares,  
chattering teeth (that age tugs to crescendo),  
and crinkling flesh that withers  
around nails that yield roots  
meant to cling against dirt and dead dreams  
but instead grip towards future memories  
that promise me happy things.

Heavens Touch  
By: Michael Arbalaez

Heavens touch is but only an arms length away;  
My angel's breath rouses my mortal skin.  
Setting my heart and soul ablaze;  
She ignites me from within.  
Here we lie, bodies intertwined;  
Love given and love received.  
To all our stars for which God aligns  
I thank God she's here with me.



Kore By Erin Turban

I swear  
there once  
was something here-  
But reality is a fickle thing,  
    a collection of almosts-  
and memories  
    etch lies deep  
into me.  
    Perhaps truth is  
        insubstantial,  
wavering-  
a false expectation.

    my mind a cluster of  
dismantled almosts,  
        stiff from memories  
it can't remember-

I caught a glimpse of where two worlds once met  
in shadows I can't quite recognize  
burnt into flesh.

your face embraced in shadow figures-  
blurring at the edges.  
surrounding me. suffocating.  
you exist in a strange in-between  
as though life and death were separable-  
    and dreams built around you. decaying.

Rain transforms your touch  
    leaving everything unrecognizable.  
distant.

Shh. they say something must have died here.

•••

Eternity swept      into  
    those floorboards-    etching itself  
deep                  into me

as though it too  
would consume me.

Light transforms liquid-  
spilling over the cracks in the floorboards-  
chasing my unsteady feet.  
your memories a second heart beating in me.  
unable to die  
unable to live with all of yesterday  
in me. Drifting between  
life and death as though there was  
a difference.  
the one certainty, the floor  
beneath me.  
And I, wondering if these floorboards too  
will crack  
beneath  
my touch-

Tired of waiting, tired of living,  
wondering if I too will disappear  
with the morning light  
Perhaps to forget is to live,  
and if I closed my eyes  
I would be swept in eternity  
and transform nothingness

Dissipating into the  
depths of my closed eyes, close  
to wanting nothing, close to  
wanting him. And I am left  
another shadow. Numberless.

•••

Unspoken  
A phantom's glitch, lingering  
in half spoken  
words, as though the very thought  
would curdle  
them at the touch If any words  
still linger on your breath,

let me catch it in mine

Your fate still fiddling away  
at impossibility, Kore  
Forever in pursuit of you  
in a dream, you melt  
into the darkness  
A waking dream still lingering  
with each breath,  
the touch of drowsiness  
pressing hard

Consider me a dream,  
weightless, flickering  
Writing "orpheus" into my skin,  
as though it could last  
without him

Parting the shadows  
as I grasp for your touch  
Hollow shadows,  
bodiless forms  
subside

With a single word  
shadows grasp  
at conformity  
Twice I attempted  
to spill  
those shadows,  
ignoring the light,  
and twice I fell

I the icarus to your wavering  
If only fate's bitter design  
was as fleeting  
as a spider's web, dangling  
precariously in the wind  
For perhaps a flame could last  
in a world without air-

By: Ari Skelcher

You were here and we were giggling like children  
At some stupid joke I made  
You were here  
Holding me whilst my eyes poured  
Over some low life guy who didn't deserve me anyway  
You were here  
Spilling out all of your sins like oil into water  
For the rest of us to make paintings out of  
You were here  
Reciting all your old journal entries that you had hidden in your closet  
And there we were  
Giggling again, the sound bouncing off the walls, through the dining room to the kitchen  
You were here  
Then you were gone

.....

The gods were waiting patiently  
Sipping their champagne  
And flirting amongst the stars  
They were waiting for me to fall into your hands  
And grasp onto your heart  
Our love will make oceans ween  
Cities fall  
And the trees walk  
The gods are now watching and listening closely  
Filled with excitement to witness  
A love this strong

Oh, Chute!

By: Sarah Shea

The grown-ups didn't know better,  
and should have listened to the kids  
before knocking on the door  
of the house that belonged to the witch.

They wanted to check on the neighbor  
who never left her home.

The neighbor kids had warned them  
that she'd cook them down to bones.

Mr. Johnson stepped up and knocked  
and Ms. Allen rang the bell.

Sir Smith peered in the window  
when all of a sudden, they fell.

A trap door dropped beneath them  
right under the welcome mat,  
and they slid down a long chute  
to tumble into a cauldron black.

The lip of the great big pot  
rose at least twenty feet high.  
They tried for hours to escape,  
but it was too steep and smooth to climb.

They all tried shouting for help  
but when the witch appeared, they froze  
and shivered as she licked her lips  
and stared hungrily down her nose.

The old hag consulted a recipe  
and poured in water up to their chests.  
She sprinkled in salt and other seasoning,  
and the taste she had to test.

She smacked the hands that grabbed  
at the long ladle she dipped,  
and sipped and slurped and gulped  
and loudly smacked her lips.

She tossed in handfuls of garlic,  
and scores of vegetables too  
rained down on the grown-ups' heads  
as they splashed into the stew.

Then the witch stoked up a fire  
that crackled and loudly roared.  
The stew boiled and bubbled and steamed  
and the grown-ups were no more.

That night the sky was filled  
with silhouettes of hags on brooms  
all headed for their friend's house  
for the feast they would consume.

There were soups and roasts and curries  
and finger sandwiches in the spread.  
And, perhaps, you might even see  
a pudding made of eyes, it is said.

The neighbor kids shook their heads  
as they saw what had become  
of the foolish grown-ups who would  
re-emerge  
from a hundred witches' bums.