ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The composition of this publication could never have been completed without the following people, all of whom are owed immense gratitude:

To the authors and artists whose work comprises this publication: I thank you for the gift of your creativity.

To Greg Kyriakakis, Rafia Chodhry, Tony Labson, and Cheyenne Poskey, who donated their time in the creation of this magazine: many thanks for your support and dedication.

To Ryan Frabizio, who shouldered the role of Junior Editor with grace, and promises to be a remarkable editor in the coming years: much appreciation for your devotion.

To Omar Lopez, who patiently led the editorial board through the creation of a beautiful publication: awe and admiration for your creativity and patience.

To Alaina Siminovsky, who was not only my right hand, but often much of my head: appreciation and indebtedness for your organization, advice, and guidance.

To Dr. Suzanne Ferriss, who advised an agitated editor: this undertaking is impossible without you, and all your efforts are prized.

Finally, appreciation goes to Dr. Ben Mulvey and Dr. Marlisa Santos, who deserve the utmost praise for seeing the need for this publication and for supporting the efforts of their faculty members and students.

Thanks to your presence, this division has provided a vehicle of creativity for all of our students.

Liz Harbaugh
Editor-In-Chief
Editor’s Note

I don’t want to write my second editor’s note. I hate to think that my involvement with this publication will end after this year, and I will be relegated to a shed of obscurity, chronicled only by the virtual annals of electronic time. It is a necessity, however, and so I must take my last bows and trust the future and fate of this magazine to new hands who will continue to breathe life and growth into this ever-evolving organism.

In 2004, the vision of Digressions was produced. This third volume borrows from and improves upon its predecessors while retaining its original goals: to inspire readers, to challenge writers, and to cause everyone it contacts “to turn aside” from the day-to-day and revel in the mind-to-mind.

In your hands, you hold a treasure beyond price. Each of the works presented in this humble frame is not only a vehicle to inspire your imagination, but the confession of a single, unique, creative mind. Digressions will spur you to self-discovery and instigate personal investigation.

Liz Harbaugh
Editor-In-Chief

The Long Road Behind
John Paul
A Wish
John Paul

A Wish is a type of dream.
Wishes are the dreams that your heart beats for.
In size, they are much smaller than a normal dream

A normal dream is “I want to be a doctor” or “I want to be an astronaut.” These are the dreams of childhood that adult life chases away towards the horizon. Most people stop dreaming.

A wish is a much smaller dream. Wishes are the leftover dreams that no amount of cynicism or reality can chase away from the heart of a human.

These are some of my wishes:
I wish to fall in love with somebody, grow old with them, and still hold hands when we’re 82.
I wish my grandmother’s cancer would go away.
I wish I knew I wouldn’t be bald one day.
I wish I had more time to read.
I wish I was traveling right now.
I wish everyone would take the time to look at the stars.

I wish everyone wished more.

Chase the Clouds Away
Ryan Frabizio

Calm and steady breeze
Coming from the cars and trucks as they pass
They come and leave me hidden in the clouds
Clouds of dust and gas
Coughing as I walk along the road

Sweet musical tones
Coming from the phones that ring everywhere
That people talk and talk into all day
Clouds of endless noise
Piercing my ears in the library

They are gone, but not for long
I can find relief but not any cure
I have to learn to live among the clouds of society
Heads between the clouds of headphone sets
Ignorant to other people’s thoughts
Everyone complains for their own good
little things
Liz Harbaugh

nails scraping on spine tingling shivering sweat sweet sex
warm morning kiss lips soft sweet love sugar taste
look of lust look lust later live lie on the bed
music loud scream car gas heat rush move
  faster
    faster
      faster
hot bath steam ache muscle move moan wine candle fire
words written pages before years past story fantasy life
dance fast beat hot noise notes pulse sing
roller coaster scream tracks clack clack rush speed
  faster
    faster
      faster
purple liquid smoke swallow frosty ice drink
talk speech learn listen thought think challenge imagine
snuggle cat curl purrrrrr yawn teeth green eyes
live move scream shout live move scream shout
  faster
    faster
      faster

little things live life
Faith
Omar Lopez

Another Last Poem
Marines Alvarez

I guess I was expected to wilt
Eat the Fruit of Sin
And let it take the place of a little girl’s faith
I was given this jaded heart
And expected to wear it under my sleeve
They gave me all the appropriately cynical answers
And all the rational against you
I let myself have all the hurt
Enough to make it obvious that heaven is too noble a solution
Enough loss to suspect and doubt
(Two missing ingredients in faith)
I was the girl in the great garden
Who felt the creator’s eyes on a naked body
Soiled by sin
I was the one who wanted to know it all
The world sees all the indications of a Godless creature

And yet
But still
Even then

In my muddied hands I hold my mustard seed
It’s grown
My eyes can’t help but lift towards heaven
And laugh at those too blind to see it
You believe this God
They say
Against your better judgment

My Best Judgment is my best reason to believe
Where did my own selfish, crusted, stupid judgment lead me
I was the girl in the lushness of a perfect garden
Who couldn’t see towering trees of sweet Divinity
Who reached out to touch the only one she couldn’t have
The only one that could do her harm –
The Fruit of My Better Judgment
The Fruit named My Judgment is Better
The Fruit named My Judgment is Better
And sometimes I feel that bitter taste left in my mouth
And I laugh again
And let my feet lead me to the tree of Redemption

I’ll Stop Writing Poetry

Spill the milk
Cry
And write it all down for the world to see
Share the secrets
The ever-ending love
The never-ending pain
Is that what it’s made to be?

Shh.
Don’t ask the questions
They killed the cat
Who held your tongue
Awkward and untalented as it was

But
Hesitant am I
To proclaim any poetry from mine
To display myself with the one a day
Who claim to own
The art that so often eludes me
Slip
Slipping Away
But this broken shoe often fits
And my hopelessness
Makes me wear it

This is my last line of poetry
In a long line of last poems
All dripping in sincerity and desperation
But if I stop this release
I’ll kill my sanity
I’ll kill my hope
Two free birds
With one pointed stone

Pain is never real until it weaves itself onto these pages
These small bits of veracity
I can’t even hold in my hands
It’s only after I leak it all
Out of my head
That these words
Start crawling under my skin
Is this who I’m meant to be?

Shh.
Don’t ask the questions
They killed the cat
Who held your tongue
Awkward and untalented as it was

Pay a penny for thoughts
And you’ll get a penny’s worth
This
Broken
Stream
Of just feelings
Just words
But no questions
This, I say
Is my last line of poetry
With as much honesty as I posses

All the silvery linings
Have weighed down the frail clouds
And now they are upon me
Crashed
Burned
Consuming
Nothing is well
This isn’t ending well

This is my last line of poetry
A small prayer that will not stand
This is another last poem.
At this point, it’s a universally acknowledged truth that a single woman in want of a genuine relationship will find herself alone, chain-smoking on a Saturday night/early Sunday morning. I wonder if I’m the only person at this university who feels like there are walls of pressure closing in around her. I feel like a cross between an HIV-patient and someone with a slight case of pink-eye—we’re both contagious, but the first is a lingering feeling that never disappears, and the second is that itch you can never scratch. Can I ever be comfortable here, or am I doomed to wander alone through my life, with men staring at me like I have a giant zit, or a third nipple, or a head growing out of my ass? (Okay, that’s unfair. Men only stare at me this way when they meet me “professionally.”) I know that it’s uncommon for a woman to be the Sports Editor for a college newspaper, especially when all the big sports are the men’s sports, and especially when the entire staff of male writers quit when I made editor. Nothing like having a five-foot girl in a locker room, or behind the bench. Even though it’s not like I say stupid things—I’ve been watching football with Daddy since I was seven.

Tonight (okay, last night, let’s be precise) was our first home game, and of course it was a giant victory, which means I should really stop writing this and start writing the damn article. But I’m so furious that I can’t imagine writing about miraculous third downs until I can get this insulting, patronizing, unfair evening out of my system, so I’ll smoke and sip at my beer and type this until I’m ready.

I got to the game early, after finally dragging Jane out of the room, beglittered and nervous as hell about her first time as a “varsity cheerleader.” She’s finally in sight of the “real” team, which means maybe Mother will lay off about her not being able to find a future famous football player. (Not
that it served Mother that well—Daddy can barely stand to be in her presence—too bad she married a star kicker who was majoring in physics and literature. Guess her degree in “education” seemed less martyr-like and more idiotic as time went on…) Jane did look beautiful, with her hair bouncing and her perfect body showcased in that scrap they call a uniform. And I was so proud—she’s practiced forever to perfect her gymnastics, and it finally paid off.

We arrived at the game, and she went off to join Carol (stupid bitch—she patronizes my sister and claims she’ll “take her under her wing,” but I know she’s just trying to neutralize the threat of finally having a genuinely beautiful and sweet girl on the squad) while I wandered into the locker room to get an idea of the pre-game mood—thought it might be good for the article. Apparently, it’s not appropriate for an editor to wear an ETSU sweatshirt, or maybe it’s just not appropriate to be a woman, because all conversation ended when I arrived. After five minutes of deathly silence, I decided to camp out on the field, study the mood of the crowd, and just cover the game.

We won brilliantly—I’ve never seen an offense play better. Billy Darcy threw to Chaz Bingley for what seemed like a thousand yards (okay, it was only 182, but they were so seamless it was unbelievable). They’ve been best friends since high school, and their relationship is hilarious—Bingley comes off all exuberant, running around and pumping up the crowd and the team, while Darcy stands around acting like football was some philosophical issue, and he could only perform properly if he were standing around looking condescendingly at everyone else. Conceited ass.

So, we won thanks to a last-second touchdown (Darcy to Bingley, of course) and the whole stadium erupted. The energy was incredible—as though a million firecrackers had been set off in the middle of the campus. As I took photos of the team celebrating (did I mention my photographer quit, too?), Bingley looked directly at my beautiful Jane, standing away from the draping cheerleaders and just beaming about the victory. I snapped a photo of him standing with his mouth open, gaping at her. She was so serene, so beautiful—he was obviously entranced. I’ll save the photo for when they finally date—I’ve never seen a couple so fitted for each other. Both ecstatic about everything, him never bothering to hide it, and her afraid to show too much. It was adorable.

I went to take interviews after I thought everyone would be dressed—I mean, Chaz and Billy set a school record—I had to talk to them. Bingley was thrilled, laughing and joking, and he invited me to a party…me, and “anyone I know who wanted to come. Don’t I have a sister who’s a cheerleader?” (So adorably obvious!) Darcy stood by his locker and refused to acknowledge me, so I practically had to pull teeth to get a satisfactory response. Anyway, at the end I agreed to grab my sister and head to their teammate’s house, so we could celebrate with them.

I found a still-glowing Jane, who had gotten an invite to the same party from Carol, and we headed that way. We got there and the party was in full swing, keg stands left and right, and what seemed like the whole campus wandering around drunk and belligerently proud. We hadn’t been there more than ten minutes when Chaz dragged Carol (can’t believe she’s his sister) up and said, “Hey, Lisa—oh, sorry, Liz—this is Carol, my sister. So, who’s your friend?” No sooner had I introduced Jane than he had co-opted her, gotten her a drink, and dragged her off to dance with him. Not that she was unwilling—I could tell she was nurturing a serious crush. I wandered around, taking photos and wondering how long I had to stay, finally ending up leaning against a wall trying to find someone I knew who I could at least talk to.

Chaz left my sister with Carol and rushed over to Billy, who was standing a couple feet away from me. He went into a glowing description of my sister (hot, nice, funny, hot—glowing for a man) and said, “I’m going to ask her to dinner tommorrow. But I’m so nervous…Billy, do me a favor and find someone here to ask, and we can all go together. I want to make sure she’s comfortable.”

Do you know what that arrogant asshole said? “Please—I’m not taking anyone here out, until the future of the human species depends on it.”

(Okay, he’s good-looking, and a football star being scouted by a bunch of pro teams. But really—he’s not God’s gift to women.)

Chaz was great. He said, “Shut the fuck up, Darcy. There are tons of pretty girls here. Look, take her sister—
that cool girl who interviewed us. She’s attractive, and interesting, so we can all go out together.”

That bastard responded with the most sexist, snooty, stuck-up comment I’ve ever heard.

“That weird girl who thinks a sweatshirt is the epitome of fashion? Please. I’d rather spend the evening chewing on your toenails than lower myself to asking some freak who thinks she knows what a football is to accompany me to a meal. I’d rather eat alone for the rest of my life. Take out the cheerleader—she’s cute. Her sister can find another idiot writer with pretensions—you know, someone she’ll have something in common with.”

At first I shrugged it off, and went to find Charlie, the lit mag editor, who always thinks that angsty boys will inspire her to feel something she hasn’t felt (since no one will ask her out), and therefore is drawn to parties like an ant to an ant-trap. We had a good laugh about male egos, and that idiot’s assumption that because I had interviewed him (hello—it’s my JOB) I must be desperately seeking him. I’ve decided to seriously criticize his ability to pass—unless he’s throwing to Chaz, he usually makes his receivers stretch—guess he thinks they’re not good enough either.

But I confess. It hurts to be lower than chewing toenails. It hurts to be alone and sad and rejected out-of-hand by a man you don’t even like. No matter. Fuck him. We’ll see how he likes the review of his performance I’m about to write. I have the power—the pen is mightier than the sword. Or the Hail Mary.
Trust
Omar Lopez

Trust is strong and supported. It holds more firmly when involving others who give the same. Without trust, bonds are broken and support is lost—leaving the existence of nothing.
There’s Life in My Fruit Loops
Alaina Siminovsky

I never eat breakfast. Either do not have an appetite in the morning, or I do not have time. One morning, however, I found myself opening the fully stocked cupboards in attempts to find something to eat. There is always an array of cereal at my house, so I had quite a selection. Across the rainbow of boxes: red lucky charms, blue frosted flakes, yellow cheerios, I noticed another box— the white box of corn flakes. It struck me as funny, why would you ever choose corn flakes? Somewhere between getting a bowl and pouring the milk I realized, one day, something changes in you and you stop reaching for the rainbow and start reaching for the real world. Grown ups eat corn flakes... But what makes them switch? We all start out with the sweet stuff, when, and why do we change? Something like cereal selection seems so simple, but is it? It seemed strange to me that an entire shift in perspective could be summed up in one moment: the instant that you switch from fruit loops to corn flakes.

It is not just perspective that changes when you reach for corn flakes; it is ambition. The force that drives the world is ambition; it is a coal or fuel for an ignition that drives the quest for achievement in life. Like the shift from fruit loops to corn flakes, the shift in ambition is one that hits at the nature of what drives us. If ambition is a fuel, a gas, then new expansions of ambition, new visions, new drives, are embodied by the search for alternative energy. New perspective is corn flakes, new ambition, solar energy or the electric car.

A few years ago when applying to undergraduate universities, I was at the stage where my ambition was comparable to a nonrenewable form of energy, gasoline. My perspective was like fruit loops. Over the last three years I have experienced a shift. No longer do I see the world the same way. It funny that in just three years I changed so much that it seems my ambition and my perspective are entirely altered. Ambition does drive the world, and in just a few years, the force that drives me has taken new form. Idealistically I went to Tufts University, expecting some sort of all-encompassing college experience, the kind that all naive high school students expect. Life would just somehow begin anew for me; I imagined intellectual conversations over coffee, and a challenge that would force me to acknowledge change in a profound way, but that did not happen. I had gone off to school thinking that this name-brand institution was a perfect fit. My prospective was altered by my and other’s perception of things. When I came home the summer after freshman year, I had every intention of going back to Medford to stick it out a few more years until graduation. But I could not and would not go back. With the program that I applied for closed, early acceptance from the undergraduate college to the Fletcher School of International Law and Diplomacy, and after having been disappointed by almost everything, I could not go back knowing that I was not happy and that the financial burden was causing problems at home.

So, after weighing my options during the summer, I transferred to Nova Southeastern University. The change has not been bad at all. From the shambles of disappointment grew a new perspective, a changed angle of vision. I felt like a whole new person; maybe that is because I saw things entirely anew. Maybe its because, for the first time in my life, I could actually see things. Tufts was not a good fit just because it was Tufts, something that I had not been able to see through my supposedly ‘aware’ status when I graduated high school. I was still at the fruit loops stage of naivety.

I got home from Tufts to find tension between members of my family. Before I left, I did not really notice a problem, but the banana stain on the wall from where my brother threw fruit at my dad was certainly real and the issues behind it had legitimately been there since before I left. Suddenly I felt like J.D. Salinger’s Holden Caulfield looking at the crayon marks on a wall in a museum, seeing something that had been there all along, for the first time.

Everything was different for the first time in my life. I guess a severe perspective change is what makes us grow up. It is what makes the twenty-something year old reach for corn flakes instead of fruit loops.

During high school I argued with my mom several times, but one time was distinct. She had been rolling her eyes at me because my latest complaint just did not register with her. Her eyes, adult eyes, just could not see my problem. Mine, as a child could not see her perspective. Now I
I understand why. Things I used to worry about now seem trivial. My new perspective is much more gestalt-like.

Change is the constant in life. The seasons change and we change. When we change, its not about the leaves or the weather, its a shift, the shift from fruit loops to corn flakes and gas to natural or renewable fuels. We change perspective and ambition, and ambition drives the world. When perspective changes, ambition changes. It is not automatic and most of the time we do not notice it. I see the world differently now than I did when I graduated high school not because of disappointment, but how I dealt with that disappointment. I grew up, I moved forward. I do not actually eat corn flakes, and over breakfast that morning when I first learned of the cereal-like perspective change, I enjoyed every bite of my fruit loops, realizing through every bite that I no longer saw the world through fruit loops goggles.

Although my perspective changed and the form of my ambition changed, there is one constant, the object of my ambition. Even as a child, I knew I wanted to be a lawyer. As a student, I worked hard to become well read and well spoken. During college, my perspective shifted. Through my long journey from fruit loops to corn flakes and gasoline to renewable energy, I still want to be a lawyer. Applying to law school is the next step through which my ambition guides me. I, Alaina Siminovsky, am ready, bowl and spoon in hand to take on the challenge of law school. This has always been the object of my ambition, the direction of my pursuit; I am prepared, through perspective and experience to take on this challenge. I have the bowl, the milk, the spoon and I am ready for the cereal. I am fueled by newly developed renewable resources, just point the way, and I am ready for a new location in which to hone my ambition further.

Barrier
Liz Harbaugh
Like the phantom of the opera
I was a misunderstood monster.
Not scared in the face by fire
But with a body of excess fat.

The demons kept hurting my soul,
They tortured me with insults.
Boys through stuff at me
Girls called me a freak.

I fought back with hatred and fists.
Boys lost teeth and girls lost hair.
My life was becoming a sad fable.
Dante would run in fear of my inferno.

So I ran into my closet and dreamt
In such a small hot space.
I lived in a new world with sunlight and cool breezes.
But the breeze was just hanging clothes
running across my face.

Silence.
That was my greatest ally to focus on my dreams.
There was nobody else that could distract me
When I was in that closet.

The price for paradise was cheap.
My heart and my sanity
I had no use for those things anyway.
I wasn’t happy when I had them.

Time went by fast when I was in the closet
And slow when I was out.
For 6 long hours I’d be in hell.
I would cut off my right arm
To hear that final ring.

For years I was in my closet.
Pray to God for mercy.

Finally my parents found me
And dragged me out of my closet.
My parents were scared
To see their baby boy look so cold.
They couldn’t understand this boy who is so sweet
Look so unwell and so angry.
I would try to get back in my closet.
My parents would kept me out,
Kicking and swinging.

Later I was placed into a mental center.
I felt like a wounded animal backed into a corner.
Scared, confused and ready to fight to the death.
The doctors looked at me with such pity.

I would say, “Go to hell.
How could you blame me for what I’ve done?
If you’ve lived my life you would understand.
For some people, dreams are better than reality.”

I met others who had my problem
Who had scars of their own
And were outcasts of society for different reasons.
Some cut their arms, some loved too much by their parents,
There was even one a boy who wanted to be 6 feet under.

Even though they opened their arms to me
I pushed them away.
My anger made me numb from the heart down
I was the boy with a permanent frown.

But something happened one night.
Somebody got their wish.
That boy was going 6 feet under
Because he purposely drowned in his toilet.
When I saw him covered in sheets
I realized where my anger was going to take me.
So I decided that it was time for me to go home.
I told the doctors everything they wanted to know
I met their requirements and became healthy again.

After months of treatment
I was allowed to leave.
I moved away from my demons and my torture.
I now have a new home and a new closet.

But I don’t use it,
I put all my clothes in drawers
and boxes in the garage.
Now I feel the warmth of a real sun
And feel the smooth breeze on my face.

I still have my anger
But I keep it under control.
I have friends now and a girlfriend.
Will it last, I really don’t know.

But now when I wake up in the morning
And I look at my life today.
I can actually see that my prayer was answered.
I am free from my torment and my closet
I have been granted my mercy.
I Should
Marines Alvarez

I hate the smell of your sweat
Iron mixing with the product of your toil
Water droplets glistening on your nose
A tangible odor in the air
I should get up and leave
But I stay and taste it
Let it dance on my tongue
Let it choke me with its strength
You don’t seem to notice
That is your specialty
You excel in the art of oblivion
Let your eyes glaze over in anger
And don’t ever see me suffocating on your air
I should shake you out of your dream
And dare put my hands on you?
I’m too scared for too many reasons
Starting with the poison I’m sure leaks through your pores
And ending with the callused fingers that love my face
Striking it into the shape you can tolerate
A whimpering creature under your command
I should get up and run away
Forget the tears in my skin
And the red silhouettes of fingers that cover my body
Five fingers I see
Just like any other man
It must make you normal
But I haven’t figured out what that makes me
I should scream until blood fills my lungs
And let you watch my demise?
Maybe not the best solution
My prayer to any god has been an end
But a secret one
Not where you stand with a pounding fist
And where your sweat fills the air I breathe
With sharp inhales
I don’t know why but it hurts worse this time
I should look down and see the damage

But I feel it
A rash of burning pain that is spreading
Like fire
Not even the inanimate iciness of the floor is enough
Not even the shivers of my tattered body
Not even the drips from the leaking roof
Not even the air lined with the smell of your sweat
The only thing that will wrap me up in an embrace
Is enough
I should find a place where they can put out these fires
I should
Run farther away to see how far you’ll chase me?
No
I’ll see you here tomorrow
Same time
Same place
Night Daddy
The Box
Ryan Frabizio

A green plastic golf tee
a white ceramic chess piece
an aging coin for fifty cents
and a thin filmy paper
bearing the Chinese for peace
pinned down by a small conch shell:
the world’s most pathetic treasure
all in this small hollow wood in my palm.

His eyes were green and still yet bright
as when the sun reflects the sea.
They never dulled
but went from kindled to ash
in less than a night
leaving my life.

Letting go, heavy with woe
the little wooden submarine dives
carrying down its curious cargo
as his ashes swirl in milky waves
as if trying to open the hatch
or to sneak and peek in
to see what we left
to rest with him.
The Lanterns
Ryan Frabizio

The sleepy sun sinks into
billowy clouds, the water surface
turning from gold dust to white ash
as the sky-lanterns are strung about
promising the light of the side beyond
this confined expanse of darkness.

I dream to string those lanterns,
to clean and polish them
so that their light shines anew.
They are so rare to see, now:
their stardom, stolen by illegitimate cousins.
Some still burn strong here,
the only night lights around.
It is true each one restrung is another question
hanging in the air

as should be.

Ma has had enough shelling for the day.
She will stiffly stagger
out of bed tomorrow morning,
happy miserable as she stretches
before going again.
I walk with her, but am saving up
to string lanterns later.
Faith’s Flaw
Alaina Siminovsky

Pain paints portraits of truth.  
Truth may deal in lies.  
Distance creates pain that perverts truth.  
Perception is seduced by faith’s flaw.  
I am starving without you,  
Reduced by emotional malnourishment.  
To my eyes, your figure has blurred.  
To my mind you are as crisp as you were upon first sight.  
Behind me I feel your presence.  
Turning I find you not there; the presence but a lie.  
Night bears the cries of my heart, screaming out your name.  
In every breath: Exhale, only solitude- Inhale, take it in.

Lone Rose
Diane Klein
Ashes to Ashes
Amanda Dier

“Cin.”
It’s my name and my profession, and nothing is simple anymore.

When you’re a princess, life is easy. When you’re a whore, things are a little different.

I meet my friends at the local AA and we take our seats. Even though we technically aren’t alcoholics—well, four of us aren’t addicted to anything, we still enjoy the relative serenity that the meetings bring. It gives us a chance to pretend that we’re something we aren’t—innocent girls. And the chances to socialize, but this time... two of our members are missing.

“Where’s Tink?” I whisper to ‘Punzel, and she shakes her head mutely. “Clinic,” she whispers back.
Again? That’s got to be the third time this month. Rapunzel gives me a sorrowful glance, then jerks her head towards the door. We both rise and make our way out of the crowded room quietly, leaving Beauty and Briar Rose in their seats to watch the man on stage gesture violently and rant about his wife. They observe quietly as he segues into a self-depraving one-sided conversation with the audience and begins to rate himself for letting her sink so far as to cheat on him with his brother. If you didn’t know any better, you could swear that they were both paying attention, even though the blue and green eyes are unfocused, and it looks like Briar Rose is slightly high.

When we both get outside, we start to walk down the dirty, cracked sidewalk, away from the storefront that serves as both home for the AA meetings and scant shelter from the bitter cold.

“Where is she?” I repeat quietly. Rapunzel stops walking, and she just looks at me with those honey brown eyes, and I have to pretend that I don’t know.

“Tayle Clinic. Snowy’s with her.” I watch the reflections in the shards of glass poking out of the edges of the sill. I watch Rapunzel’s long golden braid swing back and forth as she shakes her head numbly. I watch my battered, too-tight, faux-velvet corset strain and release with each breath I take. I watch my short pleather skirt move slightly in the icy breeze that whips past. It’s all I wear nowadays, despite the chilly air and the leering glances, and my body’s protestations that it needs warmth. Her blue eyes are dull as they meet mine in the broken glass of the storefront window.

“She’s got consumption, Cinderella. She’s got consumption and Doc doesn’t think that she has very long.”

“I knew,” I tell her, even though I had only had suspicions. “What did he give her?”

“Heroin,” she says, naming a highly addictive drug. Also a highly expensive drug.

“Big H?!” I hiss. “She’ll get addicted!”

‘Punzel regards me bleakly, and Beauty and Briar Rose step out of the meeting, and there’s no more time to say anything. I know what she means if Doc is giving her an opiate now. Tinkerbelle, the only fairy left—the only fairy to ever become a whore—is dying.

* * *

Tinkerbelle is the oldest in our little group; twenty five if you can believe it. She’s tiny, winged, and beautiful, with a pert face and a spunky attitude that kept the rest of us going. We thought she could never die. Fairies never die unless you stop believing in them. Or if they stop believing in themselves. I guess they aren’t immune to consumption, either.

When you walk into the clinic, the first thing you would notice is the screaming, and the moaning, and the stink of rotting flesh still attached to a human and feces and sweat and urine permeating everything. The first thing we notice is Tinkerbelle, on a cot in the corner with Snowy faithfully by her side. I think Snowy’s sick too, but she’s not saying anything. She’s staying quiet, like Tink.

The four of us half-run through the cots of dying poor to her side, still dressed in our street outfits but not caring, even though the glances we get are lewd and the glares disgusted. Soft cheers come from the men around us as we dash by, then they subside into coughing or more moans. We reach the fairy with the bright green hair and kneel at her side, begging her not to die.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers, voice hoarse from coughing up blood all day. “It’s not my choice.” The battered blanket trembles over her tattered green dress as she coughs again in
another racking spasm, which sends us all a little closer to the breaking point.

Rapunzel and I can only stay for a few minutes; Johann and Charming gave us a few minutes to see her—and a deadline. Briar Rose and Beauty are ‘self-employed,’ and can afford to stay with Tink and Snowy for a little bit, since they fulfilled their personal ‘quotas’ before the AA meeting. I can only think that they’re going to go hungry for a few nights before they bounce back from this ‘vacation.’ Beauty apparently did fairly well, and even brought some three-day old broth and week-old bread that she bought from a mysterious vendor who she only named as ‘Beast.’ Tink can barely get the broth down, and gives Snowy half of the bread, which she devours hungrily. A cough from the door tells me that my deadline is up. And when we all hug, color briefly comes back into Tink's face, and she smiles.

I make for the door before I can completely break down, and when I look back she’s smiling at me again; that sweet, fey smile that makes her so attractive to men looking for something exotic. She’s attractive to many; not in the least Snowy, but apparently she never appealed to Peter Pan. Peter fell in love with another, and Tink was so depressed that even after Wendy left, she left the island that she had called home all of her life. Tyme wasn’t the best place, but it was the farthest from Neverland that she could get. And then she found us. And for a while she had friends. And now she’s dying. Life seems really unfair sometimes.

The dwarf Doctor who was named—predictably enough—Doc nods at me, and I walk out of the doors, past Charming, back into the streets of my home city. Johns populate the street, and it’s not long before there’s one leading me to an alleyway, ready to drop his pants at any second, and as he pushes me against the cold brick wall, I curse the fact that the kingdom Heir is a female, and the cruel fate that befalls Tink; befalls all of us. When he finishes, he hands me my money and leaves the alley, glancing furtively to either side, then a few minutes later I leave, hastily shoving my honestly-gotten gains into the flat purse I keep down my corset. Then it’s time to look for another john; another source of money to keep me alive for just a little longer. Just a little.

Later, I wearily climb my way up the broken stairs leading to the second-floor ‘apartment’ that Pimp Charming and I share with Rapunzel and Johann, her pimp. When I first came to the apartment, I was disgusted, but a part of me saw it as a haven; the floor was crawling with bugs, and it looked as though it had a hundred years of dirt ground into it; but it was also my haven from the solicitors, who were trying to sell me into indentured servitude when my stepmother fled town with her daughters, leaving the house in serious debt. It’s both my hell and my heaven. I can only pray that Madame Smoka and her daughters are in a worse situation than I am; the woman deserves it for betraying the promises she made to Father to take care of me. I also wish that my friends and I lived together; out of the six of us, Rapunzel, Beauty and I are the only ones with semi-secure lodgings.

Beauty and Briar Rose live across town, each in a separate area, the first in a tiny attic above a bookstore, and the second in a place with no spinning-wheels. Briar Rose has an unexplainable phobia of spinning wheels, and the mere mention of one can induce a panic attack. I’d hate to see what touching one would do to her. Snowy lives in an alley—her ‘home’ is near her beat—on the corner of Drayme and Gomothe, in a pile of broken bricks and rotting boards. She’ll sleep better next to Tink anyway, I tell myself, even as the familiar feeling of guilt surges through me. I pull out my key and open the door to find ‘Punzel alone on her egg-carton mattress on the floor of the single room, and Charming and Johann are nowhere in sight.

As I lock the door behind me, I hear a sob coming from Rapunzel, and then take a closer look at her huddled form. She’s covered with bruises, and it’s obvious that she’s had a rough night from her johns. Normally it’s Briar Rose who caters to the sadists, but I guess... not tonight. Not tonight, when our friend is dying. Not tonight, when brutal men looking for a woman to savage walk the streets of Tyme, and not tonight, when pimps won’t give their whores a rest to see to a dying woman. Not tonight.

Charming comes in early, as usual, flops down on his cot in the corner and is asleep almost instantly, drunken snores almost certainly making sleep hard for the neighbors, if they aren’t drunk themselves. We’re used to it. Johann doesn’t
doesn't come back at all, and Rapunzel is finally asleep, through small, unconscious whimpers escape her whenever she moves and a bruise comes into contact with the hard, flea-ridden floor through the less-padded parts of her pallet. I lay down on my own pallet, trying to make myself sleep, but I can't; not when I think of Tink lying cold and dying in the clinic; not when I think of all the horrors of the street; not when I think of the possibility that Snowy has consumption, and will die soon after Tink, and that soon we'll all die from disease. We'll never grow old together; we'll never have children and watch them go off to school with each other; we'll never gather around a card table and play Bridge or Mah Jong together and gossip about the workings of the neighborhood.

We simply won't grow old; we'll never get old enough to grow old, because sooner or later, we'll all succumb to one disease or another, or overdose on a drug, or just get killed in a street brawl. We never will grow old, and it's a twisted sort of Neverland here.

Tink ran away from the child's version of Neverland, and that was better than what we have here. Here the whores never age, or they age too quickly—and Hook can never be defeated with simple words, a sword, and belief that only a child could muster; only with money, or the eternal solitude of death. In truth, Hook is everywhere, no matter what we do, no matter where we go. He lurks in the johns; in the tainted money they give us. He lurks in the ‘Escorts;' in the knowing sneers from the higher level prostitutes who style themselves as Kept Ladies of the Town. He lurks in the shadows that harry our steps home, and in the nightmares that plague our sanity at night. He is everywhere, and we can never escape. There is no crocodile to eat him at the last moment; no Peter Pan to rescue us; no faith, no trust, no pixie dust to save us. The pixie dust is dying with Tinkerbelle, and the faith dies with her. We still have trust, but how long can that truly last, when Briar Rose drugs herself every night, and insists that she's clean; when Beauty can only find solace in the bottom of a bottle?

How long can trust last on a street as cold as this? How long can it last in this dirty, timeless city where the whores could have been princesses had it not been for gender, and where the fairies die from diseases they're immune to?

The girl who slaved over a hot stove morning and night for the first fifteen years of her life, then ran away from Grimm to become a whore, hoping for a better life, will continue living in this hellhole of a city, watching friends die, hoping for a better life, and sometimes, just sometimes, wishing that the Princess was a Prince.

Wishes are worthless; there are no happy endings.

* * *

I wake up the next afternoon with a grimace on my face. The clock on the wall says that it's one-o-clock in the afternoon. I need to start moving; Charming will be back soon; sober and demanding the rent and a blowjob. Rapunzel is already gone, and it looks like Johann never came back last night. I dare not hope that we were lucky enough for him to have gotten caught in a gang fight. After I finish cleaning up in the small bathroom—the one commodity I am thankful for; there's never a shortage of hot water—and put on my makeup and change into tattered black tights, a miniskirt that's more like a strip of fabric, stiletto-heels that make it impossible to run, and a too-tight corset that's been cut away in the front to show the tattoo of a golden slipper between and above my breasts, I leave, locking the door behind me.

I pass Rapunzel's beat on Nev next to the Valev motel, a rent-by-the-hour place, seeing her walk casually into an alley next to it with a good-looking man of about forty years. He's wearing a blue shirt, black pants, and has silver hair. He looks vaguely familiar to me, and I search my brain trying to figure out where I've seen him before. Then it hits me like a messenger-coach with fresh horses—he's the Minister of Finance for the city, and there have been rumors flying that he's infected with AIDS. I watch helplessly as he leads her into the alley and leans back against a wall as she tugs his pants down.

Filled with dread, I walk away, hoping to find a shelter that's giving out free soup before I have to start actively hunting for johns.

Eventually I stop looking, and dusk falls over the city early. Barkeeps begin to light up the oil-lamps outside that illuminate the signs showing a beer mug and whatever else the establishment features. Some of the more prominent ones, like Kevn Brie’s—one of my haunts when I'm not working—have
mages that fill tubes with mage-fire to set outside to attract patrons. The glowing tubes are pretty; some of them are arranged in patterns that resemble beer mugs, some of them merely curve and swoop to show the name of the bar in script. A few of the really rich bars have mages constantly lighting and unlighting their tubes, so the pictures formed by the tubes seem to be moving.

As I pass Kevn Brie’s, Alinor steps outside and lays a hand on the empty tubes decorating the stone wall above the low windows. We’ve spent a few nights together—he’s one of my more tender ‘lovers,’ and he’s always gentle about what he does—if we don’t have enough money for the rent; he’s generous in what he pays. Sometimes he’s good for a free meal, too, but I’m only willing to hit him up on it if I’m really desperate. He waves to me and I wave back, temporarily forgetting about ‘Punzel. One of these nights I’m going to give him a free night with no strings attached. He’s been a good friend, these past few years that I’ve been in this city; when we’re together, it’s not always for the sex or the money. He chants something under his breath, and bright blue floods from his fingertips into the tube, filling it to the end, and he moves on to the next one.

I continue walking, and eventually find myself uptown, in the richer districts. When constables begin eying me suspiciously, I realize that I’ve gone too far; sooner or later one will approach me and discover my nightjob, and I’ll either get thrown in the stocks if I’m lucky, or thrown in jail if I’m not. I turn around and begin walking back the way I came, throwing furtive glances back over my shoulder at the constables to make sure they aren’t following me.

I need to pass a large theatre on my way back in order to get back to my beat faster, and I inwardly curse my choice of routes when I discover that the theatre is opening for the night, and has some royal patronage.

The Minister of Finance passes me with a sneer, and I form my lips into an ‘O’ and move my head back and forth at him before mouthing “AIDS” at him. The sneer drops from his face, and he hurries on into the theatre, avoiding my gaze. I’m watching him disappear through the doors when someone bumps into me, knocking me onto the cobblestone streets. An “Oh!” sounds above my head, and I look up to see someone bending over me, face twisted into an expression of concern. Her black hair is piled atop her head in some foreign style, and her eyes are lined with kohl to give it an exotic look. The gown adorning her slim form is sleek and deep purple, gathered in sweeping folds, and the bodice has real diamonds and sapphires sewn into the neckline. Her eyebrows are high and precisely shaped, drawn together above wide eyes. High, aristocratic cheekbones curve down to a pointed chin, giving her a fey look, and it’s that look which jolts me back to reality—my own and the reality of who—and what—she is.

“Are you alright, Miss?” she asks, and my eyes widen. This woman—this girl was the Princess of the kingdom, bending over a common whore. In some countries, it is death to touch Royalty. I scramble away, hands shaking, but she’s in front of me again like a bolt of mage-fire. “Miss—are you alright?” she asks. She actually sounds concerned about me.

A man appears behind her and places a hand on her shoulder. “Is this woman—ah—bothering you, Princess?” he asks. It’s obvious what he’s inferring—that I was soliciting the Princess.

“No,” she mutters, somehow seeming more human. “I’m fine, Ronald. I just wanted to see if she was okay after I knocked her down.”

“She’s a commoner, Milady. You shouldn’t be talking to her.” My ears burn with mingled anger and shame. To him, I’m not really there—I’m just a thing.

“No, Ronald. Miss, please. I’m not going to hurt you. Are you okay?” Speechless that she even took notice of me, I nod, eyes wide. “That’s good. I’m sorry for knocking you down. I—ah.” She seems to lose all capacity for speech now, fingers straying to finger a pouch hidden in the sash tied about her slender waist.

I stare into her violet eyes, still struck dumb, but now people are turning to look at the three of us; her standing in front of me, hand still extended; Ronald, casting surreptitious glances at the crowd; and me, still half-crouched and dressed in my tattered clothing, obviously a whore. Whispers begin to float through the air, and the Princess turns to stare at our audience, slowly moving in my direction. In a flash of movement, she snatches the little bag out of her sash and presses it into
my hands, cupping her own around mine for just a second, then letting go, but not before I feel the hard shifting of coins. She places her surprisingly strong hands on my shoulders and pulls me close.

“Go home,” she mutters into my ear as the smell of sandalwood and roses overwhelms me. “Get off the damn street, if only for tonight. Please. I don’t want to see someone like you get hurt. You’re so young...” She pulls back, and then I remember the stories about the heritage of the country’s rulers; how they always have some sort of supernatural power, and how the rarest power among them is that of the ability to know and affect the mind and heart; and the stories about this particular Princess having that particular power. She releases me and I stumble back, nearly knocking over a beldame in a black dress.

“Go,” the Princess mouths at me. I turn and run, clutching the little pouch to my chest and flee through the crowd even as guards approach us, ready to kill me should I try to harm the Princess. I dodge them when they reach for me, and glance back once—see the relief in her eyes—and keep running.

The stilettos make it hard to run—I avoid the guards and reach the part of town that I know best, still clutching that little bag to my heaving breast. Eventually I have to stop, and I do so near the Tayle clinic, panting in a doorway across the street, eyeing the little hospital with misgiving. Tink is in there, though. I have to see her. Resolutely, I march across the street and through the door, passing the nurse at the front with a nod, and proceed to eel my way through the cots and folded blankets to my friend’s side. Snow White is there, too. Somehow she’s managed to get a cot and is half on her own, half curled around Tink. She looks up at me sleepily as I approach.

“’Allo,” she murmurs. “Why’re you panting? Someone chase you?”

“No,” I mutter, then glance furtively around the full room. “Well, yes.” I tell her the whole story, during which she becomes much more awake and wide-eyed.

“You actually spoke to the Princess?” she squeaks, and her blue eyes widen even more.

“She was... nice...” I say, still shaken by the encounter. “What’s in the bag? Did you open it?”

“No, not yet,” I admit.

“Open it!” she urges. “What did she give you?”

I open the bag and spill the contents at the foot of the bed Snowy and I stare as gold piece after gold piece tumble onto the blanket.

“There must be at least twenty Crowns there!” she breathes, and I hastily scoop them back into the bag as she angles the blanket to hide the glint of gold from the beggars and thieves in the room.

I am left speechless. Why would a Princess give a whore gold? Why would a Princess give even a moment’s notice to a whore? In Grimm, the reigning family runs the country dry and kills peasants for sport. This Princess... is something special.

I thrust my purse with all the money I have into Snowy’s hand. “Give this to the doctor and see if he can find something for Tink.” Then I shove the Princess’s little bag down the front of my corset, turn on my heel, and leave the clinic with Snow White staring wordlessly after me.

I see them huddled outside the familiar storefront of the AA meeting. Briar Rose has a cigarette dangling loosely from her lips as she listens avidly to the story Beauty is telling of a newcomer to the women of the night; a woman who is a swan by day and a woman crowned with feathers by night. I lean against a lamp-post and listen; tonight is going to be busy. Maybe I can find the swan-woman and bring her back with me to the apartment. Johann was caught in a gang-fight, much to my surprise, and now it’s just me, ‘Punzel and Charming in the apartment, and he hasn’t been around much. Tink is still dying, and now Snowy is, too. The gold is hidden away for a rainy day, and I only think of the Princess when I’m in a safe place; I don’t want the memory to be tarnished by my surroundings. She was too pure for that. Footsteps sound on the pavement, and a young woman approaches; a girl, almost. A long, simple gown hides her curves, and simple slippers cover her feet. Her neck is long and supple. A crown of feathers sits proudly atop her head, and she looks at us with wide, frightened eyes; almost like a...
bird.
I look down at her and smile gently, extending a hand to her shoulder.
“I’m Jeannette,” she says softly.
“Cin.”
Digressions

imagine. create. inspire