*TOUCHÉ 2020 - Covid 19 Edition -

Touché - the literary yearly of UW-Green Bay -Manitowoc Campus is usually published in print as a joint project of Professor Emmett's creative writing classes, and Professor Lutsky's Graphic Design Studio. The creative writing students curate and edit the submissions, while the graphic design students, design the publication and cover art, and prepare the layout for publication. Work on this year's Touche was about to begin when the campus moved on-line. While a print edition is not possible this year, we are proud to offer this pared down on-line version. Featured are poetry and prose from the Creative Writing students and a selection of illustrated haiku from the Graphic Design Studio 1 students

The Disposable
by Eric Brey

They say that Death rides on a coal black stallion and follows soldiers into battle to reap his yield. He gallops so swift and so loud that all, even those left behind at home may hear him.

However, Death has changed. He rumbles the earth with massive tanks, he guides the screaming shells down upon each trench and releases himself unto the ground as chlorine, bromine and sulfur. He shepherds each bullet, guides them from airborne pasture, to their fleshly target. He will take you sooner rather than later.

Yes, death rides in Flanders, and Flanders cries with sorrow.

It is true that at the beginning, he charged alongside the cavalries, his warhorse sneering with delight, his sickle sword-sharp, ready to take each damned soul, both of man and equine. Each passing year, month, day hour, mankind made Cain smile in his grave with newer and ever newer ways.

Poor soldiers, adventurous young boys, they start crawling, so gingerly over the top, officers ready to shoot those who stay behind in fear. The threats of war jaunt past each boy until seconds later the first casualty, the second, the third, fourth, fifth–fiftieth. As Death comes for each one, they greet him all differently. "…no… I… not yet…" "Finally, ya cam fur me ye bastard!" or with the normal silence of a dying man, silence in the middle of muddied, tattered and broken Hell. In their deaths no one is brave, no one is honorable, no one feels their disposability is for any cause.

He sweeps behind the lines at night, along with the midnight raiders. They carry the arms of their medieval ancestors: club, mace, sword, sickle, butcher's knife and the black knight himself, scythe. The first taken by Death was silent. The raid leader crept behind the boy, floated across muddied twig-walkway. He cupped his mouth, slit his throat and while the blood was still streaming out, steaming out, Death took the boy's soul.

The scene repeated itself over and over, blood, steam, blood steam, blood, steam, scream–one-man escapes his assailant. "Achtung! Briten in den Gräben! Briten in den Gräben! Search lights trail the British Raiders, machine gun fire too. Death turns on the men, medieval war meets modern Dark Age horror.

As the sun rises over the forest remains, body remains, lives ahead remains, whistles scream out and Death joins the German men in going over the top. He guides each leaden missile into head, leg, heart and lung. Stoic, unfeeling emotion.

Whistles scream, the commanders do the same. "Zurückziehen! Zurückziehen!" The British start their counter offensive. The sounds of whistles once again fill the gray air and the revving of marvelous modern machinery in the sky and on the land drown out the anguished screams of the living, the dying and those who are seeing the face of Death himself.

He crosses the narrow trench lines, inside his newfound steel mount. 16 Sixteen-year-olds, once proud to serve their Kaiser cower in trench corners, avoiding the crushing treads and the poised Lewis guns. One battle hardened trooper throws a bundle of grenades. Twine frayed, but strong and taut, they land near the fuming exhaust and the sounds of mechanical, manmade hell break loose. Death turns on the men inside and sets them ablaze, those who escape he assures are shot dead before they reach the ground.

He takes to the air, newfound to him and man, and swoops down with a box of grenades, delivering them right onto German lines, the guides the plane too close to the bulked rear trenches. Maxim's machine children turn the ship from British to Swiss and ensures the bird streams out spirit and crash the pilot into the already desecrated soil.

He jumps, escaping the fallen angel; its canvas and beams shredded like the shipwreck it is. Far behind enemy lines he fancies himself safe for now, but that was not in Death's to-dos. The pilot looked down at the splintering pain in his abdomen to see a massive splintering sticking through his gut. Turning around he saw the face of Death and moaned out before splitting the growing red sea beneath him.

Back at the front the British roll out, roaring "For King and Country" as they fall to the ground, evading the heavy shelling. Yet here, Death is nowhere to be seen. Then the shells emit their all too familiar yellow fog. The brave British boys now forget all except to get the mask on. As the creeping death comes towards them, the boys start to cry none the less; though their lungs are protected their skin blisters as Glasgow woolens become sulfur sponges. All is quiet except for one coughing, coughing so that he can die. As his lungs fill and scar, Death manifests from the gas in front of him and closes his skeletal hand around the boy's neck as he thrashes for one last word, the breath.

Death is not done with these boys however and he walks back to German lines. As soon as the pea soup mist clears, they hear heavy breathing, boots sloshing and sinking into the mud, growing ever and ever loud. The blazing bellows of Hellfire coming toward them. Deutsche flames ravage the Earth, evaporate puddles, relieves the lives of those close by immediately, with screams heard for miles back. No one can grab their rifles in time, at least not before they are as good as dead. Yet one makes a single Deathly shot and hits the tank on the trooper's back, killing the remaining boys in the explosion as Death walks stoically through the flaming napalm to take the souls of those left.

By nightfall he has taken 11,294, and crippled 18,208 more. The dead lay atop trampled poppies and without grave. The wounded fill the shell blown holes and the fields far behind the lines. At 11:59 he looks for his last victim, his last soul for the long, forgone day. But he cannot find them anywhere, and the next day draws ever close. He takes one look down to find his day-closing harvest, a trampled bloody and broken bird. A dove lays dead in Flanders.

Shifting Sands
by Eric Brey

Before them I was made and after them I shall last.
I was born of shifting movements and of oceans past.
Blown by wind, constant storm,
In shifting dunes, sea of sand, forever and always warm.

Ra beats down with killing heat, cooks my brethren and I.
The warm winds of Set come, lift us high, carry us East up in browned skies.

The land of Kemet. Born of Amun, held by Geb and Nut and Shu
Flooded by Napi, ruled by Horus, then Pharaoh-anew.
Worshippers of Osiris and Isis, Nephthys, Anubis and the dead
Life-Death, river flowing. The ending of life they do not dread.

I fall onto a stone mighty, a stone built for a new life ever after.
The tomb of stone full of gold, full of hope for Pharaoh and built by expert crafter.
I am sealed by the rock and the plaster that keeps Pharaoh sealed in new life.
To stay there I am, if only there be not strife.

Days after they come with hammer, and deconstruct that which was so finely built,
Robbers, thieves, the starving, come to steal new life without guilt.
Yet I stay, stuck between stone, for their doorway cannot be my way.
Free sand, once me, fills the doorway. Boulders crumble on top, layers block day.

Millennia pass, a new hammer does destroy,
Bursts open the stone that captured me so long ago–oh joy!
Winds pick me up once more and I see the land of Kemet,
Stones trapped by desert sand.

The Finest Fruit
by Tiffany Duzeski

The snow falls. It falls as soft, yet massive flakes covering the land as far as the eye can see. North of the town of Tromsø, in an old cabin just quaint enough to house myself and my companion, I spend my days in repetition.

In my youth, the villagers told me I should get a dog. They thought they knew everything because they had shelter and a family. I never understood them and did just fine on my own, scavenging and dreaming of getting farther away. Afterall, dogs dig, and bark, and always want a bone. Digging in my garden would be troublesome. Cats are small, soft, and warm, and they don't sniff around where they're not wanted.

Tucked in its own little wooded area, the cabin is a perfect place of solidarity for my furry friend and me. To the west, the mountains call to the daring adventurers who visit to hike the trails and bring with them their passion to ski, some never returning from the savage and unforgiving slopes. On the south side, there lies a thick, dense forest, and to the north, open land. I never venture north. Betula and spruce trees demand the screaming wind and weather detour and work together to keep us warm inside. Aromas from the wood hide away any lingering scents from the forest and surrounding areas.

I laugh as I prepare myself for the last bit of daylight and remind myself why this is the best time of the year. The land here is perfect for the needs of man and animal; the season itself grants back life.

Gardening is my favorite pastime. My passion. The earth can give back so much of what others take. They always take. Vegetable gardens, not flowers. Flowers are just symbols. Of what? Beauty? What does beauty give? Ha, ha, beauty gives me life.

When the King of Sweden visits, my mushroom picking is at its finest. My visitors get to feast while I enjoy the golden chanterelles with a little butter, atop the finest and juiciest steak. The mushrooms grow for me year-round. I use only the most nutritious fertilizer and gardening techniques, although I must always harvest the fungi before they lie beneath the cold blanket of the wintry season.

The best meats are plump and delicious with just the right amount of flavor. Not too thin, not too thick. Freshness is important, which is why I harvest the meat on my own vitalizing piece of land. No need to rely on the futility of those who find the need to live in a pack. They're all just dogs. Ha! I catch what I need to sustain my own life--the animals that stray too close to my cabin. But not all are for steak. Just the ones Freya sends, the rest are to feed the garden.

The bright lights atop the ski resort, high above the hills to the west, interfere with the wants of the Earth. Disrespectfully intruding upon the natural beauty of the darkness expected at this time of year.

The dark helps with the freeze. Preservation is vital when surviving on your own. The best time of the year, I think, as Kuru, my loyal cat, rubs against my outstretched hand. The frigid wind howls. The sound of the blowing breeze could outlast the most fearful of screams. I don't mind the wind. It is nature, as nature intended.

Just past my luscious and wholesome garden, a cold, stone and clay dirt cellar hides buried within the bush and trees. A sniggering sound arises in my throat at the thought of the storage. Of course, it is hidden! I share the finest fruits with only Kuru.

The cellar isn't too small but is still a tight space. There are multiple tunnels where I can take safe passage to different areas in the forest through holes in the cellar walls. The passageways are fairly narrow, and I sometimes struggle to bring the packages from the woods to the cellar. Often, I stroll through the tunnels to gaze at, and sometimes touch, this magnificence of life itself. This is where the spoils of the hunt hang, frozen until ready for feast. This savory loot will grant me and my Kuru many a delight to come.

The hunt isn't too difficult. Younger animals, just let loose from their mothers, venture off to the east and onto my land, becoming my visitors. Trapping pits are a necessity for survival in a densely forested area. The holes are dug and lined with quartzite and phyllite stone. Phyllite, with its silky and lustrous cleavage grants a softness to the durable qualities of the quartzite. The combination can knock out even the most resilient of prey. Lady Wind is often doing her job, and the whimpers are caught as just another competing cackle of the forest.

The fleshy cap of the king is administered swiftly to ensure consciousness has ended and the excitement of the forthcoming treat runs through my body. Bringing the remnants to the cellar is no laughing matter, but the sweet succulence is always worth the strenuous effort.

Skill depends on repetition. And with skill comes a great appreciation and taste for the beauty of the labor. Day by day, my repetitive tasks are the same. And each night, with the adrenaline coursing through my veins, I pet Kuru's fur and softly whisper goodnight. With the sweet sound of her purr, I giggle as I fall asleep.

Swallowed Up Whole
by Gabe Guzman

A wooden house shackled to the dirt
A set of chairs strewn about the commons
But when I close my eyes, to my surprise
They're no longer there

I open them again, all is normal
Nothing is taken, nothing is amiss
I open my window to get some air
But from outside, I see someone calling

He tells me to run, screaming in panic
His words are muddled, huffing and puffing
At long last, I hear something much much worse
The sound of sirens echoing throughout

It is a vortex of chaos and dust
Trapping and clearing everything in sight
'Til my house itself is Swallowed Up Whole

Nightmare

by Melissa Kasper

The dream I had not had yet,

Was already crashing down,

Teasing me, it was a threat.

colors clear for tonight.

It is the time to reset,

I rolled my dice.

Playing out the courses in sets,

A sickened love that rode its course,

Just wait till you hear the next verse.

Moving like a daydream,

he does not walk with regret,

he treads with his sly steps.

While I walk with the wrong mind set,

He'll find me soon.

But I am not up to going yet.

by Angela Zar

by Yin Ya Lee

The Lighthouse
by Kurt Duzeski

Jan. 4. The interior of the light house is divided into 5 floors. Above the hollow that is the base□.. nearly 140 feet up□.. is the second floor – the first that I would deem a livable space – the bedroom. It is quite spacious and quaint but has no more than a small bed and a well-made teak escritoire placed under one of the 10 round portholes – none of which opens they are bolted securely to the solid iron wall that encircles the space. Ascending the stairs another 12 feet brings you to the living quarters□.. this space – slightly smaller in diameter than the floor below and containing 2 fewer portholes – houses a small kitchen and storage area. I would imagine that when occupied□.. such as it is now – the stores would be full of food, but the necessity of the cutter's narrow escape three days ago left for minimal transfer of supplies. Ascending another level, once again and about another 12 feet up, brings you to the lantern. The iron walls that surrounded us below give way to glass panels – as when lit the lantern becomes the Antares of the sea to any ship bound sailors in sight of it. Without it□.. if I were to fail in keeping it lit.□. many a ship could be lost to the rocky shores and dangerous shallows they may encounter.□. but so far so well! Above the glass panes there are small openings.□. which are necessary.□. as the lantern is of the coal lit variety, and when burning emits a coal gas that would be unpleasant□.. and deadly.□. if not allowed to escape. Surrounding the lantern is an open walkway known as the gallery. From there one could have unobstructed viewing 360 degrees around the lighthouse. The steel walkway and railings show a bit of rusting from the sea water but are still solid and sound□.. even leaning against the railing with all my weight makes nary a movement in it. Above the lantern is the cupola□.. no stairs to ascend here, as the only way into it is up an iron ladder through the aperture in the ceiling – it is small and cramped but provides a certain comfort and solitude that I believe I can relate too□.. and desire. From here, using one of the 4 available portholes one can get a remarkable□.. yet restricted view.

Jan. 5. This evening I was mesmerized by the onset of a tempest.□. change of the wind – now from the South-West – brought with it an anger that could only be from Aeolus himself. It would be foolish to step out on the gallery in such winds.□. being sagacious, of course, I instead, ascended the ladder to the cupola – Neptune, unable to climb a ladder waited diligently below, and through my telescope I could see the dim lanterns of a packet-ship struggling in rencontre with each swell of the sea. It seems to me that I watched for quite a while□.. until no vestige of the foredoomed ship remained – and then, not because I was unsure□.. for I believe – No, I am sure it was by my own volition□.. I looked again, but only the vastness of the sea was visible.

Jan. 6. I woke this morning to find that the anger of the sea has again transformed this time into a placid calmness. The reflection of the sunrise creating a sanguine painting across the water to the horizon. The gentle lapping of the sea against the base of the lighthouse working in concert with the imagery made for one majestic moment – a moment I alone witnessed.

Jan. 7. A dead calm was present all day. Towards evening, from the gallery, I spotted a man adrift. The gesticulation of the man looked like an odd dance with the sea. His cries for help a monody with the crashing waves.

Jan. 8.

Jan. 10. It was□.. early afternoon if I recall correctly.□. when Neptune interrupted my writing and made me aware of an unexpected visitor – an unwanted invasion to my solitude - for it seems that with the change in tides the body of our mysterious survivor has washed ashore. The man was lying face down, his clothing tattered and torn.□. most likely from the jagged rocks his body had been forced against for a considerable distance. Upon turning him face up□.. I became torpid – for the face that stared back at me was none other than Orndoff himself. Did De Grät doubt my ability to manage the light alone? Did he send the ill-fated vessel against my wishes? I placed his body□.. which to my surprise I should say□.. was still warm upon a bier and moved him inside the lighthouse. Together with Neptune, I undressed our visitor□.. inside his coat pocket a meerschaum□.. which in my mind removed any doubt – that I did not have – that our visitor was indeed Orndoff. Together we gazed upon his bare corpulent body. His head□.. now tilted to the side allowed a rheum from his eyes□.. which were still aghast.□. from the horror of the storm if I were to guess□.. Above his right eye a small hole as if a gimlet were used to make such. From his lips a fresh ichor did appear, making its way□.. like a man who has imbibed too much kirschenwasser.□. down the side of his face. Around his wrist excoriations from where the coir was lashed to the timber of the ruined yawl, which I presume, was keeping him afloat.□. the fag end of which gave out from the constant dredging amongst the rocks. A small section of skin was completely gone, allowing one to see a cartilaginous feature that otherwise would have been concealed. His once prodigious being.□. which he allowed the rocks to sunder□.. is now nothing more than a mere bauble. I find myself ruminating over Orndoff's gossip of past debauchery that will be no more.

Jan. 11. In my reverie it occurred to me..... one can become ill through hunger alone – and I do not wish profligacy upon my good fortune – for I have made mention that the food stores are low.

Jan. 12. Together, with Neptune, we dined□.. no□.. we feasted. To each of us a moiety of the meal. For me there was no vacillating, as we enjoyed our meal and lighthouse velouté. Each bite invoking a rapture within us□.. I must offer an elucidation upon this, for it was not fetid nor acrid, but quite pleasant. Each taste offered a palatableness.□. an increased sense of ardor that was aroused within. It was this act of obeisance that allowed Neptune to shed his chrysalis – and become a God.

Jan. 14. A fortnight has passed since my arrival at this lighthouse.□. and just two days have passed since the last of my food stores have been used. Neptune is no longer mollified as the lack of food has him on the hunt□.. and I find myself trapped in the cupola□.. alone. He cannot ascend the ladder□.. as far as I am aware□.. so here I am safe from his prowl. I can hear him pacing the lantern below and every now and again I see his shadow.□. flickering.□. flickering□. flickering in the light□.. waiting.□. waiting.□. waiting. Maybe a passing vessel will bring new stores.□. De Grät has to know that I am out of stores.

Jan.15. He calls□.. his voice satiating my desires. Listen.

Jan. 17. Last night was another storm□.. much worse than the first.□. the waves were violent enough to obscure my view from the portholes with every crash.□. creating a wet, warm, darkness within this putrescent sarcophagus of iron I find myself trapped in□.. as if held in the amatory embrace of a Kraken. The lantern below is no longer lit.□. the paroxysms of the sea made sure of that□.. and my hopes for a passing vessel have been extinguished with it. Neptune speaks to me□.. calling to me in a laconic verse of desire from the darkness below.

Jan. 19. In my soliloquy I begin to wonder if my desire to attend the light alone was an act of charlatanerie. A solitude from "society" does me no good now. If another were here□.. would they□.. could they resist the euphony of Neptune?..... the coquetries of a God? Perhaps I am suffering an early onset of dotage□.. one cannot be so sure□.. definitely some kind of inanition has to

The Whistling Girl
by Thayne Neumann

Crisp morning air filled my room as I hesitantly awoke just enough to see the violence of the wind against my swaying window. Embracing the relaxation and warmth of my bed, I tried my hardest to filter out the uninvited distraction of the wind against my now open window. Mustering enough motivation to arise despite being barely awake, I started to move slowly to the window. Looking out, I feel another silent day here--in the city that always sleeps. Through the window I see her, a diamond in the rough, too far to talk but close enough to stare. A familiar tune grasped me even more, a woman red of hair.

The whistling alarm in the distance grows leisurely as it disrupts my tunnel vision gaze. An abrupt reminding of school--the very thought is enough to suppress even the brightest of minds. Dry of aspiration, the warm call from my bed is often enough to smite all motivation. While sitting at the table I stare at the food in front of me. It taunts back at me, smirking as I start a game of tic-tac-toe on my arm. I hear my mom in her room frantic and late as she shouts out to me, "Morning, bud."

Feeling annoyed by the habitual pleasantries, I sneer back, "yep." I look down at my arm and go back to the comfort of my game one stroke at a time.

My mom scurries through the bathroom door towards the front door. She looks back at me smiling through her eyes, "bye, bud," she mutters to me as the door seals behind her. Out of the corner of my eye I notice a flashing light followed by the irritating fist clenching sound of my mom's phone on the table as it lit up with the darkness of a name--Peter.

Silence walks alongside me this morning, allowing for my soothing sulking before school becomes the night. I never had any sense towards the outdoors but today feels different, it feels deeper. The sunlight glistens off the barely melted snow like flickering lights. There is nothing around me but the love of dying Winter's wind slowing my pace. The wind whips past me as I move forward past the neighboring forest. Willingly I venture through the racing wind collides, I close my eyes relieved.

Despite wind distorted vision, I see her, a woman red of hair whistling a familiar tune. Wearing a simple white dress, she captures the very essence of the sunlight and reflects it ten-fold on the snow-topped trees. An exchange of recognizing glances took me by surprise. Prancing along the tree line she smiles at me and I mirror. With a hunger struck heart I start towards the tree line.

I follow her through the forest as she moves behind the trees, disappearing and reappearing like streaks of light in the night. As I approach, she fades out of sight. I curiously wander aimlessly, looking behind tree to tree until the reflected sunlight pierces the dimly lit forest. Blindingly, there she stands, close enough to talk. Never being this close before, I smile at her as she mirrors me, "uhhh hi," I nervously squeal while rubbing my arm. Still continuing her smile, she starts to climb the tree next to her with haste while signaling me to follow.

Nervous as always, I look up and down the tree as it towers over me. I swallow my pride and put one hand on the tree while looking up at her smiling down on me. I began my way up the tree one branch at a time. until we were even of level. Numb in the legs, I panted, "so what are we up here for." She responded only with a slight laugh followed by her continuous yet warming smile. I move closer with intimate eye contact, and in doing so her smile fades to content. I lean against the tree with my legs dangling numb, I feel a spark through my body. I look to see her hand on top of mine.

A timeless moment of lust ensues, I move closer. She begins to whistle a tune unlike any other. A sound louder than Hell itself. The trees shake around me while the tune intensifies. Cowering with covered ears, I smile to the violence radiating from her tune. Staring breathless at her beauty, I begin to shake. My back erect as I fall towards her trancing tune. Violent winds swaying the forest whole, and sound piercing through defended ears. Time moves slower than before with her simply at peace with what ensues around. The ground quakes from what I only imagine is the tune's radiating hold. A stampede of violent wind enrages the earth below. Cascading in the violence fueled wind, her hair absorbs the menacing surroundings calmly. Grabbing the tree, I pull closer. The shrieking tears at my skin as cold flows down my leg. Reaching but unable to grasp the tree, I lose hold, plummeting below.

Lost in the blazing yellow of her eyes, I feel a releasing pause. Light fades all but above-- a familiar tune echoes near.

The Power of Makeup
by Morgan Kronforst

I sculpt my face to hide away the pain
I bounce the sponge across my rosy face
My face becomes a canvas for design
The colors dance across my eyelids
Stress goes away as I play with the shades
I create something different than others
The colors I use make me creative
Powders, shadows, lipsticks and so much more
As I play with colors, I get a rush
They are vibrant and so very neon
The bright colors mask how I feel inside
Inside I feel so run down and so blue
Colors change how I really feel inside
Because of makeup I am now happy
A Woman's Body
A woman's body is her own
Her thoughts, personality, looks
They all belong to her
Some think otherwise
Men like control
They want to control women
Tell them how to look, act, and what to wear
Unacceptable.
They don't know a woman's struggle
"She's my wife. She is my property."
Disgusting.
No respect.
But respect is what we deserve
And what we really want is control of our own bodies.

Queen of The Night
by Gabe Guzman

She lurks inside her tomb, waiting alone
Waiting for her next meal, her new plaything
For each and every day, she weaves her ropes
Hoping for someone to come rescue her

An aching loneliness in a pale chest
Her long, limber legs-- gaping crimson eyes
A large frame with a beautiful body
And a wicked smile as she bares her fangs

Hazily, I wake up to the same smile
Stiff on those same, white ropes that she has spun
She welcomes me, but as I turn and see
I gaze upon her pile of bones and eggs

And in that moment, I realize I'm trapped
With her sickly venom dressing her fangs
The Queen of The Night is ready to dine

by Melissa Kasper

by Alex Peters

Two of Cups

by Kylie Forster

Her long fingers brushed the top of each card, slowly. Carefully she pulls the deck together, shuffling it. She looks up at me, questioningly, “Now what?”
I scan her up and down as she continues to shuffle the cards, “Trust your intuition. When you feel you should stop, do so, then take the top three cards and place them in front of you.” She lets out a short sigh, and begins to pull the first card, “But, don’t look at them!”
“Wait, why not?”
“Honestly, I don’t know.” I laughed, “It’s just how I’ve always done it, I guess”
Sophia smiles, setting down the three cards in front of her. “Alright, ‘witch doctor’, what’s the diagnosis?”
Moving my hair away from my face, I glance down at the cards. One by one, I turn them over. “So, we have five of wands in reverse, the two of cups upright, and...” I pause, pulling the last card closer.
“What is it? What’s wrong?” she asks, trying to get a look at the card. “Is it bad, Thea?”
“No,” I put the card back down, “It’s really good actually. It’s the lovers.”
Those bright blue eyes start to glare at me, her pink lips forming a silly grin. “Yeah, so, what does that mean?”
“Oh, right!” I turn the cards her direction, “So, the five of wands in reverse shows you are, or at least have been, dealing with some inner conflict, but soon that tension is going to be fully released.” I hand the card over to her, letting her get a closer look at the card’s details. “Now, if we look at the two of cups, it shows that this could be because of someone close in your life. Someone you may even be mutually attracted to, which could lead to partnership or, uh...” I pause again, swallowing my anxiety like it’s a lump stuck in my throat. With a nervous sigh, I continue, “or unified love.”
“Ooooh,” she giggles, winking at me, “spicy!” I laugh with her as she does a little dance in her chair. How I only wish I knew what question she was trying to find the answer to.
As I hand her the second card, with my other hand I pull the last card closer to me. “Because you got the lovers card, it basically confirms that there is love in the future for you, more specifically a romantic relationship. The options are open to you and the choice is all up to you.” I hand her the last card and her pale; blue painted fingers graciously accept it.
“I have butterflies,” Sophia sets the cards down in front of her. She places one hand on her stomach while the other brushes through her ginger curls, “this is so weird! Thea, I really appreciate you doing this for me.”
I nod in her direction, looking down at my hands. “If you don’t mind me asking, what was your question?”
“Isn’t that against the rules or something? I don’t know does tarot have rules?”
“You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to.”
Her freckled cheeks start to turn red. The constellations of speckled birth marks being enhanced by the rosy hue. She tries to hide it with her hands covering her face, fingers parted to peek through. “It’s embarrassing”.
I scan her up and down, reassuring her with my gaze. “I’ll tell you something if you tell me what’s going on.”
She smiles, those pearly teeth biting down on her bottom lip, “Okay, fine!” she uncrosses her legs, straightening her posture as I lean in to give her all my attention. “I’ve had a crush on someone for a while. I’m really close to this person, and I was scared to tell them anything because I’ve known them for so long...”
My heart started beating faster, pounding against my chest. It was so loud inside of my head. A volcano of glitter began to erupt inside of me. Each sparkling as it fell from my head to my toes, tingling at my fingertips. As Sophia continued to speak, I fell into this sort of euphoria, just watching the world around her fade into nothing but colors, blinded by the pinks and blues. The way she talked about this person, this person that sounded all too familiar, how her face lit up. Her fingers running through her short auburn curls to avoid nervous tension. The ruby tinted cheeks, and, oh, that smile. The smile that could light up a sad, darkened world.
Her sapphire eyes look up at me as she finishes. Those eyes really were like sapphires. Geez...
“So, you going to tell me your little secret now?”
I stare at her for a moment, trying to piece together a sentence in my head. The colors around us start spinning into a crystal-like rainbow. “Sophia...I...” I want to tell her so badly. I want to tell her how fireworks go off in my head every time I lay eyes on her. She’s almost magical. Her soft fingers slide onto the back of my hand, curling around it and picking up. Her hand adjusts and becomes intertwined with mine. Oh God, she makes me weak. I could just melt into her arms. Impulsively, I lean into her, pressing my lips to hers. She kisses back, softly, and I feel as if the world is nothing but cool, purple flames. Sophia pulls away slowly, cupping my cheek with her free hand.
“I would do anything for you” I whisper. I wish I could gather all the stars that fell out of the sky and put them into her eyes, just to give her the power to shine even brighter than she already does. Her hand moves from my cheek to my chin, her finger turning it up so I could see her as her hand pulls away. She holds her hand up to my face, fingers pointed, looking like she’s about to--
Snap!
“Hello? Earth to Thea? Are you good?” Sophia’s rapid snapping comes to a stop.
“Yeah. Yeah, I’m sorry. You were saying?” I set my hands in my lap once more and look down as I twiddle my thumbs.
“No, you were saying. It’s your turn to spill, bitch” she giggles.
I look back up at her, and start slow “I, uh...I really like this one girl. But she doesn’t like me back, so I guess it doesn’t really matter.”
“Oh, I’m sorry, babes. Don’t worry it’ll be alright. I’m here for you!” I give her a gentle smile. She wraps her arms around me, and over her shoulder I see the three tarot cards I pulled for her. One by one, I feel the butterflies in my stomach die as I realize what I had done. That’s a curse the universe will never let me break. That card always in reverse.

Myosotis

by Tiffany Duzeski

Carrying a wicker basket, I ventured into the call of the winsome forest. I’d noticed the fresh blossoms in varying winter and spring colors, and I thought they’d make a fine addition to the flowing curls in my hair. I skipped along the same path and weaved my way to our home. The flowers grew simply along the edges of the parapet originally intended for a mossy garden of fragrance and inviting wonder. They danced in the wind; the whispering of the forget-me-nots singing sweet nothings to my ears. As I gathered the fine specimens of perfume, I reminded myself to plant a few along the hill.
A few months ago, as I was wandering through the forest, I found this old cabin. Hushed whispers of the wind seem to turn into sounds of longing as I get closer. Calling me to it and asking me to visit. Since I discovered it, it’s been luring me. It’s just a small cabin, but I’ve never had the audacity to investigate. Instead, I like to sit back in this wild bit of brush and use my imagination. I create stories about what used to happen there and why it’s in the gnarly and dilapidated shape it’s in now. They say smiles create wrinkles. It has so many wrinkles.
The families who must’ve come and gone in the past would have been full of intrigue and wonder. Sometimes, I imagine a dwarf family saving a young woman from an evil stepmother. Sometimes, I imagine a short old man and tiny old woman living through their lives reading books and holding hands.
My teachers call me a dreamer. I can’t seem to stay alert in classes or focus on their lectures. My mind is always off riding on the backs of dragons or whispering with the fairies. That’s where I’m happiest. In a world of never-ending quests and fantasy.
I love to read, so when I found this little niche hiding amongst the trees, it seemed too perfect. Away from arithmetic and atoms, I get lost in my own fairy tales and stories, keeping a journal of my day to day imaginings. The cover is the soft color of the spring-time flowers and the parchment inside is lined with quaint doodles of nature and what lies within. My stories and drawings end up on these lines and come to life in the breeze. I’d like to share them with a daughter of my own someday. She’ll be as whimsical as I am, I’m sure.

Lately, mom has been crying a lot. She never used to. She won’t tell me why. Dad left so long ago. I just want him to come back. Mom won’t tell me when he’ll return; she just sobs louder when I ask. We used to be a family, playing ball and reading stories. Now the lights are hardly ever turned on, and she doesn’t leave her room.
I’ve begun to sneak out. She doesn’t notice much anyway, and she never checks on me. It’s fun to explore the town. The cemetery across the street is too quiet. The main street is bustling with more people who don’t pay attention to what’s around them. But, the forest calls. It’s dark, like home, but maybe that’s part of why I like it. The birds and squirrels fly or run from tree to tree, constantly moving. I wonder if there’s a pattern to their movement. The other day I found a little house. I almost missed it, it seemed half buried in the fallen branches and stones. Tucked up against a mud-covered hill, strewn with fallen trees, it fits right into the nature of the forest.

The sound of a sharp screech woke me. I hadn’t realized I was tired, but the mossy growth in my little niche was soft enough to act as a pillow. It had gotten as dark as the shadows, and the cautious hoot of the owls sent an alarm to me and the other nighttime creatures. I must get back.
Rushing towards the village, a swift breeze caught my skirt and wrestled with it. Trying to free myself, I dropped my journal and the artistic pages went flying like a whirlwind through the leaves. Easing myself loose with only a few bruises, I grabbed as many pages as I could catch and dashed out of the forest.

I made my way to the woods again. The beginning of a trail is showing from the stomped-on dirt and broken twigs. I hadn’t been able to find the house again. So, I decided to make friends with the squirrels and rabbits.

I don’t know how I got here. It feels like I just stepped into the woods, but I must’ve been walking for a while. The evergreen and oak trees are as far as my eyes can see from all directions. Might as well check it out. Good thing I put on my boots. Climbing the hill was hard. I kept slipping from the mud. At least no one would notice how dirty I’d gotten.
The house had been overgrown with ivy and thorny branches. The only way to properly explore it was to drop in from the top. The thatch roof had fallen in from years of torment and beatings. There’d certainly be a vulnerable hole to crawl through.
I found just what I was looking for and used some of the thick weaved vine to make a sturdy rope to swing down from. I’d almost made it when the vine snapped and dropped me with a hard thud and a whoosh of dust that hadn’t been disturbed in years.
I think I was only out for a few minutes. The dust could still be seen as dots flying through the streams of sunlight from the roof. I looked around and noticed my rope in a broken pile next to me. How am I to get out now? It smelled musty and damp, and I knew it would be dark soon--and cold.
Wrapping up my rope, I saw a piece of something crumpled up and poking out of the dirt floor. It seemed to be reaching for me. Carefully tugging, I was able to keep it mostly intact--only ripping a tiny corner that was too buried under the hard-packed dirt. Someone had drawn a picture of the house. It was simple, as if just an afterthought of a daydream. I had earlier noticed the doors and windows had been overgrown and I wouldn’t be able to find a way out, but the doodle showed me a hole just big enough for a child. It had a trail of blue flowers leading from the house to the cemetery.
As I looked around, I noticed a thin line of color I hadn’t seen before. How did I miss it through the dark and dank shapes of the rest of the house? This was a mystery to be solved later. I had to find a way out before all the light disappeared.
Crawling to the color, I noticed they seemed to grow before my eyes, and I could hear a murmuring sound. As if reacting to my presence, they got bigger and I thought I imagined them singing, “help her to remember.” I needed to get out before I got completely delusional. I realized I could hear the sound of dripping water and knew there must actually be a hole in the side leading out. The dirt didn’t seem as hard here and the brush seemed to part. I’m certain this wasn’t here before. Able to just barely squeeze myself through the hole, I purged myself from the house, parchment still in hand. Around the structure was nothing but moss and vines, fallen twigs and branches.
I ran home with the last few signs of the day. I wasn’t surprised no one noticed I was gone--back to the nightly routine. I washed my face and went to my room. Setting the parchment piece under my bed, I fell fast asleep.

Day after day, I searched for my missing journal pages. I just didn’t feel complete without them all tucked carefully within the binding of my book. Realizing I wouldn’t ever get them back, I gave in. I could always look back on the pages I had and remember the old cabin.
I didn’t know that I had loosened my grip on the book, and one single page flew from the diary into the thicket and brush. When I got home, I set the doodles and the fairytales aside in the attic as if it had all just been a daydream, never to be looked at by my eyes again.

The years passed by, and we had decided to move. Dad never had come back, and I basically grew up without a mother. They decided to get her treatment across the country. None of us wanted the memories of this place anyway. Taking one last walk through the town before packing the rest of our belongings and placing them in the shipping van, I realized I was glad to try to start anew.
My room had been packed up days ago. I just had to get the bed frame into the van--that and the last few remaining boxes upstairs--and I’d be good to go. As I hauled the wooden pieces apart, an old wrinkled paper fell onto the floor. I shoved it into the pocket of my torn jeans and continued my work.
Just the boxes left; in half an hour, I’d be driving out of this horrible town. As I piled them into the truck, the last container spilled its contents and an old journal fell out. Something made me reach into my pocket and join the paper with the book. Shoving the rest of the items back into the cardboard, I hopped into the driver seat and headed out of town. My last glimpse was of the blue flowers planted around the gravestone in the corner, and I set my eyes to the road.

Arriving, at the new house my family had bought, mom and dad greeted me on the wooded porch with smiles. Don’t forget to unpack all the boxes and help dad with the heavy stuff! The crisp, breeze of the wind rushed in off the lake, and the trees rustled.
With the sun setting, I noticed the lights on in the kitchen and the wafting smells of a table set full of food.

Poetry Project
by Thayne Neuman

A place so soft – dead of sound
Whispered thoughts severed to be silenced,
Stolen by the beast of the night
Hunting grounds of striped prey,
The beast lurks,
Footsteps of quiet screams,
Once upon a time -- freedom

Pain of love's joyous stain
Crimson of essence, cold of taste.
Craving, I long for your feel,
For my blood-filled grasp ever so tight
Oh, my sweet flower how I miss thee
Infectious sickness spreads like fire
A light in the night, a frightened blaze
Once mine, still mine I wonder
A diamond in the rough
A life once lived – Barred I lay

Oh, my flower long I await, a
glimpse of flamed embrace
Hearts paired, comforting
thoughts, sensed by the beast
Lurking near, stench of fear
Above and below – a cavern un-
known, untraveled, unbearable
Aching beats in the dark
Quiet love untouched
Thy crimson stain goes unknown
For you alone complete

Under breath of lies, sparks fly.
Flames ignite,
Hopeless might showers bright
Thy deathless death clouded by
judgment
Sickened gaze through perishing
fight
Watch I do through all the bite
A beast pacing. Thy thoughts eras-
ing

Oh, thy flower I know
For I have lost once more
Under thickest thin
I lean into forward light, to him does
he crow
Thy friend tells lore
Of blackened bow
Restless rest keeps me on
One day the end I seek –
Death

Forward onto dark,
I pray to open ears and
closed minds
Honor abandoned to mindless
shadows
Dancing all around me –
they laugh
Cascading horror fail to take
me
Faithful leap
to righteous just
A snake in the grass
A reaper in the yard
A stone that bears thy
name
Deeper I fall, honor on
pedestal
Forward onto dark

Borrowed all but time
A scale unbalanced
Mocking sands against the glass
Honor high, time low
Death nears, a faceless smile, a beckoned call
Relieved of grace, I embrace, a pain shared
Envied heart releases and I follow suit
Time journeys forth

Oh, Thy rose,
Thee heart unattained,
Thee soul unloved,
Thee I dreamed of,
A wish un-granted,
A prayer unanswered,
A life unfulfilled,
A faceless beast between-
Us now and forever
Oh, thy thorn
Goodbye forever more

Fall From Grace

by Alex Peters

My Garden

The first gift I received was the garden

Received upon falling from my mother

In my garden before the seasons changed,

The flowers would lead me up to a tree

Their endless sprawling the garden striped gold

Found at the end of the endless sprawling

A tree bore fruit terrifyingly red

When the season changed, the golden fell grey

The garden was stripped– and now eyes could see

No flowers could cover the statue now

It and the red trees were all that remained

Upon the greeting of the new season,

The flowers remained un-grown–far too cold

The marble swelled as it drank from the cold

Grew from the center, placed on the marble,

A stare that froze the summers warm staying

I looked to my feet, and the seasons came

When springs opportunity welcomed change,

I turned from the statue and crawled away

Honey Blight

My garden–strangled from blight,

By a honey feigning sweet

It oozed upon my garden,

Dripping from three entwined trees

It masqueraded as kind,

So my garden let it sweep

It burned shadows–left char,

Strangled the light for the free

My garden homogenous–

Only those like the triad,

And spoiled honey to spread,

Were promised unblighted land

Aphrodite

Oh, my Aphrodite

You stand beneath the apple tree

Center of my garden–you give me no peace

Your stone too cold

Your face too bold

Even the conqueror from Macedon was in your hold

Oh, my Aphrodite

Please let me be

The wall I built cannot contain your beauty

I locked the door and threw the key

But from under that terrible tree you found the key

From under the tree you broke free

Oh, my Aphrodite

Take pity on me

Please let me be

Apple Tree

I want this

There is no mistake

I plucked an apple from the tree

And drove a stake through it clean

I felt the hole it tore

But I would not scream

The apples fell from the tree

One by one planting their seeds

After time tends to the ground

My garden will bloom, birthing more trees

The trees will tower past the garden walls

Dropping the product of their bloom

Beyond the walls

Watching them fall

In the Undertow

At the center it stirred, that white statue

Perfect, so perfect, even in this rain

It lingers unchanged even after days

The water too high–your marble heavy

Too perfect–I sink in the undertow

Lightning strikes the water–paralyzing

Electrifying–my body tensing

Paralyzed–I am as the current wills

It drags me from a feeling beloved

Cursed to long for the feeling of marble

I begged the waves to swallow me again

Take me under–send your loudest thunder

I want your lightning, and I want you vein

Gift me shame, take me under, ruin my name

A Rose in the Garden

Do you remember the first time

You were springs gift to me

My sight did stumble on you there

Where first you cowered tight

Longing your un-lasting beauty,

My thumb pressed to your stem

Your rigid thorn had kissed it then

Beneath my thumb, it drove

It met the surface where it drained

Then dripped onto your bud

It made its way into your veins

Your color was prescribed

Now days later, you call once more,

You'd bloomed from your tight bud

I couldn't miss this new blooming

I press into your thorn

Peach

I laugh, remembering my first harvest

The unexplored sweet protected by pain

At that orchard the perfect peach did reign

I found a ladder–stepped on its weakest

It waivered then moaned, its bolts did detest

I reached for that peach, so round–no restrain

Oh, but that weak ladder sang, all in vain

When I hit the ground hard, was I unjust

I laughed as I easily split a peach

At its core, a pit, the center of bliss

Dripped from my hand to the ground–forereach

So sweet so perfect I begged for its kiss

Found a new ladder for reaching my peach

I climbed, forgetting my sweet reminisce

by Alaric Allen

by Jeff Pagel