

Prairie Ink

A literary Annual



Diane Engle

Issue Twelve



Fall 2021

“There is a way to see inside by looking directly through to seed or marrow.”

-Joan Halifax

From the Editors

Dear Readers,

Our community continues to impress us with the number and quality of works that are submitted every year. While every year hopes to be an improvement on the next year, it always seems to be an additional challenge to keep up with the progress of our community.

We’ve been able to grow our staff this year, and so we hope to be able to continually improve Prairie Ink. We’re lucky to have the support of Barton Community College and our little corner of Central Kansas.

We’re grateful to everyone who helped with Prairie Ink this year, and hope to see you all again next year. Thank you.

-Scott McDonald

-Cover art by Diane Engle

About the picture: The picture is call “Insulators”. This group of electrical insulators was on a metal table. They are blue-green in color. I turned the original picture into a black & white, which gives it more of a mysterious look. This picture has caught the eye of several individuals over time who have added it to their décor.

-Submission page art by Cherish Robinson

About the picture: “Sunrise in Kansas.” We all take different paths in life. Sometimes we just need to trust the path even if we can't see all the way down the road. But we do know that the Sun will Rise each morning, so trust the path and enjoy the ride.

The opinions and ideas found in this edition of Prairie Ink represent the creative vision of its contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or ideas of its editors or of Barton Community College. Contributors maintain the rights to their submissions; however, Prairie ink reserves the right to publish or re-publish those contributions.

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To Fight a Dragon

By Lady Eilish nee Sale ile de Re - mka Lisa Holt

Original from:

“The Legend of Me & Bigun”. by W. D. McCrary (dec) 1999

Two knaves went forth from
the Forest of Dean,
In the prime of '23.
Bigun astride the black gearran,
Along on the mare was Me.

We braved Snowdonia's mighty heights.
Then at the King's behest,
Joined with Sir Lancelot and his knights
And asked to join his quest.

“T'would I, Kind Sirs,” Milord said he,
“If knowledge I had of ye?”
Bigun replied, “They call me Bigun.”
I quietly said, “Just Me.”

“Just Me and Bigun! Well met, good sirs!
Can you, a dragon slay?
You see we seek the demon beast.
Only the worthy may stay.”

Bigun stroked his mighty ax and said,
“When Beula leaves my side,
Lord, she's always flown so true, so straight
Them Dragons lose their hides.”

“When ax has flown, to the sword turn I
And charge the dragon’s lair.
At times, milord, the dragons expire
When they see me standing there!”

“Brave, Lord” said I, “Something should you know,
About Old Bigun here.
Being dropped on his head as a stripling lad
Has made his thinking queer.”

Lancelot, he did laugh and say,
“Lads, you come along!”
So, while I toiled to set up camp,
Bigun broke into song.

“Wa’ll, they aint’ no har’ on a bill goats’ arse –
An’ that’s why it’s so shiiii=neee...
But Ah’ knows whar’ they is some har’
On th’ girl Ah’ lef’ behind me!...”

From Hadrian’s Wall we rode abreast
The dragons did we seek.
Through Arthur’s Seat to Loch Lomond
We nary saw a peek.

Onto the Isle of Skye, we traversed
Of a dragon’s lair we’d heard.
And when we found that mighty beast
From Bigun came one word,

“Argh!!!!” It was the word we heard,
As Bigun fled the place.
His horse and ax were all he left.
Away on foot he did race.

For Sir Bigun was full of bluster and dream
Nare a dragon had he met,
Until that day upon that craggy cliff,
Dark and drear and wet.

After a time, return did he.
Helm in beefy hand.
“I went back to retrieve my trusty ax,
Come, lad, let’s make a stand!”

We did breach the Dragon’s lair,
Sir Lancelot at the fore.
“Just Me, thou stand upon my right,
Bigun, thee, guard the door.

As knights, we bravely battled our foe.
One by one did fall.
Then the dragon turned its mighty head,
Upon Sir Lancelot’s call.

“Flame me you scaled and horny beast!
T’would face you eye to eye!”
We feared the end of our Lord was near,
When an ax, did fly by.

Between the Dragons lizard eyes
Did sprout an odd shaped horn.
Beulah, she had struck her mark,
And stuck there like a thorn

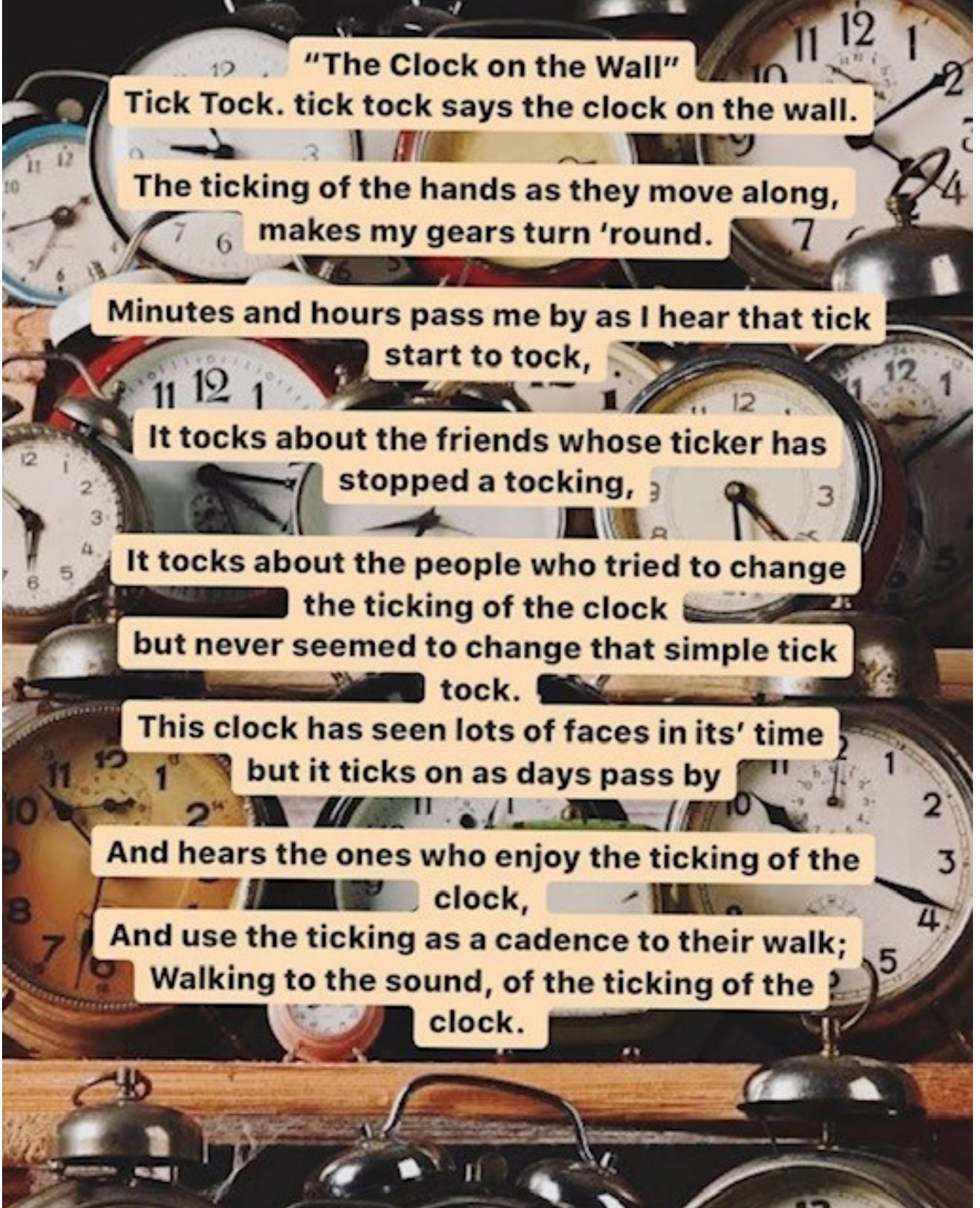
From the door, where Bigun watch,
He spied the grizzly fight.
To spare his Lord from the dragon's wrath,
Beulah, did he send in flight.

Bigun's courage had won the day!
The beast was well and dead!
But when we praised our hero and friend,
He blushed and bowed his head.

"Give not the praise and glory to me.
But to our Lord, foreswear.
I stood aback at a coward's pace
And just threw Beulah in the air.

To Arthur's Table we did return,
To show our liege Lord King,
A dragon's head with ax still struck,
And Lancelot's praise did sing.

Two knights returned to the Forest of Dean,
Astride their brave, true steeds.
When asked about their quest,
They told of other's deeds.



"The Clock on the Wall"

Tick Tock. tick tock says the clock on the wall.

**The ticking of the hands as they move along,
makes my gears turn 'round.**

**Minutes and hours pass me by as I hear that tick
start to tock,**

**It tocks about the friends whose ticker has
stopped a tocking,**

**It tocks about the people who tried to change
the ticking of the clock
but never seemed to change that simple tick
tock.**

**This clock has seen lots of faces in its' time
but it ticks on as days pass by**

**And hears the ones who enjoy the ticking of the
clock,**

**And use the ticking as a cadence to their walk;
Walking to the sound, of the ticking of the
clock.**

The Car Wreck

By Brenda Slagle

The sirens are loud;
My mind is racing.
The highway is shutdown-
The car is smashed.

The driver is shrieking.
The smell of hot plasma
Hits my nose, before I see.
She is imprisoned by metal.

Holding her hand; looking
Into her eyes. We are almost
At the emergency room.
Please hang on.

Working at a hastily pace.
The light in her eyes is waning.
I can feel the life leaving
Her body-forever silent.

A Paramedic's Day

By Brenda Slagle

Do the angels know how hard I tried?

With the training I had, I could not save you.

My mind goes dark too often,
I cannot find my way out of the gloom.

With the training I had, I could not save you.

Trying to stop the bleeding was dreadful.

I cannot find my way out of the gloom
searching endlessly for a remedy to devour.

Trying to stop the bleeding was dreadful,
crimson rivers flow in my mind.

Searching endlessly for a remedy to devour,
thus far, not finding one to possess.

Crimson rivers flow in my mind,
reminding me that I will try harder.

Thus far, not finding one to possess,
still seeking the one answer.

Reminding me that I will try harder,
the scars articulate to everyone who sees.

Still seeking the one answer,
do the angels know how hard I tried?

The Red Cat


By Jennifer Schartz

Mary was my best friend during my early years on Eighth Street. She was three years older than me and lived catty-corner across the street in a house that had a huge wrap-around porch. We spent hours on her porch and could play house in the many, many imagined rooms. We always came up with interesting story lines that took nothing more than our imaginations and a few treasured props, mostly dolls and blankets. For some reason, our mothers never wanted us to drag out everything we needed to set up a proper house, so we made do with spartan living conditions.

We had loads of fun. That is, unless Mary decided to play with Patty, another neighbor who was two years older than her. Then they would gang up and ditch me. One time when I was allowed to play with both of them, they started a club and named themselves president and vice president. I was the only club member. They sent me home so they could have secrets and never came and got me. There were hurt feelings on my part and when I cried to my mother, she said, "Those dumb girls," but never intervened. Today, it would be labeled bullying, but in the early 60s it was nothing more than the expected pecking order. Patty would only play with Mary if there wasn't somebody older and better to play with. That's the way it was and I was always happy to get Mary back for myself. It never occurred to me to hold a grudge against either of them.

One summer morning, Mary and I decided to play veterinarian. The dilemma was a lack of patients once we examined and cured my black, part-lab dog named Toby. We couldn't find my cat, Mouser, and Mary's cat, Stinky, was too old to play, but we did find a neighbor's cat. It really didn't want to play after we chased it down and further riled it up by bandaging its non-existent broken leg. The unappreciative feline got a bit hissy and wanted out of my dad's garage that we had so painstakingly turned into a vet clinic by

pushing back stuff and sweeping. We knew as soon as we opened the door that the cat would bolt. Since it looked like so many non-descript, half-feral cats in the neighborhood, how would we ever be able to recheck our patient? We knew we needed to somehow identify it as ours. Spying a can of red spray paint, we decided we could put a small stain on its belly. I held the cat on its back while Mary poised to put our mark on the beast. The nozzle on the can was sealed shut and as Mary pushed harder, the floodgate opened. The cat hissed louder than the paint rushing into a full-on splatter from his chest to his hoo-ha. Red paint! Red paint was dripping from the underside of a frantic, much maligned cat that looked like we had surgically opened it up. I let the cat out of the garage with my red-speckled hands, and the cat headed home like its tail was on fire. Although not exactly what we had intended, we were satisfied that we would be able to identify it for its next check. We went back to playing, not giving the cat another thought until later in the day when we heard rumblings on the street of somebody assaulting defenseless pets with red paint. Neighbors were asking who would do such an atrocious thing and WHY? It really was only one cat, but the story grew throughout the day. Mary and I knew we would catch it if we were named as the assailants, so I scrubbed my hands raw to remove all traces of our involvement. The cover-up was exacted, and we were never held accountable.



"A Million Lost Souls"

**The white glisten so light and
pure so wonderful and
intricate.**

**Designed from up above each
beautiful and different-
In their own unique way.**

**Those frosty flakes swiftly
drop to the floor and melt; melt
like the soft tears of crying
babies.**

**Each drop of snow falls from
heaven eager to meet the world
they become a part of.**

**Enthusiastically waiting for
their divine calling.**

**But instead they slowly fade
away into the earth.**

**Like millions of dying souls
decaying in the dirt.**

**Grasping for the chance to
prove their worth.**

**And show the world they are
worth saving.**

Selbstmord

By Brenda Slagle

All the leaves are silent;
They are in mourning.
I tried to stop you but
You had your mind made up.

You thought the world
Would be better without you.
How wrong you were-
Now I am here all alone.

The blood from your wrist
Runs like a scarlet river.
Calling for help but it
Is too late, you are gone.

Tears stream down my flushed
Face; I hear someone close say,
'You could not save her,'
As I hold the dripping blade.

Living a Lie

By Brenda Slagle

After Sara Borjas

I pretend I am somewhere else:

that is reality.

Bars block part of my view:

that is reality.

I look around and see my Mother on the other side:

that is reality.

Am I really like her?

In reality, I am.

I am embarrassed to be walking in her shadow:

that is reality.

I want to withdraw my plea:

that is reality.

The mirror shows what lays behind the eyes:

that is reality.

When I was young, my Mother was always high:

that is reality.

My older brother would feel deserted but try to take care of me:

reality.

Mother's words were sacred:

that is reality.

Black eyes swell up and are streaked red like the cherry tree:

that is reality.

My Mother loves him:

reality.

My father hated us:

that is reality.

I look at my Mother and she stares back at me; it is like looking at a reflection of myself:

reality.

My father is close-minded and there is no way in:

that is reality.

Never have I trusted anyone but Mother:

that is reality.

The scars teach lessons that I did not want to learn:

that is realty.

The beatings and the torture were horrendous:

that is reality.

He needs to disappear, she said:

that is reality.

I don't understand:

that is reality.

One night, I hear the gunshot:

that is reality.

My father looks like he is resting in the yard with his head down:

that is reality.

Mother makes me help her:

reality.

I wish I could wake from this dream:

that is reality.

The bars slam as they close the door to my cell:

that is reality.

I pretend I am somewhere else:

that is the reality.

The Light

By Lisa Holt

Life Is Never an Easy Road:

Marriage to an old Okie is fraught with ups and downs. For nearly 17 years, I had the joy of learning just what that was like. I watched my wonderful husband flourish as a man of God and an awesome grandpa. Even when Agent Orange tried to take his health and vigor away, he remained his selfless, ornery, Okie self.

Little did I realize that I would end up in a quiet hospital room, as the love of my life fitfully slept. I knew the next day I would take him home to say goodbye to his family for the last time. With this knowledge, I wept and prayed and God spoke to me. He had given me a glimpse of what was to come but this night He laid it all out clearly. And so I wrote...

Stepping In:

On February 15, 2018, with the diagnosis of Esophageal Cancer (EC), John and I stood at the gaping maw of a very long, dark tunnel. We had no idea of what lurked in this terrible tunnel. Still, we had no other choice but to step in.

The light from the entrance shone in only a few steps. There was no evidence of the light at the end of the tunnel. In utter darkness and ignorance, we slowly placed one foot in front of the other.

As we stepped in, our hands outstretched to feel for barriers, we felt hands take ours. Hands with light to illuminate each step. Hands folded in prayer, sending angels to guide us. Hands of the doctors and their staff, to teach us and offer medical aid. Hands of family and friends, giving aide.

Each seemingly small circle of light illuminated our steps, keeping us from major pitfalls. Sometimes the light didn't illuminate enough and we had to stumble, but our dear family and friends were always there to pick us up and get us back on course.

In May, the end of treatments gave us a glimpse of a pinprick of light. We traveled a rather smooth length that brought that pinprick closer and a little bigger.

Have you ever noticed when coming out of a tunnel, dark room, or even with oncoming traffic lights on a dark stretch of road, you cannot see what is really directly ahead?

Looking at the pinprick blinded us to the chasm ahead of us: blood clots, blood thinners, doctors' lack of communication. All these things caused us to fall headlong. No sign of the end of the tunnel. More utter darkness. But still surrounding us, our faithful light from GOD, family, friends, and the important doctors.

With those hands shining light to illuminate our step, we worked on climbing back up the slope on the other side of the chasm. "All Hands On Deck!" We kept walking, putting one step in front of the other because we knew that pinprick light would be a little bigger and brighter when we returned to level ground.

There would still be other obstacles to traverse before we could step out at the other side. We knew there was to be at least one more large chasm that we would have to trudge through: surgery, a long recovery, and learning how to live afterwards. But we knew it was there. Doctors and friends here and other EC travelers/survivors marked it with warning lights, telling us what is actually involved in the surgery. They encouraged us, though our lives would change drastically, that there is always a chance to survive.

Interim:

We thought we had a clear view of the light at the end of this tunnel. Then, there was no surgery, more treatments. Now, we found that the floor had become a jagged, stumbling maze which steered us away from the light, which had begun to change shape. Many times, we thought: “You can’t get to there from here.”

Going Home to Go *Home*:

One is warned that chemotherapy is hard on a person, and so it was for John, though he never stopped fighting. We walked on, stumbling around stalactites and stalagmites that seemed to grow suddenly in our path. Those blocked the progress to the strangely elongating light, a light that seemed to be growing taller rather than wider. “Curiouser and curiouser,” as Alice would say.

On Thanksgiving day, I tried to guide us around a thorny obstacle. In anticipation of an hour or two with family, John had showered but before I was able to tend to his J-tube site, it came right out.

Instead of taking him to the local ER, where they would have just had to send him on to a surgeon, I loaded him up and took him on to the Wichita VA, two-and-a-half hours away. They knew his history and had all his records. It was the best decision I had made to date.

After X-rays, CT scans, blood work and observation, they admitted him. With his existing cancer and the fact that it had already spread to the bone, they believe that the cancer had spread to his abdomen.

Our eyes were focused on avoiding stumbles. We had no clue what the light was doing, only to look up and see that the “single” light had turned into two distinct lights: one glowing golden, soft, slightly higher than the harsh, white one, straight ahead almost floor level.

The golden light moved closer with each step while the cold, white light seemed to recede.

Two lights! One for him, one for me. In reality, the higher golden light was beckoning John to heaven and healing. The ultimate end of his journey. The lower, cold, harsh light was for me, forced to continue my journey here on Earth without the man God placed in my life nearly two decades before. 17 years of watching that wonderful man give so selfless of himself to others: his granddaughters, his son, and myself. It was such a brief time to learn to look beyond the surface and see what He saw. Still, I knew I was surrounded by the light of family and friends to guide me.

My eyes turned back to the floor to watch for stumbles, but John's eyes fixated on that beautiful gold light. His steps faltered, and with each trip the light zipped ever closer.

I looked up to see it nearly filling the space in front of us. It almost obscured the cold light flickering faintly in the distance. We were in awe of this beautiful light.

Again, I stopped to guide John's failing steps. John had sent me home while the doctors worked on getting him stabilized, only to tell him he could go home the next day. I was 120 miles away, and not there to tell the doctor (politely) "No way in Hell will he be going home! Not with a winter storm coming through. And certainly not until you've answered ALL of **my** questions." I knew I should have stayed in Wichita.

When I returned to his side, I began to see a gentle, golden beam extending down. This beam halted our steps, and we watched it slide closer to us. It looked as if it would touch the floor at John's feet.

The glow was beginning to bathe his face, and I could see his foot move to step onto that beam. His foot was now shod with a beautiful sandal and was perfect. Still my John's foot, just not the earthly one. I knew as soon as his foot touched that beam, his other foot would follow instantly. There was no stopping him from traveling up that beam and into that light. I still saw the

earthly body he was stepping out of standing beside me. I felt his hand in mine, but it was growing cold and no longer squeezing so hard.

I prayed that he would look back at me, as his perfect and healed body glided up toward that light, his eyes telling me: "I love you, and I'll see you soon."

Revelation:

What God showed me came to pass 5 days later. John came home to bask in the love of his family and friends, those who had prayed and loved him so completely throughout his final journey. Five days of laughter and tears, giving John--and us--closure. On December 3, 2018, his feet stepped upon that golden beam and he gladly received his promised healing, fulfilling the promised vision.

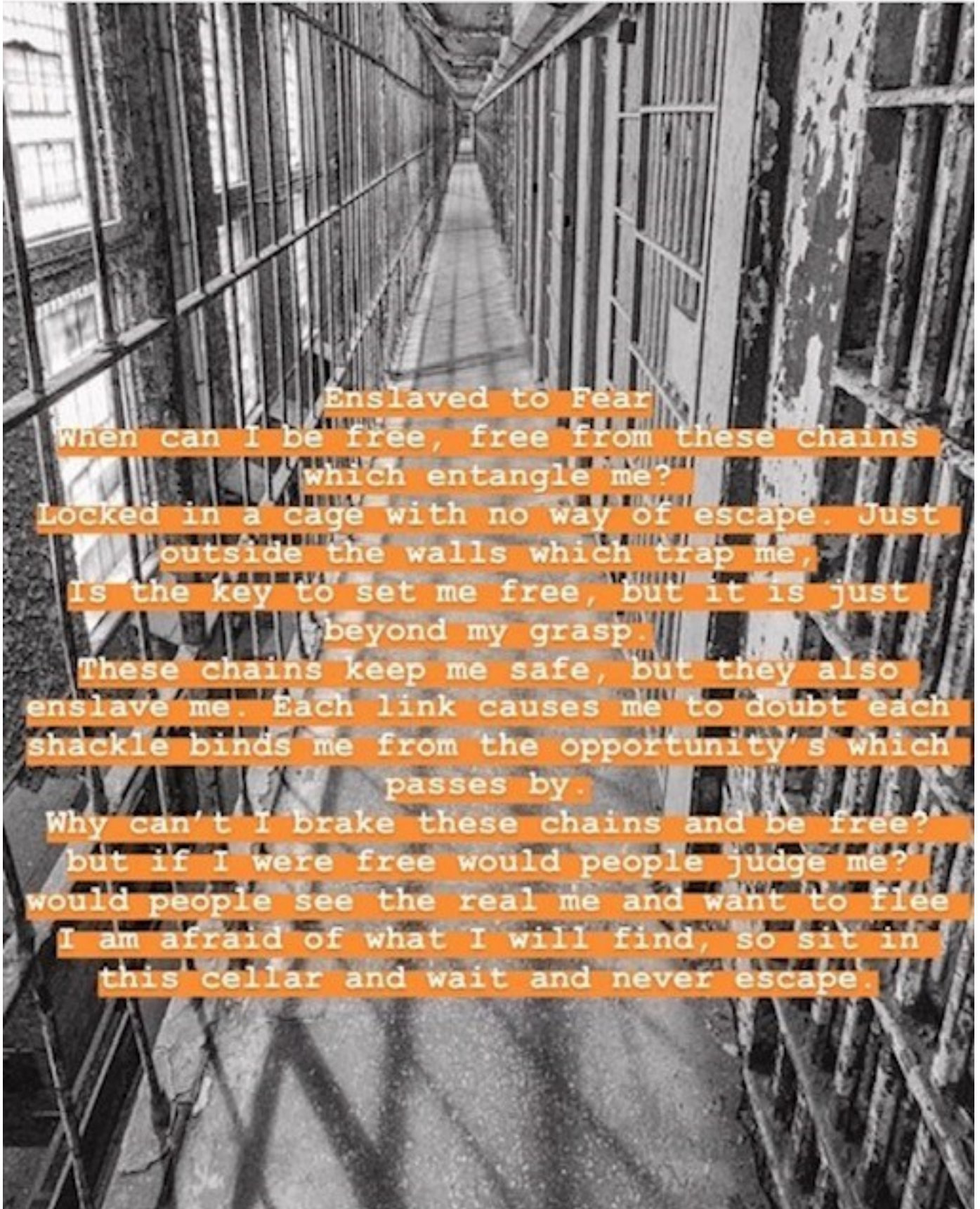
John did have his parting shot. As I reached for his hand, knowing that he was gone, I heard his voice say! "God! She'll make me watch Christmas movies! TAKE ME NOW!" So with tears and laughter, I said goodbye.

I, Not We:

I now continue on without him, continue on the lower, dark path full of trips and chasms. How am I supposed to live without that most wonderful man? How do I make the decisions that we made together? Should I remain in our home or move elsewhere? How do I support myself? Will I ever be able to walk out the door without wishing he were here with me?

So, I choose to rest in my faith that he is with God and I will continue to trust in Him as I watch for my light to begin to rise from the floor--soft, gentle, beckoning--where all my loved ones are waiting to welcome my newly healed, perfect, true body HOME.

And standing at the front, my beautiful John.



Enslaved to Fear

When can I be free, free from these chains
which entangle me?

Locked in a cage with no way of escape. Just
outside the walls which trap me,
Is the key to set me free, but it is just
beyond my grasp.

These chains keep me safe, but they also
enslave me. Each link causes me to doubt each
shackle binds me from the opportunity's which
passes by.

Why can't I brake these chains and be free?
but if I were free would people judge me?
would people see the real me and want to flee
I am afraid of what I will find, so sit in
this cellar and wait and never escape.

Flower Kingdom

By Landon H. Winkler

Kingdoms rise, the mighty tsunami grows
Kingdoms fall, the once mighty tyrant crashes down.
All that is left is the aftermath, ruins all remain unless washed away by the
waves,
Waves of the next generation.
What was once thought weak
Is seemingly strong.
The Flower Kingdom,
They burst into full bloom in the aftermath and ruins,
Building on the destruction.
Sunflower guides his utopian kingdom,
His brilliantly adorned yellow crown always looking toward the light of a better
day.
Then Rose, as her passionate colors and crimson heart
Both inspire growth and unity within the kingdom.
The Flower Kingdom blossoms, seeds of tomorrow are sewn
The Flower Kingdom wilts, a garden is grown.
The Monarchs are picked,
And the waves of the past ripple, to water the future.

Anonymous Fib Poetry

By The Collective

Tom

Hanks,

DaVinci Code

Fibonacci sequence unlocks

The secret, solving the mystery

Of Christ's human legacy on earth. All fictional

Leaves

Fall,

Floating,

Tumbling up,

Twirl, dancing down, down. . .

Resting in crimson gold patchwork.

Class

Grades,

Falling

Behind and

Trying to keep up.

Stay up late, but never enough.



A Lesson in Invisibility

By Stephanie Ramirez

There was a new guy in chemistry today. He came in late, of course, since he had probably gotten lost. I overheard the girls near me whispering about how hot he was when he walked in. Why is it that the only thing girls care about these days is how a guy looks? What's wrong with liking a guy, or anyone for that matter, for their personality? Don't get me wrong, he was attractive but not so attractive that I would consider him "hot." Plus, I try not to be one to judge a guy based on looks.

A few minutes before the bell rang, the teacher gave us some free time since the lesson was over. Like bees to a flower, the girls in class swarmed toward the new boy. While I sat at my desk on my phone, the girls fawned over him. I don't think I've ever seen a guy look more uncomfortable in my life. I waited until passing period to introduce myself; maybe then he would have more of a chance of actually acknowledging my presence. The girls rushed out of the room when the bell rang, probably to gossip to their friends or to reapply their make-up in the bathroom before the next class started. As he started to walk out of the room dragging behind the rest of the people in the class, I started walking up to him. Surprisingly enough, he saw me walking towards him and stopped instead of what everyone else does, which is practically barrel right past me while not even batting an eye.

"Hey, I'm Tiana Washington. I noticed that you were new here and wanted to welcome you," I said, extending my hand out for him to shake if he so chose.

"Olson, Travis Olson," he replied, reaching out to shake my hand. He had a firm grip, and he seemed to linger in the handshake a moment longer than what seemed appropriate before letting go, but I disregarded it. He was probably waiting for me to let go first.

"Well, welcome to Alexandria High, Travis Olson," and we parted ways, but I hoped we had started something that would go on for a long time.

We didn't talk to each other after that. At first, I feared that he had forgotten about me and joined everyone else in the ranks of not noticing me, which was a little bit of a bummer because I actually kind of liked him. Then, almost like magic, we were paired up to do a project together. Since we would get no time to do it in class, we exchanged numbers and arranged a time to meet after school. We met at the park that was close by. I definitely didn't want him coming over to my house because he might get distracted by my sisters, and he strongly opposed to the idea of me coming to his. The project went well, but while we were working on it, we started talking about other topics, like what we wanted to do after high school, what our hobbies were, what extracurricular activities we were doing, stuff like that. We ended up having a lot in common.

As time went on, we started talking more. Whether it was face-to-face, or through texting, it didn't matter. Almost every day we had a conversation about one thing or another. Sometimes it would be him trying to get me to think more positively about myself and my achievements or me trying to convince him not to do something stupid that would get him hospitalized. Other times it would be an argument about which Marvel movie is the best.

We also started hanging out together in person. Our go-to spot to hang out was the park. We both enjoyed being in nature, and the park was big enough that we could spend a while there without seeing anyone we knew.

I invited him over to my house to watch a movie once. It had been a few months after we met, and I knew him well enough to know that he didn't hang out with me because of my connections, however; I couldn't soften the blow of my family's money and influence. The first thing he told me when he got there was that I lived in a mansion. He seemed a little star struck by the house, but that's what happens when your dad works for the US Department of Defense and your mom works for the National Science Foundation. Both of my parents lead their division in their respective fields, so we have a generous amount of money. I didn't invite him over again, even though he kept mentioning

wanting to come over. I didn't want to show off and refused every time.

A few months after he came to my house, he invited me over to his. We'd known each other for about a year, and I thought we were pretty close. His house was definitely not a mansion, thank goodness, but it was still a fairly nice house. Not that it really mattered, anyway, not to me at least. I rang the doorbell, and not long after I heard footsteps. The door unlocked, opened, and there he was.

"Tiana! Welcome in!" Travis said with a smile. He ushered me into the house and closed and locked the door behind me.

To the right of the entranceway was the living room, and it was huge. There were two leather couches facing each other. An armchair was in one corner, and I could see a book propped open on the armrest. On the far wall was a fireplace that looked to have been well kept, maybe even used in the winter. Between the two couches, there was a medium-sized, circular coffee table. In an archway straight ahead, I could see a table with eight chairs around it, and somewhere around there was most likely the entrance to the kitchen. To the right, there was a hallway and a staircase. I followed Travis down the hall, him leading me to his room.

When I walked into his room, right away I saw a map of Washington, D.C., and the surrounding cities. It covered the entire wall that was across from the door. There were pictures tacked to the map of important government people and red string everywhere. I couldn't make much sense of the details, but I got the gist of it.

Oh no... I realized too late. Of course. Dad works for the Department of Defense, and Mom at the National Science Foundation. He would be the one to make the leap of thought to think that they would tell me the government's secrets or the workings of their respective jobs at the very least. He wants that information, and he's always been eager to learn more about my family, specifically my parents' jobs, and I'm their daughter. He thinks they will come for me. This is not good for me or him.

I had fallen right into his trap. Travis pulled a syringe from somewhere. It was filled with a clear liquid. I tried to fight, to get away from him, to run, but he was stronger and shoved me into the wall. The momentum slammed my head into the wall with more force than the initial shove. My vision got blurry, and I was momentarily dizzy. Travis took his chance and inserted the needle, filled with a sedative, into my arm. It took a minute to take effect, but as it coursed through my veins, the fight drained out of me. My eyelids became heavy. My legs got weak. They could no longer support my weight and gave out.

“Why?” sitting on the floor of that room, sedative coursing through my veins, my eyesight getting dim, I choked out that one-word question. Typical. I’m getting kidnapped, and the only thing I can get out is the most cliché question to ask in a kidnapping, or anything like it. Of course, I got no reply. I probably wouldn’t have heard it anyway. All I could see was Travis’ face maniacally smiling down at me. Then the darkness came, and I saw no more.

I woke up on a table and in restraints. The classic villain restraints, of course, metal bands roughly three inches across around my wrists and ankles. The table was approximately at a 65° angle, and there were platforms beneath my feet. Travis was across from me, in a chair, waiting for me to wake up I would assume.

The room was basically a cylinder of concrete with nothing in it except for my table and his chair. Somewhere above me, I could hear air conditioning, and I could feel cool air in the room. *At least I won’t die from heat or suffocation by just being in the room.* I wondered how long I had been out, but it was a miracle that I wasn’t dead or bombarded with questions yet. Travis must’ve gone soft, wanted to relish this moment of me defenseless, or wanted me to realize that I was helpless. Leave it to him to be the villain thinking he’s taunting the hero with a damsel in distress.

“Well, well, well. Look who we have here. Tiana Washington. And with her, almost unlimited information on the doings of the government of the

United States,” he sneered shortly after I woke up. He still allowed me to get my bearings though. How odd. The Travis I knew was too selfish to care about another human being. Although, I guess I thought that he cared about me, so who knows what was going through his mind.

I chose not to reply to that comment even though I could’ve easily listed a thousand things right then and there proving that I wouldn’t give him the reward he was looking for.

I’ve said for the longest time that my superpower was invisibility. The only argument that it’s not is the fact that human beings don’t have super powers. My family doesn’t care about me, and if they did, I would still be shadowed by my *amazing* sisters and what they’ve done. If they cared, I wouldn’t feel like I was the odd one out in every group, I wouldn’t feel lonely all the time, and Travis wouldn’t have been the only friend I had.

But from my life of neglect came survival skills. To protect myself from disappointment, I learned to hold my tongue. I didn’t talk to anyone, and no one ever noticed me to start a conversation either. Any comment I made was overlooked and dismissed. Travis could do whatever he wanted to me, and my lips would remain as they were stuck together with super glue.

But I couldn’t stop myself from wondering: *what are you planning Travis? There’s no way you actually thought that kidnapping me would lead to Mom or Dad giving you any information on government projects.*

“No comment, Ms. Washington?” he said, after a minute of my silence. I thought I detected a hint of smugness in his voice, but I wasn’t quite sure.

Honestly, that hurt. How indifferent he acted. Like the past year meant nothing to him. I honestly thought that we had a lot in common. We got along and worked well together. I guess that was all just an act to get close to me. How could I have been so stupid? I should’ve seen this coming, and I probably could’ve except I was blinded by the excitement of having a friend. I still held my tongue, though. That’s at least one thing I’m good at.

“I guess you don’t want to talk to me, then. Fair enough. But you will tell

me what I want, or you will bring those with information to me. Just you wait,” he promised. *Like your threats mean anything to me. No one is coming to save me. They never have, and they never will,* I thought but still didn’t say a word. Travis then got up and walked behind me. Since I was strapped down, I couldn’t see where he went, but I heard the beeping of a keypad, a door unlocking, opening, closing, and locking again.

A fool would think that they are alone. Luckily, I’m not that much of a fool. Travis probably had hidden cameras in this room to make sure I didn’t escape and to check if I mumbled anything important in my sleep. I thought about trying to dislocate my thumbs to get out of these cuffs, but I thought better of it. Knowing Travis and how his mind works, there’s a possibility that the shackles holding me down would give me an electric shock large enough to render me unconscious if I struggled, and I wasn’t keen on being forced into unconsciousness again. It wasn’t worth giving him the satisfaction, either. The only ways to get out of this situation was for me to relinquish government information or for Travis to let me go. I knew what was going to happen. He isn’t going to like this at all.

“Why are you doing this?” I asked Travis, breaking my silence that lasted 10 of his visits. I wanted to know if the realization I had in his room when he sedated me was correct or not. He seemed to visit once a day, but there was no way for me to tell exactly what day it was, what time it was, or what the actual date was.

“Why, you ask? Well, you see, the government has always been up to some shady things. First, they form the Manhattan Project during World War II, to create the atomic bomb. A secret from the public that their government was making a weapon to destroy entire cities. Even after the Trinity Test and bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the government still kept some of its projects from us, even some information about the atomic bomb they had just used. When they were testing and building the hydrogen bomb, they kept it from us until the last minute. Presidents have been doing shady business

right under our noses for years. The government's secret-keeping must end. They can't continue to have our support when we don't know what they are actually doing. Our government can't be responsible for any more bloodshed. Not if we want to keep the promise of security. The people won't feel safe if secrets are being kept from them. I need to know what they are doing. I need to stop the carnage," he responded. He even added a little emotion at the end pleading with his voice for me to give him the information. Like his act would break me. I said nothing in reply, just a small raise of my eyebrows to acknowledge that I heard him. At least I was right about his motive for kidnapping me. Maybe I'm good at more than just being quiet. Soon enough, his face showed his fury.

"Fine, then. If you won't tell me, I guess I'll just have to get it from your parents," he said. "They'll be here soon enough. It's been 12 days already. They must've noticed by now."

He believed that my parents would come save me? Is that really how naïve he is? Did he just forget, or not pay attention? I'm pretty sure I told him my situation. My parents wouldn't even notice that I was gone. He did help me figure out how to tell time in this godforsaken room, though. I can at least thank him for that. After sedating me, I was out for roughly two days, and he visited me every day after that. Good to know. At least I'll know how long it takes for him to give up.

For 51 more days, I waited. For 51 more days, Travis pressed me to give him the information I didn't know. For 51 more days, I held my tongue. Travis held me captive for two months. On the first day of the third month of my captivity, he came into my cell. I was still strapped to the table. His chair was still facing me. Nothing had changed except for the air blowing from the vent that was somewhere in the room had started to blow warm air instead of cool. The first thing he did was push a button on the side of the table, and with a hiss, my restraints were removed. I stepped off the table, leaning on it for support since my legs were not used to fully supporting my weight, and

rubbing my sore wrists. I turned to face him. His fury was unlike anything I've seen. I guess the realization hit home, and it was not pleasant.

"I can't believe I'm doing this. You should've been found by now," he said, with his teeth gritted. His hands were balled into fists at his side. I wondered how much willpower it took for him not to shake with fury.

I knew it would come to this. Nobody noticed that I was gone because nobody cared to notice me while I was there.

"So, you're letting me go?" I asked. I was hopeful, but not too hopeful, as I didn't want to be disappointed.

"You can't do anything for me. There's no reason for me to waste resources keeping you here," he responded. So, that's what I was to him now. A waste of resources. I'd have been hurt, except during the past two months I had developed a hatred for him. I didn't interrupt his villainous monologue, though, and he continued, "I thought that by taking you, the only people who would notice would be your parents. That way, I could be sure that they were the only ones looking for you, and when they found you, because I knew they would, I could use you as a bargaining chip. They wouldn't have gotten law enforcement on the case, either, because it would look pretty bad if one of the top dogs at the US Department of Defense's daughter got kidnapped. So, they do a private investigation, realize that you were at my house the day you disappeared, and they come to confront me. I tell them that they can have you if they give me the information I want. They tell me what I want to know, because you're their daughter and they love you, they get you back, I move to England or something to escape their wrath, I help the rest of the world catch up to the United States, you go back to your happy life with your rich family, and we never see each other again," he replied.

It was almost a solid plan. There were only two problems. Problem one: my parents don't even notice my presence. My sisters don't notice my presence. Travis was the first one besides teachers that acknowledged that I was more than just a space filler. The only reason I am still alive is because

my family knows that I exist and still live with them. Problem two: my parents wouldn't disclose government secrets, even if they did care about me. I'm pretty sure that they signed a contract of secrecy when they got the job. To violate that contract would be an act of treason against the United States, and they would have to relocate after they lost their jobs if they weren't killed, of course. A betrayal is not a light matter, and since those were critical parts of his "master plan," he failed.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied with yourself. You've taken away two months of my life, and wasted your time on a fantasy," I said, not even trying to keep the venom out of my voice anymore. He couldn't lock me up and get away with it. Because I didn't talk for the better part of the two months that was my captivity, my voice was raw, but I didn't care. Let these words hurt him as much as my self-reflection, and speaking in general, hurt me. "But let me inform you of this. I used to think that you were a kind, helpful person who actually cared about me. Maybe you were a little selfish and reckless, but that didn't matter because you actually seemed to care. Did you know that you were the first person to look at me and see a human being instead of a placeholder or just straight-up empty space? Did you know that I would've trusted you with my life if I had to? I believed that you were different from everyone else. That you cared about me more than my parents' influence, or their money, or for close contact with my sisters. I know that I am lesser than my family in everything, and I have for years. But with you, I felt equal for the first time since I can remember. I can't believe I fell for your lies, for your façade of kindness. I can't believe I even talked to you," and I left. I walked right out of the door that he left open, and I didn't look back.

When I got home, nothing had changed. My life went back to the way it was before Travis came along. No one exclaimed that they were happy to see me, that they thought I had died, or that they were worried about me. They just noticed that an empty desk in their classroom was filled.

Thankfully, I never saw Travis again. I will never forgive him for what he

did. I hope that he went to prison, or at least spent a good time there. I had given the police department a report of what happened as well as his address as soon as I got the time after my return to the rest of the world.

One good thing did come out of that ordeal. I had always despised being invisible, alone, and overlooked. Now, I see how that could be a good thing. Travis showed me that living in the shadows and on the sidelines could be advantageous. Looking back, I've heard a multitude of secrets that should never be repeated just because no one noticed that I was there. In that concrete cylinder, I gained confidence in my deduction skills. The confirmation of my theory concerning Travis' motives was the start of that climb in self-confidence. So, because of Travis, I found a passion for mysteries, specifically in solving them. And I can do it pretty quickly, too. At least now I know that my "superpower" has some potential for use, other than making me miserable.

Last Times

By Cathy Anderson

Last times
Unaware.
We pay no heed
Until next time—doesn't happen.
Then we know

Last times
Realized.
Through decision, planning
Expected, anticipated.
No less hard

Last times
Desired.
From pain, suffering
Prayed for, grateful.
A relief

Last times
Unimaginable.
Devastating loss
Inconsolable grief.
Inescapable

All last times

Unavoidable.

Insignificant, monumental

Alive in memories, dreams.

A life lived



I'm always so sick and tired

By Austin Smith

I'm always so sick and tired
Of feeling the way that I feel,
Of waiting to feel better, and
Of wanting to be different.

Everything is a mess and
I'm always so sick and tired.
No amount of sleep seems to make
It any better—or just good.

It's easy to feel lost and left
Behind by everyone else.
I'm always so sick and tired,
But I don't want to be like that.

I want to be wild and free
Just like in the movies. Free to
Do something more easily, but
I'm always so sick and tired.

“The Holy Ghost”

A ghost lives inside the gates of my heart speaking to my restless soul.

This ghost haunts the darkness that is trapped beneath my skin.

Quick and stealthy like a thief in the night, he slays my flesh. No stone is left unturned no closet could hide the filth and decay

which rots in the rooms my heart .

This ghost tears me down each day only to rebuild me.

A miracle has transpired within me.

Every day I wake I am raised and reborn as a new creature like Lazarus breaking out from his tomb. Even though I pass away every time my head hits the pillow my body is preserved, preserved until I am called home.

For I am a foreigner here.

This place is not my home.

I am only here for a time.

I am apart of a kingdom that has no comparison a kingdom that has no rival.



Neverland

By Penelope Rujan

My head hurt. Something on my left arm stung. My sight was full of twinkling lights. I couldn't tell if they were real or just because of my headache, but they were beautiful. I wanted to disappear and float in them. Suddenly, someone's boot rammed into my side. I moaned and curled into a ball, but hands grabbed my arms and pulled me up. "She's up Cap'n!" called a man's voice. I opened my eyes and saw that I was . . . on a ship!? I stood in a room with two small portholes looking over the sea.

The Captain was a man around the age of 25 with a short brown beard. He wore what would be expected from a pirate: a white linen shirt with black pants and a blue overcoat. His hat, complete with parrot feathers, sat on the small desk he reclined behind.

"Miss Macy Higgins, how nice of you to join us. My name is Neil Bowmen but you may call me Captain Bowmen." My head spun and my legs felt like jelly but I still had enough strength to glare at him.

"Where am I?"

He found this amusing. "You're on a pirate ship my dear girl."

I wanted to slap that smug smile off his face. "I meant, which sea are we in?"

The smile didn't disappear.

"This is Neverland, there's only one sea, and it's all named the same thing." I waited for him to tell me what it was called for about twenty seconds before I realized he had no intention to. Then what he said sunk in.

"And it's called. . . what exactly? Also, did you say Neverland? Like Peter Pan Neverland?" The smile disappeared.

“It’s called the Bowmen sea. And yes, I said Neverland, but there’s no Peter Pan.

That’s only a myth.”

“You mean, like your last name? Does anyone else really call it that? And I’m pretty sure that if I really was in Neverland, there would be a Peter Pan.” I gave him a smug smile of my own now, the problem was, he *could* slap it off.

He stood and made his way around the desk. I tried to backpedal out the door only to remember that there was another pirate behind me. I was shoved forward and practically ran into the Captain’s fist that swung towards me.

I closed my eyes letting the breath come back into my lungs while lying on the floor. When I opened my eyes again, there was a sword point pressing against my chest. I went still, held the breath I’d just gotten back, and waited to see what he would do.

I’m sure my eyes looked pathetic and pleading, but inside I was a thunderstorm of rage. How dare he take me from my home! How dare he threaten me with a sword when I had no weapon! How dare-

“I don’t like games, Miss Higgins, but you seem like a person who likes to play them, so I’ll warn you now: don’t upset me or you’ll be sorry.” His voice grew low as he gave the warning that I’d heard from every movie and every TV show about pirates. I rolled my eyes instead of saying it, but it got the point across, and the sword pressed a little harder into my chest. “I said I don’t play games.” He said through gritted teeth and might have run me through if a boy hadn’t raced in.

“Captain,” he stopped short of coming into the room, gave a small bow, and then continued, “there’s a ship approaching us from the starboard side. Requesting permission to open fire.” The captain looked out the porthole which faced the right-side of the boat.

The sword tip left my chest, and I let out the breath I had been holding. The captain stepped over me and out the door. The two other pirates followed.

Did they seriously just leave me alone?

I wanted to explore the room, but I also wanted to see the ship that was coming in. I headed out the door.

The headache from earlier had gone, but the sting in my arm hadn't. I put my hand on it and felt a wet sticky substance.

When did I get this?

I walked up a staircase and emerged onto the deck. Men ran everywhere, and no one seemed to notice me. I saw the captain and the boy from earlier standing above me by the wheel looking at the fast approaching ship. It had a white flag up, which was probably why they hadn't opened fire.

I climbed the stairs and stood next to them, enjoying the few seconds it took them to realize that I didn't belong. They both glared at me. I acted like I didn't notice.

"Who's that?" I asked, pointing to the other ship.

"Don't know." The boy answered. I turned and looked at him. He didn't take his eyes off the ship.

"What's your name?"

"Skyler. You're Macy. Skip the small talk." I rolled my eyes then turned to watch the other ship.

It was beside us in minutes.

I wanted to see what happened next and tried to walk down the steps, but the captain whispered something in Skyler's ear, and I quickly tied up and pulled away from the new ship.

"Seriously?" I asked while being dragged down the stairs and back through the door I had come from, "I can't just go get a better look at the other ship? It's not like I'm going to escape. We're in the middle of the ocean!"

"Captain orders," was all he said.

He pulled me down to what I guessed was the middle of the boat. There were cannons in long rows here. He threw me next to one and then started to get it ready. "We aren't going to open fire on them, right? I mean, the white flag means that they come in peace. And am I seriously in Neverland? Is there

really no Peter Pan? What about fairies? And pixie dust-”

“Would you shut up! You're giving me a headache!”

“I would stop if you just answered my questions.” He rolled his eyes and thought it over.

“Fine. But only if you promise to be quiet.”

“I promise.” I said, crossing my fingers; there was no way my questions would stop here.

“Yes, we might open fire on them. Yes, you're seriously in Neverland. No one has seen Peter Pan for a while. Pixie dust and fairies are fake.” He turned back to his work.

I looked for something to cut the rope around my wrists and saw a small dagger lying next to one of the other cannons just out of my reach. I looked over to Skyler. He seemed immersed in his work, so I moved into a position where my back would shield what I was doing. Then I stretched out my feet so that they almost touched the dagger. I got my foot on top of it and started moving it towards me.

Almost there.

Just a little more.

A tiny bit-

Something slammed into my back.

I flew forwards and collided with a wall. Another pirate stood over me holding the dagger I had almost gotten. Skyler glared at me and walked to stand over me too. They both shared the same smug smile.

“You hit her pretty hard Gavin.” This “Gavin” shrugged.

“Yeah, but she seems fine now.”

My back hurt, and I had just gotten my breath back, but I was giving them a glare that could melt ice. I tried to stand, but my legs, which had already been tired before, didn't want to work right. Eventually I gave up and slumped against the wall, waiting to see what they would do. They both started arming the cannons on either side of me while snickering incessantly, so I decided it

was a good idea to break out the questions again.

“So. . . whatcha doin’?” When I got no answer I decided to continue. “I’ve seen a lot of pirate shows, and I was wondering. . . do you guys really try to find buried treasure? Are there really gold doubloons? Are there any women pirates? Do you guys sleep in hammocks or beds-”

“Shut up!” They both said in unison. Glares couldn’t make my smug smile go away.

After an hour of waiting in the cannon-room, there was shouting on the top deck. “Watch her.” Skyler ordered Gavin. “I’m going to see if the captain needs anything.” He ran up the stairs without giving Gavin a chance to answer.

Gavin turned to me, leaning against the cannon he had been preparing. “Tell me a bit about yourself.”

“Tell *me* a bit about *yourself*.” He walked over to me. I pulled my knees to my chest, and he sat down in front of me.

“Fine. You know what? Let’s start over. My name is Gavin.” He stuck out his hand as though he wanted me to shake it. He clearly didn’t remember that my hands were tied behind me. After a few seconds, he remembered and awkwardly retracted his hand. Before the conversation could continue, Skyler came back.

“The captain wants her in his quarters.” Gavin stood, pulled me up, and then handed me to Skyler who yanked me up the stairs with no regard to how hard he did so. I was once again thrown into the room with the desk and captain.

“We need her to be in *that place*,” said the captain to Skyler. I wondered what *that place* was.

“Who’s in the other ship?” asked Skyler. I now realized why people hated it when others talked over their head. It’s incredibly annoying.

“It’s-,” his gaze shifted to me as though I wasn’t supposed to hear what he said next, “I’ll tell you up there.” A nod passed between them, and then I was being dragged to a small door behind the captain’s desk. Once the door was

open, I realized it was a small, cramped room with no light except for the cracks in the floorboards above. I was thrown in, and before I could turn around, the door was closing and I heard the sound of metal scraping against metal.

So here I was locked in a dark room with no indication of how, or if, I was ever getting back out. What a great way to spend a Saturday. I laid on my tied hands and stared at the floorboards above me trying to catch pieces of the conversation. “. . . I heard that we're gonna trade. . .” and, “. . .if I were the captain I would get rid. . .” Nothing made sense with them walking past without pausing. I was down in the dark room for what felt like three hours but was probably thirty minutes, when someone finally came to get me. I was expecting Skyler or Gavin, but instead it was a burley pirate who I hadn't seen before. He held a strip of cloth in one hand and more rope in the other.

“Hey, kid. Get out. The cap'n wants you up-top.”

Once I was out, he undid the rope on my hands and re-tied them in the front. The strip of fabric was a gag. When we entered the sunlight, I stumbled a bit and almost fell when the rope on my wrists was suddenly pulled forward. When my eyes adjusted to the light, I took in my surroundings.

Most of the pirates had stopped what they were doing to watch me and the new ship. The captain stood beside Skyler and another man I didn't recognize. The rope was handed to Skyler, and the other pirate walked off. I tried to pull the rope out of Skyler's hands, but his grip was like iron, and all I got for my efforts was sore wrists.

“Ah, Miss Higgins, I'm glad you could join us again.” He turned to the man from the other ship. “This is Archer Floyd, captain of *The Azarbick* and a close friend of mine.” Captain Floyd nodded a greeting and Captain Bowmen continued, “We have arranged an agreement that he'll take you with him to find the famous *Iker* treasure.”

They were trading me? What was the *Iker* treasure? Why should I know how to find it? And what would happen if I couldn't find it?

“I am NOT helping you find some stupid treasure!” Is what I tried to say, but with the gag, it sounded more like, “I mm num hlmng eyou fimd summ stupm tresud!” But I got the point across because I received glares from all of them.

“You will help find the treasure because if you don’t, then you may kiss your home goodbye. Do you really want to do that?” Skyer took off the gag so I could answer.

“People will start a search party. There will be hundreds-”

“No one will be looking for you because time doesn’t work the same here. If you go back, it will still be the exact same time it was when you left.” I didn’t know what to say to this so I stayed silent. I tried to kick him in the shin, but I think it hurt my foot more than it hurt his leg.

“I said, I’m not helping-” Someone’s fist collided with my stomach and I flew backwards sliding across the deck. Skyler must have let go of the rope because it slackened on my wrists, and there was no way I could have slid this far if he hadn’t. I wanted to get up, to run, to hide, to do anything other than being held captive, but there was no point in trying while being surrounded by armed pirates.

I could hear footsteps walking in my direction and curled into a tight ball. Unfortunately, my “tight ball” didn’t hold up to Skyler pulling me into a standing position. The two captains walked over.

“Now, will you help find the treasure?” I looked hard at the ground avoiding his gaze. He put his hand under my chin and forced me to look at him.

“I said, will you help look for the treasure?” My glare was answer enough to his question. His slap came out of nowhere, and I fell over again. This time though, I decided to make a run for it. The rope slid off my wrists as I ran for the stairs that led to the cannon room dodging outstretched arms and lunging pirates on the way. I heard swords being drawn behind me but didn’t look back.

Once I was at the staircase, I closed and locked the door. When I entered

the cannon room, I paused and looked for another staircase or a ladder to find a better hiding spot. I saw a ladder leading to what I guessed was the hold. I ran over to it and descended trying not to think about what they would do to me when I was found. I heard the sound of cracking wood and moved faster.

Once I reached the bottom, I took another second to look around. There were a lot of barrels and crates that were probably stocked with food and water. There were also a few turned over row-boats next to piles of fishing gear. I went to the furthest row boat and lifted it just enough for me to slide under as men's voices filled the room.

“Where’d she go,” asked Gavin. The question was echoed by a few more voices that I didn’t recognize.

“She's obviously hiding somewhere down here. Spread out. It won’t take long to find her.” Ordered Skyler. I heard footsteps headed in my direction and curled up into a ball hoping with all my might that they wouldn’t look under here. While I waited, I thought about what had happened today.

I had been taken to Neverland, was on a pirate ship and was about to be traded for treasure. I was expected to find a treasure that I knew nothing about and had no way of getting back home.

I wanted to cry. I felt silent tears roll down my cheeks and hoped that they would dry up before they found me. I heard someone stop in front of my hiding spot. Then the row boat was lifted, and Skyler stood over me looking slightly annoyed and immensely pleased. I was still in my tight ball and tears stained my cheeks. He grabbed me by the ankle and dragged me out from under the boat. Once I was out and he set the boat down, he grabbed my other ankle and lifted me into the air upside-down.

“I found her!” The rest of the pirates cheered.

“Put me down!” I felt his grip begin to loosen.

“Gently!” He let go of one ankle, grabbed my arm, and then sat me down and tied my hands and ankles.

“How am I supposed to walk if my ankles are tied?”

“Who says you're walking?” The cockiness in his voice irritated me, and I tried to think of something to say back, but then he pulled out the gag from earlier.

“Don't you dare put that back on me!” I tried to scoot back but collided with the row boat. I dodged his attempts the first few times, but then he motioned for Gavin to come over to hold my head while he put it on. I was thrown over a burley pirate's shoulder and carried to the top deck where they dropped me in front of the captains. No one looked happy.

“Take her to the *Penaranda*. I have things to discuss with Captain Floyd.” With a flick of his wrist, he had Skyler and Gavin lifting me into the air and carrying me across the gangplank onto the other ship.

“Take me home this instant!” Sounded more like, “ake may ome thas imsan!” This time they didn't understand what I said and gave me confused looks while taking me below deck. Apparently, all ships in Neverland have a dark room where they keep prisoners because I found myself thrown another one. Skyler lowered the gag so that it hung around my neck and started to close the door.

“I hate you! I want to go home! Take me out of here! No, NO! Wait! Don't close the door! Please, don't close the door!” I could hear the fear creep into my voice, and I just wanted to disappear. I wanted to fade into nothing. I felt more tears well up. Eventually, I fell asleep with gentle rocking from the ship.

I was awakened by a small light that darted across the room. I jumped and scooted backwards so that I was pressed against the wall. The light stopped in front of me, and I could now see it was a fairy. It opened its mouth, and I expected to hear bells, like in the movies, but instead she sounded like a normal person. A small, glowing person with wings.

“My name is Tink. Peter is waiting for you so we need to go.” She flew out the keyhole of the small door.

“Um, I can't fly.” My voice was hoarse, and I realized how hungry I was. Tink popped back into the room.

“Oh, right. Well we’ll just have to wait until night and sneak you to the top deck.”

“But what good will it do to have me on the top deck? Skyler said pixie dust didn’t exist.” Tink crossed her arms and gave me a “are-you-serious” look.

“And you believed him? They do lie, you know.”

“Yes I know; it was just. . . Well, um. . . It was just-”

“Don’t try to make up an excuse. Admit it, you believed the pirate boy, didn’t you?” My gaze dropped to the floor. “It’s fine, I don’t blame you, he was cute.” When I looked back up, I saw that she had turned around to make it look like someone was hugging her and was making an over-dramatic kissing noise. I rolled my eyes.

“No he wasn’t. Did you bring any food?” She turned to face me.

“Uh, no,” She said awkwardly, “The plan was to get you out of here and have food waiting, but since we have to wait for night, you probably won’t get food until early

tomorrow morning.”

“How long until it’s dark?” Being in this room had completely messed up my sense of time.

“It’ll be dark in an hour, but the crew usually stays up after dark.”

“Okay, if it’s going to take that long, then I’m going back to sleep. Being held captive is exhausting.” I closed my eyes.

A big boom woke me from my sleep, and I shot up trying to figure out what was happening. Tink was gone and I started to wonder if she had been a dream until she flew through the keyhole, looking worried.

“What’s happening?” I asked.

“Were being fired upon by Bowman's ship.”

“Why are they attacking? They just traded me over here.”

“They want you back. They found out what you can do.”

“What? What can I do?”

“I’ll explain later. The problem is-” The door burst open and another pirate

reached for me. I started to slide backwards, trying to avoid his grasp, but he snagged my ankle and pulled me out.

“Cap’n wants ye up-top. Says he wants to make an example out ‘eh ye.”

I was thrown over his shoulder and carried back to the top deck where I he dropped me before the captain's feet. He cut the rope around my ankles so that I could stand, got behind me, and put his sword to my throat. I was eyeing the blade and wondering what he would do when I saw something green dart between the sails. Captain Floyd called out to Bowman. “Surrender now and we’ll spare the girl! Or don’t and I’ll kill her!”

“Would you stop yelling in my ear?” I muttered. I felt the blade cut a little deeper into my skin, and a small stream of blood started running down my neck. Then something knocked the sword out of the captain's hand, and he gave a surprised grunt as the sword flew into the ocean. Something hit me over the head and I fell forwards.

I looked up to see Captain Foyd holding a small dagger and was sure that's what he had hit me with. A green-blur suddenly slammed into him and then walked over to me. I felt the bonds on my wrists loosen and come off completely. I didn’t pause to wonder how they had been cut. Instead, I quickly scooted back until I was against the ship's rail. The green-blur darted forwards, and I flinched and closed my eyes. Then I felt a breeze flowing through my hair and inched one eye open. There was nothing but ocean beneath me.

I was flying!

I turned my head and looked up to see that the green blur, who I was convinced was Peter Pan, was holding me. Tink was by his side. “Where are we going?” I asked, watching an island appear over the horizon.

“Back to the found boys.”

“The found boys? You mean the lost boys?”

“That's another part your grandfather got wrong.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Let's start at the beginning. Your great-great-grandfather came here once, but I'm the one who brought him here, not the pirates. While he was here, he kept a journal of all that he saw and wrote a book about it in your world but with a few changes. He also buried a secret treasure called the *Iker*, which was his code-name. He told us, and apparently the pirates, that he would tell someone about Neverland and that she would find her way back here to claim it, but when you didn't come, the pirates got restless and came to get you hoping you could take them to the treasure. Of course, they never would have found it.”

“Why not?”

“Because we have already found it.”

I gave him a confused look. “Then why do you need me?”

“You're the only one who can open it.” We flew in silence until we reached a partially-hidden cliff that led into a cave. Peter put me on my feet as gently as possible, but I still wobbled. “You okay?” He asked as we walked into the cave.

“Yeah, just not used to being on land, I guess.” I noticed that the cave walls started to glow. When I got a closer look, I noticed that there were tiny flower buds everywhere. “What are these?”

“Those are baby fairies, or at least they will be.” I gave him a confused look and he explained. “Fairies all have different abilities, so when the flower that they're in blooms, the petals tell us what their abilities are, and we help them learn to control them.”

“I guess that makes sense. Where's the treasure?”

“It's right. . .” We rounded a corner, “here.”

I gasped. In the center of the room was a beautiful tree with a trunk that twisted into branches covered in periwinkle flowers and leaves that smelled like mint. At the base of the tree was a wooden chest covered in intricate designs, but it didn't seem to have hinges, or for that matter, any way of opening it. I took a step closer and a round of “surprise!” filled the room. I jumped and tried to back up but ended up tripping over a rock and landing in

Peter's arms.

"Are you okay?" he asked. Three boys snickered as they walked out from behind the tree.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"Good. Macy, these are the found boys, Desmond, Garrett, and Leighton." I walked to the chest while they all peppered Peter with questions. I crouched beside it and ran my hand across the top.

"How exactly am I supposed to open this?" They walked over and crouched beside me. "According to your grandfather, you should already have the key."

"Seriously?"

"Yes, seriously. He wrote an entire poem explaining how to get into the chest."

"Can I see the poem?" He pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to me. I read it out loud.

"My granddaughter is who you need but hiding she may be. A sign upon her hand will form if these words are spoken carefully. All you need to say is this: 'A pirate's girl and a granddaughter's bliss.' She is your one and only key to a treasure that's to be used carefully."

I looked at the chest, then back at the poem that I wanted to crumple into a ball and throw across the room. Then I felt a tingling on my thumb and noticed a small, purple design forming on it. I looked at the chest again. In the top left corner, a design matching the one on my thumb appeared. I pressed my thumb to it. At first nothing happened, but then there was a clicking noise and the lid opened, but the chest was empty. We all groaned.

I turned to Peter and asked, "Did my grandfather ever say what he would put in a treasure? Or give you a clue of some sort?"

He shook his head. "No, all he told us was you were the only one who could open it." I sighed and looked back at the chest. "We should get you back home." I nodded. The rest of the boys got up and looked at me.

"I'll catch up. Just give me a moment." They all shrugged and walked out. I

reached down and touched the bottom of the chest hoping that the treasure was invisible.

The bottom shifted slightly when I touched it. I pushed on it, and a compartment popped open revealing a small velvet bag. I picked it up and was surprised by how heavy it was. Inside was a purple gem and note.

You found it! The jewel is a Pixtausy gem that allows you to become a fairy. I found this one while I was with the pirates. Yes, I joined the pirates, it was only for a little bit, but while I was there I found this gem and knew that I had to keep it safe, just as you must do now. I am putting my trust in you. Oh, and I almost forgot, to make the Gem work, just say “Some dreams become reality.”

~James Matthew Barrie~

“Macy! Are you coming?” Peter called.

“Yeah, I’ll be right there!” I replied. I took the gem out and whispered, “some dreams become reality,” and the gem glowed in my hands. I closed my eyes, and when I opened them again, I was bobbing up and down, like a plastic cup in water. I looked down and almost screamed when I noticed the ground was five feet below me.

I was flying! The gem had actually worked! I heard footsteps. “Some dreams become reality,” I whispered and was back to normal just as Peter walked into the room.

“What’s taking so long? Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I was just thinking about how weird it is that my grandfather was here.” I gestured around the room.

“I guess I never thought about that. You ready to go?”

“Yeah.” As soon as he turned around, I slipped the gem into my pocket and followed him out. He took me home, but I will be back. There is no way any of them are going to get rid of me that easily.





Submission to Prairie Ink

We are a literary annual that welcomes fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, drama, literary criticism, and graphic narratives.

We serve as a vehicle for emerging writers who attend Barton Community College or reside in one of the seven counties within Barton's service region.

The editors of Prairie Ink encourage submissions from Barton students, alumni, and community members from Barton's seven-county service area: Barton, Pawnee, Rice, Rush, Ellsworth, Russel, Stafford; and from students enrolled at the Barton Fort Riley Campus and Grandview Plaza Outreach location.

To check out submission guidelines or to submit your work, please email the editors at prairieink@bartonccc.edu.

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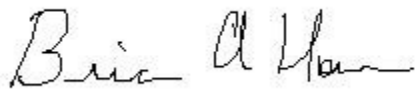
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Message from the Dean

This magazine began as a way to celebrate the life of Mary Barrows, an English Instructor at Barton Community College, who passed away suddenly in the summer of 2009. Mary was recognized as Distinguished Instructor in 1997 and was recognized as an Outstanding Instructor nearly every year of her career. She was so beloved by her students, former students and colleagues. This magazine is a testament to her and her love of literature and creative writing.

We are now in our 11th annual publication of Prairie Ink Literary Magazine. I want to thank the people that submitted pieces for this publication, the leadership of Scott McDonald and the Prairie Ink Committee, Scott Beahm, Diane Engle, our Public Relations team and our graphic designer Sasha Bingaman. I also appreciate the past leadership of Prairie Ink with Jaime Abel and Teresa Johnson.

Enjoy!



Brian Howe
Dean of Academics
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Barton's Mission and Vision

Vision

Barton Community College will be a leading educational institution, recognized for being innovative and having outstanding people, programs and services.

Mission

The Mission of Barton Community College is to provide quality educational opportunities that are accessible, affordable, continuously improving and student focused. Barton is driven to provide an educational system that is learning-centered, innovative, meets workforce needs, strengthens communities, and meets the needs of a diverse population.

We will seek to achieve our mission through eight ENDS and four Core Priorities (Values) that define our commitment to excellence in education.

ENDS

1. Essential Skills
2. Work Preparedness
3. Academic Advancement
4. "Barton Experience"
5. Regional Workforce Needs
6. Barton Services and Regional Locations
7. Strategic Plan
8. Contingency Planning

Core Priorities (Values)

1. Drive Student Success
2. Cultivate Community Engagement
3. Optimize Employee Experience
4. Emphasize Institutional Effectiveness



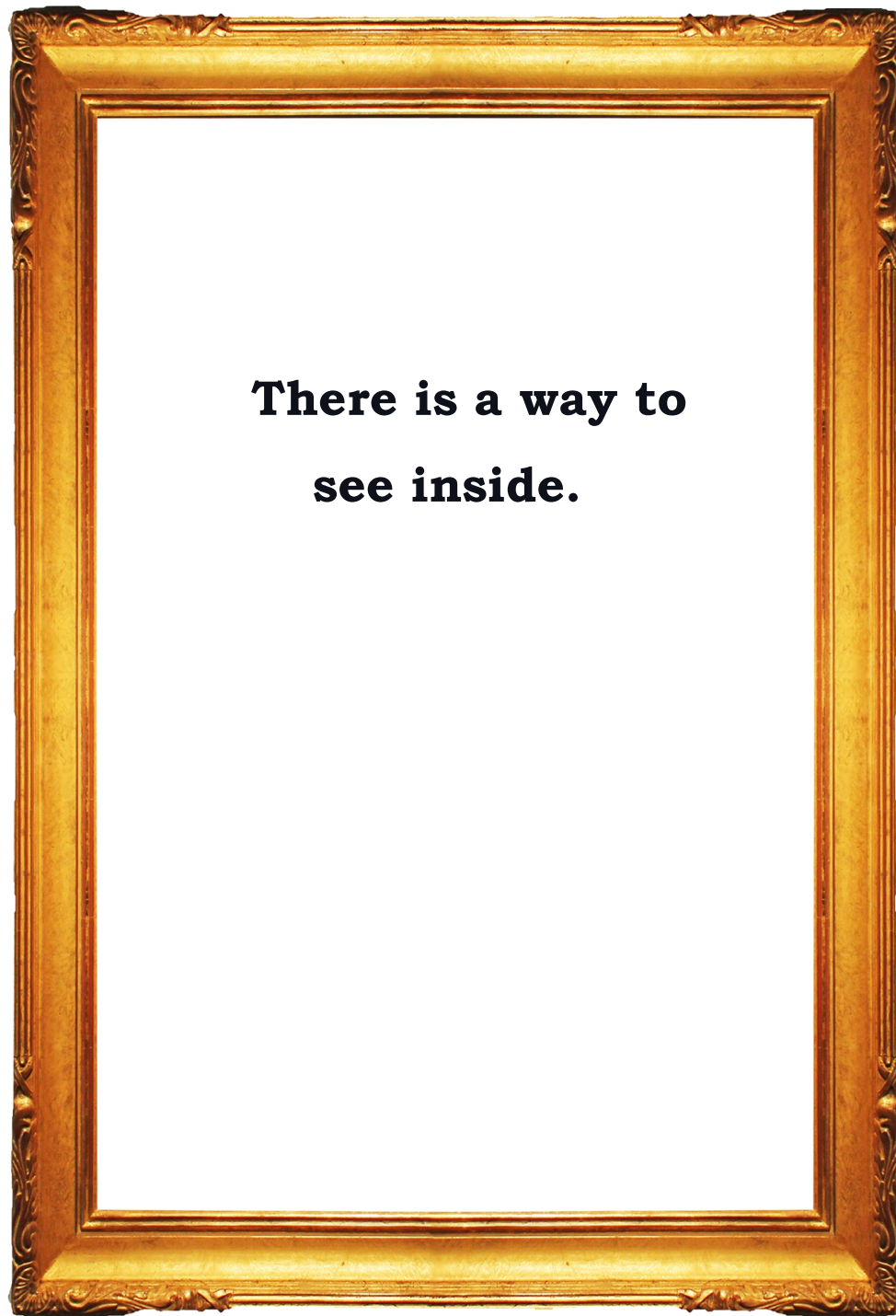
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