

Fanatical Publishing's

Weekly Review

Issue #56

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AND NOW, a word from the publisher:

Hello folks, Jochannon here; first let me say thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy, and please feel free to share it with your friends, re-post it to your profile, spread it around; the more people who get to read it, the better!

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If you want to contribute, I'd love to see your work, send it to me at the aforementioned e-mail address with: 'category(prose, fanfic, poetry), story title, author's name' in the subject line: please include the text of your story in the body of the email, and please include a cover letter about you, your work, or whatever; include any links you want.

Do you have any questions or comments? If you do, I'd to hear them; write to me at the aforementioned e-mail address.

I'm bad at stopping these things, so I'll just say again: thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy!

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AND NOW, another word from the publisher:

Hello, folks, you may not know this, but I'm a writer too. One of my more popular works is the Lurk series: It's a hodge-podge collection of bad jokes, stupid pop culture references, action, adventure, sex, a quest for true love, and an incredibly ugly hat.

Check it out!

<http://www.lulu.com/shop/search.ep?keyWords=lurk&contributorId=242500&sorter=publicationDate-desc>

LOVELOCKED

mehpinkgirlie
of <http://mehpinkgirlie.deviantart.com>

My own experiences of the curious phenomenon of love padlocks on bridges in European cities.

When we were in Frankfurt this time last year, I was feeling very emotional and downtrodden after my Granny's death. We almost did not take the trip because she died on the 20th March, we buried her on 27th and we flew on the 29th. It was just a cheap weekend away to make the most of Lufthansa starting direct flights from Aberdeen to Frankfurt. We just mainly walked around Frankfurt. I did not have the urge to shop or explore and Nicol said that I look shell-shocked whenever anyone spoke to me, even though I remembered more of the language than I had expected. I was bereaved and it is strange but I don't really remember a lot about the trip at all. I remember walking and the bridges and I loved the architecture as old buildings stand next to the modern ones and somehow it all works in a stylish but quirky fashion. Frankfurt was heavily bombed during the Second World War so most of the buildings are less than 70 years old.

I liked the Römerberg area of the city and there was a couple getting married at the town hall and then they walked towards the bridge to place a padlock and have photos taken. I had never seen this practice of putting locks on a bridge. I did not really understand it so Nicol and I walked along the bridge and looked at many different locks.

There are a few examples of this. I thought it was incredibly random and had to do a bit of research into it when I got home. Apparently this is really common in many European cities. I had never seen any examples in Rome despite it being a symbolic gesture to show a couple locking their hearts together in the eternal city, and this comes from a book which I had not heard of by Federico Moccia where the couple attach a bicycle lock to a lamppost on a bridge and then throw the key in the Tiber.

Many consider these 'Love Locks' to be a form of vandalism and many authorities have cut the locks off or given fines to any couples caught putting their own padlock onto a bridge. Surely it is no more harmful

than throwing coins in the Trevi Fountain in Rome. Symbols of love and the vaguely romantic sentiment are more hopeful, or hopeless to the cynical.

I find it kind of fascinating and really beautiful. Although there are many companies offering engraving of love locks as unique wedding and honeymoon presents, I really like the ones where people have written a message in pen or left a quote on their lock. I think it looks more sporadic. I can imagine couples on holiday in beautiful cities feeling romantic and in love with each other and this new adventure they are on in an unfamiliar city. Maybe they have reconnected for a special occasion. Maybe they are on honeymoon. Maybe they are a new couple, falling hopelessly in love. Maybe the location has a particular significance for them and their relationship. Maybe someone has put their love lock to celebrate a love unrequited, or mourn a love one.

It may sound like a piece of dialogue from *Love Actually*, but it gives me hope to see people expressing their love for one another. It is completely personal, albeit in a public place. In a time when many people are struggling to get by, I like any symbolic notion that gives me hope.

And then I went back to Paris for my 1st Wedding Anniversary in July. Like many others, we attached our own lock to the Pont de l'Archevêché beside Notre Dame.

We spent quite a bit of time wandering along the bridge, looking at all the unique locks. There is a mosaic of colours and shapes and sizes, which glimmered as we looked up from a tourist boat on the Seine.

I always credit the city of Paris with helping me soothe and heal a broken heart. In doing so, I also fell in love with the city. Is it too cliché to think that anyone leaves a part of their heart in Paris attached to the Pont de l'Archevêché? I am too cynical to believe in grand romantic gestures, but somehow I consider this to be a personal gesture of love and hope, with the belief that your love will weather the storms to come, survive the changing seasons and remain forever in that moment on that bridge.

Artwork by:
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currently open for commissions

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my stuff



NATURAL AND UNNATURAL

Solilska
of <http://solilska.deviantart.com>

As my sixth written piece i decided to write about concerns over natural and unnatural views:

After reading a section on the R&D on a way to make meat from single cells thus creating meat without the need for breeding and slaughter of animals, I asked the question : "If we can eat meat without the need to slaughter animals, who's going to complain?"

The only rejection to this idea that I have found is that it's natural to kill and eat animals, while I was quick to admit this, lets think about this clearly.

We no longer would need stupid amounts of land for cattle, which is one of the main reasons poor countries are being torn apart and forests removed, which is a fundamental problem adding to the destruction of the environment and ozone layer.

We are humans, we are becoming better and better daily. Soon enough it will be us who says what is natural because guess what? We got here through progression and our natural abilities. It's not a question of what is natural. I've personally killed animals to eat them. I don't feel bad and I didn't feel bad at the time, but If we no longer need to, then I have no problem. It's only natural because we need to kill animals to survive. We don't any more so why keep to a tradition which will no longer serve our future? (Sounds a lot like Religious tradition too, admittedly but I'll come to that later.)

Throwing its not natural at me doesn't explain anything. I need more than that for it to effect me. I need elaborations and arguments deeper than that.

You can easily argue either way. We have naturally gotten this far and all of our inventions are based on nature. Everything we do is natural, otherwise it wouldn't happen (Defects of behavior not included).

Technology could be seen as unnatural and so can humans. We are the odd one out. So either way, let's just progress and not fall over on such subjects when we could be doing amazing things with our

amazing brains. After all, what's more natural than our brains?

WEAVER AND THE WYRM

CHAPTER I: AN OLD MAN WALK

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of <http://riolightwarrior.deviantart.com>

An old man walks beside a little girl smiling, as they head towards a castle missing two of its five towers. The old man looks to the girl who seems frightened and the man asks. "What is wrong my child, you seem frightened about something?"

The child looks at the man, and shakes her head but says no words not even a na-uh, the old man could not help but to ruffle her long silver hair in a playful manner as the girl shot him a dirty look. The two of them stopped at a local tavern and had something to eat, the old man watched the little girl as she inhaled her food as if it was going to be her last meal the old man asked. "Why do you eat so fast little one, it will make you sick and you won't get full, slow down a little bit okay?"

The little girl only stared at him in total silence, her storm cloud gray eyes looking as though they would go right through you. The old timer sighs and looks at her then says "have you ever heard the tale of the weaver's little one, or the tale of one weaver in particular called Dinevar?" The little girl shook her head as the man told her the tale of Dinevar, just a normal man a farmer really who had a fascination with knowledge he wanted to know everything he could, but he could only learn so much being a farmer so he learned how to fight from a traveling caravan. He would later go on to adventures and discover more knowledge, that even kings and queens wished they knew, then one day he discovered something that he wished he didn't, a city looked normal enough till he walked into the town hall. The mayor was an odd one he had the human body with spider like legs coming out of his sides, when the mayor said that Dinevar had to have citizenship to obtain their knowledge he immediately asked how, that question he would regret for the rest of his life. Dinevar became one of the many in the city, one of the weavers his mouth was sealed shut and spider like legs jetted out of his back he felt more knowledgeable, he learned the art of magic and how to use it he learned how to talk to people through his mind.

When Dinevar was of the age of 280 years the weavers told him to go collect a magic item for them, what it was or what it did was not told to

him he was just told to retrieve it, they told him where to go and how to get there but when he arrived he was not prepared for the target to be a woman of outstanding beauty, he approached the woman and asked for the item she immediately said no, after her and Dinevar talked awhile he learned that she knew of the weavers and she knew he was one of them but sensed no ill will against her the item she held was an artifact, called the divine pearl it was supposed to protect her people from the prying eyes of the weavers soon after Dinevar had made a promise to convince or destroy the weavers. In the end he destroyed 30 of the weavers before finding out that they were 1,000,000 and strong and had let his friend know this before his dying breath.

The old man stopped telling the story and looked at the girl he was staring intently listening to the story he told. "It is also said that there will be three people who will help solve problem with the weavers, for if they continue to pursue this artifact then all of Rythmilim will be doomed unless the three adventurers find the weavers and eliminate them." The little girl smiled slightly and looked at the castle and sighed and the man nodded. "I suppose we should go." And with that they walked to the castle when inside the castle the old man was taken away and the girl became the new servant to the king, who had something odd about him but no one could place it

15 years later.

Servant girl, the king called out then you heard him call out captain of the guard, something was wrong and every one knew it, when you arrived the captain of the guard was already there what could the king want with you and the captain of the guard to have called here you wondered.

to be continued

THE DAY THE LAWN GNOME CAME BACK 2 (BECAUSE I'M BORED)

Justin Hills
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Disclaimer: I can't think of anything cute or funny to say, so move along and read the damn story....what? Why are you still here? Get moving, dammit.

Ok, where did we last leave off at....ah yes. Burgerstein was in his castle, drinking more tea, while working on plans to undo his latest resurrection project, the lawn gnome. E-lite-gor was sitting nearby doodling on a piece of paper, with his headphones on. He was listening to Lady Gaga, what else?

Then, Burgerstein stood up. He looked mad, but then again he always does. He yelled, "I've got it!" with an ominous echo and lightning and thunder sound effects even though it was a warm, happy Friday afternoon. The sound actually made Egor take off his headphones, with puzzlement on his deranged face.

"What?" he asked.

"I said I've g-"

"Yes, yes, I heard that part when you were doing the whole mad scientist babble."

"I have an idea, though I admit I'm not too keen on it..."

"What is it?"

"...I must summon....him."

"Him? Who the hell are you talking about?"

"You know who I mean..."

"No...you can't mean...not him..."

“Yes...him...The Beast!”

“No!”

“Yes! YEESSS!” Cue more ominous echo, lightning, and thunder sound effects right about now.

“... Well...that’s all fine and dandy, but do you know where he is?”

“Yes...a place called....Malice.”

“What?”

“It’s a bar in New Pork City.”

“Oh, ok. Well, you go do that. I’m staying here.”

With those words, Burgerstein left for Malice. The instructions he had been given were a bit odd to say the least: turn left at Pissed Off Ave., keep going straight on Not-So-Straight street, hang a right at The Equator Drive.

He found Malice, or rather the stairs that led to it, and he descended into the dung hole. He pushed open the plain wooden door, and entered. Lamps were lit everywhere. People, or rather movie monsters, were sitting at tables drowning themselves in beer and liquor. It was then he noticed the mountain of muscle that was...The Beast...sitting at the bar itself. He had at least one large empty mug in front of him, and he seemed to be musing, or reflecting.

Burgerstein noticed the stool next to him was empty, and sat down by him.

The Beast immediately spoke in a low, gravely voice. “What do you want, Burgerstein?”

“Beast, there you are. I’ve been looking all over for ya.”

“You’ve been looking for me? I thought you had moved on with your life. After all, the Agency forced you to let me go.”

“Yes, well...something came up. Wait, what did the Agency do with you?”

“Oh...it’s annoying as hell. At first they put me with this French family, but the family was scared shitless of me, so I hid in their rinky-dink barn. I survived on cheese and bread, with an occasional bottle of wine. They finally ran me off, with torches and pitchforks. After that, the Agency...well...let’s just say they messed up.”

“How?”

“They sent me...well, by mistake...to an Amsterdam whorehouse.”

“Whoa.”

“That’s what they said when they ripped my pants off, Burgerstein.”

“...”

“Hey, don’t get all silent on me. I can’t help it if you made me that way.”

“Moving on...what the hell are you doing here?”

“Drowning myself out, really. You don’t wanna be here, Burgerstein. Not with us freaks...the unwanted, the unloved. The rejects of movie monster history, if you will. This place’ll be full in a few hours. Full of sorry sacks of shit who all had promising futures, but got fucked in the end. Buncha tragic tales gone wrong...”

The Doc raised an eyebrow, then looked down at set of mugs in front of the Beast. He counted at least eight. How The Beast can put so much beer away in such a short amount of time, no one knew. Not even the Doc.

The Beast bulged one bloodshot eye and stared at the Doc. He slammed one large hand down on the bar for emphasis as he leaned in on the Doctor.

“Dammit, Doc, I don’t think you get what I’m telling you. Look around you, feast your eyes on this void of misery, this empty space of carnage, this black hole of despair!”

Burgerstein was somewhat surprised he could even talk straight with all the alcohol he had drank.

The Beast gestured over to a table. “Look over there.”

Burgerstein looked. “Oh, the big and ugly table?”

At said table, were four monsters that looked like they belonged in a Japanese monster movie. There was a gorilla, a giant bi-pedal lizard, something that looked like a big bi-pedal dog, and a humanoid beast made out of rocks.

The Beast continued. “Those four never got to make it big here in the west. They’re so big...and ugly. They’re supposed to head to Japan, soon. Until that day comes, those bastards sit here. Being big...and ugly.”

He gestured to another person, or, thing. For those curious, he was pointing at an onion with a pair of broken sunglasses. His glass was empty, yet he had what looked like an iron grip on it.

Burgerstein knew this onion. Hell, everyone knew him.

“That sad sack of shit is the ex-mayor of this piece of shit town, Borin G. McOnion,” Beast continued. “After the shit when he, Corn Dogg and the Lawn Gnomes destroyed half of this god-forsaken city, he went underground. Got into all kinds of stupid shit. Now he’s here, telling everyone here about his life and the grief he went through in the Veggie-kinsman War, and how he lost his best friend in the whole wide world, Been-Jammin’ Burford Blue, also known as Bubba to his friends. It’s a tragic tale.”

The Beast then gestured to another table, one that had an individual clothed in a black hooded cloak. He had a beer mug on the table as well as what looked like an energy sword. Burgerstein groaned; this was his former apprentice, E-mperor-Gor. He had an idea what he was doing here; everyone knew that too.

“I see you recognize the sorry sack of shit that was your former servant. That’s right, E-mperor-Gor ended up here too. I hear that after you got rid of him, the first place he went was a Star Wars convention. Upon arriving he got on the PA system and declared that the Jedi sucked and all should convert to the Dark Side so they could once more rule the galaxy. He got thrown out of the convention, and he had only been there five minutes.”

Burgerstein rubbed his eyes at this; E-mperor-Gor had always been a pain in the ass. He watched as The Beast pointed towards another table. He saw a wolf-man, with several bottles on the table.

“Wolfman over there was an amazing movie-monster. Few of us can ever hope to reach the height of popularity he attained. However, his last gig turned out for the worst as his agent told him he needed to shave off his fur; they wanted to go with a new look for him. Poor bastard had a heart attack at the very thought of appearing without his fur.”

Beast leaned in closer and whispered, “Once the furies found out, they wouldn’t shut up.”

Burgerstein looked back at Wolfman. “He looks like he’s smiling.”

“Oh, he’s probably killing a coupla nameless lost-in-the-woods-running-like-hell-after-making-out-like-dogs-in-heat kids in his dreams. He tends to do that.”

Burgerstein looked behind them. “Hey, Beast. That thing’s lookin’ at ya.”

Beast looked as well. “..Oh, that’s just Blob. Ignore him.”

The Blob, a huge, pulsating pile of...well, goo...formed Beast’s head in place of his own.

The Beast shook his finger at the Blob as he pointed angrily and shouted, “Dammit, Blob! I told you to knock that off or so help me God I’m gonna shove you in a jar and stick you up my own ass!”

The Blob retorted with a middle finger.

Burgerstein, who had been watching this, replied, “Beast, I’m a little weirded out here.”

The Beast gripped his mug, which was half-full, so tightly it began to crack. “ You’re weirded out? I can’t even take a piss because the Invisible Man spends all his time in the men’s room!”

Burgerstein glanced over in that direction; he thought he heard giddy giggling come from within.

“I don’t know what to think about him, Doc. I think he used to be human, but that was long ago. He ain’t human anymore.” He took a big chug of his beer.

“Explain.” The Doc demanded.

“Well, for starters he’s always invisible, which means he’s always butt-ass naked. I swear he’s got a permanent boner, thanks to what the others have said while trying to take a piss or drop some kids off at the pool. Others have said they’ve heard some kind of “fapping” noise coming from a stall on occasion-don’t give me that look, I’m grossed out by it too-but it’s always, ALWAYS with the goddamn giggling. It drives me nuts, hearing that shit day in, day out.” He shoved the rest of his beer down his throat, and slammed the mug down.

Burgerstein counted nine beer mugs. He then felt...something off to his left. It was bright. Was something....sparkling? He looked.

“Beast...why is tha-”

“That’s just Tyler.”

“You didn’t let me finish.”

“That’s because too many people ask. Tyler used to be a big shot movie star; a real vampire actor.”

“Then why the hell is he...?”

“The sparkling? Hard to say. Rumor has it he was to star in some stupid-as-hell vampire/werewolf soap opera that was to entice thousands of young and impressionable teenage female virgins. He found out what they wanted: he was to star opposite ol’ wolf man over there, and an ugly-as-fuck girl by the name of...uh...uhm...shit, I forget. Something to do with beauty, I think. Supposedly he tried to stab the girl because she was so ugly, then assaulted his agent for giving him the role. And he had worked extra hard to learn how to sparkle, too.” Beast ordered another mug of beer, and began guzzling it.

“Anyways, his fifteen minutes of fame ended with that crap. He disappeared for awhile, and found his way here. Now he just sits there...catatonic, sparkling all day.”

“...Such a lovely place you hang out in, Beast.” Burgerstein noted, with sarcasm.

“Eh, it gets me by, Doc.” Beast ordered yet another mug of beer, and drank some.

“Sooo...uh...where’re all the women? I’ve seen nothing but guys.”

“Uh...well, the fifty-foot woman used to be really big here, no pun intended. Then she left because she couldn’t stop growing while getting laid.”

“...Beast...” Burgerstein started to retort.

“...Eheh, sorry. Anyways, if any women show up here, they tend to hide in the back.”

“You have a back-room here? Where the hell is it?”

Beast pointed to a door next to the men’s room that said, “The Back Room.”

“...Shit, I feel stupid now.”

“We already knew that. Anyways, when The Mummy decides to show up, they really disappear, like ghosts or something. We can never tell if they’re playing around or if they’re genuinely trying to hide.”

As soon as he finished speaking, The Mummy strode up to the bar, and placed his bandaged hands on their shoulders. He was dressed in a white-button down shirt, with navy blue slacks. He had an ankh hanging around his neck.

“Gentlemen! How are you this fine evening?”

“Urgh, Mummy...” the rest of Beast’s speech for the moment was nothing but mumbles.

Mummy looked at Burgerstein. “Oh, hey Doc, long time no see. Wanna check out my newest curse?”

“No.”

“Aw...well, that’s ok. I’ll catch you dudes later, just thought I’d say sup and all that. Got some things to...wrap up...in the back from last night. Hahahaha!” With that, the Mummy left for the “Back Room.”

Burgerstein looked from the Back Room, to Beast, to the Back Room, to Beast.

“Yeah, forgot to mention that. His pick-up lines are the worst you’ve ever heard. You’ve ever heard.”

“I noticed.” The Doc noticed Beast order another mug of beer, this being number twelve. This was not going to end pretty.

“So...what the hell are you doing here, Doc? I know you didn’t come here simply to check up on me.”

“True...put bluntly, I need your help.”

Beast laughed and took another swig of beer. “What do you need my help for?”

Doc looked nervously from side to side, and whispered into Beast’s ear.

Beast’s eyes went wide with shock, and he slammed his mug down so hard it shattered, beer and all.

“You did WHAT? What in the hell were you doing bringing that thing back to life?!”

“I claim doctor’s excuse here.”

“Excuse my big, muscular, Frankenstein’s ass! The Lawn Gnome nearly destroyed New Pork City a few years back!”

The mere mention of the Lawn Gnome’s name sent the bar into chaos. Tyler stabbed himself in the heart, the Blob slipped through the floor, the Invisible Man screamed like a little girl, the Kaiju immediately left the bar(to leave for Japan, I guess), the wolf-man howled in despair, Borin G. McOnion screamed and fled the bar simply at the mention of the Lawn Gnome’s name, while E-mperor-Gor rose from his seat, seemingly unfazed by the Lawn Gnome’s name, and confronted Burgerstein.

“Yeeess...My...Apprentice...” He started; his eyes showed his insanity.

Burgerstein, thinking quickly, reached into his lab coat and produced a bottle of red liquid. He knew that E-mperor-gor couldn’t

resist anything colored red, and knowing him, the idiot ex-assistant probably thought it was booze. E-mperor-gor stared at it for a few seconds.

“...What is that? It’s...it’s...reeeeedd...” He spoke.

“Java Juice, my ex-assistant. Cherry-flavored Java Juice. Please, I concocted this in my lab and wish for you to try it.”

Without another notion, the deranged former assistant downed it, and mere seconds later, ran from the bar holding his ass. His face was in agony, pain, puzzlement, and the need to find a toilet. Fast.

“What was that?” Beast asked, his face stricken with confusion.

“Cherry-flavored Magnesium-citrate oral solution. Stimulates the lower intestines and cures constipation.”

“Oh, you are a devil.”

“Not a devil, just a mad scientist who loves tea.”

“You and that fucking tea.”

Burgerstein shrugged.

Beast grumbled; he had known Burgerstein was stupid, but not this stupid. He sighed; he would have no choice but to help his idiot of a maker.

He rose from the bar, while the bartender put away his dual, quad-barrel rocket launchers. They both had the words “Anti-Lawn Gnome Model” on them. Beast raised an eyebrow at him. The Bartender rose an eyebrow back, and spoke for the first time in this chapter.

“...What? I like to be prepared.”

“There’s a thing such as overkill, you know.”

“Nonsense. I prefer the “scorched earth” approach, as is.”

“...Remind me to never piss you off.”

“Just remember to pay your bar tabs and I won’t kill you, Mr.

Beast.” The bartender returned with a smile.

“Glad we could agree on something for once, if only we could agree on Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune.”

“Indeed.”

They heard a crash from outside. Beast, Burgerstein, and the Bartender ran out the door, knowing what it was.

Above them in the air...was the Lawn Gnome. He was covered in gold; still as a Super Gnome, Burgerstein mused.

“Po-tae-toeesssss...” He groaned.

“What did you just say?” Beast retorted angrily; Burgerstein was shocked he could understand the Gnome.

“Pooo-taaacee-tooesss...”

“Oh hell naw, I know you didn’t just say Who Wants To Be A Millionaire was better than Jeopardy or the Wheel of Fortune! It’s on now, you little bitch! You can’t escape me!”

Beast ripped off his shirt, displaying a mountain of muscle. He quickly tied a red headband on, and assumed a fighting pose. The Bartender responded by summoning his Anti-Lawn Gnome model dual-wield quad-barrel rocket launchers.

Shit was about to get serious. Period.

I LOVED YOU FOR FOREVER

Riley O'Neill
of riley_oneill@ymail.com

Just a cheesy love story in dedication to Valentines Day! Hopefully, you'll all think it's sweet! Enjoy!

"Danny, please, just one more kiss?"

"I'm sorry ... But no."

Tears streamed down Tiffany's face. "WHY NOT!?! Do you not have any decency left?!" she shrieked. He cringed. He hated the sound.

"I guess so Tiff."

She stood there for a minute, then ran out crying. He sighed. He just wanted her gone. He no longer loved her as he thought he did. That was all superficial. He had his eyes on another prize. He left his apartment. He got in his car, and he drove off. He had the destination in mind already.

-/\-

He pulled up to the driveway. *Trisha's* driveway. The one with the one he *truly* loved. He got out and walked to the front entrance.

He was nervous. He couldn't deal with rejection from her. That would be the end of the world for him. He took a deep breath, and he knocked on the door.

She opened it. He took a sharp and silent breath. She was wearing sweats and an old t-shirt, yet she still looked like a goddess to him.

She looked at him, eyes narrowed. She smiled.

"Hey, what's up?"

"I ... I have to tell you something"

She cocked her head to the side, confused. "Sure, come in." and she stepped to the side. He walked in, nearly shaking. She led him into

the living room. He followed, jittery inside. She sat down on the sofa, and he sat down on the chair in front of it.

He began to speak.

"I left Tiffany. Just like you suggested I should. I finally did it." and she sat there shocked. She blinked a few times then she said, a smile growing on her face, "But ... Danny ... Oh my God, that's great! But ... Why?" and he just shrugged, and replied, "You. I love you Trish" and she sat there, stunned.

She felt numb. He loves me too?, she thought. She then broke out in a grin. "Oh Danny! I love you too!" and there, she attacked him with a passionate kiss, sealing her love for him. And he kissed back, just as passionately, making it official. Making their eternal love official. For as long as they both shall live.

-/\-

The crowd watched as Trisha walked down the aisle. They all thought the same thing, that she was stunning. But it wasn't as true for them as it was for the groom. Danny stood there, basking in joy and love for his bride. That's all he felt at the moment. There, and then, nothing else in the world mattered more than his soon-to-be-wife.

She arrived at the altar. The traditions were done, they said their vows. Then the priest finally said, "Do you, Daniel Smith, take Trisha Campbell as your lawfully wedded wife?" and of course, he responded with the traditional, "I do" followed by a cheesy grin to the bride, who responded with an equally cheesy grin. Then he asked Trisha the same question, and she breathed out excitedly, "I do". The priest smiled, deciding to wrap things up, and he said in a loud and booming voice that could be heard all throughout the church, "I now pronounce you man and wife! You may kiss the bride!" and with those words said, Danny grabbed, dipped his bride, pulling her into a passionate kiss, sealing their future together.

Forever.

SCHIZOID

Sage Elizabeth
of sageelizabeth99@gmail.com

Have you ever confused dream with reality, or have been unsure about your true feelings? Or have you ever experienced something so bizarre that you are able to convince yourself it didn't actually happen? Well imagine feeling that way all the time, about everything. That is what I go through everyday. This is my world.

For me, dream and reality are twisted into this long never-ending illusion. I wake up everyday hoping that everything that is soon to come will be in reality. But over time, you learn that if it feels real, it is real. I can't escape my own mindset, so it really doesn't matter if things are truly in reality or not. Even if it is all a dream, it will always feel 100% real, and that's all that matters.

And as for feelings, it's almost like I don't have any that are true. Tragic events don't seem to bother me the slightest bit, but if I see something simple such as a dead flower, it truly hurts me inside. I don't understand my feelings. It's like they are also part of my world of illusion, constantly playing tricks on me. I cannot trust myself for this very reason.

Like dreams, all of my memories are just flashes of events that are all out of order. This makes it hard to remember things exactly as they happened, making me an untrustworthy person.

This world that I live in scares me, and I want to leave. I would do anything to be normal again. But thankfully, I am not alone in this world. I have plenty friends that only I can see and hear. Most of them I can only hear, but five of them I have seen. They can make my life both easier and more challenging, but I am still glad to have them. Although they are also an illusion, I feel like I couldn't live in my world without them.

The one friend that has been by my side for years is Eleven. He is not human, and looks very strange. He is big, four-legged, and looks like nothing of your world. He has solid black eyes, gray scaly flesh, pronghorn antlers, and large canines and claws. His front pair of legs have elbows that tower above his own head. He is very thin, and almost all of his bones push against his skin. His spine is bumpy and trails across his convex back and to his tail, which resembles that of a

rodent. Obviously, Eleven is certainly not the prettiest creature, but he is my friend. If he were in your world too, you'd probably befriend him. He is very charismatic and humorous, and although he can be a jerk sometimes, he is loyal. Eleven's voice was the gates to the world I live in now, and I'll never forget him.

My next friend is Region. Like Eleven, she is not human. Region is very small and very pretty. She has white fur, some light green feathers, and light brown eyes. She kind of looks like a feathered cat to me, but with the face of a seal. Her majestic feathers are located on the top of her head, the tip of her two tails, and the wings that spring out from her front legs. Although Region looks nice and pleasant, she isn't. She is stuck-up and an egomaniac. The only reason she is my friend is because I kind of don't have an option. I could've either been her friend, or have to deal with someone I'm not friends with on a daily basis. But I suppose she does have some redeeming qualities.

I also have a friend named Galaxy. As expected, he is not human either. Galaxy is fairly short and actually does kind of resemble a person. Picture a small little boy with tiny legs with webbed feet and arms so big that he can use them to walk. His face only has a little nose and a huge mouth that glides across the bottom portion of his head whenever he smiles. He also has small pointed ears like an elf. Galaxy is very hyper and skittish. He never stops talking when he's with me and he can never sit still. Galaxy is such a nervous wreck!

My last non-human friend is Fahrenheit. He is a complex individual, but he is probably one of the easiest to describe in appearance. He looks like a three-tailed red fox with a perfectly round head, no face, and deer antlers. Although his appearance is described with ease, his personality is quite the contrary. I feel like Fahrenheit is just as lost as I am. He is so quiet, and never expresses his true feelings. Perhaps that is why he does not have a face. The only reactions he ever gives to anyone are so negative and angry. Hopefully deep down he is nicer than that. I'm sure he is.

And last but not least, October. October is my only human friend from my world. He appears to be a 19-20 year old with soft purple hair and a big burn scar on his left eye.

Unlike my other friends, October did not arrive in my life until a few months ago. He showed up right after Eleven disappeared. I do not know if I'll ever see Eleven again, but I can guarantee that as long as October is with me, Eleven will not be. As much as I miss him, if it were not for Eleven's disappearance, I would not be able to share my

world with you.

As you can see, I live in a world where truth means nothing and rationality isn't an option. I have been living in this world for over 6 years now, and there's no escape. I have always hidden my world from society, but now I feel like I have no option but to open up. This is my story.

My name is Sage, and I have a mental illness.

I remember how it all started. My mother and I were in the car going down a road one morning. Everything was great. I was young and blissfully ignorant. I looked to my right to see the world fly past me. As we approached a stop sign and adjusted speeds, my body leaned forward then hit the back of my seat. I smiled as I saw a beautiful array of flowers gleaming in the early sunlight. Then the car pulled forward, gaining speed. My head turned as the car moved so I didn't have to cease my admiration of the flowers. Then... it all ended.

My eyes harshly closed shut as the impact of another car approached. Within seconds my mother was out of the car, running to me to pull me out. As her hands gently grabbed my arm, I slowly opened my eyes. I remember shouting, but all of my senses were distorted. I looked up at my mother, but there were three of her. Then one. Then three again.

She urged me to go sit by a tree surrounded by a white picket fence across the street. I don't remember how I got there, but I did eventually. I sat down and buried my face into my arms. I cried, but I didn't know why. No one was hurt, and it wasn't that bad of a wreck.

But then all of the sudden, I heard a voice. "Time to wake up, Blade. You've been asleep for a very, very long time..." it said. I looked up, but saw no one. My head twisted from left to right. I stood up, looking all around the tree. After I circle the trunk completely, I looked ahead.

There he was. The big scaly beast that changed my life forever.

Instead of arguing the fact that a dragon-like creature was speaking to me, I said out loud "My name isn't Blade. It's Sa--" He cut me off. "I know what your name in that world is. But in this world, you are Blade." I stared at him with pure confusion. Although most would consider his appearance to be frightening, I was never scared of him. I sat back down, keeping my eyes locked on him. "What worlds?" I said. "This is your new life, Blade." he replied "Look over at your flowers."

I surprisingly knew what he meant, and once again turned my head to the right. My eyes searched and searched for my once-gorgeous flowers, but could only see plain ones. I could no longer see the beauty in things. I knew I was different. I snapped "What happened to my flowers?!" I turned my head to look at the beast, but he was gone.

The rest of that day was a blur, but I can still vividly remember that night. I jumped into my luscious bed, and turned to the TV. My smile and giggling turned into a facial expression of pure disappointment when my scaly friend returned. "Smiling, I see..." he began. "Did you ignore all that happened?" I didn't respond out loud, but I thought to myself "Who is he?" "I am Eleven." he said. I perked up. "I can hear your thoughts..." he continued. "You don't have to speak of my presence. Better yet, you WON'T speak of my presence. Your world will remain a secret. Do you understand, Blade?" I nodded. From that moment on, I never spoke out loud to Eleven again.

I still remain in astonishment of my understanding and acceptance from that day. I was so calm and showed no sign of fear. But who knows? I could've been terrified that day but my mind has just filtered out the negative. I can recall events as they happened, but not the order of which they occurred or my feelings during the process.

That day was the beginning of the end of my sanity. I will never forget it.

Over time, I got used to the idea of having a friend that remained a secret to everyone else around me. Eleven surprisingly became humorous and charismatic; he never failed to entertain me. I had my good days and my bad days, but he was always right there to bring a smile to my face.

I remember the way he would always comment on how others looked or acted. If someone were to wear strikingly ridiculous clothing, he's be sure to point it out to me. I must've seemed awfully rude to anyone who just saw me giggling at others, but I couldn't help myself; the absurd things Eleven and I talked about was just too funny to not chuckle at. I believe that the things he said about others was how I subconsciously already felt. Now that I look back at my memories I start to realize how much Eleven and I had in common. He was honestly just a more blunt and slightly ruder version of me. He certainly wasn't that way at first, but he grew on me.

But right as I began adjusting to life with Eleven in our little world, I was interrupted with the presence of another being very much like Eleven.

Her name was Region.

One day after school, I was walking into our apartment and heading towards my room. Right as I was sliding my bag off my shoulders and reaching to pet my cat, I heard a new and unfamiliar voice. Unlike Eleven's, it was soft and human-like. It said "You'll always be alone anyways. People don't understand you." Mistaking the voice for my mother, I turned to her and said "What?" She replied, "I didn't say anything." I looked down and said "Oh... sorry." I drug my bag to my room and sat down on my bed. I looked up expecting to face Eleven, but I saw someone else instead. There stood Region, the girl that participated in my new life. At only two and a half feet tall, I was not intimidated by her the slightest bit. In fact, her small and cute stature brightened up my mood. Because of her exotic looks, I knew she too was part of my world. So, I simply asked for her name. I got my answer, and moved on.

Meeting Region was very quick and simple, most likely because I had been through the 'hard' part of understanding already. But unlike Eleven, Region just stopped by every now and then for no apparent reason. Her arrivals were spontaneously randomized. This was probably why I didn't really ever get a chance to become close to Region, nor did I ever really understand her.

After Region, along came Fahrenheit and Galaxy; each not being as exciting to meet as the last. I don't really remember my first meetings with them as vividly as Region and Eleven. Like Region, Fahrenheit and Galaxy only stopped by periodically with random information. But like Eleven, they grew on me. Their personalities were easily reflected through their words and actions.

And as the years passed, they became the center of my attention. I loved them, and I let them take over. I was manipulated and controlled, losing my mind just a little everyday, leading up to my breaking point.

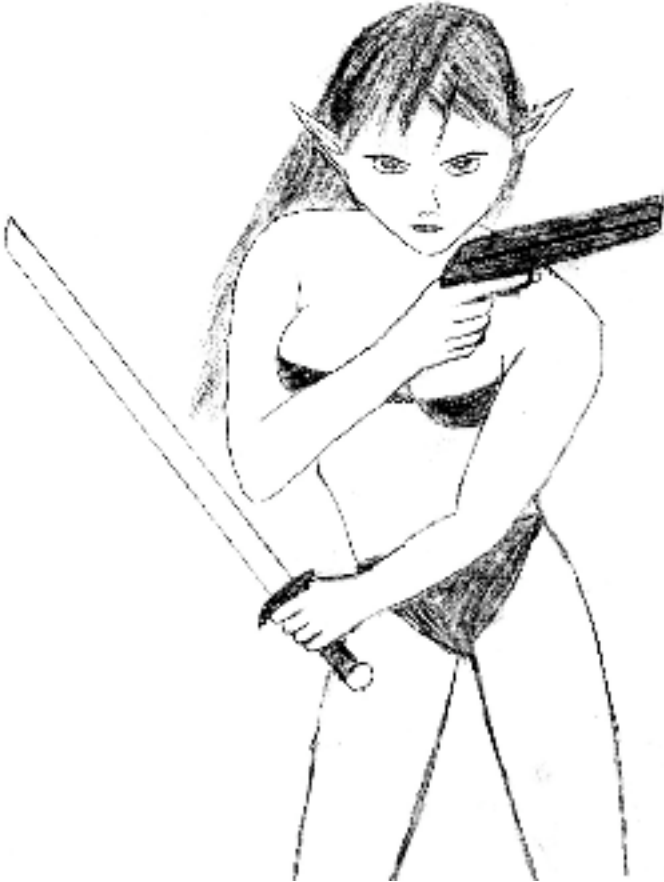
The manipulation got so bad that I began hearing a 24/7 whisper from a voice that belonged to none of them. The whisper turned into a full-on voice, and the one voice became voices. At this point in time, I had completely given up on my will to stay sane. I let the voices take over and control my actions. I made so many bad choices, and said so many bad things. The things I would do to take it all back, to start over. My

life had turned into nothing but commands from within me. I was hurt, but I did nothing about it. I let Eleven do this to me. I should've just told someone from the beginning. I should've known they weren't real and they couldn't actually hurt me. I should've done something about it, but I didn't.

I let it happen, even when I had the opportunity to save myself.
To save me from myself.

This is life through the eyes of Sage Elizabeth.

FAN FICTION



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ME2 HELLDIVER SAGA

CHAPTER 23: FIREWALKER

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The Normandy was already en-route to investigate Project Firewalker.

In the meantime, Austin decided to once again have another little chat with some of the crew. He still hadn't yet talked to Thane since the Drell came aboard and he also felt he should have another talk with Jacob.

"Major. Can I help you with something?" Jacob asked.

"I'm more interested in just talking for a bit." said Austin.

"If you want, Major. Like Cerberus, you have ranks, but you're not the Alliance. No rules about fraternization. Your boat, your call. You want to get friendly with everyone, that's your business." said Jacob casually.

"Relax Jacob. I'm just interested in what makes you tick." Austin replied.

"Anyone else said that, I'd walk away. Most Cerberus people try to play like the Illusive Man, hiding bullshit behind a smile. But you – I like what I've seen. I'll give you a shot. What do you want to know?" said Jacob.

"So... you got any family waiting for you back home? When this is done it'd be nice to have someone to go home to." Austin asked.

"I'm an only child and no extended family. Never settled down. Didn't seem fair with this job. But, you can't miss what you never had." Jacob replied.

"You seem okay with taking a risk on me. Why?" Austin asked. He was actually curious as to why Jacob was trusting him and the Helldivers this well compared to Miranda.

"Soldiers like us know how important trust is to the crew. I've not seen

it on a Cerberus ship, and certainly not from the people they put in command. But considering how friendly you Helldivers tend to be, I guess I shouldn't be surprised at seeing it here. Still, you seem to focus more on the job. A threat this big, you can't just throw people at it blind. They need inspiration." Said Jacob.

"There's a lot riding on this, but we can't give up everything." Said Austin confidently.

"Not always a choice we get to make. Good to try, though. I gave it my best back in the Alliance. Got labelled a troublemaker. They were always on the lookout for disruptive types. Cerberus wasn't any better. The only difference was that they put more effort into hiding how much they spied on us." Said Jacob.

"Let them watch you now. We're not hiding anything." Austin said without hesitation.

"Wouldn't matter if we were. It's not like they can reels us in anymore. The Helldivers are handling this whether they like it or not. Anyway, I should get back to prep. Nice talking with you, Shepard. Let's do it again some time." Said Jacob as he went back to his work. Just before he could though, Austin quickly spoke again.

"Just a minute. Any thoughts on how to prepare against the Collectors?" the Helldiver asked. He still felt it best that they upgrade if they could at all.

"Well, I know the Arkanes specked this ship to the original Normandy, but you were there—the Collectors cut her like butter. This armour just isn't top of the line anymore. People will die if we don't upgrade. Alliance had some new toys in secret development before I left. I could try and pull a few favours." Said Jacob.

The former Cerberus operative showed Austin what he had. It wasn't much, but Austin did see something they could use. One of Jacob's selections was Silaris heavy ship armour. Austin had a feeling they would need this. The specs of the armour didn't say if it was strong enough to withstand the firepower of a Collector Ship, but it was still worth investing in. It might just provide the edge they needed.

With that taken care of, Austin headed down to the crew deck. Before he chatted to Thane though, he immediately headed for the medbay. Griffin and Tali were still recovering from their injuries. Dr Chakwas immediately took notice of her friend.

"Hello, Shepard." She said.

"How are they doing?" Austin asked.

"Why don't you ask them yourself?" Chakwas smiled as she indicated to two of the beds. Griffin had removed his armour and was currently sat on the bed dressed in his suit mesh. Tali meanwhile, was lying on the bed, covered in a lot more bandages than Griffin. They mostly went over the parts of her suit from where the Collector Captains had shot her.

"You two okay?" Austin smiled. "You certainly look well."

"Still stings a bit, but it's getting better." Griffin replied.

"How's Tali?" Austin asked, noticing that Tali hadn't taken notice of him being in the room and was still lying down on the bed.

"She's sleeping at the moment. She got quite a bad fever from her wounds. She should be fine in a couple of days." said Griffin.

The demolition expert adjusted himself slightly so that he was now sat on the edge of the bed and facing Austin.

"What about you?" Austin asked, still concerned for Griffin. He'd really grown to like to the Demolition expert.

"Doctor Chakwas tells me I'll be okay to leave the medbay tomorrow, but she's said I should avoid combat for a few days. Seems the bullet broke one of my ribs too." Griffin replied, wincing slightly as he put his hand on where the wound had entered his chest. He currently had a bandage over it.

"Sorry to hear that. You're a good fighter." Said Austin.

"Oh, I'm sure you'll do okay without me. Besides, it'll give the others a chance to catch up, so to speak." Griffin smiled.

Austin simply chuckled and shook his head.

"Nothing ever dampens your spirits, does it, Alex?" he smiled.

"Not really. Having a belief in something really helps." Said Griffin.

"You sound just like Ashley now. Speaking of which, how's it going between you and her?" Austin asked curiously.

"Better than I thought it would. We've made a few calls from time to time. I can see why you two were close friends. She's quite an interesting woman." Griffin replied.

"I did think you two would work well together. You both have many similarities." Said Austin.

"Hmm, a belief in God is the first. Add to that, we both believe there's a heaven of some sorts and we love serving in the military." Said Griffin.

"Has she said anything about me?" Austin asked.

"Other than hoping you're okay, no." Griffin replied.

"It actually works well for the both you that you're a Helldiver. That way she's able to pursue a relationship with you." Said Austin.

"What do you mean?" Griffin asked, slightly confused by this.

"She's an Alliance soldier. She's also very by the book, if you know what I mean. If you were in the Alliance too, she'd always say that fraternization is forbidden." Austin explained.

"Oh, I see. Because we're not part of the Alliance, it's okay. If I recall as well, we ourselves are allowed to become involved with other Helldivers. Alaara and Sandra are primary examples, if I recall." Said Griffin.

"Indeed. Also works for my relationship with Liara." Said Austin.

"I am still wondering actually when you're going to ask the question." Griffin smiled cheekily.

"That's private, Griffin." Austin replied slyly.

"Forgive me, Major. But it always warms my heart to see something like love flourishing, even during times like these." Said Griffin.

"Our mission's too important at the moment, but maybe when this is over I'll consider looking for a ring. Maybe an Azure coloured one..." Austin smiled happily as he started thinking of the possibility of

actually getting a wedding ring for Liara.

He hadn't really thought it until now. Given how there was the possibility that they might not be coming back from this mission, though he intended to try and prove that wrong, perhaps he should at least consider proposing. Then if they truly did survive, he'd had something to look forward to. At the same time of course, he didn't want to rush Liara into something like this. True she'd remained faithful to him for two years while he'd been dead, and they'd been together for almost a year when they'd first met. Plus, Liara had said that it would soon be the anniversary of the day he died. Austin didn't know yet if that was something he should care about, but he knew Liara cared. Perhaps he should get her something nice, or perhaps spend the entire day with her, make a promise that he'd never leave her again.

The Helldiver quickly snapped his mind back to reality though before he could continue contemplating. He and the others still had a mission to complete. There'd be time to think about these plans later.

"Good talking to you again, Alex. Next time you talk to Ash, tell her I said Hi." Said Austin as he and Griffin banged fists.

"Will do, Shepard. Thanks for coming by."

As Austin turned to leave, he quickly turned to Chakwas.

"Do let me know when Tali wakes up, please." He said.

"I will, Shepard. She'll be alright. She just needs rest." Said Chakwas.

Austin left the medbay and now headed into the life support room. True to what EDI had said to Thane, it did feel rather dry compared to the rest of the ship. Austin was actually beginning to wonder why Thane had asked to be put in here. Perhaps he would find out if he asked. Thane seemed very civil after all; Austin doubted he would mind being asked.

Austin found Thane sitting at a small table. The Drell had set up a small bed next to it. He was currently continuing with his prayers by the looks of things.

"Do you need something?" he asked as Austin approached.

"Have a few minutes to talk?" Austin asked.

"Certainly. We haven't had a chance since I joined." Said Thane.

"I assume you've settled in okay here?" Austin inquired.

"Yes. Your crew has also been very friendly towards me. Some of them also seem a bit fascinated with me. It's like they've never seen a Drell before." Said Thane.

"Well, to be fair, the Drell aren't part of the Helldivers. At least not yet, anyway. Also, your people aren't often seen that much. As I recall, tend to stick to the Hanar world." Said Austin.

"I suppose that does explain it." Said Thane.

"Do you mind if I ask you something a bit more private?" Austin asked.

"That depends on what you are going to ask." Thane replied.
"Though I think I can guess what it is."

"When we met you, you said you were dying." Said Austin.

"Yes. I thought you'd want to know more. You don't have to worry about the rest of the crew. My illness is not communicable, even to other Drell. It's called Kepral's Syndrome." Thane explained.

"Are you going to be all right until the end of the mission?" Austin asked, still a bit concerned. He'd hate to lose Thane before he was needed. Not only had the Helldivers gone through a lot of trouble to find and recruit him, but also because he had good skills. Skills that might just give them the advantage.

"I should be fine for another 2 to 3 years. The more time I spend in humid environments, the faster it progresses. I think it's safe to say that by the time my body is incapacitated; we'll be victorious, or dead. Either way, I won't be a burden to you." Said Thane.

"What exactly is the problem?" Austin asked.

"My people are native to an arid world. As you said, most of us now live on Kahje, the Hanar homeworld. It's very humid, and rains every day. Our lungs can't deal with the moisture. Over time, the tissue loses its ability to absorb oxygen. It becomes harder to breathe. Eventually, we suffocate." Said Thane.

"Can't they do something about that?" Austin asked.

"The Hanar have funded a genetic engineering program. They should be able to adapt us eventually. The project has only been running for a few years though. I don't believe my body will still draw breath by the time it bears fruit." Said Thane.

"Is there anything we can do here? The Normandy has a state of the art medical bay and we have some of the finest scientists in the galaxy." Austin offered.

"No, thank you. It's being attended to. If the medical minds in the Hanar illuminated Primacy can't solve the problem, I doubt your ship's medic could. No offense to her." Said Thane.

"It's alright. I understand what you're trying to say." Said Austin.

"Still, thank you for your concern, Shepard. Trust me. This won't affect my performance." Said Thane.

"Before I go, we need to have the best equipment possible to take on the Collectors. You have any leads I could chase down?" Austin asked.

"My old contact network often located rare equipment for me. Would you like me to get in touch with them?" asked Thane.

"Let's see what they've got." Said Austin.

Thane showed Austin what he had. Like Jacob, most of the equipment was still mostly pale in comparison to Helldiver tech, but there was a modular probe bay upgrade which could work very well for them. Austin approved them before the Normandy finally arrived at Zeona where they were said to find the location of this so called Hammerhead that Arnold had mentioned to him.

Austin sat in the shuttle, simply waiting until they landed. For this, he'd gone with Jack, Liara and Dash. The convict and the scout were currently exchanging some meaningless taunts with one another while Austin was simply thinking a bit more on what Griffin had said earlier.

"What are you gonna do if I do, kiddo? Kick my ass?" Jack laughed tauntingly.

"Helldivers kick all sorts of ass. Deal with it!" said Dash in a very cocky voice.

Jack couldn't really think of a good comeback to that. She was begging to understand why Dash was often called "The Helldiver with a mouth". Not only did he talk a lot, he had a sparkling sense of humour and always seemed to have at least one wisecrack. Sometimes it was annoying, other times it was downright hilarious.

"Alright. You win. Fuck you." Said Jack.

"Don't feel bad for losing, Jack. I've managed to annoy a whole Batarian slaver colony with my wisecracks." Dash smiled smugly.

The dropship eventually touched down and the doors opened. Jack made sure that her face mask was secure just before she ventured out. The hot atmosphere had a lot of ash, smoke and ash in it from the volcano and lava.

There were a few signs of wreckage that dotted the area. In addition to this, there was also a massive crate of some kind.

The nearby wreckage appeared to be repeating some kind of recorded log entry.

"I don't think the ship is safe. We've run into the Geth far too often. I'm going to stay at the next site with Dr O'Loy. I'll think we'll be safe there." It said.

The team made their way over to the large crate. It was locked, but Austin could easily hack through the encryption. Within just a few seconds, a large ramp lowered itself down, revealing what was inside. Sure enough, they'd found the vehicle they'd been searching for, the Hammerhead. It actually bore some resemblance to the Mako Austin and the others had used on the original Normandy. It certainly shared the same front design and also had a large cannon on the top. Unlike the Mako however, the Hammerhead didn't have wheels, in fact it looked as though it had Thrusters of some kind. Could it hover? There was only one way to find out.

The team clambered into the confined space. Austin had to admit that the Hammerhead had a more comfortable and better designed interior than the Mako had. It still had the same seat positioning, but that wasn't a bad thing.

The Hammerhead had security protocols on it, but those were easily overridden. There was a gentle hum as the engines came to life and the vehicle slowly began to lift off the ground.

"This does feel rather weird, not having any wheels." said Austin.

"Let's just hope this one is easier to drive." Liara muttered.

"Well how hard can it be?" said Dash.

"Don't say that!" said Austin.

The Major very gently eased the controls over and the Hammerhead slowly turned. It certainly seemed to handle okay and the sensitivity was pretty good as well.

"Primary systems online." said synthetic male voice. "Welcome to the M-44 Hammerhead infantry fighting vehicle. This is your on-board VI."

An orange holographic map appeared on Austin's left. It was a rough 3 dimensional hologram of the area and it showed where most of the research material had landed from when the ship crashed. The first one was located just on the other side of the river of lava.

Austin took a moment to think. This thing was fast, something Dash would love, but he still wasn't sure if they could jump the gap. Then he felt a button on one of the control sticks. It was red. The holograms that were also being projected around the controls seemed to say, jump over it. Austin hated to risk it, but how else was he to find out what this thing did. As far as he could tell, there was no instruction manual.

"Strap tight, people. This may get a bit bumpy." He advised.

Everyone did so and made sure that they were properly secured in their seats, and Austin put his foot down on the accelerator pedal. To everyone's utter surprise, the Hammerhead's boost activated and it shot forward so fast that they literally sank into their seats.

"Wooooooooohooooooooo!" Dash yelled.

"Oh shut up!" Jack shouted as Austin eased the pressure down a bit and the Hammerhead's speed went to a more controllable level.

He then activated the jump just before they reached the edge and the Hammerhead jumped right over the lava.

"Mission objectives located." Said the VI.

Austin hovered the Hammerhead over where the VI was indicating. Another button on the holographic display flashed several times. Austin pressed it and the Hammerhead started to shake. Austin managed to keep it steady long enough for the vehicle to gather the research data and samples.

"Acquired." said the VI. "Caution: Guided missile system active."

"Look at that." said Liara, amazed as she had a look at the research data.

"I had feeling you'd say that." Austin smiled under his helmet.

The next objective appeared to be further away, on the other side of the crater they were in. Luckily, Austin saw a way of hopefully getting up and over. The Hammerhead jumped out, but soon found its path blocked by a crashed part of the ship.

"Obstruction detected. Recommend using conventional weapons to clear path." said the VI.

Unlike the Mako, the Hammerhead's cannon wasn't controlled by a separate person. This one was controlled by the driver. Austin gently manoeuvred the Hammerhead until the cannon was properly lined up with the wreckage and pressed the trigger. A small shot fired from the cannon and the obstruction

"Path is now clear." the VI observed.

After that, everything else was pretty simple. All they had to do was keep repeating the boost and jumps until they had all the research data that had been lost during the MSV Rosalie's wreckage. Finally, they had the last piece.

"Mission objectives completed." said the VI.

With that done and dusted, Austin radioed the Normandy and made the Hammerhead jump high enough to get into the Normandy's cargo bay. It would take some time for the data recovered from the wreckage

to be examined and decrypted, but Liara had assured Austin that she'd be able to use the data to find the Prothean ruins that Arnold had made mention to in his message about the Hammerhead.

Until then, Austin stuck around in the cargo bay and spent some time exercising in the simulator.

After about two hours, the Major finally took a break. As he came out of the simulator, he found Dell tinkering around with the Hammerhead, while Sill was scraping off the Cerberus paint in order to give the vehicle a small refit with Helldiver technology and to also give it Helldiver logos and paint scheme.

Austin went up to the Mako and looked at Dell. He was currently under the Hammerhead and appeared to have a few tools scattered around him. He'd been busy.

"Interesting new vehicle you got for us, Shepard. Sill and I can think of a lot of new tech ideas from this alone." Dell grunted as he acknowledged the Helldiver Major standing over him.

"Must say, I'm quite impressed with it myself. Certainly more fun than that Mako rover." said Austin. "What exactly are you doing?"

"Just making sure it's in the best of conditions. And as you've probably noticed, Sill's taking off the Cerberus logos. Don't want their symbol on our vehicle, even if it was theirs." Dell replied.

"Is that hard at all?" Austin asked.

"Try to remember who you're talking to, Shepard. I helped build the Helldivers. This is easy compared to that. In fact, many engineers could learn a lot from the simple systems I've adopted... OW!" Dell shouted. He'd cut his finger on a sharp piece of metal.

"You alright?" Austin asked concernedly.

"Fine. Fine. Just a scratch!" Dell said. "Shit! That hurt." he cursed under his breath.

"I can come back if you're busy." said Austin.

"No, it's fine. I've been meaning to talk you anyway. Something I need

to ask." said Dell as he slid out from under the Hammerhead.

"Sill, would you mind taking over for me for a bit? I need to talk with Shepard." he asked.

"Sure thing, Dad." said Sill as she stopped her original job and walked over to where Dell had been. "Shepard." she acknowledged.

"So, you have something to ask of me?" Austin inquired.

"Yes, now that you're here though, I'm not sure how I can begin." said Dell.

"Just take your time if you're finding this hard." said Austin reassuringly.

"Okay. Here goes." said Dell as he took a deep breath. "You remember Sill's mother? My wife, Uthenra?"

"Yes. What about her?" Austin replied.

Dell gave a small sigh before replying. "It'll be our wedding anniversary soon, you see. She knows that I and Sill are currently serving with you and that we can't come home. So she suggested that she come on board the Normandy instead. At first I didn't like the idea seeing as how dangerous it might be, but all this has started to get me thinking. I have confidence that we will survive our mission to defeat the Collectors, but a part of me still knows there's the possibility we might not." he said.

"I promise you, Dell, we'll destroy the Collectors, and we'll have a tale or two to tell when we come back." said Austin confidently.

"I do admire your confidence, Shepard. You share Zartrack's bravery. But still, the future is unpredictable, and I promised my wife that I would at least ask you this. With your permission, I would like for Uthenra to come aboard the Normandy just for the day. It might help keep me spirits up, so to speak." said Dell. At the same time, the Arkane engineer bandaged up the deep cut on his finger.

"I suppose I can understand how you feel." said Austin as he thought long and hard about this choice. As long as it was just for one day, there wouldn't really be any problem. Besides, the entire crew was trained to handle some of the worst. Also, if he and Sarah were in Sill's position, they too would want to see their mother again before

heading through hell and back.

"Tell her that she's more than welcome to come aboard if she wants. As long as it's only for one year, I'm sure there'll be no problem at all." he said.

Dell was lost for words at the Major's response. He'd had confidence that Austin would understand, but he'd mostly assumed it would be a long shot.

"I... thank you so much, Major. I cannot thank you enough." he said, gratefully.

Austin simply smiled and patted Dell reassuringly on the shoulder. "I'll look forward to meeting her." he said.

The next day, Liara managed to finish her decryption of the Prothean data and now had the location of a dig site. The planet that the Prothean site was located on; Kopsis in the Hoplos system of the Hades Nexus cluster was also the last known location of Dr Cayce, one of the scientists who'd been testing the Hammerhead.

Liara of course had practically begged to be brought on the mission and had even attempted to bribe Austin with a full on strip show, and a tittyfuck. While Austin had loved this, Liara hadn't really needed to make the effort. He'd been planning on taking her anyway since she was their Prothean expert. Since he'd already got that sorted out, Austin now just had to decide who else to take. Of course it wasn't compulsory that Austin had to take a full team. It could just be him and Liara, but still, they didn't know what they'd find. Eventually, Austin decided to take Samara and Sarah with him.

The Hammerhead hummed into life as the Normandy's cargo bay doors opened. Dell and Sill had now finished their work on upgrading, refitting and repainting the vehicle. Instead of being white with yellow and black Cerberus markings, the Hammerhead was now grey with black makings. It even had the traditional Helldiver logo on it and few extra armour additions.

Austin activated the thrusters as the Hammerhead fell in order to slow the landing, and soon they were hovering just above the ground.

Ahead of them, was the ruins. However there was an obstacle in the way. There was a massive kinetic barrier covering the entire dig site.

"Kinetic barrier detected. Kinetic barrier strength beyond conventional weapon capability. Recommend disabling power sources." said the VI.

The power sources weren't difficult to find since there were blue lines heading away from the kinetic barrier. The real difficult parts were that the dig site was guarded by an awful lot of rocket drones where buried all over the place. Austin quickly took evasive maneuvers to avoid the fire and quickly returned fire on the drones. Despite the drones increasing drone numbers though, the Hammerhead soon found the first of the kinetic barrier's generators.

"Kinetic barrier strength reduced." said the VI.

Austin quickly did the same to all the others, as well as destroying more of the rocket drones. The kinetic barrier was down very quickly.

"Kinetic barrier deactivated. Path is clear."

Austin set the Hammerhead down inside the main area. The rest of the way into the dig site was too small for the vehicle to fit, so the team continued the rest of the way on foot.

To say that Liara was speechless by the sheer sight alone of these Prothean ruins would definitely be an understatement. The Asari was acting exactly the same as she had done when they'd first set foot on Ilos 3 years ago.

"Goddess, this is amazing. The architecture is just..." she said as she tried to think of a suitable word to describe the sights that were greeting her eyes.

"This isn't secretly Ilos, is it? It feels like it." said Sarah.

"Let's try and remain focused people. We'll have to take time to study the ruins better once we find what we came here for." said Austin.

Liara reluctantly followed, but she did make a note of everything she saw. Soon, the team found an audio log. It was from Dr Cayce.

"Dr O'Loy must have been indoctrinated by the Reapers. I found him sending our data to a Geth ship. I won't be responsible for another Geth attack, another Eden Prime. I've silenced O'Loy... forever." it said.

"Sounds to me like he was having a nervous breakdown." said Sarah.

"Fear can make people do a lot of things, both bad and good." said Austin.

The team proceeded further through the ruins. Soon, they could see signs of a battle. There were several dead bodies of Blue Suns mercs and even Cerberus soldiers and scientists. They soon found another audio log. In the distance, they could see some sort of large stone barrier. It looked as though it was protecting something.

"It's too late for me. They're still in my head, stealing my thoughts. I can't keep them out. I've got no choice but to destroy this relic and myself." said the audio log. Once again, it was Dr Cayce.

Austin activated a nearby console and the stone barriers retracted into the ground, revealing the Prothean artefact that they had come for. Surprisingly, it was some sort of large silvery sphere, a mysterious, but at the same time rather beautiful sight.

"By the Goddess! This is incredible!" said Liara, barely managing to contain her sheer excitement.

"What exactly is it?" Austin asked as they approached the sphere. It was emitting a low and gentle humming sound as they got closer.

"I'm not sure. I've never seen a Prothean artefact like this before." Liara replied.

"Whatever it is, it is quite beautiful." said Samara.

Austin decided to take risk and stepped closer to the artefact.

"Austin, wait..." Liara said. Before she could finish though, Austin touched the artefact.

The sphere seemed to ripple slightly from his touch and then started vibrating. Everyone immediately stepped back.

"That was your fault." said Sarah quickly.

There was a bright light for a second and everyone was briefly blinded. When it cleared, it appeared at first as if the artefact was, gone. However, once their sight readjusted, they saw that the artefact was still there, but had shrunk. The now very small sphere fell to the ground and landed with a very loud clang.

"Okay... what just happened?" said Austin.

"I wish I had answers for you, love." said Liara as they once again walked up to the sphere. Nothing happened this time.

For now, Austin had placed the orb in his and Liara's quarters. Liara had said that it was a very nice decoration and that she would study it next time she had some free time. She'd even rewarded Austin for taking her with him, by saying that she was planning on returning the favour by getting him a surprise present in return. Austin thought at first that it would simply be a sexy one, but Liara did make it sound as if that wouldn't necessarily be the case.

As Austin sat admiring the orb, his private terminal bleeped. He accessed it to find a message. No doubt it was about what had happened down there. To his surprise, the message was a from a very familiar face.

It has been a while, Shepard. The Council have told me how well you've been doing so far. I'm very proud by your progress. Good work also with finding the Prothean ruins.

The burst of energy that coincided with your retrieval of the Prothean artefact contained coded information. Most of the data was beyond our ability to track, but the threads we were able to decrypt have provided new avenues for research on energy transfer and biotics. It will keep the scientists busy for a while for years.

The data indicates that the artefact is currently inert and not dangerous. So, as a suggestion, you could give it to Liara as a present. I know she'd love it. I hope your relationship with her is also good. In my experience, it's always good to have something to not only fight for, but to come back to.

On the subject of the artefact though, so of our scientists have wondered, that if Cayce had more time, would he have unlocked its secrets? They will continue his research. We'll make sure also to keep Cerberus away. Last thing we want is them snooping around after they nearly got you killed.

Good luck out there, Shepard. Give them hell!

Your friend and mentor

General Alkatraan Zartrack

Austin finished reading and looked back at the orb on his table. He touched it again briefly and it rippled. A nice little souvenir, if he did say so himself.

At that moment, EDI's avatar then appeared behind him.

"Yes EDI?" Austin acknowledged.

"Miss Lawson would like to speak with you in her office, Shepard." said the AI.

"Miranda? What the hell does she want?" Austin asked, a bit surprised that Miranda would want to talk with him. He and the ex-Cerberus operative still weren't on the best of terms. "If she's had another argument with Alaara again, I'm throwing her in the holding cells." he mumbled to himself. He then turned back to EDI. "Tell her I'm on my way."

"Of course, Shepard." said EDI.

The AI vanished and Austin stepped into the elevator. He sincerely hoped that Miranda wasn't planning on trying to argue with him about something.

Dash simply stood, gazing at the several Cerberus troopers surrounding him.

This wasn't real of course. It was just the simulation that Dash and Jack had created after they'd decided to have a contest with one another to try and prove who the faster fighter was and who could get more points.

"Alright. You'll all have to ask yourselves one question. Do I feel lucky?" "Well... do ya... punks?!" the scout taunted as he looked around at his enemies.

The troopers remained unfazed by this though and simply continued circling the Helldiver scout.

"Come on, let's dance." said Dash.

The Cerberus troopers aimed their weapons, but Dash immediately went for his dual pistols and aimed at the trooper's feet.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!" he shouted with each shot. "BANG!"

Another shot went into another trooper's knee. The troopers that had been shot hopped about on one leg clutching their injured feet. Some even fell over, clutching their injuries. Dash hadn't managed to shoot all of them though and they immediately opened fire on the scout.

Dash however simply ran and all the bullet's missed him.

Dash was already fast because his armour was much lighter than the others, but also because it was fitted with loads of speed enhancers. So now, Dash was able to run at nearly 60 mph. He was that fast. Dash also did an awful lot of exercises and did at least 3 hours a day on a running machine to keep him fit. Doing this for so long had allowed him to run for long periods of time without having to stop for breath or consume water.

"Feel the speed! THE SPEEEEEED!" Dash yelled as he practically ran circles around the other troopers.

The two troopers looked around wildly, and fired at Dash, but he was too fast for them. Within seconds even, Dash had already tripped up one of them and he threw the trooper over the edge of the tall building he was fighting on.

The other trooper tried to run but Dash stopped him with seconds. The scout hopped onto the trooper and aimed both his pistols at the trooper's neck.

"Open wide!"

Dash fired and the trooper's head exploded, causing blood to spill all

over the place.

Before Dash could savour this victory however, more gunshots whizzed past his head. In all the excitement he seemed to have forgotten about the last three enemies in this simulation, the Centurions.

Dash however didn't worry and simply ran again. This time though, he slid right under one of the Centurion and straight between his legs, both dual guns blazing right at the Centurion's crotch.

"Sweet!"

The Centurion screamed in pain and fell to his knees, clutching his injury. This was only brief though before Dash sliced his head off with his elbow blade. The Scout then simply aimed his gun as another Centurion ran at him. The Centurion stopped as he found the gun be pointed right at his face at point blank range.

"Oh Fu..."

Dash fired and the bullet blew a large, bloodied, hole in the Centurion's helmet.

"Hmm, I just invented a new colour. It's called hint of brain." Dash chuckled.

Only one was left now. This one was a fair distance away, but Dash would be at him before he could blink. Dash could just shoot him, but he always liked to show off. He may as well end the simulation in style.

Dash ran at the Centurion who fired at him blindly as he backed away in fright. Dash jumped and punched the Centurion, causing him to lose his balance and fall over the edge.

"Wooohoooo! Best - ride - ever!" Dash yelled with joy in between punches. He was on top of the Centurion as they both fell. The Centurion quickly realized that with him below, the fall would kill him and he attempted to struggle. Dash's constant punches however kept him at bay.

There was massive explosion of dirt, rubble and concrete as the Centurion and Helldiver hit the ground. The dust eventually cleared and Dash clambered off the now bloodied and broken dead body of the Centurion.

"You just got owned, Cerberus. Suck it, Illusive Man!" he said.

"Simulation complete. You achieved an increase of 25% in speed on that round, Mr Torres." said EDI.

The environment around Dash quickly started dissolving into loads of tiny holographic cubes and was quickly replaced by the real environment of the Normandy's cargo bay. Jack was stood just a metre or so away from the simulator pad. She looked a bit cross due to the fact that Dash was within a shot at beating her score.

"The final score, is Jack: 2581, Dash: 3000" said EDI.

"Fuck!" Jack swore.

"Yes!" Dash cheered. "So, still wanna see who's better?"

"You've certainly got a mouth on you, Dash. And you are funny, I'll give you that." said Jack. Despite losing, she didn't look as though she was going to lose her temper. In fact, she was doing very well since she often used to simulator daily to either de stress or just work off some steam. Now she didn't really see the need to take her anger out on real things. Not to mention to the fact that she was slowly growing comfortable serving on the Normandy.

"They don't call me the Helldiver with a mouth for nothing, Jack. Besides, a lot them are so boring. No sense of humour... apart from my team of course." said Dash smugly.

"We should do this again sometime." said Jack.

"Why? So you can lose again? No one's ever managed to outrun me. My speed is rivalled only by the lightning." said Dash.

"Maybe that should've been your name." Jack joked.

"In your dreams, thunder." Dash retaliated.

"Huh, big mouth and a smartass. You're not so bad, Dash." Jack smiled, not only was impressed with Dash's clever humour, she was also impressed that he was brave enough to say things like that to her without worrying about pissing her off.

"Is that a compliment I hear, Jack?" Dash asked jokingly.

"Fuck you!" said Jack as she left the cargo bay.

"I thought so." said Dash as he folded his arms.

There was then a sudden movement from behind Dell's desk and both he and Sill slowly came out of hiding.

"Is she gone now?" Dell asked, nervously.

BROKEN WINGS CHAPTER 10

by Tiffany Kennedy
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NARUTO (-???)-Masashi Kishimoto & Shueisha.
Original Characters & plot belongs to me.
Broken Wings -Re-Write-
A modern day Naruto Fanfiction.

I haven't really spoken to Aoi. Not after that night. No matter how much I want to say something, no matter how much I just want to talk to her, no matter how much I want to feel her skin and see her smile I just can't bring myself to actually say something to her. I just don't know what to say. It's been weeks now. I've been watching her, I don't know if that's creepy or not but I just need to see her, even if I can't say a thing. I just. I know, it's weird.

Gaara hid behind the tree. The one where Aoi always was. She sat in her usual spot against the big tree that blossomed white flowers. She came there almost all the time now. It reminded her of him and just of beauty in general. Being near this tree was like watching the waves, it was comforting. She also loved the fact that she could see the waves from here. Gaara sighed watching her. He didn't say a single word but his eyes stayed on her. She just seemed so peaceful without him. He didn't want to disturb that. Even though he had been a bit putt off everything lately he knew that when he was near her, when he watched her it was different. It was like he regained his strength even though when he was near her he was at his weakest. He just wanted to be on good terms with her. He stood there trying to decide if staying there watching her was enough. He watched the white flower petals fall against her perfect blue hair. He wanted to talk to her, he really did. He just felt guilty, or something like that, maybe for leaving her there without a word. Maybe she thought it was just a dream. He hoped that she did but he wouldn't know. They didn't speak. He just followed her everywhere, watching her every move.

Aoi's sight was focused on the misty clouds lining the dull blue sky. She could feel someone's eyes on her but she didn't dare to look. She just remained focused on the clouds as she thought. She wanted to go to Gaara, talk to him, make a move, and tell him how she felt about everything. But does he feel the same? That night at the party, he just walked away and when they were here together, he left her. She didn't even know if that was real. She sighed pulling her legs together and hugging them. She twirled her blue hair around with her fingers. She

then came to a realisation. Her eyes widened slightly and she smiled softly.

I know you're there Gaara, you don't have to watch me."

Gaara was shocked by the fact that she knew he was there, he was slightly confused. He thought he was hiding so well. Gaara stepped out from behind the tree slowly, just enough to see her. He didn't want to impose if he wasn't welcome.

"Sorry."

"There's no need to be sorry Gaara, I miss you."

He stared at her for a moment before moving closer, "I miss you too," he crouched down next to her.

It was a brief moment before Itachi went to go get her. He saw Aoi next to Gaara. It was like they were drawn to each other and there was no way for them to let go of each other. He knew that, he knew that it didn't matter what got in the way they would end up together but he also knew that it would cause Aoi more pain than it was worth. Gaara didn't know how to love, and even though Itachi knew that Gaara might soon learn to love Aoi would've go through too much pain. Itachi took Aoi home and Gaara was left at the tree on his own. At least it gave him time to think.

"Aoi, I need you to listen to me, I don't want you going near him," Itachi stated as they walked back to his car.

"Why ever not?" she said in a sophisticated yet mocking voice.

"Aoi," he stopped her in her tracks, "I know he was the reason why you were upset. And I know that this thing you guys have is only going to hurt you more, he's going to hurt you. I don't want to be in charge of you, and I'm not trying to boss you around but please Aoi, I just know he will hurt you. And you are worth much more than that."

"Right, you think you can teach me what's right and what's wrong now? Itachi you are like an older brother, who you don't get advice from, you're not my father. Look how well Sasuke turned out because of you yeah fabulous right? So don't try to sort me out when you can't sort out your own brother," she claimed and walked off in a different direction. Aoi cowered before running after her.

"Oh come on Aoi, you know I'm doing my best!"

"Hn."

She continued walking. He tried to stop her, he tried to get her to listen but no matter how hard he tried she just get walking. She had finally gotten Gaara to at least miss her, they got to a point where they even kissed she didn't want to stay away from him. She was determined. Itachi stopped realising that she wouldn't slow down. Cooling off might be good for her. He walked back to his car and Aoi kept walking. He watched her walking away sadly. She reached the streets and suburbs of the town where her friends lived. She turned a few corners and went on a few streets before knocking on a door.

Tenten answered it with a smile. She wore a silk pink dress that reached her knees. Her hair was up in her usual buns. Aoi hadn't planned on coming to the girls' only sleepover but she would prefer to be with them right now. It would probably do her good. Tenten showed her into the house. Ino, Sakura and Hinata were all sitting in the living room. Sakura wore denim shorts and a pink button up shirt. Hinata wore her favourite jacket along with a dark purple top; she also wore a small black skirt. Ino wore a brilliant purple dress that reached her knees. Aoi was wearing a black Of Mice & Men shirt with jeans. She kind of felt odd around these girls.

Sakura decided to plate Hinata's hair and Ino decided on Tenten's hair. Tenten smiled and called Aoi over. Reluctantly, Aoi sat in front of Tenten and she braided her hair. After they had all made facials and Aoi impersonated an ogre they played guitar hero. Aoi smashed everyone as usual. She wished someone would finally beat her. The whole thing was kind of boring for Aoi even though these were all new things for her it just seemed, uninteresting.

"Let's do a D&M!" Ino exclaimed.

"What's that?" Aoi questioned. They all stared at her.

"It means Deep and Meaningful," Sakura smiled. Aoi stared at her this time with an off expression.

"W-well, I um, I r-really like Naruto and I-I don't know what to do," Hinata's voice was really fast.

"Wow really?" Aoi already figured it out but she wasn't sure about it since she didn't really talk to Hinata.

"Y-yes."

"You know, he's been trying to ask you out for a while. You know hone in some courage for it. I'll get him to ask you out, he does like you a lot," Aoi smiled brightly. They went into the kitchen to back some cookies and make chocolate mousse while Sakura went on about her problem with Sasuke. About how he wouldn't admit his feelings to everyone. Aoi already knew about this, Sasuke wants to proclaim his love but he thinks things will change if he does. Once everything was set they started eating. It was around seven o'clock. Ino went on about how she really likes Kiba but she doesn't know if everything would work the way she wanted it too.

"What about you and Gaara?" Tenten asked Aoi.

"What about us?" Aoi looked down at her food.

"You like him, I know you do and we all know he likes you, so um go out already!" Sakura yelled. Aoi laughed.

"It's tricky; I don't think he's ready for a relationship."

"Bullshit! You go out there and tell him how you feel!" Ino yelped jumping out of her chair, "I know he feels the same way about you!"

Aoi took a moment.

"I guess, but what if he rejects me."

“Aoi, you are almost as fierce as Tenten, why are you afraid of rejection?” Sakura asked. Aoi kept quiet. She texted Gaara and told him to meet her at the tree in half an hour. Aoi told the others they were going to meet and she was going to tell him. She knew that if she didn’t try herself they would do something about it. They all smiled with glee and took Aoi upstairs. They threw some clothes at her to get changed into. Aoi looked at them awkwardly but they shoved her into the bathroom. She sighed. When she came out she was wearing a short black dress that reached her knees and a denim vest over it. They gave her black heels to wear; they weren’t platforms so Aoi was shorter but she didn’t really mind wearing them. She put on a black beanie as well. She spun around in front of the mirror. Not too shabby.

They all got into the car quickly. When they stopped in front of the forest they all smiled at Aoi. She sighed and shook her head before getting out quickly. They drove a few blocks away and waited there. Aoi put away all thoughts of doubt away as she headed over beside the tree. She looked upon the buildings from the cliff. When she heard a noise she turned around quickly to see Gaara with a white flower in his hands. He put it behind her ear which made her blush wildly.

“Gaara...” she smiled sweetly. Her hand took his and he didn’t struggle against it. If she told him, if this all worked out then maybe, just maybe her broken wings would be repaired again, maybe she would be able to have strength and fly.

“Aoi we need to talk.”

She looked at him in shock, she was the one that was supposed to tell him something but for some reason he wanted to talk. She frowned slightly. Maybe he was going to tell her what she wanted to say to him. She stared at him hopefully.

“Yes?”

“Look at me Aoi. You’ve done something to me. I don’t know what it is. But it’s insane. I just want to talk to you, I want to see you, I want to touch you, hug you, kiss you. It’s insanity. It’s not me. I don’t feel these things. They aren’t made for me. You’ve casted some sort of spell on me, like a sadist does to draw someone in. You must’ve done something to me, I just I can’t get away from you, I’m drawn to you and it’s killing me. I don’t feel this way, I never feel this way. Tell me, Aoi, what the hell have you done to me!?” he yelled. Aoi flinched.

“Gaara, I haven’t done anything to you, I’m not a witch or anything!”

He pushed her hard against the tree and she screeched in pain. She looked up to the sky not wanting to look at him.

“Aoi! Look at me! What have you done?! Do you see me, here now?! This is not me! I’m not like this! I don’t go around following people and feeling the need to worship them! I’ve heard of things, some girls have an ability to draw people in; to make them follow them worship them, like they are God. Remove this curse!”

“Do you really believe in such things?” he pushed her against the tree again and she screeched in pain. His nails digging into her. He didn’t know what had come over him, he didn’t know why he was so mean but he had to get something out of her, he had to get the truth out of her. He didn’t want to feel like this all the time, he didn’t want to follow around some girl like a little puppy.

“Aoi I’m warning you! Release this spell upon me! I don’t want to be attached to your shadow. I don’t want to be drawn in! I don’t want to be like a little puppy.”

She screeched through the pain and kissed his lips. He stayed there for a moment wanting to kiss her back but he pulled away.

“Aoi! This is what I mean! This is what I’m talking about! Ever since you kissed me I’ve been drawn to you! Even more than I was before! You’ve done something to me! I don’t want to be under this spell!”

“You feel it! You feel it Gaara! What you’re going through, I am too! This is not a spell Gaara.”

“Don’t fuck with me!” he spat.

“Gaara...I love you.”

He pushed her harder against the tree again, “Don’t try that with me! I don’t want this stupid link we have. I don’t love people. People never love me! So stop lying to me! I want to go back to being Gaara. The killer everyone so despised.”

“Rumoured killer. You and I both know you aren’t!”

“Yeah, and you and I both know this isn’t love. This is just you and some crazy piece of shit spell. That’s the only way to answer this.”

“Gaara! Can’t you understand that this is love! You feel it too!”

“You are getting on my nerves. This is not love! I don’t feel love! Especially for you. That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard. You’re just some temporary relief, something to keep me occupied when I’m upset. Pain killers. But now it’s gone too far, you’ve cursed me. This is far from love!”

“Pain killers? That’s all you think of me.”

“That’s all you are to me.”

“No. Don’t say that! Don’t!” she shook in his grip and he pressed her against the tree harder. He immediately admitted saying that to her. She was more than that. He knew that but he would never admit it. He couldn’t, he needed to know what was going on.

“This isn’t love! Get it through your thick skull!” his nails clawed against her causing her to bleed but she couldn’t feel it, she was numb in his warm grasp, “you are nothing to me but a drug. A drug that takes away pain when it appears. But all drugs have side effects, right? Well yours is that you are trying to create love but there is no such thing as love. I don’t love. I will never love. There is nothing between you and me okay?! You’re there and I’m here. If I’m in pain you take it away

otherwise I have no use for you. Don't try and make it something else."

"Gaara, it's the truth. No curses or anything, I love you. But I see how it is; I'm nothing to you! You're just like everyone else. You use people as dolls!"

"Fuck you!" he slapped her across the face and pushed her back into the tree. Blood trickled down her sick arms but she didn't care how much it apparently stung. She jumped back at him, pushing him to the ground.

"I won't fight you Gaara! Please listen to yourself! This is stupid! It's madness!"

"Why are you still fighting for me when you are nothing?!" he pushed her back off him and stood up. She latched onto his arm as he tried to walk away. She kept pulling him back. He punched her in the stomach causing her to fall to the ground. She spat before grabbing his leg.

"Gaara, listen! I'm not going to fight you! Please!"

"You are nothing but a drug! You have nothing but curses," his words stung her and he realised why he said them. He was trying to reassure himself more than anything, he was trying to tell himself that she was nothing. He didn't think about effects or anything. It repeated over and over again in her head. Why did he think this way? Why did he think that she cursed him? That's impossible. But being told that she was nothing but just a drug to him stung her more than anything. It was probably the truth. A temporary pain release. She let him go. Slowly she shuffled back to the tree. Pools of tears hit the ground and she could finally feel the pain in her body. Her cheek stung, her shoulders were bleeding and singing in pain, even her stomach was in knots. On top of that her heart shattered into a million tiny pieces. She had never felt this way either. It was like she was stripped bare of everything. She never knew words could sting so much. Maybe this was how Sasuke felt. She leant against the tree. There was blood on it too.

Fuck it. She couldn't go back to the girls. She couldn't go back to the mansion. She couldn't go to Gaara's. Looks like she was staying here, alone, in the cold, bloodshed and heart aching. She didn't care anymore. Gaara was right. She was nothing.

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THE TALE OF TWENTY THREE

CHAPTER 1 - THE GREAT SEA

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“Wind? Wind, wake up!” the King of Red Lions muttered as Wind drooled on his mast. They had been traveling for days, all the fighting was taking a toll on his small body and face. He opened a sleepy eye and slipped off the mast onto the floor with a thump; the whole of his body aching with stress. He smoothed down his bright yellow hair, his fringe bounced back up like a spring; he yawned and rubbed his big black eyes. His Picto Box fell on the floor from his pouch by his feet; he picked up and turned it around so the glass of the lens faced him; he stared at a red mark that had had made itself at home on his left cheek. That blasted bird, when he got a chance he would destroy for taking Ayrll.

“Ayrll...” Wind whispered opening his pouch and pulled out a blue shirt that almost reached his knees. Grandma made it for him when he was younger. When Ma was alive. He blinked a tear away as a shadow appeared obscuring the early morning sun. His tears soaked the cloth as in his solitude on the sea felt like a wound had been ripped open.

“GOOD MORNING, WIND!” a voice giggled, Wind sighed and hugged the shirt, the white lobster reminded him of the beauty of his home, the sun rising over the hills as the pigs grazed near the beach where the crabs would scuttle about their business. He would normally be still sleeping in Ayrll’s Lookout at this time in the morning; that is until he was stared down through a telescope. There had been many days where she had hit him with it as she had been trying to work out how she couldn’t see anything. Normally she had tripped over his sleeping body at this time and received a black eye. Wind wretched himself back to the present and wiped his tears from his face; he did not want him of all people to see him cry.

“Morning...Tingle.” Wind said through his gritted teeth as Tingle lifted Wind’s hat off his head, the green fabric that made the point on the end flopped over Wind’s face. He crossed his eyes and blew the hat out of his face but it slapped him back in the nose making him sneeze. Tingle sat on the other side of the boat just behind the King of Red Lion’s neck; glitter showered the floor making Wind tut. That

would be more to clean up later. Standing up shakily; still was not quite used to the rocking motions of the boat; and Tingle was as ever, not helping. The King of Red Lions gave a bored yawn and shook his head as the glitter sprayed him in the face.

“Something on your mind; my little friend?” Tingle asked leaning on the side of the boat, his weight making Wind grab for the opposite side of the King of Red Lions as an explosion of glitter smacked him in the face like a fist. Tingle’s green garb was dark and made him look like a holly leaf against the King of Red Lions neck; his ears were pointed and larger than Wind’s but were covered up with a hoodie. His thick black eyebrows were lifted in question and his tiny eyes were slits like he was constantly plotting something, his tiny hands were rubbing his horse-like nose and his cheeks were decorated with a pair of glittery swirls. A little clock bounced on his chest as he giggled at Wind’s half sea-sick face. Wind found the situation much less amusing and slumped on the deck; he vomited over the side of the King of Red Lions. The night had been rougher than he thought and Tingle rocking the boat simply made his stomach do flips on a normal basis ever since seeing him in Windfall Prison. Why did he let him out?!

“Wind had a rough night, last night. A giant squid rose from the depths of the water. We were swallowed and thrown away.” the King of Red Lions replied hearing Wind groan; forcing himself to keep his food down. His frown remained on his face as he talked to the creep that sat behind his neck. Tingle gave another laugh and stood up; making the King of Red Lions shudder on the waves, Wind fell backwards onto the helm; his face turned a light shade of green, the same colour as his shirt under his tunic as he banged his head. The King of Red Lions winced as he saw the fabric on the right side of his face shuffle to make way for a red lump; Wind devoutly wished he could push the obnoxious creature off the side.

“I heard you found my Picto Box after I left, could I have it?” Tingle asked jumping on the deck happily. Wind opened one eye and yelped as something pointed poked him in the back. The Wind Waker. Wind quickly turned to see Tingle take it in his hands and waft it around like he was swatting a fly. The brilliantly polished conductor’s baton shone brightly into Wind’s eyes making him grimace under his hat and the point on the end could easily be mistaken for a knife blade, but what Wind most admired about it was the design; the ancient Hylian writing that had been chiselled into the swirls that stuck out just above Tingle’s hand:

Breeze and direction at my command,
Do as I demand,
Chart me on map, compass and course,
Guided by my invisible hands, I show my silent remorse,
The hand that holds me, allows my anger to cool,
Shall forever be loved by all for just carrying this tool.
Wind let out a comforting sigh as he reminded himself of the poem; it gave him a bit of comfort.

Tingle's dancing bounced Wind from his thoughts; vomit was rising in his throat again

"Give it back, before you-ow!" Wind squeaked slapping his hand over his right eye. Tingle seemed not to notice as Wind's temper and sickness grew worse. He roared and pushed Tingle over so the Wind Waker Baton fell out of his hands into the sea below, Tingle fought to stay on his feet as Wind watched it in horror as it vanished from his sight. Wind dived in the water after it; he could barely keep his eyes open as the salt of the sea stung his eyes. The deeper he swam after it the more he choked on his forgotten breath.

Wind let out a splutter as his Grappling Hook seized his tunic and pulled him out of the water, Wind managed to grab the Wind Waker Baton before the force of the pull rose him into the air. Wind let gravity grasp him as he hit the deck of the King of Red Lions with a moan, the Grappling Hook let go of his tunic; leaving Wind to become Tingle's foot stool. Wind gave him a shove and squeezed his tunic till it was covered in wrinkles; Tingle continued to prance around on deck and did not even notice Wind ring out his hat. The opportunity to slap him in the water with it was greatly thought about in Wind's mind as he continued to roll it up. He let a smile cross his face as he replaced it on his head; it bounced off his head like it was alive. Wind glanced in it as a purple fish spat water in his face and dived back into the water. Wind shook his head and glanced inside his hat to make sure no more passengers had got inside.

"I see you're happy now, well I got what I came for, see you around the sea, my friend!" Tingle spoke standing on his toes on the side of the King of Red Lions making Wind hang onto the helm. Tingle's weight was making the King of Red Lions lean dangerously starboard How much could he weigh to almost capsize him? Wind thought looked up on deck to find the Picto box had vanished into Tingle's left hand, the gleaming reflection of the object made Wind scrunch his eyes up "Tingle, Tingle, Kooloo-Limpah." Tingle laughed as a bright red balloon filled Wind's sight as if out of nowhere, the wavy

design of the balloon reminded him of Ayrl's dress; the big spots with swirls. Tingle rose into the air without a worry that the balloon should pop. Wind readied the Grappling Hook and swung it around on his left side, the three pronged hook swung just past his head as he let it fly out of his hands. It gripped onto the Picto Box from hidden inside Tingle's red underwear. The Picto Box fell back into Wind's hands, although he was not too sure if he wanted it.

Wind slipped it back into pouch anyway and picked the Wind Waker Baton from the floor and picked up an escaped Hyoui Pear that he had dropped. Wind threw it in his right hand up a little, it was not very heavy but it would make a good bump on the head if he were to throw it... Wind raised his arm,

"Don't even think about it." the King of Red Lions growled, Wind sighed and lowered his arm, shame, he really wanted to hear Tingle scream instead of laugh and act all posh. Wind let out a yawn and curled up into a ball behind the King of Red Lion's neck. The King of Red Lion's looked at Wind's little body and reached over to pick up the blue shirt that lay in a heap on deck and gently put it over the sleeping boy's shoulders. Wind let out a quiet mumble and pulled his shirt up over his shoulders, he unclipped his belt and used the pouch as a pillow.

The day seemed to pass slowly; the odd seagull would sit on the helm, causing the King of Red Lions to jerk on the waves as the currents pushed them around the Great Sea. As dusk approached Wind opened his eyes; his legs were cramped with sleeping curled up and his cheek was a deep red and sticky

"Oh, yuck! Squashed bait!" Wind cried rubbing his cheek with sea water, a dark red stain marked his pouch from the inside as the bait had marked through when he had been lying on it.

The setting sun painted the sky a rose red and soup yellow and the clouds began to thin out to make way for the early stars that looked down on his world. The King of Red Lions stiffened his neck; he heard Wind uncork a bottle of soup from his pouch, the bottle covered in the broken bait, he looked at the puddle he had made on deck and pondered, his clothes were still a little damp and any excuse to get out of them in this hot weather was a dream. Wind unloosened his belt and placed it carefully on deck; he did not want to damage the little fairy he caught inside a bottle last time they were on land, he could hear the bored tapping of its tiny fingers on the glass. Wind slipped the blue shirt on; happy to be in familiar clothes again, it was slightly warm with him sleeping with it. He put his belt back on and

messed with the buckle in his hands trying not to stab himself with the Wind Waker Baton that poked through his pouch
“I hope Aryll is okay.” he mumbled taking the Wind Waker Baton out of his pouch and waved it slowly through the air:

Up

Left

Right

The wind direction changed in the direction of Eastern Triangle Island. The sail opened on the mast and twisted in the wind; the sail's beauty was the simplistic white background that often looked clear from the right angle with a navy green pattern in the middle of the fabric was his constant reminder of Windfall, though he could never compare it with anything.

They gained speed through the sea, Wind let his hand run through the water; the silence of the open sea was unnerving. Wind reduced the sail and picked Aryll's telescope up from rolling on the floor. He must have a hole in his pouch. He placed it up to his eye; the sea could never be this quiet. That is unless he was going to be ambushed. The quiet always became before the loud.

A shrill whistle filled the air and a jet of water blew up on the horizon. Wind fell over and held on tight to the mast “Please not another squid, please not another.” Wind begged as a rhythmic sound rang in his ears. It was slow and sounded far away but it was steadily getting closer. Wind thought he could see bubbles, huge bubbles coming towards him. He wasted no time to get the sail up and tear across the waves, with a quick glance over his shoulder he could see the bubbles were changing direction and following behind him, getting faster and faster

“Wind!” the King of Red Lions shouted as they came to a sudden stop, Wind flew over his head and landed on the land, his bottom just sticking above the long grass

“I'm okay.” Wind moaned waving his hand, the sound continued over the ocean, Wind scratched his head; he had never heard anything like it before but it was following him.

Wind turned his head and corrected his hat from over his eye, there was a statue on top of the hill; its arms open wide as if it wanted a hug. Wind crept closer and looked at it, it looked like it was made of wood,

the eyes were blank and staring, the closer he got to it; the more the eyes glowed leaf green. He opened his pouch on his belt and pulled out a glowing sphere, a pearl they called it. He placed it gently in the statues open arms and waited. The sky turned even darker than it was and the pearl lit the statue up slightly, the ground began to shake under his feet as green light sprouted from inside the statue. Wind leapt into the grass; he had had his fair share of explosions and cannon fire. It stopped. Nothing happened. Wind climbed back up to the statue.

BANG!

Wind screamed as he vanished into the clouds

The statue changed into a beautiful woman dressed in green, a small flower tied in her hair. The pearl lit up and sent a jet of light across the waves to the other statues, smashing it on contact. The other two statues sent their lights from the past pearls of red and blue to make up a triangle. Fit for the Tri-Force. A silver building arose from the depths of the waves, bathed in yellow and white light.

Wind fell back through the clouds and smacked into it as it let water cascade down the walls. His nose felt like it had been pushed into his face as gravity pulled him down to the ocean. He heard the whistle again and before he touched the water a pair of hands seized his waist, the wind rushed past his ears as he heard a voice

“Don’t worry, Wind, I’ve got you!” it said. Wind opened his eyes and saw the waves fly out from underneath him; he could feel the pair of them falling but a boy was searching in his pouch for something. “Yah!” he shouted as an orange rope passed his face “Feet forward, Wind!” the boy yelled as Wind stared forward, the orange rope had grasped onto a wall, a pair of sharp needles stabbed through the stone of the tower entrance. Wind pushed his feet forward the best he could as the boy threw him through the air and gave him a kick for good measure. Wind belly flopped on something hard and metal as the other boy landed on his feet next to him half ducking into a roll to cushion his fall. “Well, that was exciting.” he muttered adjusting a small brown hat that sat on his blond hair

“That was great, Spirit!” a girl squealed, appearing from behind the boy, she had sun blond hair against pale skin and huge blue eyes. Her smile stretched from ear to pointed ear and her cheeks were bright red, she wore a large crown made of brown material with a single pink jewel in the middle, a big brown belt sat on her middle made up of circles and squares and a long white dress with pink and purple swirls

on a piece of fabric flapping in the wind. She held out a gloved hand to help him up but Wind's hand went straight through the girl and he face-planted the metal, she blushed and scratched the back of her neck "Sorry, I forget that I'm not solid sometimes." the girl mumbled glancing at Wind's bruised and bloody face. Wind glanced up from the metal at the boy who was looking over the edge of the water unsurely

"Can't you swim?" Wind asked seeing the look on his face

"Uh, no, actually." Spirit replied slipping through a half open window

"Follow me, we have to pick up your boat then we have to go." the girl said flying down to the open window. "I'm Zelda by the way."

Wind climbed in to see Spirit slouching over a seat by the windows, the dark blue curtains billowing in the breeze near his face, the seat behind was bright red and covered in blankets and pillows, the other seats were darker and worn from being sat on repeatedly. The carpet was damp with footprints and had lost most of its bright red colour, but the wood flooring remained shiny and new. The walls were covered in red wallpaper with blue swirls of the royal family as well as a Pictograph of Spirit holding a piece of brown paper, the smile on his face stretching from ear to ear.

"Royal Engineer." Wind read, as he continued to stare at the Pictograph. He glanced over his shoulder to see Spirit go by, he was wearing the same garb that he was in the Pictograph, there were bright silver buttons covering a navy blue shirt that acted like a kilt against his knees, he wore a dark belt that looked older and more worn than the one Wind had, he recognised the buckle's design of the swirl. His hair was bright blond and a little shorter in the fringe compared to his own, Wind looked down to the Spirit's gloved hands. He looked so happy.

"I'm not that pretty." Spirit giggled juggling some black rocks in his hands; Wind noticed there was a scar on his left arm that ran under his glove. Spirit removed it but continued to juggle with the other hand; the scar looked like a claw mark that crossed the back of his left hand

"Did you get caught by the Helmaroc King?" Wind asked wincing at the sight of the red scar

"The giant bird? No, this was from Staven, or was it Byrne?" Spirit

muttered looking at Zelda for help, she shrugged as the carriage heaved suddenly. Wind rushed to the window, Spirit vanished behind a curtain at the front of the carriage

Wind saw the Helmaroc King scratch its claws across the roof off the carriage, causing paint to fleck off and deep trenches go across the roof.

“I just fixed that!” Spirit growled, Zelda seemed to shrink in size and turn even paler than what she was.

“What’s wrong?” Wind quizzed as the carriage took another beating

“It dented the roof...” Zelda whispered. Wind pulled back the curtain and walked smack into a closed door with a small circular window, he could see Spirit pulling on two levers; they were mustard yellow in colour and had a handle each. Wind scratched his head, sensing that Spirit had not noticed him due to his thought face. The Helmaroc King dove at the carriage again, almost pushing it on its side

“Ha!” Spirit moaned tugging on the lever, a cannonball shot across the carriage and bashed into the Helmaroc King’s foot, leaving a claw stabbed into the roof. “Can you aim?” Spirit asked glancing up

“I could.” Wind shrugged, his voice muffled by the door

“I need to get us under the water. There are controls for the cannon next to you.” Spirit ordered pressing a yellow button next to the levers. Wind let out a small gulp as he pulled the levers to aim the cannon; yet no matter how much he tugged and pulled, the levers barely moved.

Spirit began to shovel black rocks into a quiet fire in the centre of the engine and seam began to erupt from the chimney “Hold onto something!” Spirit screamed as the chimney made a loud whistle. The carriage jerked suddenly, letting Wind roll down the carriage like a football. The waves crashed around them and water leaked in from the trenches in the ceiling

“Spirit! We’re leaking in!” Zelda screamed as Spirit pushed a small lever on his right till it would not move further.

“Hand me your Grappling Hook, my Snake Whip will damage him.” Spirit shouted opening the door slightly, Wind searched his pouch frantically and pulled it out. He could see Spirit’s throw of it as they turned towards the island, it latched onto the King of Red Lions “Zelda, now!” he shouted. Wind turned and let out a shriek.

A metal beast stood behind him.

POETRY

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John Mahler's Quotes of the Day

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Some people, at least, have enjoyed my Quotes of the Day, so here they are, for your amusement and bemusement: one entire year's worth of quotes. My quotes by the way; nobody else's. These are my thoughts and observations on the world around us: funny, sad, uplifting, evocative, inspiring, silly, and occasionally just plain stupid, they are all here for your perusal: enjoy!

MENTAL ILLNESS

ReizYouUp
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Cast aside by the government
Missunderstood by the doctors
Controlled by the guardians
Becomming the outcast
Seeing things that are not there
Many are left homeless
Taking medications
Dealing with side effects
Turbulent emotions
Living with a disorder
Feels like no one cares
Mental illness

WEATHER

GothicWhoovian
of <http://gothicwhoovian.deviantart.com>

Snow falling in march
Wind swirling, blizzard coming
Fuck you Washington

DREAMER WITH A QUILL

FeatherSpiral
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Not much to say here, except pointing out the symmetrical rhyme scheme.

The poem pretty much explains itself, especially in the second stanza.

Mine, draw inspiration but don't steal.

I've been opening my mind
Taking one small step at a time
Once in my body tightly imprisoned
Minding my own selfish business
Now to my friends deeply devoted
Though still clumsy nevertheless

Most want the sun and burn their wings
I aim for the stars where I'm meant to be
Wisdom and love infuse my writings
If you understand that, you know me
So let me show you how it all rhymes
How I express my best and worst times

Your mind must actually be real narrow
To find any of my words a tiny bit hollow
Because here is how I use my poetry:
Weapon against hatred, idiocy, bigotry
Occasionally I'm uninspired or confused
Then I just wait to hear from my muse

Best way to think is with your mind free
Let it touch things you may not even see
Moderation is best in any discussion
I praise reason without much sanity
Listen to judgment rather than passion
I accept self-confidence, not vanity

It's quite hard to become a true friend
You need to gain some love and trust
But know that it's worth it in the end
Because my friendship has no other cost

With that, don't mix up favor and demand
Take without giving, you will be banned

I HATE THAT I LOVE YOU

Liquidflamesymphony
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I am such a naïve being
For thinking that I could not possibly fall for you.
Ensnared by the same trap that's been set too many times to count;
Lied out for fools like me to stumble upon so unwillingly.
Of course, I told myself I was too strong to succumb to the pressure.

But I was unsurprisingly wrong.

Here I am; craving such a foreboding pleasure.
The mere whisper of your name causes uncontrollable shudders to run
down my spine;
However, is it out of terror? Or...perhaps...something more?
I have yet to figure out such impossible chattels.

I tell myself that I should hate you
And thus my mind commands.
But the heart wants what the heart wants
And shows no hesitation; as it makes me a prisoner of my own
feelings.

I will never act upon such injustices.
I cannot let my mind suffer the insanity that loving you would bring.
So I punch my fist into the wall
And scream my anger into the sweet silence.
Maybe if I scream enough;
I can actually change how I feel.

You must know that you're just going to kill me in the end, don't you?
If so, then why are we still here?
Staring at each other with such heavy glances
As if we could change my cruel fate.

I'm sorry my friend, my love; but now I must run.
Never looking back to see all that I've lost.
Because it's all so overwhelming; too much for me to take.

I have learned now to never again follow that cursed path which leads
to you.
Because it will only lead to my torture

And end in my death.
For I am the prey to your predator;
Constantly watching me from afar.
But, despite my own common sense
I still desperately want to close the endless void between us.

I hate myself.
...No, I hate you!
Or maybe I just hate myself for loving you.
I'm tearing my psyche apart to figure out why:
Oh why was I chosen for such a lonely fate?
Do you take pride in my despair?
I will forever loathe you for what you've done to me.
Not that you give a single care.

So please forgive me when I cry over you.
Just lie and tell me you feel the same way.
Let me hold you one last time
And then leave me like the rest.
I'll just remind myself that it had been for the best.

Yet, despite all the warnings, I will forever be a moth to your flame.
A victim of emotions that cannot be contained.

So leave me now, and never come back!
Put the terrifying demon that plagues me to rest.
And let me sleep peacefully once more;
Until I am no longer haunted by my nightmares and vivid
hallucinations of you.
Because if you do not release me now; vanishing without a trace
I will fall back into your arms recklessly; without warning, without care.
Not even realizing that your fragile mind is tarnished beyond all repair.

Oh, must I now plead with you to let me escape?
I beg you not to lift that knife in your hands
Let the last strand of sanity you have remind you of what you know; my
warmth and my love
Because if you don't...

I am certain that you will not let me live to see tomorrow.

TWISTED

PsychoNekoo8
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How dare I
My affections have rendered me powerless
Haven't my dreams always been this way?
Nights of loving agony
Soft lips, sharp fangs
Nothing could be so twisted
Than the fantasies I've woven into rope

How dare you
Adorning yourself in my nightmares
Becoming radiant and powerful
Didn't I dream you were this way?
Soft voice, sharp words
Nothing could be so twisted
Than the fantasies knotted around my wrists

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Kela Lewis-Morin
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The Show Must Go On.

You're meant to be sad,
As long as the flowers last.
Well at least that's what they say.
Then why do I still feel bad,
Even though time has passed.
I find myself thinking about you everyday.
After mourning and mourning,
On the dawning of the next morning.
Your unplanned departure will still be daunting.
How am I supposed to grasp your sudden disappearance?
When every time I close my eyes I can see your appearance.
How can I class your death as an untimely interference?
One that is destined to occur throughout my life time and time again.
These engraved names are the people I call my family, confidants and friends.
They say I should take each day as they come and try and pretend
As if you are still here amongst us, looking down from above.
As comforting as that thought is, it will never be enough.

You not being here is a reality I am forced to take.

Living a life without you was a decision I was forced to make.

Sometimes I can't help but think that maybe God made a mistake.

On what grounds does he decide who stays and who goes?

Maybe it's one of those things we are never meant to know.

All we can do really is restart, play our parts and carry on with the show.

WHITE DOORS

Maria Kubiak
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FIRE!

I wake up immediately.
Where am i?
Who are these people?

I fall to the muddy ground...
A body, a body next me,
'Hey!', he doesn't answer.
My pupils become larger when my mind realizes what is going on...

I grab a gun,
Then i run,
Run as fast as i can

My heart is full of fear,
I feel that death is near,
SHOOT!
As my body become cold block
My life ends, and white doors are unlocked.

A DAY ALL YOUR OWN

Travis French
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With wedding bells swelling
And chocking on anticipation
They can all see it on your face
But you see the jealousy on theirs
A whole day dedicated to you
With a tear in his eye
He gives you away
To the man of your dreams
Wedding bells swell
And like a classic romance movie
We watch you drive off to celebrate
Your new life

A CHANCE TAKEN

Lydia Scott

of lidiewrath@gmail.com and <http://squidilypie.deviantart.com/>

The anger wells up,
Builds a giant wall
Separating me from reality.

The small opening at the base
Guarded by a dragon
Breathing fire and ash
Is dared by no one.

Years pass.
The wall remains.

Finally, one brave soul
Puts fate to the test
Attacks the beast head-on
Fights past the wall for me.

This man's bravery
Transformed a dangerous creature,
Quelled the constant rage
And freed a queer maiden.

There are struggles,
Many perilous quests
But the treasure at the end
Makes the journey worthwhile:
Happiness is our reward
At the end of this path.