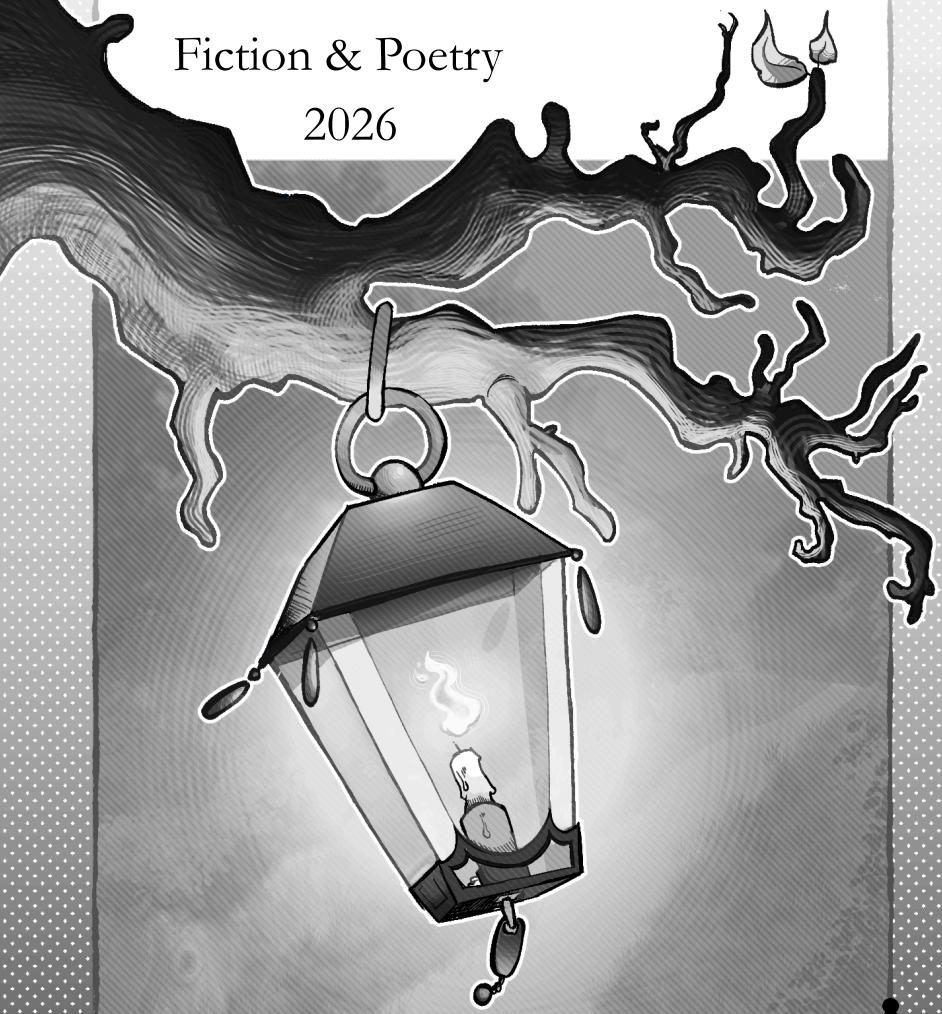
EDEN'S LANTERN

A Literary Journal

Fiction & Poetry

2026



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EDEN'S LANTERN

Where untainted beauty illuminates divine elegance.

ISSUE 1 | 2026

REGENT UNIVERSITY

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Table of Contents

From the Editors — 5

Poetry
Kingdom, *David Athey* — 8
If Sometimes You Hide Your Face, *Dorisa Costello* — 9
Resurrection and Ruin, *Hannah Hopkins* — 11
My First Storybook, *Allie Munro* — 12
Pressed, Not Crushed, *Alishia Smith* — 13
Extra Book, *David Athey* — 16
Rifleman's Road, *Tad Kamano* — 17
Yellow, *Michael Elam* — 19
Last Call for Fredericksburg, *Mallory Owen* — 20
The Ringing In My Ears, *Lydia Lorincz* — 22
Adult (noun), *Emma Wood* — 24
and yet, and yet, He loves, *Elaina Goodnough* — 25
My Marbles, *Emma Wood* — 27
I Am, *Aryn Joy Tomasetti* — 29
They Grace is Gold, *Mallory Owen* — 30
Make Me Know the Measure of My Days (Psalm 39), *Lydia Lorincz* — 31

Fiction
The Hope for Yesterday, *Hannah Copeland* — 36
Salt Angel Faraway, *Parker Biswell* — 44
The Felt Cap, *Tayla Starr* — 47
Painted Face, *Hannah Hopkins* — 51
The Know-It-All, *Abigail Gould* — 57

Author Biographies — 63

From the Editors

Dear Readers,

Eden's Lantern was born from a collaborative dream: a literary journal that voices the feelings and thoughts of Christian writers in a modern world. The Garden of Eden was a place of paradise where man walked and talked freely with God, unburdened and unashamed. Similarly, writing creates a haven for the soul to lay itself bare and express its inmost conflict before a gracious God.

The poetry and fiction in this collection were carefully selected to present a journey through emotion. The opening pieces depict the doubt and suffering all people experience as they are shaped by the Lord. The middle reflects on the bittersweet growth that comes from past trials and vivid memories. Finally, the tone shifts inward and upward to the ultimate joy and thankfulness each heart offers to God.

As editors, it is our wish that every reader will close this journal having glimpsed the inner worlds of the individual authors and been pointed toward the original Author, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

***Eden's Lantern* Editors**
Issue 1 | Fall 2026

POETRY

Daniel Athey

Kingdom

And consider
the angels
of the field

where lilies dazzle the light
to allure our eyes
to the invisible. Look

beside the brook of lulling
shimmers. One cannot see
seraphic fire or flame

and yet we look again
at field and brook to blaze
our flinty eyes from this

to that unblinking
blinding kingdom
of calm consideration.

Dorisa Costello

IF SOMETIMES YOU HIDE YOUR FACE

If sometimes you
hide your face
from blazing too fiercely
upon my skin,
I have found you
in the morning's first blush
that I was barely awake enough to catch,
in the first flush
of lovers-to-be in
seeking hands over the table,
electric anticipation and tequila

I have found you
in the bitter pith of an orange,
the bitter silence
of an unreturned call. With
the friendly hands of fear
you touch my wrist, my palm,
my fingertips and whisper
into the startling starlight:
I am here

I have found you
when I did not want you:
in the back of an ambulance,
in the streets crowded
with rage unrepentant,
crying with one voice that
our lives matter too

I have heard you in the silence,
in the cascading purple hush,
in the slowing pulse and breath,
in the silence
that surrounds my prayers

I have found you
in the hidden places,
in the lonely places,
in the unknown places galactic
wherein my soul's nucleus
holds the vastness of space

Hannah Hopkins

Resurrection and Ruin

I find beauty in decay,
In the ivy that entwines itself over chapel ruins,
Reclaiming what time has stolen.
In the cracked stained glass resting above a congregation of a time long gone.
In the way moss softens the edges of broken tombstones.
In graveyards where souls lay quietly to rest.
In the moonlight, when everyone wishes the sun would rise,
And in the dirt where nature blooms back to life—

For I find resurrection in ruin,
Where God brings light into the darkness,
Reminding me that nothing stays broken forever,
And in Him, even the shattered becomes whole.

Allie Munro

My First Storybook

My dad brought it home one day,
a gift for no occasion.
I started working on it at once,
needing no persuasion.

I don't know what packaging it had,
or the price it cost.
I don't know the time of day it was,
or how many stickers I lost.

I just remember the blank white cover
that I redrew three times.
I still have it today on my shelf
a memory of old times.

I got my sister to pen for me,
it wasn't my handwriting.
But it was all my own story,
no one else's inciting.

I carefully sketched the pictures,
making each detail precise.
I finished the story by myself,
and didn't want advice.

The whole book was my own tale,
and began a certain trend,
Of me writing for the next decades,
stories that I penned.

Alishia Smith

PRESSED, NOT CRUSHED

There are moments when life presses so hard
it doesn't just hurt — it leaves scars.

Not the kind you see,
but the kind that sit in your chest,
where breath feels borrowed
and peace won't rest.

Like gravity chose me
and said, "Let's see how much she can take,"
stacking weight on my shoulders
just to watch what breaks.

I've lived in places that never felt like home,
surrounded by people but still alone.

Trusted hands that turned unfamiliar,
love that faded, truth turned blurrier.

And I kept asking God,
"Is this part of Your plan?"

Because I'm trying to stand
but I don't understand.

I thought faith meant protection,

some kind of divine correction —
like believing in You
would come with direction.

But instead I got silence.
Stillness. Weight.
A test of endurance I didn't agree to take.

And I won't lie
I questioned You.

Not because I don't believe,
but because I do.

Because how does love allow this pressure to stay?
Why does purpose feel so far away?

I'm the daughter of man, trying to understand
why the Son had to suffer just to make a stand.

Trying to follow rules I was never taught fully,
just "believe and you'll make it" — said quickly, not deeply.

But somewhere in the pressure,
between breaking and breath,
I felt something shift
that didn't feel like death.

It felt like… molding.

Like pain had a purpose
I wasn't yet holding.

Like maybe this weight
wasn't meant to destroy me —
but shape me into something
stronger than the old me.

So I stopped asking "Why me?"
and started asking "What now?"

Because I'm still here —
and that has to count.

I'm still learning, still growing, still trying to see
what this version of faith is becoming in me.

Not perfect. Not polished. Not easy to trust.

But real enough to say —
I've been pressed…
but not crushed.

Daniel Athey

Extra Book

The weakest kid in school
carried an extra book,
a stained and scorched journal
thick as a Bible, and who knows
what he scribbled
on those sacred pages
because the bullies were afraid
to find out the hard way,
knowing the weakest kid in school
had survived a house fire,
a drowning,
and a flash of lightning
deep into his ribs. So the kids
and the teachers let him keep
hidden
all those stained and scorched words
just between himself
and the heavens.

Tad Kamano

Rifleman's Road

I carried a rifle before I carried a briefcase,
boots laced before the sun could rise.
The mornings smelled like dust and metal,
and the world was measured
in meters,
in heartbeats,
in the quiet space between radio calls.
I learned the language of watchfulness
how silence can speak,
how a shadow can mean something,
how brothers become closer than blood
when the ground beneath you shakes.
We marched through heat and cold alike,
through long nights where sleep
was a memory more than a promise.
But no one walked alone.
Not really.
Because somewhere beside you
was a man who would carry you
if your legs failed.
Years passed in the rhythm of service
orders, missions, movement, return.
The uniform held sweat and stories,
each thread stitched with sacrifice
most people would never see.
But service is not only war.
It is the quiet weight afterward.
The memories that follow you home,
the names you still carry,
the moments that shaped who you became.

And yet there is pride there too
not loud, not boastful,
but steady as the flag in the wind.
Because to serve
is to give a piece of your life
to something larger than yourself.
And even when the rifle is laid down,
and the boots are finally worn smooth,
that road never really ends.
It lives in the way you stand,
in the way you lead,
in the way you still watch over others.
A soldier once.
A soldier always.

Michael Elam

YELLOW

Yell, O yell, you hue.
Third in line bring forth,
Joyous wit, your joy
Surpassing all it sees.
You cull o'er grief,
Blur furrowed lines,
Sowing seemly light,
In joy re-leasing life.

Mallory Owen

Last Call For Fredericksburg

"Last call for Fredericksburg!"
To my dismay, the call invokes the dreaded end.

One train cab is the marriage of strangers.
They sit and stare.
They share their names.
Will they ever meet a person quite the same?

I am not used to making conversation like this.
A silence falls,
But I don't mind.
We change the topic or just watch what worlds we leave behind.

Picturesque passes quickly left to right.
From cows and cotton,
To rivers and trees,
The sunlight swallows different parts of autumn leaves.

Some moments are shared indefinitely:
Hours are seconds,
Four seem like one.
We feel time stretch between us, held by our attention.

You could be my future but I will not think——
I'm not like you;
You're not like me.
Yet we are just as comfortable as a book and cup of tea.

Voyagers on an island strange but ours,
We cannot leave.
We cannot stay.
I think you are the best part of my day.

You take your bag as I wish you well.
My friend is gone,
The seat estranged.
You are stepping into the end—off the train!
"Last call for Fredericksburg!"

Lydia Lorincz

The Ringing in My Ears

I heard the ringing in my ears.
It began soft and steady
Soon becoming harsh and heady,
Always singing, ringing, pounding in my ears.

At first, I ignored it altogether,
A simple sound, light as a feather.
It's rhythm sweet, it's promise clever,
Indulged, I let it sit, let it simmer.

I talked the talk, walked the walk,
Said hello, waved goodbye,
All while, like a clock
I heard it ticking, clicking in my ears.

I thought it nought and hurried by,
Buried in books and senseless screens.
I thought to escape the little lie,
That it was not, in fact, just dreams.

The days grew cold, yet louder still
The song grew proud and filled my mind.
I could not focus, nor see, nor find,
It's constant shout, it's screaming shrill.

I thought to tell a soul, to plead for help,
Yet over it's shouts I could not yelp,
And inward I looked, to find a way
To rid the awful sound this very day.

Alone I sat, alone I tried
To quiet my mind, to make a plan.
Yet the more I focused, the louder it cried,
And so I ran, I ran, I ran.

My legs were shaking,
My lungs were burning,
And still that awful ringing
Pressured, pounded my hearing.

At last I came to a man, He called himself the doctor.
Falling at his feet I cried, "Sir I have lied."
The man looked upon me with compassion and replied,
"Dear, why did you not come to me and confide?"
Ashamed I looked away; His face was ever so bright.
He took my hand, "Follow me, towards the light."

As I walked behind, I gazed again at His face
And I realized that dreaded dirge, that serpent's song,
Had drifted away as we walked along,
And I saw on His face, a smile so strong,
And with tears in my eyes I knew I was wrong.

His hand leading mine, His heart ever so kind,
My shoulders sighed and our eyes aligned,
And I saw his care, his love, his rest defined,
So I sang his praises and walked behind.

Emma Wood

ADULT (NOUN)

Adult (noun): One who
wakes gasping from a nightmare
and smooths the bedsheets.

Elaina Goodnough

AND YET AND YET HE LOVES

no matter how much the human scratches the earth with his claws,
one can still look out of a window and in between
unnaturally perfect skyscrapers
and metal
and sidewalks
and jagged angles,
one can still see a sunset,
God is still Painter and Artist and Glorified

in between
piles of overconsumed refuse
that spills onto the streets from our homes,
flowers still grow, and the sun still warms our faces

grass still comes up green,
the sky,
no matter how little we can see of it
in between smoke plumes and planes,
remains untouched
the blue of it is still visible somewhere

no matter how much we misuse this earth,
God still carefully holds it in His hands
and looks upon us with love,
even though we do not deserve it in the least

His gifts pour out despite our undeserving,
despite every time i place an idol in His place
He still shows me His grace and His mercy

with every
bird serenade
and beautiful pattern
of lighting that makes me stop
short
and remember,
when the moon creates shadows that illuminate
the gift that He gave me,

why is He not always at the forefront of my mind?
why do i have to come back to a place of remembrance
when i should be living there?
and yet
and yet
He loves

Emma Wood

My Marbles

They're glass, mostly.
Heavy-smooth with a
Kerplunking sound on the tile.
Never seen one shatter, but
I suppose they must.
Right?
I have a whole jar of them
Weighing a ring into my shelf,
Round and around…
Fairy bowling balls with no handholds,
So slippery
Even light rolls around
And falls through them in its
Dizzy, glossy way.
Some are bigger than others.
They hold whole worlds—
All darting koi fish and
Shaken snow globes and
Funhouse mirrors—warped.
I should get rid of the whole tub, but
I'd hate to lose them.
I like to take them out to toy with
So often they'd be worn smooth as a river
If they weren't already.
Sliding, gliding, sloppy things
Falling from my fingers like water droplets.
They hit the ground, rolling
Hard enough to wear a track in the floor
Or my mind.

Anyway, I'll put them back now,
Try not to remember the jar on the shelf,
Which isn't quite the same, you know,
As trying to forget it.

Aryn Joy Tomasetti

I AM

From liminal and lawless black abyss,
To sacrosanct and living creatures crowned,
My labor lasted almost seven days,
But guilted hearts gave up their hallowed ground.

From burning branch to highway through the sea,
To poured-out perfume on a burnished bull,
My son, my son, you have forsaken me—
The cup of wrath for you is overfull.

I know the plans I have for you. I am
In highest glory, the incarnate Son.
From straw and blood and frankincense and lamb,
To splinter, wine, and darkness: "It is done."

I am the overthrower of the night.
I courted death and bore you back to light.

Mallory Owen

THY GRACE IS GOLD

May I grow each passing hour to long
And find in you my heart's true song,
My joy, my fullest rest and passion,
That frees me from my flesh's fashion.

You are the Master of metallurgy!
In love you test us regularly.
The molten dross exposed entire
Leaves faith like gold after the fire.

Temptations show'r as spears of hail.
Thy Spirit knows my strength—how frail!
Then in the misty mires of my sin
My cry breaks out for you: My Lord, begin!

Turn my defiance to devotion,
        Ever awed!
Thy Grace is gold to pay, to purify
        Every flaw.

Lydia Lorincz

Make Me Know the Measure of My Days (Psalm 39)

Make me know the measure of my days
As I mused the fire burned,
As I meditated, I learned,
How fleeting the things I earned and
How foolish the things I yearned.

Make me know the measure of my days
My fleeting fears, my tired tears,
My whispered wounds and tactless tunes,
My weightless wealth and hasty health,
My moving moments and ardent atonements.

Make me know the measure of my days
When loves are lost and grief abounds,
When joys are found and laughter sounds.
When all seems dark and storms surround,
When all is calm and peace, profound.

Make me know the measure of my days
When the world shines and heaven dims
And my eyes can't seem to see,
The beauty of salvation bought

By your precious love for me.

Make me know the measure of my days
Lord let my heart be ever ablaze
For the precious souls lost in a daze,
Lord let them see your glorious ways.

Let my days be ever without airs
Full of faithful friends and persistent prayers
With godly growth and countless cares,
Wonder in worship and honor in Him,
Gratitude in grief and heavenly hymns.

And when I breathe my last, and see the Son's rays,
In glory and perfection, I will shout your every praise.
And I will thank you for the moments you fixed my gaze,
And made me know the measure of my days.

FICTION

Hannah Copeland



The Hope for Yesterday

I kissed my husband's forehead to wake him up for dinner. Even after eight years of marriage, it still struck me to smell sleep on a man's breath instead of stale booze. In comparison, sleep breath was almost sweet to me. His eyelids fluttered, and when I gave him a smile, he gasped.

"Babe?" I asked, concerned. "What's wrong?"

My husband sat halfway up, his hands gripping the couch cushions. His eyes scanned the room wildly, like he'd never seen it before.

"Oh no," he whispered.

"What is it?" I laid a hand on his forearm, but his muscles only tightened. His eyes were wide with fear and bewilderment.

"Ma'am, can I use your restroom?"

I gaped. "What?"

"I'm so sorry. Whatever I did. Can I please just use your restroom? Then I'll be out of here."

"Aaron, what's going on? You know where the bathroom is," I said, gesturing down the hall. "And why did you call me 'ma'am'?"

He stumbled away from me and into the bathroom. When he closed the door, I heard a gasp and then something knocking to the floor.

Déjà vu swept over me, memories from another lifetime ago. Things crashing to the floor meant danger. It meant get out, get away, fast. For a moment I sat paralyzed. But then I shook my head, reminding myself where I was now, who I was with now.

"Aaron!" I banged on the door. "What's going on? You're scaring

me. Let me help you."

He threw the door open. One hand was gripping his beard. He seemed ready to yank it out from the roots. "What… ? How did I… ?" He struggled for words. Then, with disgust, he said, "What is this?" He pointed to a tattoo on his bicep that read, "Michaela." My name.

Another man had my name tattooed on his arm once, the same arm that used to hit any part of me that he wanted. I flinched at the arm held out in front of me before I recalled that I wasn't in that life anymore. This was not that man.

"Zander!" I yelled to my stepson, Aaron's child. "Come here, I need help!" Aaron looked at me strangely and mumbled, "Zander?" A moment later, Zander appeared around the corner. At sixteen, he was getting to be nearly as tall as his dad.

Aaron collapsed against the bathroom door frame before I could catch him.

"Dad! What's wrong?" Zander asked, kneeling by his side.

One hand in his beard, the other on his tattoo, Aaron whispered in a voice choking on the shards of a broken heart, "But you're five years old."

Eleven years ago. That's where my husband thought he was.

And he was bringing me back in time too.

"What is the last thing you remember?" I asked.

We had moved to the kitchen table, the one Aaron made from a tree in our backyard. I had gathered the kids, while the pasta and bread were long forgotten on the stove. Aaron stared in fascination at his son sitting across the table from him, his eyes glossy. At the far end of the table was my daughter, whom he had barely even looked at. He turned to me, and I tried not to cry at the suspicion in his eyes.

"I was deployed in Afghanistan, a bomb went off, and then everything went black."

I stared at the knots in the wood while I swallowed the knot in my throat. "Are you absolutely sure?"

"Yes. I'm sorry, but I really don't know who you are. My wife's name is Kelly."

My heart ached with a pain I'd never known was possible to feel. In the heat of an alcoholic rage, my worth had been forgotten before. That man would forget himself and forget all the pretty things he had said to me. And then the next day, he'd forget that he'd forgotten—and he would ignore the evidence of my bruises. But now, this was a different kind of forgetting, and there was a new pain it caused. Worse than bruises, this was the pain of being completely and utterly forgotten. How could God do this to me?

I couldn't help it; the sobs lunged out of me. With my head in my hands, I heard both kids, our kids, push their chairs back to give me a hug. The past eight years of my and Aaron's marriage flashed in my memory. We joined our two families. We built a life together. A life that strove to forget the awful lives we left behind. But Aaron knew none of it.

My sobs subsided, and I reached out to smooth Zander's curls. Natasha cried into my shoulder. They surrounded me while Aaron sat alone. I wanted to reach out to him, but the confused look on his face stopped me. My husband, their father. We knew him, and yet he thought he was a stranger.

"Mom, what are we going to do?" Natasha asked from beside me in my bed, her big lamb eyes pleading.

It was the question I had been asking myself ever since Aaron woke up. One does not simply imagine a loved one losing all memory of you. This wasn't even dementia, where the memory loss is slow and complete. This was instantaneous and partial. Eleven years wiped from Aaron's existence in the span of a nap. And yet those eleven years of his life really did happen. Anyone he knew in that time frame could attest to that fact. But what good is the passage of time if we don't all have the same conception of it?

"I don't know," I whispered into Natasha's hair and pulled her close.

Earlier that day, the doctors had run all kinds of tests and said

that everything appeared to be normal. Of course, the only thing wrong was that he couldn't remember the last eleven years. They'd basically said that all they could do was keep him in the hospital and hope that his memory would return.

Hope was a dangerous thing, and not powerful enough on its own. Hoping never got me and Natasha away from her father. It was Aaron that did that. Eight years ago she asked me that question, "What are we going to do?" and back then I had an answer and a plan, both thanks to him. Now I had neither an answer nor a plan, nor Aaron, and it nearly killed me.

After putting Natasha to bed, I lay in my own bed staring at the empty spot beside me. Tears puddled around my cheek. Oh God, *what* were we going to do? I tried to pray, but my mind tortured me with imaginary scenes of life with Aaron in which he didn't remember me or my daughter, and only remembered his son as a small child. Christmas, where I bought all the gifts myself because Aaron had no idea what his children liked. Zander's graduation in a few years, Aaron weeping beside me because he saw next to none of Zander's childhood. A random Sunday morning, Aaron and I waking up in the bed with too much space between us.

I gathered the sheet in my fist when I realized there was no certainty of Aaron ever waking up beside me again. He might only feel comfortable on the couch – that damn couch that stole his life away. Or he might not want to stay in the house, or in my life, at all.

Zander sat on the side of Aaron's hospital bed while Natasha stood at the foot of it, and I stood a step behind her. I longed to be closer, but I could tell my presence made Aaron uncomfortable.

"Dad, we were thinking about what you wouldn't know," Zander said.

"Oh yeah?" Aaron said.

"And we realized you haven't seen – well, you've seen, but you don't remember – all the new Marvel movies!"

"What!" Aaron said with great enthusiasm. "They made more?

Are they as good as *Iron Man*?"

"Oh, Dad," Zander said, eyeing his sister. "You won't believe what they did to Iron Man."

"Oh, I can't wait for this. Iron Man is lit."

The kids laughed at his outdated slang. I couldn't help but smile too. The tragedy was just a little bit funny. Aaron was still his goofy self. It was strange to know him and yet not be known.

Zander continued to talk to him for the next half hour, with random exclamations coming from Aaron ("Donald Trump is president?! That guy? Really?). He asked Natasha for her name again and said, "I can see where you get your pretty looks," giving me a small smile. I blushed. It was like dating him all over again, falling in love with his charm and his kindness, the kindness that made me realize just how little of it I was experiencing in my life back then. Maybe we could do this.

Eventually, the kids left, and I had him to myself. There was a moment when we could only hear the beeping of the machines, and then he patted his bed awkwardly. I perched on the end of it. I inhaled, but Aaron spoke first.

"So we're married, huh? To be honest, when I woke up, I thought I did something really bad to be on the couch of such a beautiful woman."

As my heart fluttered, my nerves calmed. "I can't imagine what this must be like for you."

"Weird as hell."

I laughed.

"It's like I time-traveled, but in the worst way possible."

"The future happened, and you didn't know it."

"Exactly." A pause. "Are you doing alright? How are the kids?"

"The kids are taking it surprisingly well, obviously. I never thought about the fun things that you would get to experience for the first time again. To be honest, I've been struggling." Out of instinct, I almost took his hand, but stopped. "I love you. And yesterday you forgot that you love me."

A silence ensued that stabbed my heart. "I'm sorry, Michaela. It's

weird because I feel like I'm still married to Kelly. It was always rough with her, but to wake up and learn that we'd divorced and that I'd married another woman – I don't really have words for it."

Not only had he forgotten his life, but he'd forgotten mine too. He had no idea how we came to be together, that eight years ago he saved me and Natasha by drawing me to himself. "I can't expect you to feel what you've forgotten. But trust me when I say that I need you, and you need me. I – we – need this to work. We have to get through this."

He straightened up in bed, adjusted the blanket. "I want to say I want to," he said so gently. "I know I probably vowed to you and to God at our wedding that I would stay with you forever. But you have to understand, I feel like I met you yesterday. I've been struggling with the moral implications of vows literally unremembered. So I cannot say yes with total truth, but your eyes tell me that it is worth trying."

I nodded because no words would have been able to escape undrowned.

Days passed with no change and no answers. Aaron wanted to leave the hospital, so that's what he did. Home was really weird. He didn't know a thing about the house or the habits of the people who lived in it. On Sunday, I drove him and the kids to his workplace before we went to church. He wanted to understand what he did for work, and thought seeing it might jog his memory. So far, nearly nothing had jogged his memory. Very small things had come back to him, like Natasha's middle name and his affinity for Captain Crunch cereal, a discovery of the past few years. Though small, these things felt like huge wins. But, of course, we were all waiting on the full memory restoration.

One of the reasons we were hoping was so that he could work again. He did military administrative work, but had such high clearance that I didn't really know what he did. That kind of information was not supposed to be shared, let alone forgotten by those who were supposed to keep it safe.

At the site, in the dusty air, we showed him a plaque in front of a building that had his name on it.

"I can't believe I helped build this," he said. "I don't make things. I destroy them."

I imagined him in the army doing just that. He should be proud of the change his life had taken. He had made a lot more than he thought he did. He made our family, and he couldn't understand it. It was like when someone tells you that you are going to do great things, but you don't believe them until you look back and see that you've done it.

At church, we sat in the row as a family, and I felt Aaron's frustration beside me. He kept looking down at his son like he still couldn't believe it. I rubbed his back, which only seemed to give him the slightest comfort. Phrases from the pastor's mouth like "I will remember the deeds of the Lord" and "Remember the former things of old; for I am God," floated in and out of my consciousness, but they just seemed mean. It was as though God hadn't noticed that Aaron literally could not remember.

The sermon ended, and when we stood, Aaron didn't join. He sat there with his head in his hands, his anger, sadness, and disappointment radiating off him as he whispered "God, God, God." No doctor had been able to do anything for him. Time, so far, had also done nothing. It felt hopeless.

The kids and I waited in the car for fifteen minutes before Aaron joined, his eyes puffy. I'd only seen him like that once before, when his mother died, which he now didn't even know about. For all of us, something in Aaron had died, and it was worth crying about.

I dropped them all off at home while I went grocery shopping. Five more boxes of Captain Crunch cereal found their way into my cart. As I was pushing it out the automatic grocery doors, a woman in a Samaritan's Purse shirt asked me if I would like to donate to the children in need. I scoffed and kept walking. What about my children in need? What about me?

At my car, I was loading the bags into the trunk when I heard someone call my name. I looked around, and then froze. Walking

toward me, with that disgusting swagger, was the one man I had tried my very best to forget.

"Hey, mama, been a long time. How's it going?" he asked, leaning his elbow on my grocery cart, a cigarette pinned between two fingers. On his forearm, clearly positioned for me to see, it read, "Michaela."

No breath, let alone words, escaped my throat.

"I've missed you." His knuckles stroked my cheek, the cigarette threatening to singe my skin. "You don't look so good. Want me to make you feel better?" There was no one else around in the parking lot. "I got a nice place now. Come on, let me show you."

A moment of helplessness overcame me. This is what it was always like, what it always would be like. I had to do what he said, or worse would happen. There was no way out.

Then he tugged on my arm, and a spike of adrenaline went through every nerve of my body, releasing a guttural scream. I wrenched my arm out of his reach, accidentally smacking my hand into the grocery cart. I shoved the cart over his feet before jumping into my car, not even closing the trunk.

Five minutes down the road, I realized what had just happened because my hand was throbbing. A bruise was already forming. And then I remembered. Everything.

The things of old, the deeds of the Lord. Eight years ago I traded bruises for kisses. Nightmares were relegated to the realm of sleep, no longer reigning in the light of day. The man of my life brought me joy instead of fear. All of this was the work of the Lord. I was supposed to remember these things so that I could hope for even greater things in the future. I didn't know if Aaron would ever remember our life together, but I would. And something told me that would be enough for us to keep living it.

Parker Biswell



Salt Angel faraway

En forårsdag i helvede. The frosted breath of Njörðr had long been abandoned for less favoring seas, and if anyone were to watch, the young Dane most certainly would be taken for a corpse. The strongest of his lineage, he had received the grand achievement of being the last of his crew to live. His vessel's narrow hull lay splintered, settled into a low, rising arch across the base of a dune. Opposite him was that foreign sea, glassy green caps almost successful in their temptation… he snapped back to focus. He did not know what the gods thought, or even which gods to think of. He looked grayly at the waters and began across the sand.

Eight nights.

Across time, the desert has often been referred to as if it were a place, but its fine mineral army has not survived without a name. It has a pulse, a temperament. A conditional god long forgotten, his sole acolyte the traveler. And these conditions fell strictly now upon the white raider. Danes were feared in every part of the western world: seafaring men, warriors, healers, nomads; but here he was the ruled, and the speckled geckos he had feasted on had now become scarce. He reached to remove his helmet, only to remember he had left it behind on… *day three*… *five*… *nine?* Squinting, the outline of a pond flashed against the backdrop of a distant horizon, and his foot-kept pace quickened at the sight. Behold: a mirror of liquid glass, complete with upright palmettos bent vaguely toward the heavens. The oasis was perfectly circular, and at its center, a small island of burnt sand ruffled the otherwise flatly-lain scene. Crowned by a shallow pit and not much more than a boulder in size, it much

resembled those excavation projects of children in their summertime play at shoreside somewhere. The Dane strained to lap up the drink, an effort interrupted halfway through by the sound of soft crying, infrequent in occurrence, barely audible through the howling yellow wind.

What are englar? An aboriginal sat bare in the sand, his slender arms wrapped loosely around his knees. He looked younger than the sun-worn traveler, pale skin stretched flush against ornately etched muscles. His irises were inlaid like the Gemini twins of early spring, and like the points of a compass, four thin isosceles blackly encircled his nebulous pupils. The Dane had missed these, instead drawn to the emerging scarlet color blearing his hollows.

Panis Angelicus. The golden-eyed individual looked up but resigned in moving from his place in the pit. The Viking sat down next to him and was subsequently handed a small loaf of brown bread. Taking a bite, the native started.

"Do you know where you are?"

"No."

"This is the Tottori Desert… the Inaba Province of Yamato."

"Where did you get this bread? What are you doing all the way…"

"The Caspian Sea!" the younger interrupted. "You know the Caspian Sea, yes? This is much beyond that, oh yes! Far beyond that…"

He seemed to slip into a trance. The Dane did not quite care where he was. He had accepted the idea of his being dead, or that if he was not, he would be soon. He scanned the other man. *Delicate, like a woman of the village.* The two sat in silence, the palms providing cover from the blaze of that afternoon.

The sun began to set, and the young man spoke once more. "My name is Raphael. I am an angel, an archangel… one of four." A glint of silver folded behind him. "I have a proposal for you, northman. Listen to my story, and I shall aid you home."

The Dane nodded, reclining the best he could against the heat-baked knoll at his back.

"Long before a man ever was decorated in that white skin you

washed up with, I had a pool, very much like this one. It was God's gift to me, a place of refuge for Abraham's seed and the nations. Should any man have come across it, he would have all that he needs, both in body and the other. King David did, of course, as well as his son, wisest of men. Noah, after the first Ragnarök. There are others, many more… even from the lines of Cain and Esau… Herod and Nero. Well… they did, but…"

Raphael's face fell momentarily. The Viking was not unfamiliar to the art of fables, but could scarce recall the last time he had heard one told with such seriousness of countenance. Sitting up, the angel continued.

"Before the rómverjar came to have it, my pool sat in the Orchard. Each tribe would come, of Jacob, that is, and I would heal them. Now? My pool remains, enshrined to a wraith. Rome called him a god, as did Greece before. He is as old as I, wrapped in deception. Chief of Lucifer's healers, he is a foreigner who loves to dance under dim lights. Where my pool is, a devil now lives, healing wounds from those he afflicts."

The Dane spoke. "But you are Valkyrie."

"Devils never die until that day, and so he comes back in every age. Much like you to me," he said with a slight smile.

Raphael withdrew a thin beaded rope from under his thigh.

"The rope of resurrection. Laced with jade, it once belonged to Enoch. When I have gone, wrap it around your fist and submerge yourself in my pool of tears."

The Dane took the object.

"I start toward Bethesda every year when winter has all but gone. For the sake of the faithful, God has allowed me one day in the land of unbelievers."

With this, Raphael abruptly stood. The rustling mercury was fully in view: four carved wings of metal, adorned with symbols no man had seen, illuminated by the desert moon.

Tayla Starr



THE FELT CAP

The old man told stories that shone light – light into the obscurity of the Auschwitz prison camp. He spun words into beautiful colors that sang louder than the howling winds and biting cold, louder even than the yelling soldiers. For they were always yelling in cruel, harsh tones, as if none of the prisoners meant a thing to them or anyone else in the world.

But the old man's stories drowned out all the hate with unhurried gentleness. At night, after the endless monotony of horror that came with the day, the old man would begin to speak. His voice was not loud, deep, or powerful. It was quiet, and a little tired, and seemed to have an undertone of amusement that only showed when he was telling stories. And oh, the stories he told. The story of how David challenged the wicked giant Goliath with nothing more than a sling and five smooth stones in the name of the Lord. And of Adam and Eve, and how they had been created as the first human beings at the very beginning of time. Of Ruth and Naomi, and all the small miracles that transformed their shattered lives back into something beautiful. He spoke of Esther, whose courage saved all the Jews. And of Daniel, who was thrown into the lions' den for praying to God, and how the Lord had closed the mouths of the lions so that Daniel was not harmed – not even clawed at.

He told all the old stories from the Torah, but he also spoke of other things. Of home. Of his wife whom he loved and who had "put him right again," as he himself said; his wife who had died of a sickness in 1936. Of his four children, none were alive anymore, and of the mischief they would get into when they were young. Of his

own childhood, and all the wild things he did before he settled down to lead a peaceful life. He wove his words, his sentences, his stories into something wonderful that, even though their earthly bodies were very cold, would warm their souls.

They were stories that gave them a reason to face another day.

They called him Rabbi – for that was what he had been, what he *still* was. His head and beard were shaved. His rabbinic garments had been stripped from him, so all that he wore now were rags, just like the rest of them. But he was still a Rabbi for all that. No matter what the Third Reich tried to take away, they could never take away the fact that *he* was a Rabbi.

He would never begin until the officer came and read off the night's number. It was a hard thing to begin a story after the number was read and the trembling person was led away to the gas chambers, but it was an even harder thing to continue a story that had started after the number had been read off.

Sometimes, the old man would sit with the dying and hold their wasted hands as he told the night's story. And the dying man, or boy, would leave this earth at peace – at peace in the middle of a concentration camp. It was a rebellion of sorts, if you thought about it the right way. The enemy could not take everything away from them. When all was said and done, they could harm the body, but they could not harm the soul, no matter how much they wanted to. Sometimes, he would gather a small boy onto his spindly lap, wrap his gaunt arms around him as he spoke, and the boy would lean up against him, and together they would keep each other warm.

There was one boy that stood out to the Rabbi a little more than the others. He didn't look much different from the procession of weary boys all around. But he was different, because he asked *questions*. Lots and lots of questions about everything. Why does the earth go around the sun? How come every country has a capital city? Was David scared when he had to fight Goliath? How was reading invented? The boy asked these questions after the old man's story was finished, and indeed, the old man did not know how to answer them all. The boy asked his questions in a low tone so

as not to disturb the others, and so that the soldiers could not hear him. His dark eyes sparkled. He tugged on the tattered felt cap that sat a little bit too large atop his shaved head. He could hardly be more than twelve years old, and the fading red cap looked large enough to be his father's. Maybe it had been. The largeness of the cap made his face seem even thinner and paler than it already was. It was as if not even the cruelness of his surroundings could snuff out his curiosity.

The old man did not know why the boy asked him all these questions. Maybe it was because he knew the old man was patient. Maybe it was because the Rabbi was the oldest person the boy knew, and so he supposed that the Rabbi must certainly know.

Maybe it was because the boy trusted the Rabbi.

The old man did not know.

But he did his best to answer all the questions. Sometimes, though, he would lie in the dark, deep in thought, and finally say, "I do not know, my son. I do not know."

"Oh. Well, that's alright," the boy would say and tip his bedraggled felt cap over his eyes and go to sleep.

On the night of September 27th, 1944, the officer came to read off the number. Everyone waited in a silence that never lacked terror no matter how many times it fell upon them.

The officer read it once. No one moved. He read it again – louder – and annoyed that he had not been obeyed. As he read, the old man drifted his eyes across the room. His gaze came to a halt when it caught sight of a pale little face under a felt cap. It was the face of a soul so struck with terror that its body had become immobilized. The officer had called out the number that belonged to the boy with the felt cap.

The old man felt himself rising to his feet. His movement caused all the eyes to swing onto him. The boy made a choking sound. The Rabbi began to step forward to the officer, but not in a straight line. He came first to the boy. He put a hand on the felt cap and could feel the boy's body tremble beneath it. He heard the officer holler.

"My son," he said. His voice was gray, crinkled, and kind.

"My son, look at me."

He did.

"Do not grieve for me," said the Rabbi. "I am an old man with no family left. I never expected to outlive this place. But you – " the officer screamed again at the old man to COME *NOW*; " – you are a young boy with a whole life spread out at your feet. Do not be afraid. Never stop asking wonderful questions. And do not believe for a moment that it is your fault that I now go in your stead. This is what I choose."

The officer stormed up, screaming profanities, and seized the old man. Then the door slammed, and the Rabbi was gone.

Four months later, the concentration camp Auschwitz was liberated, and among the throng of freed prisoners bobbed a little red felt cap.

Hannah Hopkins



Painted Face

The crimson curtains rise, and I sway beneath a gilded candelabra, suspended from threads that glimmer like spiderwebs. I glide across the wooden platform, light spilling opalescent rays across my face in crimson and emerald flashes. From the silence, the swell of violins and piano emerges, the spotlight trailing my wooden frame as I spin on pointe shoes—each pirouette leaving a blinding glow in its wake.

The strings yank my head higher as they sear into my limbs, yet the carved smile on my face refuses to falter. Each step is calculated, aimed at gaining the audience's approval, their eyes haunting me like specters as I leap across the stage. Their whispers grow louder than the violins trailing me: "Too slow. Too perfect. Not believable."

Then, the strings lift my arms above my head, waving them around aimlessly, mirroring how I truly feel: helpless.

The music halts. My wooden knees creak into a curtsy as the spotlights dim and the audience erupts with applause. Their approval is almost enough to make my non-existent heart flutter, and my painted cheeks flush a shade of crimson for a moment. Their every clap, hurrah, and smile winds me tighter than the strings that bind me. Yet the audience simultaneously fills me with dread.

But, behind my painted smile and pirouettes is a hollow gaze and a soul composed of nothingness.

Why must the audience—the thing I despise most—be the thing that fuels me?

The crimson curtain drops across the platform, concealing my frame and sweeping away the rush I gained from the audience's

applause. Then, my maker pulls me backstage and into his grasp, swinging me alongside him as we walk past vanities holding arrays of crystal bottles of perfume and face paint, where human performers prepare for their many performances. The world around me slowly fades as he continues moving me along his side, the applause still echoing within the hollow of my chest.

Backstage, it smells like dust and fading rose perfume – a nod to the years of countless performances and the perfume used to mask the stench of sweat dripping from the many performers' tired bodies.

"Papa, do you think Evangeline captivated the audience tonight?" A little girl appears in the doorway, her lavender petticoat and ribbon curls bouncing with her as she moves towards her father, the man behind the strings.

"Just as much as the other dolls, darling," the toymaker responds dryly, peering at me through a cracked monocle, as he begins moving me carelessly against his side.

"I don't know… There's something almost real about her. The way she moves – it feels human, almost." The little girl leans in close, her vision clear, unlike her father, who needs a lens to see me.

"That's kind of the point, Alice. She's moved along strings, mimicking human movement. It's all an act…" the maker responds carelessly, brushing away his daughter's wonder and my worth all in one statement.

Alice's eyes turn glassy, her resolve flickering away like a wax candle as we move outside.

"I know it's an act, but I was just simply stating that she seems human," Alice mutters nervously.

"Evangeline is quite special, but no, she's not human," the maker shakes his head before laughing hysterically.

"What's so different about her? In comparison to the other dolls?" Alice presses on.

"Her wood is more polished. Her hair is lighter. She moves more seamlessly," the maker huffs, rolling his eyes as he begins to list off my seemingly superior qualities.

Alice's face falls before gazing back at me, her eyes devoid of

their initial sense of wonder.

After a bumpy car ride, the maker sways me against his side one last time as we walk inside a manor and into a toy room, the place where I was made and the place where I would continue to face my demise. Inside the toy room, the smell of varnish and dust wafts around me as my maker settles down onto his wooden workbench an omen that I was going back on my hook. My painted peers hang on hooks nearby me, their smiles chipping with varnish, their limbs distorted, their feet splintered from an endless array of performances as they hung along one last thread. I stand dangling along the hook as it sinks deeper into my core. The maker nears me, his beady eyes inspecting my every flaw with a cold indifference:

"Evangeline, you captivated the audience. But there's something still missing… Perhaps you need a fresh coat of paint and sanding," the maker murmurs, adjusting his cracked monocle once more.

His words sink into the hollow of my wooden chest, which beats fervently, almost as if a heart sat in its empty crevice – *I wasn't good enough, I was always needing a fresh coat and sanding*… I still remember the days when I was held in my maker's hands – each brushstroke, delicate and intentional, each color chosen deliberately, declaring me "special and unique" – and I would believe him. But as I hang suspended next to the other dolls, whose wooden faces are painted to perfection, I realize we are all the same, all a copy of each other – maybe with different shades of hair or eyes, but at the end of the day, we were all a copy, made to be a step above the last. Our individuality is non-existent, our sole purpose being to fuel the success of our maker. He'd soon move on to the next doll, to the next victim, he could attempt to transform his failure into beauty… And I would remain here, suspended in silence— a relic of his hollow pursuit. Yet somehow, I manage to be "a step above the rest," a sentiment I both admire and abhor.

"There we go. Beautiful again… Now don't go dancing without me," the maker looks at me, a devious glint catching in his eyes as he moves the monocle away from his eye and onto the workbench before he paints one last stroke across my crimson cheeks, before

he'd move to sand my feet, as if that would make the splinters and searing pain of strings jerking my every move any better. The very searing of my limbs further reminds me that I would never know what freedom felt like; I'd never get to move my limbs freely, without the pulling of strings.

The creaking of the workbench echoes in the awkward silence as the maker moves towards the corner of the room, his leather boots beating against the wooden floors as he blows out the wax candle, which slowly flickers, all the light in the room dissipating away; the only thing left visible is the moonlight catching in the big bay windows.

"Night," The maker whispers, once again talking to us as if we could respond, before he leaves us hanging in the dust.

The moonlight caught in the bay windows begins to kiss my wooden "skin," each star a painful reminder of what I couldn't be.

Then, the sound of gentle footsteps begins to thump on the oak floors. It is Alice. She stands trembling in the darkness, holding a gas lamp in her frail hands. Her tiny frame is swallowed whole by the whisper of white fabric that drifts around her like clouds, the hem grazing the floor with every awkward step. A tea rose pink ribbon is tied around her throat, rising with the rhythm of her breath, while a row of mother-of-pearl buttons holds her bodice together. Lace cuffs adorn her wrists, reflecting a sense of delicacy, her innocence being made visible in the pale moonlight.

She nears me slowly, her heart-shaped pout furled over as if she were choking back tears. She runs a finger along my cheek, wiping away something invisible. Her cerulean eyes begin reflecting a sense of warmth as she gazes at me, my strings quivering in response, mimicking the sensation of chills.

"I know Papa thinks you're just a doll… but to me, you're more. You're what I wish I could be…" Alice's eyes soften even more than they once were as she confessed.

If only she knew the pain of being haunted by the audience's applause, the pain of being the fuel for someone else's success, the pain of dancing out of obligation, not choice.

"I know you can't talk, but I know you're in there." Alice's head turns to the side, a soft smile spreading across her lips.

The air around us begins to shift as Alice's soft gaze lingers on me. She runs her fingers against my bodice, adorned with a black and white damask pattern, while the hem of my black tulle skirt lies before my knees. She admires me, a sense of wonder crossing her face.

Alice closes her eyes, blinking back tears, the bow lying against her throat bobbing up and down as she began taking deep breaths. "You're so delicate, so beautiful… If only I could make you come to life."

Suddenly, a pounding sensation begins to emerge in the hollow of my chest, my head rising of its own accord. My limbs begin to burn ever so slightly as they begin to twitch as if they were stuck on invisible restraints. The hollow in my chest no longer feels wooden; it felt real—almost like skin has grown over top of the wood and replaced it.

"Evangeline…" Alice screams, the gas lamp trembling in her hands as she gazes at me in amazement.

As she speaks, my threads begin to quiver fervently. I lift my arms and tilt my head to the side. All sense of entrapment dissipates as I meet her gaze with the same intensity. I am free, no longer bound by the strings that hold me.

Alice continues to speak, but something shifts; her words fade into the hum of violins—gentle but enchanting, stirring me to life, much like the orchestra that would play as my maker jerked me across the stage. The burning sensation I once felt at the expense of my strings dissipates as I no longer have strings holding me back. Instead, the threads fall to the floor as if they were shackles being dragged by my feet in the pale moonlight. Then, the monocle that the maker used to look at me rolls off the workbench and onto the floor, spinning before shattering into shards of glass.

I spin across the wooden floors, avoiding the shards now surrounding me, my every pirouette perfectly measuring itself to the rhythm of Alice's breath. Taking one last turn, I come to a halt, my

wooden joints groaning after all the countless years of hanging in suspension.

Then, out of nowhere, something rises in my chest:

"Alice," I mutter softly.

Alice's eyes widen as she moves closer to me, picking me up in the palm of her hand, moving me right to her face.

"I knew you were real," Alice murmurs, her eyes turning glassy as she gazes at me.

"You were what brought me to life," I whisper, still unsure of the sound of my own voice.

The longer Alice gazes at me, the more it becomes clear to me that, in her eyes, I was not a spectacle; I was my own being, admired for something more than what I could do to benefit her. While my threads hang beneath me, I no longer fear them. Alice's breath hitches right in sync with the end of my dance. Her cerulean eyes begin to glitter like sand hidden beneath the sea, and in them, I have become the treasure she had been searching for. Alice sees me—not through a lens, but for who I am, and in her eyes, I am perfect.

Abigail Gould



The Know-It-All

There once lived a man who knew everything. Everything? Most certainly. A man? Some may disagree.

It was in ninth grade that George received his first F. The impact was intense. He knew the information, but that day, laziness had gotten a hold of him. He fussed and fiddled the rest of that afternoon, until his teacher got frustrated at the clicking of a pen on his desk. The tapping wasn't a conscious decision, it was his frustration fleeing his body through the repeated pounding of a hard surface.

That night George avoided his father, burdened by the certainty of disappointment he would soon face. This disappointment did not result in a time-out or a grounding. It was much worse. A rejection. No, worse. An isolation from acceptance. George braced himself for the blow but the consequences of his failures left a much bigger scar. Never again would George challenge his father's tolerance towards stupidity.

Although George would never have the courage to face the most colossal challenge in his life, which presented itself as his father, there was *one* challenge George was willing to face.

Growing up, his mother always told him that his father knew everything in the world. Did George believe it? Well, yes, until he had reason to think that this state was unachievable. The night when George was fuming in his failure, he made a covenant with himself. He was going to achieve what his father never did. He was going to be smarter, greater, and more clever than his father ever was. He was going to learn *everything* in the world. There would be absolutely no

such fact absent from his brain by the time he was dead, and he wanted his father to forever be clueless as to how his son achieved such brilliance.

So his quest began that summer. He began chasing knowledge like a dream, and with each passing day he began to stack the facts higher and higher in his brain. He started with the sciences. The name of every bone in the human body. He thought it was a weird place to start, so he began to research the history of San Marino. Was his father aware of his son's schemes? No, not at first, but it was not long before his father recognized that George was up to no good.

Knowledge became a drug. College became heaven. Reading became a prayer, and the world became a God.

It wasn't until a perplexed woman named Jane told George in order to obtain all the knowledge in the world he would also need to master every skill in the world. George felt threatened by her revelation. He married her nine months later.

Jane found use in their marriage. She never had to see a doctor because her husband could call out every disease she had in an instant. She never had to do housework because there was only one precise way to do everything according to her husband. She never had to argue with George because everything he said was right. Although the sound of it was uncomfortable, Jane surprisingly found peace in their dependent relationship.

Soon after he got married, George started learning how to play basketball. He didn't have to master it, he just had to know every play and technique. He would come home from professional basketball games and study every American law in between dinner and bedtime. It wasn't until he started the art of fencing that he learned his first child was on the way. Jane was decently excited. George saw it as a chance to learn how to conduct an ultrasound. George felt a strange joy the day Johnny was born.

Seven years later and George believed he had done the impossible. It was when he deciphered a homeless man's dream on a busy street near his home when he had finally felt the feeling of victory. What more could he do than explain the metaphorical

allegory presented to a dirty homeless man in his sleep?

George stopped and tasted the air which he could confidently say consisted of carbon dioxide, oxygen, argon, and nitrogen. He could feel his father's defeated spirit with him.

He went home to Jane and they celebrated. They drank wine and played music. George didn't have to worry about not knowing the lyrics. He knew every song. He shouted "More wine!" in every language. He sat back in his rocking chair, mocking how small the world seemed to him.

It wasn't until his front door creaked open that he stopped celebrating. Outside in the darkness, rain crashed down, leaking into the home. The rain plummeted down hard, creating a tiny pool in his son's new hoodie. His school backpack slumped down his back heavily from the rain it caught during the strenuous walk back from his school. Jane gasped at their vile ignorance. They had been so caught up celebrating George's accomplishment that they forgot about their most important one. Apologies rang repeatedly across the room. Johnny remained emotionless, his only plea was for bedtime.

George waited for Jane to finish cradling the seven-year-old before he stepped in. He was frustrated at his misplacement. He was confused by his son's avoidance and lack of anger. If George was forgotten by *his* parents he would have been angry. Not avoidant. Not quiet.

George entered the room as Jane exited. Johnny faced away from him, his long blonde curls covering his eyes. His thick blue glasses were tossed to the side. George picked up the glasses and set them beside Johnny's bed.

"Johnny," George called out to his son. It took a few tries to get his son to face him. When he did, George observed a fearful look smothering Johnny's face.

"Why are you afraid, my son?"

The boy's lips quivered at the sound of his father's words. A single tear escaped his right eye. George reached out and wiped his son's tears.

"I know why you didn't pick me up." Johnny admitted shamefully.

"And why is that?" George asked.

"Because you *know*."

"Know what?"

The little boy struggled to form the words, "I got in trouble." He sniffled a little and began to shudder, which quickly turned to a sob. "I got a bad grade on my handwriting test. And you knew. That's why you didn't come. I failed, Daddy. And… and you knew."

George couldn't get his brain to think. He grabbed Johnny and wrapped him up in his arms. "No… no… I didn't know. How could I have known that, Johnny?"

After another sniffle and cough Johnny uttered, "Mommy says you know everything, Daddy."

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David Athey lives in Florida on a small lake with large iguanas. His poems and stories have appeared in various journals and magazines such *Christianity & Literature*, *The Iowa Review*, *Dappled Things*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Windhover*, *Seattle Review*, *Relief*, and *Notre Dame Magazine*. His books, including *Art is for The Artist*, are available on Amazon.

Parker Biswell lives in Virginia and is an English Major at Regent University, graduating this Spring. His fiction and creative non-fiction have appeared in *The Daily Runner* and *The Patriot's Dispatch*.

Hannah Copeland is a twenty-two-year-old woman studying English at Biola University in California. She has self-published two novels, *Desperate Measures*, and *Daughters of Eschaton* on Amazon, as well as published a short story titled "Aging Memories" with the *Pomona Valley Review*. She hopes to continue writing as a standard part of her life, if not as a career.

Dorisa Costello is Associate Professor of English and creative writing at Jessup University. Her poems have been featured in *The Ana*, *Plan B: A Journal of Reproductive Justice*, and *The Postcard Press*, among others. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee in poetry for 2026.

Michael Elam is an Associate Professor of English in the Humanities Department at Regent University, where he teaches literature mainly from the ancient, medieval, and early-modern eras. His specialization is Middle English literature, particularly the works of the Gawain-poet. Though his published works are mostly academic, his poetry has appeared in *New English Review*.

Elaina Goodnough resides in the Pacific Northwest amongst the mountains and bodies of water that are some of her biggest inspirations. She adores words, using them to craft pictures and glorify Jesus. He is her favorite subject to write about, and she is so thankful to Him for all the gifts that surround her.

Abigail Gould has been writing for seven years. She has found so much joy in being able to write and express herself in creative ways. She hopes to self-publish her first novel in late 2026.

Hannah Hopkins is a senior at Regent University studying English with a concentration in writing. Her work explores themes of light versus darkness, identity, and faith, and often dabbles in gothic fiction and paranormal fantasy genres with an emphasis on symbolic storytelling.

Tad Kamano is a United States Army veteran and a senior at Regent University studying government. He is the president of Regent's chapter for the Student Veterans of America.

Lydia Lorincz is a student, sibling, farmer, fantastical muffin maker, but most importantly, soldier for Christ and daughter of the King. May everything she does on this earth be to the praise of His glory and grace.

Allie Munro, originally from southern Delaware, is a sophomore at Regent University, studying English with a concentration in creative writing and a minor in film. She enjoys going to the beach, drawing, reading, and especially writing. She hopes to become a published author, bringing herlove of fantasy and her Christian background into her work.

Mallory Owen is a sophmore at Regent University earning her English degree with a minor in theatre and honors. She loves storytelling in its many forms, and has enjoyed being involved with the Drama Club, Chamber Choir, New Inklings Society and the editorial team for *Eden's Lantern* and *The Initiative*. All glory be to Christ!

Alishia Smith is a student at Regent University studying Biblical and Theological Studies. Her writing blends personal experience with faith, exploring themes of resilience, identity, and purpose. Through raw and reflective expression, she transforms life's pressures into meaningful, honest work.

Tayla Starr is an English Major wrapping up her undergraduate degree at Jessup University. Proudly the oldest of four siblings, she lives in Redding, California with her family. She has always loved to write, and her hope is that every work of fiction she creates can illuminate all the little things that make life so beautiful.

Aryn Joy Tomasetti is a senior studying English Literature at Hillsdale College. She aspires to write beautifully for children so as to engage their imaginations in what is good, true, and beautiful. As a student at Hillsdale, she has won the Carlotta and Alvin Ewing English Award and is a two-time winner of the Edwin Roodhouse Memorial Scholarship for her creative writing.

Emma Wood is a poet and (as yet unpublished) author studying the art of good writing at Regent University. Her favorite poets include Robert Frost, Mary Oliver, and Sidney Lanier. She congratulates you for being the sort of reader who reads author bios and hopes you have paused to appreciate something lovely today.

Authors

David Athey
Dorisa Costello
Hannah Hopkins
Allie Munro
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Tad Kamano
Michael Elam
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Aryn Joy Tomasetti
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Submissions for future issues are open to all creative writers.