

CHIPPEWA NARRATIVES

THE CHIPPEWA NADHENEIVES



Manhunt

The three of us girls watch, amused, as the storm whistles through the naked branches of the forest. Unanimously, the lot of us decide we must take advantage of the snow-infested, mangled trees that turned themselves into an eerie playhouse just for us. We run through the house, racing to reach our snow pants. We step into the snow, and we are pummeled by the gospel of ghosts. They sing and howl from deep within the trees. While we seldom encounter ghosts, it's much easier to find them somewhere cold.

My friend calls for her father and brothers. We will commence in a game known as Manhunt. We have two fair teams, girls versus boys. We girls will be hunted first. I'm running through the open yard, my eyes darting around the expanse. Her father stood twice my size with broad strong shoulders, menacing. Well at least when compared to a scrawny twelve-year-old. Her older brothers, one nimble, the other strong, begin to slink through the trees and brush after us.

As I approach my first shelter, I feel a red-hot rush of adrenaline all throughout my face and torso, every muscle tightening. This makes it possible for me to slither beneath a camper, the bottom of which dripping in the dirt and oil I will soon be covered in. I must remain still as a hunter could easily spot me against the rocky snow of the driveway. I see large black boots sneaking along the camper. I close my eyes, and in a moment, he's gone. I watch for the coast to clear and begin to make my way to a log structure I had found in the woods

that summer. It has no roof, only a torn, faded blue tarp rustling in the icy wind barely holding on.

Inside the makeshift shack, there lay two cold, wet cots. I rest on one of them. I rule that I should wait here. Whether because I am scared or stupid, I'm cornered. There is no way out if a hunter intrudes. I slip beneath one of the cots, and listen. Every insignificant noise of the cold wind and cordial fauna intertwines with the howls of ghosts, disorienting my perception of what is important. That of the nimble hunter's deliberate steps are almost entirely cloaked by the noise. The steps begin to seem more distant, and so I hurdle through the wooden labyrinth to the pond.

The serrated, fallen branches act as my only opposition now. Just inches from the ice lay a fishing boat that had been flipped upside down. Naturally, I crawl underneath and into the boat on account of a matted patch of dead grass acting as a small door. This hiding spot works to my advantage as I am the only one small enough to get in or even near it since it is littered in dead vines and branches. This place seems stable, but that is only until I hear the booming voices of two of the hunters above me.

My only option is to wait them out. They linger and wade around the boat for a few excruciating minutes. I remember a thin dirt path to the yard, and sprint for it when the two boys finally disperse. The surrounding vegetation seems to form a tunnel around the path, making me feel as if I am running through a painting. I halt in my movement. At the corner of the path, I stand paralyzed. To my left, I hear the faint sound of banter between two beings. Ordinarily, I would never risk a victory in Manhunt, but my curiosity precedes me.

The banter between these unfamiliar voices leaves me unnerved, as no neighbors inhabit the surrounding area. And I can dismiss the idea of ghosts. Ghosts don't speak. Their conversation sounds like that of two old friends who haven't seen each other in years. It feels too natural to be supernatural, besides the fact that I can't understand a single word. The conversation begins, and continues in a foreign tongue; A language that sounds extraterrestrial. They carry on, but as soon as I step closer, the voices cease. I feel eyes on me. I only remain still for a few more seconds before I make a ferocious break for my group.

I suddenly don't care about Manhunt anymore. I am a cheetah flying through these woods. I catch a glimpse of people, and I run towards them. I guess everyone else has been found, as they were all in a group, plotting to find me. I begin to word-vomit in an attempt to recount what I have witnessed. They can't understand what I am trying to say in a futile battle between my lips and my brain, but we silently agree to regroup inside with many glasses of hot chocolate. Now the monsters of Manhunt are nothing more than a memory. It is easy to get scared, but I have since learned to not only coexist with, but also appreciate the mysteries and anomalies constantly lurking all around us.

Caroline Dobbins

Tomorrow's Ink

The bell to the door of the coffee shop chimes, overlaid by the hum of conversation. Each weekday morning I sat facing the door, sipping slowly, watching the dance of life. The bustling crowd was a whirlwind of motion, their coats flapping as they hurried inside.

A tall man with a rugged beard rushed in, his cheeks red from the cold, tugging at his knit hat as he stomped off the water from his worn leather boots. Behind him, a woman in her twenties with red hair tied in a bun clutches a coffee cup. A group of students, their backpacks slung lazily over one shoulder run in grab their order, and go along their way. An older couple with matching quilted jackets quietly chat as they settle at a small table.

Wooden floors creaked. The antique cowhide furniture sags. The smell of fresh ground coffee beans mingle in the air, making my mouth salivate. There's a bar in the corner, where the barista stands behind an espresso machine that hisses and steams, its copper finish reflects the glow of hanging pendant lights.

My eye catches a leather-bound journal resting on the windowsill, its worn cover blending seamlessly with the cozy atmosphere. The pages are slightly curled, worn from time.

The way it lies there beckons my curiosity. The handwriting is neat and precise *almost like my own*. Childhood fears, their favorite coffee—mine too. It goes on. . .

With growing unease, I flip through each page, each reflecting a piece of myself. When I get to today's date, printed it at the top of the page, "Tuesday, Oct 1, 2024". Anxiety gripping my heart. It reads, "I know you'd come back today," "You always do." I flip the page once more. The ink spills, "I'll see you tomorrow."

Breonna Stefanko

Unwritten Roots

I stare at my reflection in the water. I sway my legs back and forth, creating ripples. The music and my family's laughter echo throughout the backyard. My balloons tug in the wind. I prance over to my parents, who are holding my cake. The candles flicker in front of me, eighteen arranged in a line. "Happy birthday, Amara!" my mother says, embracing me. My eyes fill with tears as I watch the wax melt. I inhale deeply and blow the flames. The day I've been waiting for is over.

My parents call me over to sit down. I tuck my legs underneath me and lean back. My mother hands me a letter with my name printed on it. "Is this a birthday card from Grandma?" I ask laughing. My dad's hands clench in his lap. I tear it open and pull out a small white note.

"Dear Amara, There is no easy way to say this, so we'll start by saying you are loved. You have always been loved since you came into our lives, and you will always be our daughter. We've known for a long time that there would come a day when we would need to tell you the truth. You are our daughter and we are your parents, but we didn't give birth to you. You are adopted."

The words blur in front of me. My eyes burn from the tears I try to hold back. I feel a lump forming in my throat. I look up from the letter, "You're not my real parents?" My mom furrows her brow. "Amara, sweetheart, we are your parents. We've always been your parents, but you were adopted." Dad took my hand, his thumb brushing across my palm. "We didn't keep this from you to hurt you. We kept it from you because we wanted you to feel like you belonged."

The stairs creak under my feet. I swing open my door and lay in bed, staring at the ceiling. Silence fills the room. My computer screen flickers at me, and the light casts deep shadows in the corners. With my eyes feeling puffy, I pick it up. I look up *myadoption.com* and type in my records. The names Rosa and Angelo Ricci pop up on the screen. Their address is San Marco 1484 Venice, Italy.

I know what I have to do. I type the soonest flight to Venice, Italy. A flight leaves at 8:00 AM tomorrow. My hand hovers over the touchpad. My stomach drops as I click the button book now. I shove my face into my pillow and close my eyes.

I wake up. I grab my luggage, filling it with a mound of clothes. I crack open my door and tiptoe downstairs. *I see my Uber waiting for me.* My mouth dries up as I sit down and say “The Orlando airport.”

I land in Italy after an eight-hour flight. My heart pounds as I leave the airport. I make my way through the narrow streets. The chattering city lingers in my ears as I turn down an alleyway with a bridge. A stone arch sits on the other side, with a canal behind it. An oar sloshes through the water and the two men aboard say “Would you like a ride?” I grab his hand with a smile and get on. The sun reflects in the blue water as the gondola glides to my parents.

I make it to my stop. I walk up to the front door of the house. My heart skips a beat. My mouth starts to dry up. I ring the doorbell and take a step back. She opens the door and I'm face to face with my real mother. Her green eyes glisten. *They look just like mine.* “Rosa Ricci?” I said. Her eyes tear up. She embraces me and says, “Amara, is it you? I'm so sorry I couldn't give you the

life you wanted.” My legs collapse under me and we sit there. She runs her fingers through my hair and kisses my forehead.

Taylor Lanham

Slippery Slope

I was leaving my friend's house. He lived in an upstairs apartment in Barberton. Walking out of the door, it was cold and the snow falling made it look white outside. There were long slippery steps, I took one step at a time clenching on the railing, while snow and hail were hitting my face, feeling like hard pebbles. As I was walking to my car, I was shivering trying not to drop the keys. Turning the key in the door, then sitting down felt like I had just sat on a sheet of ice.

I sigh with relief when I feel heat blasting from the vents, adjusting them on my face and beginning to leave. Rumbling down the road, with very few to no people on the road. All I could hear was snow crunching under my tires as my car struggled to get by. With snow hitting my windshield, it was hard to see. Before I knew it, headlights were coming at me.

I froze for a second and steered hard to the right, and it felt like my heart was going to pound out of my chest. I was headed to Doylestown, squinting my eyes to see through the blizzard. As I was rolling up on the 4-way stop on Portage Street, I saw police lights and cars blocking the road.

Instead of taking my usual way home, I had to take roads that had not been plowed. So I sped left of the stop sign, and past Dollar General which was burning into flames, and made a quick right, slipping and swerving on a small road that was not cared for. The ice on the road made my car move faster than I wanted to, trying to brake but I slid more than I was, but I managed to get by.

At the end of the road, I turned on a narrow road trying not to slip in the ditch. It was tough, the road was steep, making my car roll backwards a little bit. I almost got out of my car and walked the rest of the way home. Instead of doing that I just keep trying and eventually, I do. I saw my house, a tan two-story with so many cars in the driveway there wasn't any room for me to park so I parked on the snow-covered curb.

I went to walk in my house, only wearing slippers walking in the grass and my toes are getting cold and wet. I got inside, a rush of heat hit my face but not enough to keep me warm. I turned my heated blanket on, and got under it. I was thinking to myself how crazy I was even driving in that kind of weather. I always think I can do anything even if it is idiotic. It is crazy how a 15-minute drive turned into a 45-minute drive.

Emma Parker

The Heart of Winter

It was the heart of winter in the small village of Bellwick. The first snowfall blankets the village transforming it into a white wonderland frozen landscape.

The bell rang in town square, a group of children bundle up in their warm coats and scarves set out to the frozen pond. Lavinia with bright red earmuffs and long brown hair that is always in a braid, spun around in a circle practicing her twirl. Lydia the more confident one zips past and knocks Lavinia to the ground. Lydia has been ice skating since she was four, it is her favorite hobby. Finn, a young boy with mismatched gloves and red cheeks, wobbles over to help her up. Finn's friend Jasper didn't know how to skate well and fell with a loud thud creating a crack in the ice.

Not too far from the pond was a young girl named Marie. Her cheeks are rosy from the frosty air. Her hands clutch a wooden bucket waiting for it to fill. Around her, the village hums with life. Kids play at the frozen pond and Marie's younger brother Peter struggles with his stubborn pig. The pig's grounded making it clear he isn't moving without a fight. The pig's ears perk up being aware of the effort that is being put in, but doesn't care. Peter had enough and tugs on the rope, the pig then drug Peter to the ground full of mud. He got up with a bright red face chasing the pig across the village.

At the edge of the village, the baker Margaret carries firewood to her shop. Her husband has been sick with winter fever. She wants to help him get better so she burns the wood for warmth and bakes bread. She wipes the sweat from her forehead silently hoping the bread will be comforting. The smell of fresh

loaves fills the room. The bell above the shop jingled as a boy with boots too big steps inside. The little boy said he could trade some apples for fresh bread. Margaret told him to not worry about it, he walked out with a smile on his face. As she pulled the last loaf from the oven a faint smile broke across her husband's face. For the first time in days, his eyes opened.

A group of kids head out to the open field. One child named Amy, scoops up a mound of snow, as she presses the snow together it crunches until it is in a smooth round ball. A mischievous grin on her face as she hurls it toward the rest of the kids, the children's eyes sparkle. Laughter struck as they began scooping snow. The sounds of snow crunching under their boots while they chase each other.

As the sun sets, painting the sky with shades of pink and orange, the children gather around a small fire pit. They toast marshmallows and make their hot chocolate. The day ends with the kids being tired. They knew this snowy day would be a cherished memory.

Alana Tacchio

Lumber Work

“Hey Tom, I need you to get the saw,” says Jack. Tom brushes off his green breeches and grabs the biggest saw from the shed. Tom carries the saw to Big Bertha, the fattest tree in all of Jamestown. Tom passes the other end of the saw to Jack. Jack and Tom line up the cross cut saw at Big Bertha's trunk. They move the saw side to side. Creating sawdust, Tom thinks about how breathing the dust in is going to affect him later on, but right now he is still young and able bodied. After sawing back and forth for an hour, the tree is only one quarter of the way cut:

“Man, let’s take a water break.” Jack wipes sweat from his forehead with his sleeve.

“I am okay with that,” Tom replied.

Tom goes over to the well and fills their canteens with water. On his way back he runs into John Smith, the leader of the colony of Jamestown. “Hey Tom, winter is coming fast. We need that tree to be firewood soon.” His voice gets deeper. “We made it this far, we can't freeze now.”

“We are working at it,” said Tom.

“Keep pushing, you're doing a fine job.” John encourages. “If you need me I'll be over in the field yelling at the fools who are digging for gold,” John utters before turning away.

Tom made his way back to the worksite and joined Jack on a pine wood bench. Tom hands over Jack's canteen and gulps down the water from his own. After 10 minutes of talking, Jack and Tom groan as they stand up. Jack bends his back and picks up the saw with his calloused hands. Tom follows along grabbing the other side and steps over to the tree. *Khhhhh hhhhhh khhh hhhh*. They saw for another hour to cut half way through.

"Alright now we get the angle going," Jack instructed.

"I made a tool for this job," Tom replied. Tom hastened over to the shed and grabs what looks like a long chain, but has blades on it. He wraps the mechanism around the tree. Tom angles the cut down towards the previous cut. Tom grabs one handle on the left and Jack grips the other on the right. They simultaneously pull each tail end like children playing on a seesaw. Succeeding hours of curving backs, they cut out the triangle. The two hard workers then shuffle around the tree. They get the big saw and line it up with the first flat cut. They labor for another two hours finishing off the first cut.

Finally they hear the sound of wood starting to crack. Creak!

"Alright, let's push her over," Jack yells. They lunge into the tree. Big Bertha crashes to the ground. Over the next two months Jack and Tom continued day by day to chop the tree processing the lumber into firewood. Due to an injured back and severe coughing, Jack is incapacitated in bed, leaving the job up to Tom. Tom gets down to the last slab of wood. He keeps a wide stance and slings the maul over his head and down on the log. He makes the final split. The sun peeks through the shadowy clouds. Tom drops his maul and sits alone on the pine wood bench. He studies his hard work and feels

passionate. He walks over and puts his foot on the stump and puts his hands on his hips, peering at the giant pile of firewood as he takes a relaxing deep breath.

Blake Mingle

Treasure Hunt

“Hand over the treasure,” the leader barked, his voice cold and commanding.

Jake, Lisa, and Max exchanged nervous glances, their eyes darting between the armed men and the empty treasure chest at their feet. The air seemed to thicken with tension as Lisa instinctively stepped closer to Max, her breath quickening.

Thinking fast, Jake snatched up the chest and, with a grunt, flung it deep into the bushes. "Run!" he shouted, and they bolted into the dense forest.

Shouts erupted behind them, followed by the sharp crack of gunfire. Bullets zipped past, splintering trees and kicking up dirt, but they didn't stop. Jake, Lisa, and Max pushed forward, their breaths ragged, their hearts racing.

Dodging low-hanging branches and weaving through narrow paths, they leaped over moss-covered logs and pushed around jagged rocks. The men's footsteps and curses grew fainter, swallowed by the tall trees.

The three friends arrive at a fast pace river. Without hesitation, they dive into the cold water, the current pulling at their limbs as they swim desperately for the opposite side. Behind them, the men chasing them hesitate on the shore, giving them a chance to escape.

Dripping wet and gasping for air, they pull themselves onto the muddy riverbank, their hearts pounding. As they scan their surroundings, Lisa spots a

hidden cave entrance concealed by thick bushes. “Over there!” she whispers urgently. They scramble inside, the darkness swallowing them as they huddle together, trying to calm their racing breaths.

“What now?” Lisa asks in a hushed voice, her eyes darting nervously toward the cave’s entrance. Jake wipes water from his face, thinking quickly. “We have to make it back to town and call for help,” he replies firmly.

After a few tense minutes in the cave, the three friends cautiously emerge, their breaths visible in the night air. They move quietly through the forest, each step deliberate as they listen carefully for any signs of the men. The trees tower over them.

As they approach the forest's edge, voices pierce the air. The men are still out there, their search never-ending. Jake raises a hand, signaling the others to stay low. “This way,” he mouths, leading them into the thick trees and bushes. They crawl on their hands and knees, their hearts pounding as the voices grow closer.

Finally, they reach the roadside. Jake waves frantically as headlights approach, and a battered old pickup truck rolls to a stop. The driver, an old man with kind eyes, and a baseball cap listens as they explain the situation. Without hesitation, he nods. “Hop in,” he says, his voice gruff but reassuring.

At the police station, the friends recount everything—the chase, the cave, and the stolen treasure. The officers reluctantly assemble a team to apprehend the men. Jake, Lisa, and Max sit in the waiting area, tension thick in the air as they exchange worried glances.

Hours drag by as the police finally return, escorting the men in handcuffs. Relief washes over the friends, the weight of danger seemingly lifting. But as the adrenaline fades, a restless unease creeps in.

Layla Hutching

The Front Line

The sky is gray as artillery shells rain down in the distance. Children play in the streets of a small rural town as the faint yelling of men and gunfire echoes out. Snow flutters about as the German army pushes deeper into Soviet territory.

The townsfolk hide in their homes. They gaze out to the war front, the line only mere miles away. As one boy glances out his window, the Germans break through. They sweep in and encompass the Red Army, and the boy runs to his father.

“Papa! Papa! The soldiers! They’re being surrounded!” The boy cries as his father’s eyes widen.

He bends over in his chair, puts a hand on his son’s shoulder, and says through his thick mustache, “Alexi, take your mother and hide in the cellar. I’ll be back soon,” and he pulls him in for a hug.

Alexi and his mother run downstairs as his father grabs the rifle hanging above their fireplace. Alexi barricades the door. His mother looks out a thin window on a step-stool, unaware it’d be the last time she would ever see her husband.

Planes fly above, shaking the house. The two huddle together as tanks roll into town, and the woman next door sobs. A knock comes to the front door, and Alexi’s mother covers her mouth, tears welling up. The door bursts open as two soldiers storm in.

“Come out! We know you’re in here! Don’t make a fuss!” The shadows of the pair peer through the wooden planks, the same woman still sobbing before she’s silenced by the crack of a gun. The two soldiers rush throughout the house, and come to the basement door last. One kicks the door in and bypasses Alexi’s shoddy barricades. Alexi’s mom shrieks as they stomp forward, and she runs for the exit. One of the men grabs her, and Alexi tries to fight the soldier.

“Let go of my mama!” He yells, punching the shins of the soldier before the other scoffs and throws him against the cold floor.

“Look at this one! He thinks he’s so brave,” one jokes and they both laugh. The men force the two out of the house as soldiers set homes alight. Alexi and his mother are forced into the center of town, where the rest of the townspeople are gathered. The two soldiers push them away and turn to their commander.

“We’re almost ready to get them going,” their commander tells them. Alexi and his mom stand with the group watching the Germans torch their village, embers floating through the air. The town priest watches as the men set the church alight, and he steps forward.

“Who do you people think you are? You have no right to scorch this village, let alone burn a church!”

The commander struts up to him, and says “You should have stayed in line, Father,” and the sound of his pistol rings out. He turns to three soldiers. “Get rid of the body.” They drag and hurl his corpse into one of the burning homes before ordering everyone into a line.

“Alright you degenerates! Get marching!” The commander barks. As more people slack at the end of the line soldiers gun them down before meeting a railroad track. The line turns and follows the track as the occasional gunshot startles everyone. They come upon an idle train in the middle of a field, more soldiers surrounding it.

The Germans divide up the line by men and women, separating Alexi from his mom, and funnel them into separate cars. The cars are dim and reek of cow dung. Alexi’s surrounded by adults he vaguely knows, the town butcher on his left and a grouchy old farmer on his right. The train propels forward and the car rattles. Men grumble and cough throughout the ride. Some pass out from a lack of air, and a kid throws up onto everyone around him.

The train comes to a stop and the door opens, the dark sky looming above. They usher out of the car and are greeted by large brick buildings with smoke pluming out. A sign sits above the entranceway that reads “Auschwitz.”

Kane Bishop

White Rose

I take one last look at my father, laying a rose on top of his casket as people shovel dirt onto him. I had read in the newspaper my father was poisoned by some sort of white powder. I grab my little brother's hand as he cries and tugs against me, wanting to go back. I struggle to get him back to our ranch where our older sister is waiting.

She runs a bakery down the street, right next to our father's meat market which he has left to me to take over. There's a flower shop right across the street from the bakery which an old lady runs, our father told us she was no good but how much damage can an old lady do? She offers to watch Jimmy while my sister and I are working.

Sadie sets the table while I prepare the chicken. I rinse it with cold water and dab a paper towel over it, before cooking. A knock at the door startles me. I wipe my hands off and I open the door to find the old woman holding a bouquet of pink lilies. I thank her and invite her to have dinner with us. She nods and plops down on the couch, helping Jimmy color.

I jump awake to Jimmy as he pulls my sheets off and asks where his bacon is. Sadie had already gone to work. I rub my eyes while springing out of bed and put on my new jeans. I glide down the stairs and pull out a pan from under the oven, preparing the bacon.

We stroll to the flower shop to drop Jimmy off to Miss. Agatha. She accepts Jimmy in with open arms and bids me farewell. As I walk across the street I pull out my fathers keys, struggling to find the right one when I drop

them with a clang. I bend down when I notice a faint residue of white powder on a rose petal.

Before I could pick it up a light breeze swept it away. As I walk in the feeling of chills runs down my spine, my fathers sweat lingers around the place. I head to the back, expecting a whole chicken to be there. My father's business partners are the ones who catch everything, he had told me before his death that they had an agreement for things to stay the same when I took over. There was no chicken, just a letter from the townsmen, that stated they did not want to be associated with a killer. *The town thinks I killed my father?*

I had moved the chairs and tables around and wiped down every counter just in time to pick up Jimmy. I locked the place up as my eyes began to wonder. Miss. Agatha is whispering to one of the townsmen, peeking over his shoulder to look at me. When our eyes met, she put her finger to her mouth as she stared at the man then shoved his arm to get him away from her. Sensing she needs help I rush over but the man took a glance in my direction and fled. I ask Miss. Agatha, if he was bothering her, she told me not to worry, her eyebrow slightly raised with a subtle smile.

I peek into Miss Agatha's shop expecting to see Jimmy helping make bouquets but he was nowhere in sight. I ask but she told me Sadie had picked him up earlier. *Sadie never leaves work early.* I dash home, burst through the door to see Jimmy on the table with Sadie as she dabs a wet cloth on his forehead. His face is red, sweat drips down his face as he tries to smile, but is too weak.

I kiss Jimmy goodbye on the forehead and tiptoe out the front door, feeling the cool morning breeze. I give Miss. Agatha a small wave, as I pass her

and dash across the street. As I unlock the door a small odor creeps into my nose. I follow the smell coming from the back to find 3 dead, skinned chickens. *Miss. Agatha must have knocked some sense into the townsmen.* I grin from ear to ear and start to prepare the chicken. I hang the chickens on the hooks and begin to cut them into various parts. Starting with the thighs, wings and drumsticks then throwing them into a bowl where I rinse with cold water to remove bone fragments and other debris.

I scrub my hands after putting the meat in the cooler as the same gentleman that was talking with Miss. Agatha walks in and asks to buy chicken thighs. I keep a close eye on him, package the thighs in a rush and hand it to him when he grabs my wrist, pulls me toward him and whispers in my ear to not trust the old lady. The footprints of his boots trail on the floor, as he rushes out the door. *Maybe my father was right.*

My hands tremble, as I try to lock the door. I hear Miss. Agatha shout my name from across the street, holding a bouquet of bright red roses. I turn to walk back home, keeping my head low and stare at the ground. I jump, as I feel a tap on my shoulder, my body reacting before my mind could catch up. She stands there with the bouquet, her smile stretching wide exposing too many teeth. The corners of her mouth twitch slightly, making a chill run down my spine.

She shoves the flowers into my hands and tells me these were my fathers favorite, I thank her but she gestures I smell them. Despite being a foot shorter than me, her gaze made me feel small. I slightly bring my nose down to smell them when my vision goes blurry. I lose my balance and stumble into the wall beside me. I hold my arm out, expecting her to help me but all I hear is her voice "Like father, like daughter," echoing through my mind and the world goes black.

Taylor Petit

The King

The wind of change stirs around me, carrying whispers of dread. Fear lingers in the air around. I glance toward the doorway to see the soft glow of a lantern flickering shadows on the wall. From the narrow streets, I catch a faint murmur of voices, hushed yet urgent, echoing through the cool night air. A voice trembles, "Have you heard what Herod plans for the little ones?"

"His cruelty knows no bounds. He thrives on the anguish of others, the devil in man's skin," comes a bitter reply.

Their words slice through me. My muscles are locked up, and my voice croaks, "Yeshua!" My fair-haired boy emerges from the shadows.

"Yes, Mother?" his tender voice lilts.

"I pray thee, hide thyself well, for a vile man seeks to do us harm. Flee to the safety of our humble dwelling and remain there until I summon thee to emerge and offer thy aid. Dost thou hear me?" The time is upon him to announce the coming of Yahweh, arriving sooner than I had foreseen.

The moon's gentle glow marks a complete cycle since the lord chose me to withstand another one of his children. My heart is heavy, word has spread that Herod has sent his most ruthless soldiers to decapitate every newborn found. Their blades thus far have cut many lives short. Shaking has consumed me these past few days, yet tonight is different. A strange unease courses through my body, sharp and unyielding, as though my deepest fears are boiling beneath me. *Can I escape the inevitable? Is what's bound to happen avoidable?*

The force of the soldier's shouts demanded obedience without mercy. The barking of their orders broke the fragile silence of the night and makes hiding seem impossible. My breath quickens, panic seizing me. *Have they come for me? How could they have found us here? Was not Yahweh's word my assurance against such dread?* I run through the house, gathering my children close, and hastening to the dungeon below. The air there is thick and damp, and the walls close, yet it is the only refuge I can provide.

As we kneel in the dim light, my newborn son, Isaiah, speaks with a clarity far beyond his tender age. "Thou shalt not perish under my patronage!" His words ring through the abode. At that moment, light begins to beam from his small hands, its brightness casting out every shadow. My heart races, my senses sharpen as the glow fills the chamber, enveloping us all. Then, in an instant, the dungeon fades away.

I stand once more at the birth ceremony of my firstborn, Yeshua, and before me, I see King John Hyrcanus II alive, reigning in his splendor. My mind reels, I recall clearly the sight of his burial by the river—I watched as his body was laid to rest. *This can't be. Or can it?*

My thoughts are consumed by questions. *Am I dreaming? Or have Herod's men reached us, and this is some vision granted to me beyond death?* I stand static, my breath stuck in my lungs, a blur of movement draws me to the corner of the room. In the luminance of the light, a tall, fit figure begins to appear.

"Tis Yahweh," I whisper, my voice trembling as tears well in mine eyes. His presence fills the space, radiant and commanding, His gaze steady upon me.

“Tis me, Mary I gave you the gift of life not just with yourself but the children. I gave you the promise you’d never have to worry again with this miracle to earth. I kept my word to you to this point and you are back to a peaceful time again. Your responsibility to the world is to change your own outcome from this blessing you’ve received and bless others, thus shall not be self in love.” Yahweh beamed with a rich, full-bodied, and elegant voice.

Bryce Van Nostran

Repeated

I slam the door behind me as my mom screams from downstairs. My math homework is due in five minutes. My head is throbbing as my hands frolic through my hair. I want to go to sleep so this day will end.

My eyes were open, so I thought. They won't open. Unsure that I was awake, I stumble to the bathroom. My eyes are swollen shut. I try to open them, but it feels like they are glued. I get up to go to the bathroom when I feel pain in my stomach—the same sharpness from yesterday.

My mom sprinted upstairs screaming that I would be late for school. I sit there confused because yesterday was Friday. The same fight is happening. I run downstairs and shove my books into my bag. I drive to the junk store to see if there is something there that will help me. The cashier looks at me in despair, takes me to the back room, and shows me a glass bottle with thick green liquid. The cashier looks at me, stuttering with his words, and tells me that there is a risk that I can be turned into a gorilla. I drank the bottle and my head hit the ground blacking out.

My eyes open, and I am back in my bed. I hear the whistle of the referee in the college football game. I smell the scrambled eggs my dad makes every Saturday. My mom busts through my door, saying, “Wake up, you're going to waste your Saturday!”

Colin Gerber

Mission Soldier

I watch as three small grenades roll into our trench. I sprint away, diving into the wet mud. The explosion causes a ringing sensation in my ears. An arm lands next to me as a red mist fills the air. I sit there, shell-shocked, staring at piles of mangled bodies. A Russian soldier with a knife tattoo comes up to me, shoving a gun into my side. The other wields a metal pipe. He yanks on my hair while another ties a bandana over my eyes. The metal pipe smacks the side of my head. Everything goes quiet, and the soldiers' screams become faint.

My body thumps as I hit the bed of the truck. The driver is wild, swerving all over the place. My limp body rolls around the bed of the truck, slamming against the sides with each hard turn. The bandana slides off my face as we make a hard stop at some prison; the fences are covered in barbed wire, and there are watchtowers on each corner of the building. The soldiers come to the back of the truck, throwing me out on the wet dirt. One soldier throws me over his shoulder as he carries me inside the prison.

As we pass the prison guard's booth, I catch a glance at a sign. It reads, "Soldier Conversion Camp." I struggle to keep my eyes open as they drag me through the halls of the prison. We finally reach a cell, which they throw me into and slam the door shut. The prison is huge, filled with other prisoners. I lie down in bed and close my eyes.

The prison guard wakes me by banging on the bars and screaming in a language I don't understand. He pulls the door open and drags me out by my arm. I follow him to a courtyard where all the other prisoners are lined up. He shoves me into line and tells me to listen. The director of this thing, Boris Petrov, speaks to us about the prison. We are used as decoys in war, and the best

prisoners are converted to regular soldiers. Those who survive are given a chance at freedom.

Boris grabs the first prisoner in line and shoves him to the ground. One of his guards steps forward, kicking the prisoner in the stomach. The others join in with a barrage of punches and kicks. Petrov used that prisoner as an example of what happens when you don't obey his commands. I follow the group back to our cells, sitting on the edge of my bed.

The next morning, another prison guard comes banging on my cell. I rub my eyes and get out of bed, following him to the courtyard. There are shooting stands set up, with pictures of dead soldiers as targets. Each line is around twenty people long, each inmate taking three shots before going to the back of the line. There are expert marksmen at each stand, correcting the mistakes of the prisoners. The guns are locked on a mount, so no one can try anything with it. I step up to the podium, resting the gun on my shoulder. I pull the trigger and the gun kicks back, sending a pain into my shoulder. After the smoke clears I lean in to see where my shot hit. It was dead center of the forehead. The instructor signals me to walk off and to do as I please while the others train.

I feel a tap on my shoulder while I'm eating my lunch. One of the prison guards tells me to follow him. I follow him into the basement of the prison. Inmates were beaten and tortured down here. Some were missing arms, others were just beaten an unimaginable amount. Through the torture chamber, we reach a conference room. The table is long and the walls are lined with gold. A large red chair spins around. Boris Petrov sits in it, looking at me with a smug look. He tells me what I have done is very impressive, and I have caused them no issues, so they will move me to their army the next morning.

I sit in the back of a box car with three other inmates. My stomach feels twisted as we ride through the rain. I wipe the sweat from my forehead, rubbing it off on my pants. My grip tightens around the barrel of my gun, fear takes over my body as I sit there. The truck makes a fast halt. Petrov pulls the curtain back, telling us to come through. I step out into the battleground.

I rest my gun on the edge of the trench, squinting to get a better view. There is no noise, no movement, nothing. A loud explosion goes off on their side of the trench. I look up to see a mortar flying towards us. I drop my gun and sprint, hiding under a bridge. Screams fill the air as the mortar drops, taking out most of our troops. I get out my canteen, slurping the last drops from the bottom.

The face of Petrov stands out in the crowd of bodies. He sits there holding his leg. I stand up, stumbling over to him. I pull out the handgun from my hip, cocking the slide back. My foot sits on his chest as I look over him. I press my foot down harder, I can hear his ribs cracking as I push my foot into his chest. I put the gun to his forehead and pulled the trigger, again, and again, and again. Anger flooded my body as I looked at him, his fate should have been much worse.

I can hear footsteps coming in behind me. I spin around reaching for my gun, but I'm not fast enough. Gunfire fills the air and bullets fill my chest. Time seems to slow down as I fall to the ground. Blood starts leaking from my chest and mouth. I close my eyes, accepting my fate as my mind goes silent.

Gavin Caron

Fields of Fear

In the heart of a wheat field stood a scarecrow, with its tattered clothes flapping in the wind. He overlooked the field of an old man named Walter. He, along with his wife Mary lived in Fox Run, Iowa. A cozy village with wooden cottages and farmhouses. They lived together in an old beige farmhouse with broken steps that led to the front door.

Windows flew open with a breeze, and the floorboards creaked with every step. A winding farm path was used by the Thompson family as a cut-through. Walter would invite them over when Mary would make her chicken pot pie.

Walter was out in his field when he noticed the hat of his scarecrow was on the ground. The scarecrow was dressed in a pair of dirty overalls, and a buffalo plaid flannel. Walter's knees popped and cracked as he bent over to grab the hat. Lifting the hat from the cold coarse dirt, he jumped back as a prickling sensation crawled up his spine. A pool of fresh blood had seeped into the ground.

Walter started to rationalize what he had just seen. *It could've been a squirrel or a coyote.* The next morning, he checked his scarecrow, but nothing was there. The lady who usually cut through his fields at night suddenly stopped passing through. Without a trace, the lady went missing. There were signs all around town. On telephone poles, and in people's mailboxes. The town searched for days but couldn't find anything that led to her disappearance.

Two teenage boys named John and Joseph decided to head through Walter's field. They knew about the scarecrow, but they just thought it was a

myth. Walter had seen the boys and warned them to return home and never cut through his fields again, but they didn't listen. They went up to the foot of the scarecrow and looked up at him, but nothing happened. The next evening signs went up of the two missing boys. The news had reached Walter and he knew he had to do something about this. He headed out to the fields where his scarecrow stood. The scarecrow's appearance stood untouched.

Walter stood beneath the scarecrow, feeling a silence surrounding him. The air was thick and still. The scarecrow, with its hollow eyes, appeared almost lifelike in the evening light. As he moved closer Walter noticed something unsettling, there were deep cracks in the soil beneath the scarecrow's feet, as if it had been drained of all its moisture. Kneeling, he ran his fingers through the dirt. It crumbled in his hands like dust which was far too dry for this time of year. The truth started to settle with Walter. *Something isn't right with the land, and it's not just the scarecrow.*

Walter rushed back to the farmhouse where he managed to find his old family books. He wiped the dust off them and flipped through the yellow pages where he was reminded of so many memories. But one page, in particular, would give Walter all the answers he needed. It was all about the history and the legend of the scarecrow. His great-grandfather had placed it there not to watch over the fields but to keep the animals and people from stealing and eating his crops. It seemed as if the land didn't need moisture to keep it alive. It needed lives.

Jackson Rockhold

Two Boys and a Dream

The white silk drapes over the rough wood, the faint hum of an engine vibrating through it. The shiny new plane catches the light with its sleek shape, thanks to two brothers from a small town in Ireland. Eddie is known for his inventing and engineering skills. Brock, strong and hardworking, worked with wood and tools. The two boys sat down to discuss how they would make a plane. buying an old glider from a local parts shop. Eddie sits in his office on an old chair, placing paper on a workbench, and sketching his plan for a plane. Brock, in his shop, grabs a hammer, pries the glider apart, and separates the pieces by size and shape. Brock learns that the glider's wings are larger than its body.

Brock scavenges for wood in his shop and rounds up his chisels and saws. He places wood on a bench and starts cutting and sanding. Brushing off the sawdust, Brock grabs his chisel and hammers channels for fabric. After he staples cloth onto the wood, he designs a small engine small enough to fit between him and the middle of the plane.

Unpacking and readying the plane, popping the rudder into place, and filling the engine with gas, the brothers flip a coin, calling it in the air. Eddie wins. He stumbles to the plane. Shaking, he straps in. With a crank of a handle, the engine roars to life, glancing at his brother he nods before he starts moving forward. He pulls the rudder back. Slowly, the plane rises. Eddie yells to his brother, giving him a thumbs-up.

Readjusting himself, Eddie kicks the rear wing, knocking a pin out of place and sending the wing tumbling. Eddie loses control of the plane, sending it toward the field. Tall plumes of smoke climb. Eddie stumbles from the wreckage.

An old farmer named Warren storms to the wreckage and screams at the boys for what they've done to his field. He makes the boys a deal and tosses the boys a sickle Eddie and Brock mosey their way to the field.

Eddie throws his sickle to the ground, wiping the sweat from his forehead, they carry the wheat to Warren's flour mill and begin making flour. Stuffing wheat grains into the mill, Brock looks for the old man. When Brock finds Warren, he is greeted with the smell of freshly baked bread. Warren hands him a neatly woven basket full of breads and pastries. Warren shakes his hand and pats him on the back. Brock enters the mill, grabs his brother, and they head home.

Eddie and Brock return to their shop, where Eddie is pleased with the shape of the wings. Feeling the rear wing needs some tweaks, he reviews his sketch and realizes they made it too small. Brock begins experimenting with different materials and designs, envisioning the second plane as fully enclosed. Grabbing his woodworking tools, Brock chops, and finishes pieces, building a sturdy framework for the new plane. Once the structure is complete, he and Eddie cover it and paint thin grey sheets.

Entering the cockpit Brock flips a red switch starting the engine. Adjusting his harness he checks his instruments and heads to the runway. He pulls back on the joystick lifting the plane, till he pushes a button bringing the landing gear in. Brock flies through town. He circles back bringing the landing gear out. Brock slowly descends to the runway. Climbing out of the plane with a smile ear to ear he tells Eddie they have a product.

Connor Goins

Loved One

The mornings grow colder and colder with each day passing. Lying in bed, I ball up shivering underneath the blankets. I feel a brisk of cold air hitting my face as I force myself out of bed. I look at my window to see a crack that's allowing the cold air in my room. I grab duct tape from my vanity drawer, patching the window until I can call the owner of my cabin. I walk downstairs to the fireplace wrapping myself up in a blanket by the fire. Walking away from the fire, my body goes from warm to cold as I enter the kitchen.

I grab the largest bowl from the cabinet and pour pancake mix into it. Pouring the thick mix into the pan bubbles start forming on the top. Next to the pancakes I put bread in the toaster and butter the toast. I pour milk into a clear cup and walk to the living room. I search for the remote and turn the tv on. The news shows a heavy snowstorm for today, and a high of 15 degrees. That means it;s going to be icy and extremely cold. I finish my breakfast and shut the tv off. I put my plate into the sink and walk upstairs.

I open my large walk-in closet and look for the warmest set of clothes I have. I have to dress in layers with the harsh weather so I start with layer one. I pull on black thermal leggings along with a black thermal long sleeve.

I go in with a second layer pulling a grey hoodie over my head and grey sweatpants over my leggings. Walking to my dresser I pull out 3 pairs of socks and slip them over my feet. I finish with a third layer which is a second hoodie and my snowsuit. I get downstairs to slide my snow boots on before I leave.

Reaching my boots I slip them on and triple knotting my laces. I grab my phone off the table as I'm sliding my hefty winter coat on. I see a notification from my brother telling me to come find him in the mountains. I rush out the door sliding my gloves over my fingers and slamming the door behind me.

As I stand there on the porch I take a second to take in the scenery. The sky's the perfect shade of blue with white clouds. The snow sparkling from a far, and is a blinding white. The mountains peak over the fluffy cloud as do the rock statues that surround them. The sun is just shining enough to give me the right amount of warmth. I walk off the porch into inches of snow. I make my way to the first trail called *Gold*.

Walking up to *Gold* the trail has large footprints almost the exact size of my brother's feet. I follow the footprints, for maybe a little less than half the trail. I look up and I see my brother standing in front of me.

He's wearing a black suit and holding a cane looking into the image beneath him. His orange curly hair blowing with the winds. I go up and hug him, or at least I thought. His image disappears when I reach for him. My brother passed away two years ago.

Emma Hughes

Midnight in the Library

I was studying late one night in the library. I was so focused on my notes that I couldn't think of anything else. The sound of the librarian locking the door made me jolt up. I had lost track of time and realized it was now 11pm. An hour had gone by as I was distracted trying to find a way out, and I heard some books fall off the shelf, followed by the sound of pages rapidly turning. I spun around to see piles of books thrown open on the floor. I could see the covers of *The Great Gatsby*, *Treasure Island*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. There was nothing but silence until the words started to come off the pages and clump together, creating fairy tale creatures. I froze with confusion.

One by one, the characters came to life and began wandering through the library and greeting one another. There were knights on horseback, gladiators in armor, and pirates with their crew. I watched from behind a bookcase as the characters wandered about. One of the pirates noticed me and alarmed the rest of the party, bellowing out "Ahoy!"

The lively characters froze. I rose and stumbled toward them. One figure moved forward from behind the crowd. It was William Shakespeare wondering why I was still in the library. I lifted my arm, tapping my watch, and mumbled I had lost track of time. He then signaled to the statues, telling them it was okay. They then all broke out of their poses and began moving freely. I was informed an Egyptian curse was put on the library. They came to life at midnight every night.

Brennan Schade

Confined

My eyes peek open slowly. Fidgeting in my bed, I stay there. I look to my left and see my phone, but I do not pick it up. I want to pick it up, but my hands feel stuck in their position. The breeze from my fan blows in my direction, it makes my body cold. I want to turn it off, but my body feels stuck in its position. Staring at my pill bottles, I know I need to take my medicine. I want to, but I don't. Time goes by without notice. 6 am turns to 6:23 am. I need to get up, and so I finally do.

My head is running on a wheel—an uncomfortable but comfortable feeling. A cycle. I begin my routine but take small pauses in between each task. The negative internal feelings attempt to escape with each breath.

I finish my routine like I know I'm supposed to do. At last, I ended up in the place where people expect me to be. I enter through the school building and into the office. Seeing the same woman at the desk pushes a wave of nervousness through my body. Embarrassment and shame don't leave but I have to follow through with the late process. An internal aura of confidence attempts to mask my natural presence. I get through—all of it happening within seconds.

Imaginary sandbags are tied to my feet as the school day goes by. Getting home, I reflect on the day unwillingly. The pure exhaustion of something else masking me for hours kicks in and things that must be completed are left undone. Why is weariness there when it doesn't deserve to be? Guilt floods

through my veins. I lay on my bed and fuse with the blankets until the heat creeps in. My body becomes sticky from sweat.

I want to turn on my fan, but my body feels stuck in its position. Crystals lay beneath my pillow. As I drift to sleep, they guide me to a place I've already visited in my dreams.

I am alone on a still lake, sitting in a rowboat under a night sky filled with stars. The water is clear, illuminating neon plants beneath its surface, glowing faintly in the darkness. For a moment, there's peace—a stillness that fills the air like a lullaby. But just as quickly, a shadow emerges from the depths. I feel a presence watching me, something powerful and ancient. I know I should row away, but my body stays frozen, stuck in its position.

The creature surges upward, and I feel myself swallowed whole, consumed by the water and darkness. I wake up with my heart racing, the weight of the dream pressing down on me as if I'd actually been submerged. I lie there, catching my breath, and look around my room, reality settling in around me.

But even in my half-asleep state, a strange thought creeps in. I picture myself as something else, something other than a living soul—a higher being or a celestial creature, floating beyond the bounds of emotion or sensation. The vision is appealing, almost comforting: a being that simply exists without the messiness of feeling anything at all. No pain, no worry, no exhaustion. No crushing weight pulling me under.

Yet, as I entertain the thought, something else stirs within me. Despite everything, the struggle and constant thought circles, there's a small, quiet yearning—a flicker of warmth.

Even if it means feeling this heaviness, even if it means sinking beneath waves of sadness, I can't deny the beauty that comes from feeling at all. The pain and the weight are real, but so is every other feeling I've experienced, even the small, fleeting moments of joy and peace. I'd rather feel sadness and anger than nothing at all.

In some strange way, it feels like a gift. To feel deeply, to know the ache and the release, the highs and the lows. I imagine myself as that higher being, staring down at life, unable to feel curious about the mystery of human existence. And I know, even then, that I'd trade everything to be here, even with all the struggles. Because feeling—even the hardest parts of it—is what makes life vivid and full.

The thought pulls me from my bed, slowly but surely. I stand up, the weight still there but somehow less heavy. It's still difficult, and I still feel the ache deep within me, but there's a part of me that recognizes the significance of a human life. I am stuck in a gray area.

Alyssa Lanham

The Story Between Strokes

Jin-woo wakes up and stretches, he puts on a shirt and brushes his teeth. He leaves his room grabbing his jacket and his bag on the way out of the Happy Internet Cafe for a jog. He walks down a side street and sees shops built using traditional Chinese architecture. One shop named soup cakes, the other is named Zhang Fei Beef. He bumps into a lady that was on her way home from the grocery store. He helps the lady pick up her groceries.

Jin-woo arrives back at the Happy Internet Cafe where he works as the night manager. Chen Guo, the cafe's owner gives him an earful for returning late from his jog after giving him an earful, she heads home. She leaves her best friend Tang Rou in charge for the night. He puts his bag in his room and then he starts sweeping the floor; he wipes the tables and keyboards clean; while Tang Rou takes the trash out then she flips the close sign back over to open.

Jin-woo walks out front for a quick smoke break as he watches a league match for the game Glory. The match is playing on every TV in the cafe and the giant TV across the street from the cafe. He puts out his cigarette and walks back inside. He gets back to work by delivering soda and fries to the customer that had ordered it then he delivers an energy drink to another customer.

Jin-woo sits down at the front desk and hands a cup of coffee to Tang rou. When one of his ex-team mates named Liu Hao from Jin-woo's old pro Glory team walks in with the help of another and a red face. Liu Hao hiccupping

starts to mock Jin-woo for his loss of his old account, one autumn leaf. Liu Hao starts to hit on Tang rou when Jin-woo, stands and interrupts him by telling him to leave, pointing over his shoulder to the sign that states that the cafe does not serve drunk customers. Liu Hao leaves with anger shown by his clenched fist at how calm Jin-woo was.

Jin-woo loads up Glory during his break. His avatar Lord Grim is the most known on the tenth server. His class is unspecialized, a class that is hard to master but can use other classes' abilities. He is equipped with The Myriad Manifestation umbrella, a silver grade weapon that is all class specific weapons combined into one.

He meets up with one team member, Soft Mist the battle mage who is also Tang rou. They join a party to set a new clear record for dead valley. The other members are Blue River and Hateful Sword, both of them are swordsmen. Hateful sword is there to copy Jin-woo's strategy. Lord Grim gives a list of rare materials to Blue River he wants for payment after the clear is done. He starts to go over the strategy to trap the other monsters and face the boss with a small grin.

After the run Hateful Sword tries to join another one but Jin-Woo refuses calling him out by his real name Liu Hao. Lord Grim received his payment of rare materials from Blue River. Lord Grim goes and upgrades his weapon using the newly acquired materials before logging off.

Jin-woo goes to the back street where he bumped into a lady to eat dinner at the store named Zhang Fei Beef.

He buys some soup cakes from the store across the street after eating at Zhang Fei Beef. He returns back to the closed cafe and goes to his room and stores the soup cakes in the mini fridge for breakfast. He puts on noise canceling headphones and goes to sleep.

Thomas Kramer