

# Tapestries

Saint Francis University's Literary Arts Magazine

2020-2021

**2020-2021**

Each year the School of STEAM hosts the Gunard B. Carlson Creative Writing and Visual Arts Contest, a competition open to all Saint Francis University undergraduates. Students may submit written entries of up to 3,000 words in the following categories: (1) fiction, (2) creative nonfiction, including personal narratives and memoirs, (3) essay writing, and (4) poetry, with a minimum of five poems per submission. Students also may submit works of visual art, such as photographs, sculptures, paintings (oil, water, and acrylic), sketches, and collages.

The Department of English and World Languages also hosts the annual Father Callan Poetry Contest, which aims to celebrate Father Thomas Callan's love of literature. This contest, funded by the generous donations of SFU alumnus and published poet Paul Martin, is open to all undergraduate and graduate students.

The winners and honorable mentions of each contest are published in our annual edition of *Tapestries*, Saint Francis University's literary and visual arts magazine. This edition includes the winning entries and honorable mentions of our 2020-2021 contests. Opinions expressed in this magazine do not reflect those of the contest judges and magazine editor or those of the Saint Francis University community.

**For more information about the Gunard B. Carlson and Fr. Callan Poetry contests, please contact:**

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# Tapestries

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## Weaving the Threads of Creativity and Innovation

***Faculty Editor***

Brennan Thomas

**Cover Artwork** by Taya Whitfield

"Candy-Colored Skies" (1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner in the Visual Arts Category)

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# Acknowledgements

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Ms. Carol Stoltz, for judging all visual art entries for the Gunard B. Carlson Contest and selecting the overall visual arts winner and honorable mention recipients;

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All students who submitted writing and artwork for the Gunard B. Carlson and Fr. Callan Poetry contests. The quality of your creations was exceptional, and our judges thoroughly enjoyed reviewing your work.



## **Gunard B. Carlson Writing Judges**

**Dr. Patrick Farabaugh**, Associate Professor of Communication Arts

**Dr. Grant Julin**, Associate Professor of Philosophy

**Dr. Art Remillard**, Professor of Philosophy

**Dr. Kent Tonkin**, Associate Professor of Business

## **Gunard B. Carlson Visual Arts Judge**

**Ms. Carol Stoltz**, Head of Library Access Services

## **Fr. Callan Poetry Judge**

**Mr. Paul Martin**, SFU Alumnus and Published Poet

## **Contest Coordinator & Magazine Editor**

**Dr. Brennan Thomas**, Associate Professor of English and Writing Center Director

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# My First Real Works

by Grace O’Connell

## Ni (Two) Haiku

A hot tear streams down,  
Salty and bitter from pain,  
No tissues are here.

Sleeping dogs lie still,  
Waiting patiently for their  
Owner’s late return.

## The Ugly Hunts the Pretty

A golden horizon expands over open plains.  
Light descends onto the soft earth and ever fading twilight envelops the sky.  
Ivory feathers, like the dawn of an angel, soar into the free expanse as the glowing sun finally disappears.  
The THUNK of a lead shaft hits unsuspecting prey, echoing throughout the air.  
Falling

Like  
A  
Shooting  
Star,  
The  
Bird  
Hits  
The  
Moist  
Forest  
Floor.

The fragile form's fight is fading, with its pulseless plumage drenched in lukewarm blood.

The liquid ebbs and flows into stony ground,

And it drips

Off

The

Making

Gory

Limbs,

A

Sight.

The warmth from caramel clouds has ceased,

All that remains is a dreary, unforgiving

End.

## **People and Plants**

A little baby cries out for its mother.

A seed seeks for soft soil yet stays in standby.

While children grow with the care and nurturing of parents,

Plants become brand new beings after time and experience with only the distant sun as company.

Without the necessities of life,

The child withers away and becomes a hollow husk of hopelessness.

Without room to grow,

The plant is overtaken by others just like it.

Actions of the forces outside can sap life from both living things.

Gardens are more than fruits and vegetables,

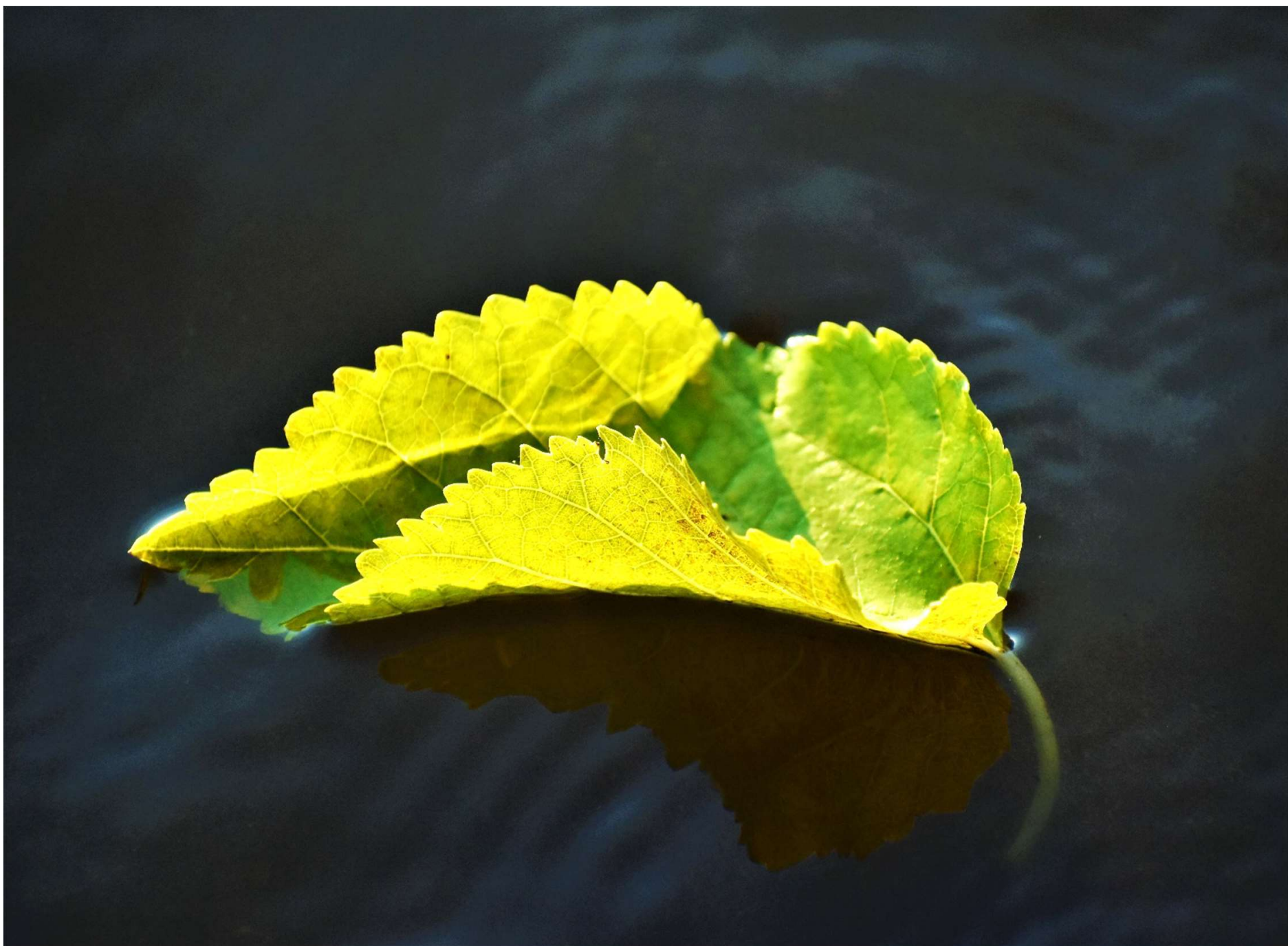
Family is more than picket fences and fancy cars.

Both desire the support and compassion of a loving caretaker.

A parent to a child,

Is a gardener to a seed.





## **Leaf** by Katelyn Diehl

# July 2020

by Jack Weidner

3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner, Fr. Callan Poetry Contest

How I long for the quietness  
in a Sunday,  
but I no longer know which day is which.

The composition limps ahead  
at allegro towards its *shattering*  
*Cres*

*CEN*

*d*

*O!*

As I lay in my bed  
waiting for my delusion to kick in  
so I can start my day.

How I long for the life I will  
never live,  
while the band plays on.

# **The Russia-Ukraine Conflict in Ukraine**

by Wendelyn Bintrim

4<sup>th</sup> Place Winner, Gunard Carlson Contest

The conflict in Ukraine, which is between the Ukrainian military and a separatist insurgency backed by Russian troops, has been going on since 2014, when Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula and fueled separatist rebellion in the Donbass region of Eastern Ukraine (Wong 2020; Bebler 2015, 196; Kleinschmidt 2019, 428). To date, over 13,000 Ukrainians have been killed in the Crimean conflict, both soldiers and civilians (Wong 2020). Thousands of ethnic Ukrainians and Tatars have left their homes in Crimea to escape the warzone (Bebler 2015, 218; Cumming-Brice 2017). Following annexation, tens of thousands of Crimeans who did not want Russian citizenship or were disqualified for it lost their property, employment, political, and health rights as well (Cumming-Brice 2017).

In the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, five million people are affected by the Russia-Ukraine conflict along the contact line (Schein 2019). Civilians in the rebel-run areas tend to suffer extreme poverty because the Kiev government is unable to send them their pensions (Schein 2019). In Crimea, Russia arrests and convicts Tatars simply for being members of Muslim organizations, branding them as extremists, while at the same time Russia commits grave human rights abuses against noncombatants such as torture and extrajudicial killing, (Schein 2019; Cumming-Brice 2017). Even before the annexation, the Tatars were usually the victims when there was ethnic strife in Crimea (Grant 2015, 74). The Russian occupying authorities also “forcefully entered” the civic and religious buildings of the Ukrainian Jews (some of whom are Karaim Tatars) (Özçelik 2020). Not only Muslims and Jews, but also Jehovah’s Witnesses were persecuted when Russia took over: Russia prohibited the religious group (Cumming-Brice 2017).

The Ukrainian conflict is an example of a hybrid war involving other European countries like Poland and Germany and the United States (Wong 2020; Bebler 2015, 214). “Hybrid war” is a term used by NATO, but there is no official definition. Loosely, a hybrid war is a conflict in which the different sides do not directly attack each other, but instead exploit the enemy’s political and economic vulnerabilities, coerce militarily, or use diplomatic or technological means to get their way (Bingöl 2017). Most countries still believe Crimea rightfully belongs to Ukraine, not Russia, despite the 2014 annexation (Bebler 2015, 196). The states that do recognize the annexation include North Korea, Syria, Nauru, Afghanistan, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and nonstate entities like Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia (Özçelik 2020).

Russia historically had ties to Crimea; it was part of the Russian Empire for 168 years and was later integrated into the USSR (Bebler 2015, 198). Today, most inhabitants

of Ukraine are Ukrainian, but there is a considerable minority of Russian-speakers (Bebler 2015, 198). In some specific parts of Ukraine, ethnic Russians are actually the majority (Bebler 2015, 198). Besides the ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians, Ukraine is also inhabited by people of 130 other ethnicities/nationalities (Khan and Ihsan 2017, 21). Since 1991, Russia has secretly controlled what the separatists in Crimea do and kept some intelligence agents there (Bebler 2015, 203). In fact, Russia had likely been plotting the annexation of Crimea for over twenty years (Bebler 2015, 203). The Ukrainian government knew Russia had designs on their land in 2007, and the former prime minister of Ukraine, Yulia Timoshenko, publicly notified Western countries of her suspicions concerning Russia's intentions (Bebler 2015, 203). A year after Timoshenko expressed her fears about Russian designs, Russia probably solidified its desire to annex Crimea when the opportunity would arise (Bebler 2015, 203). When in 2008, NATO, upon the suggestion of the United States, naïvely suggested that Ukraine could join the organization in the future, the suggestion incensed Russia, so, in retaliation, the Federation launched its plan to annex Crimea (Bebler 2015, 203-14). Vladimir Putin claimed that the annexation was carried out in the interest of securing Southern Russia from NATO's gradual encroachment in nearby countries. He said that he did not want NATO on the metaphorical doorstep of the "Russian house" (Bebler 2015, 214). Russia wanted to eliminate the possibility of Ukraine ever joining NATO or, at the very least, to avoid the North Atlantic Treaty's area from expanding into the mostly Russophone areas of Ukraine's east and south (Bebler 2015, 213). As a consequence of the annexation, other countries bordering Russia feared that the Federation would also try to assault them via their own ethnically Russian minorities (Bebler 2015, 216). Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania started spending more on defense; Lithuania reverted to conscription (Bebler 2015, 216). Poland is nervous about Russian hostility due to what happened in Ukraine as well (Sydoruk and Tyshchenko 2018, 1). As a result of this fear, most of the Polish public supports measures against Russia and ones in the favor of Ukraine (Sydoruk and Tyshchenko 2018, 189).

When Russia did annex Crimea in 2014, the annexation was fairly easy. Approximately 20,000 Ukrainian military personnel in Crimea were ordered not to resist and surrendered (Bebler 2015, 205). The majority of those personnel switched sides (Bebler 2015, 205). Even so, at the time, Putin denied that fact of the annexation (Bebler 2015, 205). Russia suppressed Ukrainian TV channels and printed media in Crimea and prevented flights from the peninsula to Ukraine (Bebler 2015, 206). Russia then disseminated propaganda that asserted that the government in Kiev was the aggressor, claiming that Ukraine's government was run by "Neo-Nazis" and "fascists" plotting a "genocide" against the Russian and Russophone populations (Bebler 2015, 206). Contrary to this narrative, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCR), the Council of Europe, and OSCE found no evidence of the supposed violations of the rights of ethnic Russian people in mainland Ukraine and Crimea (Grant 2015, 75; Özçelik 2020). Meanwhile, Russia threatened Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians who wanted to remain with



Ukraine; pro-Ukraine journalists and activists were kidnapped and abused (Bebler 2015, 206). A Tatar who protested was kidnapped, tortured, and killed (Bebler 2015, 206). The Ukrainian parliament made a mistake in removing the Russian language's official status; this removal was cherry-picked by Russian disinformation campaigns as a sign of malice. However, it must be noted that the parliamentary blow to the Russian language's status never had any real consequences because the law was vetoed. While technically perhaps Russia had more of a historical claim to controlling Crimea (having owned it for 168 years versus Ukraine's 60-year possession of Crimea before the 2014 annexation), Russia's acquisition of Crimea was obviously by unethical and dishonest means and also served as a tool for Putin to elevate his own domestic popularity (Bebler 2015, 209-210). Putin even had the nerve to draw a false analogy between the Ukrainian-Russian fight over Crimea and the atrocities of the 1998-1999 Kosovo genocide (Ronayne 2004; Bebler 2015, 210). It's unlikely that the Kiev government will be able to effectively oppose Russia in Crimea and South Eastern Ukraine (Bebler 2015, 213). Even the West's anti-Russia sanctions seem not to discipline Russia effectively; the governments of Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary expressed doubt that sanctions would work (Bebler 2015, 213; Sydoruk and Tyshchenko 2018, 83-84). Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary have complained that the economic sanctions might end up hurting *their* countries and other EU members and missing the Russian target; they point to their financial and energy needs being linked to Russia (Sydoruk and Tyshchenko 2018, 84). The point of these sanctions might theoretically be to force Russia to give Crimea back to Ukraine, to compel Russia to desist from helping the rebels, or to topple the current Russian regime (Bebler 2015, 213). Putin thinks that his enemies are attempting to overthrow him (Bebler 2015, 217). Sanctions likely will not hurt Russia sufficiently; the US tried using sanctions against much smaller and weaker Cuba in the past, an experiment that failed (Bebler 2015, 217). Sanctions against selling military equipment to Russia are especially pointless because Russia is the second-largest arms exporter in the world and can certainly supply itself with weapons (Bebler 2015, 217). Perhaps recognizing that the struggle to restore Crimea to Ukraine is a daunting task due to Russia's status as a large, intimidating, authoritarian neighbor, in 2014 Ukrainian prime minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk discontinued all rail connections to Crimea from the mainland, despite asserting that Crimea will always be Ukrainian at heart (Bebler 2015, 219; Treisman 2018).

Putin and Poroshenko (then president of Ukraine) agreed to order the Ukrainians and the separatists to cease fire back in 2014, but that order was reversed for the technical reason of Russia's involvement only by proxy. The Kremlin's press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, stated, "Russia cannot physically agree to a ceasefire, as it is not a side in the conflict" (MacFarquhar and Roth 2014). The Minsk II measures have so far failed to stop the fighting in Ukraine, but at least, as of 2015, the war in eastern Ukraine was partially frozen and the international community has attempted to mitigate the conflict through the work of the security-oriented IGO Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (Dubský and Havlová 2019; Roth 2018). However, in 2018, Poroshenko

was concerned with the possibility of a “full-scale” war as the number of Russian units near the Ukraine-Russia border and Russian tanks rapidly increased and Russia detained Ukrainian sailors after firing on and seizing their ships in the Kerch Strait, which separates Crimea from Russia proper (Roth 2018). Russia’s actions led to talk of new sanctions by the West (Roth 2018). Ukrainian observers feared that the Strait incident might inflame eastern Ukraine (Roth 2018). Unfortunately, as of 2020, Putin “shows no signs of easing pressure on Ukraine [and he] will remain the decision-maker” even after peace negotiations between the two nations (Seddon and Olearchyk 2020).

The constructivist perspective (the perspective of looking at reality as a social construct) would portray the war as the clash of the ideologies of authoritarian Russia with those of the liberal West that is trying to help Ukraine defend itself (Bebler 2015, 217-18; Kleinschmidt 2019, 428). Constructivists might note the fact that Russia uses hypernationalism (and therefore, by extension, irredentism in mainland Ukraine and Crimea) to distract its citizens from the temptations of political freedoms that are illustrated by Russia’s liberal democratic enemies in the US and other Western countries (Macaulay 2017, 14). Constructivists see post-USSR Russian politics as entailing a societal identity crisis and subsequent efforts to resurrect some of the widespread power that Russia had in the past, as by the expansionism just discussed (Kleinschmidt 2019, 428). Those using constructivist methods might note that Russophone insurgents are called “terrorists” by Ukraine (Bebler 2015, 213). On the other hand, Russians have also labeled the Crimean Tatar population, part of which peacefully resists Russia’s grasp on the region, as “terrorists,” capitalizing on xenophobia and racism (Özçelik 2020). And also, as mentioned earlier, Russia has questionably demonized the Ukrainian side of the conflict by likening it to neo-Nazis and the perpetrators of the Kosovo genocide.

Realists, concerned with power, might see Putin as an offensive realist trying to offset NATO’s power and to forestall Ukraine from joining NATO, analyzing NATO’s offer to the Ukrainians as a mistake, however well-meaning the gesture may have been intended (Bebler 2015, 218). Offensive realists believe that Russia was disturbed by NATO’s attempt to add Ukraine, that Russia felt threatened by the possibility that democracy might even spread to the Federation itself, and that the Russian state is rational in its calculation to strike first (Kleinschmidt 2019, 428). Power transition theory, which is a part of realism, suggests that changes in the distribution of power among and between states can cause either the declining power or rising power to go to war; for example, the realist John J. Mearsheimer reasons that Russia is a declining power and that it felt threatened (Kleinschmidt 2019, 428).

The liberal perspective might view the Ukraine-Russia conflict as a problem of not enough cooperation (Bebler 2015, 218). Ukraine and Russia cannot cooperate because both see cooperation as a zero-sum game in which one side must lose for the other to gain; Russia wants to gain control of territory, while Ukraine wants to keep its territorial integrity. Adherents to the liberal perspective might also point to the fact that Russia is not a transparent democracy; rather, it is an authoritarian state, so scholars can only guess

Putin's true motivations. Relatively democratic and pro-West Ukraine and authoritarian Russia do not get along well due to the different natures of their governments (Özçelik 2020). The liberal perspective would also say that the aforementioned sanctions from the international community against the aggressor (Russia, in this case) are key to thwarting Russia's hostility by proxy in Ukraine.

I read two articles stating that the realist perspective (the offensive type, in particular) does not explain the conflict well and was convinced by the authors' logic (McFaul 2014; Kleinschmidt 2019, 431). Weighing the constructivist and liberal perspectives concerning the conflict, I came to the conclusion that the constructivist perspective works best because, as I noted, the article by Anton Bebler maintained that sanctions seem to have little effect on Russia, and I found another article reporting that "economic sanctions usually fail" and can potentially produce "the opposite of the intended outcome"—economic sanctions are among the methods preferred by the liberal perspective (Seitz and Zazzaro 2019, 1). Also, the liberal perspective would entail the international community coming together in the interests of collective security to punish the aggressor (Russia) militarily on behalf of the victim country (Ukraine), but NATO, as of 2017, will not "reverse Russian behaviour in Ukraine through force of arms" (Sperling and Webber 2017). The constructivist perspective most comprehensively explains the conflict because Russia is lacking in the democracy element of the Kantian peace (a formula for international peace entailing that countries are democratic, connected economically, and share membership in international organizations) and disobeyed international law by annexing Crimea (Gilady 2017, 135). The Kantian peace does not work if any of its elements are missing (Gilady 2017, 136). Also, Putin's efforts to make Russians "rally around the flag" concerning Crimea via propaganda, a personal PR move on his part, point to the socially constructed nature of the confrontation. Thus, I conclude that the constructivist perspective best describes the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

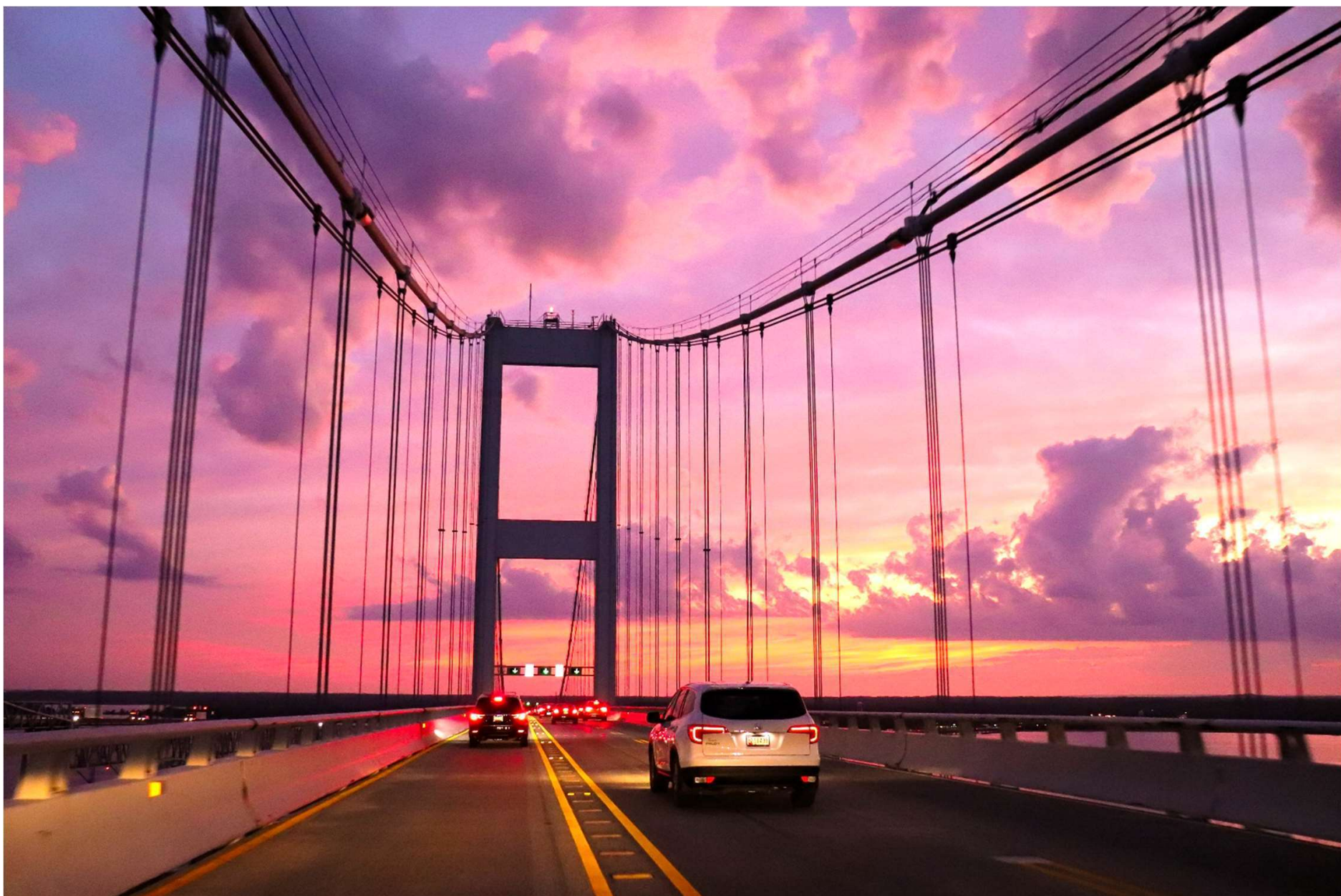
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**Candy-Colored Skies** by Taya Whitfield  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner, Visual Category, Gunard Carlson Contest

# Uniquely Generic (Excerpt)

by Kei-Shon Graham

It is 7:30 in the morning and Shawn is beginning his walk to school just as he does every morning. As he walks, he feels the stiff winter air beating against his coat; he hears the wet snow sloshing beneath his boots and sees a freezing cloud with every breath that slips between his chattering teeth. Shawn has lived in Philadelphia his entire life.

You would think 17 years is more than enough time to get used to Philadelphia's cold winters, but he is stunned every year, claiming, "It's never been this cold before."

This morning in particular the cold does not have Shawn's full attention. He is more concerned with what is waiting for him at school. Today report cards are being passed out and Shawn knows he did not do well this marking period. The source of his anxiety is not necessarily the report card; he knew for some weeks now that he was not doing well. His anxiety is coming from how he believes his mother will take the news.

Shawn has never been at the top of his class; he also has never had a report card with grades as low as he is expecting on this one. Shawn is nearing the end of his walk; he can faintly see the school through the barrage of snowflakes. For the past ten minutes of his walk, he has been debating whether he will get in trouble for his report card. The reason he ponders this is because his mother has been acting weird lately. Shawn has not been able to figure out what is causing the difference in his mother or exactly what the difference is. He just knows that she is not herself.

He resolves that one of three things will happen: his mother will be extremely upset and punish him for the rest of his life, she will not care about his grades because she is too focused on who knows what, or Shawn's prayers will be answered and his teachers will mistakenly write As and Bs on his report card instead of Ds and Fs. Before making the transition from the coldest winter ever into his school, Shawn prays once more that his teachers will miraculously bump his grades up.

Before he can make it to homeroom to see his report card, Shawn has to go through the metal detectors at the front door. The students have to file in line and one by one put their bags into a machine that scans them before they are ushered through the metal detectors. Shawn's school has had a number of students unsuccessfully attempt to sneak weapons past the metal detectors. Shawn does not like that he has to go through the metal detectors, but he understands why they are there. Occasionally, Shawn will forget to take off his watch or belt and will have to go through a second time. When this happens and the metal detector beeps him the first time, the security guards stare at him suspiciously until they are assured the beep was caused by metal accessories and not weapons. When the security guards look at him like that and assume the worst about him, it makes Shawn angry. He thinks, *I'm not a criminal, but I feel like that's all they see when they look at me.*

Security guards are no issue today. Shawn is wearing sweatpants, and his watch broke last week in a game of touch football after school. Past the metal detectors, up two flights of stairs and Shawn finally reaches homeroom. He enters and walks straight to his homeroom teacher, Mr. Caldwell. He cannot wait any longer. He decides that whether the news is good or bad he must know now. He is so focused on getting his report card that he does not notice his homeroom teacher greet him. After a second or two of waiting for a response, Mr. Caldwell shrugs off Shawn as just another rude kid. Shawn spots his name on the corner of a paper peeking out from a stack of others that look just like his.

“That’s mine,” Shawn says sharply as he reaches for his name among the cluster of others.

As he draws both his hand and his report card back from the desk, Mr. Caldwell says, “Yeah, it’s yours for now, but make sure you bring it back to me with your mom’s signature.”

Shawn’s heart drops. He knows that only bad report cards need to be signed and returned. He slowly glimpses at his report card, and it looks just as he expected. Two Bs, one C, two Ds and one F. There was doubt in his mind before, but at this moment all doubt is washed away. There is no uncertainty; Shawn knows for sure that his mother is going to kill him.

He spends the rest of the day trying to figure out how he will explain his grades to her. His mind is racing with things and people he can blame this on, but nothing he comes up with will work. He goes to all of his classes and retains nothing. All he can think about is what his mother is going to do to him when he gets home. Scenario after scenario crosses his mind, and none ends happily ever after. On his walk home, Shawn comes to terms with his reality. He tells himself, *I am going to die, and I am okay with that. I have lived a long 17 years and my time has come.*

Finally, he reaches his front door. He has taken his entire walk home to prepare for the wrath that lies behind door number one. He enters the danger zone. As he closes the door, he takes off his bookbag, which is concealing his report card. He hears his mother in the kitchen. He wants to get his punishment over with quickly, so he walks straight to the kitchen. When he turns the corner, leaving the dining room and entering the kitchen, he is met with a surprise. His mother is sitting there crying.

He swiftly approaches her and asks, “What’s wrong Mom?”, to which there is no reply.

He begins to look around to find some type of clue to help him solve the mystery. A piece of paper on the table catches his eye, just as his report card did on Mr. Caldwell’s desk. Similar to his report card, there is a name at the top of the paper. It reads, “LINDA BLACK.” He picks it up and looks above the name where he sees bolded text and begins to read. At this moment, he realizes that this piece of paper is far worse than his report card.



Shawn is so shocked by the words on the paper that he inadvertently reads them aloud: “EVICTION NOTICE?”

Shawn’s exclamation causes Linda’s head to shoot up from her tear-filled palms. She snatches the paper from him and slams it down on the table. She rises from her chair, leaves the kitchen and makes her way up the steps. Linda moves too swiftly for Shawn to attempt to console her. She flies up the steps, into her room and BANG! Shawn jumps at the booming slam of her door. After taking a moment to process what has happened and what it all means, Shawn looks at the eviction notice once more. He reads the rest of the notice, and it finally sets in; this is really happening. He puts the paper back on the table. He decides to go upstairs and talk to his mom. He knows that she may snap on him, but he does not want to leave her alone.

Shawn slowly makes his way up the steps, around the banister and to his mother’s bedroom door. He knows that she needs him, but he is nervous because he does not know how she will react to his presence. Standing in front of the wooden door, splintered at the bottom from years of use, Shawn takes a deep breath. Before he can finish exhaling, he gets a surge of courage and knocks on the door.

He waits for what seems like an eternity. Finally, he hears a faint and defeated voice mutter, “Come in.”

Shawn opens the door and leans his head in to examine the lay of the land. There is his mother, whom he has always viewed as a very strong woman, curled up in her bed weeping. He looks at her tears. They seem to flow from every direction, as if they are spilling from the pores in her face. Shawn cautiously approaches his mother’s bed and sits on the side furthest from her. As Shawn sits, he searches for something to say. In the kitchen, he decided that he needed to console her, but he did not think about how. *I can’t ask her if she’s okay. I can’t tell her everything is going to be all right, can I?*

Suddenly, Shawn’s internal dialogue is interrupted by his mother’s voice. Linda begins to explain to Shawn that the landlord told her months ago if she was late on another payment, he would have to evict them. She goes on to say that she just could not keep up; it simply became too much.

She expresses, “Seeing that eviction notice broke me. It’s never been easy, but I’ve always found a way out from under.”

Linda begins apologizing to Shawn. He tries to assure her that there is no need for confession.

“It was never supposed to be like this,” says Linda as she wipes away tears.

She explains to Shawn that coming out of high school she had multiple scholarships to play basketball in college. She decided to go to the University of Tennessee where she was an accounting major and starting point guard. She excelled on and off the court; things were looking very bright.

Everything was working out for her until her sophomore year when she met Shawn's father.

"Ask me then, it was love at first sight. Ask me now, he was the biggest mistake of my life."

She explains that she does not regret having Shawn, nor does she see him as a mistake. If she could do it all over again, she would wait until she finished college and was ready to start a family before having Shawn. Instead of being a high-profile accountant living comfortably with few worries, she is a single mother with two jobs and worry towers over her.

"What if I had finished college?" she asks. "Where would we be? What would we be doing?"

She wonders because she feels the question will never be answered. What she does know is that her two cashier jobs combined do not make as much as the one job she could have had with a college degree.

"I spend all day handling amounts of money that I will never see," she explains to Shawn. That is what really makes her upset.

It hurts her to see the way that she and Shawn have to struggle as a result of her decisions. She wishes that she could give her son all that his heart desires. She wishes Shawn had not experienced certain things in his life. She wishes that when Shawn is asked about his childhood, he could tell stories of getting the best gifts for Christmas, going on extravagant vacations and eating expensive foods, but he cannot. Instead, Shawn's childhood stories include dark nights and cold showers because all of the bills could not be paid. Not enough food and too much stress. Shawn's childhood was one of struggle and sacrifice.

Once Linda is finished giving her explanation, Shawn feels compelled to say something. He wants to let his mother know that it's not her fault. He wants to tell her that he loves her and would not trade her for the world, but every time he goes to speak, the words evade him. There are so many emotions and thoughts occupying Shawn's mind that he cannot find the words that will truly express his sentiments. He searches his mind and vocabulary for the proper words, while fighting back a river of tears. Shawn does the only thing that feels right. He gets up from the bed, walks to the other side and hugs his mother. There are no more words, no more apologies and no more explanations. They just hold one another. That is all the communication that is needed.

After some time, Shawn pulls away and tells his mother that he needs to get some water and he will be downstairs if she needs him. The real reason Shawn feels the need to make an escape is the river of tears that he has been holding back. Shawn does not like crying, let alone in front of his mother. Crying makes him feel like less of a man. When he makes it to the side of the door opposite his mother, he raises his hand to wipe away his tears. He frantically wipes his eyes on his way down the steps, as if there is a burglar

downstairs whose sole intent is to steal his pride. By the time he reaches the bottom step, he has dried his eyes enough that the remaining dampness can be blamed on allergies. His foot leaves the bottom step, turns and heads for the refrigerator. Before he enters the kitchen, he trips over the bookbag that he left in the middle of the floor. The bookbag with his report card inside.

\* \* \*

The next morning, Linda decides she has cried long enough, and it is now time to handle business. She pulls out her phone, goes to the contacts and looks for “Dad.” Linda and her father have had a distant relationship ever since she got pregnant and dropped out of school. Her father may not be her biggest fan, but she knows he will come through. She calls. She begins to speak, but her words are muffled by tears and sadness. Her father, Roy, is confused by the whole ordeal.

He yells into the phone, “I can’t understand a word you’re saying!”

She takes a few seconds to calm down and gather her thoughts. The streams of tears begin to slow and her voice gains clarity.

“Dad, they’re kicking us out. Me and Shawn don’t have anywhere to go.”

Even though Linda did not ask a question; she waits as if an answer is on the way. There is a pause. It lingers so long that she questions whether the call dropped. She dares not say anything, in fear that she may interrupt her father’s train of thought—if he is still there.

“Hmm.” Just the audible reassurance that she needs; he is still there. “All right, Linda, you can come home. I’m not gonna leave you and the boy out on the street.”

Linda thanks him repeatedly.

She hangs up the phone and goes downstairs to inform Shawn of their new living arrangement. Shawn listens and acts relieved in an effort to make his mother feel better, but she can see right through his façade.

Linda leans over and says, “Listen Shawn, I know this is not the ideal situation, but this is the best we have. Just give it a chance. Give him a chance.”

The “him” that Linda is referring to is her father. Shawn has had few interactions with Roy, but he has made up in his mind that he hates him. Shawn is well aware of Roy and his mother’s estranged relationship. Even though Linda never really opened up and spoke of how she felt regarding her father disowning her, Shawn is privy to the emotional damage it has caused. It is almost as if Shawn has created a monster in his mind. For years, he has taken all the evil that he can fathom, packaged it up, and named it Roy. To be completely honest, Shawn’s disdain for Roy is probably stronger than Linda’s.

Shawn’s few encounters with Roy have done nothing more than reinforce the idea of him being a monster. Every time Shawn had seen Roy, he was arguing with Linda. Shawn

had no positive memories of Roy, other than one Christmas when he bought him a pair of boots. Shawn makes it a priority to avoid Roy at all costs. He cringes and becomes upset with himself if he even thinks about Roy. He has successfully blocked Roy out of his life for years, but now he is going to live under the same roof as the monster.

The entire walk to school is spent thinking about how he is going to survive living with Roy. In the doors, through the metal detectors and up the steps, Shawn walks. He does not stop until he reaches his seat in homeroom. Just as he begins to calm down and stop thinking about everything that has transpired, he is met by the face of Mr. Caldwell.

“Your report card,” he says sternly.

At this moment, Shawn realizes that he never gave his mother his report card, meaning it had not been signed. The penalty for failing to return a signed report card is detention. Shawn stutters and stammers while attempting to explain to Mr. Caldwell that his report card is not signed. Before he can even ask for an extra day to get it signed, Mr. Caldwell informs him that he will be serving detention later that afternoon. Shawn sits in his seat, unfazed by the news of his detention. After the past couple of days, this detention is the least of Shawn’s worries.

He goes through the rest of his day thinking about how his first interaction with Roy will go.

*Will I be able to compose myself? Will the years of pent-up anger and frustration be too powerful to conceal? How will Roy act? What will he do?*

FULL STORY COMING SOON

# withered

by Elizabeth Catalano

1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner, Fr. Callan Poetry Contest

30 july 2020

sitting beside her  
my body felt so supple  
untarnished by rusty time  
unblemished by clouds of alcohol  
breathed from a husband's tongue.

sitting beside her  
I was conscious of my ankles  
in their tapered slimness  
the only part of me I liked  
pencil sticks holding up the immensity  
of all that I am.

the level of my voice felt too loud for this moment  
that wasn't quite a eulogy but felt like one.  
I wasn't sure which one of us was dead.





**House on the Sea** by Katelyn Diehl



# Finding Me

by Faith McMullen

Rock bottom is my new home,  
I linger there, waiting for the right day.  
The right time,  
The right me.  
I am sitting next to my mistakes,  
My missed opportunities,  
The old me.  
Down in my sorrows, I wonder how I got here,  
Alone in the darkness,  
Why me?  
I wonder if I can make the change,  
The answer finds me like it was always meant to be.  
I realize it is never too late to climb back up,  
To change my fate,  
To find me.

# Gay

by Anthony Vassalotti

3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner, Gunard Clarson Contest

Gay.

I'm worried, sitting in the back of the car, barely breathing out of anxiety, waiting for what my mother will say next, whether she's willing to abandon me or hold me tight.

Gay.

I hear about my grandmother being unaccepting of my niece's choice of fiancé, since they aren't the same race, and I suddenly wonder whether she'd accept me.

Gay.

I'm playing on my gaming console with a bunch of friends, and we're all laughing, but one of them loses and says, "That's gay," and suddenly I'd rather be alone.

Gay.

I'm talking with someone online, and we're getting along really well, she and I, and then she says that I'm her gay best friend, and for a moment I feel like some trophy friend.

Gay.

I'm talking with my friend about his decision to join the army, and he says that they have a pretty bad reputation of treating those who are non-straight horribly, and suddenly I want to beg him to reconsider his career choice, even though this is what he's passionate about.

Gay.

I'm talking with my high school friend about someone, and she mentions that an old friend of mine is homophobic, and suddenly I don't feel like my old friend was ever my friend to begin with.

Gay.

I'm shifting books inside my locker, debating how to tell someone that I'm gay, and then I realize how bad it could be if someone overheard, and my nervousness shoots sky high when I imagine how bad my school life could become.

Gay.

We're watching some dumb bullying video in class, and the bully calls the other kid a faggot, and everyone else scoffs at its unrealistic portrayal, but I suddenly feel like the video got more right than wrong.

Gay.

I'm reading about the two political parties for Civics homework, and I'm reading about the Republican party's ideals, and I see that they want to undo the legalization of gay marriage, and suddenly I don't want to be a Republican anymore.

Gay.

I'm trying to find the motivation to get up and go to class, knowing that someone I was interested in is in there, and all I can think about is how, if I'm too broken over it, someone might notice, that my school life might get way worse, and I pull the covers closer to me instead of off.

Gay.

I'm sitting in sex ed, and the teacher is talking, but she's talking about straight sex, so I'm waiting for her to get to talking about homosexual sex and what I should be careful of, but she never does.

Gay.

I see that a bunch of people are angry that two teenage girls are made out to be in a relationship in *Finding Dory*, even though they didn't care about the relationship between a woman and a bee from *Bee Movie*, and suddenly I feel like going back to my homework instead of being on my phone.

Gay.

I'm watching another action movie, but the romance is focused around the male and female protagonists, which was so obvious and cliché that it makes me hate half the movie, and I realize how few popular movies there are with main characters being gay and falling in love.

Gay.

I see a movie including a gay couple for once, but my excitement dies as I watch them act super feminine and talk about fashion and design, wearing pink scarves and carrying purses, and I wish they had forgotten we existed instead.

Gay.

I hear straight people complaining about how there are so many letters in the LGBT+ community, and I realize in anger that they couldn't even name half of the sexualities that we encompass, that they have no business complaining about a community they don't actually support or know anything about.

Gay.

I hear someone say that one of the letter A's in the LGBTQIAA name stands for "Ally," and I get really pissed off because I know that those two A's stand for "Asexual" and "Aromantic," that there is no letter for "Ally" and there shouldn't be.

Gay.

I'm scrolling through images online, and I see a post about how pedophiles want to be included in the LGBTQ+ community, how some people agree simply because they think gay people are equally disgusting and horrible.

Gay.

I see so many people being heralded as brave or awe inspiring for admitting to being non-straight, and I feel angry because they shouldn't have to feel they need to hide in the first place.

Gay.

I hear about male singers and artists, the ones who are pretty and attractive and hot, feeling a need to defend themselves, to always have a girl with them, horrified to be thought of as non-straight.

Gay.

I'm reading about different writing tips for fun, and I come across someone complaining that the writer made a character non-straight, that it doesn't add to the plot at all, that they shouldn't do it unless it serves a purpose, and suddenly I don't want to write right now.

Gay.

I'm sitting in church, and I listen to the pastor talk about how gay marriage is wrong, how I shouldn't marry someone I love, and I realize I can't leave and have to be quiet.

Gay.

I'm hearing about how Catholic people are pushing as Pro-Life, and I remember that this is the same religion that causes non-straight children to be abandoned, and suddenly I hear hypocrisy instead of love of life.

Gay.

I'm deciding on a college, and I'm looking over my favorite choice, and then I realize it's a Catholic university, and I have to search whether they're safe for me or not, if I can even find the truth online.

Gay.

I'm talking with a guy a year older than me, and he says that he isn't in the Honors program simply because the head of the program doesn't like how he's got tattoos and isn't straight, how he is too obvious for her, and suddenly I don't respect the head of the program as much anymore.

Gay.

I'm telling my roommate in college about my sexuality, because I feel he deserves to know, and he says he'll need a little more time feeling comfortable, even though he's accepting.

Gay.

I'm talking with a friend while we're out at a museum, and I ask him how much he, as a straight male, knows about the LGBT+ community, and suddenly I find myself having to explain how there's more than two or three sexualities.

Gay.

I'm rereading Harry Potter to help myself fall asleep, and I suddenly realize that there are no actual gay characters written in the story, no actual overt themes about being gay, and suddenly I want to read something else.

Gay.

I'm reading about how people are upset with J. K. Rowling and her declaration that Dumbledore was actually gay, and I read someone's argument that it was never actually hinted at, explored, or stated in the books, and suddenly I wish she'd never said anything at all.

Gay.

I'm reading about homelessness, and I find a statistic that while there are only 5-10% of youth who identify as LGBT+, about 20-40% of the homeless youth identify as LGBT+, and I have to take a break from the homework to relax.

Gay.

I go to Walmart to decorate my room, because I would love to hang a pride flag on my wall, but I find out that they don't sell those on their shelves, that I'd have to walk into a store that also sells sex items to get my decorations, and I don't feel comfortable going alone anymore to decorate my room.

Gay.

I'm talking with my friend about my dreams of going to a gay bar when I become 21, and as I say it, I realize there probably won't be too many people there, and I wonder how good of an idea it really is, going into a near empty bar and seeing who's there.

Gay.

I'm sitting after watching the ending to *Avengers: Endgame*, and I hear about how the movie directors forced the idea of Steve and Peggy to be a thing simply because the ship of Steve and Bucky, of two men, was so popular, and they didn't want their characters to be made out that way.

Gay.

I'm writing a college essay about issues like racism and sexism, and I want to include homophobia, so I take a look at GodHatesFags.com, where I see parodies of songs turned into hatred, a shop to buy signs that declare gays go to hell, and I can't stop sobbing, even after closing out of the website.

Gay.



I'm talking with a friend, and they say they got a date for Friday night, and I feel a mixture of happiness for them and jealousy about why that can't be me.

Gay.

I hear a conversation about someone being discriminated, and I catch that it was because they were Catholic, and I suddenly want to punch them because they could never understand what discrimination, what being a minority, actually feels like.

Gay.

I'm imagining all the possible places I would want to get married, and then I remember that most pastors won't marry a gay couple, that I'd probably have to get married in a courthouse, and my heart drops instead of lifting.

Gay.

I'm thinking about how I'm gay, and how I haven't ever dated someone, and I find myself wondering what it would've been like if I were straight, whether I would've dated someone by now, who I'd be, whether my life wouldn't be so painful sometimes.

Gay.

I'm reading online, and I see a post about gay victims holding signs and explaining what they've suffered from, ranging from conversion camps to beatings, with one sign saying that the person killed themselves, and I crumble into ruin.

Gay.



**Elephant in the Room** by Vittoria LaRosa



# Burnt Popcorn, Burnt Cathedral

by Scott Riner

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner, Gunard Clarson Contest

It is believed by some that buildings have memories. Others have disputed this theory as preposterous. A building consists of nothing more than some wood and nails; it has no brain, no organ which would allow it to remember information or situations. A building, these people say, is just a building.

If those people are correct, then Notre-Dame Cathedral is little more than some stones held together by mortar. Notre-Dame would not be special, would not be able to recall all the important history that has taken place both within it and around it in the city of Paris. Notre-Dame would be just like any other building in any other city in the world, no different from a bank in New York City or a tower in London.

\* \* \*

The smell of freshly popped popcorn fills my nostrils before I even set foot in the door. My mouth begins to water. Grandma B makes the best popcorn; hers is yellow with butter and lightly salted, which makes it taste like the kind you could buy at a movie theatre.

The scent of popcorn draws me upstairs into the kitchen. Adam follows closely behind, eager to toss handfuls of Grandma B’s famous popcorn into his mouth. It’s not like he needs any more salt; his face is already populated by red pimples so large they could have been snow-capped mountains. He doesn’t care, though. “Grandma’s popcorn,” he said once, “is worth all the skin problems in the world.”

Grandma B is seated at the kitchen table, a big bowl of popcorn beside her. She is setting up a game of Scrabble—one of her favorite games. She looks up, and when she sees me, a huge smile stretches across her face. “Hi, Scott. Popcorn?”

\* \* \*

In 1160, Bishop Maurice de Sully conceived of building a cathedral on the ruins of two older churches. His idea was met with little criticism; so inclined to indulge Bishop de Sully’s idea was the Catholic Church that Pope Alexander III laid the foundation stone three years later. Notre-Dame’s construction lasted until 1345, but even then, it wasn’t finished. In fact, additions were still being added until the nineteenth century when restorations were being made on the cathedral.

\* \* \*

OX. The word glares at me from the Scrabble board. I look at my letters; an A, two Fs, a Q, an L, a P, and a D stare back. I wonder how I can use these letters—any of them, for that matter—to my advantage. Not even the slightest idea occurs to my young brain.

“C’m’off it already,” Megan sighs. She hates games, always had, always will.

“Be patient,” my mom tells her. Megan forgets sometimes that I don’t know as many words as she does. It isn’t my fault that she’s in college and I’m only in third grade. “Give him a little bit of time.”

It’s quiet in my grandparents’ house. The only sounds are of the occasional crunch of popcorn and of my grandpap, dad, and brother conversing in the next room.

I reach for my letters, ready to play some word that isn’t really a word. My mom will persuade them to let me use it anyway. I’m only in third grade; I don’t know as many words as they do. But then I think about it, about how it isn’t fair to do that, so instead I put my letters back and say in a voice so quiet it’s completely unfamiliar to me: “Pass.”

Grandma B needs only half a second to play the word XEROX. She does so on a triple-word score.

\* \* \*

The grandness of Notre-Dame cannot be overstated; so great and proud does the cathedral stand that one cannot help but think of royalty. Statues of kings lifted straight from the Bible—twenty-eight in total—once stood in the west façade of the cathedral, just as Henry VI was crowned King of France in Notre-Dame in the early 1430s. Notre-Dame was a testament to the Church, a testament to France. It was as grand as the royalty who were crowned within its halls.

\* \* \*

The odor of burnt popcorn lingers in the air. Upstairs, Grandma B sits at the kitchen table, the Scrabble board set up.

I take my seat beside her. On the table is a bowl of popcorn, if it can even be called that; popcorn is supposed to be white, but the stuff in the bowl is sludgy-black color. Grandma B catches my eye.

“I left it in too long,” she explains.

I frown, not quite believing her but without any evidence to the contrary. I’m no Nancy Drew, but I’m twelve years old, which means that I pick up on things, things adults don’t want me to pick up on. I go to say something else, but before I can, my mom comes up the stairs.

“Ready to play some Scrabble?” she asks.

“Ready,” I say, and forget all about the burnt popcorn.

\* \* \*

The 1790s saw the beginning of the French Revolution, a time when many of the French grew frustrated with the country's strong ties to the Catholic Church. After all, how was it fair that the common people had to pay taxes, taxes collected *by* the Church, when it didn't have to pay any taxes of its own?

From this frustration grew a rebellion, and the rebellion, which sought to strip the Church's grasp on France, turned its attention to Notre-Dame, a symbol of the Church and France united. The statues in the west façade, the ones depicting Biblical kings, particularly infuriated the rebels. In 1793, these statues were removed from the cathedral and taken outside, where they were publicly decapitated, done so during the same year as Marie Antionette.

The heads of the statues, recovered in 1977, are currently on display at a museum.

\* \* \*

I'm sitting at my grandmother's kitchen table, waiting for her to play something. It's been five minutes and still the Scrabble board has nothing to show for it. *She's up first*, I think to myself impatiently. *She can play any goddamn word she wants—there's nothing but room on the board.*

"Mom," Mom says, her voice taking on the same gentle tone she used to sing me to sleep when I was younger. "Do you want one of us to go first?"

Grandma B shakes her head. "I got it."

After another moment's consideration, she plays some word so inconsequential I cannot even recall it the second after she lays it down.

It's my turn and I play something good—CYNIC, one of my vocabulary words from ninth grade English—and tally my points.

I don't win the game (no one can best my mom), but I do beat Grandma B for the first time. Strangely, the victory does not feel as satisfying as I thought it would, though I cannot explain why.

\* \* \*

Napoleon Bonaparte may have been a tyrannical monster, but he had taste. Just like Henry VI was crowned King of France in Notre-Dame, Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself Emperor of France in the same cathedral.

Not long after Napoleon chose Notre-Dame as the site of his coronation, the emperor-to-be ordered the roads leading up to the cathedral to be paved. He also instructed houses near the cathedral to be destroyed, so that the Notre-Dame might be the center of attention.

The year was 1804 when Napoleon was crowned Emperor of France, and that may have been the year Notre-Dame was saved from possible destruction. If not for Napoleon, whatever his faults may have been, Notre-Dame may not still be standing proud.



\* \* \*

“Mom’s home from the hospital,” my mom tells me. “Would you want to come up and visit for a little?”

“What day?” I ask without looking up from my smartphone.

“Saturday.”

“Mmmm.” I am unable to think of a good excuse. My job is seasonal; cutting grass and caring for gardens is downright impossible under the dense January snow. Mom knows I have nothing going on; that’s why she’s asking me. She never asks Adam or Megan or Elizabeth because she already knows the answer. Finally, I say, “Do we have to play Scrabble if we go?”

“You love Scrabble.”

*I only love Scrabble compared to the other games, I think. Who doesn’t prefer Scrabble to Yahtzee?*

I don’t tell my mom this. Instead, I agree to go with her to Grandma B’s. Unsurprisingly, we play a game of Scrabble while we are up there. Grandma B doesn’t talk much, and when she does, her speech is slurred.

There is nothing else on the table beside a Scrabble board.

\* \* \*

“One might almost say he had assumed its form,” wrote Victor Hugo, “as the snail takes on the shape of its shell.” The “he” in question was Quasimodo, the protagonist of Hugo’s 1831 novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*.

Hugo’s description of Quasimodo speaks volumes—not only of the hunched hero but of the condition of Notre-Dame. Though Napoleon had arguably rescued the cathedral from destruction, the emperor had done nothing to prevent Notre-Dame from falling into disrepair.

Hugo, an advocate for architecture preservation, may not have written *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* to save Notre-Dame, but that’s exactly what it did. Due to the success of his novel, readers flocked to save the cathedral. In 1844, a project began to restore the cathedral to its post-Revolution glory. Hugo was as pivotal to the cathedral’s initial restoration as Napoleon was for saving it. Hugo’s passion for architecture, first observed in 1825 when he published a pamphlet educating readers on the beauty of Gothic architecture, helped to preserve the memory of Notre-Dame—a preservation that exists on and off the page.

\* \* \*

“Want to play a game of Scrabble, Mom?” Mom asks Grandma B. I sit on my grandparents’ couch, scrolling through my Facebook feed, wishing I were anywhere else.

The house smells of soiled incontinence pads and old people. When Grandma B doesn't respond, Mom prompts her again with a "Mom?"

"Huh?" says Grandma B, staring through Mom.

"I asked if you wanted to play Scrabble."

"Okay."

"I'll get it ready. Scott?"

I sigh, wondering why I still had to come with my mom to visit her parents. Megan, Elizabeth, Adam, and Dad never had to go; my brother and sisters hadn't come up with Mom in years, and I was almost an adult. Why did I still have to come?

"Sure," I say, making sure to go into the kitchen before my grandma gets up off her chair. If I didn't, I'd be stuck walking behind her, the only person who moved slower than a turtle.

By the time Grandma B finally gets to the table and sits down, I already have my first word picked out (OCEANS). Grandma B goes first, and after much consideration lays down the word—no, not a word, but a series of letters—PRFFN. Mom lets her play it, even though the "R" is backwards and the one "F" upside down.

\* \* \*

The French Revolution was not the only war that left its mark on Notre-Dame: both World War I and World War II brought change to the ancient cathedral.

In the beginning of the First World War, more than two dozen bullets—fired by German soldiers—hit Notre-Dame. In addition, the wooden scaffolding caught fire, as did the roof and many of the wooden pews inside. Luckily, much of the interior was undamaged.

It was during the Second World War that the stained glass windows were removed. It was decided that the thirteenth-century windows would be destroyed by German enemies, so authorities decided to prevent it by removing the stained glass windows. The windows were replaced once the war was over.

\* \* \*

I wait for my grandma to lay down a word, wondering how many games I've played with her. *Probably over a thousand*, I wager, but that number is just a guess. It could be much higher than that. I doubt it's any lower.

Grandma B lays down a bunch of letters that couldn't possibly make a word. (Is there any word that contains a "J," "Q," and "B?") Mom lets it slide, but what else is new.

When it's my turn, I add a POP to the CORN that is already on the board. When I see the word spelled out on the Scrabble board, I feel a longing for the grandma who made the

best popcorn in the world, the grandma whose house smelled like a movie theatre and not like a hospital.

The game ends and my mom helps Grandma B to the bathroom, an endeavor, judging by the widening stain on the back of her sweatpants, that is futile and pointless.

The next time I go up to visit with my mom, we don't play Scrabble. In fact, I never play it with my grandma again.

\* \* \*

At approximately 6:20 p.m. on Monday, April 15, 2019, a fire alarm went off in the middle of mass at Notre-Dame Cathedral. The priest celebrating the mass continued—he believed that it was a false alarm—but then decided to evacuate the cathedral just in case.

An hour later, the first signs of smoke were seen in the city. The citizens of Paris began taking pictures of the fiery cathedral, which circulate freely on the internet. Within minutes, the entire world learned of the fire ravaging Notre-Dame.

An hour after that, a spire collapsed. World leaders took to social media to express their sorrow that such a historic landmark had fallen prey to the fires of destruction.

Through the efforts of over four hundred firefighters, the fire was extinguished thirteen hours later. After almost fifteen hours of burning, Notre-Dame still stands, although sections of it have collapsed or are badly burned.

\* \* \*

The caller ID reveals that it is my aunt on the phone. I know why she's calling from the sorrow in her voice, but she doesn't tell me anything except to let my mom know she called.

It's been over six months since I last visited my grandparents. I use college as an excuse, but the truth is that I can't bring myself to go up there. Seeing my grandma is like visiting the ruins of one of the wonders of the world: both were once magnificent, both have fallen into decay.

My mom gets off work at nine. At ten after, she tells Megan, Dad, and me that Grandma B has passed.

\* \* \*

A year and a half later, the efforts to restore Notre-Dame are far from over; though much of the debris has been removed, the collapsed spire has yet to be rebuilt. Many scientists postulate that the spire will not be finished until 2024, five years after the fire took place.

Though Notre-Dame has a long way to go, tourists need not fret; the ancient cathedral has survived much worse than a fire over the years. It has seen numerous wars, has been the site of coronations and lootings, has been saved from ruins several times

over its almost nine-hundred-year life. Notre-Dame will be restored, just as it always has been. Fire may damage it, but the cathedral will not be destroyed that easily.

\* \* \*

In her casket, Grandma B looks almost like the grandma who made bowl after bowl of popcorn, the grandma who beat me every time in Scrabble. There is no hint of the grandma who played random letters, the grandma who couldn't remember if I was Adam or Scott, the grandma who couldn't seem to recall how my mom was related to her, the grandma who forgot first her family, then herself, then how to breathe.

I fight back tears as I kneel by her casket. *I will never eat her popcorn again, I think, I will never play Scrabble with her. She will not be at my wedding, the way she was for Elizabeth and Adam. I will never visit her again.*

I close my eyes so I don't have to see her, so I don't have to feel the guilt which resides deep within me. Instead of thinking of all the things I should have done, all the times I should have visited her, I say an "Our Father."

\* \* \*

Notre-Dame has stood proudly for almost nine hundred years, and may stand for nine hundred more. It has been the site of many historical events—coronations, weddings, and masses. It has survived revolutions and fires, and though the latter has damaged the interior significantly in recent years, it is nothing that cannot be repaired.

Born in 1936, Grandma B was only eighty-four years when she passed away—a tenth of the age of Notre-Dame. She raised nine children, doted on her twenty-two grandchildren, and relished her eleven great-grandchildren. She was a nurse, a mother, a wife, and one of the smartest people I have ever had the privilege of meeting. Disease ravaged her mind and left behind few remnants of the grandma I remember during my childhood. No surgery could have ever repaired her mind.

Though the human mind has memories—something that buildings may or may not possess, depending on what one believes—it is just as fragile as the interior of a building. It, too, can deteriorate, can decay like the inside of a building, like the inside of a nine-hundred-year-old cathedral. Unlike a building, however, a decaying mind can never be reconstructed. When the mind is too far gone, no construction crew can mend it. Once the human mind begins to forget, it is only a matter of time before it forgets itself. In that regard, dementia is little different from a fire: both destroy the interior of something—or *someone*—beautiful and leave only a shell of what once stood proud and strong. Fire and dementia—both are diseases that hallow and hollow anything (or anyone) that crosses their path.





**Spread Your Wings** by Kiley Papcun



# For My Persephone

by Mary-Kate McCann

2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner, Father Callan Poetry Contest

All I know is that  
I lived underground  
Until your rope lowered  
I was found

And your eyes were the mountaintop  
After the abyss  
It's your colored world  
Your slow kiss

And when you disappear  
Well, that is worse than anything of the underworld  
Worse than my prisons  
In the darkness.



## **Nature's Balance** by Cassidy Bezek



# Didacticism and Realism in O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi"

by Jonathan Kirk

In "Beyond the Net: Feminist Criticism as a Moral Criticism," Josephine Donovan claims that "[l]iterature on its most profound level is a form of learning. We learn, we grow from the *knowledge of life*, of psychology, of *human behavior*, and *relationships* that we discover worthwhile in works of *art*" (242; emphasis added). When applying mimetic criticism to any work of literature, especially O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi," readers must understand the meaning of Donovan's quotation: essentially, the morals and lessons we learn as a result of reading the story are reflective of real-life experiences. The authentic characters and realistic scenarios that authors create in their works are at the heart of mimetic criticism; these didactic aspects are what ultimately lead to a deeper, more meaningful appreciation of the text. Thus, when interpreting O. Henry's short story from this perspective, readers can home in on the bona fide personalities of Jim and Della, as well as their selfless actions, as a way to comprehend the reality of the situations they face.

Although O. Henry's short story is *timeless*, the *time* of year when the story takes place could not have been more significant. The Christmas season always seems to conjure up emotions and feelings of anxiety in everyone as he or she—in O. Henry's case, Della—scrambles to purchase the perfect Christmas gift. Nevertheless, Jim and Della, in the end, find unique ways to overcome their financial burdens and purchase gifts for one another that are not only meaningful but also reflections and symbols of their love for one another. These reflections, of course, are what mimic the reality of life, especially when humans are faced with a moral dilemma. Thus, "The Gift of the Magi" is a clear representation of reality because of the genuine characters who, despite their inner faults, "[give] us an immediate knowledge of how the world is experienced by the individual consciousness and an understanding of the inner life in its own terms" (Paris 232).

As the story begins, we see Della frantically counting the money she has set aside to purchase Jim's Christmas gift. Once she realizes that the "one dollar and eighty-seven cents" she has managed to save up is not enough to buy Jim's gift, Della begins to sob (Porter 1). Her reaction in this particularly stressful situation imitates that of a realistic wife—a "good woman" or "patient wife" according to Donovan (239)—who yearns to please her husband by purchasing him a gift that is meaningful. Knowing that no amount of grieving will ever ease her financial burdens, Della gathers her thoughts and proceeds with her wifely duties in preparation for her husband's arrival home from work.

This image of Della is a realistic depiction of the archetypal housewife that was common in many households around the time that this story was written. Although O.

Henry's story is timeless, which I mentioned earlier, looking at this specific time period in history helps readers to see that Della is an authentic depiction of the wife-figure who cooks and cleans for her working-class husband. While she is not depicted as someone who is subservient to her husband, Della does elicit some concern over his opinion near the end of the work: "Please God, make him think I'm still pretty. . . . Don't you like me now? . . . Be good to me, because I sold [my hair] for you" (Porter 4-5). Della, in an attempt to please her husband, gives up her most prized possession (her hair) in return for affection; unbeknownst to her, Jim later does the same thing to prove his fidelity and love for his wife.

Nevertheless, realistically, during the early 1900s when this story was written, the idea of "feminine inferiority" was a significant factor in the relationship between a husband and a wife because "[women] had no reason not to be submissive, as their men would only give them the best" (Fortin). Straying from these anti-feminist ideals of the early 1900s would have signified a break from tradition—a break from reality—that would have proven to be detrimental to the woman and her relationship with her husband. Therefore, Della, *imitating* an obedient housewife, is the epitome of an authentic early-twentieth-century woman who obeys her husband and longs to please him through the giving of unrequited love and valuable gifts. In essence, Della is a realistic character who, according to Donovan, illustrates her role as "the other" or a "vehicle" that drives home the normative role of the male and the obedient role of the female during the time period (236-37).

Moreover, Della's character, aside from her obedience, further illuminates the idea that "the 'interiors' of the characters are of no more moral substance than the house and apartment interiors that they live in" (Donovan 238). Although there is very little to say about Della's husband, as O. Henry does not go into detail about him specifically in the story, Jim's character also embodies this idea of a genuine, house-like interior, which is reflective of their living conditions. "Furnished rooms at a cost of \$8 per week," O. Henry writes: *There is little more to say about it*" (1; emphasis added). Truthfully, Jim and Della are their home: very minimalistic, yet sentimental and quaint. The Youngs are a poor family, and their home clearly mirrors their financial state. Thus, this idea of having little to "no more moral substance," other than the home that they live in, accentuates the reality of being an impoverished family who can afford only the bare necessities of life (Donovan 238). Yet, while readers believe that to be poor means to lack a good or service as a result of a financial deficit, O. Henry yearns to have his readers interpret Della and Jim as an impoverished couple who, despite their situation, burst through societal norms and represent a shift from what reality expects of them (as a poor couple) to what they actually (realistically) make themselves out to be.

Jim and Della *are* the Magi that we read about in the story, and proving that the reality of a time period can be overcome by living a life separate from what reality expects of us is a didactic lesson that Bernard Paris explains in "The Uses of Psychology": "the characters created by the great realists . . . live an independent life of their own; their

comings and goings, their development, their destiny is dictated by the inner dialectic of their social and individual existence” (230). Jim and Della, therefore, are authentic beings who, through their life-like actions and obstacles, imitate reality in a sense that readers can learn from their fictional mistakes and triumphs, which ultimately highlights the didacticism and realism of O. Henry’s short story.

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**Oscar** by Taya Whitfield



# Vacationing with the Germans in the American Alps

by Jack Weidner

1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner, Gunard Carlson Contest

On Christmas Day last year, I said goodbye to my family, got in my car, put on the soundtrack to *Schindler's List*, and began the five-hour trek down to southern Maryland. I don't speak Hebrew. I'm also not Jewish, but *Schindler's List* just felt right. That beautiful violin, lamenting the dead and honoring the living. Happy Birthday, Jesus.

My mom called about two minutes in. "How's the drive going?"

"Still in town. I haven't died yet, so that's good."

"I miss you."

"I miss you, too, Mom."

I was on my way to my other family's house, or at least, hopefully, my eventual other family. It just makes sense for my girlfriend and me to be serious in our twenties. She's Catholic and I'm haunted by a serial adulterer of a father. "Now *that* is how you don't treat women," my mother would say, "Understand?"

I was never sad to leave my family before. Usually, I can't wait to fly out the door after prying myself from my mother's vice-like grasp. To ease the process, I would pack my bags the night before—*just get me the hell out of here*. That morning, though, I was carrying my suitcase with me and had to make several trips back in for things. On the last trip, my grandfather asked me to stay another day. I couldn't, but how could I tell him that on his birthday? *Other people were waiting to see me* seemed like a shitty reason, but it was all I had, so I left. It was only for a few days.

"Just wanted to let you know I'm on the turnpike... I realized I forgot my hair gel," I told my grandfather, looking for a reason to call for the third time. "Yeah, Mom can call back anytime. Happy birthday. I'll call again when I get there."

I called my friend, and another friend, and talked to myself, realizing halfway through the drive that listening to a Williams score about the Holocaust created a feeling of isolation for one already feeling alone. *Why are there so many people on the road? It's Christmas*, I thought. They were like me. On their pilgrimage to bring gold, frankincense, a Nintendo switch, and a bottle of wine to homes other than their own. *Did they live alone? Were they with someone?* Christmas is a time for family, and I guess sometimes we have to pick.

I got to my girlfriend's at four. The sun was setting over the Patuxent River on my way across Solomon's Bridge. That bridge is a one-way launch-strip, with cars dodging

each other as they pass by. Hayley was standing in her driveway waiting for me with a wide smile on her face.

“Miss me?” I said, hurling my suitcase out from under my skis.

“A little.” She kissed my cheek and stole the bag from under my hand.

I walked into pandemonium. Her younger sisters were screaming at each other while playing a new dice game, and her grandmother was shoving an oversized, overly frosted piece of chocolate cake into a minute Tupperware container. The rest of its brethren seductively lounged on the island.

“Don’t eat that,” Hayley told me. “It’s too dense, tastes like straight Bailey’s.” I for one never thought that could be a bad thing, but I didn’t protest. I wasn’t hungry.

“Look who’s finally here!”

“Merry Christmas!” I hugged her mother. “I brought beer,” to her dad.

“You’ve got to eat something! We have chocolate cake—”

“and fudge,” added Phil, the boyfriend of Shannon, one of the sisters. He was very proud of the fudge because he made it with his mother. An old family recipe only the women knew but the men could help make.

Hayley comes from a family of nine kids. *Nine*. I mean, I know they’re Catholic, but that seemed an astronomical number to me. I always wanted a big family, though, so it’s nice—more to love and more to love you.

“I’ll have some fudge,” I said, with an approving glance from Hayley.

After gorging ourselves on sweets, Hayley and I got ready for bed. We were leaving for North Carolina at four the next morning, and I had the pleasure of driving, so we tried to excuse ourselves early. Sleeping at the Mesmers’ is always an interesting experience. Hayley and I share a twin bed, but for me, it is sleeping under the watchful eyes of Mother Mary. *How was your son’s birthday?*

Before I got in bed, my own mom called—I forgot to text her. “Still not dead. Thank goodness,” I told her. “I love you.” That was always constant in my relationship with my mother. She and I have gone through ebbs and flows of closeness, her being in and out of the hospital, and, for a two-year period, caring for my brother, who was in and out of the hospital, too. I still don’t understand how she dug up the strength to put her own illness aside and be his mother. She missed my birthday that year. I told her to fuck off one too many times. I told her I was better off alone one too many times. I regret it now. I regretted it then. But when we are going to bed, there’s always love. And she’s everything to me. That’s what families are for.

The alarm at four a.m. sounded like that one old woman screeching a shrill hymn in the pew behind me in church. *I hated her.*

One and a half people over its size limit, the bed ached as I used all my will power to remove myself. I met Hayley's "good morning" with a blank expression that she alone could understand as "hello," underscored with my resentment of mornings.

"My family vacations like the Nazi party," she told me.

"Heil, Hitler."

Phil and I loaded my car with our girlfriends' luggage. Bag by bag, we stuffed, shoved, kicked, swore, and prayed each item into the car. Phil and Shannon navigated their way to the back seats of my Subaru. Hayley got in the front.

"Do we wait for your parents?" I asked her.

"Just go. We're all going to the same place."

I didn't know exactly where that was, but I had a general address, and we were off. It took about twenty minutes of driving before everyone in the car was asleep—or, as Hayley insists, "just shutting my eyes." We never left this early for my family trips. Wake up this early, yes, but leaving by seven was good enough, and we stopped somewhere for breakfast. I drove in tangible silence for a long time and ended up turning on Harry Belafonte. (*Schindler's List* felt wrong.) Belafonte seemed like an odd choice. We weren't going to the beach; we were headed to the mountains. I had left a small coal town in the mountains of Pennsylvania, *on Christmas*, to travel eight more hours to more mountains in a different state. Sometimes you just need a bit of the same to make you appreciate how much you want to go somewhere else. I guess Harry Belafonte was my somewhere else. My grandfather used to lean against our kitchen counter tops and sing, after two or three vodkas, "Jamaican Farewell" to me—*Down the way, where the nights are gay, and the sun shines daily on the mountaintop*. I wanted to go with my grandfather to see him in concert a few years ago. "No. He's too political, now," my grandfather had told me.

"We're almost here," I announced to the car. "Does anyone want to call Liz so we know where to meet her?"

"Wow! Almost here! This trip went fast." Don't they always for the passengers asleep in the back?

Hayley called Liz, another sister: the oldest. Liz was the purpose of the visit. Well, she and her year-and-a-half old baby, Cooper. Phil insisted he isn't interested in babies until they turn two, so Cooper was of little importance. Phil came south to ski.

"There's seven sisters, Phil," I told him. "We aren't gonna be able to *look* at that baby."

"Liz said we should meet her at this hiking trail," Hayley said.

"How long is it?" asked Shannon, obviously concerned.

"Only a mile."

We got to the trail, which offered a panorama of all the mountains, standing seemingly untouched by the destructive hand of development.

We were the first group to get there, and while we waited for the other clown-cars in Hayley's Mesmer Three-Ring-Circus to arrive, we watched Cooper kick a ball around and talked with his parents. Chris, the father/husband of Cooper and Liz respectfully, is an engineer who's entering his Clooney years of life and has wonderful gray streaks growing in his beard. Fatherhood suits him well. He carries a knife and a diaper bag with him at all times.

I texted my mother that I had made it safely, and Hayley's mother's car finally pulled in.

"Well, I don't feel like waiting for the rest, so let's just start this hike," Liz told the group, as if it were a task that needed to be completed rather than enjoyed. Her whole family are go-getters. Hellos are quick. Goodbyes are quicker. Action is preferred. My family would likely still be saying goodbyes to each other at the first rest stop, but I appreciated the directness.

To say that the hike was straight up would be to say that surfing during a hurricane was choppy. Some of Hayley's family took it, though not gracefully, at least leisurely. Not Hayley. No. She walks with purpose, more of a jog, really. So, with dying optimism, I jogged up the side of a cliff with my girlfriend and Liz, who had a baby duct taped to her chest.

"Oh, those poor people. They aren't even halfway there," a family said on their way down, watching us ascend. They looked as if they had survived the apocalypse and Jesus forgot to send them somewhere.

We all made it to the top, some of us faster than others. The hike was more than a mile. We took a family photo, selfies, couples' pictures, met a family with a dog, and then started the journey down from Mordor. I let Hayley go down on her own this time, and I spent the time with Shannon and Phil, who decided to meander down at a reasonable pace. Since I began dating Hayley, my walking pace has increased at an alarming rate—so much so that when I was walking with my brother a few weeks ago, he looked at me and said, "What the hell are you running from? A bear?"

When we arrived down the mountain, we all decided that the kids were going to travel the twenty minutes back to the cottage we rented, while the parents went to the grocery store to avoid starvation. Liz, Chris, and Cooper were going home. As soon as we got the address from their mom, Hayley and Shannon started to yell at me.

"Floor it! We have to get there first!"

On vacation, my family picks rooms with diplomacy: oldest gets first pick, and so on down the totem pole. The Mesmers pick rooms like guerilla warfare.

"This is mine," the youngest would say.

"Who the hell do you think you are?"

“I got here first!”

“Over my dead body!”

“That can be arranged!”

Bags flew through the air like bombs and people darted through the rooms like bush warriors. I viewed the fire from the stairwell.

The drive up to the cottage was steeper than the hike, and I never regretted driving a manual transmission more. At the top, we encountered a quaint, cozy little cottage nestled in the side of the mountain. It was a weathered tana and finished wood made up most of the visible structures on the house. There was a strange smell of nursing home; dusty puzzles sat under the TV, and the couches had certainly been there since the eighties. A deck overlooked the valley, a hot tub sat at ground level, and the delightful scent of sewage mixed with the crisp mountain air. I had never been to a mountain cottage before, but I loved it. When I’m with them, the Mesmers have this wonderful ability of making any place feel instantly like home. Sometimes I forget I’m not.

The siege for rooms ended with the kids upstairs—eight of us split up in two rooms, four beds, and one bathroom—the engaged couple on the ground floor, and the parents in the master bedroom in the basement. Shannon, Phil, Hayley, and I all got to share a room, but the younger ones hung out with us anyways. The next battle of the night was waged over whether we were going to go skiing tomorrow at seven a.m., or if we would push it to the afternoon. After the drive, hike, World War Rooms, and cooking dinner, the thought of waking up to do more physical activity was unbearable.

“We need to get up early so that we have the rest of the day to do other things,” the engaged sister, Kristen, explained to us. *Other* things? Like what? We were on vacation. Hayley explained to me that if her family were the Nazi Party, Kristen would be Hitler.

“No, honey, your family isn’t the Nazi Party. If they were, Germany would have won the war.”

Through sheer brute strength, the Allies won, and we got to sleep in the next day. Sleeping in to go skiing was a new concept for me. Winter with my mother and brother meant hitting the slopes every spare second of the weekend. My brother and I would ski for hours, with occasional breaks for food, while my mom sat in the lounge keeping warm and watching her sons. She said it was such a pleasure watching us ski. She used to do it when she was younger, but after she shattered her leg too many times, she stopped. She never did it with us, but she was always there. She drove us to the slopes with friends. She drove us to the slopes in blizzards. She drove us to the slopes while she was sick. And she drove us the hour home, quietly listening to music while my brother and I slept in the back. It was always the three of us. We were always a team.



My new team of twelve piled into the car after breakfast, snowsuits packed. I had my skis. Only four and a half of us had ever skied before—Phil, Mr. and Mrs. Mesmer, Hayley (she’s the half), and me. I describe Hayley as a half because she’d gone once.

Her family was an adorable train wreck. On our way to the bunny slope, her younger sister Livy began falling down the hill and was about to destroy what looked to be a very nice Chinese man, so I kindly grabbed her and we waited for him to pass. Livy, in her infinite kindness, giggled and said, “Thanks.” I never had a sister before. My half-sister is six years older than me, and our families would avoid most contact, even though we lived in the same town. We try to have a relationship now, but I think we’re past our expiration date.

I never know how to act with Hayley’s siblings: I’m still a child to the adults, but I’m an adult to the children. I lose myself in the paradox of identity. I think that’s what is different about a new family. There is a new version of yourself, whether you want it or not, and you just hope they accept you, and that you accept your new self.

I sent my mom pictures from the day. She yelled at me for not wearing a helmet. I explained I spent the day on the bunny slope, but that didn’t matter to her—it never will.

The main event of the vacation took place that evening after dinner: Secret Santa. I was included even though it was my first Christmas with them. Mesmer Secret Santa is not a full contact sport like picking rooms, but it is still a game. Christmas at my house is simple: My mom organizes the presents between my brother and me, we open them, hug her, and steal each other’s chocolate-covered pretzels once one of us runs out. The Mesmers *only* do Secret Santa, and, being that there are eleven of them, not counting boyfriends or husbands or other offspring, I understand why. The way you play is like a gameshow. Each contestant has a turn to open their gift and guess who got them it. If you don’t guess right, it goes to the next person. I got a cookbook and a *Fantasia* poster. I didn’t guess the person right, but the gifts were perfect. It was a new type of Christmas, but it was fun. Cooper got a toy plane and a lot of books—I think my gifts were better.

The next day was just as busy as the first. We went to the Biltmore, or “the Downton Abbey of America,” as everybody kept saying. We got there, probably walked ten miles, and then toured the house. I think the Mesmers are less people and more shark: if they stop moving, they will die. My family has the terrible habit of moving too much, causing death.

“We really just sit there on vacation,” I explained to Hayley about my family on our jog back to the estate from the waterfall. Everything is a race with these people. There is no walking: even Cooper runs everywhere. “We get to the beach and just vegetate... But this is kinda nice. It keeps the time moving. Keeps me on my toes. Keeps the weight coming off.” I took lots of pictures of the house to send to my mother. She loves old houses for some reason and is also fascinated by very fine things. This house had both and I wanted to share. Mrs. Mesmer, my mother away from home, toured with Hayley and me. I love going on outings with her because she always makes me feel wanted. “So, this is a

gorgeous venue for a wedding, and the college near our house might have an English professorship open when you're ready," she would tell me on walks around the town. It feels nice to be wanted by a group other than my family, because they have to want me, but the Mesmers don't. Mrs. Mesmer isn't subtle, either. She shoves southern Maryland down my throat like a feeding tube, but she sells it well and it nourishes my heart. My mom doesn't want me to leave, but eventually I have to.

I've stayed close my whole life. For her. For my grandparents. For me. I'm scared of leaving and missing a moment with them. Goodbyes are hard because what if it's the last one? Time is short, especially with my family. Sometimes I find myself sitting, waiting for them to die. I can't do anything about it. I can't stop it. It's life. At one point or another, I've watched them all almost die. Some on multiple occasions. We all have to say goodbye at some point. I like to make mine last.

My mom and I know that one day I'll have to leave and that's difficult for the both of us. It doesn't get any easier, either. It just gets harder to rip the band aid off.

*I'm going.*

For a weekend or a week. Rip. For a holiday. For a birthday. Mother's Day. Rip. For forever...

We left the morning after the Biltmore. Piled into my car, much like before, but my car didn't leave as early. The sun was up and we actually ate breakfast. I helped Mr. Mesmer load the cooler, take out the trash, and shuffle the car layouts.

Then we were gone. No one slept on the way home; we didn't really talk either. Leaving any place is sad because all you have to look forward to is home, which is familiar and dull. I turned on *Schindler's List* because Shannon and Phil were watching a movie and Hayley was studying. I descended the carved-out cliffs of Ashville, internalizing the Hebrew that I didn't speak or understand... but I knew the meaning. A group of people finding a family. A group of people finding unity in the face of tragedy. A group of people finding peace in the unrest—in the new—and saying hello.

I glanced at Hayley, sun-streaked hair concealing her face, lost in the study of human anatomy. I see Shannon and Phil laughing, arms entwined, pushed up against each other and the wall of bags in the back.

"Thank you." I slipped my fingers into Hayley's.

"For what?"

"For inviting me." We were headed home.

# Tapestries

2020-2021

Weaving the Threads of  
Creativity & Innovation

