

2017

Legacy 2016-2017

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The Legacy

2017

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Poetry

The Gallery

Beth Travis

When I was young, my father'd take me
To look at the paintings in the gallery
We'd gaze at them and there we'd stay
To discuss them in our special way
We'd debate the merit of deepest red
Found in paintings of war and kingdoms dead
We'd search each portrait for its blues
To grasp their melancholy hues
And in each drawing we'd find green
A herald of all things new, unseen
And with each new painting I would see
A portrait took its shape in me
Made rich with reds and greens and blues
And patterns only I could choose.

The day came when I left my home
And when I returned, the town had grown
I rushed straight to the gallery
To see how changed things would be
It had grown into a mighty hall
And a thousand portraits lined each wall
But I looked on them in sheer dismay
For in every piece there was naught but grey.

Gone were the reds with their passion and strife
Gone were the greens with their promise of life
Gone were the blues with their shades deep and bright
Gone, worst of all, were the black and the white.

I looked closely, I did, I truly tried
But nothing but greys would meet my eyes
They mixed and they mingled, they'd blemish and blend
Into a conundrum that no mind could mend
Mixed between White's pureness and Black's velvet thrall
They now became simply nothing at all

“No! This must not be!” I cried
With a swirl of my coat I strode outside.

I searched each shop along the street
Each one of them would friendly greet
But when asked what colors they had in store
Each put up the Closed sign and bolted the door.

And so I went home and from my shelf
I took all the books I had chosen myself
I took history books with their deeds and their wars
And I took all the reds they ever had stored
From many a memoir and stories quite true
I took a thousand shades of blue
And then I stooped and took my green
From tales of fiction and fantasy
Then I stood and, in the end
Took a leather-bound book whose pages were thin
Whose tales were true, whose councils were good
Whose most holy words were as crimson as blood.

So I took my colors and set them to paint
And I took up my brush and my pallet-plate
And when I was finished I saw what would be
The finest painting in the gallery.

I took it and hung it upon a white wall
As the visitors came and strolled the hall
And the colors on my canvas blazed
Among the quiet, muted greys
The people looked on with judgmental eyes
Then turned to “A Portrait of Compromise”
Nestled comfortably by a scene which portrayed
“The Virtues of Tolerance” in deep, gloomy greys
A man saw my picture, observed it deep red
“Why, what bigotry!” he said
One woman noted its rich, deep blues
“Oh, such a pessimist,” she enthused
Still a third passed by, recognizing my green
“Such idealism I have never seen.”

But I stayed by my portrait and day by day
Colors replaced those dark shades of grey
The red and the blue and the green rose again
I even saw some Black and White now and then
And every day and each new night
The gallery's colors shown more bright
They're not always good portraits of well-made scenes
But I smile to see them and I know what they mean
Someday I'll teach painters about those green hues
And the proper uses for the reds and the blues
But right now I smile to see them there
Constant companions to all who declare
"No. There'll be no greys for me
When I paint my portraits for the gallery."

Nothing to Forgive

Caitlyn Bartlett

As I was shoved into the dark and cave-like structure made for men,
A brief scene of my surroundings made its print upon my ken

The damp air hung as heavy as the weights I used to watch the strongmen lift,
And, as though indignant by my entrance, began lazily to shift

The cobwebs in the corners sagged with one to many bugs, the spider long since gone
The holes torn in them gaped – frozen in one eternal yawn

Then darkness all around me, engulfing me in the lonely grasp of doom
For no guarantee was there of freedom from this solitary room

The noise, a silence so profound it deafened me and made me want to hide
But where? When all to hide behind was gone, life's comforts all of which I was denied.

The long and lonely hours passed, told only by a faintly tolling bell,
Reminding me that life continued on beyond my dark and tiny cell

Once a day, a meal was served, passed through the metal door
Stale water and a crumb of bread so old that I could never stomach more.

Eventually, the stagnant cup became a blessed spring,
From whose refreshing depths my new washed soul could find a song to sing

The mold upon the elderly crumb became cirrus clouds above the earth
With freckles of a darker color added in for mirth

The silence became a time for God and I to see the anger in my heart
Against the ones who put me here, laughing as they did their evil part

After unchecked eternities, my captors set me free,
The war was over. I struck for home and loved ones I had longed to see

Years later as I walked in peace the very streets I'd once fought mightily to gain,
A man I vaguely recognized approached me as if in great and mental pain

His head was bowed, as though afraid I'd simply pass him by
Then he introduced himself to me, his manner hesitant and shy

It was the guard who'd fed me at the prison where I'd stayed so very long ago
And I realized I was speaking with a once forever foe.

He told his story of the cruelty he'd committed, his stature screamed unease.
His voice approached a whisper as he begged, "Forgive me. Please."

As my silence stretched the moments, the man began to pant.
And I believe he nearly fainted when I simply said, "I can't."

I reached to settle him upon his feet and took his hands in mine
And gave him my explanation carefully,

"My friend, when first I came, I hated all of you.
You shut me in a lonely box. Your deeds were cruel it's true.

"But time, and God, abounded there, and I learned truly how to live.
You gave to me a gift of Gold: there's nothing left now to forgive."

He broke and there we hugged, each trying to control the tears which down our faces flowed
And hand in hand, friends now at last, we walked on down the road.

Whatever I Wanted

Tierra Hayes

They told me I could be whatever I wanted
the nice tall teachers in the nice building
with the books and the chairs and the hand sanitizer that smelt of alcohol and cherries
and then I wanted
and I wanted
and I wanted
but I couldn't be
I struggled
but
but
but
you said
the words slipping from my mouth, a life of words to make me feel
important
smart
needed
middle school
high school
be what we want you to be they said
the not so tall teachers with the boards and the markers and the red ink pens
the ink flowing across my words
across the promise of being whatever I wanted
crossed out
correction fluid
until I fit in the box
of their expectations
five paragraphs
opening
body
supporting details
conclusion
good
be whatever you want to be, but do it in this box
don't color outside of the lines
we don't want that

we want nice, neat children
nice, neat names
nice, neat papers
nice, neat boxes
with less red ink
spilling across their words that are supposed to be mine
that I am supposed to want to write
because aren't I supposed to be whatever I want to be?

Colors of Life and Love

Elizabeth Dodd

Was never an artist.
Took a brush to a canvas, and nothin' came out.
Just white.
Silly me; I'd laugh and put it away,
Put it on a shelf,
Go to something else.
Tried to make words blossom and come to life beneath a sketcher's hand,
Hoping they'd fill with hue as bright as day as dark as night,
Watching as their color drained and emptied onto dusty ground.

But then he.

And he—so close all my life, so far away—
Drew out the colors of my heart
So that it bled onto my hands,
Stained with shades of love I had to hide.

Then he.

He held the brush, he drew the lines of the horizon,
Drew them far and forever,
Dotted the night with stars,
And burst paint balloons across the world.
The fields were the color of his eyes;
The sky was not blue, but an ocean.
He painted winter with white lace and
Rainstorms a trickling of silvery tears.
I remember my own eyes glowing bright;
The world became colorful.
He painted my life with spring.

Then he.

He let go to save the world,
To save me, he said.

He let go to be at peace,
He said.

But he.

He slipped away, and there I was,
Watching spring fade into winter,
Color of life draining with him
From the sky,
From my eyes,
From the sun itself.
Grey, draped in grey, dull and lonesome grey,
Where my soul was lost, my heart was searching,
But finding nothing,
No words of bright hue,
No sun to light the day.
Stars grew shadowed and distant;
The moon no longer pearly gem,
But dismal rock hung morbidly in the dead of night.
And there I was,
A colorless, featureless shape,
A ghost, a specter, grief itself,
Staring vacantly at these paintings of love,
Wondering how I saw nothing,
Then bursts of spring,
Then greyscale of death.

Storm

Alexis Jones

I used to think gentleness meant weakness.
Letting your heart and hands be borrowed
Being so vulnerable that you reek of leniency

Because people take that for granted,
And pull and tear and bruise and scar
And leave you with reoccurring thoughts of
Where you went wrong.

My hands have always been rough
I'm always running on eggshells
Not realizing that my words can pierce like blades,
My tone so sharp
It slits your thoughts

I bring the thunder out of clouds
The flooding of hurricanes
And the sparks of forest fires.
I am the catalyst of all reactions,
My waves are too powerful
To silence any storm within me.

I'm too hard to swallow
I have volcanic tendencies
I am the collision, the crash,
The ultimate catastrophe

How can You love me?
How can You love restlessness and impulse?
How do You love me the way I am, yet transform me into who You want me to be?
I know, I know I'm temperamental and high-strung
But you let Your grace and mercy
Intertwine with my strings to pull me in closer.

Lord, I know You bring peace like a river

So let me sing it is well.
Let me be still.
Teach me how to be gentle.

Mirror

Able Sankovik

I looked in the mirror, And what did I see;
 A man with no soul.
The mirror looked at me, And what did it see;
 A man with no eyes.
I looked away from the mirror with no eyes,
To again see my reflection, In the dripping water;
 A man with no soul.
The water cast a glance at me, To see me looking back;
 A man with no eyes.
I slumped to the floor, With my chin on my hands;
 I, the man with no eyes.
 What had I seen.
 For what did I give my soul.
As I sat the filling water overflowed,
And what did I chance to see, In the pool gathering at my feet;
 A man with no soul.
The water gathered at my bare feet, And what did it chance to see;
 A man with no eyes.
The water gurgled and flowed around, Rising higher as it did;
 Rising higher and higher.
It poured through my eyes, Into my body;
 Trying to find a soul.
But it could not, For I am a man,
 A man with no eyes.
I stood to my feet.
Again, I look in the mirror, And what did I see;
 A man with no soul,
 A man who lost his soul,
 For something to see,
 A man who lost his eyes,
 For something new,
I am man.
 I stand at the mirror.
I clothe myself, And look away;
For I cannot see,
 I have no eyes.

I'm Perfection

Able Sankovik

Perfect in its imperfection

The cracks are showing the way

The way to a life apart

Imperfect in its imperfection

A smooth heart, not beating,

not beating for you

Perfection,

without crack or blemish

Imperfection,

with all but perfect

The cracks are filled with gold

A smooth heart, still not beating

The golden cracks in the heart

Showing your way to me

We are perfect imperfections,

of what we should never be

All of the Who

Able Sankovik

A man; a man who was once a peasant.

A peasant; a peasant who was once a knight.

A knight; a knight who was once a king.

All of these are not who they once were.

All of these are not who they want to be.

All of these are not who they will be.

Who were they?

Who do they want to be?

Who will they be now?

A king; a king who was once a man.

Daphné's Song

Sarah Hunt

Apollo
sings the song of destruction,
of want, unwanted advance.
Zephyrs, carry my voice to Olympus,
till my nails split,
sprouting tendrils of newly birthed leaves.

The first blood he would have spilled
turns to sap, heavy, leaden, golden--pure,
Skin the bark and marrow the wick.
Fingers! Fulfill yourself to branches,
Feet! Still! Take root.
Let the toes dig deeper than the mud between them,
pulsing drive into the ground,
to the earth from whence we came,
dust to dust.
Limbs, twine round my waist,
hide the breasts he so covets,
make them rough.
Fuse the legs, the lips, he sought to part
in haven chamber,
wrapped in ring upon ring of aged silence.
Laurus nobilis noble, sexless.
As the bark closes over my mouth,
Untouched.
Safe.

Transform

Jacklyn Ruth

Most people say that they don't believe in magic.

I believe in a certain kind of magic,

A magic where a person transforms before your eyes.

Nothing about them has really changed,

But suddenly you see them with new eyes.

You may have seen that person from afar, gave no second thought.

And then you meet.

Call it fate, call it destiny, call it a coincidence.

But you meet.

And you click

And you talk

And you connect.

And the next time you look at that person, they look different

What may have repulsed you days before doesn't anymore.

You know what that's called?

A transformation.

The Light

Zakeya Sisco

My mind in a cocoon's world
Trapped, confused, alone
Darkness is all I see
But in this world enslaved
Is not the place for me.

Quietly waiting for a way of escape
A crack of light shone through
This light was no ordinary light
For my confused mind became renewed

My mind opened
My thoughts became clear
Humility became my reality
And meekness my priority

In tears I clung to this marvelous Light
I opened my heart and surrendered
Determined not to let Him out of my sight
For darkness I would no more remember.

He whispered to me, I am the Light of your world
Abide in me and I will abide in you
I will transform you through and through
I will make all things new

You are a new creation set aside for a holy purpose
I will fill you with My Spirit
I will equip you
I will empower you
I will use you for service.

You are set free
So let your light so shine before men
That they may see your good works

And glorify your Father, which is in heaven.

This Light became the light of my world
Transformed me and set my spirit free.

Here I Go Again

Stefan Heldzinger

Here I go again
Oh Lord the decisions I've made
I say I'll change but then...
I don't want this to stay the same
I want my life to prove
That there's more
It's not just a game
But I'm trying on my own
And I'm the one to blame
I need your heart Lord
Your promises I'll claim
I've let her down
But that's not my aim
It's breaking my heart
I don't want to lose our flame
I'm struggling to win
What you already overcame
I don't want this
I feel so ashamed
Come take the reins
She and I
Take us Lord
Keep us in your love
The amazingness of the thought
This peace only comes from above
My actions have pushed her away
But Lord she's the greatest gift I've received
I want her to stay
My resolutions are ropes of sand
I think I'm able
I say I can
But Lord I'm lost without You
Take this wayward man
I'm weak and unable
But You are I AM

Draw us close
Hold us in the palm of your hand
My strength I cannot trust
But oh Lord I look to you
You are a must
I'm all in for you God
Without You we'll bust
Take my desires
The things I yearn for
Everything I admire
And bring your presence into the center
Light us up like a blazing fire
May You illuminate Your purpose in our lives
Keep us on track
Because I love her
I don't want to say goodbye
In this moment I surrender all
I want none of me
I'll take the fall
Because You are more
With You we'll have it all
And that's my prayer
Her hand in mine
Walking side by side
No worries no fears just trust
With You as our Guide
Enjoying the rays of the sunset
Seeing our footprints washed away by the tide
Looking into her eyes
Calling her my bride

When I Was Little

Marslinny Mawuntu

When I was little,
I thought I had the whole world to myself.
My selfish desires transpired into a song
I felt everyone needed to hear.
A song that sings millions
Though words are mute
But to me,
The world was deaf.
When I was little,
I would watch the time
Fly by
Tick tock, tick—
Talking to myself about the ways
That one day, I could change the world.
When I was little,
Instead the world changed me.
Society would lie to me
And try to mask my plea
Of being who I was,
Being who I am,
Being who I will be
Because they thought they had the authority.
When I was little,
People clothed me in invisible garments
Of don'ts and can'ts
From my shirt to my pants.
I looked in the mirror at my reflection
And saw no direction
But a collection of names
Etched on my face; but the skin-tone ink
Could never be erased.
When I was little,
I thought that our past mistakes
Dictated the choices we'd make,
My world was shaking

Violently at sight of losing myself
And gaining the world.
But now that I'm older,
I've learned that the scars of enmity
That marred my serenity
No longer are the factors
That define my identity.
Who I was, who I am, who I will be
Will forever be
Me.

Short Stories

To the Person I Once Loved

Sierra Correia

I tried to create another word, another euphemism for what I felt for you. But love? It was as simple as that. Because I did. Once. But falling was never really my style, so I walked into it, smacked my face, and rubbed my aching nose and held my head high knowing that I was walking into the stupidest and most illogical decision of my life. I drew my stubbornness around me like it was a leather jacket and did it anyways. I was just a person who cared too much about most things, including you. I had hoped that my “too much” care would be enough for the both of us.

I look at us now and think: what have we done with our lives? What decisions did we make that led us to that last meeting with your remorse (at how the situation had turned out or how I could barely look you in your eyes – I couldn’t decide) and my revulsion. And in that moment, as the rain poured down all around us while I stared at each little droplet, with my back in black facing your kicked puppy expression, you asked me what you had done and why I hated you. That was when I realized that, not only did you clearly not know me, you had yet to grow up.

See, that boy I met all those years ago, he, too, was a selfish person. With clumsy hands, he tried his best to create, but in the same breath he wrecked everything around, crushing and smashing it to pieces. And I stood by in the path of his destruction, hoping that my care and sympathy would be enough. Until he, too, walked all over me. I look at us then, and I wonder if I am the same

person as well. The same girl who believes love is a fantasy, who writes tragedies because that's all she knows. The same girl who tries to hide a heart with "too much" care. Is it I who has yet to evolve and change and grow?

You're hardly in my thoughts nowadays. It's so strange to think that someone who was once such an integral part of my life – so ingrained that, back then, to think of a world without you was almost unfathomable – could vanish as if they'd never been there in the first place.

Sometimes I imagine what it would be like to see you again, after all this time, what I'd say, what I'd do. If I'd be able to look at you without seeing a ghost of my past. If I could acknowledge that you were not the only one at fault, that I had my own part in the grand scheme of how everything fell apart. I definitely wasn't the best of everything, that much was true. And sometimes I find myself wondering if, perhaps, I simply wasn't enough. But, in this way, I have grown, haven't I? Because saying it aloud is almost like seeing it written before me. I can see the hole in each word, how the sentence is barely holding itself together with transparent, pure intentions and sinking under the weight of its lie. In this way, I am not the same child who wrinkled her nose to hide a smile at some stupid thing you said. I am not the same girl who eased your guilt with false smiles and told you what you wanted to hear.

I've learned a few things in the time we've spent apart. Not much, but enough to compile into a short list, and a parting gift, if you will. Firstly, love may be a temporary, fickle thing, but it is quite real, easy to see and hear and touch. I know now that whatever you felt for me was not it, and as much as I would like to dismiss whatever I felt for you, I know that, in our little infinity,

my feelings for you were probably the largest idea that I have ever experienced. Secondly, the sad fact of life is that tragedies are unavoidable, no matter how hard we kick and scream. It took me a while to make my peace with reality, but perhaps, someday, you will too. And lastly, finally, you'll be happy to learn – or, at least, some distant part of me feels that you will – that I no longer fear the idea of having a heart with emotions that leak out at the most inconvenient of times. It's how we learn, it's how we grow. It's what makes us human.

It's sad to think that I had to discover all these things without you and that somehow, without even realizing it, I've outgrown you in a way that I can never undo. You seem so far away from me now, and there's this almost tangible distance between us, one that I'll never be able to reach across. I think I'm okay with that now, the idea of you never coming back, of me failing to chase after you. We're different now, for better or worse.

And yet, we've still got a lot of growing to do.

Sincerely,

The Person Who Once Loved You

Empty Spaces

Farrah Daniel

The blood refused to stop spilling. I stared out the window with hazed, blurry vision. Wet fingers pressed against the glass. My sister's fading voice was shrill as she frantically zipped in and out of traffic. Her face reddening and fingers threatening to burn right through the steering wheel, she threw horrified glances in my direction as I seemingly dissolved into my seat. I imagined her tone to be a striking shade of red: piercing and feverish. Though, her fiery spirit was dwindling, and she was melting right alongside my embers of consciousness. Sounds and images slowly began to evaporate. I felt weightless and airy, floating through a part of the universe I didn't know existed.

•

My hands gravitated to my blooming abdomen. I sighed in relief and caressed my belly, immersing myself in thoughts of the life growing inside me. Falling deeply into my imagination, I smiled as I envisioned my baby cooing and curdling in my ear, taking her first steps as I cheer on enthusiastically. I turned over in my bed and extended my hand toward Dixon, longing to feel his warmth. I drearly opened my eyes upon feeling the vacancy and was sorely greeted by blinding fluorescent lights accompanied by the sharp tinge of an IV in my arm. Sirens screeched and shrieked in every quadrant of my brain. Numbing vibrations echoed through my body.

What's happening?

I turned and spotted Dixon sleeping uncomfortably in the corner. Suddenly, I remembered.

Snapshots of blood running down my leg painted the walls of my mind. There it was again—red.

My chest thumped relentlessly like a child discovering pots and pans. I heaved loudly as the pieces of the puzzle began to reveal the truth.

“Di-Dixon,” I sputtered.

He wasn’t waking up. Struggling to clear my throat, I growled his name in hopes of rousing him. He stirred for a moment, then adjusted to being conscious. His eyes opened widely upon seeing me lucid, then immediately glossed over.

“It’s gone. You lost the baby.” He straightened himself up in his chair and avoided my eyes.

Even through my hospital gown, the beauty of my round belly shone. From the moment of its growth, it created a light inside me that was visible to the world. It housed a connection I felt with my baby, and I was still riding the waves of that high. My face grew wet with tears. The gruesome images increasingly bombarded my thoughts, the room appeared to be spinning, and my abdomen was cramping sorely. There was a ringing in my ear and a heaviness in my chest that overwhelmed the pain my body produced.

“Come on little baby, come on. You’re still with me, aren’t you?”

Woefully, I sang to my baby.

“Lullaby, and sleep tight, my darling sleeping.

On sheets white as cream, with a head full of dreams.”

I held my belly, and I sang a song from the depths of my heart.

“Sleepyhead, close your eyes, I’m right beside you.

Lay thee down now and rest, may your slumber be blessed.”

I sang as the nurse sat beside me and rubbed my back. I sang even though Dixon commanded me to stop. I sang with my body, with the very motherhood I had adopted in the few months that I carried my child.

“Lullaby, and good night, you are mother's delight.

I'll protect you from harm, and you'll wake in my arms.”

I sang with the sorrow that captivated me because this feeling of loss was unnatural. How could anyone feel this much sadness and not wither away?

“Guardian angels are near, so sleep without fear.”

Dixon paced furiously as I sang through the lumps in my throat and the cold glares he threw at me. My body was frozen. I wanted to break into a million little pieces, but my baby's song held me together. It wrapped its arms around me and rocked me into healing. I sang until the words could no longer form and were replaced by cries of mourning and defeat.

Practically a stranger at this point, my husband stepped to me and barked, “It's over, Victoria. The baby is dead, you are singing to no one. Stop it. You have to stop.”

I waited to feel a morsel of anger or sadness from his neglect, but nothing ached more than my empty womb.

•

“Why are you doing that?”

I've been home for three days. Each passing day has been more morose than the last, and my assumption that I would be numb by this point was incorrect. Dixon grunts and mumbles, shrugs instead of speaks, and I haven't had it in me to fight. Until now. With the sleeves of his shirt

rolled up, his tie slacked, and beads of sweat rolling down his sulking face, Dixon hacks away at the remnants of the rocking chair we put together. Unscrewing pieces bit by bit, he throws each removed part, adding to the pile of destroyed baby furniture that once contained the anticipated existence of our child. My child.

“We don’t need these things anymore,” he declares.

“And what right do you have to decide that on your own? You didn’t discuss this with me first. How dare you?”

He froze. Slowly turning around to face me while still holding onto what would’ve been the arm of the chair Dixon began to laugh menacingly. His cold eyes danced in the contempt I knew he had for me.

“How dare I, Victoria? Really? How dare you?” He inched himself closer to me until I could feel his breath above my upper lip. “How dare you come in here and ask me why I’m doing this when you’re the reason why!”

The pace of my heartbeat quickened, my stomach began to flutter, and nausea was so deeply buried in my bones I thought I might faint from the pressure.

“Every woman I know has carried their baby to full term, but you...,” he chuckled. “You with your cravings and your...your obsession with your job. You carried on with the stress, you kept forgetting to take your prenatal pills. You were lazy. You didn’t take care of it, Victoria. You failed.”

When I was 12, I accidentally drove my bicycle into the side of a car and I remember thinking that I’d never feel a pain greater than the soreness that invaded my body for weeks. Of course, I

was proved wrong through different occasions of physical and emotional pain, but here I am thinking the same thing again.

“You failed.”

“You failed me, you failed your family, and now you saunter in here and dare ask why I don’t want to look at this anymore. Who do you think you are?”

Tears began to fall from his eyes, but I couldn’t see past his darkness. The veins bursting out of his neck were throbbing as the hairs on his arms stood erectly, unwavering in the midst of our harsh winter. There was no love. No warmth. He loathed me. My husband stood before me, and while I saw him, he saw an enemy. I studied the frown that had been plastered on his face since the moment I awoke in the hospital. I took in his brown eyes, thinking of how I loved watching them twinkle in the mysterious radiance of the moon.

I wonder if our child would’ve had his eyes.

I could tell he awaited a response, but I didn’t have one. All I could do was pull his hand toward my belly and let it rest.

“Let’s play pretend,” I whispered with hope glimmering in my sad eyes.

With his hand in mine, I guided him to my hollow womb and searched for a heart beat in his eyes. Feeling his palm grip the round surface, I breathed a sigh of relief and inhaled the compassion that emanated from his intimate touch. Before I could exhale, Dixon’s hand fell. The connection was lost and he was wiping away his tears.

“I don’t have time for this.”

Quickly turning his back to me, Dixon made his way to his office as my plea for his return was answered by the slamming of his door.

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I didn't know for sure, but I believed we were having a girl.

Amelia.

I fantasized about taking her to a quaint park. The neighborhood mothers would peer at her and inquire about my feeding schedule, whether she's colicky, and if I was getting any sleep. I'd welcome their advice about how to trust babysitters or what to do when I was certain that she hated me.

Sitting on the newly painted bench, I took in my surroundings as the laughter and screams of playing children both soothed and saddened me. Before I could entertain another thought, a little girl with a messy ponytail plopped down right beside me. Her tiny legs swayed excitedly as she hurriedly ate a red, melting popsicle, oblivious to the fact that it was staining the sides of her mouth and her clothes. I stared at her in fascination. She looked to be about 7, and I began to wonder about what kind of thoughts swirled around my head at that age. Feeling my shameless eyes on her, she turned to look at me and smiled genuinely, flashing an incomplete grin that displayed several missing teeth. I could tell she didn't think I was strange. As I sat up and prepared my things to leave, her squeaky voice piped out.

"Are you Nathan's mommy?" She continued to kick her legs, her body bouncing along with the swinging.

"Uh, no. I just...I'm just sitting here. What's your name?"

“Elyse.”

“Hi Elyse. I’m Victoria.”

She returned to her popsicle as we sat in a comfortable silence, neither of us mindful of her now sticky, candy red face. “Why do you look so sad, Victoria?”

Elyse’s concern startled me. I wasn’t aware that I appeared as somber as I felt.

“Well, I...lost something that was very special to me.”

She thought about this for a moment then said, “Our dog ran away once and I cried a whole lot, but then Pickle came home! Maybe you’ll get your thing back, too.”

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I found Dixon sitting on the floor of Amelia’s room. The sun was setting and it shone a mixture of lazy orange and pink rays into the unveiled window. I stood in the doorway and admired his athletic frame as his fingers danced along the edges of scattered wood fragments. The door creaked as I leaned more heavily on it, and he turned to face me. His eyes exposed his sorrow and defeat, the startling confusion that had stumped him. His shoulders sunk, and he wept.

“Vic...I...I don’t...,” he stuttered.

He was as broken as me. A chill went through my spine, and I was reminded of the first time I saw him. It wasn’t love at first sight, but time certainly stopped moving as I was swept up in the shiver that consumed me when I watched him that day. Now here we were. Dizzy and out of breath, inhaling the fumes of grief. I knelt and lay on my back, feeling the plush material of the baby’s rug on my skin. Little by little, tears flowed from the corner of my eyes.

“I don’t know how it happened.”

I confessed to the twilight of the dusky sky. Swallowing my husband's darkness, I placed my head on his lap. He stroked my locks and we wandered about in each other's mystery. We stared intently at one another as despair dripped from his eyes like the melting cherry popsicle. Dixon's hand timidly reached for my womb. He let his palm settle, and I closed my eyes as he submerged himself in the abyss.

First Born

Sarah Hunt

The hound at Joscham's feet stirred, but he was so absorbed in his work that he hardly noticed. Something of a dinner sat before him untouched, hundreds of drawings littered the door: measurements, designs, plans, none good enough. The hound let out a single bark, and then Joscham heard knuckles rap across his door. The sun had been down for hours-- the knock was oddly loud. Suspicious, he hefted his smith's hammer to his shoulder before trudging to the door. Cautiously, he opened it. A cloaked figure swayed before him in the night wind.

"Who goes?" the blacksmith asked.

"I see you've done well for yourself. This is a richer house than I found you in."

He recoiled at the familiar voice. "You."

"Aye, me," the witch said. "Now let me in."

He stepped aside, and she blew into the room with blast of night air, scattering across the stone floor the sketches he'd been working on.

"I suppose you've come to collect."

"Och-- look how bright you are," the witch mocked. "But, you haven't wasted your purchase, I see," she murmured, admiring a finely made sword that hung on the wall. The cottage was filled with finely wrought pieces of armor and weaponry, elaborately carved and burnished to gleaming.

"Word of you has reached over the mountains, the best smith in the land, they say. Heard you had earned a commission from Lord Dubhshlaine himself. A wonderful gift of the gods they say, though they should be giving me the credit. But here. I haven't all the time in the world, where is the child?"

“Merlin!” Joscham bellowed. A light crash brought a small boy tumbling into the room. He was waif thin, with scraggly hair and deep-set grey eyes. He stood trembling before his father and the witch, terrified.

“Seven years ought to make one taller and fatter than that,” the witch commented, a softer tone gracing her voice. “What do you feed him?”

“I don’t. He gets fed if he gets his work done.”

“I see. Well, then, he’ll do.”

“He’ll do whatever you tell him. Beat him if he needs it. You should pay me for what I’ll lose. I’ll have to hire a servant with the bastard gone. He’s worth at least fifty crowns.”

Fire flashed in the woman’s eyes, and with a snap of her fingers, Joscham’s hands were suddenly aglow with an ethereal blue light.

“And what’s your gift worth? Your firstborn and what else? I can take it away as easily as I gave it. Did you ever tell the boy how you groveled and begged? ‘Oh please, mistress, I want to be rich mistress, make me the best smith in the land, mistress.’ And what did I tell you?”

The horrified Joscham looked up at her pleading.

“All magic has a price,” he whispered.

“What did you say?”

“All magic has a price!”

“Aye. Now, you can keep the gift or keep the boy. A fair price you agreed to.”

“Take the boy! Take the boy!” Joscham shrieked. The blue light disappeared, and the smith collapsed back against the table, inspecting and flexing his hands.

“Now, Merlin, come with me,” the witch said, extending her hand to the frightened boy. He recoiled. She pushed her hood back to reveal a gentle, middle-aged face, but still he hung back.

“Now there, my sweet, it’s quite alright. I won’t hurt you.” The boy still refused to go to her.

“Who are you?” He asked in a trembling voice.

“My dear child, I can be anyone you like. Who do you want most in the world?” The witch asked softly.

Nervously, Merlin glanced over at his father, who was ignoring their conversation, busily scribbling away at his drawings.

“I want my mother,” he said quietly, staring at the floor.

“Of course you do, child,” she said softly. As she spoke, her voice changed to a lighter, familiar, warmer tone. The boy looked up—and it was his mother’s face before him in the witch’s clothing.

“Mama!” Merlin gasped quietly, staring into his mother’s face. “Mama, father said you died?”

“Those we love never die, darling, they continue to live as long as we love them. Now come, I’ll take you home.”

Eagerly, Merlin took her hand. Wrapping him in her cloak, she whisked him out the door, leaving Joscham still madly scribbling at his table.