

70<sup>th</sup> year  
**THE MOTLEY**  
SPRING 2019



# The Motley

Student Art and Literature at Spring Hill College  
*Spring 2019*

*O noble fool!*  
*A worthy fool! Motley's the only wear.*  
**As You Like It, II, 7**

# Table of Contents

## Short Stories

<i>Eating is a chore.</i> by Oliva McNorton .....	4
<i>Dizzy</i> by Caroline Moran .....	13
<i>Ghost</i> by Mason Mitchell .....	16
<i>Sunshine in a Bag</i> by Josh Collins .....	22

## Poetry

<i>A Boombox in Spring</i> by Samm Brown .....	10
<i>Trifecta of Trash</i> by Matty B. ....	10
<i>Ode to My Grandpa</i> by Erianna Roy .....	11
<i>These Halls</i> by Allyssa Litton .....	12
<i>Growing Patience</i> by Bryan Dunn .....	15
<i>Ode to the Flag</i> by J. Davalin .....	20

## Art

<i>Freespirit</i> by Bailey Parish .....	Cover
<i>Bones</i> by Laura Krall .....	9
<i>Untitled</i> by Caroline Moran .....	14
<i>Xacax</i> by Veronica Christensen .....	21

### With works by

Christy Wallace, *The Motley*, 1991  
Joelle Bernhardt, *The Motley*, Spring 2007  
Daniel Creagan, S.J., *The Motley*, Spring 1982  
Laura Kaffer, *The Motley*, Spring 1978

## *Why the Motley? Why such a puzzling title?*

Well, in days of yore one of the most engaging figures in the royal court was the jester, a character who seemed to embody a puzzling union of several characteristics: wisdom and buffoonery, profundity and foolishness, gravity and frivolity. Dressed in his colorful costume, the motley, the Jester enjoyed a favored position. Never regarded completely seriously by anyone, least of all himself, he was free to pass comments on any subject under the sun, sometimes piquantly, sometimes displaying a certain wisdom, almost always entertainingly. Most important of all, the Jester's sole aim was to provide amusement for the king.

It is from this that we draw our analogy.

We have chosen the motley for our garb to serve as an indication of both our spirit and our scope. We hope to incorporate in these pages a wide and varied choice of subjects, all the while not taking ourselves too seriously and making no pretense at being definitive.

Thus, like the famous juggler who entertained Our Lady, we offer our efforts for the pleasure of our Monarch: Christ the King.

We are His jesters.  
This is our Motley.

- *The Motley, Volume I, 1949*

*Eating is a chore.* by Olivia McNorton

I.

In my dreams, I can smell the sweet aroma of maple syrup. I can hear the sizzle of bacon cooking in the skillet, and my mouth waters.

Familiarity washes over me. I am eleven years old, a budding adolescent, as innocent as can be. My mother is cooking breakfast for my father, who will be leaving for work immediately after. He had the occupation of carrying cargo all across the country. He provided thousands of businesses the products they would sell to happy customers. He essentially provided happiness to everyone, all while supporting our economy. I embellish. He was a truck driver. He couldn't even make himself happy.

I bounce out of bed, my mouth watering. I already see myself sitting down, my mother slapping down a plate with three large pancakes and four pieces of bacon in front of me. The butter rests besides me, beckoning me to spread it all over those pancakes, so it may enrich the flavor. The maple syrup, that regal bottle of sweetness, begs to release its contents so it may create that alluring medley of sweet and savory.

*Pass the butter, Shannon.*

This delightful pancake and bacon breakfast were a gift from God, one that he only gave a few times a year, the days when my father would leave us. My mother always made sure to make her best recipes those few weekends she saw her husband; the remaining days were full of cereal, fast food, and instant mac and cheese.

*I said pass the goddamn butter, Shannon.*

I sit at the table, my father at one end and I at the other. My mother was at the stove, lovingly flipping each pancake, tending to every strip of bacon. While she had dutifully cooked my father enough food to feed the entire U.S. Army (and my father would be eating 99% of it), she had forgotten to put the butter directly in front of him.

*I will sweetheart, I just need to watch this bacon for one more minute or it will burn.*

My father groans loudly. It's difficult as a timid, eleven-year old to know what I should do in this situation. The most obvious answer is to get the butter myself, so my mother can stay at the stove.

*I've got it, mom!*

Scoping up the butter from the counter and placing it on the table should've been an easy, mundane task that took 15 seconds and was forgotten by everyone as soon as it happened. But that's not what occurred. I did pick up the butter from the counter, but it did not make it

to the table. It instead found its place on my father's shirt, as I tripped on my way to the table.

I'm sor-

I couldn't even get my apology out before he smacked my face. I fell to the floor, stunned, but not quite sure why. Hadn't he done this before?

*Get your ass back to your room you dumb fuck! Get the fuck away from my food! Goddamn Shannon, I have to leave in 10 fucking minutes! I don't want you touching any of this food, you little cu-*

I wake up. I'm flustered, resentful, sorry. I feel my stomach growling. Goddamnit.

## II.

The day is beginning. I dress, brush my hair, turn the tv on, open my refrigerator and stare at the insides for a few moments, put my shoes on, and head out the door. The air is crisp, the streets are busy with people walking to and fro. Anxious-looking parents are hurrying to get their kid to school, who took a little too much time getting out of bed this morning. You can see in their faces that they can't wait till their kids can do this on their own.

My nose catches an alluring smell. The stupid pesk. I've tried to cut it off a few times. I usually chicken out once I feel the blade on my bridge. I'd look quite hideous without a nose, right? But once while heavily intoxicated, I managed to press down the handle a bit and put a nice nick on the tip. Nothing makeup won't cover.

I'm walking towards the scent, the aroma growing stronger as I walk on. My stomach clenches. I see people past by holding hot dogs, parents hurriedly handing them to their kids so they'll shut up. College students carrying three at a time, hoping that through each bite, stress will escape their body. I see ahead that the hot dog stand is conveniently located next to a pedestrian crossing I stop at every morning. Convenient for him, inconvenient for me.

I stop once I reach the signal, waiting for it to turn so I may leave the cursed place. That's what it is now, a cursed place. From the business the fat, burly man is getting from this spot, he won't be leaving anytime soon. My stomach won't stop growling, imploring me to indulge myself in the worthless treat. I'll have to find a new route to work.

“Ey, ma'am, you want a hot dog? Only \$3” He reaches out to me, taunting me. He can hear my stomach begging me for it. I watch him handing the decadent things out to happy customers. Some are covered in ketchup, some in mustard, others in chili. I would order one with all three, and relish too. I can taste all the flavors culminating onto my

tongue. The juicy meat, the fresh warm bun, tangy mustard, the flavorsome chili.

I turn to him. “No.” I spit the words out. Annoyed that he would ask me when I clearly wasn’t interested. Annoyed by his existence, annoyed that of all the busy crossings, he chose one of mine. Annoyed that he sells such an enticing treat. Annoyed that I want it. Annoyed that I can’t have it.

I make it to work eventually. My stomach won’t stop growling.

### III.

“You ready for lunch?” My coworker asks me. He sits at the desk directly in front of me. He asks me this every day.

I smile widely, teeth showing, “Oh yes! I can’t wait, I’m starving. I feel like I haven’t eaten in days!” I chuckle at this and he smiles back.

“Heard the boss is taking us somewhere really nice, since the new issue is about to release.”

Oh yes, the new issue. The one in which I wrote an article about why my readers MUST sink their teeth into Sri Lankan cuisine, telling them of my fabulous adventures in the darling Sri Lankan neighborhood a pleasant walk away from my house. How I dine there so much that the adorable Sri Lankan couple who’ve been married for 87 years know me by name and *oh the venue is simply divine!*

“I hope Isuru and Fathima get tons of business from my article! They deserve it!” Can’t that fat slob of a boss just stuff his face full of the usual meatball footlong he orders for lunch? The lucky bastard.

“I’m sure they will, you’re such a good writer, you have such a way with words. You know, I’ve eaten at all the places you’ve suggested in the magazine, and your blog.” He looked down sheepishly.

The pest. Always flirting. “Thank you, that means so much to me!” I wink and turn away. I guess I do lead him on, don’t I? I don’t want to, I’d love to stop incessantly smiling and winking at this poor man, he doesn’t deserve believing he has a shot when there’s no target to begin with. This facade has gone on for too long though, I can’t stop now.

My head is spinning with calculations. I didn’t plan on a lunch with the coworkers today. Usually they happen once a week, but are announced the week prior so I can make my calculations ahead of time. Now I’m left with minutes to figure out this unexpected outing.

The best option is to opt out. Blame an upset stomach from dinner last night: *I guess I had a little too much Mexican last night, if you know what I mean!* Or blame it on work: *I just have so much to do and so little time!* This wouldn’t be difficult, except this lunch may hold some importance. A big issue just released, which leads to big news being told



at a fancy lunch outing. Plus, I know I would be a highly discussed subject at this lunch if I didn't attend. *She's so weird. But what does it matter? She only ever orders a side anytime she comes, no wonder she's so bony.* Damn it.

#### IV.

"I'll take the Chicken Cordon Bleu, with lobster macaroni and cheese and potatoes au gratin. Oh, and a glass of Rose, please." The waitress nodded her head at my coworker sitting next to me, patiently taking her order.

I weighed my options. I could order a side, as I always do. But then all my coworkers would look at me. *Is she anorexic? She never eats. She's so skinny, like a string bean. You know, that's what her father used to tell her. That she'd never get married because she was so skinny. It was so disgusting. Can't you gain a little weight?*

"And for you, ma'am?" The waitress is looking at me, pen ready.

But if I order even the smallest of sides, the steamed asparagus, for example, this completely ruins my schedule. I planned on a sizeable meal this evening, something to congratulate myself on a job well-done. This month's segment was so incredibly difficult, after all. Having to beg the old Sri Lankan couple to take a photo with me and look decent. Which was hard considering that they had never laid eyes on me before, and here I was asking them to smile like I was an old friend that came for lunch every Tuesday and Thursday.

"Are you not ready yet, ma'am? The waitress was growing impatient. Everyone was, I could feel that watching me, wishing I would just say something so she could move along to them. They were hungry, it wasn't every day that the boss decides to treat everyone to a 5-state restaurant, was it? *This dumb bitch looks like she's never even eaten before, she's so thin. Paper thin, you could cut right through her. That doesn't sound like such a bad idea after all. Doug, get the scis-*

"I'll take the same thing as her." I smiled widely and motioned to the woman who had ordered her Chicken Cordon Bleu before.

"Do you want the lobster macaroni and cheese and potatoes au gratin too?"

"Oh yes!"

"And the glass of Rose?"

I nodded early and winked. "Bring plenty of it!"

#### V.

When I get home, I run to the bathroom, slamming the door and sinking down. I've done it. I ate that entire plate. I want to say it was

delectable. The best meal I've ever had, nothing else will ever recreate the joy I experienced with every bite.

Truthfully, I can't. It was average at best. The chicken was chewy, the sauce was underwhelming. The potatoes au gratin was dry and unsatisfying. The entire plate was unsatisfying. The restaurant was a B- at best.

Yet, it was the most delicious meal I've ever encountered. For a moment I could taste freedom. I looked around and realized I was like everyone else: happily eating the food set before me. I wasn't worried about how it would affect my body after. That with each precious bite, another layer of fat was being added to my stomach.

The euphoria only lasted a moment. I looked down at my plate and saw nothing. I had eaten the entire lunch. I was stunned. My plan was to only eat half, and if a coworker looked at me concerningly, I would simply smile and say, "*Ah, I'm just not very hungry!*" or "*I can't eat, just thinking about how amazing Isuru and Fathima are!*" I could work with half. Half wasn't as bothersome. A minor inconvenience that could be dealt with quite easily.

But I had really went and done it, hadn't I? I'm so fucking stupid. A fat cow, not smart enough and too ugly to be considered a human being. I could feel the fat settling on my body. The extra pounds were already there.

*I couldn't help it, I plead with myself, I tried so hard, I truly did. But it was so good. The chicken, the potatoes, the steamed asparagus! Such a perfect, dreamy combination of flavors. I haven't eaten a full meal in weeks. I can't have just this one? I promise it will be the last one. No more after this. I will say no next time, and every time after that. I was just so hungry, it was torture to see everyone else eat while I ate nothing. You saw the way they were looking at me, didn't you? They know. They know what you do.*

My words don't reach me. I'm already at the toilet, my face hovering over it.

*Please don't. I don't want to do this again.*

I shove two fingers down my throat. Others use more glamorous means, like a toothbrush. But fingers always get the job done. They're always on hand too.

*That hurts, stop it.*

I can feel my fingernails scratching my throat. I must've skipped a clipping or something, how foolish of me. The common misconception here is that I don't know the danger of what I'm doing. I'm aware that I can bruise my esophagus. I'm aware I can cause internal bleeding. That's

why I normally keep my fingernails nice and low. Don't blame me for missing one clipping.

*I hate you.*

The food comes up easily enough. But it's not enough. Once is rarely enough. *C'mon, that's barely anything. You ate much more than that. More.*

Five times does the trick. I look down at once was in my stomach. The smell is revolting. I can feel it in my mouth, in my nose. I'm surrounded by my own repulsiveness. How many times have I done this before? It must be a thousand at this point. Day after day. Sometimes twice a day. The most was thrice, after attending a coworker's wedding all day. Weddings are trivial affairs.

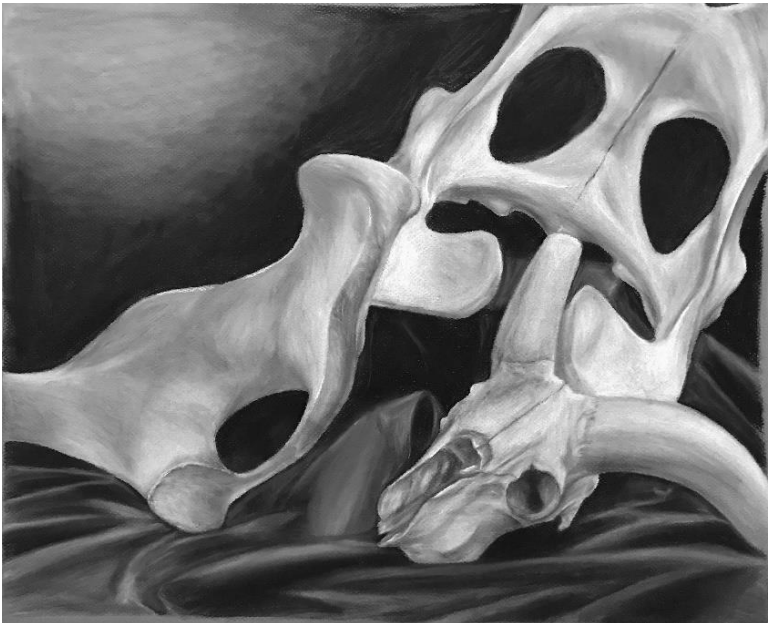
I sink to the floor, my back pressed against the cold tiled floor. I look up at the fluorescent lights above me. My bright sun in the midst of my pristine kingdom.

I think back to that delectable lunch I had early. What I wouldn't do to taste that Chicken Cordon Blue for the first time!

*It wasn't very good. You just wanted to gorge yourself, you fat pig.*

I become aware of a substance on my fingers. I bring my hand in front of my face. The dark blood on my fingers is a stark contrast against the white lights.

I chuckle. Eating is a chore.



*A Boombox in Spring* by Samm Brown

Sunlight falls, repeated twice.  
Birds sing, repeated none.  
Air flows from three;  
carried by the wind.  
One speaker plays a song.  
The other sits in silence.  
“I am your burden.”

One beat, repeated once.  
One laugh, repeated once.  
Two bodies, one soul contained.  
Two bodies, containing one soul.  
Grass never stands alone.  
Neither should we.  
“You are my relief.”

*Trifecta of Trash: 3 Sub Par Poems* by Matty B.

1.

The brick lying in the middle of my carpet,  
not only broke the silence of the night,  
but also, my front room bay window.  
The note attached read, "I like your window."

2. (Limerick)

Down Dauphin there is Chick Fil A,  
the owners sit down to pray.  
I've waited all week for my treat,  
let's go, I'm ready to eat!  
But sadly, today is Sunday.

3. (Haiku)

Twelve dirty dishes  
Waiting to be clean again,  
But no one is home.

*Ode to My Grandpa* by Erianna Roy

It broke my heart to lose you,  
But you didn't go alone,  
A part of us went with you,  
The day God took you home.

As we take this day to lay you to rest,  
We place flowers with care,  
No one knows the heartache it gives us to leave you there.

If the tears shed for you could build a stairway,  
And the pain in our heart a lane,  
We could have a path to heaven,  
To bring you back.

Until we meet again grandpa, I love you!

Sunrise: June 10, 19xx  
Sunset: November 8, 2018  
Service: November 14, 2018



*These Halls* by Allyssa Litton

These halls have scars:  
Beautiful and ugly.  
Each a monument to the person or thing which brought it into being;  
A witness.

These halls have eyes:  
They've seen progress.  
They've seen failure.  
They've seen beauty.

These halls connect:  
They weave a new tapestry each day of the lives sheltered there.  
Thread upon thread combined in an endless changing pattern,  
Always adding, Sometimes stopping,  
But never subtracting.

These halls have many names:  
School, home, work, safe haven.

These halls hold the future:  
Doctor, lawyer, teacher, writer, artist, mother, father, sister, brother;  
World-changers.  
They walk these halls.



## *Dizzy* by Caroline Moran

“Hello?” He asked this very slowly and carefully, for he did not want to scare off the inhabitants of this place. His breathing was heavy, and a thin sheen of sweat covered his entire body, creating a suction for his clothes. He had run here - run like his life depended on it, as a matter of fact. He had run from something. He had run to something from somewhere- he knew it. *Had something been chasing him?* He couldn't be sure. He wasn't sure of anything now. The exquisite exterior was only a facade. He risked a fleeting glimpse out the window and saw a row of eery gargoyles strategically placed as if to stand guard at a rigid black iron gate. beyond that, a wilting, unkept garden occupied the front lawn. Lit only by moonlight, it was a wonder he could see anything at all, for there were no other houses or lights on the road. The road, he observed, was only a mere dirt trail, and from that a measly cobbled path picked its way through the overgrown garden to lead any stray travelers to, he assumed, the front door, though he did not recall where he had entered from. A thick, foreboding tree blocked his line of sight as well.

Inside, it was damp and cold. Nay, not a pleasant cold, which is crisp and sets one at a brisk walk. A still cold. It filled him to the brim with a deep heaviness.

Out of the darkness of this place, emerged two red-rimmed eyes. Tired. Wrinkles lined them. They seemed strained and overworked as though all the life had been drained from them.

*Oh, wait, he was standing in front of a mirror now.*

The curtain was pulled back. But that couldn't be him. It wasn't. He was positive of that. A chill raked him from head to toe, prickling his scalp. As he looked further at this monstrosity, a small bug crawled across one of those haunting eyes. Shark eyes. They were clear and had a sort of brilliant focus about them, only he felt as if their unwavering gaze passed through him, unseeing... or perhaps seeing too much.

“Dear, it's time to take your medicine now.”

The feeble old man's head jerked awake as he was jolted from his sleep by his caretaker, Maria. His eyes widen in a mask of surprise only to squint as if he were trying to impersonate a pair of raisins.

“Ah, yes, of course,” he sighs.

“And you can't skip out on them like you did last time,” she says with a stern nod at the bottle she had placed on his night stand, clearly waiting for him to take a pill. She was all no-nonsense and meant business. *But he hadn't skipped out had he? No, he was usually very trusting of his doctors. He had always taken his medicine right on time everyday just like they told him to- once in the morning, once at night.*

Suddenly, with no warning at all, he felt a rope tighten around his neck. It was the Devil. Shadows lengthened and spiders swarmed the sheets of his bed. It reeked of death. The smell pervaded his nostrils, assaulting his senses. Fissures fractured the walls enclosing him, confining him. *Could this be it?* A silky whisper squirmed its way into his ear like a worm and filled him with such fear, confirming that yes, of course this had to be it. Its silken tongue seemed to lick at his ear saying, “You walk down the dark path. I am at the end. You want me, you want me, you want me.”



He then heard a vicious rattling. He looked down to see his trembling hand still clutching the pill bottle. *No, the pill bottle was still on his night stand where Molly had put it- or was her name Maggie?* He was clutching his sheets. He gripped them so tightly, the thin skin of his knuckles strained and turned white. The rattling was not rattling but scurrying. He cried out as thousands upon thousands of rats seemed to fill every space on the floor so that he could not even see what color the floor was anymore. All he saw, in horror, were the small mounds

of matted fur undulating and waving as one rat would crawl over the next. All in a race to get to him. They seemed in competition with the spiders, who were now whispering through his sheets. He jumped as he felt the pincers of one bite deep into his lower calf. A scream threatened to rip out of his throat, but he held back. Who could help him? It would just be the rambling of an old man, after all.

The rats chattered eagerly, all clicking, sounding strangely robotic. The shadows morphed and warped into themselves to form wolf heads, who howled ferociously, calling in the rest of their pack to finish him off. The fissures widened into cracks and a shrill scream overwhelmed him. Perhaps it was his own. This would be his last memory before the thick, black void consumed him. He welcomed it with weak relief.



*Growing Patience* by Bryan Dunn

It grew.  
The stem pushing up,  
Breaking through the ground  
As if to make some grand point  
A stand against nature and every limiting factor  
Leaves broke the ground, then a green nub shortly after  
It was filled with potential, ready to bloom and release thereafter  
But it all came to a halt.  
Only time could tell now  
When the time was right,  
For a full show would shine  
Suddenly—the air changed, more stems surfaced, and leaves followed  
suit  
A growing family, cheering on the grand event  
The sun seemed to shine brighter; the sky clearer  
The soil had been nurtured in just the right way  
This was the product of love and labor  
Finally, the moment had arrived

\*

The green bulb burst  
Something new, bright, and cheerful  
Petals spread in every direction  
Against the odds of nature  
A wonder of that very thing itself  
But only for a moment  
As the show would soon end.  
The event would repeat  
Over, and over,  
As always,  
With life  
So too  
Comes death.

## *Ghosts* by Mason Mitchell

The rain was patting softly on the window as the van cruised into the back alleyway. Two quick flashes come from the driver side window, shattering the nearest lamp post, sending it crashing to the ground. The alley is now an opaque wilderness, waiting to be disturbed.

Thatcher, the driver, gives Hunter the thumbs up as he vigilantly looks out the windows, keeping his pistol close by. Hunter slides out the van door, grabbing his supply backpack with him as he leaves. It was a quiet night. Only the sounds of late city traffic in the distance and the slapping of puddles at Hunter's feet as he scurries down the alley.

His body wasn't as swift or graceful as his last heist five years ago, but he was still the smartest and most skilled in his occupation. As long as he stuck to the shadows, his all black outfit made him a ghost. Once he reached his objective, he could only see the faint silhouette of the van in the distance. Hunter scans the back wall of the black-market armory headquarters he is about to infiltrate, looking for security. He only spots one infrared camera on the east corner. It hasn't spotted him yet. He digs in his bag and pulls out a roll of stickers, a broad piece of folded up sheet metal, and a grappling hook attached to a rope. Still out of site of the camera, he launches the rope to the shortest roof ledge of the building. Hunter then unfolds the sheet metal and places it out in the alleyway. The purpose of this is to reflect the rays of the infrared camera back at it, therefore only able to read the cold sheet metal and not Hunter's body heat.

With the camera impaired, Hunter scales the wall. As he reaches the camera, he places a sticker over the lens and continues up. Once at the top of the wall, he motions the van closer with three flickers of the flash light. The van slowly creeps down the alley to Hunter's position. Hunter continues up the building to the very top roof as the van's quiet purr still continues in the background. On the north side of the building, there was a glass pyramid shaped sun roof that overlooked the third-floor bar area inside of the building. After a few minutes of examining the area inside, Hunter pulls out a glass cutting tool and suction cup from his bag. He sticks the suction cup on the window and carefully cuts a delicate wide circle around the cup into the window. The circle slides out with ease, just big enough for his body to slip through. He throws a rope down to the third floor. Just before repelling down, he puts a suppressor on his pistol, knowing that things were about to get dirty. Everything else was the easy part.

Hunter repels down the rope into the bar area. There was faint talking coming from a distant room. He radios his driver, Thatcher, for

the coordinates of the Celerium. Thatcher reports back, “fourth room of the basement in an office vault.” Hunter moves slowly though the hall looking for a back staircase or elevator.

The storm outside was beginning to pick up. Thunder cracking louder with lightning becoming more frequent. Hunter could easily use the thunder to cover his movement throughout the building. The lights flickered for a second and then returned to normal. There was no sign of any security, which was surprising to Hunter. How could such a powerful source of energy be so under guarded? If Energco allowed the Celerium to fall into the hands of any opposing nations or terrorist organizations, there’s no telling what super weapon they would create that could be used to wipe out entire states. There would be no such thing as safety in this world.

He continues moving throughout the building. As he turns around a final corner, he spots a guard at the elevator. A flash of lightning shoots across the sky outside the nearest window, leaving the lights flickering once again. Hunter quickly whips out his pistol and waits. Suddenly a loud cash of thunder shakes the building. Hunter turns the corner, locks sight of the guard and pulls the trigger. Blood splashes across the window and the guard drops to the floor, all before the thunder had ended. Hunter drags the body into a supply closet across the hall and stuffs it inside. He turns and looks back at the splattered blood everywhere with a grin on his face. The action is finally starting to pick up, just like old times.

He calls the elevator up, but notices there is a slight delay before it starts to move. Other guards must have been getting on. He opens a room door into the hallway next to the elevator and conceals himself, pressing up against the wall behind the door.

After a few seconds, the elevator opens up and two guards, a tall guard and a short plump guard walk out. The tall guard walks towards Hunter’s location as the short guard spots the blood on the wall. Traumatized, he calls out to the tall guard and radios the disturbance in a panic. The tall guard notices the open door that is concealing Hunter and finds it suspicious. He slowly walks over, but instead of looking behind the door, he is fooled and lurks into the room. Another crack of thunder rattles the building, sending the short guard into a panic as he looks outside the window. Hunter slips into the room and grabs the tall guard by the head and snaps his neck. He gently puts the man on the ground before the short guard comes scurrying towards the room, completely horrified being alone. As the guard steps into view of the doorway, the lights go out. A long chain of simultaneous cracks is heard and then a

loud thud. When the lights come back on, the short guard was left lying on the floor while Hunter ran towards the elevator.

Hunter hits the button for the basement. He knows it is risky just walking out of the elevator into a gun fight, especially if they are all expecting him now. He reaches for the maintenance hatch of the elevator and thrusts it open, revealing the elevator shaft. Hunter then slings his supply bag into the shaft on top of the elevator and climbs up, sealing the hatch behind him. He digs in his supply pack one last time, pulling out two grenades, an extra ammo clip for his pistol, smoke screen, and a small stick of thermite. He equips these items to his tactical vest and waits. The elevator doors open up at the very bottom, followed by the clicking of a bunch of guns. Hunter slightly cracks open the hatch and peers into the elevator, counting about nine to twelve pairs of guard feet. Three guards enter the elevator, examining the area. Just as the guards look away, Hunter drops the smoke screen down into the elevator. A thick sheet of white smoke spreads throughout the elevator and expands down the basement hallway. As the three guards are submerged in smoke, Hunter fires three critical shots. The smoke becomes a stained red mist. The guards outside of the elevator scuttle around behind cover, keeping their eyes locked on the elevator door. The smoke was an opaque wall now and then everything was calm. The slight hiss of the smoke-can continues as a lake of blood flows from the elevator towards the other guards, drawing their attention. A single click is heard from the elevator followed by a loud clank and rolling. A grenade rolls out of the smoke just a few feet from all of the guards. There was a quick flash of light trailed by a fiery ball, engulfing the hall, setting all of the guards ablaze. Hunter drops down from the elevator and cruises past the smoldering bodies and screams.

Most of the doors were blown off of their hinges in the blast. Hunter examines each room as he passes through the hallway. He approaches the fourth room of the basement and walks inside. It was just an ordinary office. No security cameras, no traps, no guards. Just an empty desk, some filing cabinets and a large picture on the wall of a battle of some sort.

Hunter shuffles through the desk looking for signs of clues as to where the Celerium could be. Nothing was found in the desk. Finally, he assesses the giant picture on the wall, running his fingers down the sides of the frame and wall. The picture was not attached to the wall and could be moved to the side. He forces the frame to the side ever so slightly and reveals a solid steel corner mounted inside the wall.

Hunter laughs at their basic hiding place for a superweapon. There was no way anyone could be so stupid as to not find a giant mural

in an empty office suspicious of hiding something. Hunter uses all of his strength to lift the mural off of the wall and lets it fall to the floor, exposing the entire vault. He then radios Thatcher that he has found the vault and estimated time of rendezvous, about 2 minutes. There was no time to try and figure out the combination, so Hunter takes out his small stick of thermite and puts it right on the handle. The thermite burns a hole straight through the bolt, opening the door. The glowing, bright blue orb was right where Thatcher said it would be. Hunter grabs the Celerium and turns to find four more guards standing in the door way with him in their sights. The first guard cocks his gun, signaling that Hunter wasn't going to get off easy. Hunter turns to put the Celerium back but as he turns, he hits his radio two times without the guards knowing. He turns back around, throwing his gun on the floor and putting his hands up. The guards motion him over towards them. They surround him and walk him out of the room. Hunter waits for another power outage, but one never came. They throw Hunter against the wall and jab him in the stomach with the barrel of their rifles as hard as they can. They wail on him with everything they have, striking him in the head and kicking at his torso. The old timer couldn't take the abuse for much longer, sprawling on the floor trying to fend off each blow.

Suddenly, the basement ceiling lets out three simultaneous beeps, erupting into a cloud of smoke and debris, followed by Thatcher descending from the smoke, riding down a block of tile from the floor above. A spray of bullets whiz through the smoky air, only to leave the sound of empty shells clinging to the ground. As Hunter looks up, all four guards were dead. Thatcher was hovering over him, reloading his weapon as if expecting another wave. He helps Hunter up and they both head back to obtain the Celerium. Once their objective was acquired, they head back up to their get-away vehicle.

“Another job well done and back to retirement,” muttered Hunter.

Just outside, sirens could be heard. Red and blue flashing lights could be seen beaming through the windows with Police vehicles now surrounding every inch of the building. It is crucial that the Celerium doesn't fall into the hands of anyone, especially their own government. It needed to be destroyed. Thatcher safely re-secures the Celerium in his pocket as he cocks a pistol and hands it to Hunter. They sprint up the stairs to the roof, Hunter following right in Thatcher's footsteps. A police sniper peaks out from behind a chimney stack, but before he can even process what is going on, Thatcher sends a suppressed bullet straight into his forehead. The sniper stumbles back and disappears over the edge into the street.

They were running out of roof very fast, with the next building just few yards away. They pick up speed, now at their peak. When the edge came, they take a leap of faith. Over the alley with their van down below, and onto the roof of the next-door building. They continue sprinting and jumping to new rooftops, never looking back. They arrived at their mission and left without any leads pointing to them, disappearing into the dark night never to be seen again, like ghosts.

*Ode to the Flag* by J. Davalin

As I stand to pledge,  
All I can see is the flag of my ancestors oppression.  
A flag that represents a troubled past,  
A past of hatred and bigotry.  
Though it may anger some,  
I am not angry.  
I am not outraged.  
I am pissed off.  
Because after all that our society been through,  
People still decide it's okay.  
People stage these rallies,  
Using this flag to express their passage of freedom.  
But you know what, Mr. Flag  
I don't blame you.  
Why, you are just a piece of cloth,  
A mere symbol

Mr. Flag, I just wanna talk.  
Not about anything too bad -  
Have a little chat about why I don't blame you.  
Why you are nothing but a "flag."

Dear flag,  
It's not your fault.  
How were you to know  
That your creation would be the center face of a revolution?

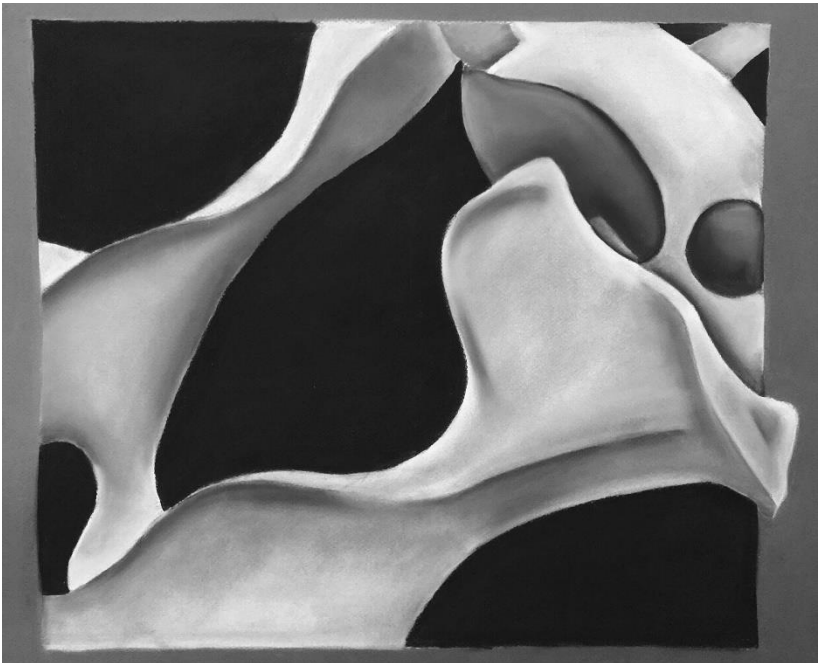
Dear flag,  
I don't blame you for the bloodshed of my ancestors.  
Besides, you never pulled the trigger or cracked the whip

You never used your rope to hang us, but your meaning does suffocate us.

Dear Flag,  
You were only meant to cause hope,  
But this ideal of your hope  
Was what caused us destruction.  
But of course, how could you know?

Dear Flag,  
How were you to stop all the white supremacists  
From hanging you up next to the dead body of a young black man  
To show that they had the freedom to do whatever they pleased.

Dear Confederate Flag...  
Wait.  
Did you think I was talking about the American Flag?  
I wasn't, but you couldn't tell the difference.



## *Sunshine in a Bag* by Josh Collins

He missed the jump.

Quinn groaned even before she'd clambered down and seen the damage. Dolph was always cocking up her fun, but she'd held on to hope that he could make a simple jump across the small ravine. Children little older than seven had been making the jump between Ike's Perch and the Starkknife mountain for as long as Feildrum town had children old enough to disobey their parents. *Maybe the height spooked him*, she thought as a smirk stretched across her face. *Come on, Quinn, he's hurt. Laughing comes later.* She forced the smirk away. *How hurt, though?* She glanced down, squinting through the light fog at the poor boy, and groaned louder at what looked like his contorted left leg. *His dad's going to make me pay him back for this one, too.*

"Quinn," he croaked, "m-my leg is—"

"Broken, I know. I've got this under control, Dolph, but I have to concentrate. No more talking for you, not until you make that jump." She reached for another handhold on her descent down the side of the Perch. She squinted as she went, only just able to see her next footholds when she needed them. *He had to fall today, with the fog like this and no one else around.* She couldn't help but look back towards Feildrum, towards the watchtower. *No, not even Gideon could see us this far out. I'll have to carry this prodigy all the way back myself.*

Lights accused her from the tip of the Perch. There were two, pointing at her an Dolph like sunbeams breaking through a cloudy day. They both turned to her and nearly blinded her. She screwed up her eyebrows, closed her eyes, and stopped climbing. Patches of lights danced on her eyelids, and the beams stayed pointed her way. Her handhold gave way when she stopped. The rock tore away from its mother mountain as if it wished to fly. Quinn cursed the suicidal pebble as they fell.

She covered her face with crossed arms and kept her eyes closed, plunging towards the bushes Dolph was stuck in. She smashed into brambles and bristles, letting slip a muffled yelp when she felt dozens of thin, long scratches being carved into her arms and hands. Her clothes were torn just as she was, but luckily they'd protected her from suffering even more cuts. For an instant, she laid in her pain and gasped until her breath returned. *My last yellow shirt, ruined. Papa hates sewing, and I've only got two stone to pay for new clothes. I won't have it back for another year if I don't do it myself. Eugh, but there's so much to do.*

With great care and more curses, she untangled herself from the spiny, bloody mess and eyed her wounds with a grimace on her way to



check Dolph's. He was much more cut up than she was. Even without his life in peril, he never had been the quickest lad in town, and his weight helped him fall as a sack of potatoes would from a high window- quickly and with a splat on landing. Luckily for him, he was of slightly stronger stuff than potatoes. Regardless, his whole body was cut up and softly bleeding- even the cuts underneath the tatters of what had moments before been his last clean tunic.

The swirls of dirt and mud that passed for his eyes were leaking just as his cuts were. His lips thinned as he desperately tried to hold back the whines and shouts she saw rising in him. He gulped the outbursts down and turned his head as best he could towards her. "Quinn, why'd ya make me do this? Pa's gonna 'ave me whipped up and down the street for ruining the last of m' good clothes."

She sighed and took hold of his mangled leg. It wasn't too terribly broken- she remembered having a worse time when she jumped from the Perch to see if she could land with a roll. She hadn't, and she'd spent months recovering. When her father found her broken amongst the brambles, he'd made her watch as he set her leg. "You need to know how to do these things, and not just for keeping yourself well," he said as he'd fashioned her a splint from strong sticks and some vines, "One of these days, someone will need help and you'll be the only one around who can. You won't be able to know what kind of help they'll need beforehand. But if you're prepared for everything, maybe you can help them- save them, even. Then maybe they can return the favor."

"Those clothes are the last of your worries." She took off her belt and slipped her knife's scabbard into her pocket. She handed him the wrapped up belt, told him to bite down hard, and took firm hold of his leg. "Your Pa's going to whip the both of us because of this break. Lucky for you, I'm here. It won't be broken long." She went to set it, but her eyes caught his. His thick brows were arcing upward, and his dirty pupils were bigger than any she'd seen before. Tears had already soaked his cheeks, and she watched as a new salty stream started down his plump face.

"Close your eyes, Dolph. You don't need to see this."

With the same clean motion her father had taught her, she snapped the leg back into place. She closed her eyes when she heard Dolph's muffled scream. Then he stopped screaming, and she felt him go limp. For an instant, her heart leapt to her throat. *Gods, I've killed him!* Her eyes flashed open, she fell to the ground, and she leaned near to his chest. She removed the belt from his mouth and felt his chest move. *Not dead. Not yet.* She went to work fashioning his splint.

When her work was done, with a grunt and a heave, she lifted him up out of the briars. Her strength did not serve her as well as she'd hoped, and she dropped him. Before she could reach down to scoop him back up, the boy began tumbling down the side of the mountain. Again she cursed, running after Dolph's unconscious body- it jolted here and there down the hill overlooking Feildrum. She closed her eyes again just before he thwacked into a rock, bringing his unwilling romp to an equally unwilling halt. She heard him groan, then. *Thank the gods he's not dead- but how is he not dead?*

She noticed that near his body were two wooden coins, one side flat as a board and inscribed with a picture of the queen of the island. The other side was split into four triangle-like sections partitioned by slivers of wood. Inside one of each of the two coins' slots was a dirty bit of stone. Two stone, worth two lanx. Quinn had two stone herself, waiting at home- hidden in her special place. With hers and Dolph's money together, she could make one iron, worth five lanx. She grit her teeth and palmed the coins. She rubbed her thumb along their cool, smooth surface. As dirt from the coins came off onto her thumb, she imagined she could see her reflection in the rock. She looked around, peering through the fog as if anyone would be outside the walls this time of day, much less near the Perch and watching her. She slipped the boy's coins into her pocket before she tried to rouse him.

Gently, she gave his face a couple of light taps. His groaning grew louder. "Quinn," he called out, meeker than a kitten, "Am I dead?"

She smiled in spite of her attempts to keep her face stiff. "Not yet, you stubborn bastard," She said as she reached down to pick him up once more, "but we both will be if I don't get you to the healer's hut before your Pa gets a look at you. Now could you please be lighter? If you don't go ahead and do that for me I'll have to drop you again."

Dolph exhaled from his nose harder than usual, a weak smile atop his dazed expression. Quinn laughed as he clumsily pretended to gnaw his own hand from its arm. She stopped laughing when she heard a wolf cry out from the woods around them.

She could move briskly with Dolph, but not nearly briskly enough to outrun a wolf. As quickly as she could manage with her trembling hands, she yanked Dolph around to where he was sprawled across her back with his arms across her chest. She ran. As fast as she could, she ran. Each howl grew louder as the wolf grew closer. Each step sapped more and more of Quinn's strength until she was panting, slick with sweat, and barely able to stand. They were just over a hundred feet away from the western watchtower when she collapsed.

She and Dolph fell into a tangled heap, and he groaned again. Quinn looked up at the watchtower, her vision fuzzy and head spinning from her efforts. She couldn't remember who was in the western tower this afternoon- but it was either Gideon or Val. *Please let it be Gideon.* Another howl erupted from the tree line, but it was distinct from the first. It made a deeper noise, one that sounded more like a war horn blaring before a battle. The noise changed pitch more than once, and seemed to scrape at her ears like gravel underfoot. She could feel the ground tremble at its boom. Then there was a yelp. Then a series of yelps that brought goosebumps to Quinn's arms. The second howl boomed again, closer and moving.

"Gideon!" she called out, as loudly as she could manage. No response. No movement in the tower. She clambered to her feet and checked on Dolph once again. "Can you move? Can you crawl?" she asked him.

The boy frowned and closed his eyes. "I'm not baby," he whispered, "just sleepy."

Once again, Quinn cursed. Another howl cut through the sunset haze, and the creature that made it came barreling out from the tree line.

It was larger than her by half. Its coat should have been a uniform white, but it was speckled with bits and splashes of brown and crimson. Its bared teeth were chipped, yellowed, and stained just as its coat was. There were scraps of flesh and cloth stuck between its fangs, and even through the fog she swore it was grinning at them.

Its eyes were a milky white that sent shivering tendrils of light through the fog, as if they were lanterns. It blinked, and she lost it. The light returned, and she spun to face it once more. It was closer, and she could see the creature's corded muscles rippling as it moved.

The wolf kept snarling and circled around the pair. Quinn's dagger was already in hand. She was in one of her defensive fighting stances, her eyes firmly on the wild animal and her legs moving with it to keep Dolph shielded. "Gideon! Wolf!" she cried, hoping that the older man was in the tower and could send help somehow. *I can't fight this thing myself, let alone kill it, let alone keep it from killing Dolph.* She was still panting and slick with sweat. Her dagger felt as a greatsword in her grip and her legs felt as if they'd snap just the same as Dolph's had at any moment. Still she followed the wolf's movements, tensed just as he was, waiting for the perfect opportunity to strike.

Dolph made some kind of noise from deep in his chest, and Quinn couldn't stop her eyes from turning to him. In that instant, the wolf pounced. A smell hit her like a punch to the gut, dragging the breath from her lungs. The stench almost blinded her; her pupils shook and

sweat as if in fear of it. Quinn heard a savage bark from the animal as it lunged, a thump, and a pained squeal before she even returned her eyes to the danger. When she did, she saw a purple-shafted arrow with blue feathers holding the wolf's back right leg in place. Another arrow sang through the fog and went through both of its back legs, and a third caught it in its side. The beast was snapping its jaws at her and straining against the thick arrows that kept it in place. She jabbed at the beast and only just kept her hand when it snapped down on the space between them. One of the arrows came free. She sucked in a breath and fainted left. Before the wolf even moved, she struck at the right side of its neck. It fell for the feint, and her knife slid deep into its fleshy, corded neck. With a grunt, she cut across the neck and nearly severed the beast's head from the effort.

She mopped the wolf's blood from her face with her torn sleeve and collapsed to the moist ground, wheezing. Her arm throbbed and burned like she'd climbed the Starknife one-handed. Dolph was coughing and whimpering beside her. One of the wolf's paws had landed on his chest. As lifeblood pooled around her head, she saw a hulking figure in the watchtower waving a large golden bow. She imagined his mouth was moving. She couldn't hear the words, but that didn't matter. She closed her eyes and exhaled, heavily. *Thank the gods it was Gideon.*

...

Her eyes flickered, and Gideon's face loomed huge before her, as squat and smashed as it always had been. His crooked nose was almost as large as her hand, his eyes small and darker than the shafts of his arrows, almost black. His mouth drew a thin line across his face that never seemed to move, even on the few occasions when he smiled.

She watched his lips move, but it took a moment for the voice to find her. It echoed and boomed as if she was deep under waves and he was on shore trying desperately to bring her back. She couldn't hear the words. Her eyes closed, and when they opened again she saw more than Gideon. She was in Frinley's tent. Not all too surprising. She was hurt, and so was Dolph, so Gideon had taken them to the healer's hut. *Dolph!*

She sat up-or, tried to. When she leaned forward, there was a rush in her ears and she heard Dolph screaming. She noticed that her head felt as if it were getting bigger and shrinking down to nothing with every heartbeat. She felt a strong hand on her stomach carefully push her back to her pillow, and her head's resizing doubled speed. The room swam before her eyes and she heard the crumbling voice grumble "Rest, pup. The wizard says to stop moving your head about."

"M'fine," she slurred, "Lemme up." But the hand stayed on her stomach. It was bony, like the rest of the watchman. Gideon seemed

more bone than man, sometimes; hidden under the deep purples and dark blues of his armor, it seemed each and every piece of his skeleton was sharpened to a dull point by a fine smith. Even his playful punches almost broke skin every now and then. She could feel each of his finger bones digging into her, even through her clothes.

“Gideon, let her up,” came the voice from across the tent. It was a shaky voice, but not an unsure one- just the same as the man it belonged to. “If she does, she most likely won’t die. You hear me, Quinn? Most likely. Just try not to throw anyone else down a mountain or kill anything and you should be fine. That headache will stick around until you get some more sleep, though. Think about it before you completely ignore me, huh?”

Quinn grinned up at Gideon and stumbled her way off the bed. He crossed his arms and rolled his eyes. “Whatever you say, wizard. If the pup’s head goes rolling off her shoulders, you’ll be the one telling her father. No skin off my nose.”

Frinley turned to them, one eyebrow raised. He took a hit on his pipe and placed it on a nearby table. “I’m sure you could use some skin off of that thing, eh? I’ll take your wager. Hadarai doesn’t scare me as much as she does. She did kill that beast of a wolf, after all.” Dolph whimpered and Frinley returned to his work, mumbling smoke as he chuckled and worked on the boy’s leg and cuts. His shoulder-length hair swished when he laughed.

Shaking all the way, she crossed the tent and watched as Frinley tended to her friend. He’d coated the leg in a mint-green salve and wrapped it in linen. She saw traces of the salve on every inch of Dolph’s body, covering the dozens of cuts he’d earned from his falls. His face waxed and waned in waves of pain and relief as the wizard spread more salve across the cuts. Her eyebrows furrowed, and she turned to the wizard. “How’s his leg? Has it set right?”

Frinley’s face was marred with age lines. The ones around his mouth twitched when he spoke: “You did fine, ‘pup’. I daresay had he been with anyone but the two of us or your father, he might have lost the leg. But as long as I can get this right, he should recover by the year’s turn.”

“Eight months!” the boy shrieked. “Will I be able to walk? How will I still be my father’s apprentice? Quinn, help...it hu-h-”

Frinley had picked up his pipe again, but when he took the hit, he blew it into the boy’s face. Dolph’s panicked expression softened, and his eyes closed. He smiled. Quinn could smell the smoke as it faded away. *Flaky bread fresh from the oven. Mmm. Wait, it’s changing? Papa’s study? What-* “Frinley, what was-”

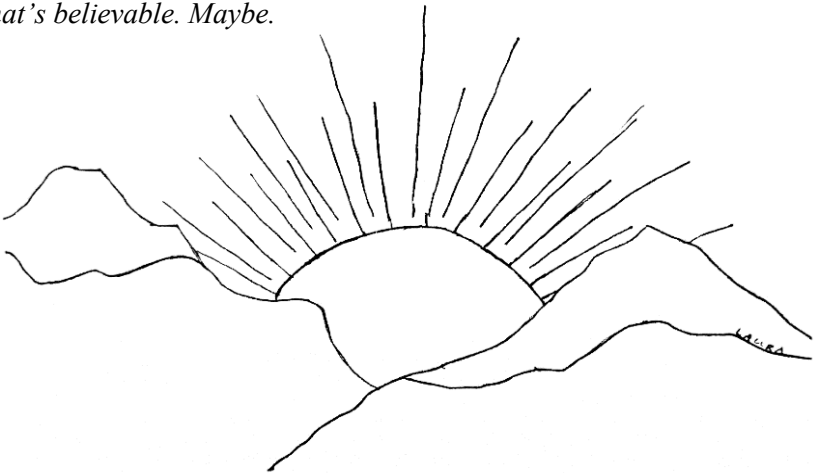
He had a finger pressed to his lips. “Memories of a better time, I’d imagine. Quiet, now. He needs to be asleep when I do this. You need to know, I somewhat exaggerated your leg-setting prowess. He will heal, but when you snapped the leg back in place, you twisted too hard. I’ll need to break him again. You did well, but only because the boy still breathes.”

He peeled the spectacles from his nose and pressed a fist to its bridge. “Perhaps I’m being too harsh. You are young, and not a sawbones, after all. Just...be careful next time you try to help someone. Make sure you help more than you hurt. Now, run off, tell your father you’re not killed by the wolf. And tell the miller the same of his son. Make sure he knows *you* threw him off the cliff, not me.”

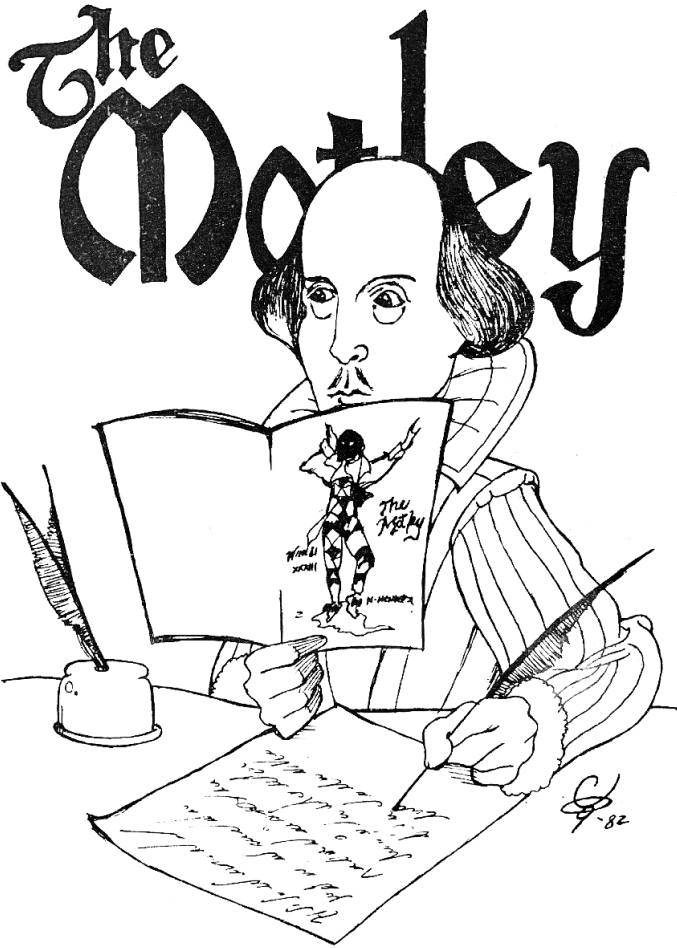
She took hold of her braid and flipped it over one shoulder, pulling at it with quick strokes. *What was I supposed to do, just leave him to the wolves? Drag him down the mountain with a mangled leg? I did what I had to, didn’t I? I did it the same way Dad did for me.* “But—” Quinn felt a bony hand digging into her shoulder.

“Wizard’s right, pup. Dolph is safe with him, and I need to get back to the watchtower. Let’s get you to your father.”

She tried to shake his hand off, but it didn’t budge. His claw turned her away from Dolph, and she sighed. She felt the coins in the pocket of her pants, flipping and twisting as they walked away. She bit her lip and her flicked her head back around. Frinley had blown a particularly thick puff of smoke, and she could only see their shadows. She saw the pipe in his hands unfurling itself, growing to look like a staff, or something- but her head was still pounding. *Might just roll off if this keeps up.* She palmed one of the coins. *I’ll give them back next time I visit him and he’s awake. Say I combed the cliffs looking for them. Yeah. That’s believable. Maybe.*







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