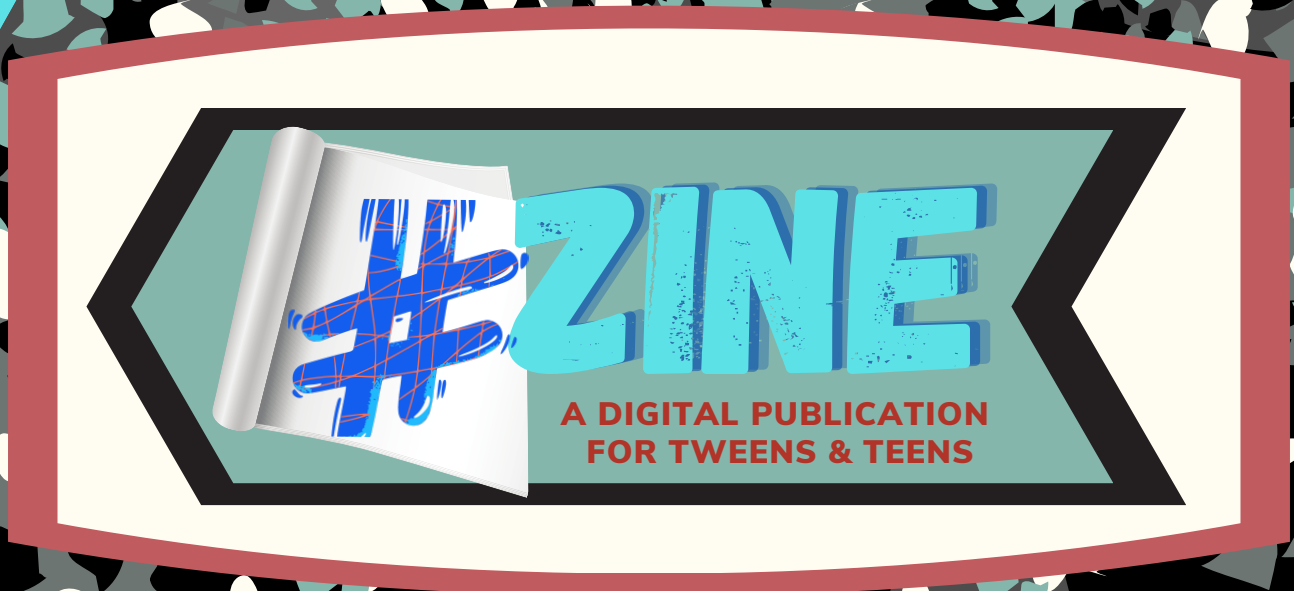


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High School



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A NOTE FROM MISS BLAIR



The Teen Advisory Group just held the 2023 Fantasy Writing Contest this January, and they had some outstanding writers submit their work for consideration. I was lucky enough to help judge the entries and was floored by all the amazing submissions from our local community of writers from grades 6-12.

In true #Zine fashion, we wanted to celebrate all these inspiring writers and have given them their own editions- one for grades 6-8 and one for grades 9-12. This edition is for our awesome high school participants!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

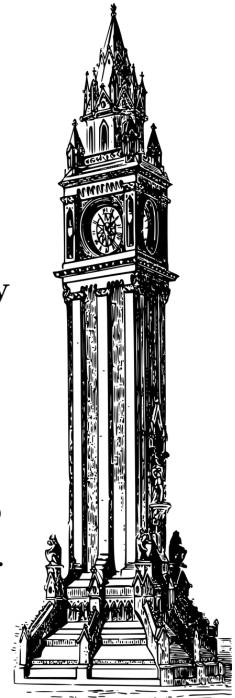
Page 1)	A Note from Miss Blair & Table of Contents
Page 2-3)	1st place: The Banished King of Morgara by Taylor Phelan
Page 4-5)	2nd place: Silence in Beryl's Swamp by Ethan Potts
Page 6-7)	3rd place: Forgotten Melodies by Elena Gonzales
Page 8-9)	Midthorn is Ours by Iva-Mae Bosley
Page 10)	"Dragon Snarl" art by Megan Engle
Page 11-12)	1897 by Gabriel Garfield
Page 13-14)	Discovery Awaits! by Adam LoBaido
Page 14)	"Red Fire Dragon" art by Megan Engle
Page 15-16)	Inheritance by Connor May
Page 17-18)	Overthrown and Underdetermined by Ty Miniati
Page 19)	The Burnouts by Clairee Myers
Page 20-21)	A Close Call at the Ball by Joel Nelson
Page 22-23)	A Candle by Evelyn Van Tuyt
Page 24)	"Dragon Embrace" art by Megan Engle
Page 25-26)	The Secret of the Well by Iris Van Tuyt
Page 27-28)	All the Stars in the Sky by Jaret Zizz
Back Cover)	About Write Spot & Teen Advisory Group



THE BANISHED KING OF MORGARA

by Taylor Phelan

The ebony clock struck twelve, and a long, dry grin grew on the Banished King of Morgara's face. He thought of the twelve nobles in his court, each with their own dragons and attitudes of such arrogance and gluttony they seemed to embody the very sins mankind sought to forget. The Banished King of Morgara thought of his old court again as he clandestinely swapped out his broom that he had been sweeping the dirty street with for a sharp sword that seemed to glitter in the light of his imagined revenge. Still, the clock rang out with heavy, sweeping strokes, echoing and booming along the dirty streets that had once shone with glory. The Banished King brought his shadowed eyes up to the clock decorated with the scales of the dragon lords of old. He paused in his step to listen to the very last, sharp ring. The world fell into a profound silence. From the rawboned, sniveling rats and beggars of the streets to the glorious dragons and lords of the skies, every being listened to the clock, but now he would ensure no ears in the castle could listen again.



The Banished King passed underneath the clock on his way into the lush gardens that had once belonged to him. No palace guard shifted their eyes to him, for he had learned to disguise himself as one of their own. Men, in this world, in his world, believed in righteous dominion over the rest of the creatures that crawled desperately in hopes to find purpose. Those that men considered monsters—dwarves, goblins, or any creature with a smaller stature than them—were banished, just like the King. Men considered themselves higher than any creature that stood taller than them: dragons, elves, or perhaps treants in their fabled stories of old. The Banished King loved to think about all of these creatures, for he knew that he held power over them. He once had power over men, too. With the sharp sword at his side, he could bring honor to this world once again. He could bring truth to men, even dominion over them. The Banished King set aside his thought and regarded the small garden around him with disdain. Once teeming with life and beauty, only a few plants stood alive now. A patch of turquoise and crimson flowers blew in the harsh wind, but around them, the grass had dried up and been ruined by the new King.

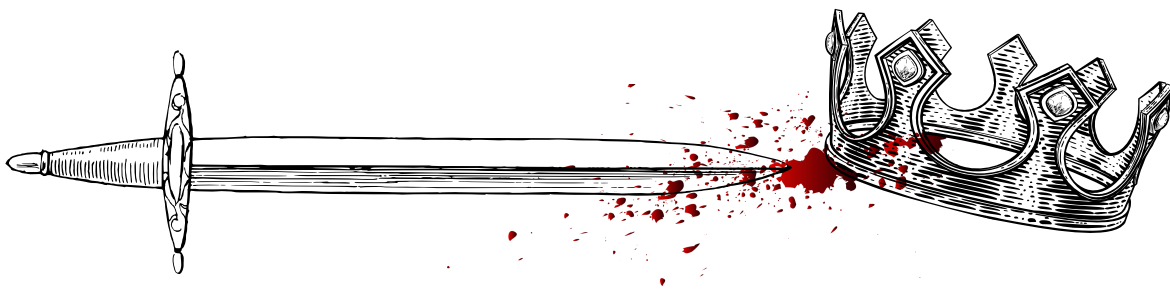
He waited. The Banished King had patience beyond every man he had ever known. He waited in the halls that he once ordered men through. As he waited, he heard swelling music in his mind. He imagined the royal balls and parties filled with salted meats, wine, and elegant gowns swirling with the sweet sound of the cello and violin players filling the ballroom. He thought of the crimson tapestries, the golden goblets, and the statues of..

Continued on Page 3

THE BANISHED KING OF MORGARA- CONTINUED

...proud dragons all around the shining hall. It belonged to him. He instinctively tensed up with desire, with lust and absolute, desperate need, but the Banished King then relaxed as he remembered what he had set out to do. He remembered the Queen that had once stood by his side; now, crushed under the weight of scandal and treachery, she stood beside her stepbrother as he wore the Banished King's crown in utter dishonor. The years of the new King's reign seemed to slow to a crawl with every day passing in waves of disease or war. The Banished King had survived with one purpose set in his mind: blood.

When his waiting finally paid off, he found himself standing in front of the court of twelve nobles with their twelve dragons joining in the expansive hall. Mirrors, the Banished King realized, now stood all around, reflecting the men and their sinning ways. He kept his word polite and broad, giving all of the men enough time to chug—unbeknownst to them—their poisoned goblets of wine. He watched with a grin as each one of them fell, their souls shattering in eternal fields of shadow. The dragons, once thought to be proud and brave, fled the moment their masters drew their last breaths. The Banished King, brandishing his heron-marked sword, moved from hall to hall as if he were a ghost risen from the depths to swiftly bring death upon all those that walked in the halls of the palace that once stood in the palm of his hand. He watched the life in all their eyes give one last sparkle before falling dull. From the courtyard to the ballroom he passed, and no one could put up a fight against the Banished King. His sword moved and danced. His eyes, alit with the flame of vengeance, were the last eyes anyone looked upon before dying in pools of the blood they deserved. He soon made it to the King and Queen of Morgara, and before their enraged screams could reach any passing ears, their bodies lay still and bloody with all of the others. The Banished King plucked his crown from the blood-soaked scalp of the man that had dared to take his place, and when he placed the golden crown upon his head once again, he was no longer the Banished King; though quickly he realized the crown did not fit upon his head. It was far too big, and the throne he looked upon suddenly seemed a giant. The Banished King promptly ignored it and turned aside. He strode out to the tallest balcony of the palace and gazed out upon the courtyard full of silent bodies with glazed, lifeless eyes. He lifted his arms and stared at the gathering storm in the gray sky. His laugh, the only noise now that every soul lay dead, echoed through the palace of death and blood. As he stood alone, he smiled with only the glorious smile of the King of Morgara.





SILENCE IN BERYL'S SWAMP

by Ethan Potts

It was quieter than usual in the swamp. The frogs must not be enjoying the rain today, Beryl thought as she gathered some herbs for her garden. She knew that this was strange. The frogs and toads were usually rambunctious in this kind of drizzling weather. She continued pulling a turquoise onion from the mud. Turquoise onions made for amazing spells when used correctly. Beryl was one of the few witches this side of the swamp that knew how to draw the plant's full power out. All of the other witches tried tricks and spells and truth serums to learn how Beryl had such powerful turquoise onion spells. Some even attempted trial and error, brewing hundreds of combinations, but none of them could figure out the secret. None of them thought to ask Beryl how she made such powerful spells, even though she would have told them that the secret is to always include a single peppercorn in whatever spell you are brewing.



Satisfied with the amount of herbs she'd gathered, Beryl stood up and said a quick cantrip to get the worst of the mud off of her knees. The soil magically dusted off of her dark green skirts and onto the soft ground. She grabbed a few glitter blackberries on her way inside. She admired how they sparkled and popped one of them in her mouth. It was sharp and delicious. Once inside, Beryl took off her muddy boots. The boots stayed where they were. She nudged them gently, surprised. She nudged them again. The boots were usually quick to stomp to their cozy shelf by the fireplace, but this time they slowly walked over to it. Like the frogs outside, they seemed to be a little gloomy today.

Her skirts swooshed by the sleeping kittens as Beryl took her armful of herbs to the kitchen. Her small cottage was softly lit by a few candles and a small fire in the fireplace. There were oil paintings on the walls. Plants and cats lazed everywhere. Her dog was lying on the couch, a big mutt that her stepbrother had given her as a guard when she moved to the swamp. It didn't matter much that the dog stayed silent at even the most conspicuous of commotions, since Beryl herself could handle what little trouble the swamp brought to her doorstep. On one wall hung all of Beryl's musical instruments. There were fiddles, guitars, and all sorts of creative little noisemakers. There was a big, warm cello propped against the side of an upright piano. All of the instruments were silent. Outside, night was just falling and the gray sky was getting darker. Beryl politely asked the curtains to close. She had to ask again, a little bit louder that time. I really need to get going on this potion, Beryl thought as the curtains crawled shut.

Continued on Page 5

SILENCE IN BERYL'S SWAMP- CONTINUED

She leapt into making her potion. She hurried about the cottage, stoking the fire, chopping ingredients, saying what lines of poetry were needed for the spell to have the necessary effect. She was uncomfortable with how silent the cottage was. She hummed a tune to distract herself and took a few shortcuts for time. This spell was simple and didn't require the extra power boost that being meticulous would have provided. She couldn't find her jar of peppercorns amongst the cluttered shelves of ingredients, so she skipped that step. She roughly chopped the turquoise onion rather than finely dicing it and she didn't strain the seeds out of the mashed glitter blackberries. She added all of the other herbs that the spell called for and said a few magic words. Her foot tapped impatiently as she waited for the concoction to heat up over the fire.

When the potion was finished, she was left with a warm, purple, jam-like paste in a small glass jar. She hurried over to the cello. One of its strings had snapped that afternoon, causing it and the entire house to fall silent. Beryl carefully and quickly took the snapped string and put the two ends together, rubbing a bit of the potion on the injury. The string mended itself. After a simple spell to tune the newly fixed string, the cello started playing. Beryl felt the entire cottage and all of its occupants breathe a sigh of relief. The other instruments joyfully joined in. She heard the frogs outside begin to croak along. The fire grew brighter and more candles lit themselves. The cottage was filled with a warm glow. The curtains swayed back and forth to the melody and the boots gently tapped by the fire. The dog wagged his tail and the kittens began to play chase around the room. Beryl danced to the symphony, pleased that she helped fill the aching silence. The entire swamp was much happier when a waltz was playing.





FORGOTTEN MELODIES

by Elena Gonzales

It wasn't my fault, you have to trust me. Some say that the world needed the transition. That it needed to be flipped upside down. Others say that it was changed because of excess sin or lack of following our divinities- if you even believed in those. Some blamed reckless magic, while the rest tried not to think about it, for if you dwelled too long on the twisting turquoise maze of behemoth trees that had overthrown our oceans, the icy crystalline power that had eaten away at the worlds of all, it might just break your mind. Whatever you believed, It wasn't me. Even I lack that kind of power. Nevertheless, I was there the day the lost kingdom fell.

I was there when the residual vibrations upended the order of magic in the marble city. When man's dissonance was finally freed and their darkest desires became manifest, the city fell from the inside. I watched, disregarding the chaos, and vigilantly observed the young heir, as he was carried out of the castle in the arms of the chef. I had come back to retrieve that heir when the world changed. And I smiled as the boy was carried off. Perhaps, well, perhaps this could be interesting. I watched, with casual intrigue as the child was raised, never quite interfering, but always just out of sight, around the corner, in case.

The chef taught the child to be quiet. To speak softly. For words and emotions are powerful things and you must be careful of them. He was mine to look after, to train, by order of the boy's mother, but I could always wait. The chef tried to teach the boy which words had symmetry and which were imbalanced. Which tones caused which words to vibrate and make something happen. And the child learned. He learned how to speak without broadcasting his emotions. Resonance, and how to sing with symmetry and connect to the Aria. He was, to say the least, very powerful. He could sing the animals to sleep and the flowers to grow. He could speak symmetry and make the clouds go away, or weave Aria's melody into life. As he grew he learned the magic of other things that made music. The piano, the cello, and the guitar were the only instruments the chef had to offer. The child mastered them easily, adding to his powerful Resonance. I had known that the royal family was descended from long forgotten Harmonies, but I had never expected him to hold so much Resonance. I had assumed that because I had gotten so much, that the little heir, my stepbrother, would have gotten less. The chef tried to dissuade the boy from asking about the turquoise trees or the crystalline frost, but he was curious. He wandered down to what used to be the coast of the sea, to stand on the frozen sand and look down into the unnatural forest. He could feel...



Continued on Page 7

FORGOTTEN MELODIES- CONTINUED

...the Resonance that the frost and forest had, and it drew him. The trees were miniscule at the very edge of the shore, yet still proportioned like a full grown tree. They got bigger as the earth sloped deeper, their tops staying even with the ground, even as they got taller to compensate for the depths. The dark frost covered the ground of the beaches and the ground that sloped away. It sang softly, if you knew how to listen. I didn't turn the oceans to unnatural trees, nor the ground to singing frost, but I had heard of the divinities that could. And despite all of my power, I never wanted to meet them. The boy wandered further every day, running his hands along the geometric, dark violet frost as it shone like glitter along the trunks of small trees. He couldn't see me as I rode the whistling wind above him, making sure that the other beings in the unnatural wood didn't come any closer. One particularly bad day for the boy sent him running to the frost shore, humming in an attempt to calm his Dissonance, but when he reached it, he yelled across the tops of the twisted trees. His powerful voice echoed with Resonance as it ripped across the ground. Silence. Then the ground began to fall. The frost-covered shore collapsed downward, like a sinkhole had opened up beneath him, swallowing the smaller trees. They then grew to reach the height of the rest, and the dark frost surged outwards, covering the ground like a sandstorm would claim the dunes. When the movement stopped, the boy was left hanging on the edge of the sinkhole he had created, legs flailing wildly. The now perfectly still woods sang softly, murmuring words in a strange language. Aretev'a oul'avon ajahla estel'el. I shivered at the words, feeling them more than I heard them, their confusing combination of Dissonance and Resonance only giving off the emotion of peace. Somehow it was a dark peace. I moved over to the boy, murmuring soft words to lift him out of the ground. He stumbled to his feet, and I caught his arm before he could fall to his knees. He was shaking. "Careful child." I murmured with comforting Resonance. He looked up at me with wide eyes. "Words and emotions are powerful things," I smiled softly, "You should be careful."



MIDTHORN IS OURS

by Iva-Mae Bosley

Nothing could've prepared them for this. Bodies everywhere. Fire blazing in every direction. Gusts of wind whipping relentlessly. The bleak atmosphere was suffocating.

Mithdorn had fallen into complete disarray when Groffmog, the Giant King, took over along with all the other dark creatures of the land. A year had passed since his overthrow, and there were only eight rebels left.

Among the rebellion was a centaur, an elf, three dryads, two griffins, and a dwarf named Raemon. He had lost everything to the war, save only his will to survive. Just a week prior, Raemon watched the last of his kin die when his stepbrother attempted a solo attack on Groffmog himself, only to be eaten alive by one of his goblin cohorts.

But no more.

Today marked the end. The rebellion would end the king's reign or die trying. That morning, as they readied themselves, they said their goodbyes and prepared to march on to battle.

Ikano, their centaur leader, stepped forward and bore a final testimony to the coming battle. His deep, steady voice reminded Raemon of a cello, smooth and confident.

"It is time. Too long have we sat idly by waiting for an opportunity to come our way. Mithdorn belongs to us all, and it is time we reclaim it!"

His cry elicited a chorus of shouts and cheers. Some of them even raised their hands in honor of their flag which waved proudly atop the nearby mountain, its turquoise fabric glistening.

"We'll do whatever it takes," he continued. "Hope may seem lost, but do not give up yet. Groffmog will fall, for Mithdorn is ours!"

The exclamation resounded as they took off toward the king's castle. As they approached, Raemon saw Ikano slice the head off a troll. His elven ally, Wilks, pierced the eye of a cyclops that tried to clobber him into the earth. Raemon even managed to knock out a few banshees with his battle hammer. With each fallen enemy, the rebellion gained ground, closer and closer to Groffmog's residing place. But what they didn't expect to see was Groffmog himself striding toward them through the blood and carnage.

Clad in only his girded loins, the Giant King remained a menacing presence, wielding a double edged sword in one meaty hand and a shield in the other. Two of the dryads sprinted toward him. With utmost confidence, they each drew their weapons and ran as fast as possible to stop the king in his tracks, reckless though it may have been. By the time Raemon got close enough to see what had happened, it was already too late. Groffmog had killed them. Raemon saw their bodies crushed by the Giant King's immense foot. One moment breathing, fighting, the next, bloody, lifeless, dead.



Continued on Page 9

MIDTHORN IS OURS-CONTINUED

At times, it seemed they had a chance. Ikano would get in a slash here or there. A griffin flew over Groffmog's head, tearing his talons through the thick skin that presided.

It didn't matter, though. Wilks lodged an arrow in his throat, only to be gouged in the heart by a minotaur from behind. Both griffins flew around the king's waist, but were batted out of the sky by the flat side of his sword. Neither arose again.

Raemon noticed the king was preoccupied by the last remaining fighters, Ikano and Charise, the dryad. He saw his chance and took action, sneaking up on the king from behind. His height helped him to stay low. Raemon leapt up, grabbing onto one of the hairs from Groffmog's calf, and started to climb the burly monster of a beast. It was a treacherous climb. Every time the giant took a step, Raemon nearly lost his grip, let alone from all the other distractions.

Raemon only managed to reach just above Groffmog's knee when a tremendous boom caused him to swing too far out and let go of the strand he'd been holding onto. Raemon flipped through the air for a few seconds before miraculously finding himself reaching out and touching the Giant King's finger. He quickly grabbed whatever he could and held on for dear life.

However, Groffmog's hand did not stop moving. Raemon soon realized why his hand had been in reach in the first place as he spotted Ikano and Charise. Although they had fought long and hard, they were forced into a defensive. Groffmog had reached his sword hand to his side before releasing a swing of his massive blade directly toward them. Whatever plan Raemon had come up with to save them from their gruesome demise was of no use now. Just as soon as he saw his fellow rebels in the midst of all the destruction, they were gone... dead.

At the extent of the king's swing, Raemon could no longer hold on. He soared high and long before rapidly descending, the world around him momentarily becoming a sea of dust and glitter. Unfortunately for Raemon, he landed in the muddy bank of the Sige River, giving him just enough time left to die in his misery.

The pain was like none other Raemon had ever experienced. Upon impact, he heard several cracks and tasted blood in his mouth, accompanied by a most severe burn spreading like a wildfire all across his body.

Raemon had failed. Nothing could have pleased him more than to die on the rough, unforgiving mud, just as he deserved. And although angry and defeated, Raemon couldn't help but feel a sense of relief flood through him. The war was over. At least he had gone down fighting.

Raemon's senses were in and out of focus. As he lay still and immobile in his suffering, he could hear the faint twinkling of bells in the distance. A light so pure seemed to encroach on his vision, and the pain of his wounds melted away, a familiar warmth enveloping him. As he welcomed death, the last thing Raemon saw was a turquoise flag fall to the ground.



DRAGON SNARL

by Megan Engle



1897

by Gabriel Garfield

"At the beginning of time, nine types of magic were formed. Air, Water, Fire, and Earth are the most known, but there exist five more obscure forms: Darkness, Light, Life, Consciousness, and Time. Time was the magic that marked the beginning of creation itself. These nine forms helped to shape the universe as we know it today. These forms of magic can only be found in the ancient texts of a lost city. A city that once was- and might still be- home to an ancient civilization that was one with magic. It is rumored that this city still exists today in a mysterious island group located within..." he paused for a dramatic effect, "The Bermuda Triangle!"

The crowd immediately dispersed. Disappointed, he turned to his best friend, Emma, who was staring at the photograph she received earlier that day. It was May of 1897.

"No one will believe you. Yes, it makes sense, but people only like to believe in things they can see and touch. Like a photograph! This is magic that people can see and touch!" she said.

"They would be able to see and touch this magic if they would listen and join our expedition-" he said, before he was cut off.

"To risk their lives for something they might see?"

"They will see. And besides, photographs are not magic. They are technology," he said.

"Cedric, no one is going to spend money to go on your long expedition to Bermuda. Not even my insanely wealthy stepbrother. We should just leave as soon as possible,"

"We need a crew," he said. "I'm going to go home and call it a day, but tomorrow, I'm going to find us a team."

The next day he awoke with a start. Someone was knocking. He got dressed and opened the door. It was Emma.

"Good morning! Let's go, I have a surprise for you," she said.

He followed her to the docks.

"Why are we here?" he asked.

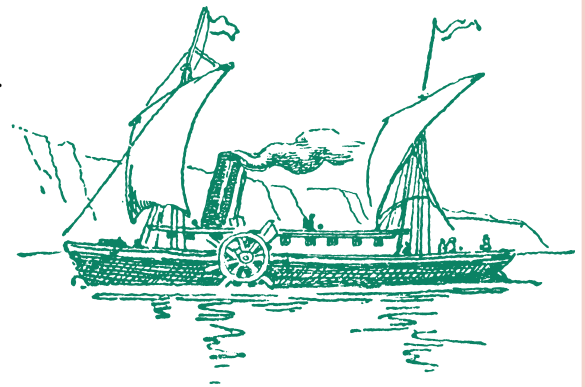
She stopped at a small, turquoise steamboat.

"Surprise! Look inside!"

He did, and what he saw did, in fact, surprise him. There was a whole crew waiting for him, ready to set out to sea.

"My stepbrother did want to help after all. He paid for all of this, including the crew! He couldn't come, though. Here, let me introduce everyone," she said. She moved down the line of people. "This is James, he's a famous cello player, but he's always been interested in voyages like this. This is William, he's a cartographer. And this is Anna. She's unemployed, but she seemed weirdly excited, also,"

Weeks later, they came within the waters of the Bermuda Triangle, and immediately they noticed a change. The winds seemed to be pushing them away, and the further they went, the stronger the winds became. The waves grew and swallowed the vessel, but it persisted, each time coming back up above the water. The crew scrambled around the ship. Lightning struck all around the vessel, tearing through the clouds above. One bolt struck the center of the boat, igniting the wet, wooden floor.



Continued on Page 12

"Rocks! Rocks up ahead!" screamed William. Pillars of rock stood towering out of the depths of the ocean beneath. They veered around the rocks, but one scraped against the side of the steamboat, slicing it.

The clouds suddenly grew so dense that it seemed all light was lost. The lightning came to a halt.

The wind was first. Then came air. The waves next. Next was water. Then the lightning. Fire. Now the rocks. Earth. Then the clouds became thick. That must be darkness, Cedric thought. *That means...*

"It won't be dark for long-" he said, just before being cut off by a blinding explosion of light that erupted from the sky. The lightning returned with fury.

"I can't see! I can't see!" James screamed.

"Emma, there's a pattern. They're attacking us in the order of magic! The next is Life. How are they going to attack with life?" Cedric whispered to Emma.

"What if they don't attack with life? What if they just attack life?" she responded.

James screamed. They heard a splash.

"What happened?!" Emma and Cedric yelled.

"James fell off the edge!" William said.

"No!" Emma cried.

"We can't mourn yet, we're still under attack. They're going to attack our minds next! Try to block them out!" Cedric said.

"Oh, I don't think I want to," said Anna.

"What?!" Emma yelled.

Anna's eyes dilated. She grinned.

"Anna?" Cedric said.

She growled and swung at him with her nails. He felt a sharp pain across his cheek and he yelped. Emma broke next, and she struck Anna with a previously undiscovered strength that sent her flying into the air. She hit the deck and was knocked unconscious. Emma collapsed as well.

Time. Time will be the worst yet, Cedric thought. And it was. Different moments in time flashed in front of the eyes of the two remaining conscious crew members; Cedric and William. They saw war. They saw peace. They saw ice. They saw fire. They saw darkness. They saw light. Each moment flashed by, one after another. The time between each vision shortened until they flashed so quickly before their eyes, it became painful. The rush of contrasting colors was dizzying. They both lost consciousness and joined the others, lying on the deck of the ship.

When they woke up, they were all lying in the warm sand, facedown. Cedric let his eyes adjust and he looked around, but what he saw confused him. Once he thought about it enough to realize what was happening, he couldn't believe his eyes. There were mountains and rivers hovering in the sky. There were lakes and towers, trees and islands. There were people levitating with grace from one flying landmass to the next. Cedric looked around himself, but he saw armored people surrounding him who looked as if coated in glitter, and he knew that this was only the beginning.



DISCOVERY AWAITS!

by Adam LoBaido

Attention, denizens of Yallaga! Looking for a little adventure? A chance to go where no Yallagan has gone before (and maybe even to pick up some neat souvenirs along the way)? The Gopher Gold Travel Company® has you covered. Next year, we'll be embarking on a wondrous excursion throughout the Realm, and the first twenty people who purchase their ticket before Rabalom fortysecond will receive a special 30%-off discount*! Read on for more details, and remember ... Discovery Awaits!

On Kashlash twenty-third, you and your fellow travelers will board the Gopher Galleon, our company's award-winning airship which will ferry you across the land, held aloft by only the highest quality levitation charms. While aboard, you'll be presented with a variety of the most vibrant victuals from around the globe, including a selection of Alamar glitter spices, an all-you-can-eat thunder-shrimp buffet, and an exclusive starjuice tasting on the evening of the fifth day of the voyage. While not being wowed by the sights or dazzled by the delicacies, feel free to check out the galleon's whirlball field, vibrojelly pool, and, of course, Realm-famous zap-spell arena, all open to anyone who's interested. Last but not least, you'll get to retire each night to your very own luxury cabin, its size magically enhanced to include more space and services. We trust your trip will be one to remember!



Our first destination will be the scenic Blacktar Valley. You'll be treated to a dragon's-eye view of the great valley itself, followed by a guided tour of the subterranean Blacktar Mines (on that note, the orc mining collective which operates in the Mines has kindly asked us to remind all travelers that, during the tour, wearing clothing of the color yellow and use of the word "grimblegronk" will be strictly prohibited, as each of these actions could result in the reawakening of the fearsome Blacktar Pitworm of Yore, which slumbers just below the caverns). After wrapping up your underground escapades, you and your fellow travelers will meet up with a conductor warlock who will send you to Blacktar Village, a nearby tourist town, by charm-rail. There, you'll experience a slice of rural life, dining that evening at the Hairy Hog Inn and listening to a live performance by the chart-topping band, Gnome Jones and the Six Cellos. Before you leave the village, be sure to pay a visit to some of the town's curious characters. These include Smith Gumblepuff, an elf who can (supposedly) levitate objects without using a charm and Sam Spaniel, a man whose stepbrother (allegedly) is a genuine, bona fide half-giant. Both are certainly worth checking out before you go!

After leaving Blacktar Valley, the Gopher Galleon will again set sail in the sky, this time headed for Turquoise Shore, a mysterious beach in the Realm's deep south where the sea turns all it touches turquoise. The Galleon won't touch down there, of course (we tried in the past, but we learned the hard way that, yes, people can be turned turquoise by the sea, and, no, the color does not wash out), but the aerial view will still be stunning; you can count on that. Next up is Skull Crag. There, you'll experience a once-in-a-lifetime encounter with the one and only Great Necromancer, who, after a Q and A session, will lead you on a full tour of his cliffside castle.

Continued on Page 14

DISCOVERY AWAITS!- CONTINUED

That evening, you'll join in the celebrations of his six-hundredth birthday, but, unfortunately, you'll have to cut the festivities short as you'll need to return to the Galleon before midnight. Staying later could result in an undesired encounter with the zombies that rise, each night, from his lawn, and, sadly, that would violate our insurance policy. Finally, we've planned to end the voyage by visiting a very special place: The Airborne Archipelago. As you probably know, the earth beneath the Archipelago exhibits unusually low gravity, allowing for the series of islands to float high in the sky. Up there, you'll frolic through fields of cotton candy, swim in seas of sweetest soda, and climb mountains made entirely of pink bubblegum. Unfortunately, due to recent events, we may be forced to cancel the trip to the Airborne Archipelago. So far, the Gumdrops Goblin Conglomerate has refused to accept the trade demands of the Sugar Cyclopes, and it's looking like a clan skirmish may ensue. We'll be keeping a close eye on the news, but, in the *Discount is first-come, first-serve. Terms apply. event of a full-on war, we'll replace that portion of the trip with a lecture by Professor Mothball Higgins about the origin of the Archipelago, complete with a slideshow visual aid. We're sorry plans might change, but we thank you for bearing with us in these trying times; besides, we're sure the lecture will be positively riveting! We sincerely hope you'll join the Gopher Gold Travel Company on this unforgettable journey. New sights, sounds, and sensations are out there, yours for the taking. So, what are you waiting for? Discovery Awaits!

RED FIRE DRAGON

by Megan Engle



INHERITANCE

by Connor May

My grandfather's voice was quiet as he played his cello, "Harper, my girl, this little instrument will be yours one day. Along with everything else here. All for you."

My face must have betrayed how little my 9-year-old self understood him, but even if it didn't my words did.

"Why?" I asked.

He laughed and said "I won't be here one day. Once I'm gone I'd like to give you everything."

"What about Theo?" I asked him. He was my step-brother, just a few years older and seemingly more talented than me in everything. Even at that age, I wasn't sure why I was our grandfather's favorite. His answer wasn't clear when he just told me "You'll see."

That was 12 years ago to the day, and as I now stand in front of the dark mahogany door leading back into the same study I can't help but think back to that conversation. It wasn't the last time I would see him, but it was the last time he was so open. I don't know what changed that or why that conversation is so prominent in my mind, but it's all that I can think about. I look around me before I open the door, but everyone seems to be gone, occupied with my grandfather's funeral. Come to think of it, I don't know why I'm not there or how I even got to the door to the study now. I brush the thought off and reach to open the door, but when I grab the handle I find my hand feels stuck to it, and out of nowhere golden lines seemingly covered in glitter are drawn through the air. It takes me a second to process this, but once I have the lines turn into a turquoise color and the door opens without me even pushing. The study is almost the exact same as I remember it, but it feels empty. I'd never been in here without my grandfather before, and now that he can't be here the room feels cold, as if the towering bookshelves are just waiting for the best moment to collapse onto me and kill me. But that doesn't happen. Instead, I find a note placed on the desk. Normally I wouldn't snoop through someone's papers but I feel drawn to it and when I pick it up I see it's addressed to me.

Harper,

It's been too long. That's my fault of course, and there's always phone calls and the mail, but what I want to talk to you about can't be done in the traditional way. It's about our family and what they stand for. You know that when your father, my son died, your mother married another man and you met his son Theodore. I'm glad that he's been there for you, someone of your own age that you can talk with him, but he isn't my family. I hate to speak of him this way, but his lack of our blood meant that when I tried to teach him our family's ways, he couldn't learn. The realm of the mystic arts is out of his reach.

Continued on Page 16

INHERITANCE- CONTINUED

At this moment I pull back from the letter. I have no idea what he's talking about. It's not like I had ever been told of any of this and there's no way in hell I know how to feel. But I keep reading, I want to know more.

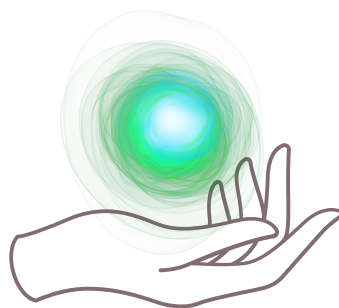
His failure at this may have led to you two drifting apart. He was jealous of you and it led to your parents not letting me teach you, so in a sense, I suppose he knows more than you do at this point. I'm sorry I couldn't teach you anything then, but that's what I'm here to do now.

With love, your grandfather.

I place the letter down with more questions than when I first picked it up. There's nothing else I can see that's for me, and he's dead so I don't see how my grandfather could teach me about anything, so I place the letter back on the table. The old man must have gone senile, I think, but when I shove my hands back into my pockets I find the letter is in them, not on the table where I left it. That doesn't make any sense at all, none of this has made any sense. Magic isn't real, it can't be. But there's nothing else that would explain the lines in the air, or the note sticking itself in my pocket. That means he'd been hiding this from me for years, that everyone in my family was. I can't believe that, any of it. It just sounds so... wrong. It doesn't make any sense. But if it's real that means I only have one option. I need to make this right. This would explain why Theo suddenly started avoiding me. It opens up another can of worms, but I can deal with that later. Theo should be here, I saw him earlier but didn't have a chance to talk. I leave the room and start scouring the halls for Theo. I'm not sure how much time passed back in the study but the halls are darker and there's no light coming in from the windows anymore. It can't have been more than a few hours but I start to panic as I run through the halls. I can't find him, and the only other people are relatives I don't remember and promptly brush off in my search for Theo, and then it hits me. I run outdoors and he's standing next to the coffin, alone. I toss the note to him and ask if it makes sense.

"What do you want?" His expression shows that it does.

"I was thinking, we aren't his generation. We don't need to follow his rules, so we can do this together. Magic means nothing to me and I know I'd like my brother back."



OVERTHROWN AND UNDERDETERMINED

by Ty Miniati

"I kneeled in the cavernous vault in the second-highest tower in the citadel on the western half of the city on the day of the coup, having once thought myself a hero and not yet knowing I was merely a subject. It was evening, the twilight of my idols. The spirits I'd released, in their mad rush to destroy the citadel, had torn through the vault. In my despair I noticed strange things, the glitter of gold coins and the dead soldiers' armor, a cello drawn on a yellowed page torn from an ancient spell book. I could not stay for long, for the citadel was crumbling beneath me as I mourned my stepbrother and cursed his name. I stayed.

It was not what he had said that tormented me, for I knew it well- it was that *he* said it. As you know, demon- for perhaps you kept him alive long enough to break me- I, as part of the eastern faction, "knew" nothing but the Revolution and the ingenuity of our leaders and the strength of our golems and soldiers. Pyrrho, as part of the western faction, "knew" but the Revolution and the ingenuity of his leaders and the strength of their golems and soldiers. Yet how could that have been? I had always harbored seditious thoughts (despite earning this mission through my penitence) and with this bait, they swarmed my mind. If *I* knew, then *Pyrrho* knew, for our only grounds were what the leaders and propagandists of our sides taught us, and somehow they taught us the same. But if we both knew, then the Revolution was impossible, and if I did not know, then Pyrrho did not know, and the Revolution was equally impossible. And that ruined me. Did he exist then? Did I exist then? Did anything exist then? What sadism prompted you to build illusions who knew they were illusions, to burn through the veil? And why must I tell you my story? Did Daedalus yearn to know of the Minotaur's life in its labyrinth, so that he could design a maze even more nightmarish? As I must, I shall return to my tale- though surely you know this, for you were its architect and witness.

Then the body's eyes opened. They had turned turquoise and gleamed with an insane light. The body levitated, contorting itself into excruciating positions, leering horribly. It was possessed - surely by the spirit that armed the trap- but some insane impulse led me to think of the demon Pyrrho had mentioned, the trickster whispering illusions into my mind.

"What are you?"

The vault flickered, evaporated, reformed. A great thunder came from below as the citadel collapsed. The spirit spoke.

"Is it not clear? I am your demon."

"No- you don't exist! You can't exist! Something must be true!"

"I don't exist. Neither do you. You are nothing but a piece on a board in a game in a story in a demon's dream, a flickering point spun back and forth eternally. What is it that you see, you touch, you hear? It is my illusion. Perhaps you, too are illusory. Perhaps, if you dig beneath...

Continued on Page 18

OVERTHROWN AND UNDERDETERMINED- CONTINUED

"...the surface, you will find nothing beneath, and you would fall if you were there to fall. There is nothing beyond the veil, nothing but I, your Pyrrhus, and my game. The phantasmagoria flickers before you- ah, yes, you now realize! Everything you have ever known is a lie! It is my fantasy, and you are my puppet. Perhaps I, too, am a puppet manipulated by another demon. But if so, what are you? A shadow cast by nothing."

It- you- had revealed itself to me. And with my world, everything I had held true withered. Had I not believed the demon, I would have when I fell through the illusions it conjured. Though I must tell my story, the things I saw do not bear repeating. Was there still a Revolution to believe in- had none of my convictions survived?

"Ah, your "Revolution"! There is no revolution. There is nothing but an eternal cycle of war between the city and itself. No- you do not believe me? From above there is no difference between East and West. It matters not for whom you fight. Ever since the king died, there has been no up and down, no right and wrong, nothing but the eternal clash of one halved army in a whirlpool in time. Where is good? Where is evil? Do they lie in the substance of the world, in the banners you bring to war, in the mind that I torment with ease? How can you find these phantoms? Are they even to be found? How is there a right side when both sides are the same?

You will never escape me. Your soul is mine, as you wander through the phantasms painted with its own brush in my hands, never to know anything but your ignorance!" I could hear no more. I tore past it. Surely it was a liar...

It was in a desperate flight from the demon's chamber of dark dreams that I found the tower's only window. It was broken and I climbed through. Fires were burning across the city, the fires of the war began in earnest. Even now Apollenax was leading his soldiers to the battle. But with horror I saw that the layout of the fires was the same from east and west, that both sides burned even as the other. At this dizzying height East and West were identical. The last intact half of the East Palace crumbled as the armies overthrew each other, and the West Palace fell with it. Suddenly I found myself falling, falling with the citadel I had broken. At once I could no longer see the fires, for the demon had taken them as it took everything, as it took me. I now only knew that I was deceived."



THE BURNOUTS

by Clairee Myers

Since magic has become common and power can be harnessed by children, many new careers have been in demand. From managers, who, for a fee, make sure these "heroes" are seen in the best light, to trainers, who see to it that no hero expends too much energy, or gets too much rest. That's a larger fee.

But I handle the burnouts.

Every time some kid passes out from overusing their powers, trying to be like the wealthy, honored heroes on TV, they get brought to me. Some have starved themselves, hoping the strain will somehow help them focus. Others throw themselves into harms way, thinking powers will just manifest if they need them.

They don't.

But the ones who survive find their way into my garage. I don't ask questions. I just wrap the wounds, take down the fevers, and hook up the needed IVs. But every time I see them swallow those tiny turquoise pills that barely fit in their little palms, then pass out on my dirt-stained cot, I want to find the nearest news studio and smash it to bits.

And that's just the ones with powers.

Shockingly, no manager or trainer or reporter ever thinks about the casualties, except to tell them how grateful they should be for being "saved." Too many times they forget to clear the old, crumbling buildings the heroes burn down as "publicity stunts." Too many times a scorched, rag covered victim will stumble in, sometimes fainting before I can clear a bed. I fetch new clothes, clean their faces, and try and get some food in them before they run away.

My patients rarely talk, either because they're in shock or their throats are burned or they're just exhausted. But I remember one, a teenager who got his fingers trapped under a boulder in an avalanche. They had to cut his fingers off to get him out. He just said, very quietly, as I was wrapping his hands, "I used to play the cello."

They could go to a real hospital, with real medicine and real doctors, except they all lack one thing: money. Unless your cousin or stepbrother or someone you know is a hero, no one really cares. They pretend, with the charities and the fundraisers, but all that they raise just goes toward the food, the music, the costumes.

I might buy into it, get caught up in the glamour of the media, if I didn't remember being a scared, lost little kid, gifted with I healing power that burned me out every time I tried to use it. I went everywhere could think of for help, even sitting outside a hero's mansion for a week, until security shooed me away. Because I was grubby, sickly, weak. Nothing like a "hero."

I drifted around, hiding in the old, crumbling buildings that are being disintegrated every day. But I pulled myself up, got control of my power, and opened a sanctuary where no one would ever feel the way I felt the day I learned our world's guiding principle: if you don't glitter, you don't matter.



A CLOSE CALL AT THE BALL

by Joel Nelson



The masquerade ball. An annual dance put on by the king and queen for their closest officials. But I wasn't invited to dance, in fact, I wasn't invited at all. I was hired. My name's not important. All you need to know is that I'm a detective, and this was possibly the most dangerous case of my career. If anyone had any sort of common sense here, the whole issue could have been avoided. The problem in question was a dragon, which was rather unusual in its own right. Dragons generally stick to their own business and keep out of everyone's way as long as we keep out of theirs. But it seems this particular dragon had something of a vendetta against humanity. Seeing as dragons can shapeshift into humans, the Royal family was concerned that the party might be the perfect opportunity for the dragon to kill some members of the court.

I normally don't receive cases involving royalty, but my stepbrother, the Duke of HazelBurrow, suggested me for the job.

If they had just delayed the party by a few weeks, or at least done away with the masques, I might have been able to solve the problem before it became one. If the job wasn't difficult enough already, I had a time limit. The king and queen, the most likely targets of this dragon, were due to make their appearance at midnight. Complaining wasn't going to solve the case, though, so I surveyed the room, looking for nervous twitches, strange behavior, anything that could give the dragon away. I also looked for the traits of a shapeshifted dragon: clawed fingernails and pointed ears, they also had sharper teeth but that was useless thanks to the masques. A dragon masque caught my eye. No, that's way too obvious. It would be something clever. Dragons can't resist poetic irony and the such. Then again, I chuckled to myself, neither could I. I had donned a mongoose masque myself since I was here to hunt down a snake. As the musicians on their pedestal against the window began their next song, I waded further into the guests in their glittering party gowns and ceremonial armor. I greeted those I recognized from my stepbrother's meetings and noted those I didn't. As I made my way to the hors d'oeuvres, I ran into my brother, who was wearing a turquoise owl mask. A little presumptuous, perhaps, as the owl is meant to symbolize wisdom. "Have you found the dragon yet?" he asked me directly.

"No, and I'm not getting any closer by chit-chatting," I answered him while still studying the guests around me.

"Right! Sorry for the interruption, but I really do need to press you. *Both* our reputations could rest on this."

I roll my eyes at him. "And, you know, maybe the lives of the king and queen, but I get your point."

"I'll let you get back to your work. Just remember to report it to the staff when you find him, and we'll get him out of here quietly."

Continued on Page 21

A CLOSE CALL AT THE BALL- CONTINUED

“Right, of course....” Wait... am I that blind? “The staff...” I whipped around, looking closely at all the servants and guards in sight. My eyes landed on the cello player, who was wearing gloves and his hair was styled to cover his ears. The bell tolls twelve, and on cue, the doors opened to admit the king and queen, both wearing lion masques. I saw the cello player begin to put down his bow and move his hand toward his mask. It was a butterfly, the symbol of transformation. Clever, but it's too late to tell the guards I had to move now.

The world seemed to move in slow motion as I sprinted across the room toward the soon-to-be dragon standing in front of the giant tower window, leaving startled royalty and very confused half brother in my wake. I reached the stage, flung myself toward him, and prayed I was right just as speckles of scales appear on his skin. We crashed through the window and began falling from the tower in a matter of seconds. I clung to the man as we plummeted through the night, and before my eyes, his limbs elongated, wings sprouted from his shoulder blades, horns appeared at the back of his head, and his scream of surprise transformed into a roar of fury. Now I was clinging to the back of a great golden dragon hundreds of feet above the ground. Just how did I get myself into this mess? The dragon prepared to spew deadly fire into the ballroom when a giant crossbow bolt zinged past our heads. A dragon's skin is tough but far from invincible, so with a frustrated bellow, the shining beast decided to flee from the aim of the ballista.

I couldn't help but let out a yelp as the dragon abruptly flipped around to retreat. This, unfortunately, reminded him of my presence. As he tried to crush me between his massive teeth, I hung low on his back, just out of reach. He wasn't entirely out of ideas yet, unfortunately. With a smirk, the cunning beast began barrel-rolling while I clung desperately to its neck. My mask flew off, and I saw through quickly blurring vision that we were approaching the lake the castle was built up against.

I clenched my teeth and tried to stay conscious. I just had to make it to the lake. I just had to make it to the lake. At last, I let go and was flung headlong away from one death and towards another. I had just enough time to straighten myself into a dive with the dragon following mere feet behind before I hit the water with such force it literally knocked the air from my lungs.

The golden terror was rightfully quite upset with me, so he began blasting flames at the water's surface, blocking my escape. I felt like my lungs would explode when a ballista bolt hit the water next to me. Oh, thank the lord for those idiots! The dragon finally retreated, and I resurfaced, gasping for air. After a few moments of regaining my breath, I began swimming back to shore. So much for getting him out of there quietly. All things considered, that could have gone much, much worse. The king and queen were safe. The castle had sustained only minor damage. My brother's oh-so-important reputation was intact, and by some insane miracle, I was not dead. Next time the royal family calls me for a case involving dragons, though, they can find someone else.



A CANDLE

by Evelyn Van Tuyl

Even after ages of dragons and enemies slain, there were shadows come into the west. And these shadows were said to threaten stars – what a thing to come in his time! Fairen did not understand, but he could neither ignore nor forget because the rumors were true: when the night came, when the dawn came, the stars were fading. Star studiers could not understand what had brought it and did not know what to do. But the shadows would soon move until all the lights made to shine over wanderers on lost roads and for glory had ceased to glitter.

Fairen could not let his stars go. They were his stars; his because he loved them. And all these things he knew most strongly one night when he awoke with a song in his heart:

*Light a candle where the deep darkness lies
To keep the light before she fades and dies;
Burn a flame where the growing shadows are
To save the Sunlight and her sunlit Star.
And this shall not fail nor be in vain:
A sooner day will the world attain.*



“What a dream!” he said to himself. The song shook him, but he did not fully understand it; especially about the ‘sooner day.’ What did it all mean? He did not know. But he knew he could not let his stars go. And the song had come to him now, perhaps when it was needed.

“Light a candle,” he whispered. “I wonder what that could mean.”

He asked his friends and studied writings, but he found no answer. The darkness was coming fast and there was no time to wonder any longer. Maybe this was the answer. All that he could do was follow the song, and so he decided in his mind and heart that he would: he would light a candle.

When this thought came to him, he became very excited and filled with such feeling that he burst into tears. But hope was not yet lost, and his stars were not yet dark.

Fairen then decided that he could not go alone – it would be dangerous and dark in the west, and companionship would help him to get there and to have heart enough to light the candle when the time came. But his stepbrother, a studier of the form of stars, was gathered with his fellowmen deep in the west, studying the stars to try and understand what the shadows were doing. His friends would not understand. The only other person he believed would go with him was his brother – not his stepbrother, his full-blood brother who was called Will. But there was a sting there: His brother did not believe; in neither dreams nor the king-come-true nor stars. And yet, if all these things meant nothing to Will, then he likely would not care whether or not he went to the west.

And so, Fairen went to his brother. After he had spoken to him, a queer feeling came over him, and he could not remember a word that he said. But this did not matter. He studied Will’s face and saw a graveness there. But suddenly, a splash of warm colour appeared in his eyes, and he spoke softly.

“I will go, though I do not believe.”

Continued on Page 23

A CANDLE- CONTINUED

Fairen's path was being shaped at his feet.

They packed their things, and when the morning came, with only traces where the days stars once burned, they set off together.

It was indeed a dark journey, and the stars were dimming.

After many days, they stumbled onto cliffs beside the sea, and Fairen knew that they had come into the heart of the west because they were surrounded by mountains, and he could barely see the stars.



And there, Fairen laid aside his pack and drew out something wrapped in silver cloth: a freshly made candle. He held it for a moment against his breast and closed his eyes. He recalled the song again, breathing slowly.

Standing to his feet, he walked slowly toward the edge of the cliff and kneeling he set the candle there. Then he turned and went back to where Will lay cast upon the ground.

"Sit up," Fairen said to him. "Watch for me." He piled some dry wood there and placed stones around it.

Now here was the time.

Although his heart was pounding, Fairen ignited the flame. It burned bright and it made his dark eyes glow and made Will sit up straight, his face growing serious. Fairen carried the flame to the candle, singing softly and sweetly as a cello sings, and bending over he lit it. He watched it flicker for a moment, and then he turned and went back to the wood and lit it all at once.

And suddenly, the candle and fire lit up and burned brighter than nearly any light the world had ever seen – yellow, orange, and gold! A streak of silver burst forth and all around them the world glowed white, like snow falling in the heart of spring. The fire lit the cliffs around them and the once turquoise sea turned to gold. Fairen's dark eyes blazed and Will's glowed. Their eyes, like the stars, took back the light that was won; won by the king-come-true.

"I believe," Will whispered. "Fairen, I believe!"

Laughing joyfully and tearfully, Fairen unwrapped some meat and began cooking it with butter over the brilliant fire. The aroma filled the brothers, and Will began to cry because now he was seeing everything as brand-new.

And as the wine was poured out and the meat was turned over, something caught the new eyes.

"Fairen!" he cried.

Looking up, they saw that in the east the Sun was bursting forth and the day stars lit up as they had at creation! They must have smelled the dinner cooking there, and heard the voices of brothers reconciled.

Here was the sooner day. The nights were never again so long.

Go now, and light your candle.

DRAGON EMBRACE

by Megan Engle



THE SECRET OF THE WELL

by Iris Van Tuyl

Betty-Anne sat by the foot of a small well, crying.

She and her stepbrother Harold had been out exploring in the woods when Harold had tripped and tumbled into the well by which she now sat.

She had no idea what to do. Her first thought was to run for home, but she realized she did not even know the way home. She called into the well for him, but he did not answer. She called out into the echoing woods for help, but no one heard. No one came.

So here she sat now; alone and crying hopelessly. The sun began to set, and night began to draw its dark curtain over the light of day.

Betty-Anne's crying was interrupted by a shout. It sounded almost like Harold calling her name, down from the bottom of the well. She jumped up and looked about. One thing she noticed was that the well looked larger. Not only taller, but wider and deeper. She walked up to the edge and stood on her tiptoes to peek over the edge. She noticed that it was immensely deep, and there was no water. She had not noticed either of these things before. She heard the shout again; only this time it sounded much more like a lady calling her name. Then the calling became more like a chant. As it got louder, it became more like a song. Betty-Anne, who was quite afraid by now, tried to turn to run away, but found she couldn't. She was being lifted into the air.

She struggled but it did no good. She let out a wail as the singing grew louder, and she was carried higher, and the well grew taller. Suddenly, as she was suspended directly above the well, the singing ceased, and she was dropped. She shrieked as she plummeted downward and disappeared into the well's depths.

She felt herself beginning to fall very fast. She was sure that at any moment she would hit the bottom and be dashed into a million pieces. But she didn't. At least, not for some time. Then, suddenly, she stopped and alighted like a feather onto the bottom of the well. She lay there for a moment in a daze.

She then sat up quickly, and looked around. She thought that she had heard the sound of singing. And laughing. And music. She looked about. She then noticed a ring of light on one wall of the well, like when light is shining through a closed door. She reached out and was sure that she felt a doorknob. She thought this strange. She looked up and could see she was so far down the sky was not visible. The only way out was through this door. She turned the knob.

She then found herself stepping out of a large oak tree and into the midst of a party. There were three horses – a black one, a white one, and a brown one, each with a pair of moonlight wings – *jigging on their back legs* while a hare played a tune on his cello. But the hare ceased playing his cello, and the horses lowered to their usual horse positions when Betty-Anne came into sight.

"Not another one!" cried the Hare in disgust.

"Hush, Milton!" cried the Black horse. "Lest I allow the Night Dancers to steal your cello." His eyes, the color of turquoise jewels, sparkled humorously.



Continued on Page 26

THE SECRET OF THE WELL- CONTINUED

The hare, who was apparently called Milton, clutched his cello possessively, yet remained silent.

Talking animals?!!! Thought Betty-Anne. She thought she should flee, but she stayed. She felt something strange but it wasn't fear. The Black horse stepped forward and spoke.

"Hello, I am Regal – Horse Guardian of the Night. I protect the Day Dwellers from the Night Dwellers."

"And I'm Dusk, his companion," the brown horse said proudly.

"And I am Star, his *other* companion," the white horse said, also quite proudly.

"And *I* am out of here!" cried Milton. He stormed away, dragging his cello behind him.

"And you," said Regal, "Are Betty-Anne. Stepsister of Harold, the boy that came about here by falling down the well."

"Is he alright?" asked Betty-Anne fearfully.

"Yes, quite. But now you must come along with us. He is at Glitter Palace with Queen Bratilda."

Upon arriving at the palace, Regal, Star, and Dusk saw Betty-Anne to the great door, and bid her farewell. They then lifted their great moonlight wings, and flew away. She thought she could see them alight upon the moon.

Betty-Anne was never able afterward to describe her joy when she was once again in Harold's arms. He had been waiting for her, and when she had entered the Palace, they had run to greet each other joyfully. He then told her that the Queen needed to see them at once.

"Hello, my dears," Queen Bratilda said as they entered. There was a familiar tone in her voice. She looked at Betty-Anne. "I am the one that sang you here. And I shall soon sing you home, but I have something I need you to do. You see, many people suffer the same fate that Harold nearly suffered today. There is not much we can do but there is something. I shall give you each a flask of glitter. Whenever you come across a well with the mark of Regal upon it, I wish for you to sprinkle some of this glitter into them. It creates a door into our world for those that fall in." She gave them each a flask. "Now, I shall send you home," she said. She began to sing.

The children suddenly found themselves back at the well. They watched it as it shrunk back down to its normal size, and filled with water as the bottom became visible. Down on a small corner stone, a small black horse with moonlight wings appeared. Betty-Anne sprinkled some of her glitter into the well.

"Shall we begin?" asked Harold.

"Yes!" exclaimed Betty-Anne happily. "Let's."

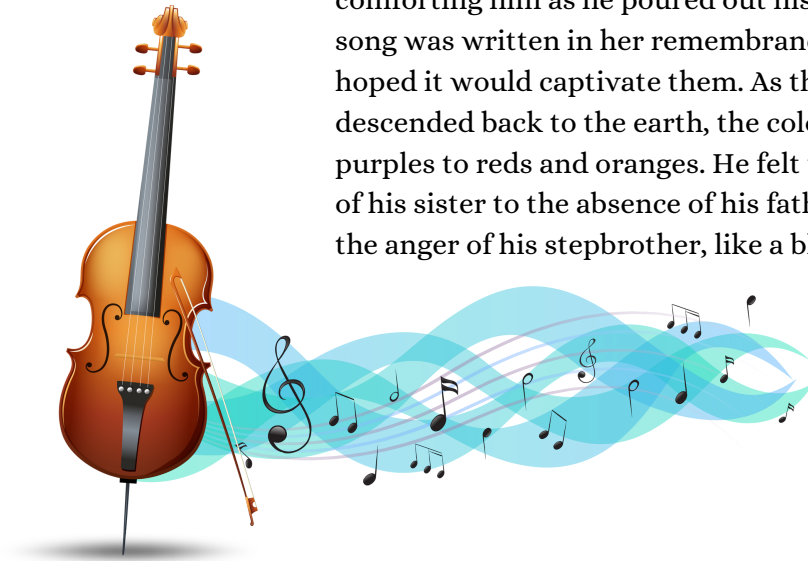


ALL THE STARS IN THE SKY

by Jaret Zizz

Sebastian could hear the roar of the crowd overhead as the anticipation made his breaths shorter and faster. His lungs burned and his heart raced as he slowly ascended the stairs towards the thunderous applause. He squinted as the lights of the theater shone around him. As he crept to the seat placed in the middle of the stage, a hush fell over the audience. With a snap of his fingers, sparkles and glitter rained down around him as his instrument fell into his waiting arms. Sebastian paused for a moment, breathed in, and lowered the bow to the strings of his cello. And at that moment, the rest of the world faded away and all that was left was the music. He could feel the symphony rushing through him, the wake of the emotion leaving him breathless as drops of sweat slid down his face.

The music was alive and he was its vessel as it rose into the night sky, captivating everyone below. below. The light of the stars shone around him, its turquoise glow comforting him as he poured out his heart and soul to the audience. The song was written in her remembrance, for as she had captivated him, he hoped it would captivate them. As the shift in the song came on, he slowly descended back to the earth, the colors around him turning from blues and purples to reds and oranges. He felt the weight of his life, from the passing of his sister to the absence of his father, the disappearance of his love to the anger of his stepbrother, like a blanket of burdens dragging him to the



ground. His grief and melancholy, rage and helplessness all swirling together like the surf in a storm. The bow swept and dipped, going faster and faster as his emotion reached its climax. And as the dam threatened to break him forever, the shift came yet again.

He saw himself in green meadows with the yellow sun glimmering in the bright blue sky above. She was sitting there under the tree, a red and white blanket spread beneath her with a basket resting next to her. She looked up and smiled, the softness of her expression making his heart pound and hands shake. Silently, she patted the place next to her, and he hesitantly lowered himself to the ground. The flowers bloomed up around them, their colors forming a multi-colored tapestry as the butterflies rested on the petals. Yet as everything bloomed around him, he knew that this deepest desire of his heart wasn't really there. He clung to her, feeling her breath on his lips one last time as the flowers died and the sky turned dark. Sebastian sat there in the dark, and he felt the music come to a stop beneath his fingers. In the dark, however, a light began to glow.

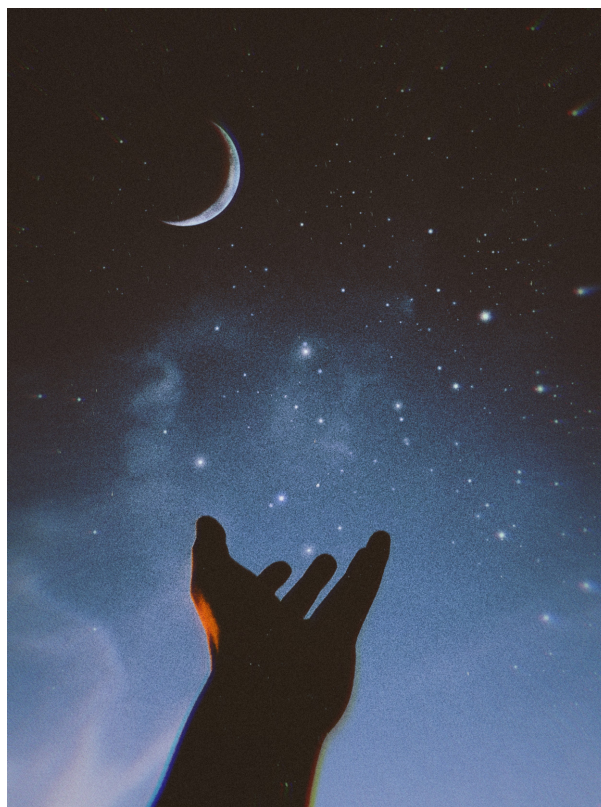
As he gazed at the solitary star, it was joined by one, then another as the spread of stars swept through the sky. And as he found himself back where he had started, the music started up again under his hands, the last strands of melancholy and happiness blending together into a soothing end to his symphony. As the last note faded away, he jolted awake in his chair as the audience watched in silence. Then the rushing noise of applause as the audience rose to their feet, shouting "Encore! Bravo!" over and over as Sebastian bowed.

Continued on Page 28

ALL THE STARS IN THE SKY- CONTINUED

As he watched the audience, however, he noticed that one person in the front row had remained seated. As Sebastian examined the figure, he realized it was his stepbrother, who rose at that moment. Although the noise of the crowd drowned him out slightly, Sebastian could still hear his voice. “Congrats, big bro! That was certainly something! But, sadly, I don’t think that the audience is going to get what they want this time,” he said with narrowed eyes.

Sebastian knew what was coming even before his stepbrother raised his hands, but even then, he wasn’t fast enough to avoid the red light that shot out of his stepbrother’s hands and directly into his heart. He fell back, hearing a voice screaming before realizing it was his own. The audience began shrieking as security guards dove after his stepbrother, who disappeared into the frenzied motion of the crowd. Healers rushed towards to stage, but Sebastian had seen the effects of his stepbrother’s powers before. The light that burned into his skin prevented the regenerative abilities of healers, leaving marks that would never disappear from the victims’ bodies. Sebastian had observed the number of prosthetics growing the neighborhood for some time before he realized just what his stepbrother was doing. No, Sebastian knew that his time was up, even if the frantic healers didn’t know it yet. He lay on his back and gazed up at the stars that he had been dancing among just moments ago in his mind. As his life force flowed out into the ground, Sebastian wondered if what he had seen in his mind had been intentional to help him on his way out of this life. He smiled then, and as he breathed his last and went to his love, he looked up one more time, captivated by all the stars in the sky.





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