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Magnify

OUR MISSION

Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together! (Psalm 34:3)

Looking past the sensible to the transcendent, *Magnify* journal of the arts seeks to climb the ladder of love and beauty to God. We endeavor to magnify students into artists, their gifts into skills, and the campus of Ave Maria into a retreat of aesthetic and intellectual contemplation. We include photography, paintings, drawings, short stories, and poetry; uniting them is our attempt to gather all, readers and contributors, to the united elevation of our souls to God.

Cover Art by Kiara Rivas

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Welcome to *Magnify*, the magazine for student creative arts at Ave Maria University! It has been my great pleasure to advise the student writers, artists, and editors of *Magnify* as they created the magazine you hold in your hands.

Magnify is a student-run organization, from the contributors to the editorial team, and our students have put together an amazing collection of visual art, poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. Students’ work ranges in tone from thoughtful, to shocking, to inspiring, to funny (and sometimes all at once). Our editors selected the work to be included, consulted with student writers to help them revise the work, and laid out and designed the issue.

This year, the editors have chosen to organize the magazine around the mysteries of the rosary. Like the exitus-reditus pattern of salvation history, by which all things are created by God, set forth into the world of suffering, and return to Him through His forgiveness, the works in this issue begin with joyful innocence, proceed through a world of sorrows, and return with a joy that is greater because it knows God’s forgiveness. Pope St. John Paul II described Christians as an “Easter People,” and that surely applies to the young writers, editors, and artists who contributed to this magazine. I hope you enjoy it.

William Gonch, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief of *Magnify*
Assistant Professor and Director of Literature, Ave Maria University

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Upon Discovering a Painting of the Annunciation

I wander through the lonely halls, my sullen eyes downcast.
 My heart borne down with beating sorrow for the race that fell.
 And at our foolish detrimental gaff I stand aghast,
 For deeds which our own hands have wrought unlatched the gates of Hell.
 So dwelling on this tragedy I wander 'bout alone
 Until at last upon my path a ray of heaven shone,
 And God before my longing eyes made our salvation known!

A light begotten from the vivid elegance of art.
 The silence of the painting chants a chorus not for ears.
 Articulation angels sing is only heard in heart,
 Where what but awe can be expressed and humble lowly fears.

A lordly angel, he reveals the God-will from the shrouds,
 A herald of the king of kings, a vast resounding voice,
 In blue and white with wings of grace he soars, his feet on clouds.
 Descending he announces the mighty Godhead's choice.

To whom was it that this prestigious angel's message came?
 A king for sure or man of might by whom all men might rise.
 But neither, not a man, but 'twas a Virgin without shame.
 This humble girl was heaven's answer to our anguished cries.

Oh Virgin Mary purer than the holy lilies white,
 Of all the race, oh you alone, exist without the taint.
 The providential hand of God chose you to be the saint
 Through whom He all mankind redeems, repairs our wrong aright.

Oh blessed inspiration from this timeless portrait hailed.
 The silence seems to sing aloud with laud, "O highest bless'd
 Who never fell, most bless'd in whom the grace of God resides!"
 For even as they sing in you the Lord of Lords abides.
 And thus the maid was by the angel of the Lord addressed,
 "The king doth choose to dwell in you, his sanctuary veiled."

The pious humble Virgin pondered in her heart the song.
 She trusted in the will of God, In meekness bowed her head.
 The Ghost of God shone down on her, the angels round her throng.
 "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Thy will be done." she said.

And thence occurred the Incarnation: valiant saving grace
 Assumed the form of flesh and blood within the Virgin's womb.
 Creator of the world, a babe that we might see your face.
 In such a way did You come down to free us from the tomb.

The graceful image sows the seeds of wonder in my soul,
 As I reflect upon the fact that Mary's "Yes" has changed
 The hopeless lot of all mankind, once broken, now made whole.
 From hence on I shall give myself to God whom all arranged.

Match Point

“To the victor go the spoils.”

Deuce, ad-in, deuce, ad-out, deuce again. The server readjusted her cap and felt that the fabric had soaked through with sweat. She had played from morning to evening and had borne the worst of the Floridian sun. The heat was a small price to pay. Nothing compared to when she strode onto that clay court sporting her favorite fuchsia-pink Nike gear; racquet in hand, with her family and friends cheering behind her, she felt like a gladiator. She could wrap up this match in two points. Her heart quickened with excitement.

The server bounced the ball three times at a steady rhythm – this was her ritual before every serve. After the third bounce, she cast the tennis ball upward and struck it with her racquet. “Out!” her opponent called. The server took out another ball from the pocket of her shorts and repeated the ritual. This time, her racquet caught the ball with a satisfying ping! A yellow blur zipped past her opponent. An ace! The advantage was the server’s once more, and that was match point: one more point to win.

She served again, and this time, her opponent returned the shot with a strong backhand of her own. The rally was on. The yellow ball flew back and forth over the net as the girls ran all over to chase it down. It’d be easy to make a mistake now if she got too hasty, so the girl focused on keeping the ball in play. An opportunity would present itself. Once she saw the ball come to her smoothly, she tilted her racquet upward on the contact. This was a trick she knew. The ball flew in a high arc. Her opponent backed up, but the ball was already too far away. It passed over her head and hit the back of the fence, rattling the mesh link.

Game! The girl’s parents clapped and cheered her name from the pavilion where they watched. She approached the net, met her opponent with “good game,” and ran into her family’s embrace. They showered her with congratulations and recounted the best moments of the match. In their eyes, their daughter was already the next Serena. She finished the last of her water and forgot all about the soreness in her legs. The tournament’s award ceremony would begin soon. To a twelve-year old tennis player, victory tasted like a slice of pepperoni pizza.

“Only one receives the prize.”

Deuce, ad-in, deuce, ad-out, deuce again. The receiver tucked a few unruly strands of hair behind her ear. The braid that her mother had tied so neatly in the morning had been gradually unravelling by the hour. It was now the final match of the day, and the situation had turned dangerous. The girl’s opponent had pulled ahead of her, and with this next game, she would win. And yet, they kept returning to deuce. If only the receiver could score two consecutive points, she could stay in. Was it even worth it? she wondered. Did she really want this match to go on longer? Her face was all red from running. On the bench, her water bottle was empty, and so was her Gatorade. Her coach would tell her such thoughts are poison. She couldn’t give up so easily.

The rallies had been long and hard. The receiver had charged the net for volleys and defended well with her backhand. She had fought at her fiercest, but she was out of luck. Her opponent’s second serve flew fast over the net, too quick for her to touch it. An ace! She couldn’t believe it. It had to be an ace! Then came the final ball. The two players returned shot after shot until her opponent hit a lob over her head. The girl stretched her arm as high as she could, but her Wilson racquet couldn’t reach. The ball could have been as far away as Jupiter. It was over.

A chorus of cheers coming from the pavilion tolled her own defeat. Out of custom, she shook her opponent’s hand and said the words without feeling: “Good game.” After collecting her gear and empty containers, she trudged off the court to where her dad waited for her by the fence. He told her she had fought hard in that last game and that he was proud of her, but all the girl could think about was the ball passing over her head. It hadn’t felt fair. She wished she was taller – it wasn’t the first time she had blamed her height.

As father and daughter walked past the other courts, they could see a few other girls and boys still playing as the red sun set behind them. Once their matches wrapped up in victory or defeat, the junior tennis tournament would be over, and the organizers would hand out awards and food. The young girl wished she could just leave. Her shelf didn’t need yet another participation trophy.

Allison D’Amico



Isabel Gonzales

For the Rain

Chicago raised, a royal name, her voice
 And amber scent; her tender touch consoles
 My anxious, trembling mind. Remaining choice
 And longing hearts entangled, smoking coals.
 Her hair, so lush and full and soft and brown,
 Like Oaks in summer, bathed in joy so pure.
 Her dimples sweet and light, her face is crowned
 With jewels of Hazel, eyes, e'er deep and sure.
 Blushed cheeks, my heart is drawn to she
 And she to me. That forrest green, the birds
 That sing her song; a wind, a mellow breeze
 Which follows every breath, each solemn word.
 I kissed her cheek once, warmly hand in hand.
 Perhaps one day we share a soul, a land.

Jackson Eckblad

Beneath the Shell

All of creation bears the beauty of its Creator in some minute way. As a result, even a seemingly insignificant egg is fit for the application of such typology. The egg is a rich allegorical image. It symbolizes the Incarnation of our Lord. The egg is a spotless, stainless vessel carrying a golden treasure within its body. The Virgin Mary is represented by this vessel and the yolk within is a type of Christ. Christ the golden yolk gives His body as food to nourish the growing embryo in the egg. By the power of the strengthening food, the embryo grows into a chick and is freed from the egg into life outside. Through the food of Christ, we are so nourished as to gain admittance to the next life.

On the moral level, the egg is a symbol of how an academic should approach his education. In the matters of the scholastic world, one should balance their learning so as to remain well-rounded like the egg. It is true however that most eggs are elliptical in their shape. This shows that almost all men will end up having a natural strength in or inclination to a subject, but they should still attempt well-roundedness. Such an imitation of the egg results in a well-balanced thinker.

On a theological level, the egg is a symbol of how every Christian should live. Just as the egg, every Christian should maintain humility of appearance while holding his greatest treasure within. We are all vessels of the Lord, we all bear that golden treasure within us. In death, we are called to show our love for God and hold him as the center of our being in our last moments. Likewise, when broken, the egg holds the treasured yolk at its center. The egg is a symbol of Christocentric life and death.



Abigail Moreno

In the anagogical type, the egg is a symbol of the final judgment. When the fresh eggs are broken they are found pure and worthy of the feast. The rotten eggs however are cast out with the scraps and fed to the hogs. The Christians who daily confess their love for God and offer themselves as a pure temple will be joyously welcomed to the eternal feast. But those who contaminate their temple by holding rottenness and sin in the dwelling of Christ will be justly damned.

The egg is a symbol of the tripartite structure of the person. The outermost part is the shell. It symbolizes desire and which can be pure and unfractured, however, if broken, the shards of the shell prove dangerous to the rest of the egg. The protein-rich egg white represents the spirited, honorable part of the person. When it is centered around reason (the yolk), it holds the egg together and protects the intellect, thus serving its purpose. On the other hand if it leaks out through the broken shell (disordered desire), it abandons its purpose and proper alignment, dooming the yolk to be popped on the shards. The intellect characterized by the yolk is the center of the egg and the egg's greatest treasure. The yolk is harder to see than the shell (desire) and is also harder to reach, but once it is reached, it proves to be of far more worth and delicacy than the base shell. When the shell and the white are ordered towards the purpose of preserving the yolk, the egg fulfills its structural purpose. Just so, when desire and the spirit are subject to reason and truth, the human person is properly ordered. The complex beauty of God's typological creation may be witnessed in something as ordinary and minuscule as an egg. Thus, as Christians we are all called to see the deeper beauty and purpose behind creation, letting it draw us in wonder to the Creator of all. For since all beauty is His, we may appreciate it as such.

Gabriel Carter

To Steal a Heart

Lavinia leaned back languidly in her seat, her slender fingers that were studded with rings curling in anticipation. Her black gown had few sparkly sequins, almost allowing her to melt into the shadows of the night, but it was far from plain. The bodice and sleeves were primarily made of black lace that formed intricate patterns across her torso and arms. Sections of the material were sheer and a plunging neckline and open back showed off just enough skin to entice but not fully distract. The skirt of the gown was long and flowing but light and easy to walk and move around in. Her hair was done up in an elegant but sturdy braided crown, a few strands of her raven hair falling in soft curls around her face. Her heels added an extra inch or two to her height but were not tall enough to inhibit her movements. She considered wearing a mask, but since it was not a masquerade ball, she reasoned that it would only attract more unwanted attention. Even when she had servants to attend to her, she preferred to dress and accessorize by herself so that she could be in full control. After all, she had a mission tonight and she wasn't going to let something like shoes or unruly hair ruin her plans. She was going to succeed and she was going to look good while doing it.

Her carriage sped along the paths to the Caerhayes castle, and though she was looking out the window, she barely took in any of the gorgeous scenery as her thoughts were elsewhere. When she had first received the invitation, she was quite suspicious and even contemplated moving away again out of fear that someone had discovered her true identity. She hadn't been to a ball ever since she left home that one fateful night, and she always did her best to avoid the public eye in case someone might recognize her. But she had heard word that he was going to be there tonight, and she knew that this was her one and only chance. She could think of nothing else with scenarios flying around in her head as she imagined all the different ways the night could end. In the best case scenario, everything would go according to plan, but if it didn't, she knew she had to be ready for anything. The risk she was taking was evident, but she figured it would all be worth it in the end. She fiddled with one of her rings, twisting it around her finger. It would be a lie to say that she wasn't at least a little bit nervous, but above all, she couldn't let anyone know that. Things would be much easier once the moment actually came, she supposed. The carriage began to slow down, drawing her out her thoughts and back into

the moment. Finally focusing on what she was seeing outside, she gazed at the castle's full gardens, noting how they somehow appeared so vibrant and lively despite the darkness. There was something unusual about this place, something that she couldn't quite put her finger on. It was hypnotizing, enchanting, and somewhat haunting, as if it could reach into her and pull out her deepest, darkest secrets, exposing it to the entire world. This only made her want to hang onto those secrets tighter, hating the way the sheer majesty of the entire property made her feel small and vulnerable. She gritted her teeth as her hands subconsciously clenched into fists. Hopefully she'd never come back here again. She'd just have to tolerate it—and him—for just one night.

"Lady Alanna," her coachman called gently. "We have arrived."

Alanna was the new name she had taken on to protect her identity, and though she had been using it for some time, she still wasn't fully used to it. The name "Lavinia Caradine" had been forever tainted by that vicious rumor, so now even she couldn't call it her own. She snapped out of her thoughts, turning her head to the opposite window, seeing that the carriage had stopped in front of a large iron gate with a golden 6 perched at the very top. This was her assigned gate, and no number was more fitting for

only the devil could approve of what she had planned tonight. But she didn't care. All morals went out the window the day she lost everything because of him.

Her footman opened the door, offering his hand to help her out of the carriage. She murmured a small thanks, immediately focusing on the two attendants in front of her, wearing bright smiles and white tailored suits. Clearing her throat, she painted on the sweetest smile she could return, one dripping with honey that could soothe even the angriest bear. "Good evening," she greeted, keeping her voice light and dainty.

"Greetings, Lady Alanna. I hope your trip was satisfactory."

"It was indeed."

They smiled. "Excellent. Now if you would please follow us."

She nodded, following behind them as they led her through the large oaken doors and into the castle. She paused to take in her surroundings for a moment, her eyes shifting from the polished marble floor to the gilded staircase to the high ceilings and chandeliers. It was nothing short of spectacular, but it left a slight bitter taste in her mouth as it only reminded her of the life she would have had if things had turned out differently. Even though the castle itself was completely harmless, in her mind, it felt like it

was taunting her about her ugly past and even uglier present. It took her a second to realize that she had lost her composure a little, so she stood up straighter and placed a smile back on her face.

"Is everything alright, my lady?" one of the attendants questioned.

"Yes, yes, of course," she assured. "I just thought I forgot something, but I was wrong."

They nodded. "Please, if you need anything at all, just let us know." "Thank you," she replied simply.

She remained silent as the attendants led her down one of the halls, stopping next to one of the side rooms, swinging it open to reveal a fully furnished sitting room, complete with cushioned seats, a fireplace, more large windows with velvet curtains. Before the attendants left, they handed her a corsage made of red roses and promised to return shortly with her trinket. Running her fingers across the soft petals, she breathed in the sweet scent of the roses, allowing herself to enjoy the calm before the storm. She was starting to feel restless, so she began to pace around the room, looking for something to occupy her attention. Her blue eyes eventually fell on her own reflection in a large, gold lined mirror that was hanging on the wall. It had been a long time since she had last worn a nice dress, much less get fully decked out for a fancy

ball. Just obtaining the gown had cost her an arm and a leg, and she frowned at the thought that she would never get to wear it again. She sighed, tearing her eyes away from the glass. Tonight, she would finally make him pay for what he did.

~ ~ ~

Dominic hummed to himself, drumming his fingers against his thigh as his carriage raced to the castle. Peering out the window, he gazed up at the clear starry sky, enjoying the tranquility of the night. Aside from the few chirps of birds and the rustle of leaves in the wind, the night was quiet. Most other people were unnerved by the deafening silence, but he liked it because it allowed him to clear his head and focus on the present. On a normal day, he would not have expected to spend his night like this, but many people in court were annoying him and he just needed to get away from them for a short time. He found himself oddly thankful for the stipulation on the invitation that prevented him from bringing anyone other than himself. Here, most people wouldn't know him, so he could just spend a peaceful night alone. If he was lucky, maybe he would get to meet someone new who wasn't a pretentious peacock. But he figured that was highly unlikely, considering the type of people who get invited to balls in the first place. At the same time, the Caerhayes Castle

had a rather interesting reputation. Some said only the most elite were ever invited, but others argued that its grand exterior only served as a mask for its decrepit interior. But he knew most of it was just speculation from those who had never been there before, and now that he had received a coveted invitation, he was going to find out for himself.

His eyes remained fixed out the window, watching as the speck in the distance came closer and closer, morphing into the shape of a castle. Its dark silhouette with high spires soon became speckled with orange as the illuminated windows came into view.

Passing through the first archway, he stared in awe at the expansive gardens, envying the vibrant flowers that seemed to inhabit every crack and crevice effortlessly. Part of him wanted to stop and pick one to save, but he figured it would be in poor taste to do so. For now, he opted to simply look and admire, noting that a marble fountain similar to the one currently located at the center would make a wonderful addition to his own estate. The castle grounds certainly lived up to his expectations, and he couldn't help but feel a twinge of excitement in his stomach to see more as he approached his gate. The gold number six at the very top of the iron gates glinted in the moonlight and the carriage slowed to a halt before it. Climbing out on his own, Dominic straightened out his suit before

making his way over to the two white clad attendants, greeting them with a smile.

"Good evening, Lord Dominic. We are pleased you could make it."

"It is my pleasure. Thank you for the invitation. Please give the host my regards." "Of course. Now, please follow us in."

The attendants led him up the marble steps, holding the oaken doors open as he stared at the sight before him. Taking one step inside, he instantly felt lighter, as if he was walking on air. He floated around, almost in a daze as he stared up at the intricate paintings and sparkling chandeliers. He stumbled over himself a little as he tried to take it all in, but it felt like a wave was crashing over him and he could barely keep his head above the water. Eventually, he stopped at the staircase banister, his fingers running over the gold embellishments. He chuckled to himself, realizing he probably looked stupid, but he wondered how many others had a similar reaction. Damn all those people who spread malicious rumors about this place. If only they knew what they were missing. Why weren't more people talking about this castle? Maybe it was because it was hard to put into words the exact feeling that just ran through him. You'd have to experience it for yourself.

It took a few moments for him to realize that the attendants were calling him.

Snapping out of his trance, he apologized sheepishly before following them down one of the halls. The attendants stopped at one of the side rooms, and one offered to take his coat for him while the other presented him with some red roses to adorn his suit.

"Are these from the garden?"

"They are, my lord."

Guess he didn't have to steal one after all. "Thank you. It's lovely."

"Of course. We will be back shortly with your trinket. Please wait in this room in the meantime."

He nodded, exchanging smiles before they disappeared down the hall. Before entering, he took a moment to look at his surroundings a moment longer. He could barely suppress the urge to want to tell everyone as soon as he got back and brag about all that he had seen. That would certainly take the other lords who thought they were all that down a notch or two. He still couldn't believe that he was lucky enough to get invited. Was there a specific reason for it? Would he ever be allowed to come back? He supposed that that would depend on how tonight went. He had to make a good impression for sure. Sighing to himself, he finally opened the door, stepping into the sitting room and shutting the door behind him.

Looking ahead, Dominic immediately froze in place, his heart dropping into his

stomach when he saw a tall raven-haired lady standing across the room. Her deep blue eyes bore into him and a triumphant smile formed on her face. Immediately, all other thoughts left his mind and he forgot everything that he had just been marveling about. Goosebumps spread across his skin, and he felt fainter than he had been in the hallway just a few moments ago. She looked just like he had remembered her, her dark hair having a sharp contrast against her fair skin and a fire encasing those beautiful eyes. Her black dress complimented her figure perfectly with the form fitting top leading into a long flowing skirt.

"Lavinia," he murmured, his voice coming out soft and weak.

Hearing her real name being spoken aloud, especially by him in his fearful voice, was like music to her ears. His dark brown hair was combed back, and his emerald eyes were just as lively since she had last seen him. The red roses pinned to the front of his suit matched her own, and her eyes narrowed, wondering if it was him who had set this all up.

"So you do remember me."

"How could I forget? Is this where you've been all these years?" She scoffed.

"You don't honestly believe that."

He shifted in his spot, not taking his eyes off of her. "I wouldn't know what else to think. Are you not the one who orga-

nized this?”

“No.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“I was invited. Same as you.”

“Then how did you know I was coming?”

“I heard word. I knew someone like you wouldn’t pass up the opportunity to show off about your invite.”

His eyes narrowed. “So we were set up by someone else?”

She shrugged. “I don’t see a problem with that. Whoever it was probably knew what you did to me.” She took a step closer, and in response, he backed against the door, his hand clenched around the handle. “What? Going so soon?”

“What do you have planned?” he asked, trying to keep his voice calm. “What makes you think I have something planned?”

“You knew I was coming, and here you are waiting for me. Remind me again why this isn’t your doing.”

She laughed, stopping in front of him.

“Oh, I could only dream of an occasion as perfect as this. So how could I just let this opportunity slip by?”

He raised an eyebrow, still not convinced. “I hardly believe you just wanted a night alone with me.”

“Mm, well, it has been a while. Now, tell

me,” she continued. “How has life been in court lately?”

“Same as always,” he replied through clenched teeth. “Just pretentious people trying to show off to each other.”

“Oh, don’t pretend you’re any different.”

“I only partake in it because I have a reputation to uphold.”

“For someone who cares so much about reputation, you sure didn’t care about ruining mine.”

He frowned. “You’re not still mad about that, are you?”

She glared, her hands clenching into fists. “You’d still be mad too if you had to live with the effects of it every waking moment of your life.”

“It was just a stupid rumor. People move on.” She raised her chin. “You clearly know nothing.”

At that moment, the attendants returned, and the door swinging open threw Dominic off balance. The attendants hastily apologized, but he waved them off, rubbing the back of his neck in embarrassment. They held out two matching boxes to the guests, each encasing their respective trinkets. In one box sat a thin golden chain and in the other, a simple white handkerchief. Lavinia and Dominic took their items, thanking the attendants before they stepped out of the room once again. Dominic glanced over, noticing the way Lavinia clenched the chain care-

lessly in her hand as he carefully tucked his white cloth into one of his pockets.

“A necklace? I never thought you were that kind of girl.” She glared.

“The hell do you know about me?”

“I’ve always known that you had a good sense of style, but that clearly doesn’t match the dress at all.”

She was caught off guard by the random compliment, but she rolled her eyes.

“Well, you’d be right about that. Besides, it’s fake anyway.”

“Then why—”

“Because I don’t think the host would take too kindly to this,” she stated, parting the slit she had cut into the skirt to reveal a dagger strapped to her leg. His eyes widened, but he couldn’t help but smirk a little. She certainly wasn’t like most ladies from the court. His smug smile slowly melted away however when she unsheathed it, the silver blade mirroring the devilish glint in her eye.

“Do you like it?” “It’s...ah...very sharp.” “Very perceptive of you.”

His eyes narrowed. “What, are you going to try to kill me?” “Don’t test me, Dominic.”

His heart jumped a little in his chest.

“Alright, alright. Calm down now. Look, I’m sorry for what I did, truly. I never meant for it to go this far.”

She scoffed, raising the blade closer to

his neck. “You think one little apology is going to change things?”

His eyes widened. “Lavinia.”

“What?”

“The...the attendants are coming back,” he warned, spotting them approaching out of the corner of his eye.

She quickly sheathed the blade, once again hiding it with the fabric of her skirt. His quick response certainly saved her from getting caught right away, and she couldn’t help but wonder why he did it. But she could barely dwell on that thought for long before the attendants asked them to follow them to the ballroom. Dominic cautiously offered out his arm for her to take, but she ignored him, opting to walk ahead of him at a brisk pace. He followed behind, watching her long and confident strides without attempting to catch up. It was clear that a fire of resentment was burning deep inside her, and he had to do his very best to diffuse it without getting burned. This was not at all how he expected the night to start, and part of him wondered if he could successfully make it to the end.

Isabel Gonzales



What Should a Man Be

What should a man be?

The question is echoed throughout history.

Should he exude strength and power?

Conquer all the world- land, sky, and sea?

What should a man be?

Asked she,

“Should he toil for me?

Work day and night for our family’s peace and ease?

Have no need of sleep or food,

Be such a glorious sight that all threats to me

Turn on their heels and flee?”

The thought brings the woman blush and glee.

What should a man be?

Said he who was the pride of the Greacean fleet:

“Slaughter your foes and gather all you can take.

A man should make all continents quake,

Have no mercy on your enemies, their spirits you must break.

That’s what a man should be.”

What should a man be?

The Roman emperor answered with stoic dignity:

“Show virtue, but you are your leader and let none other be

Conquer your enemies, for the greatest good is victory.

A republic? Indeed, not for me. A man takes control and leads.

That’s what a man should be.”

Catherine Cox

What should a man be?
 He does not answer
 But who is this man that I see? He carves wood quietly
 Does he not hear me?
 Who is this carpenter who preaches peace?
 What hero has ever said one must turn the other cheek?

Why does he let them whip his back?
 Why does he let them as his skin bleeds?
 Achilles would have hacked off their heads!
 Caesar would have summoned armies!
 Surely this is not what a man ought to be.

As the nails are drilled into his hands
 And he inhales his final breath the brutal cross allows him to
 breathe,
 A faint smile crosses a dead man's lips
 As the whole world is now redeemed.
 Souls destined for slavery are now freed
 And a cosmos sighs with relief
 For a true man carried salvation on his back
 And showed all men how to truly lead.
 Meek and humble, this man conquered lust and greed
 For true men have not these.
 Jesus Christ has freed men and showed them all
 What a true man is destined to be.

Allison Pesce



Catherine Cox

Red Rain

Sliddle sladdle,
Drip and draddle,
Lines down windows course.

Whiffle whaffle,
Clink and claffle,
Steps up stairways pause.

Miffle muffle,
Sift and suffle,
Gleaming edges wink.

Rainy tapping fingers,
Shiny turning knobs,
Darkened shape advancing,
Clibble clabble clobs.

Audrey Curley



Victoria Husak

Tom

The sound of the constable pounding on the door was particularly irksome to the ears. It only ever meant one thing. Sighing and muttering to himself, Mr. Douglas straightened the collar of his white shirt and shuffled to the foyer. At the door he was met by a placid-faced officer chaperoning a small, scraggly boy who wore the typical vestments of an urchin: a shirt in tatters and scuffed pants in need of mending. Dirt and grime coated his pale feet. His hands were better off, for they were outfitted in woolly gloves. As the officer greeted the guardian, the boy's gaze remained anchored to the floor.

"Where'd you find this one?" Mr. Douglas asked.

The officer responded with a grunt and said, "Heaven knows where any of them come from."

"And yet Heaven always sends them to my door."

"Well, you better do Heaven's work then and keep an eye on this one. Scrawny as he is, this one's born trouble. We caught him stealing bread."

"Gutsy, are we?" Mr. Douglas poked the boy in the chest.

"Well, you won't have any time for mischief under my roof. What's your name?" The child didn't react, even as his silence was met with more poking and prodding. Two dark eyes remained wide and empty. "What's wrong with you? No one teach you manners or you're a mute?"

"Eh, don't fret over it," said the constable. "He hasn't spoken a word to us either."

"Fine, if you don't come with a name, we'll just have to give you one. From now on, you're... you're a... Tom. You think stealing is light, Tom?" Mr. Douglas grabbed the boy, newly christened Tom, by the shoulders and shook him roughly as if to wake him. "You look at me when I speak to you, boy. Look at me." The man got right in his face that his spit easily crossed the space between them. "Do you know how thieves were dealt with under the old law? They would capture the scoundrel, and slice off his offending hand!" He snatched the boy by his wrist. Immediately, viscerally, the child fought to pry himself free. At this, the man laughed, almost in good humor. "Lucky for you, I'll be lenient this time. But if I ever catch you stealing from ME, I'll give you something fierce to cry about. You

understand me? Nod your head, boy."

The child's head shook so fast it made him dizzy, and the man let him go. "Come on then," he said and shoved a broom into his hands. "I'll show you to your work." Trusting that Mr. Douglas had the situation under control, the officer took his leave.

Tom had been charged with sweeping the first and second floors in reparation for his crime. It was Sunday, the only day the children of the orphanage looked forward to. They were a rowdy bunch. Even from inside, Tom could hear their hoots and hollers. From the windows, he could see them racing across the lawn, kicking a small ball, or wrestling one another. Occasionally, some boys passed him by in the hallway. The well-mannered ones stopped to greet him. A couple sneered. Tom ducked his face and focused on sweeping. (The staff would have to explain things on his behalf, seeing that the boy was incapable of introducing himself.)

It had taken Tom the whole day to finish. For his labor, he was rewarded with a biscuit (he had missed supper) and an oversized set of clothes to replace his rags, though his gloves remained a staple of his outfit. At last, Tom thought

he would retire to the dormitory – a long, low hall lined with thin straw beds – but he froze at the entrance, unsure of where to go or how to navigate through the tide of bodies pressing in around him with introductions and questions – all day, the scamps had waited to meet the newcomer more formally.

"Hey Tom! Where'r you from?"

"How old are you?"

"Is Tom really your name?"

"Don't you remember?" One of the older boys, Jack, rolled his eyes. "Doug said he can't speak. He's a mute." The audience marveled.

"Why's that?"

"Can he make any sound at all?"

"Wait, look there!" All the attention made Tom's face flush. His lips quivered and hung partly open as if he were trying to speak. This excited the boys greatly.

"Don't be shy!" said a boy with dark ginger hair. His name was Kay, but he went by Red – most of them used nicknames for each other. "You can do it." Different faces

looked at Tom encouragingly, but his mouth snapped shut.

“What did you expect?” went Jack.

“You’re making him shy!”

An idea came to Bow. “Or maybe... Maybe he’s not mute. Maybe he had nobody to teach him words. We could teach him!”

Red liked that idea. “Oh, is that it? Try saying your name first! Like this: Tt – ohm.” He demonstrated with great emphasis, opening his mouth wide and slowly. Evidently, the other boy was overwhelmed. He grabbed a spare blanket, marched to the end of the row of beds, and settled down to sleep. “Alright, we can try tomorrow!” The audience dispersed to their beds.

For once, the boys were eager for the next day’s lessons, curious how Tom would perform. They had tried again at breakfast to get him to speak. As if he were a puppy, they coaxed him with extra bits of food and slowly sounded out words. Failing to get anywhere, they placed their hope in old Mr. Peasley to teach him something, anything, about letters and words.

Red had made sure to sit next to Tom – both to help the boy and study him. As the class copied letters onto paper, Tom stared absently at his pencil. “Just draw the lines and shapes,” Red whispered to him. He demonstrated by writing the word “Tribulation” as it appeared on the board. Tom looked instead toward the window where a brick wall topped with iron thorns separated them from the city.

Tom was still staring when Red tapped his leg with his foot, mere seconds before an irate Mr. Peasley exploded in his face. “What are you looking at, Tom? The board is up here. Write!” The boy’s eyes trembled as if to communicate that he couldn’t. Hating to repeat himself, Mr. Peasley slapped his wrist. “Didn’t you hear me? I was told you were mute, not deaf. You can copy the letters.” Tentatively, the child began to scribble a word. Mr. Peasley stopped him partway through. For the first time, he took stock of the boy’s gloves. “Why are you wearing these? You don’t need them now. Take them off.” The tone of his voice left no room for debate. The boy peeled the gloves off, and everyone could see how his right hand didn’t match his left. Instead of smooth skin, rugged pink patches covered his palm and fingertips – hideous leftovers from a burn that

didn’t heal right. The boys around him shivered and cringed. Mr. Peasley wore the ugliest grimace of all. “Humph! Keep them on.”

The children weren’t a patient bunch. Within a week, the lot of them had accepted the fact that Tom was a helpless mute. The boy could write words with wobbly letters during class, but he made no progress at speaking. The persistent ones, however, hadn’t given up on teaching him. Try as he did to avoid them or shoo them away with glares, they still pursued him. The crueler ones took advantage.

“Tom, don’t say anything if you’re a moron.”

“Don’t say anything if you’re a bastard!”

At breakfast one morning, Jack sat in front of the mute boy and flashed a crooked smile. “Hey, Tommy. Don’t say anything if I can have your biscuit. Gee, thanks friend!” Quicker than a greedy fox, Jack snatched the biscuit from across the table and gobbled it up as laughter rose around them.

“That Jack,” grumbled Red, who still had a half-finished biscuit. He passed it to Tom, who studied it for a long time before

taking a bite. “Next time, tell him to stop. Or sock him.” Red’s eyes glittered with mischief. “He used to pick on me before I gave him a good wallop.”

Tom grew despondent. He longed to leave the orphanage far behind; he wouldn’t miss its crowd. On a dark night, the boy had slipped outside and stood before the iron-barred gate; with a sewing needle he had pilfered, he had tried to work the lock, but to no success. He was a simple bread thief and knew not the fine art of lock-picking. Mr. Douglass would lock the gate every night, but the boy lacked the courage to steal the key from him. (He remembered that thieves would have their hands cut.) But neither did he have the courage to fight off Jack, so the older boy grew in meanness.

Jack had devised a prank that was especially cruel. At night as everyone was settling back into the dormitory, he came behind Tom and shoved him to the ground. He ripped away the gloves and held them aloft like a trophy. Tom punched his nose. Around them, children called for the fight to stop or watched with interest. For the pair of gloves, his most prized possession, Tom attacked with everything he had – punching, clawing,

kicking – but Jack was stronger. The small boy was forced once more to his knees as Jack stood over him.

“Don’t worry, Tommy. I’ll give these back to you. Just say something first. Say I’m strong, and you’re weak.” His smile inflated. He knew full well the boy couldn’t speak.

“Jack, leave him be!” yelled Red.

“I thought you wanted to hear him.”

Red would have sprung at Jack at that moment, but he heard Tom clearing his throat. He took in a deep breath, and everyone else held their own. In a hoarse, vicious voice he hurled a stream of obscenities at Jack. The slack-jawed boys were the ones struck mute now – even the worst of the scamps had learned a new word or two from their dear Tom. Then there was Red, who roared with laughter.

Mr. Douglass had heard the commotion from his quarters downstairs. In no hurry to get out of bed, he grumbled and took heavy step by heavy step up the stairs to find Tom and Jack at the center of the scene. “What’s going on here?”

Jack saw an opportunity. “Tom said something vulgar!” As others nodded their heads in agreement, Tom looked piteously at the man.

“Tom can’t speak.”

“He did! He did! He said...” Jack repeated the words Tom had spoken.

The man boiled over, and Jack regretted his decision too late. “Boy! Where did you learn such foul language? And to deliver a bold-faced lie on top of it!” He dragged the howling voice away for punishment. Tom recovered his gloves and felt no remorse.

In the aftermath, the children had grown nervous around Tom – except for Red, who held a deep appreciation for the language of sailors. The others went quickly to their beds, in hopes that when they woke up, the memory of the mute boy speaking would prove to be a strange nightmare. Red lay awake. After half an hour, he climbed out of his bed and went to where Tom lay sleeping underneath a patchwork blanket – or at least, Red had expected to find him sleeping; his eyes opened alert when he touched him on the shoulder.

Red tried to win him with his toothy smile. “That was something great you did showing Jack. You know, you can talk to me if you want. I won’t tell anyone.”

The other boy considered it for a long moment. “No thanks,” he finally replied in the faintest whisper. Red’s smile grew exceptionally wider.

“You’ll think about it?”

“Goodnight.”

Red returned to his own bed, overjoyed.

Tom couldn’t sleep. His mind had too much to think about now. When he considered the red-head, he thought he was a loon. Then he remembered when Red had given him his biscuit. At first, he couldn’t make sense of it. Tom wouldn’t have done such a thing, not even for someone like himself, yet it made him, in a word, glad. He didn’t know what it was like to have a brother or sister, but he wondered if he might like having a friend.

Before he had given it permission, a tear streaked down his face. And then another. The last time Tom had cried had been when his mother pressed his hand

against a hot skillet. He had wailed for hours on end until his mother screamed for him to stop. Whenever asked, her face would soften with practiced pity. With all the right formality, she would explain that it was an awful accident: Anthony shouldn’t have been playing in the kitchen. She knew that he wouldn’t contradict her. She had informed the boy a hundred times over what the consequences would be if he ever spoke out of line.

“I’ve never met a child so quiet,” someone had commented once.

“Oh, that’s just how he is. A silly boy.”

It took several weeks for the pain in his hand to dull, but the scars stubbornly remained. He made up his mind to run away and never looked back. It really was funny; the boy was quite silly for crying now when he had more reason to be happy.



Ava Clare Joly

Nevermore

Nevermore' quoth the bird,
Wisdom speaks and beak ceases
To strike. A Black streak which
Undergirds England's lease on life.

These denizens of rocky dens,
Hermits of the wild,
Now clipped, stripped, flightless,
God's messengers defiled.

Atlas upholding the power
Of solar unsetting's bower.
Inky Rapunzels trained.
'If the Ravens leave the tower

England will fall" the gray beard
Prophesied – perhaps he just liked
To hear them cry:
Nevermore

will the Ravens leave...
Wilderness chained and tamed,
Last prisoners who remain,
Result of fatephobic fame.

Man and country's fall's prevented
By a cunning fix of fate.
Tradition's tome a feathered cover
Chained: body mods an iron gate.

A living breathing British Tarshish,
Eyes grown dead and cold.
Condemned priests of norse religion,
Deflocked and disrobed.

All the tourists gawk and gasp,
Squeak and squawk and buy.
Take 1000 photographs,
Condemn them not to die.

Nevermore will England pray
To God. There is no need.
The Ravens are in the Tower
And they can never leave.

Elizabeth Hall

Digression

If I be but a footnote trailing prose,
 A whisper slanted, pause for poetry;
 My humble line invites you sweet repose
 In stroke, a kiss, enshrined eternally.
 An ancillary though I crowned,
 My pride in precedence succeed
 All doubt, I pray, but truth it certain found
 on page alone. Oh, how to truly love thee?
 A sentinel, I guard excerpts from the start,
 Dragging every syllable to pages safe
 to breathe. They trace your piece; I piece your heart,
 Forgotten? “Darling, dedication ‘stead,”
 You promise, “not a footnote in my life;
 But nestle by my feet when it we write.”

Juliana Marchese



Katherine Gawron

When Hands Outlive Their Use

Oliver opened his eyes to the beige ceiling above him. The unwashed comforter covered him halfway to his abdomen, fell to the side of him, then down off his bed. He slept on the leftmost side of his mattress, a habit he had formed from his early childhood. The bed was much too large for himself, yet he found the most comfort anchoring his body to one side. Oliver slept like a dead man in a coffin, his eyelids to the ceiling after he had gone to sleep, and he remained that way through the night without movement. He liked it that way. It made him comfortable. His sleeping position allowed his nightly mask to form firmly on his face, eating at his blemished skin while he slept. Oliver was a man of order, of purpose, of practice, at least that is how he justified himself as a man. It made him comfortable, and like many, he lived for that very reason.

The beige ceiling above Oliver was discolored and blotched. The dark spots on the ceiling gave Oliver the impression of a disfigured face in the paint, much like how many people see figures in the clouds. Oliver hadn't cared to paint over the dark spots, and he didn't need to. Oliver reached over to his bedside table as an innate response to the movement of his mind in the morning. Turning his head to the left, his eyes met the wall. The small window that allowed him to see out over the city was shaking, the

wind making the weak glass quiver. Oliver sighed. Already he was overwhelmed by what was out of normal order. Before any more of his senses could be afflicted by the unpleasant sights in his room, he waited no longer before reaching for the object on his bedside table. The one small object at his side was a teal green rectangle with two circles, equal parts away from each other. Both circles protrude outward from the body of the object, and it was clear they were both compartments of some nature. Oliver sat up in his bed, cracking the cap off of one side circle, then the other. The popping sound of the compartments being forced open serenaded Oliver's ears, and with each waking moment he became enthralled by the object in his hands. In the two circular compartments were two pools of water, about a finger-nail's width in size. Both compartments held a translucent film in the pools of water, and Oliver was enthralled at the idea of using them. Like a child with a gift, Oliver scrambled to turn on the lamp above his bed so that he could see his prize in a pleasant light. He held the container tenderly and wasted no time in ripping the rightmost contact from the pool of water. With a swift hand, Oliver lifted his head to the sky as he had done thousands of times and dropped the precious contact into his widened eye.

There was an immediate rush of comfort, and now Oliver was completely awake. Looking up at the ceiling still, Oliver blinked rapidly to adjust the contact in his right eye. He closed his right eye, then his left, then his right again, switching sides every couple of seconds. Looking up at the ceiling from his bed, he closed his right eye once more. Through only his left eye he could see the ceiling. The dark stained face in the ceiling stared back at him, as if it were judging him, and Oliver did not enjoy that. Oliver now closed his left eye and opened his right. The contact he had placed on his right pupil had adjusted, and the face in the ceiling had vanished. That made him comfortable.

Oliver quickly put the left contact in his eye, and the things that troubled him no longer existed. The window that quivered to his side ceased its shaking, and his walls and ceilings were now a flush, beige color. The saturation of his room turned from a cold, dark corner of his world, to a bright, new life. He had no need for his lamp to be lit above him. The contacts now provided him with light. Oliver justified this behavior because the contacts took less energy to charge than the lights took to operate, so with the contacts in, he no longer needed to pay largely for artificial light in his apartment.

Years ago, Oliver was skeptical of the new product market for "financial spurs." He was there when the contacts he now wore were pitched and introduced to his company, he even sat in the boardroom when

they were approved. Every company needed a way to survive in that time, and it seemed the only way through was to spur the economy themselves.

After the technological boom of the 2000s, wires became a part of society's bloodstream, and digitized media flowed through society like a plague. Life became a luxury, and needs were made so easy that what would have taken hours of mortal time to prepare a list and travel for food became a task not done yourself, but which could be accomplished on technological dime.

Food became delivered by air; water came through pipes pumped by plants that no longer needed human intervention to operate their valves. Work became online, and past hubs of activity on land became land for more hardware to serve its purpose. Companies with not enough income to adapt to the robotic change closed down, and human work became a cost they could not bear under the cheap labor of electronics. Stores became obsolete, social infrastructure crumbled. In all the scurry for advancement, we left ourselves behind, and the economy collapsed under the weight of how expensive flesh was to hire and maintain. Humanity had driven themselves from their own market.

With the physical economy crumbling, large companies needed a way out, or a way through before they too went under. To spur the human economy into motion, people needed to connect. But after so much time spent coddled by effort not

exerted by themselves, and having their needs met behind closed doors, humanity had become reluctant to work outside. Many whined about what they were asked to do. Why would they work when all they needed was at an arm's length, well within their comfortable reach?

"Financial spurs" became a term used by companies who caught a whiff of the success of the idea. The term was pitched with the hope of making the outside so much more appealing than the indoors. The visual contacts would be a device, like any smartphone of the early 2000s, but rather than exploring an already existing reality through the lens of a screen, the contacts would allow for the user to see a better reality through their own eyes. Rather than creating an escape from reality, the technology would be used to enhance the appeal of the reality individuals already lived in. It was a way to move forward without tearing anything down.

It was perfect, and the people loved it. Soon, companies started to enter the market selling this product after its initial success. As popularity grew, prices went down, and the human economy started to sputter to life. People began to leave their homes, and consumption started to flourish once more.

Oliver fluttered his eyelids to make sure the face in the ceiling had disappeared from his vision. The caffeinated rush from putting his right contact in had left him, but the tingling feeling from insert-

ing his second contact still had his mind in ecstasy. Oliver whipped the bed sheet off of himself and jumped upright out of bed. His world was now bright, and nothing more could trouble him. He was ready to go to work.

Oliver came out of his bedroom to a clean kitchen with hardwood floors. It was perfectly pristine with overhanging lights that activated upon his entrance. He opened his fridge to grab an apple and a bag of cold cooked bacon to eat on his way. Oliver brought his food into the bathroom and started to eat small strips of the bacon as he wiped away the lotion from his face he had applied the night before. While doing this with his right hand, his left hand reached down to grab a hanging apparatus on the wall.

The object Oliver took from the wall looked like a small extension cord with two, bulky, odd-shaped ends. As he kept wiping his face, Oliver stuck one bulky end around the outside of his ear like an earpiece with his left hand. He then took the long string attached to the other bulky end and strung it around the back of his head to his other ear. Oliver then took a sticker-like object off of his right earpiece and stuck it on the right side of his nose where the cartilage and bone meet. He did the same with the left earpiece, leaving him with two earpieces, and two pill shaped stickers on his nose. Oliver tapped a button on the earpiece, and all three sets of objects lit up in a flash, the contacts, the earpieces, and the

stickers. Oliver could now not only see pleasant sights, but hear pleasant sounds, and smell pleasant things. The earpiece and the nerve stickers were a gift given to him by his company. Oliver accepted them with skepticism but now appreciated them with gratitude. He didn't buy them himself; they were a gift. Why shouldn't he use them? At least, that is how he justified it, and that made him comfortable.

Oliver was brushing his teeth when he realized one of his teeth was out of place and slightly yellowed. It was a beacon of imperfection in his world of beauty. That meant his grace period was over, and it was time to leave for work.

Oliver left his newly painted apartment building into a bustling street with bright cars and blue skies. There was a mechanic across the street working on a bright, glossy new convertible beside a family of four enjoying their time eating ice cream on the sidewalk.

Oliver boarded the train to Tempest and quietly found a seat in the back of the middle car. His stop was the first of many on a bustling route to the center of Tempest. Oliver predicted his luxurious carriage space would grow crowded with many people, but he knew he wouldn't mind because he quite liked his journey. With his earpieces in, it was obvious Oliver was not a man worth talking to on the train. Oliver had a routine, and he stuck to it, if that involved no distractions, then that was what he needed

most.

The train came to a screeching halt at Raleigh Station, the next stop on the path. Many people got on at this time, including an old man that sat across from Oliver. Oliver didn't much care to look in the old man's direction but did so only to see out the window behind the old man once the train had started moving again. The train took a path through the sky, and at some parts, above the clouds. Oliver especially loved the cloudless parts of the journey because he could see the rising sun in all its saturated glory, and it would sometimes bring a tear to his eye. His view of the sun out of the window was, however, interrupted when it passed behind the old man's head across from him. Only then did Oliver realize the old man was speaking to Oliver.

Obviously, this old man was just an idiot, Oliver thought. Oliver was wearing earpieces, he could not hear the old man who was so intently speaking to him.

The old man must not have seen the earpieces and the nerve paths around his nose, Oliver thought. Or maybe the old man was using contacts that blocked out all other artificial devices to where he couldn't see Oliver's devices at all? That was probably the case, so Oliver continued ignoring the man.

As the sun went away and the train plummeted back down from the clouds, the old man was still speaking, looking directly at Oliver. The old man looked intently at Oliver, as if Oliver was receiv-

ing what he was saying. The old man had a gray beard and large hat on. He had the posture of being wise, but his eyes made him look insane; they were wide, staring directly at Oliver. Oliver did not want to, but figured just once he would take his earpiece out so at least the man could see Oliver had not been hearing him the entire time. Oliver hated to break from his routine.

Oliver reached up and tore the bud from his right ear, and the man stopped speaking at once, like a vehicle that had suddenly been halted.

Oliver was perplexed, and slightly annoyed. The man had been speaking to him for a good five minutes, and only now decided to cease speaking when Oliver took the effort to take his earpiece out? Oliver looked at the old man with a raised eyebrow, visibly confused, but the old man just smiled and stared intently back.

Oliver slowly put his earpiece back in and returned to listening to the sounds that pleased him. Oliver looked up to check if the man was still staring. Not only was the old man staring, but he was speaking again.

Now the old man had managed to irritate Oliver, and worse, the old man had made Oliver uncomfortable. Oliver took the earbud from right ear again and stared at the old man. The old man stopped speaking at once, again, which irritated Oliver further. The old man was ruining his routine.

“Are you playing a game with me, sir?” Oliver stated.

The old man simply stared into Oliver’s eyes like a dog, silent.

“What are you getting at with this?” Oliver asked again.

Silence, again.

“I think you should know that you have wasted my time,” Oliver said, still annoyed. “I will not take out my earpieces again. You should speak now if you want to be spoken to.”

Still the old man said nothing, and Oliver slowly reinserted his earpiece as he stared directly into the old man’s eyes. The moment Oliver’s earpiece hit the inside rim of his ear, the old man started talking again, more fluently and with more hand gestures. As much as Oliver wanted to ignore the old man again as he said he would, he took out both earpieces and held one up to the old man, speaking in an elevated tone.

“Sir, I cannot hear you! Can’t you see I have tw-”

“Why did you take them out again?” the old man said calmly with a furrowed brow.

Oliver was perplexed for a moment and said nothing. Oliver was a bit deflated from feeling taken advantage of by the lack of conversation, so he let the old man speak again, which the old man did.

“You said you would not take out your earpieces again,” The old man said as he tilted his head and lowered his voice.

“Yet you did. Why lie?”

Oliver decided to defend his actions and spoke to the man in a condescending tone. “I wanted to let you know that you were wasting your own breath on speaking to me, I cannot hear you.”

“I received that impression the first time you took your earpieces out to berate me, but why take them out to repeat it again?”

Oliver wondered that himself but knew. “I was angry at you,” Oliver said, “and I was wondering whether you were blind, deaf, or stupid.”

“Angry? You were angry at me? You have the perfect way to ignore me. You could use your earbuds and block me out of your consciousness entirely, yet you chose not to. Why?”

Oliver had had enough of the old man’s riddles and wanted to end their conversation with an angry comment.

“Is this a job interview? Are you my parole officer? Are you a genie? What will these questions do for you that a conversation couldn’t, a conversation we could have had if you weren’t playing a game. Now if you don’t mind, I am going to return-”

“No, it wasn’t anger.” The old man said. Oliver was now officially fed up. Not only had the old man wasted his time but now seemed to be telling Oliver how he felt. Before Oliver could retaliate, the old man began to explain himself.

“I was intriguing to you. You were curious.”

The old man paused to chew on his tongue, then continued. “Not only did you open your ears once, not only did you open them twice, but three times you opened your ears to try and hear me.”

Oliver did not want to agree with the old man, but the old man was, in fact, intriguing, and Oliver was, in fact, curious. Oliver sat back in his chair a bit slouched this time, with a slight visible frown on his face he couldn’t hide.

“What were you talking about earlier?” Oliver said curtly.

“Mystery,” The old man stated as a fact. “Mystery is what drew you to open your ears to try and listen to me. Mystery is what caused you to lapse your own judgment and words. You had a perfectly good way of living in silent bliss, yet you chose to ignore that and tried listening to me.”

The old man’s eyes lit up as he paused, then spoke again.

“Mystery is what did that, not anger. You ruined your perfect peace for mystery.” Oliver was still annoyed. The old man was ruining Oliver’s favorite part of the train ride. “And how is all that important to me?” Oliver said.

“It’s only important to you.” The old man retorted.

Oliver made an attempt to return to order by putting his earpieces back in, but the moment he tried, the old man began to question him again.

“Those things in your eyes, what are

they?”

The old man was referring to the contacts in Oliver’s eyes, and out of all the questions, Oliver was happy to oblige this one. Oliver pulled an amused smile. He thought the old man was playing another game.

“These are my contacts from Evervision, you must have a different model. It’s funny actually, the company that created this had a specific department devoted to color. I would know.”

The old man was staring at Oliver blankly with a sort of strained look on his face, so Oliver stopped speaking. The train had halted at the next station, and few people entered the train.

At that moment, staring back into the old man’s eyes, Oliver realized the old man was not wearing any contacts.

“Sir, where are yours?” Oliver said, pointing at his eyes.

The old man drew back a bit, as if they were speaking of something that emitted a foul smell.

“I don’t wear anything like that,” the old man said through a slight smile. “They are killing the people.”

Oliver felt the old man was insulting his line of work and now felt obligated to argue.

“And you choose to not indulge?” Oliver said.

“I choose to see the world how it is. No more, no less.”

“And because other people can’t operate

how you do, you find them lesser?”

Oliver could sense a crack in the old man’s facade, a crack of emotion, perhaps a crack of ego.

The old man spoke. “I think of no one lesser than I, but I can clearly see with open eyes that your product takes away mystery from intrigue. With your product, we find mystery everywhere but in reality. Take your fake eyes out and you’ll see the world, but you’ve never thought to entertain that mystery, have you? You would take the noise from your ears to speak to me but you won’t take the mask from your eyes to live.”

Oliver thought for a moment in silence and lowered his voice beyond the calm tone of the old man.

“What kind of clothes do you wear?” said Oliver to the old man.

The train pulled to a stop at the next station, it was the third to last stop on the way to Tempest.

“You can see for yourself if you take out your fake eyes,” said the old man.

“Are you religious?” Oliver said, squinting his eyes slightly.

“How would you want me to answer that?” The old man said, squinting his eyes just the same.

Oliver finally gave in to the old man’s wishes. He took one contact out so that his right eye saw the raw world, while the left saw what the contact wanted him to see. Oliver closed his left eye and opened his right to reveal the real world. The train had little light, and was

not in the sky but, in fact, below ground. Oliver knew what the old man expected, he wanted Oliver to have a eureka moment, a conversion, a revelation on his past ways. The old man wanted Oliver to see what truly was behind his eyes, what life truly looked like and why he was the enemy. But Oliver did not think that; he did not mind, and he did not care.

Seeing the old man across from him in a much less flattering light on the train, Oliver singled out the man’s coat, shoes, and watch he was wearing. Oliver examined the old man, who wore much of what reminded him of himself in the past. Oliver ignored his surroundings out of spite and lectured the old man.

“The coat you wear on your back only exists because of an economy spurred on the backbone of technology like that of which are in my eyes. Your shoes are a kind of work boot sold years ago, when people were starving on the streets because the technology I help sell hadn’t been invented yet. And finally, your watch...”

Oliver looked at the old man’s watch, then back to the old man’s face, which was now sorrowed at the unexpected response. The old man surely wanted Oliver to see something new, to see something he hadn’t, but Oliver chose to attack what made him uncomfortable. “Your watch is dead.” Oliver said bluntly.

Oliver fiddled with his own watch under his own jacket, then continued. “Not

many can live like you can,” Oliver said, “But the ones that cannot are at least alive to try. Without my product, society dies. Whether you like it or not, my product will stay no matter what I do or what anyone else does. This is how people work, this is the way society thrives, this is the way society lives and breathes. This is the way it will always have to be if we are to live.”

The old man and Oliver sat across the aisle from one another in complete silence. Some passengers that got on the train heard Oliver rambling but surmised that he must be on a phone call, or that he was simply talking to himself.

After some time, the old man spoke. “This reliance is a death sentence, Oliver. How many more creations will we become dependent upon before the world has no use for our legs anymore, or our arms, or our bodies. How much more artificial bliss do we need to drug ourselves with before reality becomes tolerable again after your creation fails to entertain the next generation of minds?” Oliver crossed his arms and said nothing. In his own head, he had millions of reasons not to give up his creation, his work, his wealth. In his own head he justified their use but couldn’t seem to form words defending it.

“Luxury makes men weak, you know,” the old man said.

“It also makes them proud,” Oliver shot back.

The old man looked down, disappointed in how little Oliver was willing to change or realize how dreary raw life was around him. Oliver, on the other hand, was proud of defending his work, and his way of life.

“Someday even your technology won’t save you from your own greed.” Oliver leaned his head back. He did not want to look at the old man anymore. “And when that day comes, you can have your

victory.”

The next stop came, and the old man left. Oliver was left in silence again as he popped his right contact back into his eye, and soon after, his left earpiece, then his right, in routine fashion. The train was in the air again, and his ears played pleasant sounds as he smelled the fresh wind around him. He felt alive, and that made him comfortable.



In Reflection of Grief

Gone! Gone to the grave has my beloved fled
Fled this forsaken world.

In hatred turned I to the sea
And asked it's rushing banks a plea:
“Why hast thou spirit enough to flow
On the morn I must let my beloved go!”

Then in remorse, shout my revenge
With heart set to avenge
To shining sun aloft I scream
“How canst thou shine!
Satisfy my pain and let it rain!”

Cried I to the wind,
“Match the state my heart is in!
Blow the trees up from their mound,
Break all loved things and send them round!
How dare thou be so blissfully gentle
My soul finds no comfort in your sentimental!”

On my knees I weeped,
“Wretched breeze so soft and sweet
rip me apart and set me free
from all the joy I see”

I writhe and weep.
My heart is stone.
Yet from earth seeps joy alone.

When all the world would not answer me
In shame I turned to thee:
“Oh God, will your creation not mourn with me?”
“Command the sea to weep and sun to hide its shining ray,
let no love befall this day.”

And to heart of woe did God's gentle face show.

“Daughter wrought with despair
tis not that the world not care,
the river runs on such a morn in joy
for soul torn from hell's ploy.
The sun shines with glee
for thine beloved comes to me,
And though the wind doth not start to your complaint,
My heart hears.
For you, I weep without restraint.”

Poetic Imitation of “She Walks in Beauty”

She moves in mystery, deep and vast,
 The navy waves caress the coast,
 Where long sands stretch, in stillness cast
 In murmured secrets, haunting ghosts.
 At once astir, at once steadfast,
 A phantom dance in mist enclosed.
 O'er hadal fathoms, glist'ning crests
 Where ebbs and flows in kinship be,
 The salt-stained gusts in distance nest
 In flaring sails that etch the sea.
 The deeps that daunt the mightiest
 Bring safely home the admiralty.
 In lullabies, in hushing words,
 Embracing all in blankets blue,
 And hearing heart's aches gone unheard
 By others; Mother's ever-true
 And ever-faithful presence stirred
 By those who seek her secrets too.

Maria Landry



Jenna Valenta

“All Comes to Him By Pure Gift”

We never believe magic and spells are real, but C.S. Lewis shows us that these fairytale fantasies have some truth -- our sin causes the “evil enchantment of worldliness” that we can only wake from with “the strongest spell,” God’s grace.¹ C.S. Lewis’s twenty-first letter of *The Screwtape Letters* and *Perelandra* reveals a dangerous variant of the “enchantment of worldliness.”² man’s enchantment with the sense of ownership, his belief that he owns time and creation, arising from the fall of humanity. Due to Adam and Eve’s first act of disobedience in the fall, man’s nature is now corrupted, and he has developed a distorted sense of ownership and pride. However, C.S. Lewis presents the remedy to man’s sense of ownership as God’s grace, submission to God’s loving and merciful will in an act of obedience, and the virtue of humility which conquers pride and leads man to rejoice: “For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy” (Psalm 92:4).

The planet of *Perelandra* is an unfallen world – the land consists of floating islands, the King and Queen receive everything as a gift, and they are completely obedient to Maleldil (God). On *Perelandra*, much of the land is not fixed (like earth), including floating islands which represent the harmonious connection between creation and its Creator. Ransom, a man from earth who travels to *Perelandra*, is shocked to see these floating islands and states “the whole look of the earth [has] changed.”³ Next, Ransom sees the Green Lady, the Queen, who has “such grace [...] in all her movements,” and he is amazed at her strength, for the Green Lady and the King have a graced nature and are completely obedient to Maleldil.⁴ Thus, knowledge is a gift for the Green Lady and the King, for “there is nothing between” them and Maleldil, who puts “their glory and their joy” into her mind.⁵ Unlike *Perelandra*, Earth is a fallen world with a fixed land, and man’s broken nature, corrupted by sin and pride, causes him to take God’s gifts to him for himself. The King of *Perelandra* recounts the fall of man, where Eve “fell and [...] your Father went with her, doing her no good thereby and bringing darkness upon all their children.”⁶ In an act of disobedience and pride, Adam and Eve reject-

ed God’s grace, the free gift given to them from the very beginning of creation and instead tried to take knowledge for themselves. As a result, human beings are passed on a fallen nature that rejected God’s grace, and pain and suffering entered the world.

Now with a fallen nature, man is enchanted by a “sense of ownership,” where he wants to take for himself things that God has given as a gift – time, creation, and knowledge – and claim it as his own.⁷ In *The Screwtape Letters*, the demon Screwtape says an attack on man is “darkening the intellect,” and from the center of this darkness comes the “sense of ownership.”⁸ The “sense of ownership” teaches man to say “‘my God’ in a sense not really very different from ‘my boots,’ meaning that God on whom I have a claim for my distinguished services and whom I exploit from the pulpit – The God I have done a corner in.”⁹ Fallen man, in his pride, tries to make God his servant and use Him for his own purpose and pleasures, which is an ultimate act of disobedience and the rejection of submission to His will. Man, entranced by the “sense of ownership,” begins to believe “I am the Universe, I, [...] am your God and your Devil,”¹⁰ and that “in the order of creation I am greater than He.”¹¹ He thinks his is center, rather than all is center, and that he is the owner of creation. In other words, man believes that he is the center of the universe and does not need God, although that is not what God intended. Rather, when all is center, man is in harmony with creation and his Creator (God) and willingly submits to God’s will.

Fallen man, enchanted by the “sense of ownership” does not realize that “all comes to him by pure gift”¹² out of God’s compassionate love and endless mercy, and “to walk out of [God’s] will is to walk into nowhere.”¹³ To conquer disobedience and pride, man needs the vow of obedience and virtue of humility, which God gives man through grace. As Screwtape understands, God “really loves” man, and “always gives back to them with His right hand what He has taken away with His left.”¹⁴ Although man rejects God’s grace in the fall, through His Son – the “beloved became a Man”¹⁵ – God gives humanity the free gift of grace to a greater degree. Grace is the “best fruit,” and it is a gift that comes from the hand of God – He reaches down to men

and draws man to Himself through His grace, so man can have eternal life.¹⁶

Furthermore, submission to God's will in an act of obedience breaks the enchantment of the sense of ownership. The King and Queen in Perelandra state that Maleldil gave them "no assurance. No fixed land," but man must "always throw oneself into the wave."¹⁷ This demonstrates that obedience is love and trust in the will of God, even though the "troughs" and "peaks" of life;¹⁸ Love and trust in the Beloved's plan is the realization that all is gift and a submission to His divine and Holy will. Hence, not ownership, but obedience is true freedom and breaks the enchantment – it is the proper act of creature to Creator. Moreover, humility eliminates merely "animal self-love" and replaces it with "a charity and gratitude for all selves, including their own."¹⁹ God "destines [man] to eternity" and "wants each man [...] to recognize all creatures (even himself) as glorious and excellent things," because He, the Author of Life, is "glorious and excellent."²⁰ Through humility, man acknowledges his insufficiency and inadequacy, but also that he is divinely loved and called, for God "wants servants who can finally become sons."²¹ Thus, humility breaks the enchantment of the sense of ownership, because man realizes that this world and everything in it is not his own, but was made by an infinitely loving and merciful Creator as a gift to man.

Although man will never be perfect and will still fall into sin, pride, and disobedience, once he submits himself to God's will in obedience and humbles himself before the Father, he can truly rejoice in the Beloved. A humble and obedient man, accepting God's grace, recognizes "How beautiful is [God] and how wonderful are all His works."²² Man, blind in pride and disobedience, finally sees God's wonderful works through grace, humility, and obedience, therefore conquering the sense of ownership. Then, man rejoices in the Lord and says, "For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands, I sing for joy" (Psalm 92:4).

In Perelandra and The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis explains that man's belief of the sense of ownership, a result of his pride, is overcome through God's grace, the virtue of humility, and a vow of obedience. Fallen man, in his corrupted nature, becomes enchanted

by the sense of ownership – the belief that man owns time, creation, and knowledge. However, this enchantment is broken through God's grace, the virtue of humility, and obedience to God's living plan, because he can then recognize that all is pure gift. This recognition of God's goodness and love leads man to rejoice in God's wonderful works He has done for the world and for man. Man, destined for eternal life, will fully and completely rejoice in God's love and rest in His will when he reaches his last end – the Beatific Vision.

CITATIONS:

- 1 C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in The Essential C.S. Lewis, edited by Lyle W. Dorsett, (New York: Scribner, 2017), 364.
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- 3 C.S. Lewis, "Perelandra" in The Essential C.S. Lewis, edited by Lyle W. Dorsett, (New York: Scribner, 2017), 181.
- 4 C.S. Lewis, "Perelandra," 193.
- 5 Ibid, 197.
- 6 Ibid, 287.
- 7 C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1982), 113.
- 8 C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, 111-112.
- 9 Ibid, 114.
- 10 C.S. Lewis, "Perelandra," 207.
- 11 Ibid, 233.
- 12 C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, 112.
- 13 C.S. Lewis, "Perelandra," 222.
- 14 C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, 72.
- 15 C.S. Lewis, "Perelandra," 197.
- 16 Ibid, 287.
- 17 Ibid, 288.
- 18 C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, 38.
- 19 Ibid, 71.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid, 39.
- 22 C.S. Lewis, "Perelandra," 251.

The Castaway



A young woman walked by herself among the wreckage. Wooden splinters of all sizes jutted from the sand. There was no way of knowing they had once belonged to a mighty ship. Or maybe it had been a humbler sloop. Or a canoe. She considered the debris for a long time, hoping the mystery would reveal itself.

The girl's eyes were the color of the dull air before a storm. She wondered if she had come from a tempest. If there had been a great storm, the heavens hid its traces from her. It was a glorious day – wonderfully sunny with a gentle breeze. There was blue on endless blue where the ocean stretched to meet the sky. Cresting waves would catch the light and dazzle as though small gemstones had been strewn across the sea. Within the currents, she saw hues of azure and teal. It was altogether lovely, but even so, the girl frowned, for she knew better than to trust the sea.

The ocean wore a flaunty costume. The night came to tear down the illusion. It had been such a moonless night when she washed up. Giant clouds swam in the sky like crocodiles coming to devour the light of stars. The ocean and sky merged into an endless black. Sailors knew to fear such a night. Jagged rocks poked out of the water like teeth to ensnare ships.

She had found herself alone and blind in the dark, but her other senses had not failed her. She was aware of the chill that tortured her clammy skin and of the salt that burned in her mouth and throat. Filling the air was an incessant roaring. The thunder grew louder, closer.

The crescendo of seawater slammed into her. For a terrifying moment, her small body was lost in the flood and raked against sand, rocks,

Victoria Husak

shells. Then the violent tide spat her back onto shore. Awash with fear, she scrambled to flee, half-running, half-stumbling, and sputtering seawater as she went.

After only a few yards, she collapsed. A hundred cuts and bruises cried out in fresh pain. There was another pressure she hadn't felt before, like something trying to split her skull.

Behind her, the restless waves continued their charge and pounded the shoreline. Farther out, they crashed against the rocky spires, and water was deflected high into the air to rain down in explosive display.

The sea was raging, but its violent clamor was growing more distant to her ears. The sirens were calling her. With soundless lullabies, they invited her to dreamless sleep. The tide would rise and she would slip into the endless darkness, devoid of light, devoid of life, devoid—

NO! She commanded her strength to appear. Her legs quivered from the effort. Unable to walk or even stand, she pulled herself forward miserable inch by miserable inch along the sandy floor. The idea never occurred to her that the region might be deserted. She could not see the horizon as it was so dark, but she was certain that somewhere ahead she would find a town and find someone to help. She grit her teeth to keep from crying and kept going.

In the end, her battered body couldn't match her strength of will. The next she opened her eyes, she found herself lying on a thin mattress in a circular hut. In the morning, someone had discovered her unconscious form on the beach and brought her to a healer. Her wounds were treated, but the worst pain remained in her throbbing head. People came to her with questions, and she found herself unable to answer. She couldn't even tell them her name. The girl returned to the



William Orson

beach hoping she could sift through the wreckage for any clues of her past, but the water gave nothing away.

The ocean was a hoarder. It swallowed ships and men, and stored them in its seven-chambered belly, never to be seen again. Why it hadn't swallowed her too, she didn't know.

Allison D'Amico



Gracemarie Yeh

El Sacrificio de Aguascalientes

Alberto packed the film-reel case,
And slipped the wafers in,
He rolled the pray'rs and candles up
Within the screen pressed thin.

Projector case (a flask of wine)
He placed up in the cart,
He heaved the boy up to the seat,
And promptly did depart.

Across the rocky desert path,
Rancheras now in sight;
All gently step through casa door,
And slowly, shut it tight.

A peasant-man turned holy priest,
El padre is transformed.
The table's cleared by grateful hands,
New altars now adorned.

The Victim is in silence brought,
Bells sing a smothered song.
The hands of altar boys fold hard,
That war would not last long.

Alberto prays for family -
The strength to pull them through.
The girls and mama needed him.
Señor, he needed You.

Now all approach, consume the King,
Now worship is at end.
And bless'd before they take their leave,
His flock does Padre send.

Alberto clears the altar off;
The vessels seals back in.
Ranchera back to household state.
No trace of what had been.

Through casa door, 'cross desert path,
The sun beat down and glared.
Police in sight! ("Betray no fright!")
Alberto reined in the mare.

The hands of State probed round the cart
Looting the sacred hoard.
Alberto faced a bloody end
Like first had claimed his Lord.

The boy alone was sent back home
With woeful news to bear
The mother, listening for her son's
Glad greeting from the stair.

They dragged him to a nearby wall.
Panting. Blindfolded. Bound.
Alberto begged, "Come heaven's strength!"
To fear he gave no ground;

Two choices was he left with now:
His mother, or his Lord?
How weigh the duty? Weigh the love?
He faced the wall: Death moored.

The choice was made. The guns all aimed -
Peace stood, by heaven’s grace.
“Ready! Aim! Fire!” Unleash -
Nought of Death’s embrace.

Alberto waited for the pain,
Had Death come to evade?
He writhed himself out of the bonds,
And saw how Death was stayed:

When State had taken final aim,
Cristeros saw the whole.
They would not let their brother fall!
The State’s last “Fire!” they stole.

Free now, Alberto drove back home,
And raised his thanks, full awed.
Then held his sobbing mother close,
And, closer still, his God.

Olivia O’Rourke

The Worth of It

“The world offers you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness.”

- Pope Benedict XVI

The sun wasn’t up yet. The orange light from the lampposts encircled us as my team and I ran our morning workout around the lake. We always did the kilometer workouts there. The lake had a path around it and was the perfect size. The ceaseless impact of the cement was wearing on the knees, but the light from the streetlamps kept us from tripping over the cracks in the worn path most of the time. There were a few weeks I went to class wearing a Band-Aid over a scrapped knee like a six-year-old. At the start of the workout, we split off into groups based on our running paces. Some of the faster woman could run eight reps in the time I could run six; most of the boys could run ten.

That morning the sound of the alarm set off the same internal debate that it usually did. My body refused to move, even to turn off the alarm. I could text coach telling him that I couldn’t make it, that I was feeling too fatigued. I groaned, knowing that the rest of the team was just as tired as I was, maybe more so. Papers and midterms had stolen most of our sleep the past couple weeks. I wished I was sick. Very sick. Then I could miss classes too and just sleep for twenty-four hours. After a few minutes of failed attempts to convince myself that I was ill, other excuses trickled into my mind. The team didn’t need me. I wasn’t fast enough to score any points and I probably never would be. Why train as much as those that did and could?

But my conscience refused to be rebuffed by these arguments. After all, they were made every morning and did not gain ground with repetition. They could never alter the facts. I had a commitment to fulfill. Once I got up I would be fine, and if I didn’t get up I would have to explain to Coach and each of my teammates that I passed in the hallway on my way to class. At that point of the semester it wasn’t courage, or habit, that got me up. Some have called it dedication. But dedication requires an aim towards a goal. I had none. My mile time was completely artificial to me. It had no call to define me, no business in claiming two hours of my morning. But they thought I could do it, or at least they said I could. My coach, my parents, my teammates. In the most encouraging way, I felt that they told me if I just tried harder I could do anything. I could make that time. I didn’t

know what peer-pressure was until I came to college. Dedication? Maybe. Or just fear of failure.

I dragged myself out of bed and started braiding my hair. I always had my hair braided. Ponytails never stayed in cause my hair was too thick and they pulled anyhow. I wondered what would be for breakfast after the workout. Breakfast was the most reliable meal in the cafeteria. They always had oatmeal and waffles. On a special day the potatoes were good. The toughest mornings were when my body was aching for fresh, juicy fruit. I pulled on my cool mint shoes. I usually preferred a darker color like burgundy, but these were a good brand and had been on sale. They had seen about two hundred and fifty miles in the past two months. I would have to change them out soon. I grabbed my white Hydro Flask and biked to the weight room to meet the team.

As always, Coach started with a prayer and then explained the workout. Every morning, even if he told us to do a 90-minute-long run, he always finished with a proud smile and the same phrase, “And that’s it!” He ought to have been a salesman; every day he sold us a workout as if it was a piece of cake. He made it sound so easy. He could make life sound easy. The only thing he didn’t lie to us about was racing. He told us outright that racing hurt. But we did it.

“What’s the prayer intention for this rep?” one of the girls called. Three or four intentions were shouted out as we rolled into the fourth lap. One more step, one more step. I could dimly see my teammates’ bright pink and orange running shoes in front of me.

“Good work, good work! Eyes up!”

My teammates ponytails swooshed from side to side. “Maybe I won’t do this next year. Maybe I’ll be practical and focus more on classes and sleep.” One of the blue and green ribbons fell from one of my teammate’s hair. I filed my nail on the concrete snatching it up.

One more step, one more step. I listened to try and match their steady, deep breathing and heard the clinking of my miraculous medal. Coach shouted the boys’ paces from the far side of the lake as they crossed the line. The morning larks sang back in reply. My lungs were getting tight. The black cement was determined to prove that it was tougher than my shins and the arch of my foot was remembering an injury from a race over a year ago. “Maybe running on my toes will help my shins for a few

minutes. Nope! Terrible idea. Golly, now my calves hurt.” The only thing that ever helped my shin-splints was slowing down. But the other girls had lapped us.

“Good work, ladies! Let’s go. Offer it up!” called one of the team captains as she passed.

One more step, one more step, one more step. I could do one more step; but how fast? The sun was just about to rise, but I still couldn’t see clearly. I looked down the path in front of me and focused my gaze on a palm tree. It became terribly clear, but everything else was just a blur. One more step, one more step. We were approaching the loop’s halfway mark. It was a stone bridge with an incline of about twelve feet. The hills of my home state were five hundred times as high and twice as easy. But then we were at the top and running down. Now I could speed up, just go, getting faster, little by little, till I crossed the line. But the sharp turn at the bottom cut my pace. One more step, one more step. Why wasn’t I going faster? It didn’t matter. I was across the line and jogging the recovery.

We grouped up for the fifth rep and started. One more step, one more step; too late, I was already flagging. I told myself that I didn’t resent my teammates’ speed, reassuring myself that I could match it if I wanted too. My mind wandered back to the beginning of the season and Coach’s voice echoed through my head, “You have the Who and the Where and the How. But make sure you have your Why.”

The boys had come back around by this time. We heard the chimes of their watches starting as they approached the line behind us, and then they sped past as we all turned the corner. That’s when I saw her.

She was sitting there, on the cold mettle bench at the corner, in the orange spotlight of a streetlamp. She was looking out across the lake at the rose sky as the stars fell behind her. The lines on her face told a tale of some eighty years. Her hair was a beautiful white, and was in a thin braid, tied at the end by feathering, silver and blue school ribbons. Her clothes were simple, a plain dress and leather sandals, wet with dew from the grass, and a beautiful, lavender, wool sweater that had seen much wear. Her bony, shaky hands rested on a carved, wooden cane. On her wrist was a polished, silver bracelet, just delicate enough to have been a gift from a young boy. A slender, gold wedding band was on her left ring finger, glimmering, but not polished, as if it hadn’t been off her hand in over sixty years. A wistful look was in her eyes when she smiled, watching the run-

ners speed by in the raw energy of youth, with worn faces, wind tossed hair, and determined eyes. She saw each and every one of us, noticing who ran in a stride and who was a loner, seeing the subtle difference between someone competing against a teammate or gently pulling them along.

My soul stopped, facing her through the forest of my teammates, looking at the flower of age through the stems of youth. It was like the opposite of driving through a forest. It was the forest that sped by. She sat still. She had come to the end of time, while we were plunging into it headlong.

My teammates were pulling away from me. They were light footed, those girls. Their feet barely touched the ground before they sprang back up. Each of them had a different Why. Scholarship, fitness, comradery. I'm sure at least a few of them had an Olympic dream.

At the beginning of every season one of the seniors would speak to the team and give advice on how to balance being a student and an athlete. Each year they made the same claims; pray, keep your priorities straight, every teammate is important. Whether they are the first or last across the line every teammate needs to give their all. Even if they felt eighty percent, the team needed every percent of that eighty.

At that moment I just wanted to be curled up in my bed.

I looked up at the last of the stars fading into the dawn. It would be grand to sit comfortably and watch them, like the old woman. Maybe with a cup of tea. She must have come to look at the stars as well as the sunrise or she wouldn't have been there so early. I realized, she hadn't been facing the sun rise but the reflection of its colors in the sky. It was the stars that she had been looking at. I had often thought of doing just that when the cross-country season ended. I never did though.

“Let's Go! Last rep!”

The old woman was gone when we next turned the corner; she must have gone to continue her walk. She had risen before the sun and seen it rise. That had been her challenge for the day. Ready and waiting she had beaten the day itself.

I took a deep breath and moved my arms in rhythm with my quickening feet. One more step, one more step, one more step, one more step. A stitch

started to knot itself in my side as I lost my breathing pattern and the nerves in my legs went into panic. But the more it hurt the faster I went, focusing on my breathing and moving my feet more and more quickly, so that before they could register the pain from each previous step I had already taken another one. My Claddagh ring felt cold as I clenched the ribbons in my hand. A drop of sweat fell into my eye as I squinted against the sun and the wind. It was the wind of my speed, though, and it felt exhilarating. As we turned off the bridge the sun raised her head and peaked over the horizon on my left, blinding my good eye. I shut both and I felt the sun on my face and shoulder and my medal slap against my cheek. I must have been near the edge of the path; the long grass brushed against my knees. I saw the picture if the old woman on the bench. I heard coach calling out the girl's times as they crossed the line.

Then I heard my name. I opened my eyes and saw my teammates ahead of me, jogging, panting, lying on the ground. The pleasure on their faces was mingled with surprise when they saw how close I was behind them. They started cheering me on without catching their breath.

“Let's go!” “You've got it!” “Finish strong!” “Bring it in!” “All the way!”

Maybe the team needed my individual effort, even if I never scored any points. But I needed the team to cross the line.

I tried explaining to one of my teammates afterwards. I never tried again.

“You good? You really picked up the pace on that last one!”

“I think so. I figured if she could do it I could.”

“Who?”

“The woman on the bench. Did you see her?”

“Like, fifteen minutes ago? Yeah. Just for a second though. We were going pretty fast.”

“Oh, but it only took half a second to see – She looked like the end of time itself – .”

“Wow, wow, let's be respectful of her age...”

“No - No - that’s not what I meant! – She made it out here – like she’d been – she came out to see the stars – just for me - Did you see her ring? - I bet her husband used to watch the sunrise with her - Maybe that’s why she does it still - I wonder if she prefers the stars or the sunrise – or maybe the way one melts into the other.” May haps if I hadn’t been gasping for air these scattered fragments would have been cohesive. But I doubt it.

“Say what now?”

“Nothing. It doesn’t matter.”

Later that night I tried telling my roommate as I sat on my bed. She was... slightly more understanding.

“Well of course you have to give your best in everything you do. What did you think life was about?”

She was a straight A student.

Eventually I gave up trying to explain and instead considered the red ink on my weekly Latin quiz which was lying in the open folder on my desk. Seventeen correct answers out of twenty. It would have taken me fifteen minutes of studying to have gotten those right. I had a full twelve hours before the next one. I rolled off my bed and dug out the textbook.



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