

pause

COVID Edition | December 2021

The Writer's Block Literary
Magazine

The University of Alabama
in Huntsville



Acknowledgments

Our Sponsors

The College of Arts,
Humanities, and Social
Sciences

The Honors College

Student Life

&

The Student Government
Organization

Our Advisor and Mentor

Dr. Susan Friedman

Our Team

Allison Zeman-Johnson

Raul Ortiz

Guillaume Williams

Emily Bishop



Letter from the president

Dear Reader,

If there is one thing that unites us, even through the lonely isolation of distance, it is literature. We want to leave our mark in this world. Make it clear that we are not alone. This 4th annual edition of the Writer's Block Magazine is comprised of a collection of prose, poetry, and art provided by the students and alumni of the University of Alabama in Huntsville that stands as a testament to the community and fellowship that is maintained through the pandemic. Our club has gone through much achievement and adversity since our origin in 2013. From small beginnings of a few like-minded individuals with the innate desire to transcribe dreams to paper to the steadfast and determined operations that allow us to channel those dreams in an official publication of a high quality magazine recognized by the University and its faculty and student body.

While the world may have stopped for some time, the officers and members of the Writer's Block kept hard at work. This magazine is only possible through the dedication, passion, and effort of long hours and careful consideration from the club. We would like to extend our appreciation and acknowledgement to all those who have lend a hand throughout the process of this magazine. We also appreciate the University and our generous sponsors for not only supporting the magazine but the creativity of those that call the university our alma mater. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you. As much as we have done to get this magazine together, the real stars are the authors that have submitted their stories to this edition of the magazine. The drive it takes to pour an expression of yourself into a story and the bravery tied to showing that to others is no small feat. Be proud for in your hands is the fruits of your labor.

Sincerely,

Raul Ortiz President of the Writer's Block (2021)

contents

Prose

The Neverending Discussion - Alexis Coleman

Over the top - Dylan Varney

Please Excuse my Dear Aunt Sally - Kerri Ballance

Paid in Full - Kasey Badger

The Un-Chosen One - Abigail Badger

Saw This and Thought of You - Emily Bishop

Poetry

Everything - Kerri Ballance

How Far Afield - C. E. Phillips



the never-ending discussion

By Alexis Coleman

An angel and a demon go out for lunch.

Stranger things have happened of course but one could argue that this was a normal occurrence given that they have been doing it every second Wednesday of the month for centuries.

They sit down in the sun and debate the logistics of what makes something good and something evil. Where one believes that they are two very different things, the other argues that they are one and the same.

This same discussion has gone on and on for a millennium. You would think that they would tire of the same conversation, but perhaps they just enjoy each other's company.

The waitress checks in on them from time to time, bringing refills and a smile in an attempt to get a nice tip.

She thinks nothing of the pair of deities as she is just trying to get through her shift.

That's not entirely true.

While she has nothing personal against the odd pair she had been serving. She did think it was quite rude that they had yet to leave the cafe after finishing their meal over an hour ago.

She had delivered the ticket a while ago and that had left it in the middle as if they were in the middle of a game of chicken just waiting for the other to break.

She was right of course.

The angel and the demon had placed a small wager as that always did. One would pay if a server dropped an order in the dining area, while the other would pay if they were asked to leave the facility.

It was a tradition by now.

The waitress passed by the table with a tray of food and in her attempt to see if the pair had paid their check; she slipped on another patron's coat.

In her attempt to lessen the damage from the fall, she shifted the tray to the left in her descent.

Sending the meal into the laps of the demon and angel.

One laughed at the situation; while the other scoffed and began to wipe themselves down with a napkin.

The waitress apologized sincerely and offered to get the pain more napkins to help with the cleanup.

They waved her off and paid the tab. The one that laughed shook her tattooed hand and told her it was no problem on the way out.

"Situations like this is exactly why most humans are damned." Said one to the other on the sidewalk out the little cafe.

"What situation old friend, a small accident doesn't send people down the highway to hell," replied the other.

"I don't think you should have tipped so generously, and we are not friends. She will probably use that money to purchase drugs."

"Just because a person likes ink doesn't mean they are drug users."

The conversation went on like this for a few minutes. The pair relating the, ever constant, argument to the waitress.

That is until one had an idea.

"If you are so sure of your opinion let's make a wager," exclaimed the grumpier one. His mood visibly lifted as they believed they were going to prove the other wrong.

So, they began to watch the waitress until the end of her shift. And proceeded to follow her to test their theory on what she would spend her tips on.

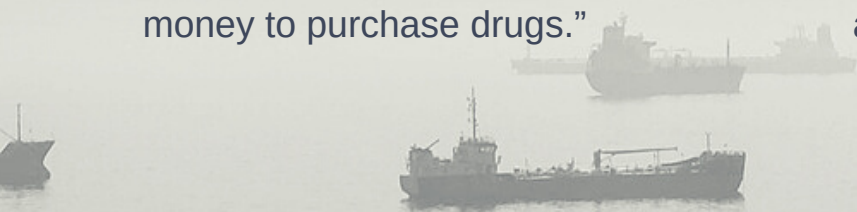
The waitress walked into a corner store and purchased a bottle of cough syrup.

The strong stuff.

"I was right," said one to the other.

The other asked to keep watching.

And so, they did. They watched the Waitress all the way back to her apartment.



And through the open curtains they watched her as she portioned the cough medicine to half the recommended dose and gave it to a child sick in bed.

“This stuff is kinda strong kiddo, I'll give you half now and if you feel any better, I will give you the rest later.” She said as she pulled the child to her side.

The kid nodded and sniffled.

The angel and the demon looked at each other. One smirking at the other in victory.

They bid the other goodbye and went on their separate ways.

Their argument was in no way over as they agreed to meet on the second Wednesday of the next month.



Over the top

By Dylan Varney

Snow.

It was snowing.

It had been snowing for the past week.

It would probably snow for the next. As far as the eye could see, with or without binoculars, there was a carpet of thick white snow that hid the world below it.

And I was glad for it. For just beneath the bright veneer of crystalized water laid the bodies of at least half our company.

Three times over the past week, we'd been ordered to charge, and three times we had been repulsed. Three times we had to leave our dead and wounded behind, so that we could cower in the trench we had built, the trench which looked more and more like a grave with each passing hour.

Both of my friends had been killed on prior assaults. Both had been ripped apart by artillery. There wasn't anyone I could blame but the faceless man kilometers away manning a massive gun.

What was left of the company was lined up against the wall of the trench, waiting anxiously for the order to move. Even through my winter gear, I could feel the snow as I leaned my whole body against the frosted bank. My left hand gripped the lip of the trench, growing numb as my body heat failed to compete with the near freezing temperatures. My right hand gripped my rifle, tightening ever so slowly as the seconds dripped by. The steel seemed to amplify the cold, though my rising anxiety prevented me from recognizing the falling temperatures in my limbs.

I was looking over my left shoulder, eyes fixed on our captain, who nearly blended in with the snow-filled trench due to his white uniform. He held his command shield in his right hand, which I had learned meant he was left-handed. His left hand was held above his head, as if he was going to sweep it down as the signal to go.



We waited for what seemed like an eternity. A thin layer of snow gathered on my fingers, which had almost set in their positions. Still no one moved. The threat of death by machine gun did not please anyone.

We were left fighting phantoms, only ever able to fire blindly into the blizzard that separated us.

The terrain was known to us, though. There was a crater about halfway across no-man's land that would shelter us briefly before the inevitable order to retreat. My friends had found it. It had been our safe place. It was where they had died.

“Go!”

A single word galvanized us to action, and after the briefest of moments some fifty men clawed their way out of the meter-wide hole that had offered them sanctuary.

We ran. We ran past the barbed wire that I and a friend had set up at night. We ran past the ditch that always seemed to be full of water, despite the temperatures. We ran past the mound of snow that would be the final resting place of several men.

Bullets were expected to meet us. To fly at us, greet us in the chest and take us down to the dirt, somewhere more comfortable. But their hospitality never came.

We ran past the crater. We ran past a decrepit wooden bunker that had only existed through the lenses of binoculars. We ran past the barbed wire that they had set up. And we reached the lip of their trench.

We had stayed in a rough line, and now we all stood on the edge of the enemy's trench, aiming down into it.

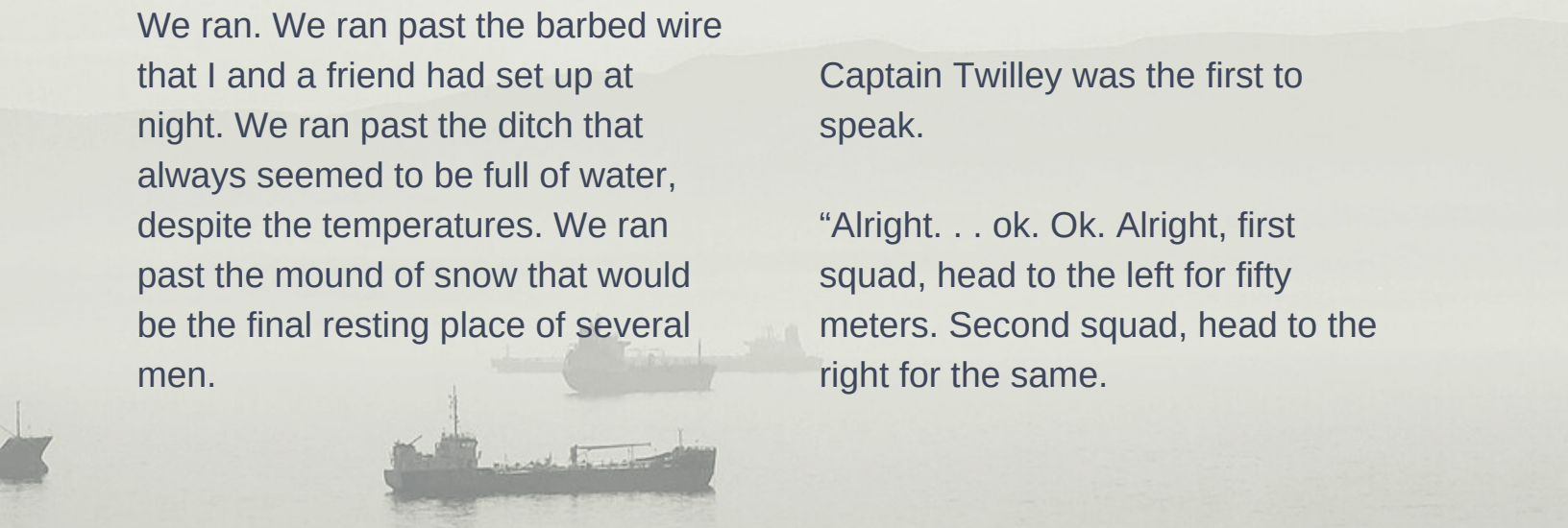
There was no one.

All that greeted us was a pair of Zirisian Trench Spiders, which hissed at us and skittered down the trench in either direction.

No one lowered their rifle. We all looked in stunned silence at an empty trench.

Captain Twilley was the first to speak.

“Alright. . . ok. Ok. Alright, first squad, head to the left for fifty meters. Second squad, head to the right for the same.



"Third squad, you look around here. We're looking for a communications post, people. It's a hole in the wall, probably covered with a tarp or some shit to camouflage it."

Those who had been ordered away grouped up and set out. I was part of the third squad, and I fell in with my fire team, two of the seventeen other men in the squad. One was the dedicated medic, his name being Franz Lojka, the other being a regular grunt like me, by the name of Austin Princip. We began searching the rightmost area in our section to be searched, and ran into a spot where the trench forked. Second squad had continued straight, but no one had been assigned to go down deeper into the enemy trenchworks.

Princip stared down the trench, leaning against the wall with his left hand to allow support as he craned around the edge.

"I think I can see something down there. A sign, maybe."

Lojka responded. He had a German accent.

"No. Our orders were to just look here."

I cut in.

"Besides, this is the front. The comm outpost would be close to it, not tucked away in the back. Lines of communication need to be upheld."

Lojka supported me.

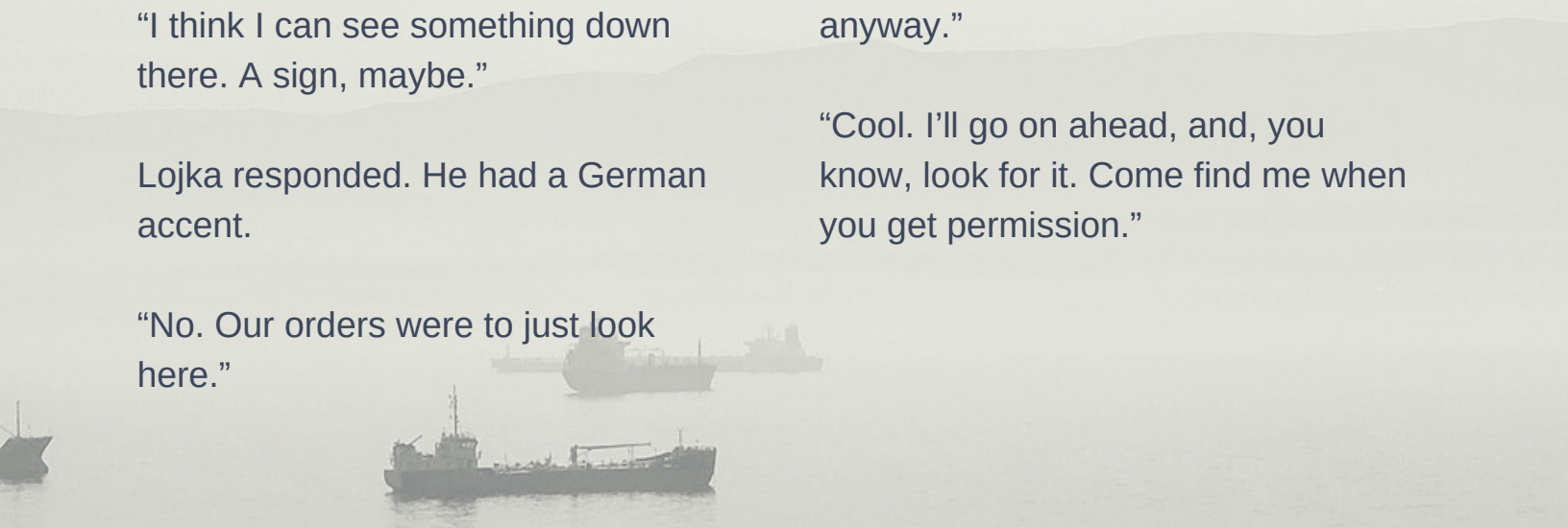
"Our command post is only a hundred meters to the east in our trench. This one is likely similar."

Princip looked back at us. I had assumed a more relaxed hold of my weapon, while Lojka kept his at the ready.

"Well, yeah, but these are backwards-crazy communists, so who says they do things our way? They could put it back there, thinking we might not look back there."

"Why don't I go ask Captain Twilley for permission? There's probably nothing here, but I'll ask him anyway."

"Cool. I'll go on ahead, and, you know, look for it. Come find me when you get permission."



Lojka grabbed Princip on the arm.
Princip glanced back at him.

“‘Ask for forgiveness, not permission’.”

With that he ran off, and Lojka and I walked back to where Captain Twilley had settled himself to wait for reports.

“Captain Twilley?”

“Yes, what is it? Have you found something?”

The captain was imposing and frightening. Anyone could tell immediately that he demanded respect. His strong demeanor was built due to the fact he had committed himself to the army long before some his soldiers were even born.

“Well, we believe we have, sir. . .”

“Princip thinks we have.”

“. . . right, Princip believes that the enemy may have positioned their command post deeper into the trenchworks as a way to confuse us. Unorthodox methods to counter an orthodox army, I suppose.”

Twilley turned away from the lighter he was playing with to face us.

“And what exactly does Private Princip want?”

“Well, he wants your permission to go further down into the trenches. We found a way that branches deeper into the fort.”

The captain seemed to think for a moment before delivering his response.

“He’s already gone down there, hasn’t he?”

“Well-“

“He has, sir.”

“Figures. Sure, go down there and find him. If he’s found anything, then come and find me. If he hasn’t, kick his ass.”

Captain Twilley picked up his shield, which had been lying against the wall of the trench.

“First squad just radioed to say that they actually did find something. So I’ll be about thirty meters down the trench.



Whether Princip finds something, report back to me after you're done searching that trench."

We saluted, and Twilley returned the gesture. We about-faced and made our way back to where Princip had broken off from the main trench.

"Don't you think it's weird that the trenches are empty? Like, where did they all go? What was so important that it drew their entire force off this line?"

Lojka shrugged.

"It is likely they had a more pressing engagement on another front, and assumed forces wouldn't be missed here."

We reached the fork and turned down it as Princip had.

"Well, shouldn't they still leave at least a few guys to hold the line? To at least spot for the artillery?"

"There was no reason to assume we would attack today. There was no reason to assume we would attack tomorrow, and there was no reason to assume we would attack yesterday. You speak as if they left today."

"I'm just saying, it seems quite suspicious that they would all simply pick up and go as they did, without even so much as—"

Something made a noise. Lojka and I brought our rifles up, aiming down the trench where the sound had come from. We approached slowly, our boots softly treading the snowed-over paths. Something else made a noise, and our attention was drawn to our immediate left, which revealed another trench we had not seen. The snow made everything blend together.

A can sitting about ten meters down the trench moved, and the long, spindly leg of a Trench Spider extended out from it. We lowered our rifles. The tall, eight-legged beasts were more alike to rodents than actual spiders. We returned our attention back along the trench, just as the silhouette of a man appeared about thirty meters down it. We raised our rifles again, ready to fire.

"Who goes there?"

No reply. But the man was not holding a rifle, and after a faltering step he fell over. Lojka and I lowered our guns and ran towards him.

Princip had fallen face-first into the deep snow at the bottom of the trench, his arms at awkward positions. He was clearly still breathing, but not very strongly. Lojka ripped off his gloves, and began feeling his neck for wounds.

“Go tell him. You’ve got to tell him that. . . that th. . .”

I got down on one knee as Princip reached an arm out at me. Lojka held his hands firmly over the right side of Princip’s neck, blood now clearly seeping between his fingers.

“They’re here, Jared. They’re on this planet, and you NEED TO TELL THE CAPTAIN!”

He grabbed the end of my trench coat and tried to pull me closer but let go as his strength gave out.

“He has a puncture wound in his throat. I am unsure for how long, but he has lost a lot of blood.”

I began to hyperventilate. There was only one thing he could be speaking of.

“You need to go. Go tell the captain. I’ve got him.”

I returned to my feet and began running. I ran past the trench with the can, back to the main trench, and I ran the sixty meters to where the captain said he would be.

A door-sized hole in the wall greeted me, and I lifted the tarp covering it.

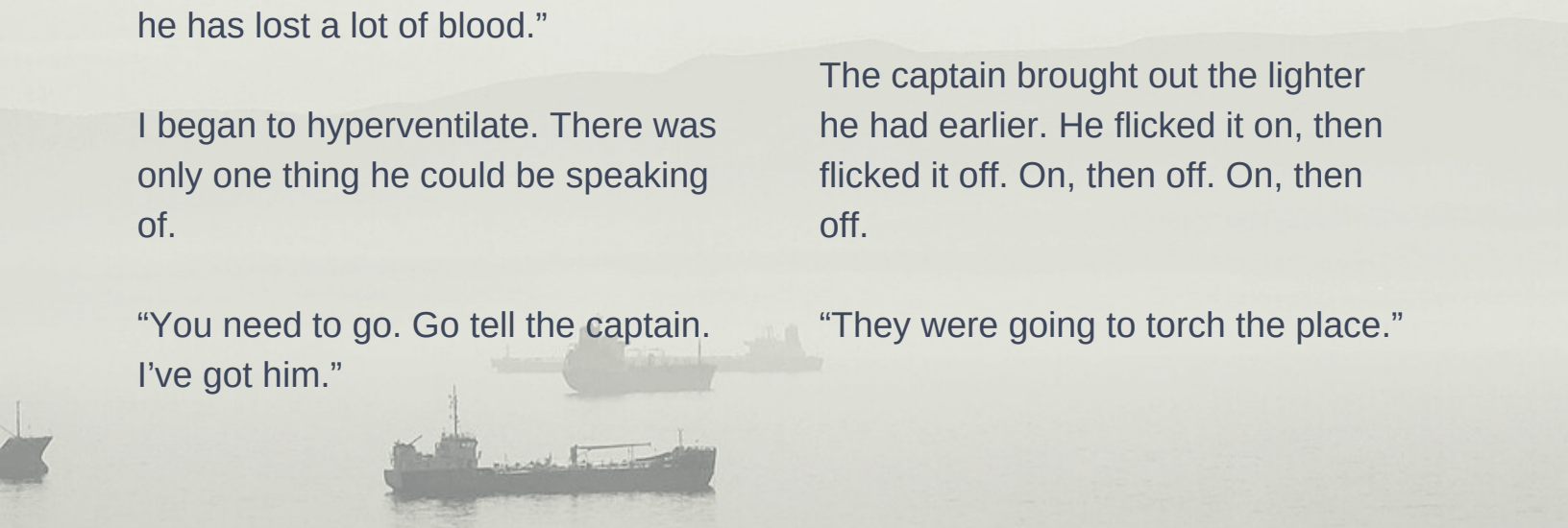
“Captain! Captain, Princip found something!”

The room had almost no light. Only a small lantern hung over Captain Twilley. His back faced me, and before him stood a table, behind which were several barrels of gasoline and oil. The rest of first squad stood in a spread-out manner behind him. Everyone was looking towards the captain, obviously agitated. One of the soldiers shivered, his leg twitching with the ripple through his body.

“I think it’s safe to say we all know what Princip found.”

The captain brought out the lighter he had earlier. He flicked it on, then flicked it off. On, then off. On, then off.

“They were going to torch the place.”



I noticed the tendrils and fangs hanging from the dimly lit ceiling.

“They were really close, too.”

I noticed a body on the floor next to the captain, a lighter in its hand. A head dropped from the ceiling, but no one flinched. I also noticed the layer of oil on the floor.

“Run, Jared.”

The tendrils began to descend. A chitter echoed through the room.

“Let them know we’ve lost.”

I ran. I climbed over the top of the trench. No one followed.

The trench exploded.



please excuse my dear aunt sally

By Kerri Ballance

You once asked me what my clearest memory was. At the time, I told you I could not answer. I said, as all parents say: "I'll tell you when you're older." I'm sure you thought that I would forget, that you would never know the answer; I too thought I would forget. But, despite my best efforts, I haven't. Every so often, your little voice pops into my head, asking me so innocently. I tell that voice, "One day. One day soon." But we both knew I was lying.

Your voice is no longer little, but still I have not answered you. That ends today. I'll read it to you, as I wrote it that day, when I myself was almost grown out of my own little voice.

It was rainy at Aunt Sally's wake. Or funeral. Or, I think I heard one person say "celebration of life?" whatever that means... the point is- Aunt Sally was dead, so we were all there, at the funeral home, to "deal with it in our own way."

My "job" (unofficial, yet explicitly implied without anyone saying a word) was to watch (shepherd) the female cousins younger than myself (all the boys are older than us, which I guess makes me the oldest girl-or something like that). I made sure we were where we needed to be-which, since there are four of us in total, wasn't that hard- made sure we did what we needed to do, greeted and thanked the people who needed to be greeted and thanked, sat, stood, went to the bathroom, went to the hall for the slightly stifled cry (that didn't actually exist [none of us wanted to be there anyway]), tried to make us look normal. Even though we weren't-aren't-whatever. I know they say "Everybody grieves in their own way," but we...didn't.

Amongst the bawling aunts, and nephews, and third cousins-seven times removed, we were unemotional. It was like grief never even looked our way; we were the only four not crying, I swear I think even the total strangers at the back cried, but not us, loving nieces that we are. On several occasions, I had to fight back my habitual smile, which left me in an awkward facial position because I didn't know what face to make: smiling didn't seem right, but the smiling is to cover my neutral face, which also didn't seem right.



See, I suffer from Resting Bitch Face, so while smiling at a funeral wouldn't be good, scowling seemed like an even worse idea. I have no idea what my inbetween face must have looked like, and I don't think I want to know.

There's one part of that day that I'll never forget: everything had been happening like it does (this was at least my eighth funeral, so I've got a pretty good idea how these things work), and almost all of the other members of the somewhat immediate family had been to peer down into the casket (and people say I'm morbid), except us. I knew my crying Momma would ask if we had too, and I didn't want to lie to a grieving woman (especially not to my Momma), so I herded the other girls, my young charges, towards the casket. The second oldest and the youngest (who was also a sister to the middle) girls went ahead without a fuss; the middle one did not want to go up there.

I didn't blame her, and I told her as much; I said, "I don't want to either, but we have to. If we don't they (the aunts, my Momma, her Momma, all the grieving ladies [because the guys are too busy with their own emotions to pay attention to us]) would ask if we had, then take us up there themselves, and they didn't need another thing on their plates."

I didn't blame her, and I told her as much; I said, "I don't want to either, but we have to. If we don't they (the aunts - my Momma, her Momma - all the grieving ladies (because the guys are too busy with their own emotions to pay attention to us) would ask if we had, then take us up there themselves, and they didn't need another thing on their plates. Plus, it is always so awkward to be standing up there, dry-eyed with a sobbing woman at your side." I told her that we would walk up, stare at the body for a minute then head back into the hall where it was less emotional (because, even though we weren't emotional, watching everybody that we loved be emotional was just plain freaky). She nodded at me, and we did just as I said. Right on cue, my Momma spotted us, after we had put some distance between the casket and ourselves, and asked if we had been up there yet. I hated to see her cry; it was a very disturbing thing because my Momma, though she can be kinda emotional, is the rock in our family; I had seen Daddy cry at funerals (you know since it was his family who was dead), but I had never seen my Momma cry. Ever. I said we had been up there, so she nodded and went back to her teary conversation with her surviving sisters.

I looked at my middle cousin real hard-as if to say "See, I said she would. Now aren't you glad we got that over with in our own way?"

See, here's the thing about us four girls, I know I said it before, but I want to expound upon it a bit. We aren't bad or mean or uncaring girls; we all loved our Dear Aunt Sally, but for some weird reason, death just didn't seem to affect us. We didn't feel anything; aside from all the crying people, we would have sworn it was just another day. Aunt Sally's funeral-wake thing was, for sure, one of the most bizarre and routine days of my life.

So, little one, now you know your mother's secret: I don't process emotion like most people. It doesn't mean I don't love you, I do, I just don't know how I'd react if, heaven forbid, anything happened to you. I'd like to think I'd be sad, but I really don't know. I love you so much, my little one, but you have to understand, if I'd told you all this when you were a baby, you would have never slept at night. But now, I hope, you are old enough to handle this knowledge and, I think to understand.

Yes, dear, I saw how you reacted at Gammy Judy's funeral. You are more like me than your father gives us credit for. And I want you to know, it's okay to be different, no matter what, I will always love you. Even if you do turn into a sociopathic murderer like your grand-Uncle Joe. I will always love you, my little one.



Paid in Full

By Kasey Badger

In my world, any creature you spare, or purposely try not to kill owes you a debt of gratitude. In the olden days this resulted in stags and bears leading lost hunters out of the woods. Young girls found coins in their shoes, courtesy of the mice they had freed from traps. There are even stories of fish warning fishermen away before the onrush of great storms.

Now days, any squirrel or bird you manage not to hit in your commute, any bird you take pity on when it hits your window, even every spider you fail to squish, owes you a favor. You can call these favors in whenever you like, obviously the creature you spared has to be alive and in the area to help. But if they can, we find that they will.

Most people generally call these favors in periodically, as these creatures tend to be short lived compared to humans. My neighbor asks birds to sing to her every morning. My sister asks every spider she sees to please make its brethren keep their distance and keep all the wasps away while they're at it (she is terrified of things that buzz and crawl). My uncle has spared so many ants that his lawn hasn't been broached by an anthill for about three summers now.

But me, I haven't called in a debt since I was young. People ask me why I don't have birds bringing me pieces of money or rodents bringing me back the keys I lost. I just smile and shrug at these questions. "I'm saving them" is my response. I walk around lines of ants and put out birdseed and hummingbird feeders. I plant a butterfly garden and when I go out in the countryside, I plant vegetables then watch the deer graze in the early morning. They owe me now. I see their expectant eyes. I laugh at the crows that drop credit cards in my path, because of all the animals, they hate being indebted the most. But I save my favors and live watching the life bloom around me.



Years pass, so quickly and yet so slowly. The beautiful days and the sad ones pile on top of me. It gets to be the end, I am surrounded by family watching the end of my time draw nearer. On my last day I call in my favors, just once I ask everything I've ever touched to come and sit with me, watch one more sunset. I don't expect many to come, most of them must be gone now. I close my eyes, and when I open them again, the sky outside my window is swirling with birds, all shapes and colors, raptors and swallows, geese and hummingbirds. Butterflies dance on the breeze, Bees fly in clouds, white muzzled dogs and ancient deer with many pointed antlers peek through the trees at me. I smile and close my eyes again as the sun sinks below the horizon. "You never owed me your life" I whisper to the creatures outside my window "In fact, I owe you mine."



The Un-Chosen One

By Abigail Badger

I have a relatively small circle of friends. Frankly I don't have the energy for the upkeep on more relationships than the ones I have. There's just one hitch to all this though, I am the only normal human in the group, and I will fight bitterly to keep it that way.

Let's unpack this a bit.

My best friend, Amanda, was chosen by her grandfather to wield the sacred source of their family's power. Its basically a big arse book of spells that he expects her to memorize. She can do magic, which is pretty cool. But she routinely misses band practice because her house is getting raided by leprechauns and goblins every other week. This makes movie nights annoying; I have a questionable scar on my ankle from a whyte, don't ask.

Next up, Annylis, heir to the throne of Xenon 4. She's an alien by the way. I have nearly been caught in the crossfire from two separate intergalactic assassins, on two distinct occasions. Once I ended up fighting a giant robot hamster with a can of hair spray. Again, don't ask.

Thirdly, Regina, continuing her family's legacy of fighting bad guys and saving the city. She has lightning powers, so she's great for roasting smores and power outages, I guess. Don't even get me started on the supervillain plots. I once had a teacher expect us to turn in the homework the day after the streets were flooded with chicken broth due to the antics of a certain ner do well.



Finally, Carlotta (Carlie) who claims to be a normal high schooler but we all know she's got ties to the mafia. Once, I had a snot nosed bully put gum in my hair in elementary school. He came to class the next day, white as a sheet and jumping every time Carlie blew her nose. She gets into a range rover with tinted windows after school. Parent day was absolutely hilarious, Regina's parents were making dagger eyes at Carlie's parent, both decked out in silk suits with diamond studded buttons.

"I am the normal one" I said triumphantly at our monthly sleepover. Tonight's fest was at my house, So while we didn't have as much room as we would at Carlie's place the snacks were handmade by my mom, which puts everyone into high spirits.

"How are you normal?" Amanda yawned from the beanbag, she scratched at a pixie bite she'd gotten a few days ago. "The last time I screwed up a portal spell we ended up in a magic garden in Tir na Nog. Some fairies were trying to push a magic amulet on you claiming you're the chosen one" My bestie finished with a raised eyebrow. She nudged her magic book lying within grabbing distance by her bag chair.

"They might as well door to door vacuum cleaner salesmen with that pitch they were pushing" I snorted.

"When we ended up on Glaxnin that one time, the Ryne Moon Knights offered you a lifetime membership" Annylis chimed in, her purplish eyes clashing with her greenish hair.

"You've got enough hand to hand training to be a skill- based superhero if you wanted to" Regina added. The girl had been in the market for a sidekick ever since her older brother had bet her his favorite grappling hook she wouldn't get one before him.

"So what! I took judo as a kid," I shot back.



"You are also friends with me" Carlie stated blandly, as if association with her placed me on some higher level of cosmic importance, which admittedly it probably did.

"Finally, Your parents have a bunch of medieval art posted on your walls" Amanda finished triumphantly. She pointed at the sword rack behind me.

"So what? My dad's a history buff" I scoffed. Amanda brushed past me to examine the swords.

"Holy mother of a lumpkin!" She yelped.

"What!" Annylis wheezed, having spaced out halfway through the conversation.

"This is Excalibur!" Amada responded, brushing the hilt reverently.

"Its what?" I said in a dead voice, my friends all turned to me with startled looks in their eyes. A veritable black cloud of anger was forming around me. Amanda lunged for her book and started paging through it.

"Yup, I thought I recognized those runes. You, my girl, have Excalibur hanging on your wall" She said in a bemused voice.

There was a terrific clang as I threw the sword and it hit the pavement outside. The house fairly rattled as I slammed the door behind it.

"So, who wants to watch a movie?" I said, too forcefully, my friends exchanged glances and smug smiles.

I am the normal human in the group, and I will fight bitterly to keep it that way.



Saw this and thought of you

By Emily Bishop

"...An astonishing discovery in England reveals hints of..."

The TV drones on in the background, an extra layer of noise against the silence all around him. Luke supposes it's interesting enough if you're into ancient history, but he is most definitely not.

"...to no information on this culture, or what may have led to..."

In front of him, the microwave hums its quiet beat, the ramen inside occasionally shifting or popping or otherwise adding to the auditory barrier. His fingers drum an anxious melody on the countertop. The air conditioner rumbles as it fights the late-night summer swelter. His pen drags audibly as he writes notes, tidbits and answers to the homework he has sacrificed his rest for. Somewhere a few apartments over, a quick electric beat tells him the neighbors are hosting another party. A dog barks. A frog croaks. Bugs buzz. A door creaks open down the hall.

"Archaeologists are working out a deal with the local univ..."

Even his own head is making noise: the muffled rush of sleep trying to draw him into bed, an absent half-remembered melody, wandering thoughts about class and girls and arguing with his father and the beer in his fridge and 'will multiplying by 2 really help me solve the equation, or am I overthinking all of this?'

"...cussions of a possible city buried under..."

The silence closes in on him from a distance. At first, it is too small a difference to notice. The frog finds a mate. The dog settles its grudges.

"...the question remains, how did we miss all of this?"

The music in the apartment down the hall shuts off, the party over and done. The insect-sounds die slowly, and then all at once. Luke replaces that with his own quiet humming. It works for the bugs and the bullfrogs-- maybe he'll attract a partner this way, too, he ponders.

"...look for, signs are popping up in other..."

The air conditioner goes quiet. The TV does too. Luke groans, the sound harsh against the newfound silence. He doesn't have the time or the energy to deal with a power outage right now.

The microwave cuts off seconds later. He reaches up to get his noodles- he's hungry, he'll eat them even undercooked- only to realize that they're still rotating. Still cooking.

The light from the TV still partially illuminates the room. The woman on screen silently mouths a farewell, and an advertisement for a blood pressure medication starts playing. 'SIDE EFFECTS MAY INCLUDE DEATH.'

Luke suddenly realizes he can't hear himself breathing. He opens his mouth to call out, and even though he can feel his vocal chords vibrate no actual sound comes out. His skin crawls. His heart races. Something is wrong.

He adjusts his grip on the pen, holding it up in front of him like a knife. He looks over the room, moving stiffly. He is the only person in it.

Luke stops for a moment and walks to the hall. He checks all the closets, but no one is in the closets. He checks the bathroom, pulling back the shower curtain. The mirror reflects Luke with terror in his eyes, but he is still the only person there. He goes to the bedroom, too, and though he checks everywhere, he does not find a single person there, either. He returns to the living room, closing the bedroom door as he goes.

The bedroom door creaks audibly.

Luke tenses, whipping around and raising the pen as though to strike someone down. He sees no one, but the bedroom door hangs ajar. His panic becomes increasingly obvious.



The TV begins making noise again, but it isn't English. Luke goes to look at it, keeping his distance. He can still see the bedroom door from where he stops.

A dull shade of lavender tints the screen. It's a blood pressure medication ad. There are people smiling happily, all of their problems gone. The people are hungry.

Luke is hungry.

"Come here, Luke."

The voice grates in his head. Someone is running their claws on the inside of his skull, provocative, teasing.

If the air conditioner hums, he will stay cool.

If the microwave hums, he will eat.

If he hums, he will attract a mate.

If the TV hums, he will not have to listen to the silence.

Luke takes a step forward.

"Eat with us, Luke. We will feed you. We will love you."

He begins to hum, deep in his throat.

"You will be safe. You won't fear or argue or suffer."

The people on the TV are smiling. The TV has rid the people of their problems.

"You will be able to sleep, Luke."

'SIDE EFFECTS MAY INCLUDE DEATH.'

"Come here, Luke."

He comes.

"...a possible second set of ruins discovered in Greece just yesterday..."

The microwave beeps. The air conditioner rumbles. The party continues, the bullfrogs and insects look for their mates, and the dog barks at intruders. The pen drags on the paper.

But no one is there to hear it.



Everything

By Kerri Ballance

I never really understood
Time.

Time would be the same if
not for a single word of
Rhyme.

Rhyme, which is the
lifeblood and distraction of
Life.

Life, the meaningless thing
full of purpose and Direction.

Direction, where we must go
to do the thing which gives
Life purpose so we can
Rhyme before we run out of
Time.

Time, the end all, be all of
Everything.



How Far Afield?

By C. E. Phillips

What can my love for you compare against?

Perhaps hold it beside the shining seas

Or maybe to the looming mounts immense?

Does my heart fly as falcons dance the
breeze?

Nay, the Earth's trifles never could suffice!

Afield must eyes investigate new sights.

Above cloud tops that billow, capped with
ice

My eyes do scrutinize far space's heights.

A home to myriad orbs twinkling

Turn galaxies in spirals gracefully.

With twisting bands of vivid coloring

Do rise majestic gaseous nebulae.

But even fiery stars must pale above

When held against the passion of our love!





THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE

If you wish to be published in one of our magazines, please
contact us at our email writersblock@uah.edu

All future rights belong to their respective authors.