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# embers '12

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# The Blackberry Bushes

Rebekah Brown

Excerpt from *The Blackberry Bushes*

*[While exploring their relatives' backyard, ten-year-old Jacob, his sister Hannah, and their cousins discover that the blackberry bushes lead to a mysterious other world which they are sure will fulfill all their expectations of a fantasy land. The first person they encounter is a girl named Rietta, who is eager to introduce them to her mother.]*

Nothing could paste a smile on Jacob's face like approaching the exciting part of the adventure story he knew they had stumbled into. Rietta would not have been his first choice for an introductory guide to a magical land, but the first person one meets in such a place is always odd. And Rietta definitely qualified. At least she was leading them to someone who knew something, to someone who would unload a back-story on them.

He knew just from the way Rietta had spoken about herself that she was somebody important. *And of course, her land needs my help. I know it.*

Following Rietta wasn't easy. The bushes in her garden had been allowed to grow wherever they pleased, which happened to be exactly where all the paths were. Wayward vines sprawled on the ground and snaked over the crumbling bricks of the long house. A ridiculous number of leaning chimneys adorned the roof, though otherwise it wasn't particularly peculiar. But it could be inside. Appearances always deceived in such places.

Rietta, seeing their hesitation, gestured toward the door. "Please go in. My mother won't bite you."

When they entered, they could barely see the room, but as their eyes adjusted, they found it to be a foyer. Thick, carved doors set into dark-paneled walls lined a corridor directly ahead. A grimy window near the ceiling let in enough diluted light to display the holes in the rug and the wooden picture frames screened in misty gray dust.

Rietta rammed through one of the doors. The children followed her into a much smaller room whose low, beamed ceiling gave Jacob the impression of walking into a shoebox. Under the bigger but no less grimy windows stood a table crowded with potted plants whose yellow leaves drooped from trailing stems, tangled beyond hope. At the table sat a woman, writing a letter. When she heard them enter, she stashed her paper under the pots and sprinted across the room to meet them.

"Mother, you must see!" shouted Rietta. "There's a magical country

under the blackberry bush, and people live there, and I've brought some of them to meet you!"

The woman's hands flew up like a stage curtain. "My word! Indeed? Let me look at them." Not knowing what else to do, Jacob lined up beside the others and watched Rietta's mother examine them like statuary. He wanted to laugh. *Hasn't she seen people before?*

The woman tapped his shoulder. "Where do you come from?"

"Oregon."

"I thought so. Though the name ought to be more romantic. Just *Oregon* is rather dull, don't you agree? How long do you intend to stop in Faysmond?"

"Not long."

"That's a pity. We would lose our chance to be the kind, benevolent souls aiding the heroes in their quest. Think of the honor! There can be no higher calling than assisting the weary to their noble end. Perhaps it would mean the difference between success and failure to you—or even life and death! And besides that, you're certain to have a sensational story to tell and we want to hear all about your enchanted land."

"If any place is enchanted, yours is. You probably have Fairies and Magicians everywhere." *And the sooner they show up, the better.*

"Oh, no! We're most ordinary, unfortunately. We don't get any more magical than printing presses and telescopes. But I should think you have enchanters of some sort wherever you come from. I can tell you're not as other people are. I adore stories about magical lands! Do tell!"

Jacob squirmed. He glanced at his sister and cousins, hoping for a shred of moral support, but he got only flustered looks. Nothing coherent had left anyone's mouth when Rietta's mother said, "Oh, of course! You might wish an introduction first. I'm Tietra, and I assume you already know *her*. Do you care for refreshment?"

The children introduced themselves but declined her offer. Jacob wanted to try whatever they ate here, before he remembered that possibly magical food was dangerous. He almost wished he hadn't read all those books. *Knowing what to beware in a magical land sure takes a lot of the fun out of going to one. . . .*

*[They learn that, as Jacob has expected, Rietta is indeed the queen of her country, with expectations of a political marriage in the near future.]*

"So," asked Jacob, "what do you want us to do?"

Tietra sank to her knees beside him, and looked him in the eye. He knew that expression. It was the face of the desperate victim before beg-

ging the hero to fulfill the prophecy. Her hand wrapped itself around his. This poor, helpless lady, how much larger her hand was than his own, and what a determined grip she had!

“Will you be able to stop here or return soon?” she asked in a tremulous voice.

His honor demanded but one answer to such a question. “Yeah, sure.”

“Then would you—?”

*Slay the dragon? Battle your dark enemy one-on-one? Save the world? Bring it on, lady!*

“Would you come to Rietta’s Presentation Ceremony?”

Jacob dropped her hand as if she had confessed to being rabid.

“That’s it? You don’t want us to put Rietta on the throne?”

“No. She’s already there.”

“You don’t want us to stop her arranged marriage?”

“No. She’s delighted about it.”

“You don’t want us to save the kingdom?”

“No. There’s nothing wrong with it.”

“You just want us to—go to a party?”

“Yes. Can you?”

“But—that’s boring!”

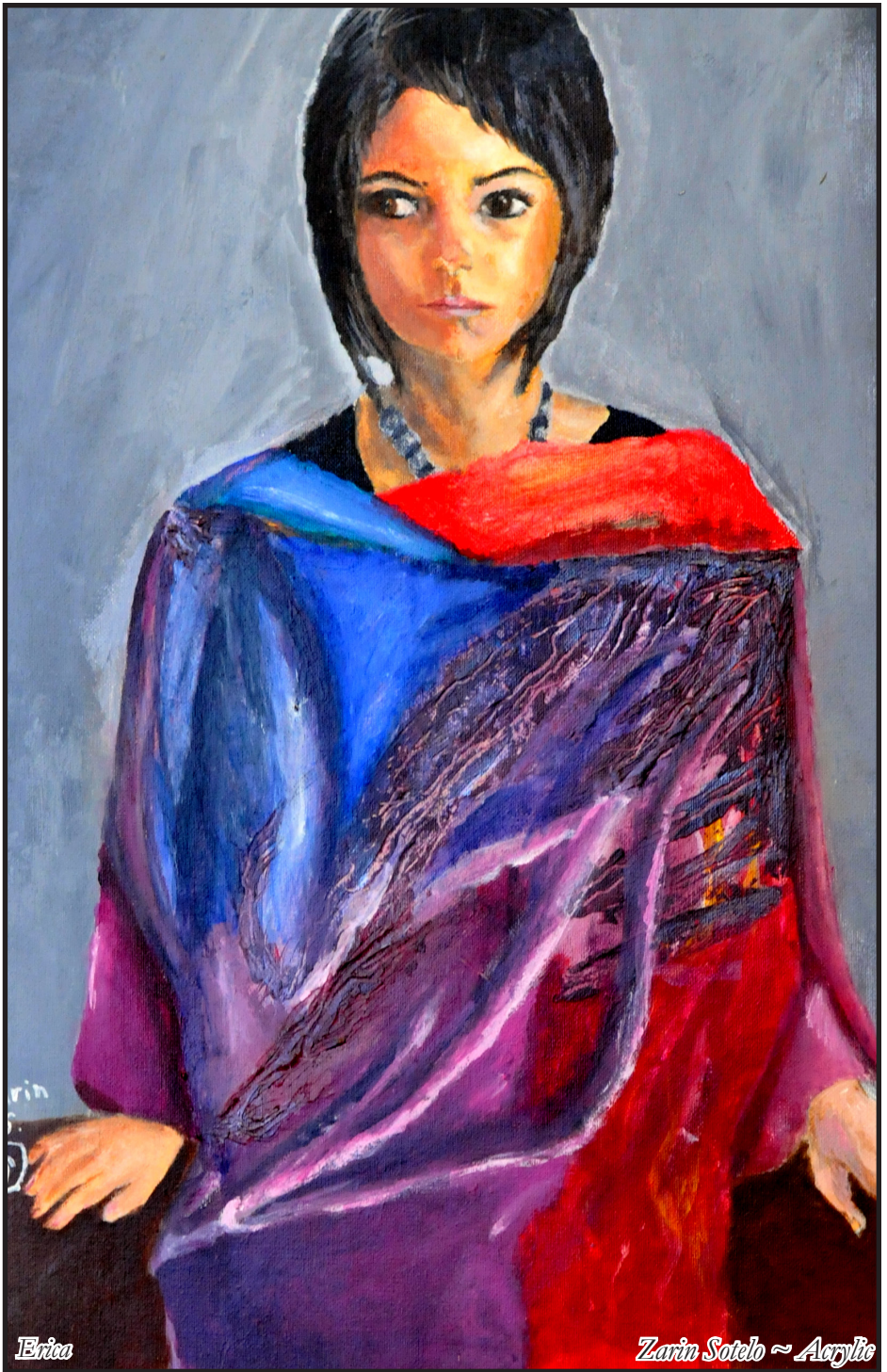
Tietra frowned. “How do you mean?”

“He means,” said Hannah, “in books, people always have to save the world or do something heroic in magical countries. We were expecting that here.”

Jacob unsheathed an imaginary sword and made a few passes. “Can’t we at least have a good duel?”

“No!” said Tietra. “We don’t let little boys play with weapons here. If we needed a champion, we would never pick children. It would be cruel to send you into danger. No one around here would need that anyway. Why would you want to make life harder for yourself? All we ask is that you return Monday and go to the Presentation. We’ll make merry, and you may go home safely. Now if that doesn’t please you, I don’t know what will.”





*Zarin Sotelo ~ Acrylic*

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# Payment

*Lindsay Inscore*

A slip of paper with a single drop of blood was the only notification he received of his daughter's disappearance. When he awoke the note was pinned to the pillow next to his head. He smeared the blood with his hand as he groped in the dark for his glasses. Still groggy with sleep he stumbled from his bed down the hall to the bathroom. The light blinded him for a few seconds before he noticed the blood on his hand. Startled, he ran back to his room and observed the note that read:

She's mine.

In a panic he hurried to his daughter's room at the back of the small house. His hands flew up to his mouth as the light from the hall revealed a bloody lump on his daughter's bed. He flipped the light switch, and with a sigh of relief took in the sight. His daughter's cat had been stabbed brutally. The sheets of the bed were stained and a darkened spot grew on the floor. The message was very clear: *This is all you can expect to find of your daughter.*

His daughter was all he had; without her he had nothing to live for. He considered the rat poison in the garage to end his own life, since he was sure his daughter was lost to him forever. His debt was too high for any common man to repay. Ten thousand does not seem such a high price to pay until it is the only amount Charon will accept to ferry one out of Hell.

As he stood in his daughter's doorway staring at the matted fur of the once lively Siamese cat, his phone rang a single, sharp tone. He jumped, loosing a cut-off "Son of a..." He walked back to his bedroom slowly, still in a mild state of shock. Picking up his phone he saw the tiny image of an audio tape declaring a voice mail, but there was no missed call. With trembling fingers he dialed his voicemail box and listened to the automated voice announce, "You have one unheard message. First unheard message..."

A scream shattered the silence and his thoughts—a scream so cold that it could freeze even the devil's blood. He dropped the phone as the scream melted into a sob. Sobs usually signify life, but he was not willing to get his hopes up. He closed his eyes attempting to shut out the image of the cat fearful of his daughter's fate.

His phone rang again. Startled, he bent and retrieved his phone to answer it. No sooner than he had pressed the accept button did another scream batter his ears and his heart. He threw his phone at the wall instinctively and raced to the bathroom to vomit violently in the sink. His

phone rang for the third time but continued to ring unlike the first two instances. He stood for a few seconds staring into the mirror, contemplating his misfortune. Never would he have imagined that he would get this deep. His daughter was as innocent as any other teenage girl; he should not have let her become wrapped up in his problems. He let his thoughts run unchecked before remembering suddenly that his phone was still ringing. He made his way back to his room and observed *Unknown Caller* flashing on the screen. He hesitantly picked up his phone unsure whether answering it would be the best idea. Curiosity got the better of him. He pressed the accept button a second time. No scream. Only silence. He could faintly hear breathing on the other end of the line. He shuddered as if electricity had surged through his veins. The breathing continued as the only break in the silence. Although it was not cold, the skin pricked up on his arms like freshly plucked chicken flesh. The chill continued to cycle throughout his nervous system, inflicting convulsions at regular intervals. A knot formed in the pit of his stomach.

“What do you want?” he managed to choke out through the lump in his throat.

“You have something that is mine,” a gruff voice answered. “Return it with interest and you might get your daughter back alive. If you don’t then don’t expect to see her again—at least not warm.”

His daughter screamed once more in the background, and then the line clicked off. He was left in silence. His blood thumped in his ears. He had no legal means of collecting the ten thousand that he owed. The banks refused his pleas for loans. He had no equity in his home. He was alone.



# The Price of Words

*Angela Lichtie*

If words were your currency, what would you spend your words on?  
Would you spend them on tearing down people with slander and mockery?  
Would you spend them building encouragement and offering hope to many?  
Would you dabble in many different types of investments?  
Don't speak too soon.

Would you have many different types of coins and paper bills as you speak  
in many dialects?  
Would you spend your gold in gossip and unsure gamblings?  
Would you place your bets speaking of politicians and nationwide dilemmas?  
Wait, hold your tongue.

If you truly put your money where your mouth is,  
Would you be in poverty because of your endless chatter?  
Or perhaps a penny-pincher, having many words, but speaking few?  
Would you be a wise spender or would pay as the words came?  
It's hard to say.

Funds are never unlimited, and rarely is anything free.  
There are taxes to pay, salaries to make, bills waged, and interest to top it off.  
Your words. Will they make you pay the price? Will they earn you a bonus?  
Will they put you in the hole? At the end of the day, what recompenses will  
you owe?  
If you have nothing to say, don't say anything at all.

Would your salary of words reflect your heart and most sincere intentions?  
Would your payments draw you to a greater fate, or leave you rightly bankrupt?  
Think before you speak.

What picture do your words paint? And if that picture is worth a thousand  
words, would you be willing to purchase it and hang it above your mantle?

If your words were your currency, what would you spend your words on  
*today?*

# In This House

*Hannah Wells*

This house is made of corner edges and  
tree leaves, waiting  
as a book to be peeled,  
but without words or bark;  
we elbow through the door  
like wounded birds, cautious

Our fears ebb out as we move,  
the warm lines limping  
along the floor  
separate

In this house, we are emissaries  
without dialogue;  
servility of pursed lips and lung exhaust  
begin to outline the fact that  
it was not supposed to  
go down  
like this

Anger-shakes and wakes of denial  
forge our backs, taut,  
so that we are now  
porous and sharp  
in this house of volcanic ash





*Red Jacket-Spirit of Peace*

*Larry Simmons ~ Pencil*

# You've Forgotten What the Mountain Is

*Caitlin L. McCulloch*

You've forgotten  
What  
The mountain  
Is.

It is not  
Shallow ground  
For you  
To plant

Your garish  
Red-roofed  
House upon.  
You forget

That tire tracks  
Don't go away  
Up here--  
Your careless  
Disrespect  
Of him  
Will last  
Longer

Than you know.  
Have your fun--  
Your self-centered  
Pleasure.

You can only  
Climb ice so long  
Before  
It breaks.

# Adventures of a Little Red Cup

*Rachel Morrison*

Excerpt from the short story *The Adventures of a Little Red Cup*

Thursday – Day 1: I was cold and stiff, nearly to the point of breaking, when the shop-assistant opened the frost-lined box in which I had spent the cold and dark night. My stiff crystals and frozen bubbles did not compare though, to the sheer joy I found myself bathing in when I was taken inside the store. I was given a beautiful price of ten dollars and fifty cents - which, I understand, is a hefty price for one of my kind - and placed on a window-shelf for display.

Oh, what glorious wonders I saw those eight days I spent, happily sitting on that beautiful window-shelf; people, animals, objects of various nature all passing by under my scrutinous eye; all to be enjoyed whenever I saw need for enjoyment.

Friday – Day 2: An old lady, about fifty-five in appearance, came into the shop about eleven-thirty (by the clock's reckoning; I should have liked to have napped a few minutes longer...) She immediately came over and picked me up quite abruptly. Honestly, I had anticipated this coming, but I did not want to be taken away from my new dwelling of adventure so soon.

“Put me down” I tried to yell. She did not even flinch at my merciful cry. Instead, she flung me onto the counter and demanded of the shop-keeper, “How much for this cup?”

Cup! The least that this woman could do would be to admit some decent language and call me by my real title. “I am a glass, thank you very much...”

My thoughts were not heeded.

“What does the price say?” inquired the shop owner, who was a slightly older man. He looked weary under his wiry spectacles.

“There isn't one,” asserted the woman.

The old man sighed, taking me from her horrible clutches, and said, “I can sell it for about five dollars; how about it?”

“Humph,” coughed the woman. “I could get one of an exact make



and color at Walt's World for far less."

"Then, perhaps you should go to Walt's World," sighed the old man. The lady scoffed one last time and then none-to-gently placed me back on my window-shelf.

That was close, I thought. I began to wonder what would come next. Those days of adventure, though I was only my second, were beginning to concern me.

Saturday – Day 3: Nothing out of the ordinary happened on my third day sitting in that lovely little Salvation store, save my being there still, and I began to wonder if this was indeed the lifestyle for me. Was I to live in that old place, day after endless day, doing nothing but sit upon an old rickety shelf, every moment turning a paler shade of red on my west side? My air skipped a turn.

Sunday – Day 4: It was Sunday, and that was not good. How could the shop-keepers and everyone else go to church when at their very mercy laid the lives of so many objects want of a loving place to call their own? I mournfully sat and sulked, already wishing I were back in my box in the attack. This life of adventure was just too jolly a display even for me. How had I gotten into this mess? Oh, it was for biting that silly girl... Well, I only had another six hours to go until midnight. I thought once or twice, in the time lapse previous, of throwing myself over the edge to end this misery of waiting, when I realized that Monday would be a new day; a fresh start. Someone was bound to come in and relieve me of my precarious duty of doing nothing but making the shop's windows look appealing to the public eye!

Wednesday – Day 7: I had lost all hope. Monday and Tuesday had come and then left in a flurry of activity with many people, and too many hopes passing through the store at every delayed minute. My countenance fell and I once again wished myself to be "home," in my old box in the corner of that lovely, old attic. At least there I was safe from being sunburned. Each day that passed I was becoming a lighter shade of pink. It was unbelievable! Somebody should have saved me!

Alas, there wasn't even a soul that walked through the door that would have particularly suited me. The sharp old lady in her red suit and British accent looked promising, but I soon found she was merely practicing her role in a modernized Oscar Wilde play, so she wouldn't have suited me at all. Then two girls in their mid-teens came in, giggling, and sauntered over to me with mischief in their eyes.

"What a lovely piece of ware," one giddily chirped to the other, who

nodded her bobbly head in agreement.

“Just the thing we could use for Christmas dinner. I wonder if Mom would like it.”

“Oh, definitely; she’d go totally insane when she saw it,”

That was all they said before they glanced through the old prom dresses and left, not even giving me a second glance. It was just a well, I didn’t need the likes of them drinking or admiring my beautiful rusty-red complexion. Oh, but how long! How long would I lie in desolate agony waiting for my turn of a real adventure to come?

---

You probably wonder why I did not try to entertain myself with friends. The reason is simple: I had none. Yes, I could hold conversation with many sorts of objects and items easily enough, but I soon found it rather distressing to listen to the tales of the other “heroes” who had been “goodness knows where” nearly every day of their lives. They were living in a constant motion; not to mention the “what’s” that came in one day and left the next (which in no way appeased my quandary). I soon began to ignore anything that came within my panorama.

So there I was, sitting upon my faithful, old glass shelf - who was in dire need of a cleaning himself (and my only companion whom I could now endure) – just moping and creaking, and shivering about all the dreadful days that would soon come and render their ugly faces; slowly turning into years and years of anguish – when a little boy and his mother came hand-in-hand into the store. Something about the expression on their faces had a most beautiful and contented appearance that they immediately caught my attention.

The boy found my interested gaze and began to pull his mother over to me, saying “Mommy, come look at this cup; isn’t it pretty?” I tried looking as modest as possible when they both walked over; their smile’s gazing ahead on curious faces. I dared not to hope what it could mean. But, then I remembered that this wasn’t even the beginning of my story. There was more.



# The Last One

Score

Brian Spruill

Andante ♩ = 90

**Soprano** *mp*  
I write you this song—

**Piano** *p*

**Sop.** *mf*  
— in hopes that it makes you im - mor-tal. I write you

**Pno.**

**Sop.** *mp*  
this song— in hopes that you'll re-turn home, in

**Pno.** *mp*

**Sop.** *mp*  
hopes that you'll re-turn home. I paint your sweet face—

**Pno.** *mp* *p* *mp*

25

Sop. — in hopes that your smile lasts for - e - ver. I paint your

Pno. *mf*

31 *mf*

Sop. sweet face \_\_\_\_\_ in hopes that I'll see it soon, in

Pno. *mp*

37 *mp* *mf*

Sop. hopes that I'll see it soon. O con - ti - nue to love me, ne-ver

Pno. *mp* *p* *mf*

43 *mf* *cresc.*

Sop. doubt the faith - ful heart. O con - ti - nue to love me e-ven

Pno. *mf* *cresc.*

49 *f* *mp*

Sop. when we're a - part. e-ven when we're a - part.

Pno. *f* *dim.* *p*

56 *mf*

Sop. I write you this song. I paint your

Pno. *mf*

61 *rit.* *dim.*

Sop. sweet face. I sing this song for you.

Pno. *rit.* *dim.*



*Flora's Cross, Isle of Skye*

*Deborah Kahlmann ~ Photograph*

# My Maiden Entombed

*Cameron Warren*

Even in death  
My adoration of you still abounds,  
Though on the ground  
You lie in a perpetual state of sleep.

Our bed of love your sepulchre shall be.

'Twas much too soon  
Exquisite being in the prime of life  
Too young to expire.  
Ripped in twain  
Whilst in the grip of the purest passion,  
The likes of which would make the angels envious.

I long for thee,  
Impulsion within me.  
Can't be contained,  
I won't be restrained.  
Though it is bereft of a spirt,  
Your body will not go to waste.

My maiden entombed  
This night we shall be as one.

Interred by the sea  
Such a romantic view hath your grave.  
This act of sepulchral unity  
Will be felt in the heavens.

Even in death  
My adoration for you still abounds,  
Though on the ground  
You lie in a perpetual state of sleep.

*(Continued on next page)*

But still I scream:  
My dead beloved, submit to me!

On this night  
A joyful high,  
That I never felt during your life.

The angels' attempt to tear us apart  
Shall be repaid.  
This carnal violation  
Will make them weep this day.

While you rest in so delicate a state  
Gentle I must be.  
My soul is bursting  
As is your bloated frame deceased.

My maiden entombed  
We are now one.







*Apples to Apples*

*Janelle Durrong ~ Photograph*



*Waiting*

*Kate Trejos ~ Oil on Canvas*

# Stolen

Rebecca Davis

For days now she had heard them calling. Morning and night, awake and asleep, their voices spoke the same words to her: *Come to us. Come!* It terrified her as much as it enticed her. She hadn't told anyone about them yet. What was the point? They would all laugh at their silly little girl, pat her head, and tell her not to listen to so many stories from the old ones. But it was these stories that had told her who the voices belonged to. On the nights when her father, brother, uncles, and cousins were out in the coracles fishing, and mother was too busy tending to the endless tasks around the home, Grandmathir would weave stories of the times before Saint Patrick. She told her the legends of heroes and monsters, of bean sidhes and other faeries. She had whispered about the beauty of the faeries, their grace and eternal youth. But she also told of their cruelty; how living for eternity turned their hearts cold. Grandmathir had told the girl about the changelings, children who the faeries lured away into their raths and duns, who became as the faeries were themselves: cold hearted and frozen in time. Children who were never seen again. She told the girl of how they enticed victims with their sweet voices and beautiful promises. It was because of these stories that the girl now knew that the faeries wanted her. And once the faeries chose you, Grandmathir said, there was no way to escape.

All of the family watched as the once lively and spirited Aneen became quiet and withdrawn. Their little bird, as her name was, no longer poked her head everywhere, asking question after question. She no longer ran with her cousins to bring in the sheep, laughing as she picked up flowers that grew in her path, or skipped down the strand to see the men folk bring in their catch with the other women and girls. Instead, she stayed indoors, only coming out when her mother insisted that she go fetch water, and even then she would run back to the cottage as if the devil were after her. She grew paler and sicklier with every passing day. Often, she would tilt her head, as if she had heard something, and she would look more terrified than before. She barely slept; even when she did, it was a fitful slumber, like that of a newborn babe. Finally, the elders of the family gathered one night to discuss her strange affliction.

"It's unnatural!" he mother cried. "She acts as though she's scared of her own shadow!"

The middle uncle scratched his beard. "Has she said anything to you

Coleen? Have any of the older children been scaring her with a joke?"

Her mother shook her head. "No Jaime; she woulda told me if they had!"

Uncle Jaime went back to his puzzling. The girls' father shifted in his chair, pulling out his pipe, which he always did when he had a problem to figure out.

"Perhaps we should send for the doctor on the mainland." he said quietly as he lit his pipe.

"Padraig, we haven't the money!" Coleen cried. "Not with the taxes being raised."

Padraig glared at his wife. "I'm aware of that Coleen. But she is our daughter!"

The adults began to argue about what should be done about Aneen, trying to keep their voices down so they would wake the children. It only took them a second though, to realize that Grandmathir had something to say.

"When I was a young," she began, her ancient voice the very sound of wisdom, "A girl in my village fell ill, just like our Aneen has. Her parents tried everything that they could. But even when the local priest said a special mass for her, she didn't get better. Her parents wept, thinking that they would soon lose a child. The midwife in the village however, saw the signs, and knew what was really happening. She told the parents to always keep a close vigil over their daughter, no matter how certain her death would seem. She told them that their daughter had been fey marked, that she had been chosen by the faeries to come and live with them."

"Gods' bones ma!" Padraig slammed his fists down on the table. "Enough of your stories! We aren't children to be frightened into behavior with the threat of the faerie folk! This is the real world, not some story! And we need a real solution!"

Grandmathir smiled sadly at her eldest son. "The girl's parents ignored the warning, and one day, they saw their daughter skipping off into the woods, sickly no more, following a glowing light. She was never heard from again."

"Well, we've no woods nearby." Jaime said sarcastically. "Aneen won't be skipping off to them."

The old woman frowned at her other son. "Do not mock the old way, James Brennan! The faeries do not dwell only on land; they dwell in ponds and streams, in the lakes and rivers, and in the seas and oceans as well. We have the sea right outside our door."

“Enough!” Coleen cried. “Please Mathir Brigid, enough. I am already scared enough about my daughter; I don’t need your tales to frighten me more.”

Grandmathir leaned back into her chair, staring at the hearth. “We must keep watch on Aneen.” she announced, staring into the fire. “For if they take her, we will never get her back.”

The girl sat on top of a large stone that was perched in the meadow, watching the sheep graze on the lush green grass. She hadn’t wanted to come, but Mother had ordered her, saying that it was her turn to watch the sheep. She had pleaded with her mother to allow her to stay, fearful that they would come for her if she went out, but her Mother had refused to listen, telling her to stop speaking nonsense. But as the girl left, she thought that, for a moment, she saw fear cross her Mothers’ face. A lamb butted its head against her leg, wanting to play. Its mother glanced up at its bleating and then went back to her meal.

“That’s a pretty lamb there.” The girl looked up to see a strange boy walking over to her. His hair was long and straggly, like the seaweed that tangled up the nets. She looked more closely at it; it was a peculiar shade for hair to be. No one she knew had hair that was a brassy green color. The boy smiled at her. She tried not to look at his face, so pale with his blue green eyes staring at her like two glowing orbs. As he drew closer to her, she noticed his trousers: they were dripping wet, like he had just fallen into a river.

“Have you swum in from the bay?” she asked the boy, keeping her eyes on his dripping clothes. “Was your boat lost at sea?”

He laughed, a sound that was beautiful and hideous as well as joyful and cold. “My boat isn’t lost, though I did swim here.” He smiled again. “I’m Muir.”

What an odd name for someone to have. Muir. The sea. She got up from her stone seat, her hands on her hips. “You can’t have swum here! The mainland’s miles off, and you are just a boy, and no older than me!” The lamb bleated, as if in agreement.

Muir didn’t seem to notice. “I could show you how I did it Aneen.”

Her mouth dropped into an O. Fear began to grow deep in her stomach. “How did you know my name?” She began to walk backwards, towards the path that would lead to the safety of the cottages and Grandmathir. “Who are you?”

He laughed again. “I told you, my name’s Muir.” He took a step forward, as if to catch her. She moved her arm out of reach.

“You’re a faerie, aren’t you? What kind?”

Muir stopped, his hands folding across his chest. He grinned, revealing pointed teeth that were far too white and far too pointed. “Very good. You’re clever you are.” The freakish grin widened. “And since you’re so clever, I’ll answer your question. I’m a selkie.”

One of the seal-folk that guarded the deep, hoarding treasure collected from sunken ships. She tried to swallow back her fear. “Has it been you that’s been calling to me?”

He nodded. “Me and the others.”

“Grandmathir has told me the stories, and I don’t want to go with you! So you can just leave me alone!”

Muir opened his mouth to reply, but they both turned at the sound of approaching footsteps. With a curse, Muir spun around and disappeared, just as Da came into view.

“I came to fetch you home Aneen.” he said. He looked around as if searching for something. “Who was you were talking to?”

For a minute, she thought about telling him. But he wouldn’t believe her; he’d only tell Mother, and then they’d be even more worried that she was going mad.

“Nobody. I was just playing with the sheep.”

Da smiled, not really believing her, but not wanting to hear the truth. “Well, come on then,” he said lifting her up onto his shoulders, “Your ma needs help with dinner.”

As they went down the path, she heard Muir’s voice call back to her.  
*Well played little bird. You have won this time. But we will win in the end...*

(Abridged due to space limitations.)

*Pronunciation Guide:*

Aneen: *Ahm-need*

Grandmathir: *Grandmah-tear*

Mathir: *Mah-tear*

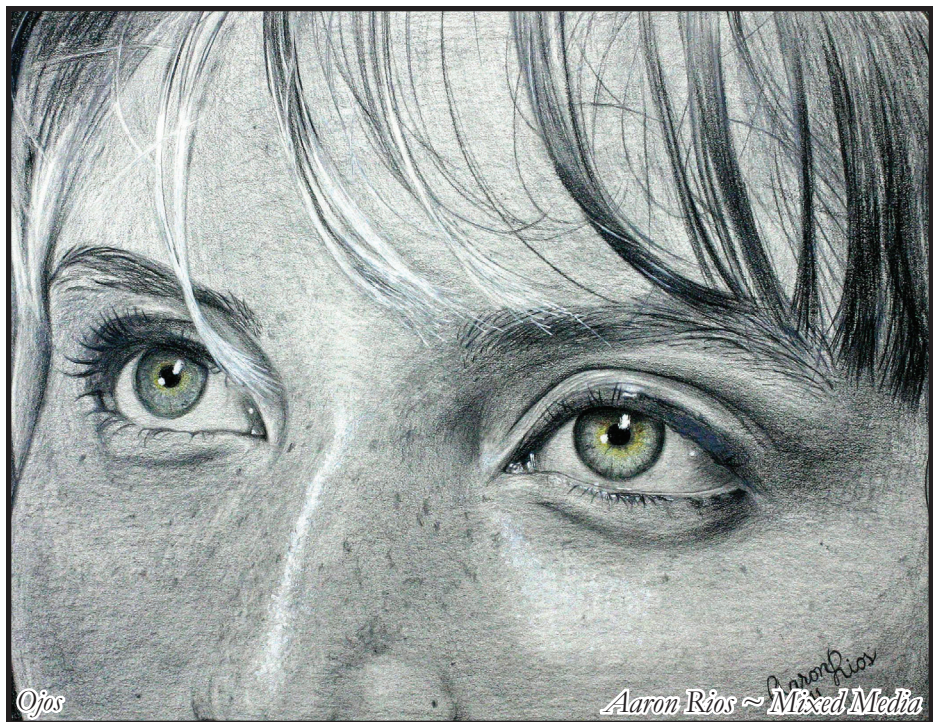
Beansidhe: *ban-shee*

Padraig: *Patrick*

Muir: *M-urr*

Niall: *Neal*

Niamh- *Nee-ab-v*



*Ojos*

*Aaron Rios ~ Mixed Media*



*White as Snow*

*Elizabeth Miller ~ Photograph*

# The Best of Me

*Jon Lennon*

I'm trying to be  
the very best version of me,  
But time after time I fail  
To live with standard.

Not that heaven set for  
Me, but the misguided  
Façade of perfection.  
The forgiven infection.

This illusion of the delusion  
That I'm unclean,  
is the only thing  
That keeps you from me.

# Going Anonymous

*Christa Smith*

For all of us  
There comes a moment

When worn identities  
Become a burden

From whose encumbrance  
We long to escape.

# A Different Perspective

*Jenna Swift*

Those that have experienced a glimpse of true beauty say that is beyond humanly description. They would be right. Yet even they have not seen but a hint of beauty that has gone untouched by sin's decaying hand. Even the most beautiful things of today are warped and stripped of their original glory. This glory once radiated from every rock, plant, and moving creature and has since been contaminated. I, alone, am what is left of that time of pure and undisturbed glory, although even I am only a dull piece of my original beauty. I sprung up from the ground at the command of my creator at the beginning of what we know to be time. I watched as glowing lights appeared in the sky and creatures began to scurry about the ground. I was there as the creator formed a creature in his own image from dust and breathed life into him. I witnessed all of the most glorious events that formed this earth. Yet now I stand, hidden from the world, fallen like everything else, but a portion of my intended beauty. But I offer a glimpse at the world of perfection that once prevailed because I was part of it. I was once a fruit that hung from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Not just any fruit, but I was the fruit that the infamous bites were taken from. My flesh held the secrets of the evil that had fallen from heaven. After being discarded in haste, I lay on the ground rotting away in the garden. As time passed, I became one with the soil and eventually grew up into a tree bearing my own fruit. My ability to portray the things that I once saw has diminished with the rest of the fallen world, but my memory still prevails.

The first thing I felt was a presence. This presence, although veiled to me, felt familiar and the warmth that encased me was comfortable. I could feel myself being pressed and pulled but by the softest and gentlest touch. I was being formed in the way a potter shapes and molds clay. When the creator perfected my shape, I felt myself solidify. The warmth never left and I rested in the newness of my being. Suddenly colors of all sorts burst into my vision. Light engulfed me and crystal clear images appeared before me. As the silhouettes transformed and their frames filled in with vibrant colors, trees of all sizes with crisp leaves and ripe fruit became distinguishable. Flowers were spread beneath me encircling my tree and speckling the earth with brilliant color. The waters rose and fell and lapped the banks of the river keeping a steady beat with the occasional flourish when the breeze



drifts through the trees and gently brushes the surface. The light seemed to be coming from the creator himself causing everything to glow. And there was evening, and there was morning.

As the morning came, a light filled the sky, bringing new clarity to the world. The rays of the new light would break through the thick foliage and thousands of colors would dance upon the water gliding back and forth to the swaying of the trees. As the day floated by the sky above me changed into an array of pinks, purples, and oranges as the sun was fading behind the grassy hills that rose and fell with the fluid motion of ocean waves. This sky was the perfect backdrop to finish the beauty of the scene. As the brilliant colors of the day continued to fade, a blanket of darkness descended across the expanse of the sky. Suddenly tiny lights began to twinkle in the sky and a larger, yet somehow paler, light began to glow casting a blue tint on the earth. The darkness of the sky seemed to highlight the beauty of the lights and all through the night they glittered in a steady rhythm. When this darkness came, it hid no fear. No evil lurked in its shadows, but instead it came every night to reveal more of the beauty that the creator exuded. Fear did not exist in any form because the perfection of love and glory left no room for it. As dawn broke the next day, small winged creatures streaked the sky and perched gracefully on the branches around me. They would soar through the air, singing their praises to the creator. Also, creatures appeared beneath the water occasionally disturbing the surface with a playful flick of their tails. The rivers teemed with life and the creatures began to multiply and increase in their numbers. Again evening came and then morning. On this day, creatures of the earth appeared. They galloped and scurried and sauntered from the banks of the river to the shade of the forest. Their sounds filled the air, creating the melody<sup>1</sup> of the earth working and moving in perfect harmony with all previous creation. With the arrival of these creatures, the song of the day crescendoed but quickly softened as night fell and the lullaby of the insects kept time with the shining of the stars. Finally, as the sun arose again, the crescendo seemed to build with excitement and urgency until it became so loud and joyous that everything seemed as though it was going to burst, just at the last moment, silence echoed through the garden. A breeze rustled through the trees and dust from the ground

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1 Arthur Peacocke & Ann Pederson, *The Music of Creation, with CD* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), page 23.

lifted into the air and the creator stood before us. With precise and intricate movements of his hands, he formed a creature in his own image. He fashioned him with hands more gentle than the hands of a new mother holding her firstborn child. After the form of the creation reached perfection, the creator took his creation and from his own lips, and he breathed life into him. As the new being stood and opened its eyes all of creation erupted in sound bringing the song to its climax. This being was given dominion over all of the creatures and told by the creator to work and take care of the garden. He then allowed him to give each living creature a name. The man was amazed by the complexity and majestic beauty of the creation of which he had been put in charge<sup>2</sup> The man that the creator made walked with Him and talked with Him in a relationship that was rooted deeper than the bottomless oceans. There was no barrier between them, no barring restraints. Their steps were in perfect unison and the human was completely dependent on his creator. The creator gave the man only one rule and that was to not eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (a.k.a. me). On this same day the LORD decided that it was not good for the man to be alone. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.<sup>3</sup> The look in the man's eyes was one of bewilderment and amazement and yet absolute certainty. This woman was his perfect helper and the missing piece of the puzzle. She was the crown of creation. Her presence made the final notes of the composition fall into place and in its completion it was prepared to be played again and again for all of eternity.

This Garden of Eden as it was named was a flawless balance of both the earthly and heavenly realm . . .

(Abridged due to space limitations.)

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2 Henry Morris, *Biblical Creationism: What Each Book of the Bible Teaches About Creation and the Flood* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2000), page 21.

3 *The Learning Bible, New International Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 2003), Genesis-1-3.



*Innocence*

*Tatiana González Rodríguez ~ Charcoal*

embers '12 ~ 35

# Now I am Alone

*Priscilla Topp*

*For Guitar*

**G**                      **D**  
Standing here waiting  
                         **G**  
For you to come  
**G**  
Seeing your face  
**D**                      **G**  
In my mind all day  
         **Em**              **Bm**              **A**  
But I know I will never see you again  
                         **Em**              **Bm**              **A**  
You should know I will love you till I die

Chorus:

**D(A)**                      **G(F#m)**  
//You have my heart  
**D(D)**                      **G(E)**                      **A**                      **F#m**  
You have made me whole                      (You have my soul)  
         **Em(D)**              **Bm(E)**              **A(A)**  
But I see you will never be with me//  
                         **Em(F#m)** **Bm(D)(E)**      **A**  
I should know now I am                      alone

**G**              **D**  
You were sent by the angels  
                         **G**                      **D**  
Your scent is on my skin  
**G**    **D**  
I see you around every corner  
**G**  
I fell your presence

**D**                      **A**  
Take my mind and soul

Bridge:

**D**                      **G**                      **A**  
//When you walked out that door

**G**                      **Em**  
You broke my heart

**Bm**                      **A**  
Now I'm trying to erase

**G**    **A**                      **D**  
This feeling of disappear//



*Stories*

*Victoria Pollard ~ Acrylic*

embers '12 ~ 37

# Gethsemane

*David Brosseau*

*Inspired by the painting "L'Etoile Bleue by Joan Miró.*

Weeping eyes, darkness grows;  
Drops of sweat, reddened, flow.  
Morning star, noon-day sun --  
Shown to all, seen by none.

Overwhelmed, sorrow-bent  
to point of death -- splendor spent.  
Cup so full, bitter, sweet,  
Shall not pass -- time to drink.

Canvas blue fire rends;  
Painted lines, torch in hand,  
Blindly led -- now they come . . .  
Calmly said, "It is done."

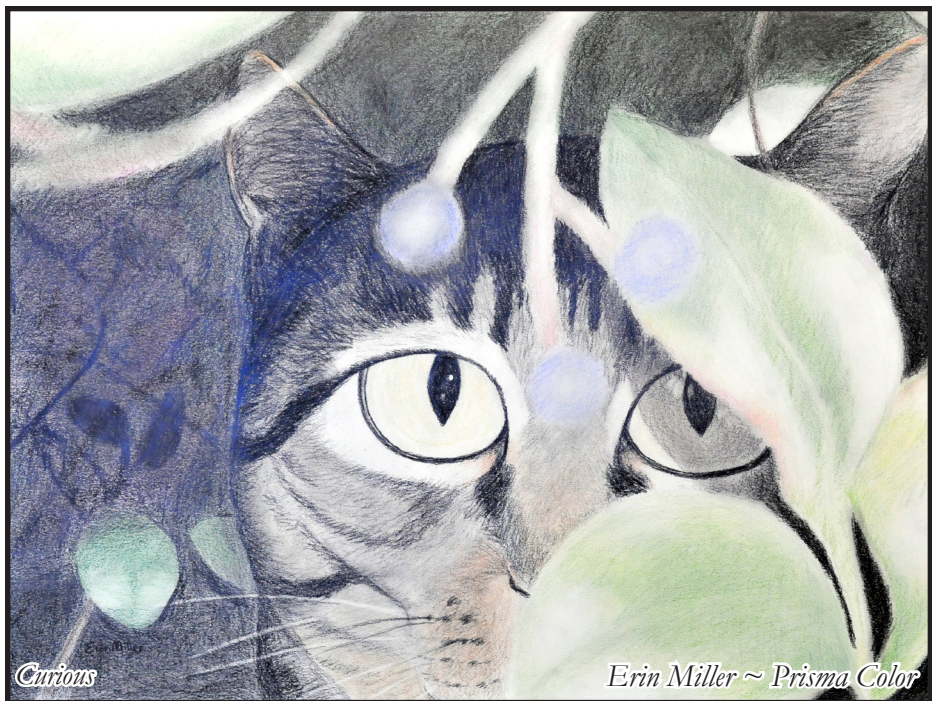
# Simple Prayer

*Janie Keller*

I ask to see only with transparent eyes all of creation  
the same way the One who created me sees all.

I pray I learn to love with the heart of the One who  
gave his life for the one who slay His.

I ask for wisdom and nothing else, for everything flows  
from wisdom.



# Dear Grandpa

*Brenda McCartie*

When I found out the news that day  
Quite frankly, it blew me away

I never even said goodbye;  
I tried so hard not to cry

I told you I would visit again soon  
I'm sorry that promise didn't come true.

Even though you are gone,  
I will always let our memories live on.

I will always miss your chuckle,  
And when you grabed my nose between your knuckles.

I'll miss your kisses and your hugs  
But most of all I will miss your love.

You lived an amazing life,  
And lead a great example for your Savior Jesus Christ.

I feel it is necessary to say  
I'm glad to call you my grandpa each and every day.

I know that you are safe and sound,  
And that you are Heaven bound.

I try to remember you're in a good place  
And you are looking down with that big ole smile on your face.

I know that God is proud to say  
He welcomed my grandpa home that day.





*Venice, Italy*

*Lauren Johnson ~ Photograph*



*Dogs of War*

*Angel Azúa ~ Watercolor/Acrylic*

# Scatter

*Hannah Wells*

Time is purloined in the crook of your arm  
as you lean against the evasive peace of the bed

like the white rabbit-  
he has no dream to give you  
and you own no protection from the  
gravity of brain fluid.

your tongue is a draconic whip,  
a witching veil,  
that doesn't hurt me with pain  
but in love we don't understand.

You can't fix your neurons  
you cannot grip the last fingertips of reality  
like a fish fading between the oils of our skin  
and the anticipation of water.

I watch you asphyxiate on the  
brilliancy of your beauty, the demon  
you speak on behalf of  
because your other half is weeping.

There is a child in your motherhood  
but she is a vagrant birth because this is not you;  
like holding ice on my tongue

are the words of my fear-  
fallen promises from a conversation  
you won't remember  
even though you will burn from it after.  
the space in your thoughts is a shifting nightmare  
until the paranoia is the person you see  
and I have become a fabricated question  
to make time pass.

The days we have yet to see are lined in the  
face of my father, waiting  
in the lull of helpless disownment.

so I stand, hushed beneath the love  
I know you still bear inside,  
a surrogate self to bind.

# Playing Santa Claus

*Danny Andrews*

Folks love Christmas for lots of reasons.

I love it because I get to dress up in a red suit, white hair and beard and put a pillow under the top for padding--not that I need a whole lot--and play Santa Claus.

What a gig!

This year, I hit every elementary campus - where “my two (or more) front teeth” would seem a logical request for many - as well as Calico Caboose at First United Methodist Church and the Senior Citizens Center and had the most fun I’ve ever had playing the Jolly One.

At most places, I just took a walking tour of the rooms, greeted the youngsters (many of whom had to jump out of their seats and hug Santa), and told them Santa would see them next Friday.

Thankfully, few seemed wary of St. Nick.

I loved the responses of two boys. One turned just in time to see me walk into the room and let out a loud gasp, his eyes wide with amazement that such a legendary personage would visit his class.

Another tow-haired fellow with big ears and a deer-in-the-head-light look asked timidly, “Am I on the good list?”

I assured him, “You’re on the VERY good list.” The look of relief on his face was priceless.

I also got a chuckle out of a darling little girl who took a good look at my attire and said admiringly, “I like your red suit,” as though Santa wore any other color.

What I enjoy most is seeing kids I know and watching their expressions when I call them by name or mention a relative of theirs.

The 4-year-old granddaughter of my good friend, Tom Hall, was most impressed, she told her “DeeDad,” because “‘Santa didn’t just say Mallory,’ he said ‘Mallory Rosetta’.”

Several others I knew responded with a puzzled look when I called their name.

But this pseudo-Santa didn’t fool Kelly Bishop, a tiny 6-year-old at La Mesa, one lick.

When I started out of the room, she told someone confidently: “He goes to my church. That’s Mister Danny.”

“You’re not the real Santa Claus,” one boy insisted, while another punctuated the same declaration with a cautious question mark, “are you?”

“I don’t believe in Santa Claus,” said another with a bit of a smirk.

My pat response, “Well, if you don’t believe, Santa won’t come to your house,” wiped the bravado right off some faces and elicited immediate loud testimonials from other children in the room: “I believe in Santa!” and “I believe in you!”

Many youngsters wanted to know where the reindeer were. “Back at the North Pole getting in their exercise to be ready for next week,” I offered.

Others wanted to know where Mrs. Santa was. “She has to take care of the elves.” (A precious second grade boy handed me a little gold ring with a purple stone set in a heart and said, “This is for Mrs. Santa.” I wore it on my pinky all day Friday.)

“Why aren’t you at the North Pole working?” one sharp youngster inquired.

“I’m only in a supervisory capacity. My job is public relations,” I said. That seemed to satisfy the questioner.

In most classrooms, I told the youngsters that I used to visit their teacher when she was a little girl (or little boy, in a few cases), and “she always wanted a dolly or a puppy.”

Either that was a very safe guess or the teachers played right along because most responded with a nod of the head and big smile, though one politely chastised, “I never did get that puppy.”

The requests this year ran the usual gamut with Gameboys, X-Boxes, computers, pets (including rabbits and hamsters--one boy wanted a penguin; another, maybe the kid with the Rudolph nose that lit up, wanted a reindeer with lights), Barbie’s, Dora the Explorer, remote-control cars (or “mote control,” said one tongue-tied lad), motorcycles, and even clothes leading the way.

But there were the old standbys such as trampoline, marbles, an old Western gun set, and a Pogo stick or things as modest as new cray-

ons or a notebook.

Some of the more surprising responses included five cell phones, a swimming pool, a new room, a jet plane, a fishing rod, karaoke machine, a million bucks, and--every parent's nightmare--a drum set.

Some kids rolled their eyes when Santa asked what they wanted and mulled and hummed a while before deciding, "This is hard," as though they would be stuck with something if they made a bum request.

One animated boy decided he wanted his school to have every grade--even college--so he'd never have to leave. Another said he wanted to be "a little nicer" (maybe nicer than the two little girls who tattled that "my sister isn't being very nice"). A sharp little cookie decided to hedge her bets and said, "10,000 wishes."

But the ones that always get you are the kids who respond to the question, "What do you want Santa to bring you this Christmas?" with "I don't want anything. I just want my mom to be happy. She lives in Chicago and really misses me." Or "My mother is sad because we're moving to Minnesota."

It's hard for Santa to do much about those requests and absolutely impossible when a child's request is "a new baby."

My stock reply: "Have you talked to your mother about this?" And the look usually says, "What does she have to do with it?"

Well, I could go on and on, but I'll close with the delightful parting words of a two-year-old, "Bye, Ho-Ho!"

Hope this job's open again next year.





*Madame*

*Kate Trejos ~ Oil*

embers '12 ~ 47

# Untitled

*Ebony Holloman*

*Spoken Word*

Some of us are most fascinated with the fabricated  
Charmed by the made up, deceived by the make up  
But do you know what they're really made of?  
You've been hoodwinked by the hood rich  
Embarrassed much ashamed you should be  
Idolizing those who want to be real-  
Sadly just as much as you do.  
The minds of young girls are all off track  
Maybe it's the glue in their track  
If you stand for nothing you'll fall for anything  
Standards we lack.  
Somebody please enlighten them on what's right.  
Unfortunately for them it's staying at the club all night  
But let's not give up on them now  
Let's just pray until they get it right.  
This is no competition but yet we hate on the next  
Instead of encouraging one another we spread rumors  
False tales just as synthetic as  
Our pony tails are fatal.

Tell no tales our voices aren't heard  
Although the pain screams through  
Apparent enough our hearts are see through  
Can you see through the concealment and bandages?  
Everything's not alright and society reminds us  
Everyday we're not all right.  
The way to fix it is not having admiration for the worthless  
But worshipping HIM who makes this life living worth it  
It's not trying to be someone you're not but  
Being strong in who we are  
Because we're all we got  
Let's stand with our hands together  
And drop the facades forever.





