

# Byways

Journal of Arts & Letters  
Spring 2011

**CENTRAL TEXAS COLLEGE**

# Forward

Collections of creative works, such as this one, enable the reader to see the world through different eyes. Like a light beam focused through a prism, life can be experienced as splashes of vivid, distinct color thanks to the mind of the writer or artist; it is through the power of the writer's word and the artist's brush that, many times, we come to understand ourselves better.

Every student that has submitted to Byways this year leaves a unique imprint on the way we see our shared, diverse, and complex world; consequently, they renew our awareness of our place in it. Our social and private lives can grow from these newfound perceptions, fed by the voices and insights recorded in these pages.

Of course, the greater the chorus of voices becomes, the more opportunity for a song to emerge that will lift up the mind to richer heights of understanding. Let this small volume encourage the entire student body to see that there's enough room for their voice to be added here. Indeed, contributions are always welcome. One more short story or poem, one more painting or photograph can help augment the song and intensify the transforming light that is our shared imagination.

Jonnathan Molina,  
Byways student editor

# Byways

## Journal of Arts & Letters

### Spring 2011

#### **Cover Art**

*Fabric* - Drawing, Berry Rodriguez

#### **Poster Art**

*Trains* - Photo, Curt Swalley

#### **Byways Artists Prize Winners**

1<sup>st</sup> Place: Berry Rodriguez - *Ash*

2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Natasha Campbell - *Tetanus*

3<sup>rd</sup> Place: Charles Wilson - *A Light that Shines*

Honorable Mention: Carla Villanueva - *Cinderella's Dress*

#### **Byways Literary Prize Winners**

1<sup>st</sup> Place: Tamara Hawthorne Lohman - *A Farewell Taps*

2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Lee Elder - *The Reaper Waits*

3<sup>rd</sup> Place: Chondie - *Sam*

Honorable Mention: Patrick Cline - *Nickel*

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Donna Duran for Page Layout  
CTC Printing Department

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# Dominican Republic

Library Award

*Peter Jackson*

Teary-eyed Dominican chanting Republica Dominicana  
Rojo y blanco y azul grandma's pride  
Kids high fiving on white sand screaming DR Rules  
Tallest statue yells I love being Dominican  
While flags are blowing in the wind

Palm trees soar over villages  
While I walked on gravel roads  
I saw endless rainbows and smiling faces  
Canoe boats paddle under the paradise of the cloudless sky

Grandpa sits underneath the tree marveling his offspring  
As future baseball heroes slide on the diamond  
Predecessors of poetry are conquering minds  
As European tourist relax on the beach

There was a five foot six goddess  
Between the cave on the rocks  
A temptation peaking my desire and when this goddess dove out into the water  
I knew that I would marry a Dominican woman in Santo Domingo

During the day it was the beach and at night I listened to the sound of the beats  
Only in Santo Domingo does passionate salsa dancing transform the moon  
My heart transformed into the moon shinning over the city  
My lungs flowed like shooting stars in the sky  
Wishing never to leave this beautiful country

# My World, Her Maybe

*Lourdes Ballard*

Nothing I started from is nothing I fear I'll be.  
Lovely Lady so fair and fine, heavenly eyes unveiled.  
Graceful as a swan with subtle rhythm, seduce me.  
Uniform exhaled words refined on rouge tinged lips.  
Hazel optic glances, how they penetrate me.  
A plethora of unobtrusive beauty defined by your hips.  
Your uttered vibrations engulf like fire in my ear.  
I have yet to see a woman to compare to your light,  
But you are entangled in knots, for it's love you most fear.  
I offer you everything, yet you take nothing.  
Your mind aloof, you remember the beginning of loving.  
Mournfully you forget where love is to go with desire aflame.  
Amorous appetite is what I wish to feed you.  
Nothing I started from is nothing I fear I'll be.  
Bewitching guile and a soul filled with magic.  
Wicked and witty, I perceive you alarmingly self assured,  
But your heart is flawed and frankly that is quite tragic.  
My counterpart, I listen to a spirit enticingly heard.  
And I want to keep you locked away like a flighty bird.  
But your will is greater than any cage can hold.  
It's your zeal for living which keeps my soul stirred.  
I wait for the moment you make up your mind.  
Will you stay with me for the remainder of time?  
Will you walk away with no remorse left behind?  
Nothing I started from is nothing I fear I'll be.



# Creepture

*Natasha Campbell*



*Photo*

# Just Before Dark

*Chondie*



*Painting*



# The Reaper Waits

Second Place Written Award

*Lee Elder*

Looming behind me, always waiting there  
Emotionless figure breathes down my neck  
The black-robed figure, death, waiting so near  
Waiting for when my life, he has to beck

His ghost looms over me as it does all  
A man of duty you cannot dissuade  
He waits for the day when we each must fall  
His razor sharp scythe you cannot evade

A head made of bone without eye or ear  
Pleading for your life will do you no good  
Your beauty he won't see, bribes he can't hear  
Emotionless underneath the black hood

I do not know how long we will both wait  
But I know we will, it is all our fate

# The Bard And the Black Crow Man

Curt Swalley

*Farmers tell the gullible that they chase crows away because they are the harbingers of death, when in reality they are nothing more than simple earthly nuisances that pick at the seeds and the crops uninvited. Ravens, on the other hand...*

*Ravens are a different story altogether. Any one of them could be Her messenger, an agent of the Lady Raven herself.*

*And why were the crows not recruited for such service, you may ask?*

*Because the Black Crow Man did not deliver messages. When He came, it was to take the wicked and unworthy away, without warning, without mercy. He only had one companion, one ally that stood by his side.*

*If the people's folklore was to be believed, that is.*

*A raven who was three times chased and did not fly was almost certainly an omen, and its behavior was closely watched. The holy men could sometimes understand their messages, if they were wise, and old, and closer to Her than the fresh young farm boys.*

*There was one other who showed an odd interest in them, and the ravens seemed to return his attention. When the boy walked out in the grass among them, they seemed to welcome him, cawing and cavorting like tame cage-birds around him. He was an orphan, deaf but otherwise perfectly healthy, and nobody knew who his parents were. The people were kind folk, and any one of them would have taken him when they found him by the well, barely old enough to walk. But all had hesitated...there was a raven on the rim of the well, and it watched them without the normal twitching and fussing that fills a bird's life. Even the Holy Man of the village hesitated to come forth, but his father, the Holy Man before him did not. He hobbled over and knelt down, leaning heavily on the well as he did. With many grunts and creaks and an "ahhhhh" of relief when he finally made it, he carefully gathered up the calm and quiet toddler. With another chorus of grunts and creaking joints, and mutterings under his breath about age and bodies added, he brought himself to a sitting position with the child in his lap. He smiled a warm and toothless grin at the boy who was already almost asleep in his arms and crooned an old song chant. The boy faded fast and was asleep in moments. The song faded too, and as it did the old Holy Man's head bowed down until he was asleep as well.*

*The boy awoke hungry a few hours later, and one of the village mothers made room for him at her breast. The raven was long since gone, and the old man never woke up again. The next day, Anturo buried his father and took the boy into the house of the Holy Man, his house, and raised him to be his son, Antino.*

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The young boy was quiet and well-behaved as ever, though he was thoroughly bored. He seemed to be the only one out of the crowd packed into the common room of the Broken Bow Inn to ignore the Bard's story. This was for two reasons, one being that he was deaf. The other was as much a mystery as his appearance some six years ago.

He spied the dog, a large Collin's Roughherder sleeping on the hearth rug, and began to watch him carefully, as if he was going to suddenly jump awake and do tricks. The dog slept on, no doubt tired and sore from a full day of herding the massive Gargans up and down the hills. Though taller than a Paladin's warhorse and twice as wide, Gargans were surprisingly docile. Still, they tended to ignore anything smaller than a plains tiger, which is why the local roughherders who kept Gargans gave up on Northern Sheepdogs and introduced a new nemesis to their herds: The Collin's Roughherder.

A Collin's stood 4 feet tall at the shoulder, weighed 250-300 pounds (all dense muscle and heavy fur), were intelligent enough to anticipate and adjust to a dozen herd members all wanting to go their own way, and had the endurance to chase them all down and bring them home. They also had a quality know as "The Eye." Though they didn't possess any magical abilities, they did possess a startling and unearthly intensity in their stare. The gleam in their dark eyes alone could sway the opinion of a stubborn Gargan who wanted to go it's own way. Long legends and tall tales say that they were bred from Death's own hellhounds, the legendary Ghost Pack, and that's where they got their "Eye". Few admitted to actually believing that, but more folks than not wondered silently to themselves if it might just be true.

A stranger, the old roughherder who belonged to the dog, was watching the Bard from under his tattered sun-hat, as intent on the smooth-talking talespinner as the young boy, Antino, was on the dog.

*"...And it was then that they all looked upon the unfortunate soul as one, and paused to stare, just as he stared back at them, frozen in terror. For a scant few seconds, time slowed and the only sound heard was an ethereal eldritch growl, barely perceptible and echoing as if they stood within the deep, dark bowels of Hell's blackest caverns. The wind itself held it's breath as the growl faded away.*

*A brown and withered leaf, the last leaf left clinging to its cold and barren perch finally gave up the struggle to resist the inevitable fate of all things living. Seconds passed as it fell, twisting in its sad, graceful descent. Then, lighter than feathers, it landed, nay....alighted upon the new snow. It had been a fine leaf, and in a lifetime measured in sunrises and rainfalls, it had grown green and broad, and collected more than its share of warm and delicious sunlight. If trees were truly sentient, as the druids so quaintly believe, than this one must be especially proud of its last faded leaf.*

*...at that moment, there came a tiny, pitiful noise, an exhalation of life's breath that would never be drawn again. A soft thump of dead weight on the grassy ground cover followed, and then all was still. The Ghostly Pack left then, not by bounding away, but by simply fading out of existence.*

*The Wind exhaled as well, a sigh both frail and sad that pushed the brown, dead leaf across the snow. It was too weak to lift this withered remnant into the sky, and the leaf's last dream of floating up to heaven died on that frozen hill. That wind, as it rose once and fell forever... It was not unlike the breath of the man who lay dead, slain by the vile and evil will of the Pack."*

The dog did nothing but lay there while the boy stared at him. He didn't so much as twitch his tail, but Antino clapped his hands sharply and laughed at some imagined antic. The people blinked then, as if all of them half remembered some forgotten chore left undone.

That's when the stranger, the old roughherder, spoke.

"True it is that poor Shermik died that day upon that cold and weathered hill...but since you folks paid your good silver for this *grand* story (this earned a nasty look from the Bard), I take it upon myself to tell the full and unglamorous truth of it. Besides, I've always fancied myself a bit of a tale-spinner."

The dog, curled up near the fire, continued his façade of sleep unnoticed, even as he voiced another deep and powerful growl that would have filled the room, had it been perceptible to human ears. How Antino had heard the silent voice of the dog was a mystery, but however he did, it again succeeded in engaging and entertaining him where the Bard had failed. While the first growl had magically freed the crowded room from the Scarred one's deftly woven story-spell, the second caught them fast again, this time to their benefit...Their attention turned from the scowling Bard in one corner to the stranger, the old roughherder in the other corner, who was suddenly as fascinating to them as "Jaemrin the Scarred, brave and valiant walker of the Wesborlands" was trivial.

"You all know that Shermik was not a paragon of giddy joy. Worn were his old army boots and weathered was his old soul." A few of the people dropped their eyes and murmured...longtime friends of the dead man, if ever he had any. "He was not generous with kind words or small encouragements. Indeed, He rarely spoke, and when he did, it was to point out that the storms were coming in force, or weren't coming at all." Some nodding occurred among the crowd, and the murmurs steadily grew. "But surely...he had some generosity in his heart?" The people looked at each other, but nobody answered. Even the murmurs stopped. "I see. He was not loved here. Hmm." The Bard watched helplessly as the power of the counter-spell took its final effect on the crowd...HIS crowd, the gods of justice be damned! Jaemrin's former audience never realized that for a few moments, all emotion was taken from them, leaving only a stretch of cool, unclouded, magically induced reason that ruined the Bard's grip on their feelings and desires.

A few moments were enough, and a calm voice said "Shermik was respected. In fact, he and I drank good health together a time or two, when he was in town. He was never much sociable...but he was always out working the herds is why." Another finished for the young man; "O'right, those herds that fed us for the last dozen winters."

"Aye, too true!" said a third. "He fattens them up all year, then we fatten ourselves all winter!"

The old roughherder smiled and crossed his arms as more and more people began to speak. "And the skins! For his efforts, we have wool for our coats and rugs."

"He pushes the herds high that their coats grow thick and lush in short order, though it's costs him dearly in time and comfort. There is much wool left over for trade after we warm ourselves, and horns too...the mine salt and honey from the lowfeld hills are welcome indeed."

"And the bountiful harvest of valley apples, for pies and vinegar and wine!"

"Welcome yes, and sorely needed in Autumn, for the pickling and preserving days."

"Those lowfeld boys have him to thank when they manage to keep their own herds from the wolves and wild hill beasts. He is a hard teacher, but any shepherd's hand who can keep up learns all of everything they need to know."

The Bard lost his haughty sneer as he realized that not only had he lost his chance to fleece this flock, but that he had to move quickly to avoid losing his own hide. *Country folk, while stupid and gullible, tended to be troublesome in angry masses.* He had learned this the hard way once. He had the scars to remind him.

The conversations continued as a dozen people talked to a dozen other people all at once.

“-not entirely true, I often sent soup bundles to him so he could boil a pot at the restwater, while the herd stops to drink and relax.”

“I always had extra wheat flour and veggie-grind from making field-cakes for the farmers...but he never ate a single one”

“Sure as he eats ‘em, but he shares with the worker dogs, see? Dips ‘em in the restwater soup to soften ‘em up some, right?”

“oh aye, but the dogs loved them...kept ‘em running hardy up and down the hills and far away from the barber’s shears!”

“His are lucky beasts...work hard for a few years, retire young to the lowlands, chase girl dogs instead of livestock.”

“Heh, yea...and he’s never had a dog snipped, has he?”

The dog at the fire, named “Oggie” by the etching on his collar, reared up from his false sleep as if to say “Certainly *NOT!*”; then turned towards the Bard edging his way carefully towards the window. He had found the door already locked, though no hand of man had touched it. When he heard the now audible and painfully familiar low rumbling growl of the displeased dog, he knew how and why. He froze and his eyes swept the room. They grew large as they fell on the only one there that could have possibly scared him more than the huge Collin’s, even when he showed the Bard a mouthful of sharp, pointed displeasure. *So many teeth....*

“You see, good people...It was not the legendary Ghost Pack of Death’s Hell-Hounds that took your Flockmaster...*it was this lying coward, he who stands before you now!* He murdered that good, honest man in a fit of pique...why? Because he had been bested in a game of chance by a boy half his age in the last village! When he protested, they beat him until he paid, then they ran him off like the criminal he is, stinking of the rotten fruit they had gleefully pelted him with. He demanded respect from them and got none, which was all he earned and less than he deserved. He demanded the same from the stranger who was kind enough to share his fire and his soup, a stranger that refused to bow to his ‘fame and magnificence’. Your Shermik told him that he bowed to none save the earth and sky.”



“*THIS* man” he stabbed a finger at the Bard, who flinched, “*THIS* wretch poisoned him with a Zcharek blade and watched him die, which gave him the sick inspiration for the story he fouled your ears with tonight. He only got away with his life and soul that night because the old shepherd delayed The Pack. They wanted to give your Shermik special treatment for his life of unflinching selfless service...and his boundless love for his dogs. Yes, the Ghost Pack IS real and it WAS there. They watched as life left the poor man, and they took him to his rest in the heavens.” The outrage of hearing the truth of his heinous actions told was nothing compared to the horror of what Jaemrin heard next.

*“And then they returned to me, for I am their master.”*

Those foreboding words drifted around the room like the thin smoke from the cheap candle lamps on every table. The townspeople were vaguely unsettled by them, but the Bard’s guts twisted beneath his wide, many-pocketed belt. The interloper had just told everyone who he really was, but Jaemrin already knew. Oggie’s growl had already told him. No doubt the name was short for “Drachan-Augen”, or in the common tongue, “Dragoneyes.” The Bard recalled a passage from Oksilnoraff’s “The Hymn of the Black Crow Man”, about a cruel tyrant who met a terrible, well-deserved end...

*“The pack struck as one, one biting mouth full of hellish teeth, one great demonic beast, one perfect instrument to deliver the most final of justices. They savaged the King’s blackened, twisted soul as they dragged it howling in madness and denial to the coldest and darkest of Hell’s lost halls. And then, tongues of flame hanging out from their exertions, eyes burning with pure power like the most ancient of Dragons, they returned to me...”*

*...For I am their master.”*

The Bard went pale and broke out in a cold sweat that caused his carefully applied fake scars to peel a little as he wiped his brow.

“And now, we have come...” The roughherder pointed at the Bard again and finished in a low growling voice “*For YOU.*”

Jaemrin saw what the others did not, would not if the dark and fearsome figure did not want them to. He saw the emissary of the Goddess of Death, Anesthia’s Black Crow Man himself, spreading his tattered cloak like the shadow of massive black-feathered wings. His terror-stricken gaze dropped to the huge dog growling and curling his lip as he pawed over to his master’s side. In the dimly lit room, darkened further by the presence of Death’s servant, the bard saw the Dog’s unusual name confirmed...his eyes glowed with power, as if they caught and reflected all the light of the room though emerald prisms. His form

blurred until all the Bard could see was his outline...and those hellish green eyes; then he saw the rest of the Ghost Pack. Some were standing as if they had always been there, some were pacing about, their ethereal forms unhindered by walls, furniture, even the puzzled townspeople that could not understand why the Bard had gone so pale and fearful.

One achievement he could hold high over the other spirits in the afterlife of sin's reward was that he had seen the Ghost Pack twice. While the first had lasted for quite a few minutes, the second time only lasted a few seconds, the time it took to return their stare and release a single lungful of air into the cold blackness of eternity. It made a tiny, pitiful noise as it escaped, an exhalation of life's breath that would never be drawn again.

There was an ungainly crash as the Bard's collapse brought down a table laden with half empty steins of ale, greasy plates and a tarnished silver-plated platter with the tattered remains of a large roast mutton joint. Dragoneyes, the fearsome hellhound that was the Black Crow Man's only companion, darted forward and clamped his jaws tightly on the screaming, howling soul that oozed from the Bard's dead body, giving it a cruel and threatening shake as he did to quiet it.

One man gave a short laugh as a happy Oggie trotted out the door with his jaws clamped tightly on what his eyes told him was the fallen mutton bone. In the aftermath of the Bard's sudden, unexplainable death, this bit of humor was enough of a contrast to break the tension and distract the shocked witnesses, if only for a moment, from a small detail; the bone lay untouched where it had landed when the Bard fell dead upon the table.

As one, they turned to look at the stranger who had confronted the Bard with the truth of Shermik's murder, which apparently caused some sort of massive heart attack or some-other. The Holy Man would know what was what.

But when they turned, the stranger was gone, the only evidence that he was ever there perched on Antino's head. The boy smiled out from under the wide brim of the tattered old sun-hat, which now sported a single long, blue-black feather, and he laughed again, clapping happily as he did.

# Twin Ice Pillars

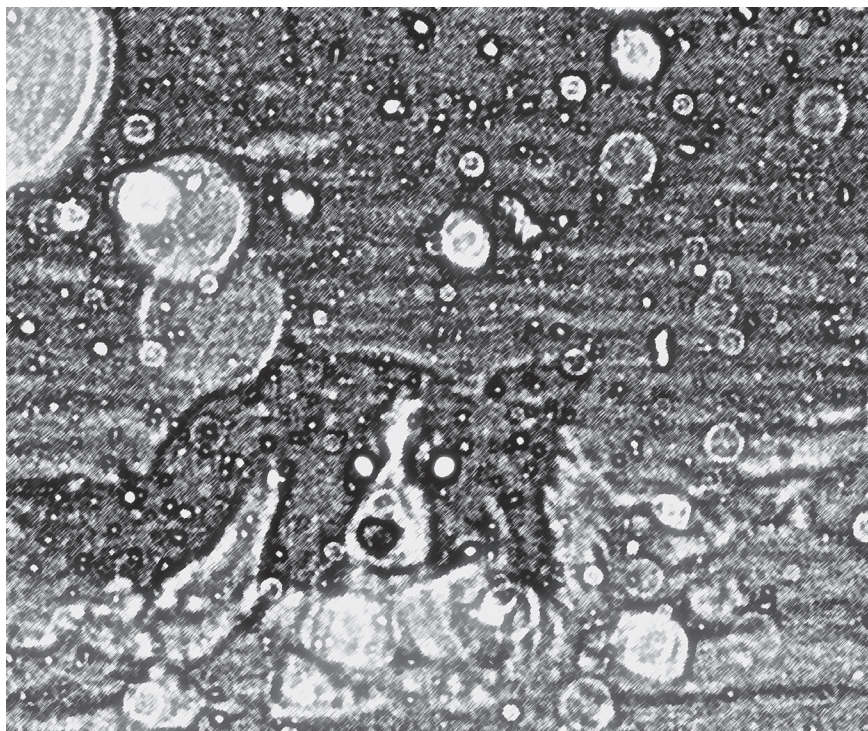
*Charles Wilson*



*Photo*

# Heavy Snow II

*Curt Swalley*



*Photo*



*Berry Rodriquez*



*Ceramics*

# Cinderella's Dress

Honorable Mention

*Carla Villanueva*



*Jewelry*



# Tetanus Shot Needed

Second Place Art Award

*Natasha Campbell*



*Photo*

# Nickel

Honorable Mention

*Patrick Cline*

Faith is an uncertain thing, but what is certain is that people have a lot of it. Perhaps that is why while visiting a Gypsy fortune teller; a writer received me among the change on his transaction. Upon returning home, he threw me on his coffee table along with the contents of his pockets: a cell phone, a stack of various payment cards and identification, and a pack of Pall Mall Menthol cigarettes.

He began writing, became frustrated with slow progression of storyline and began to ponder at the objects on his table. Glancing at the pile of change he noticed a really old nickel. Picking it up, he ran his thumb over my face, clearing a bit of grime from it, and then laid me face-up on the table closest to him.

I don't know what the Gypsy told him, her enchantments were quite legendary, but he did something that no one has done to me in a long time. He spoke, making a bet unheard to anyone but me. He bet that I had a story to tell, and so I replied. Amazement overtook him briefly, then grabbing a pen he began to write as I dictated to him the story that I always wanted to tell.

One day, whilst lying in my cave where I had lived for as long as I can remember, I was struck over the head with a pick and taken away from my home by dirty faced men. The nameless men placed me in a truck which drove me countless miles until they dumped me with other dirty faced men who kept calling me "Silver". These men were worse to me than those that had struck me from my crevice, as they loaded me with shovel into a furnace which burnt me, melting me into what they called a "Bar". Sometime later, other men loaded me alongside other "Bars" into a crate where I remained until I was violently thrown onto the conveyor belt of a large machine that then pressed me into my immortal shape; a small, round piece of "Silver".

Of all my transformations and name changes, this was the most significant. They called me "Nickel", which I have been since 1941, though I have had many masters which have called me by a variety of other names; this reference being so frequently used to describe me must be what I am. So I am a Nickel, but this story is not of my many exchanges from hand to hand or bank to bank as oh so many have occurred in all the years of my existence. This story is of the man that acquired me in 1965 as "Change" for his morning coffee at "Sally's Diner" in San Francisco, California.

I remember the first time I saw this man, this "Edward Stephen Anderson", as his driver's license which he frequently laid me beside would read, when he picked me up with a smile and began to speak.

“Oh cool! We’re the same age Nickel. Tell you what, I’m gonna Bogart you and whenever I have trouble, I’ll ask you for help so that we both get older.”

The man then rubbed me and placed me in his pocket along with several other coins, as so many others had before, but he never forgot to take me with him. He was very responsible with me, placing me atop dressers, tables, dashboards, and all sorts of surfaces until he returned me to his back left pocket the following day.

During my earliest days with the man, he lived alone in a small apartment on a busy street. He was at this time a student at the University of San Francisco, or so I gathered from the multitudes of lectures I had overheard, though the denim muffled anything recognizable from my dark home in Edward’s pocket. However I had become very efficient at hearing conversations which took place while he as upright. Most of these interactions between the man and his fellow humans bore no impact on my existence, so I for the most part paid them no never mind. I was always more interested by what he laid in the pocket beside me as the greatest portion of my life was spent there.

It has never failed to amaze me how much one can learn about someone from what they keep in their pockets. Edward was a smoker, particularly one that only smoked Marlboro reds, which he always packed against his palm. He also fit with the culture of the time by ritualistically experimenting with a variety of drugs, which may explain his extremely unusual decision to keep me as a token. He was never short of money, though he was unemployed for great periods of time, I suspect his valley dwelling parents had afforded him a life of ease. Edward must have been a fan of unprotected sex as I never saw a condom while in his possession.

Although Edward’s first consultations of me were quite pointless and, for lack of a better word, dumb, eventually he came to trust me with more important questions. As I am only a Nickel and therefore before my possession by the fortune teller I was incapable of speech, his asking of my opinion seemed to just reassure him of what he thought was right, as if I was the only backbone the man had. I was his ever present confidence booster, telling him that he was right, easing his mind so that he might make decisions that he truly believed in.

One night, Edward drew me from his pocket, working my exterior with his thumb and forefinger in a manner characteristic of one that held a worry stone, and turned my face to see his as he began to speak.

“It’s lonely here Nickel, there is only you and I when the drugs are gone and everyone goes home. I think we need to find me a steady girl. That girl Daisy in my English class sure is a Marilyn Monroe, but what do you think? Do you think I would have a chance with her at all?”

I didn't know Daisy, but I certainly knew Ms. Monroe. My life before the safe, solitude of Edwards pocket had afforded me many opportunities to read the front page of newspapers as old men read them over me. If only I could have moved my lips I would have told him "Yes! Of course you should take her out!" But as always, I simply lay in his palm and smiled.

The following week, Edward approached Daisy and engaged her in an upright conversation. I like to think that he did this on purpose, knowing that this was the only way for me to hear what he was saying.

"Hey Daisy, thanks for letting me borrow your notes, they were a big help on that exam."

"You're welcome Edward, I'm glad I could help."

"You know, I would really like to repay you for being so helpful, maybe you and I could go to the drive-in on Friday night?"

"That sounds like fun, I would love to go. You can pick me up at my house at seven."

"Great! It's a date."

My master wrote down her address on a slip of paper and slipped it into his back pocket alongside me. Upon doing so, he lurched a finger deeper within his pocket and gave my face a pinch, almost as if he wished to give me a wingman's high-five.

Later, as he prepared for bed he took me out and enthusiastically re-announced the development and thanked me for my contribution in the "collaborative effort".

On the night of their date, the movie "The Birds" by Alfred Hitchcock was showing. Edward had removed me from his pocket and placed me face up on the dash of his baby blue Cadillac DeVille alongside a fresh pack of Marlboros. I found the birds in the movie to be quite uncharacteristic of real birds, although I am certain I was the only one in the car to notice this as the other occupants in the vehicle were too busy necking. Needless to say, the date had been a success for my owner, which he praised me for as soon as he had returned the beautiful young Daisy to her home.

Many more dates would occur between the two of them, and in time Daisy became the steady girl he had hoped to find. What to do about and with this twenty-three old blonde bombshell came to fill up most of Edward's questions.

"Which shirt should I wear tonight? I like this white one, but Daisy's favorite color is blue and that one is pretty fine."

“Do you think Daisy would like the red roses or the pink ones?”

“Where should we take Daisy tonight? There is a new restaurant uptown...”

Daisy, Daisy, Daisy. Edward was clearly, inescapably in love with this girl. I must admit that it became quite aggravating to be the consult of such a sap, but as he controlled my fate I was always there to listen and smile as though I guided his actions in some indirect way. Several months passed in which my unheard answers fueled the fires of young love. “Money” literally made the world go round.

In late July of 1967, something unusual happened; Edward consulted me whilst in the presence of Daisy. Naturally, Daisy found this to be quite odd as anyone who talks to inanimate objects is viewed as a lunatic. My master attempted to explain the relationship he had founded with me to his girlfriend, but on this hot summer day she seemed to be less than understanding.

“So you are telling me that you ask this nickel for help making your decisions?”

“All the time, he has never led me astray before.”

“What about your job? What about our life? Did you ask the nickel what to do when I got sick last week?”

“All of it, Nickel has brought me all that I have.”

“I can’t believe you would be so irresponsible, so ignorant. I can’t see you anymore Edward, not until you learn to make real decisions. Goodbye.”

Daisy stormed out of Edwards’s small apartment and I never saw her there again. The man was distraught, drinking heavily and wailing out in the muggy, dimly lit bedroom of his once more lonely apartment.

Eventually, my beholder’s pain turned to anger as he turned his attention to me, blaming me for the tragedy that had just befallen him. Never before had anyone done me so wrong, it was as though he cursed my very existence as he spewed undue hatred upon me. I had never told him to talk to me, I never once lead him to believe anything, and not a word came from my lips as he continually questioned the path of his life. His voice filled with malice as he began to shout at me.

“What have you done to me Nickel!? She was my world, my everything, and now she’s gone! How could you do this to me? Have I not kept you safe all this time?”

I remained silent; I simply sat on the counter my owner had placed me on. The silence must have been contagious as Edward stopped shouting, prepared his things for a drive, and slid me off the counter into his hand with a snap. The man walked to his Cadillac, placed me on the dash, and started the engine. In a drunken yet determined manner, Edward drove us many miles outside of town until we arrived at a barren field in the dead of night. He once again snapped me from my perch, and with a final lash of anger, hurled me as far as he could into the dirt plain, entombed by gritty, infertile earth.

This was not the first time I had left circulation, but it certain was a new feeling for me. As I lay alone, without sight, without sound, nothing but the dirt, I finally understood what it was to be dead. True, I was still a piece of silver as I have always been, but up until that point, I stood for something. My shape, my shine, my texture, all of it meant nothing when before it made me what I was. The imprint of man that pressed me still adorned me in this grave, a grim reminder that it was all over.

I lay dormant under that soil for nearly three decades, when you spend your life laying around you develop an affinity for time calculations, until the soil around me began to turn and I felt myself being pushed out of it. I felt the warm sun beat down upon me as I lay face down above the soil, though I still could not see the world around me. Then, another sensation overtook me as a pair of rough, callused fingers gripped my edge. Although aged and toughened by the toils of a laborious life, I could feel a sense of belonging between this familiar thumb and forefinger. Edward beheld me once again, turning my face up to see his as great enthusiasm lit up his weathered face. Tears of joy streamed out of wrinkles near his eyes as we embraced.

The man told me of his life after he had thrown me away into the field, of how Daisy had returned to him days later, revealing that she was pregnant and had left out of fear. The two of them had wed soon after and had a boy which they named "Nicolas Jefferson Anderson", named for myself; the nickel that brought them together. He said that when Daisy returned, he came back to the field and searched for me, but rain had moved the dirt, making his efforts all in vain. Edward and Daisy had worked laboriously for years to raise the money to buy the land, which Edward tended, always tilling it with a mule so that he could watch and shift the soil, searching for me.

His life had been tough, his pain great, but he never stopped trying to get me back. All that was good in his life, at least in his eyes, I had brought to him. I never understood the faith that Edward had placed in me, but I know he had it, and when he had lost it he was willing to spend a lifetime to get it back.



I was once more the ever present consult, the driving force of Edwards's life. My master asked me his every question as I would lie smiling in his palm. In good times he would praise me for my guidance, in hard times he accepted it wasn't my fault, and together with his beautiful wife Daisy, grew old and prosperous. I was there when he lay upon his death bed, and on that day, his final words were one last question for me.

"What do you think death is like Nickel? Will I lay in the dirt, without sight, without sound, forever? Will I be alone? Will my size, my shape, my remnants of life cease to matter?"

I couldn't bear to answer his question, even if I was able to talk. When he died they dressed him in a fine, black suit and laid him into the dirt in a modest coffin. Edward's grave was a happier place than mine in the field. I overheard them say he was smiling when he was buried, as they slid me into his back left pocket before they lowered him in the ground. No longer to worry of life's questions or at least he stopped asking me.

# A Farewell Taps

First Place Written Award

*Tamara Hawthorne Lohman*

I hear a faint, familiar sound.  
The taps play on, o'er desert ground.  
They honor men without a band,  
so silently, through wind-blown sand.  
I feel a chill, like icy-heat,  
as desert sand blows through my feet.  
My closest friends are laid to rest,  
beneath my feet; yet, I'm still blest.  
I so admire the souls of those,  
who sleep amongst the desert rose.  
This farewell taps will play through time.  
Year after year, its echoed rhyme,  
will sound throughout the desert soil,  
as our men rest from life's harsh toil.  
The blasts ring out o'er ocean sky.  
"Let freedom ring," the sound doth sigh.  
The taps have crossed the ocean bed.  
"Farewell; good-night," the echo said.  
In vain, I wished I could reply,  
and echo back, "Farewell; good-bye!"

# A poem for the ages

*Peter Jackson*

In my arteries  
Lies blood stories  
Biological mixture of earth's contamination  
A chemical unbalance of evolution  
Orgy of autopsies

1 yellow life jacket  
Two men color blind  
Few words many spoken

Corrupt president's country in debt  
Nation of prostitutes  
Wasteland wants more lands to waste  
An aging poem to be continued

# The Truth

*Jillian Nulter*

Jessica's cab pulled up in front of the house. After paying her fee, Jessica stood looking upon the house before her. Inside this house was her mother. After year of searching, Jessica finally found her. Carefully Jessica approached the front door. Standing there, she couldn't bring up the courage to ring the doorbell.

"Okay Jessica, you can do this. She is your mother. She is going to welcome you with open arms. You've wanted this for years now. Just press the doorbell and meet your family," Jessica mumbled to herself. Reaching her arm forward, Jessica finally pressed the doorbell. A quaint tune softly filled Jessica's ears.

As the door opened, Jessica saw a pleasant looking woman with dark hair and Jessica's hazel eyes standing in the frame. A dusty rose colored apron hugged the woman's waist. A faint smell of freshly baked cookies filled Jessica's nostrils. There was a distant look in the woman's eyes as well. "May I help you?" Jessica responded lying about how her car had broken down a few miles away and wondered if she could use the phone. "Of course dear. Please come inside. Would you care for some milk and cookies? I just made a fresh batch of chocolate chip?" the woman asked stepping aside to let Jessica in.

"Yes please. That sounds wonderful." The woman left and came back carrying a tray with two tall glasses of milk and a plate full of cookies. Jessica took a tiny bite of a cookie. "These are incredible. I don't think I have ever had a cookie this chewy before."

The woman smiled at the compliment and noticed the necklace Jessica was wearing. "I seem to have forgotten my manners. My name is Kimberly Taylor. And your name is...?" Jessica told her and watched as Kimberly's smile faded away. Jessica began to toy with her necklace. Kimberly now saw the necklace better. It was identical to the one she gave her daughter before putting her up for adoption twenty years ago.

Kimberly asked to see Jessica's necklace. Jessica handed it over explaining that she's always had the necklace. "I gave a locket very similar to this one to my daughter years ago," Kimberly explained running her thumb over the intertwined hearts. She handed the necklace back to Jessica. "I don't know where she is. I missed all the important moments in her life because I gave her up for adoption. I was young but I don't regret my choice."

Jessica sat dumbfounded. Her mother didn't regret giving her daughter up? Jessica asked to use the phone to call a cab. Kimberly led her to the phone in the parlor. Making sure that the doors were shut tightly, Jessica searched for a pen and paper. Quickly composing a letter, Jessica slid it into an envelope and set it on the desk. Jessica walked back into the sitting room. "The cab is going to pick me up by my car so I must be going. Thank you for the snack. Goodbye." Kimberly said goodbye and watched Jessica walk down the lane.

Later that day, Kimberly went into the parlor to clean when she found the envelope. Pulling the letter out, Kimberly began to read. Sinking into a chair, she sobbed. Pulling out the other object in the envelope made Kimberly sobbed harder. It was Jessica's locket.

# Ode to the Muse

*Patrick Cline*

She is the Sun and I the Flower,  
An unchangeable force of grace and power,  
Beaming purity and light despite the hour,  
And I shall grow from her heavenly shower.

For despite my petals that are my guise,  
I remain a wicked weed tainted in lies.  
But her's is a love that never dies,  
As this corrupt plant cannot breach the skies.

Never shall I taint nor destroy  
This unreachable object of vibrant joy.  
With her grace my blossoms will deploy,  
An ivy that climbs the wall of Troy.

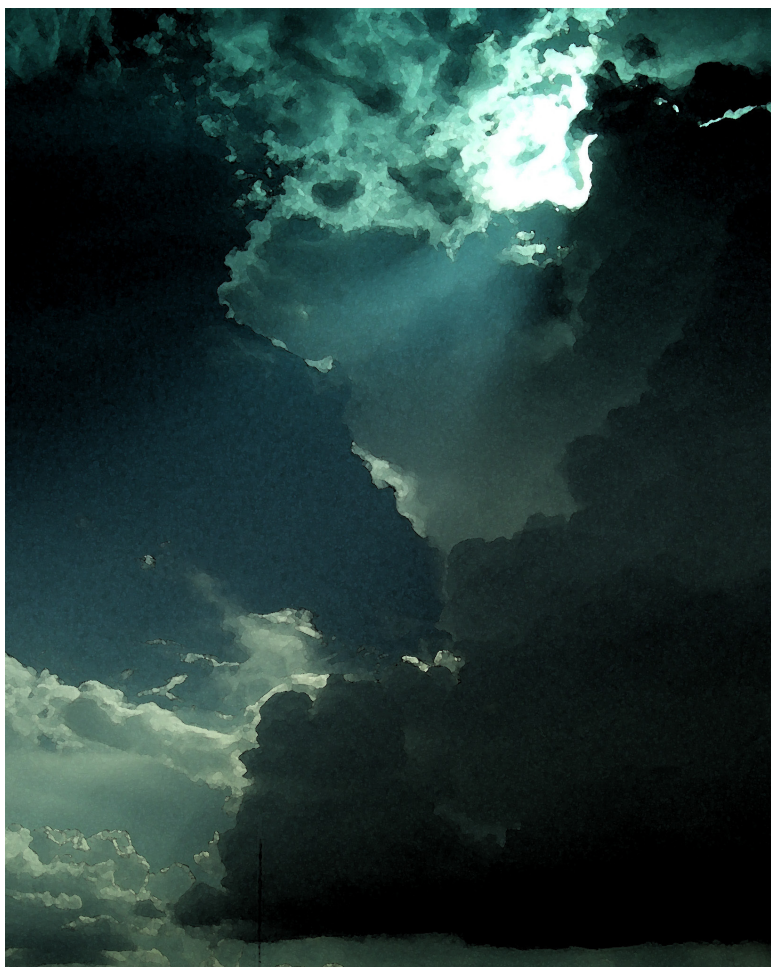
I will pine for her, reaching for the light,  
Her cosmic radiance my only sight.  
Until dark sadness increases my plight  
I will yearn for the moment day takes night.



# A Light That Shines

Third Place Art Award

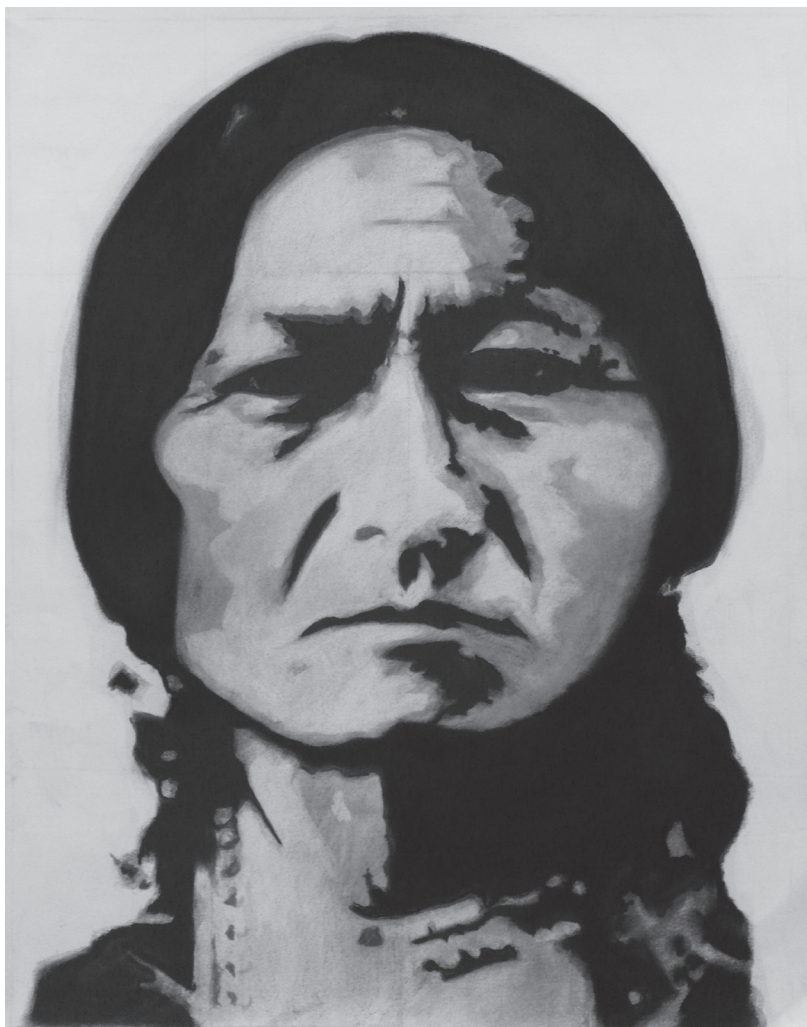
*Charles Wilson*



*Photo*

# Sitting Bull

*Berry Rodriguez*



*Drawing - Charcoal*

# Untitled

*Brian Wilkey*



*Drawing - Charcoal*

Chondie

*Grandpa, this first one is for you. I am your Sam and you will always be my Granda. Thank you for teaching me everything is possible!*

I'd heard the day I was born my Granda had a heart attack. He'd hardly ever been sick a day in his life. He scared my da so badly, that when he asked to name me, Da let him. Shannen Ashlynn Macnamara. But to everyone, I'm just Sam. My ma didn't even mind. She always said she was too happy that I'd made it into this world and that my Granda had stayed.

For as long as I was old, my Granda told me stories. My grandparents lived next door, and I saw them everyday. Every night, Granda would come over and tell me the stories of his youth. When my brother and then my sister were born, he told them the stories, too. As each got older, they tired of listening to Granda, but I never did.

Sometimes I thought I was in Granda's stories, but they were just dreams. I could see his homeland as he'd stretched and painted its details for me -- forever green and misty, full of wonders and mysteries. I couldn't understand leaving such an enchanted place.

"How could you and Gran leave Ireland?"

I lost him. For a moment, I did not recognize him that was dearest to me. Looking through me, he came back slowly, his eyes focused on my face with unshed tears.

"Why, we came lookin' for you, my wee Sam."

I never asked him again.

As I got older, I was so clumsy. I can't think of one day when I didn't drop or trip over something. 'Stop dreaming and pay attention' was my secret mantra, but it didn't help. Sometimes I thought I felt really weak, but I didn't tell anyone.

One time I fell asleep listening to Granda. We were in the family room waiting for my da to get home to celebrate my tenth birthday. When I woke up later in my bed, I heard my da and Granda whispering, but I was still too tired and drifted back into the shadows of my dreams.

Soon after, we took our first big vacation ever! We drove for hours and hours. By the time we got there, I was better than myself. For three weeks, I didn't trip and fall or drop anything. At first we did fun things, but that last week we mainly stayed in our room while Da or Ma was out.

When we returned home, they just packed up everything and moved us to that vacation place. I begged Da and Ma to let me stay with my Granda and Gran, but they said no.

That first week was the hardest. I couldn't believe we had moved so far away from home. At first, my parents let me visit as often as I wanted – which was every weekend! I would always come back with a bruise or scrape, but I didn't care. I was with my Granda. My Granda always told me I was special, and when we were together, I could feel it, too. And always, he would talk of *Erin*, his magical isle.

Over time, things came up and my parents insisted that I stay home – school, work – until it seemed that I could only see my Granda with the family for holidays and birthdays.

That Christmas, he seemed frail some how, but he asked me so many questions about everything that he distracted me. Gran said I didn't have to help, but I wanted to hang the traditional mistletoe on the mantel. I'm not sure how it happened, but I fell off the ladder. I think I was just hungry, but we didn't stay the week like they promised. That's when I knew -- it was all my fault.

"Daydreaming again? Can't stand on a ladder?"

My brother and sister teased me the whole trip back. For weeks, my brother continued. How much it tormented me, but he didn't know. Finally, Ma told him he would be grounded for a month every time she heard of him saying it again

The longer I stayed away, the more I missed Granda and the more ordinary I felt. Although we spoke on the phone, it wasn't the same, and I wondered when I would get to see him again. As another birthday approached and even though nobody said, I just knew we would go to see my Granda and Gran. So I wasn't surprised when Da and Ma picked me up after school. Ryan and Kathleen were already in the back, and I could barely wait to get it.

"So, are we going to..."

"Your Granda is in the hospital, and we are driving there now."

"What happened?"

“We don’t know, but Gran said we had to get there tonight.”

Ma looked like she wanted to say more, but Da had already turned around and put on his blinker to pull out. I had to hurry and fasten my seatbelt. For once, my brother and sister were quiet. I was left alone with thoughts of my Granda.

Hoping we weren’t too late, we arrived at the hospital and went directly to the third floor. Gran met us as we got off the elevator, and we followed her quickly to the ICU waiting room.

“Everyone canna go back at once. I’ll take Sam now. Patrick, you and Moira decide whosit’ to be next and each of you bring either Ryan or Kathleen. They’re only allowin’ two at a time.”

Gran took me through the sterile maze of hallways. As we approached the doorway of 310, I thought I could feel my Granda, but it was fleeting and I wasn’t sure. Shaking, Gran stopped, and I couldn’t hold back.

“Gran, I wish we hadn’t moved away! Maybe he would be better.”

“None of that! Your Granda’s here because he got sick, and he has stayed with us much longer than anyone thought he would. It isn’t anyone’s fault.”

“But, if I’d just...”

“Weesht! It isn’t your fault, Sam, and he wouldn’t want you to be thinkin’ it. Get yourself in there, lass. He’s been waitin’ for you.”

She squeezed my hand and sent me in. I stumbled crossing the threshold, but could not look away from him. If Gran hadn’t brought me here, I would have thought he was someone else. He looked like someone left in a bathtub too long and then dried paper thin. But then, he saw me, and his eyes found mine. I wanted to run and throw myself at him, but he was so small in that white bed, I thought I might break him. I settled with holding his hand.

“Please let me speak while I may. The Lord has answered me prayers and I dinna want to insult his blessin’. I must tell you what I can. Go to the cabinet and get out me coat. In the inner left pocket is a key. One day, that key will unlock all of the secrets entrusted to me and which will become yours to keep and protect.”

I got his coat and found a small silver key. It was shiny and cold. My Granda seem to grow stronger, his determination filling the room.



“I will have your oath, Shannen Ashlynn Macnamara.”

“I will, Granda! I promise.”

I fumbled trying to put the key in my pocket.

“My wee Sam, never forget how special you are! I will love you always and watch over you forever until we meet again. Now, give your old granda a kiss, and ask Gran to bring your da.”

I gave him a kiss and a fierce hug. How I wished I could have stayed with him.

“I love you, Granda!”

I made myself release him and walked away. As I looked back, my Granda gave me one of his winks. Smiling through my tears, I followed Gran back through the corridors to the waiting area. Gran took Da and Ryan next and then Ma and Kathleen. I just sat there waiting and thinking of my Granda and that small key heavy in my pocket.

Gran went back to my Granda while we all waited. It was after midnight. Such a small reminder, that I was now thirteen, though it no longer held any joy. Gran came back, looking older than I'd ever seen.

“He's gone.”

While Da and Ma consoled Gran and each other, I slipped back through the hallways to my Granda's room. It's not that I didn't believe her. I just needed to see him again. My heart in my ears, I opened the door quietly, and walked silently to the bed. My eyes were hot and everything blurred, but my legs that took me closer to him were steady and sure. He was smiling. My Granda had gone home.

Oh, how I wanted to cry, but couldn't seem to let go. His smile, so happy and peaceful, stopped me. When I dream of that smile, I always feel he is content. I still remember my Granda in my prayers. Silly, but to me he is still alive somewhere, watching me and waiting.

And I waited -- three long years to the day. I was finally old enough. His long promised secrets would be revealed. An old letter arrived with no return address. As I held my treasure map, the 'x' was a security box at my local bank. Now that I was sixteen, I could go alone. It was hard to breathe and sound casual.



“Can I take the car by myself? I need to go to the bank before we go out for my birthday.”

“Ah, sure. Just be back before Da arrives with Gran.”

“Thanks, Ma!”

I ran to my room and closed and locked the door. The false bottom of my Granda's old jewelry box hid that small silver key. I slid it into the front right pocket of my jeans and put the jewelry box back on its shelf. I grabbed my backpack and the car keys on my way out the door.

I drove to my bank with my mind occupied, concentrating as only new drivers do. I arrived at the bank and parked away from the door. As I entered, I knew to sign in and sit down. Shirley called me.

“Sam, how can I help you today?”

I was so nervous that I just blurted out.

“I need to access a security box.”

She walked to her desk and opened a drawer full of files. After a quick search, she laid a paper and pen in front of me on the desk.

“Just fill out this form. Make sure you put the complete account number and password. Don't forget to sign and date at the bottom.”

Hands shaking, I wrote in the information contained in my letter.

*No one will be able to decipher my writing.*

She looked at my paper and started typing into her computer. She smiled.

“Okay, Sam. Come with me.”

I followed her into a private room with no windows, just a single table and chair, and the door behind me.

“Wait here. I'll be right back.”

She returned with a large black metal box and placed it on the table. She hesitated, and then left. I knew she was curious. I waited a moment, then walked over and locked the door. The key shuddered in my pocket and pressed in against me. As I moved towards the box, I felt gravity shift within my bones. Suddenly the room was too small. I couldn't breath. Granda wouldn't be keeping any more secrets. Memories and images flooded my mind, filling all spaces. None were spared.

*Was it moments, or years?*

I couldn't tell, but my face was cold and wet. Tears long overdue flowing past the barriers I had erected. I couldn't pretend my Granda's secret was that he was some how coming back to me. All along, it had been mine, my secret, and my heart was hoarse from its restraint! I had to leave and get way from that box!

*You promised, Shannen Ashlynn Macnamara.*

I could feel warmth behind me. It was coming from the box. It felt like... *home*. I pulled the key from my pocket and put it in the lock. Holding my breath, I turned until it clicked. Closing my eyes, I saw my Granda's smiling face. The box was open.

Inside I saw a palm-size green stone and the leather journal that used to sit on my Granda's desk. There was something larger beneath it. Silver Celtic symbols encircled another symbol made of phosphorescent gems. They looked like some type of water plant. My hand was drawn to it, and with that touch I remembered. They were reeds, opal reeds, and they were hot. I jerked back my hand, inadvertently freeing a folded piece of paper from inside.

Take care, my wee Sam. Remember my stories. They are all I could teach you in the time we had together. My journal is all that I know as it was passed down to me, and what I discovered. The stone is the key and the manuscript, the cipher. The rest will be up to you until you find another, Secret Keeper.

My love and protection you will have always.

# I'm No Longer Afraid

*Tamara Hawthorne Lohman*

I've already been there.  
I've walked alone in strange dark passageways,  
-- the fiery corridors which lead to Hell!

Nobody saw me there.  
I was "too young" to be a prisoner,  
-- so I hid amongst the willows and within my shell.

He knew where to find me, though.  
When he called my name, I cringed;  
-- though silent, I wished I could yell!

No one else knew my plight;  
I bore the heavy burden alone - morning and night,  
-- for somehow, I couldn't tell.

I dived into books - especially the *Holy Bible*.  
I wrote poetry and kept my mind busy,  
-- for then, I was in a "safe" place.

Every day was full of anguish;  
'twas a childhood of dreams mingled with despair.  
Many-a-night, streams flowed down my face.

Intelligent enough - possibly,  
but trapped within the gloom of a dark family secret.  
None of us could escape it - this disgrace!

Though finally we left,  
those dismal ghosts ever lingered 'round our family.  
Yet, along this solitary pathway, God's sustained me with His grace.

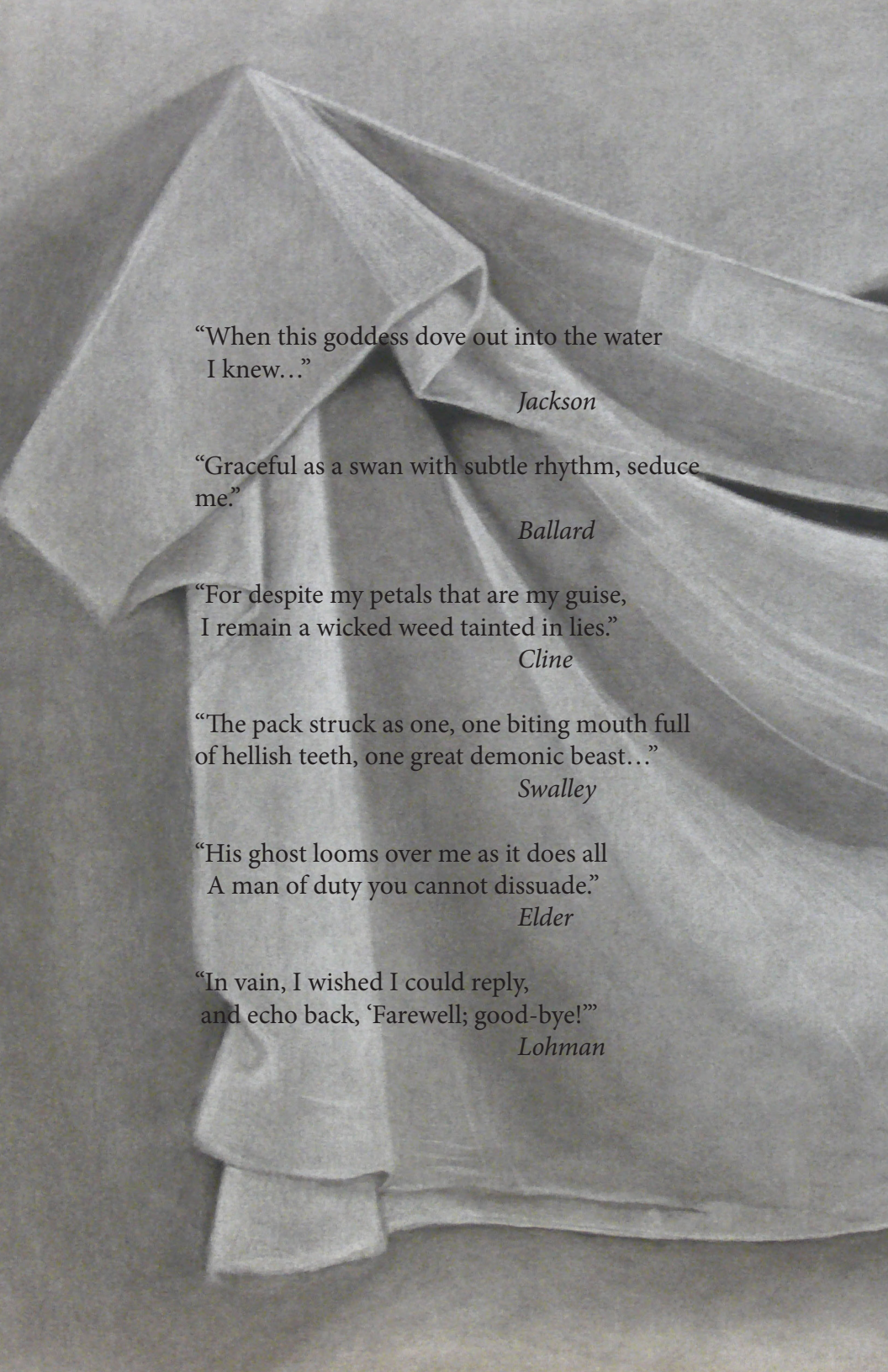
Many years have passed, and I don't feel that pain;  
I am wiser - yet cautious,  
but now, I wonder what price I've paid.

While young, I was held there -- captive;  
in that place, with no hope of ransom or escape,  
and I wish we'd never stayed.

I can now feel sweet empathy for those who suffer,  
but I sometimes wonder what effect that childhood  
has had on the choices I've made.

I'm alright now, and God's created me into a unique individual.  
I am not that innocent young child,  
and I'm no longer afraid!





“When this goddess dove out into the water  
I knew...”

*Jackson*

“Graceful as a swan with subtle rhythm, seduce  
me.”

*Ballard*

“For despite my petals that are my guise,  
I remain a wicked weed tainted in lies.”

*Cline*

“The pack struck as one, one biting mouth full  
of hellish teeth, one great demonic beast...”

*Swalley*

“His ghost looms over me as it does all  
A man of duty you cannot dissuade.”

*Elder*

“In vain, I wished I could reply,  
and echo back, ‘Farewell; good-bye!’”

*Lohman*