

It Came From The Internet: A Collection of Short Fiction

Edited by Wings-of-shadow, VirgilD, & geekyjesusfreak.

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Preface

The following is a project put together by a collection of writers on the DeviantArt web-site. As a site that predominantly features drawing and photography, I thought it would be a nice change of pace to put together a project for all the writers that also use the site. The theme for this first collection of short stories and poems was Wings. Stories either literally or symbolically about Wings... or that at least include Wings as a background object or something! This theme was originally put forth by GreatWTF, and won a majority vote from all the people offering to contribute to the project at its start. I would like to thank all the contributors to this project, but especially the volunteer proof-readers Wings-of-Shadow, VirgilD, & Geekyjesusfreak. So, read on, and I hope you enjoy.

Wings Themed Short Stories

Angela

by TwilightsLily

Wednesday morning turned out to be like any other morning at Dr. Green's office. The office was cozy, the brown leather sofa and matching arm-chair were centerpieces of the cluttered room. The grand oak desk stood before the monumental window that took most of the wall opposite of the door up, the desk's edges were adorned with golden trim, beautifully engraved with angels. Not much rested on the desk; a calendar, a lamp, and a phone with a noticeably large speaker, not to mention the overflowing and quite crude folder that lay on top of the calendar. The soft tick-tock of the clock on the wall above the door told all of its watchers that it was six forty-five am. Of course, no patients were in the office that early—except for one.

A tall man in his mid-fifties stood in front of the towering oak bookcase that matched the desk with its embellished edges. He scratched his graying head as he pondered why a man such as Dr. Green would have so many angel knick-knacks, all of them turned around so the main point was the feathered wings of each.

As this man ponders the mystery behind the angels, let us introduce Howard Speake, a very popular and influential politician for the northern state of California, not to mention the dean of Redding Private School, an educator, a Democrat, and an insanely good actor. For those of us who know Mr. Speake on a personal level, we know that the brave and loud man who speaks before crowds of hundreds—thousands, even—and gets them all inspired to make their state a better place, is only but a mask for the shy, cowardly Howard we all know and avoid. It's a no brainer that someone like the real Howard would be in a therapist's office. That's right Mr. Speake made an appointment with Dr. Green, the best there is in all of California. He's diagnosed and successfully treated hundreds of "socially awkward" patients and others that seem reluctant to follow the social norm. Only, it wasn't Mr. Speake that Dr. Green came to see.

Mr. Speake gave up on the mystery, better to ask the man himself, he decided. Instead, he let his gaze wander to a particular figurine. It was an angel of course, a brunette in mid flight who looked eerily familiar to the politician, but the familiarity was not what attracted his eye, the stand for this beautiful angel had a red "look at me!" button that came close to drawing the eye away from the angel and an elevated speaker. It was odd, Howard had never seen anything like it, and he had seen a lot. While his mind wandered the possibilities of the angel's abnormality, the door to the office silently opened, and allowed entrance to the slightly pudgy man that couldn't have been any younger than sixty-three. The

man wore a green suit that most of us all know only a man such as Dr. Green would be brave enough to wear. The doctor's surprise to see Mr. Speake in his office so early became obvious by the look on his face. Unconsciously quiet, Dr. Green stepped closer to his client and greeted him with careful concern.

"Mr. Speake...?"

Howard jumped and almost dropped the beautiful angel. He fumbled with it and hastily put it back in its place. He quickly turned around to see the short man and smiled awkwardly.

"Why, D-dr. Green! You're here early," Howard said, trying to gather his self together.

"I could say the same to you, I thought we agreed on seven," Dr. Green responded.

Howard cleared his throat to buy himself some time and chuckled nervously before nodding in agreement. "You're right, but I wanted to tell you something before you talk with Judith."

"Well, I'd be happy to hear it; I'd like to speak with her soon."

"Um, it's about her past, y-you see, most of the doctors I've taken her to, never seem to know much about it, a-and I think it might be the problem."

"Hm, well, you're no psychologist Mr. Speake, but I'll take your word for it, I may be able to find the reason why your daughter has such an extreme case of Schizoid—possible Schizophrenia, even without the positive symptoms—hallucinations and such. From what I've read in her file, the medicine isn't working well," Dr. Green said, nodding towards the overbearing file on his desk, "It's possible that something else is bothering her."

"Ah, yes, those were my thoughts exactly."

"Though, group therapy would be better suited for her case, if she wanted it—though, with her disorder, I doubt it."

"I-I'd rather she didn't. I can't have the press finding out. A-and Judith being in therapy regularly wouldn't help in that case."

"But taking her to different psychologists every week doesn't help *her*, Mr. Speake!" Dr. Green exclaimed suddenly, making the shy politician bump into the bookcase in surprise. The doctor sighed and walked to his desk, a tad flustered by

his outburst. "This is exactly why I wouldn't vote for a man such as yourself—not even able to take proper care of your only daughter."

Howard kept mouth shut, and told himself that you can't win them all, but still, he died a little inside. As Dr. Green calmed himself, Howard went over what he was going to say. He only had ten minutes now if he wanted to get his daughter in to see the doctor on time.

"That is a moot subject, Dr. Green," Howard said, using his loud and firm, politician voice, "However, I do wish to go on and tell you of my thoughts."

"Very well, tell me," Dr. Green replied feeling no need to apologize to the man.

"You see, my daughter suffered a traumatizing event when she was eight-years old."

"You mean the death of Angela Diaz? Yes, I've heard of the event, but never thought to look into it—the other therapists never even mentioned it in their reports."

"That's because Judith keeps it hidden. She keeps everything bottled up and out of sight—I've rarely seen her smile..."

"That makes me wonder why it hasn't been brought to light thus far—I'll make it a point to bring it up."

"Just be sensitive, she witnessed the murder. Her best friend being murdered by their babysitter is not something that gives pretty results."

"Then why bring it up now? There's at least two months of information and observations in her file, and you must have observed her behavior for at least nine years—assuming that this was caused by the murder," Dr. Green pointed out, he was beginning to question Mr. Speake's intentions now, it was becoming apparent that he was only helping his daughter because of his campaign to become senator. He was loathing the man more and more as he talked with him and his pity for the girl that this man called his daughter only strengthened.

Howard pursed his lips and averted his eyes from the doctor's judging stare. "I...I just thought that it would be better to keep it hidden," he said, struggling to find the right words for the delicate situation.

Dr. Green scoffed, but dropped the matter and pegged Howard Speake as another power hungry idiot whom seemed to be filling all the spots in government now days. "Like I said, you're not psychologist."

Howard ran a hand through his paling caramel hair and sighed, he wasn't going to win over Dr. Green, but it's not like he had to, he figured, as long as he helped Judith, it didn't matter—but, there was one thing that was beginning to bug him.

"Very well, doctor, but I do have one question..." he said, his courage finally rising now that Judith wasn't the main subject, "You have an angel on your shelf and it had a big red button, is there a reason for that?" he asked.

"Why, that's the tape recorder, you see my handwriting's terrible and I can hardly ever read my notes, I use it to help when I need to write my report, but I still have to write down all actions not caught on tape..." the doctor explained.

"Ah yes, I remember you telling me that, I've already signed the consent forms right?"

"Of course, I promise not to distribute the tape as long as you don't mind me taping your daughter's session, of course I hardly ever do this since it can compromise a session, but since Judith is still underage, just the parent knowing is fine, not to mentio—"

"That's all good and well, but I should be going, I'm paying you to see Judith, not me," Mr. Speake said as gently as he could, already he was walking to the door.

My, it was seven already? How time flies. Dr. Green sighed, and shooed the meek politician away, he was right, after all, it was time to see this patient he had heard so much about.

As Howard left the room, Dr. Green prepared himself, which was really only taking a pen and paper and hiding his latest patient's file, and that's all he had time to do, for, as if she were waiting at the door for him to call her in, Judith waltzed into the room.

Now, let's explore the wild eyed girl that was Judith. She was a petite little thing, five-one, five-two at the most, she had caramel hair much like her father, only hers was bright and young, and it was just barely shoulder length. And let us not forget the intense hazel eyes that had a fire behind them that Dr. Green felt he knew—something he encountered quite often, but just couldn't name it at the moment, perhaps it was because it was so early in the morning.

Judith had a look on her face that told all who bothered to look that she didn't care and that she was simply bored, a look that may have intimidated all those around her. Of course if you had known what her disorder was, you would

have described her as anti-social and depressing—oh the wonders of labeling. And just like her father, the girl automatically drifted towards the towering bookcase and went straight towards the tape recording angel.

"Judith? If you don't mind I'd like to get started," Dr. Green said, taking his pad and pen and sitting in his armchair, he imagined his patient laying down on the couch like a stereotypical Freudian therapy session and chuckled to himself before Judith responded.

"I prefer Judi," said the girl, not moving from her spot.

Dr. Green nodded and told her that was fine, he didn't quite care what he called her, but he was curious of the tattoo that covered her back. He couldn't see it very well, since her shirt was in the way, but he would have bet they were angel wings.

"Judith..."

"I prefer Judi," Judi repeated.

"Oh, sorry, I was just going to ask about the tattoo you have on your back," he paused, "May I ask what it's of? And the meaning behind it?"

Judi turned to see her therapist and the good doctor swore he saw a ghost of a smile on her face, something that seemed out of place with her normally emotionless guise. "I'll just show you," she answered, lifting the black of her shirt to reveal her tattoo. The good doctor turned away as she lifted her shirt and began to protest, but he decided at the last minute that it would have been best to see the tattoo first hand, so he turned his head to examine Judi's bare back.

Well, at the very least Dr. Green was right about one thing, they were wings, you could argue they were angel wings, but the dirty gray and tattered look of the wings would probably cost you the argument. They were torn and there were red spots of what appeared to be blood scattered all about the wings imprinted on the young woman's back.

"Oh my..." Dr. Green had never seen such a sight, they certainly weren't the wings of an angel—a demon maybe. "Judi, what exactly...why do you have such a depressing tattoo?" he asked, as if the answer weren't already obvious.

Judi let her shirt fall back to its original place and she picked up the recording angel and shrugged. "Memories, I guess," she said while staring at the angel. "They look a lot like the wings I wore when I went trick or treating with Angela that last time."

Now we were getting somewhere, in all of her records, with all of her therapists, Judi had never mentioned Angela, and Dr. Green was feeling quite smug about the accomplishment. With a bit of pride in his voice, he told Judi that they were getting off on a good start.

"Can you tell me why it was the last time you and Angela went trick or treating?" he asked, prodding her to talk more.

"Cause she was murdered that night," she said, putting the angel figure back on the shelf with a little more force than necessary, Dr. Green winced when he heard the bang that followed.

"She was?" he asked as if he didn't know, "Do you remember what happened before that?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really."

Dr. Green bit his lip, now she was beginning to grow difficult. He tapped his pen on the notepad and asked a few more questions, avoiding Angela for a while. Nothing really out of the ordinary, at least not for Judi's standards, all that followed were tid-bits of emotion and annoyances with her father that were all listed in Judi's file, hell, she said them as if she were reading them off the same list Dr. Green had!

"Judi, about the tattoo, I'd like to know where the idea came from," Dr. Green said as he ran out of questions. "I understand that it is a memento of Angela?"

"You could say that, I got it because I thought it would...remind me of her."

"Do you miss Angela?"

"Miss her? Of course I don't! She was a spoiled little bitch who deserved what I...what Ruth did."

"So she deserved it?"

"That's what I just said, yes, she deserved to be pushed into the drainpipe. I still daydream about her floating in the sewage, her once pure white costume wings, grey with dirt," Judi giggled, and her eyes flared with a fire that Dr. Green

was finally able to identify. "I'm glad she was killed!"

Dr. Green didn't respond right away, not sure if he wanted to know what was going on in Judi's mind, but it was what he was paid to do. "You're happy Ruth killed Angela?"

Judi's smile disappeared, the doctor had no idea what he said but he winced when he caught the glare she shot him. "Just shut up, you have no idea what you're talking about!" she spat, "I'm sick and tired of Ruth getting the credit *I* deserve!"

The look on his face could only be described as priceless, and Judi laughed at the look and her grin reappeared, more menacing than before. Standing up and walking around the couch, she began to pace as she told the truth of Angela's murder for the first time.

"Sure, she was my friend, but she annoyed the hell out of me. She was the local angel, *Angela*. She was the little girl everyone wanted to have as a daughter, even my father. Even her sister despised her! That's why my father was able to frame Ruth so easily—she was the jealous older sister. I-I remember the night, as if it just happened, everything else, the interviews, the aftermath, my whole life after, is just a blur. I remember that my father had forgotten about Halloween, he forgot to get me a costume, I wanted to be an angel, but Angela talked me out of it, said we couldn't be the same thing, said she was more angelic than I was... much more angelic. So I decided to be a bee instead, and I asked my father to buy me the costume when he was driving home from work. But he forgot, he always forgot. So I went to the Dias' house, crying, telling them I couldn't go trick-or-treating. But, Mr. and Mrs. Dias being the nice people they were, offered me one of Angela's old costumes. It was an old angel's costume, of course, it was grey and dirty from spending a year in their garage, and the wings were torn and dirty and there were spots of red paint from when they painted their house. I told them I didn't mind it, told them that I loved it, but I really hated that costume, and hated it with a passion, almost as much as I hated Angela. So when Angela told me that I looked like a-a demon, I was outraged! I couldn't take that girl's snotty comments or her constant plots to take my father away! Sure, she was good at hiding them, but the voices told me, they told me all I needed to know! I knew Angela wanted my life—she was trying to take my life!

"So that's when the voices told me, told me it was time. Time to get rid of her, I wasn't going to give her the chance to take my life, I wasn't going to let her get rid of me first! So, while Ruth wasn't looking, Angela and I crawled under the gap in the chain-link fence that led to the drainpipe. It was practically overflowing! And we were entranced by the fast moving current. It was my idea to check it out, the voices told me that it was perfect, that I couldn't let the

chance just pass me by. So, when Angela's back was turned, I tapped her shoulder, and before she could turn, I pushed her!

"She tried to swim, tried to survive, but the current was too strong, my hate was too strong, and she soon went under. I didn't bother going back to see Ruth, she seemed to be enjoying herself, searching for Angela and me. I walked home, and my father was there, he was reading a newspaper, smoking, and he didn't even look up when I came in. He only grunted a hello, and that was it. I wasn't very happy with that, I wanted Daddy to know what I did, know that I rid the one thing that was trying to tear us apart. So I did. I told him everything, from the costume, to the voices, to Angela's death. He didn't believe me at first, but, when Mr. and Mrs. Dias came by the next day, told my daddy that Angela was missing, he believed me, told me never, ever, ever, tell anyone what I did, that it was out secret. *Our* secret. I was so happy, I agreed to everything he said, he told me to tell anyone who asked, that I walked back home alone after Ruth took Angela home. I didn't realize then that Daddy made me say all that was so he could protect his career, I didn't know that it would lead to Ruth getting arrested, didn't know that I would never be recognized for what I did. It was such a great feeling, such a wonderful thing I did! Why couldn't I tell anyone?! *Why?!*"

By the end of Judi's tale, she was close to tears, her wild eyes still burning with insanity that no longer hid behind her emotionless barrier. She watched Dr. Green and his reaction, which was how any one of you would have reacted, his eyes wide, speechless, simply appalled that such a young girl could tell such story—could do such a thing! He didn't know if it was only a cry for help, or an actual confession, but something told him that it was the truth. This girl was a murderer, and the doctor had no idea what to do.

"J-Judi, you need...I need you to get your father. He should be nearby, tell him...tell him I need to speak with him," he finally said, coming to a conclusion.

"Of course, doctor!" Judi said, uplifted, she just seemed so...so happy. She literally skipped to the door, and left the office and Dr. Green with his thoughts. Taking a moment to relax, he walked to his bookcase and pressed a button that ejected the tape inside that had recorded each and every one of Judi's words. Taking the tape, he came to his desk, and pressed the speaker button.

"Mary...?" he spoke into the speaker, asking for his secretary's attention.

"Yes doctor?" asked the grainy sounding voice from the speaker.

"I need you to do a few things."

"Anything, sir."

"Call St. Jude's Mental Institution, tell them that Dr. Green needs to admit another patient."

"Certainly sir, who is the patient?" Mary asked innocently.

"Judith Speake," he answered reluctantly.

"Alright then, anything else?" she asked.

"Yes..." he said, taking a deep breath, still not sure if he was right, "I need you to get rid of this tape."

Dreams of Icarus

by Harry Durnan / sjwatden

Chut abruptly awoke from a feverish dream that left him groping about the darkness in a disoriented haze. Soft sounds of sleep arose from the dark forms lying about the fur-strewn cavern. The last fragments of his dream evaporated with his waking, leaving him with a vague sense of longing. He lay back on his pallet as recognition of the familiar sleeping chamber calmed his troubled mind. Running a hand through his dirty brown hair, he tried to recall the details of what had disturbed his slumber.

His introspection was interrupted by the dull clang of the morning bell. He rose with his fellows and collected his pick from the neatly arranged assortment of tools along the wall. After passing through the chamber dominated by towering white mushrooms, he arrived at the eating chamber. Breakfast consisted of a battered bowl filled with a mixture of mushroom cuttings and a small portion of the manna. A spicy substance granted to them by the gods in exchange for their offerings. The meal was washed down with water drawn from the slow moving river that ran through the back of the chamber. Then began the daily ritual of worship: reverently hewing away the walls of their ever-expanding home in order to fill the three chariots with their offering. As Chut worked at the task he vainly tried once more to recall the dream that had disturbed his rest.

"What bothers you so, brother?" inquired Iapyx, sensing the inner turmoil as they worked to carry one of their heavy offerings to the chariots.

"A dream I can't seem to remember," Chut grunted as they hefted their burden into the cart to lie among its stony compatriots.

Iapyx snorted. "Beware of dreams. Remember when Butes dreamt of beautiful voices calling him from beyond the river?"

"Aye. I thought I'd never be warm again after helping to pull his body from those chill waters," replied Chut.

As custom dictates, we had placed his body upon the next offering so that the gods might judge his spirit.

As the work wore on, Chut's worry was washed away by the comfort of routine. The pleasant rise and fall of the picks beat a steady rhythm, and he let his mind empty of all but the music of the work. He was pleasantly surprised when he discovered that the chariots had been filled. The group gathered around and, with a great shared effort, rolled the chariots into the Chamber of the Gods.

This was said to be the oldest chamber, with walls at unnatural angles, beyond what any man could possibly produce. At the far end of the chamber was the God's Gate, two enormous slabs of sleek gray, which they avoided with a mix of respect and fear. It was said that beyond the gateway only the dead or

immortal could pass.

When the chariots had been put in their places, the group retreated from the chamber and knelt upon the ground. Facing away from the chamber, they bowed their heads to the ground while the elder performed the sacred rites. He chanted as he made a complex series of hand movements along one edge of the cavern. At the end of the rites, a familiar hum began to rise from somewhere just beyond the cavern walls. The noise slowly built to a gentle roar as two gray slabs, twins to those at the far end of the chamber, reached out from the rock to greet one another; sealing off the chamber behind them.

As the outer gates rumbled shut, Chut felt a jolt of recollection. In his dream he had been standing before the gates, slowly drawing closer to them until... nothing. The rest escaped him as he stamped down a sudden urge to turn toward the chamber. He was surprised to find that he had raised his head up from his prostrate position. He forced himself to remain staring towards his hands, pressed firmly against the cavern floor. None of his fellows had noted his abrupt partial rise, for they all had their foreheads pressed against the well-trod rock. He balled his hands into fists and pressed his eyes against them, as new rumblings arose from within the sealed chamber.

The gods had arrived to collect the offering.

After what seemed like an eternity, to Chut, of strange noises within the chamber, there at last came another rumbling. As the slabs behind them withdrew once more into the walls, the groveling worshipers stood and reverently reentered the chamber. The chariots had been emptied and one now contained a small packet of manna and a pick. Three offerings ago, when hewing away at the walls, a pick had broken at the shaft. It had been carefully placed, as the corpses of the dead, upon that offering. Now, here it was, miraculously made whole once more. The men celebrated as they pushed the, much lighter, containers back through the caverns. Before resting, their bowls would be filled with an extra helping of the manna granted to them for their offerings.

Chut lay on his pallet fearing that sleep would never come, until he hazily realized that he was dreaming once again. In this dream he stood in the cavern before the Chamber of the Gods. Only now, everything seemed as if it was somehow bigger or that he had somehow shrunken. Indistinct figures prostrated themselves along the hall. He moved forward, passing among them. Looking ahead he saw that the slabs sealing the chamber were slowly and silently sliding shut. He found himself approaching the gigantic doorway and laying a hand upon its cool, slick surface. He pressed his face against the door, shifting until his eye peered into the seam of the two great slabs. At first he saw nothing, but then his vision was filled by a blinding gloriousness that he could not put words to. Something alien to Chut's dark underground world, yet it seemed to sear his mind with a strange beauty.

The clang of the morning bell rudely woke him from his vision. Chut sat up, feeling chilled, yet covered in a light sheen of sweat. He clumsily grabbed his pick and made his way to the eating chamber. Splashing himself with the cool water of the river, he felt with dread certainty that this was the same dream. Seeking counsel, Chut sought out Iapyx and told him of the strange dream.

"Truly a dangerous vision my brother," Iapyx acknowledged. "For to see the faces of the gods in the waking world is said to be the death of a man. It is no wonder that, in your visions, the gods appeared so indescribably fair to behold. It would be best for you to let your dreams remain confined to the world of sleep."

Chut silently nodded in subdued agreement. The brief conversation was adjourned as the group rose from their breakfast to take up their collection of offerings. The cycle of work played out as it had in countless others before. When the time came for this offering to be presented, Chut approached the chamber with trepidation.

He was unsure what his dreams presaged. However, as they pushed the chariots into place nothing seemed to be amiss. As the group exited the chamber, Chut felt a need to hang back momentarily. After a moments hesitation, he felt a rush of embarrassment and hurried after his companions. As the great doors made their noisy journey to close off the chamber, he could not suppress an urge to look back. Just before the chamber sealed, he felt a sudden irrational urge to leap up and try to press his eye to the crack. Reason prevailed, and he held himself rigidly prone. As the noises within the chamber grew, Chut felt his heart racing. He pressed his hands over his ears, unsure whether he meant to block out the noise or to keep the taboo thoughts swirling about his mind from spilling out into reality.

When the noises faded, the group arose to collect the emptied chariots. Chut remained panting on the floor, unnoticed as the chariots were inspected. This offering was rewarded with a new fur, to serve as either bedding or clothing as need dictated. Chut wearily regained his feet and staggered over. A number of his compatriots expressed concern seeing Chut's state. It was conjectured that he might be coming down with an illness. Once the carts were moved again, Chut wolfed down a meal without tasting it. He staggered over to his pallet, and collapsing upon it he was asleep at once.

Chut found himself in the familiar corridor. The larger cavern and the over sized figures prone along it gave him the distinct impression that he was smaller. The dream followed the previous course: he walked ahead among the figures, the slabs began seal off the chamber, he pressed his face to the cool surface, and then his eye was at the seam granting him a brief glimpse of some alien beauty. Only this time the dream was not yet broken. He felt hands grab his body and pull it away from the slabs. Large figures tossed him roughly to the floor and forced his head to the ground. His prostrate body was beaten, and he saw a glimpse of his attackers' faces. They wore the visages of his compatriots, only

twisted into grotesque caricatures. He awoke thrashing among the furs.

Sleep would not return, and Chut simply lay there, trying to make sense of his visions. What was the meaning behind his vision? Was it meant as a warning or as a course of action? And why did it invoke in him such a sense of longing? At the heart of his visions, there seemed to lay some question about the never viewed gods. Questioning the gods was forbidden, and even questions about the gods were firmly put down.

When the morning bell sounded, Chut rose and collected his pick. During breakfast a few of his compatriots suggested that he should return to bed if he were feeling ill. Chut waved off their concerns with assurances that the work would improve his health. As he began to work, he thought of his home with its cavernous rooms, the forest of white mushrooms, the cool dark stream, and the compatriots that he had shared it with for all his life. Or, had it been all his life? He believed that he had been young once, but he could recall nothing of his past beyond an endless cycles of worship in these caves. A certainty began to grow within him that there was something beyond this endless labor. With grim determination, Chut hewed away at the rock wall.

As the last offering was put into place, Chut clapped Iapyx on the back.

"My brother, I just wanted to thank you for your advice and friendship," he said.

"Think nothing of it, and I am glad that you seem much improved," replied Iapyx.

When the group had prostrated themselves in the cavern, the elder began his chanting. From his prone position, Chut cast a glance back, watching as the two gray slabs began to rumble forth. As the elder finished his prayers and assumed a a prone position, Chut sprang to his feet. He turned about and, with a few leaping strides, hurled himself between the slowly closing great gray jaws.

Lamentations arose from the group behind him, but none dared to approach as the slabs ground together. A rush of excitement ran through Chut as he stood alone within the large chamber. He would know the truth behind his dreams. The rumbling behind him faded away, to be replaced by a rumbling on the opposite side of the chamber. Unsure of what to do next, Chut ducked down behind one of the chariots as the God's Gate slowly began to crack open. The brilliance he had experienced in his visions began to fill the chamber. It filtered in through the slowly-widening crack, causing the chamber to begin to take on new shades, unlike any he had never seen before. The sight quickly became almost painful to behold, and Chut ducked his head back around the chariot while covering his eyes. He uncovered his eyes, then squeezed them shut again as the pain returned. After repeating this a few times, he found that the pain became less upon each opening. With his eyes adjusting, he marveled at chamber

revealed to him as if for the first time. After a few moments of slack-jawed wonder, he peered out from his hiding place, gazing towards the now half-opened gateway.

From out of the brilliance came two small figures flanking a metallic behemoth. The beast was reminiscent of the chariots, but much larger. It also rolled forward under its own power, instead of being pushed by any men. As the figures came closer, Chut drew back in terror. The two flanking figures were quadrupeds, walking on four segmented legs that were covered with serrated edges. Their upper bodies were covered in series of segmented plates, with two thin angular arms, and two gossamer wings extending out across their lengthy backsides. Their heads were squat ovals set atop thin necks, with large multi-faceted eyes, and a protruding jaw with two mandibles on each side. A third of these creatures was seated astride the metallic beast, which slowly lumbered forwards.

Chut cowered behind the chariot. Were these terrible creatures the gods that they had made offerings to? With the doors fully opened, the metallic beast rumbled forward, emitting a steady growl. The creatures' feet clicked along the stone floor as they drew closer to Chut's hiding place. The chariot was suddenly rocked as a gigantic claw reached out from the beast to grab it. Chut bolted forth in terror, sprinting towards the only exit – the gateway from which the creatures had entered. The two creatures on foot reared back in alarm, making unintelligible chittering noises as they cowered back towards the beast. Chut's feet pounded against the rock as he fled up the path towards the source of the beautiful luminescence.

He exited into a cavern unlike any he had ever seen before. The ceiling was a shifting mass of cerulean streaked with moving swaths of white. He had no sense of how far above him it was, but it seemed immeasurably distant. A blazing ball of yellow hung suspended on this roof, and he found it consistently painful to try to look upon. There were no walls in sight beyond the one he had just exited from. Instead there was a forest of mushrooms unlike any he had seen before. They reached for the sky with brown stems and oddly-shaped, multi-layered green caps. Chut stood with his mouth agape, gazing at the alien landscape.

His wonderment was broken by a searing pain in his shoulder. He turned, seeing that one of the creatures had come up behind him. It held a strange metal device in its claws, which was emitting a small wisp of smoke from the end. With a primal roar, Chut smashed his pick into the creature. Greenish ichor leaked from the wound, and the creature shuddered and collapsed. Chut fled into the forest, tripping over piled bones as warm blood dripped from the wound in his shoulder.

Mine overseer Kin-minoz's mandibles twitched in fury as he inspected the scene. The two workers cowered nearby, awaiting his displeasure. He rubbed his

legs against his wings, causing a high pitched series of squeaks.

"You mean to tell me that one human ape, armed with only a pick, not only managed to escape from three armed ore collectors, but also killed one of you worthless idiots?" Kin-minoz demanded.

"He was hiding among the ore carts and, while we were loading, he made a break for the exit. We sent this fool after him, while we finished loading the hauler," meekly replied one of the workers gesturing at the corpse.

"A human loose after all these years. We should have just exterminated them all and made you fools do the digging," the overseer chirped in disgust.

Chut washed his wound in a stream that he had discovered during his flight. Unlike the stream of his home this water was a translucent blue, instead of an endless black. He drank from it and it had a surprisingly the clean taste. He leaned back against one of the strange mushrooms, finding that the stems were much firmer than those he was familiar with. He watched in delight as small creatures, displaying a bright array of colors, flitted among the green caps above him. He realized that, for first time since he had experienced the dream, he felt calm. No longer did he feel a desire to escape, a need that he only now could identify. He had been unaware that he was a prisoner.

For the first time that he could remember, he was free.

~*~Joan of Arc~*~

by GreatWTF

I knew from the day I met my baby sister that she was born to fly. There was just something about her, some strange, half-crazed look in her eyes that told that one day she was probably going to take a flying leap off a cliff and either change the world or crash in a blaze of glory. I did not know it at the time, but it was the same look that our dad had once been known for, before the hard years working for our grandfather had broken his spirit. It is also a look I am known for getting from time to time, the one that makes my personal security reach for the big guns in exasperation and rival business owners reach for their checkbooks in fear.

My husband calls it 'Icarus eyes' because it's the look we all get when we are going to do something absolutely mind-blowing, but if we are not careful we're going to crash and burn while we are doing it. He also believes that everyone has Icarus eyes occasionally, but there is something very different that sets my family apart from others. Others have wax wings, ideas and half-formed thoughts that carry them just high enough to melt their fragile wings and send them crashing back to the ground. My family, however, has real wings. It sounds like a very good thing when you first hear it, but in the end I really think those wings my husband professes my family and I have are nothing but another sign of madness. We are all too insane to realize we are flying far too close to the sun.

If not for those 'wings' that the silly bugger seems to so love, I doubt we would be in the situation we are in right now. Only my family would be crazy enough to go to war with a madman controlling an army of genetically engineered super-demons. Then again, my family was also the one crazy enough to fund that madman's experiments forty years ago, so I guess it could be considered our job to clean up the mess.

Then, there is my sister, who is another breed entirely and takes my family's Icarus eyes to a whole new level for one very simple, very obvious, and very big reason, one that is roughly thirty feet from tip to tip with blackened feathers. My younger sister has wings.

And, judging by the absolutely awe-struck look on our father's face, he had no idea about it until roughly thirty seconds ago when she took a flying leap off the edge of the cliff we are currently camped out on and, instead of falling like so much dead weight, shot off into the sky in a shower of blood and feathers. I wonder if she realizes how absolutely stunning she looks right now, like the angel she is gradually becoming to the people that are depending on us to survive. There are two dozen men around me that had been, until just now, ready to fall dead with exhaustion after having run for days just to stay alive. It takes 82 men to crew my sister's airship, but only 30 at most of them made it out of the city

alive. They have managed to keep the ship in the air for six days to avoid attack and I am sure many of them will be seeing numbers and data readouts for days after this is over.

Right now, however, all any of us can see is her, our own personal Joan of Arc. She turned seventeen not long ago and until two weeks ago had been attending high school with her childhood friends, her only taxing thoughts being what song she would have the drum line open the next football game with and how to cheat on her math test without me catching her. Then suddenly, our father came home after a four year absence and all hell broke loose. Now she has somehow become the leader of our little ragtag army and her Icarus eyes are glowing brighter than ever.

I really believe she will be the key to all this. She has this power, this amazing ability to make anyone believe in her from the moment they meet her. She certainly changed my whole world, and she was only seven when she did that. As long as we have her, we will find a way to get through this alive. Like the army of Sparta, we are three hundred against three thousand, our backs to the wall, but as long as she is the one leading us, the men will follow her to the ends of the earth. I can see that now in each face watching the beautiful figure dancing among the clouds before us. My mind screams that this is insane, this is suicide. A child cannot lead an army.

It certainly would not be the first time she defied all logic in her life. Her impressive vocabulary of swear words alone defies any logic, and compared to her gift for mechanics, even that pales in comparison. She is most certainly our father's daughter.

"Hey!" my father shouts, "All you drop whatever the fuck you're doin' and get the hell over here! Come see what my baby girl can do!"

Vulgarity aside, there is just something very wrong about the leader of an army being referred to as 'baby girl' by anyone, even her own father. Then again, there is also something very wrong about the idea of someone as well-bred and intellectual as myself being related to a man who considers bacon grease a beverage and raised his daughter in a mechanic shop full of other smelly, loud, and vulgar men. How her mother dealt with him for so many years is beyond me.

Speaking of her mother, I really must figure out where the beautiful woman got off to. It is just not right to see my father and sister together without her.

Now most of the camp is gathering around. I never got an exact count, we were far too busy running for our lives from the hordes of demons to do a head count, but I roughly estimate somewhere between two and four hundred men

have managed to cram themselves into the airship. I know for a fact that there are twenty-two genetically modified demons or their children traveling with us, refugees from the madman that created them. One of them is actually standing on the edge of the cliff shouting at my sister to come down before she breaks her neck.

All eyes are on her, stunning, beautiful, almost surreal in the dying sunlight. In complete silence we watch as she climbs so high she becomes nothing more than a distant speck among the clouds before folding her huge wings and falling at breakneck speed towards the ground again. She shoots past the cliff at a speed that seems to suck the very air out of existence in her wake and with a snap opens her wings to catch the air again. A few flaps bring her back up to level with us and towards the heavens again.

I have heard the crack of a shotgun so many times in my life that I barely register it any more, having watched my chief of security use them in most situations that require something larger than her fists. So when I heard one go off in the distance, I simply assumed the crazy woman was getting in some more target practice for reasons I would never understand. Her aim was already perfect.

It was not until my sister started falling that the panic set in. The sick thud of her hitting the ground like some downed bird brings back my senses and I rush to her side. Thank God for whatever genetic glitch gave her those wings, because it made her nearly unbreakable while it was at it. She sits up, shakes her head a few times and rock and debris falls away from her hair. She is stunned, judging by the glazed look on her face, stunned and nothing more worrying than a minor bullet wound to patch up...

She tries to pull her elegant wings back into her body as she always does, but for some reason they refuse to go. That is when I see it. One of her huge, elegant black wings has been almost completely blown off of her back. It clings by a scrap of flesh and tendon to what looks more like a trench than anything else in her back. Part of the wing has been blown away, too, by the looks of it. I look to my husband and my chief of security, both well-trained in medicine and muscular and skeletal damage.

They both shake their heads. There is no repairing such a wound. My heart breaks in my chest as I sit and watch her struggle a bit more with trying to degenerate her wings into her back again. My husband carefully approaches her and, before she has the chance to see it, injects a sedative into her arm. She flaps her good wing vainly in protest and knocks several of the gathered men off their feet before slumping sideways against our father's chest. He holds her tight, stroking her long hair and whispering comforting nonsense to her unconscious form while tears roll down his tanned and dirty face. It must be an unbearable

sight for him, to see his daughter lose something so precious and wonderful, something that he dreamed of having for years. Her crew gathers around us, looks of fear and concern on their faces. These men are devastatingly loyal to her, and for the first time I remember they really look uncertain, even afraid in her presence.

I watch numbly as my husband cuts away the last remaining bits of tissue holding her destroyed wing and stitches the wound shut. It takes three men to carry her back to her room on the airship, my father carrying her and two others doing their best to carry her suddenly ridiculously large and cumbersome wing. "We should cut the other one off," I hear myself suggesting, "it will only be a hindrance now."

Even as I say it I know I could never let such a thing happen. It would not change anything now, and I have no doubt she will only be mad at us for it. Her wings were her life, her hope, her freedom.

My sister was born to fly, to spread her wings and soar. Never once in my life have I seen her truly at peace on the ground. And now, just like that, she will never fly again. It is a killing blow to one like her, someone who knows no other existence than the sky and the freedom of wings.

The ancient Joan of Arc was burned at the stake for heresy, defeated by close-minded fools and cowards, but her legacy lived on. Our Joan of Arc will have no such blessing, no such legacy. She is too young, our war too young, and without her, our war will most likely be a very short one.

LITTLE LEOPOLD AND LUC

By Magnus Aspli / gnombob

Usually, after little Leopold had waited a few minutes on the fallen log, his skinny and sliding figure would come out from the cover of the trees and into the wavy field. With short, yet brave footsteps he'd emerge from the thick growth of the Midland Forest, a big smile on his big face. His head would barely reach over the tall axis in the green ocean as he made his way to their island, the log and the old oak. Leopold would look up from his two favorite toys; Donatello and Leonardo, as his new friend approached. He'd place the Turtles down on the moss-covered log and balance on the dead tree to get a better view. The afternoon sun would shine warmly from a cloudless sky. The leaves on the old oak next to its fallen sister would rattle in the soft summer breeze. Leopold's unbuttoned blue shirt would play in the wind like a captured kite. He'd shade his eyes from the bright sunlight and spot Luc on his way through the high stalks. Every time, Leopold had always felt Luc coming before seeing him. That's how it's like with best friends, Luc had said.

The first time they met, Leopold was crying head-in-hands, sitting on the fallen log, wanting to be alone. Luc just suddenly showed up, sitting next to him, smiling, without saying anything. Luc was always smiling. Leopold wanted to run off when he noticed him, but, curious, not having seen this new boy before, remained still. He stopped crying, and dried his tears on the blue shirt, leaving dark blue spots on the sleeve. Luc still didn't say anything, and Leopold didn't know what to begin with. "Hi" was getting old already. So, the two boys just sat there under the oak in the sun, looking out across the green sea of grass. Before Luc said goodbye and strode into the field towards the tree line of the Midland Forest later that afternoon, Leopold already had a best friend. Since that afternoon, Leopold hadn't cried.

Back home at the dinner table that day, Leopold had told his mum and dad about the new boy, which he at that time did not know the name of.

"He is very skinny." Leopold looked up from his plate of soup.

"Oh, but you are too. Tomorrow we'll have porridge, so you'll be as well-groomed as your father," his mother said and smiled.

"No, he's very skinny." Leopold tried again, looking at his dad.

"Yes," his father pointed at the salt, "could you send me the shaker, dear?"

"I think he lives somewhere in the forest," Leopold said.

"Aha," his mother handed the shaker across the table.

"What's this about that barbeque over at the Roarks', honey?" His father

asked, while grabbing a day old newspaper from the end of the table.

"It's tomorrow. I already told you a couple of times, dear. You and your goldfish brain."

"Uhuh, yes," his father unfolded the large newspaper.

Leopold was staring into his soup plate, not listening. His spoon going in slow circles, trying to make a trail in the soup. "Goldfish..." he whispered.

Usually, after they had played some with the Turtles, Luc always being Leonardo, they'd put the action figures in a hole on the log and tuck them in with moss, and then Luc would do some of his tricks or talk about things Leopold didn't even know existed. The other day Luc had stood on the log and commanded the field. When he moved his outstretched hand to the right, the stalks would flow to the right, and then he would move it to the left, and the grass would follow, like a wave. Leopold was very impressed by Luc, rolling the field like that. Luc would always smile and make Leopold try the same trick. He would hold his hand and after a few attempts Leopold would succeed, feeling proud as he did. With his soft nasal voice, Luc would tell him he was very good. Leopold always believed him, and felt a little bit bigger every time Luc told him that he was good or smart, which he did quite often. Leopold would need a new body for his bigness soon, he thought.

Usually when he came home there would be dinner on the table and his parents would sit there, talking about the garden, work, the house and the car and stuff like that, or they would be reading magazines and newspapers. Yesterday there were no parents, just a note on the table, telling Leopold to look in the fridge for food, since they were over at Roarks'. Leopold scanned the fridge for something good and picked a piece of leftover chocolate pudding. Too bad they weren't here, now that Leopold was going to tell them of the latest trick that Luc did, making all those bugs fly. The whole sky filled with bugs in all colours. Blue, gold, red and yellow. A symphony by insect wings, Luc said. That's what it sounded like, Leopold had to agree. Then again, mum and dad were probably not that interested in Luc's tricks, he assumed. Tomorrow he'd have to show them one of the tricks himself, he nodded to himself.

The pudding went down quickly and Leopold pushed the plate to the middle of the table in a display of a satisfied stomach, displayed to no one. He looked around, and, scratching his nose, figured he might as well go back to their island in the field and practice the bug trick.

Wading through the high grass, Leopold noticed Luc was sitting on the ground, his back on the fallen log next to the old oak. Perfect! Now Luc could help him practice. But as Leopold sat down next him, he could see Luc wasn't smiling, which was strange, because he always smiled. From Luc's big eyes tears were

going down his round cheeks, meeting on the tip of his small chin before falling to the grass. Leopold knew that "hi" was the wrong start, so he just sat there, close to Luc. It should have been uncomfortable sitting like that, not saying anything, but it just never was with Luc. Leopold folded his arms around his knees, thinking of bugs.

"Do you have parents?"

It was Luc who broke into the light rattling of leaves and the dancing of grass. This was a strange thing for him to say, Leopold thought, since Luc mostly talked of strange stuff and things that were amazing. Never simple questions like this.

"Mhm, I do," Leopold answered after a while.

"Mine said we were leaving tonight," Luc glanced at Leopold, who looked back questioningly.

"They didn't say where, but I don't want to leave. No matter where they might want to go. I don't want to."

"Maybe I can come with you?" Leopold dared to suggest.

"I wish you could, but it's not possible." Luc's voice sounded sad, and he rubbed his eyes to get rid of the last tears.

"Oh," Leopold replied after a while, feeling a lump in his throat growing. He stared out towards the Midland Forest and then up at the moving foliage above their heads.

"Do you ever feel that your mum and dad are strangers?" He asked looking at Luc nervously, afraid he'd posed a stupid question, Luc being so smart and all.

"Yes, I do," Luc looked at him, smiling again. Leopold relaxed and smiled back. Luc got up and helped Leopold to his feet.

"Now, let us practice a bit on making the bugs fly before I have to go back, okay?"

"Okay," Leopold straightened his back and felt as big as before. And better.

Usually before pulling his blanket all the way up to his nose, Leopold would call out for his mum to come turn off the light and read something from the many books in his room, but tonight he'd turned off the light himself. And he didn't bother pulling the blanket all the way up to his little nose. The chin would do, and so would all the things Luc had talked about, buzzing around in his head. No need for bedtime stories, when he'd already got so many in his head, he figured.

Usually when Leopold had gone out to the island in the fields, Luc would come out from the Midland Forest after a short while, a big smile on his big face. He would take his short but firm steps towards the old oak and talk about the marvels of the world until Leopold's brain was saturated. He would teach him amazing things, and make him prouder than the any grown-up. That was then.

This is now. Leopold squeezes his mother's hand eagerly; confident after all the practice he and Luc did yesterday.

"Luc wanted me to be very good at this trick, so we practiced a lot yesterday."

"We have to hurry; I need to get to the supermarket soon, okay, love?" His mother presses and continues, "Where's Luc now, by the way?"

She follows behind Leopold and his firm footsteps. They exit the long grassy field and stop by the old oak and the fallen tree masked with moss. Leopold and Luc's isle.

"He had to go somewhere," Leopold answers and climbs up on the log, helping his balance with his arms.

"Wow, this is a beautiful little patch, Leopold. When did you discover this, you little explorer?"

Leopold says nothing, too busy concentrating.

"Give me your hand," he says after a while, "and close your eyes."

"What are we doing? What's supposed to happen?"

"I told you. Now close your eyes."

"Okay, okay," his mother closes her eyes.

Long silence.

"Yes?"

Moments pass by, while the wind is the only thing making the world seem alive. The sun is pushing through pale clouds in the distance.

"Yes...?"

"Hush, wait," Leopold says with anticipation, "here they come."

The rustling from the old oaks foliage seems to increase, turning into buzzing. The air feels electric with life as Leopold opens his eyes.

"I did it, mum!"

His mother looks around. Hundreds of bugs in different colours circle above and around them. Blue, gold, red and yellow. Leopold raises his arms and several of the bugs land on his fingers before flying off again. A symphony by insect wings.

"Amazing. Did you stomp the log or something?" His mother smiles.

"Or something," Leopold sighs.

She takes his hand and he jumps down. Luc would have been proud, Leopold imagines, looking towards the Midland Forest.

"Oh, my, the time. I have to hurry. Come now." His mother checks her watch twice.

"I'll wait here."

Leopold sits down on the log watching his mum wade through the moving green ocean. Usually Luc would be there with him. Staring out to the fields, up into the foliage, or down in the dirt and grass. Luc always made time. Always slowed it down. Leopold feels the little lump in his throat grow, but knows that it's alright to cry. Even Luc cried.

Project Wings

by Virgild

June Town - Month of July...

*Once upon of time,
There was a boy named Bill
Who lived alone in a shabby home.
Bill was a goodish boy
But curious...*

*One night he summoned a harlot.
She was a stunning gal
But Bill didn't know
That beneath her beauty
Stalked a deadly germ...*

July...

The night was hot. Bill's dwelling had changed from a decrepit attic to a fiery oast. He and Julia smoldered into dawn where they gradually began to spoil...

July...

A pleasant fragrance is with me. The scent hits me strong at first then eases to a usual. A colossal mass of feathers suspend down my back. They feel like limbs. Limbs I'd go disabled without. I'm perplexed. One maddening thought haunts me - what am I?

The boy Bill seems to have hollowed out of me. Humanity as well... I resurrected into something else. That I know for sure.

July...

An urge to touch the sky masters me. My sturdy arms undo the inferno-breathing framework and I plunge myself through it; away from the shabby dwelling where Bill had died.

I leap down with fear of falling but my wings resound a brilliant flit as they span East and West across Bill's town. They keep me off the ground. I thrust onwards -

breeze washes over me. Wings pierce through electric cords and other human creations that hinder their path. Now I ought to straighten my body. I look below to see my marvelous shadow spread larger as I lift. Then with a jolt I arc to the skies. What I feel there passes the conception of man.

July...

I touched ground in an abandoned church where I feel safe. I'm an Angel I believe. A being portrayed in the Bible and Eastern graphic tales Bill used to read.
...

Hours pass and I seem to have no need for food. My body craves a new feed I cannot understand. I'll stay in this church and graze for instinct.

July...

Thoughts of the sky stimulate me. That night my wings erected to orgasmic bliss and I soared once more. I flew wildly and ventured to the moon. There I listened to a cosmic symphony till dawn shed back on earth...

July...

I rest on a hard floor in the room of a new house wherein I fell. I stand up now and shake the rubble off myself. I look about my surrounding. A television subsists here. Television - an electric box that summons moving images. Or so I remember.. I'll switch it to life and see...

A woman being materializes on the flat surface:

"Dozens claim to have witnessed the UFO sightings in June town. We received recorded footage of the aerial phenomenon people described as a shiny egg-shaped craft."

An egg-shaped craft? Surely not me... But in the skies of June town I flew. That I did...

"As you can see the hazy entity soars over the school to the North of town and right there! It ascends in the clouds! It looks like a metal ship."

Metal ship? That's a flying being with wings. Can they not see me? My human-like figure? The colossal wings? It's so clear.

July...

The craving for foreign nourishment is now maddening and it ceases my ability to fly. I gradually walk in the secluded East of town. No one is here to see me. Whatever I am.

I need to satisfy this urge but with what? I can't help myself but wait for an answer.

July...

A 4-wheeled machinery I remember as a car strolls by my side. I stop. It stops.

Two beings depart from it. Their suits are white and radiant as me but no wings. For some reason I can't distinguish their gender.

"1963 Chevrolet Impala. Fantastic human creation she is - made for us by Him and ecological safe He made her. We used to travel on Griffins whereof they grew to be outdated ." I can't make out which one of them spoke but just a mannish tone.

"Forgive our lateness, Angelo..." Says a gentle woman voice that can disarm evil itself.

"What are you?" I incite to question them.

"From the Kingdom of Lord and Divine Realm we are recruiters of divinity." The gentle voice answers. And at that I assumed to understand but I don't.

"Them who die we resurrect into Angels for the greater growth of the Divine Realm. Ye thyself have been endowed with spiritual attributes."

I was raised from the dead. I understand. But now another worry weights my mind...

"What happened to Bill? I feel as if I lost him."

"It may seem but the sense for thee is not yet clear. Two parallel spirits are united and become one Angelo. For this reason you are part Bill. Your other half is one more spirit."

"I see..." My other half.... Julia, the woman from that night. She was with me all

along. We're now binding into one...

"And now the craving. How does one satisfy it?"

"Because of it you cannot rise. A strong Angelo is comprised of many spirits. Do you understand?"

"Yes." I reply.

"We are assured and know that thou will flourish. Now take this manual from which you will obtain knowledge." They toss a black handbook unto me and Julia. We grasp it and read the cover. "*Angelo: A Guide to Divinity*". The title is made of color human eyes can't perceive. Marvelous.

"Don't bother if a human sees our book. To them thee shows as "War and Peace". The earthly world makes us appear in abstract fashion." Of course. That explains the UFO sighting...

July...

I open the book:

Evil polluted the Earthly World and they have filled the beauty of thee with Industrial Revolution.

By multitude of evil they have hindered the gateways to the Divine Realm, and thus human spirits haunt the Earthly World.

The Elysian Act known by humans as "Kyoto Protocol" was established by the Godly Summit, held in the Divine Kingdom. The treaty is created for thou to perish evil's smog from the golden gates and cease weaken of thy Divine Nation.

Human spirits continue to dispel in the Earthly World. Angelo Recruiters are appointed to resurrect the dead into Divinities for each to nourish on 1000 lost spirits; ascend into heaven, and cast thee 1000 human spirits in the Divine Realm, that they may aid the greater growth of our kingdom.

I'm an Angelo I learn... A fancy name for transporter of human spirits.

Rusting Cage

by geekyjesusfreak

The bar is quiet, all things considered. There's the usual hum of activity and conversation, of course, and the usual buzz of the television, but other than that, it's completely hushed. Caroline Bakersfield decides it's a nice change and happily soaks in the silence until a soft, scratchy voice remarks "I think 'buy you a drink?' is what you say when you meet a pretty girl, right?"

Suddenly feeling as though she'd been reduced to a walking cliché, Caroline shook her head. "No. Well, yes, but I'm not letting you buy me a drink. You men only want one thing."

The owner of the voice peers at her curiously, apparently unable to discern whether she is serious or just play hard-to-get. Seeming to accept that it is the former, he sighs, shakes his head, grins at her. His teeth are even and straight, his eyes a light navy colour, but his hair was oddly spiked, and seemed to have been dyed pink or purple. All the same, a little adventure couldn't hurt...so she continues,

"However, I will drink with you, assuming you buy your own and let me buy my own."

"Of course. I'd forgotten, many people go in for splitting the bill nowadays, don't they?"

"What, you don't know? You're a little bit old-fashioned."

"Yes, I'm afraid I am....for instance, I like women with long hair..."

He's cheesy and a little creepy, but charming, so she drinks with him for a while and takes him to her home...

It's the last thing she ever does...

He doesn't know where he is for a moment. Just a moment, because all of a sudden awareness snaps in and he remembers that he's in the room of the woman he killed last night.

He wakes up slowly. Yeah, last night. He'd gotten into her apartment for the express purpose of killing her, in fact, although of course she hadn't exactly known that at the time. A small giggle rises in his throat at the thought of her inviting her into his apartment under the assumption he was going to kill her. If only it was that easy.

He's giddy, giddy because he's free and because he has nice, lovely hair to play with. New hair, the ones he had were all getting a little frostbitten and it had been time for a fresh one.

He stands up, goes to the fridge, and fetches his prize. He'll wrap it up and take it home, in the bag he brought for just this purpose. Nobody takes a second look at him, strange pink-and-purple hair and plaid shorts and ripped tanktop. Just another kid in the body of an adult who hasn't really grown up.

They don't know a thing, though. Nobody does. He remembers, frowning. They told him to do something good with his life, like being a hairdresser wasn't worthwhile. He did what he wanted to do, though, despite all their protests.

They'd died a year ago. The police had said they may or may not have been murdered. Birthday had laughed, laughed so hard. He couldn't even remember if it was his doing or not, but he'd been free at last, completely free- and that is why he has to be careful.

He holds the bag casually, trying not to attract suspicion. If the police catch him, they will lock him up like a bird in a rusty cage, and he will lose his wings. He will rot away in that cage, dead dead dead like the girl he had left headless in her apartment. Some people say that there is freedom in death, but he knows that it isn't true. Life is freer.

He will not get caught.

He reaches his apartment safely, glad it's Saturday and that he has no work. Smiling, he unloads the bag and sets his prize carefully down...

Now what to do with all this lovely hair?

It is two hours later and he is still free. He has just finished applying a nice red rinse, perfect for that complexion. Smiling still, because it was so nice to be alone, with just his new acquisition; he'd turned the phone off just so he could be considerate while he was fixing her hair. It was wonderful- her than- you was so polite, the way she lets him know it was okay- she didn't mind dying. A sweet woman, he thinks. Inanely, he smiles again, reckless and footloose because he's so happy to be alive. It's a great thing to be here, to play with this nice girl's locks and not worry about-

A knock at the door. Hurriedly, he rushes down to the basement with his ladylove and gently puts her in the nice cold place he always keeps his conquests, and he runs back up the stairs to answer the door, sneakers squeaking.

"Hello, sir." A eye in the crack. "Bullen, isn't it?"

"Y-yes, Birthday Bullen."

"Yes, yes. Of course. We just have a few questions we want to ask you."

It's the police. For an instant, his blood freezes and he feels to chilled to move, too cold to do anything but stand in shock, the breath stolen from his lungs, but then he remembers that this happens sometimes and they can't ever prove anything, because he's so careful and he never leaves anything behind for them to see. They have never come to see him again, His confidence returns, and he smiles at them.

So he lets them in, a woman with dirty-blond hair and an affably bored expression and a dark-haired man who is scowling at him in a disturbingly knowing way. A good team of good-cop bad-cop, he thinks, suppressing another smile. He knows all their tricks, has seen through all their ruses, and he is not afraid. He still has his wings.

Checking a notebook, the blonde lady asks, "Do you know a Caroline Bakersfield?"

"Hmm? The name doesn't sound familiar. Should I?" He apologizes silently to his lady.

He must present this deception for both their sakes, make sure that they can remain together and he can stay free as a bird. He smiles gently at the police officers with the intent of seeming innocent and at-ease.

"Well, sir, she was killed last night. Found in her home, beheaded, and we're not sure where her head is."

"Oh, my. How dreadful."

The cop is watching for his reaction, Birthday knows. He pretends that he is shocked and slightly appalled, but not too much, because then they'd suspect that he really does know her. He has gotten the perfect mix down in the mirror. He practiced for hours before taking his first head. Really, the urge to giggle madly again has come and he has to fight to hold it down. They have nothing, absolutely nothing. And he has his wings.

"Well. Yes. It was rather dreadful, I'm afraid."

"I'm sorry to hear of it."

The female interrupts "Can I use your bathroom?"

"Hmm? Of course." He has no reason to refuse, and if he does, it will look suspicious.

The visit proceeds without incident, and when they leave, Birthday is satisfied that he is safe and that he and his ladylove of the month can be together until he is forced to put her away for good and find a new darling.

But a week later, the police are back, and they have a search warrant this time. The woman had snatched a bit of hair from his brush: it matched the one they had found at the crime scene, the one he had left, they were here to search his house and they had found his ladies-

Years afterward, people wondered at the irony of a hairdresser, the media-named Hair Care Murderer, being caught because he had messed up and left one of his purple hairs at the scene of a crime.

And the caged bird, Birthday Bullen, he rotted away, slowly going insane....

He had lost his wings.

Wings of a Broken Soul

by MariaShade

Falling. It was a sensation almost like flying; a final freedom before she died.

Her memories started to cycle through her head. This surprised the girl, as she had always thought the saying to be merely a figure of speech.

The girl had never had a name, her first memories were of the streets, alone. Always she had been dirty and cringing, hiding from all, barely surviving.

And so, there on the streets she had lived, begging, stealing and starving; broken.

When she was five she tried to get work with the thieves, she thought she might be of help to a pickpocket, distract the targets. But it was not to be.

The memories washed in.

"Girl," the huge shadow said, "Not only are you ugly, you are filthy too, who knows what colour your hair is. You are useless, and stupid for thinking we might accept you."

The girl cringed back as the figure bent over her, and then the blows fell. It had not been the first beating she suffered, and it was far from the last.

Beaten, starved and despised; that was the story of her life. Nothing ever changed.

When she got older though she became pretty, her angular face began to hold a certain attraction for the men which the muck did not hide. In the end all it did was make it worse.

From the age of twelve she was used by men, taken against her will, still she starved. As she grew older it only became worse, the rapes occurring more often and the beatings that accompanied them. Even worse though, was when they gave her money, the shame she suffered from being paid, and even more from the fact she needed the money.

Her thoughts shifted.

Now she remembered the compulsion she had felt to spend this rape money at the fortune tellers tent. How the place had smelt dusty, old, and how the fortune teller had looked crazed.

"Sit down young one," the fortune teller had said, taking the girls' hand, "Ahh, I see you have had a hard life, and nothing will change until you die, unless you find the courage to use this."

The fortune teller had put a piece of parchment in her hand, on it were some unintelligible words which seemed to glue themselves into her mind, and scrawled underneath, the words Soul Creature.

What is there to live for, the girl wondered.

Her thoughts shifted.

The cats that kept her company, ten mangy mongrels which kept her warm at night, and gave her love.

The small dusty basement that she called her own, that she had filled with souvenirs. Which gave her comfort.

The dream she had of traveling, of becoming great, which gave her strength.

The young street thief who had given her money, and thus give her a chance.

Love, comfort, strength, a chance, what was missing. Hope.

The spell which gave her hope!

I want to LIVE!

The girls' eyes snapped open and the words of the spell poured out.

A change came over her, and suddenly she was flying for real. Her new found wings had caught her barely a foot above the ground.

Now she had wings, which gave her freedom.

"I am Raven," the girl called to the night.

Wings Only Make You Fall

by hyphenated-semicolon

Part 1

The bench under him felt cold, but he hardly noticed. The piece of paper he held in his hand crackled under the sheer weight of impatience. It was recess and Michael sat there alone, and as he waited he let his imagination run wild, dreaming of mythical creatures and the epic battles he liked to read about. His mother had bought him an encyclopedia last summer, when he was still seven years old (he liked to boast that he was already eight), and he immersed himself in it thoroughly, as though it were a calming bath to his over-anxious mind.

It was a cold December morning, and the sky looked rusty and worn. He sat quietly on the bench, waiting for Susie to eventually walk by, or so he hoped. Brunette, brown-eyed Susie was not like the other girls. She was older and, therefore, devoid of the ever-spreading cooties girls his own age were plagued by, like his classmate, Jane, who suddenly walked by and waved to him. There were all kinds of things crawling on her hand, whatever it was that cooties looked like.

Michael had thought about Susie every day since the school year started. He was determined to confess his undying love to her before the summer came and she moved on to middle school. With each passing day, however, he felt the opportunity closer and closer to slipping from his hands. Thus, on this particular gloomy morning, he had chosen to show her a drawing he had done of her. It had taken him two weeks' worth of suppressed hunger during each recess to sit on a bench near her, working hard to capture that broad, joyful smile, and her softly-contoured features, crowned on each half by two glowing pearls bubbling with youthful enthusiasm. Every time she caught him looking at her, she would turn away and Michael would have to wait until the next day to continue his drawing. Though it only bore a passing resemblance, he was proud of having put so much effort into it, since his mother often complained that there was nothing he put enough focus on, or effort into. It really was difficult to stay focused in class when he had all these creatures, knights and dragons, centaurs and maidens, that would plague his mind, and that he just needed to bring to life in his notebook, instead of scribbling the boring words his teacher would throw in his direction about the Declaration of Independence and other nonsense.

Suddenly, he caught sight of Susie and stood up. Her hair, tossed around in the wind until she pulled it back and put it up in a bun. Michael thought his heart skipped a beat. His hands were sweaty, and he hoped not to ruin the drawing. She was only a few feet away now. His stomach churned, and he imagined a can of soda popped open inside it, fizzing and bubbling. She looked at him, and he looked down at the ground. She passed by, and the opportunity was gone.

He was not going down without a fight, however. He called her name and she turned around, well aware of who was calling her. He smiled a weak and broken smile. She walked back towards him and noticed he was holding something, which he quickly showed to her. She took it from his hand, not politely, and examined it brashly. Susie asked, "What's this?"

Michael swallowed and replied, "It's you."

"That doesn't even look like me."

"Maybe. But it's how I see you in my head."

She gave him back his drawing and walked away. Michael imagined his smile being flushed down the toilet, never to come back. He threw the drawing on the ground and stepped on it spitefully. He walked to the back of the school and then through a narrow, dark, passage, which older kids claimed was haunted. At this moment, however, any trace of fear was overshadowed by disappointment. He sat here, in the dark even after the bell rang and all the kids went back inside. There were pebbles all around him and he began hurling them against the opposite wall, as hard as he could.

After a few minutes, he heard the crushing of leaves. Someone was outside. As stealthily as he could, he crawled outside and saw that it was only a pigeon. He became infuriated, and shushed it away, but it wouldn't move. It stood there, looking at him, mockingly. Michael picked up a stone and threw it at it, to scare it away, but ended up hitting its head. After it was hit, the pigeon tried to fly away but crash-landed a couple of feet away. After twitching a few times, it stopped moving and became stiff as a branch. Michael was terrified but enthralled by the sight. He had never seen anything larger than a cockroach die. He approached it slowly and pushed it with a twig. The pigeon didn't move. Michael then pulled it by its wings and noticed how magnificent they looked spread out. It was as if the wings outlived the pitiful pigeon, for they still looked full of life. Suddenly, in a moment of blind curiosity, he yanked them both off.

He wanted to fly away, far from this town, far from Susie, far from the people that seemed not to understand him, and live up in the sky instead, always flying. He would find adventure and new cities, towns, full of colorful characters.

He bound each wing to his back, and seemed to be able to control them now. He spread them and wondered if they would support his weight. Why wait, he figured. He hopped a few times, flapping as fast as he could, with eyes closed, hoping not to find himself disappointingly still on the ground. His heart started racing when he felt his body light as air. His feet were dragging on the ground, and he began gaining more control of his wings. Before he gave a last thought to

it, he finally took flight.

Part 2

After flying over the countryside all morning, Michael began to feel hungry. He had not eaten anything since breakfast after all. He was hesitant to land, however, afraid of not being able to take flight again. Almost an hour later, the pangs of hunger were just too strong to ignore. He descended close to a lone fruit stand. There was no one around, so he grabbed an apple and a banana and rushed away. His flying was clumsy again and he began losing altitude until finally he landed over a patch of dirt, bruising his elbows and squashing the banana in his hand. Flying was definitely more difficult than it seemed.

Michael wiped his hand on his pants and decided to walk for a while, as he ate his apple. The sun was beginning to sink close to the horizon. The sky around it turned a warm, powdery orange. An idea occurred to Michael then: he would follow the sun until he found a place where it was still daytime. He did not want this amazing day to finish anytime soon. He was afraid of losing his wings overnight, since they were the best thing that had ever happened to him.

He started flying due west, and became overwhelmed by the urgency at which the sun began to set. The blue-tinged darkness spread like wildfire, and Michael found himself exhausted. Under him, a vast city stretched in all directions, blinding lights enticing him to take refuge within its confines. He descended slowly until he reached the murky streets. He had never been to the big city before. The air was much thicker, almost sludge-like in texture. As he turned a corner, he saw a group of children standing or sitting on wooden crates. It was a dark back-alley, illuminated only by the weak flickering light from the one working light post. His eyes were closing, so he found a dry spot on the ground and fell asleep for a few moments, until he woke up with a start, worried about his wings.

Struggling to remain awake, he sat up, and suddenly heard footsteps drawing closer. He hid behind a large trash bin and saw the kids walking out onto the street. He was surprised to see that they all had wings too. He figured he would be able to fit in with fellow winged creatures. Slow and slippery like a shadow, he followed them around the city, as they stole food from shops, and pick-pocketed the few lonely passersby who ventured outside at this time of night. Whenever they felt like they would get caught, they would spread their glorious wings and fly away with hawk-like speed. Michael was impressed by these creatures, who were so like him, but much more graceful and fearless. He wanted to be like them.

The children regrouped back in the alley, and Michael kept his distance. Finally gathering enough courage, he decided to talk to them. They caught sight of him, and stared at him as he approached them.

The tallest of them asked, "What are you doing here?"

"I.... I'm lost. I'm tired and don't know what to do or where I am."

"You don't belong here. This is no place for you."

Michael paused for a while, confused about why they would turn him away. He said, "But, you're like me."

"We're not like you. Your wings are not even yours. You stole them. Just go back to where you came from, before something bad happens to you."

Michael began to feel afraid. He thought he had finally found people like him, who would understand him, but they were no better than his classmates who bullied him. He truly did not belong anywhere.

"But.."

One of the girls interrupted, "But nothing, kid. You don't belong here. You belong with them. You'll find your way. Trust me, you don't want to be one of us. You'll be better than us."

Part 3

Michael flew all night, burdened by disappointment, knowing that no matter where he went he would not be able to fit in. Frost collected along the strands of his now stringy blond hair. The cold was almost unbearable, as though small nails were being thrown at his face. He was fatigued and wondered how much longer it would take him to return home. Ahead of him, he could see the silhouette of a massive mountain garnished by a large, silvery-white moon. Once he reached the mountain, he was enshrouded by a heavy snowfall. The snow was soft but he noticed his limbs were becoming numb and stiff. His chest began quivering violently, and he wished he would not die here, lost and forgotten. Remembering his mother, who must be worried sick about him, he gathered enough strength and continued flying with resolve.

As the sun rose once more in the horizon, elegant and mighty, Michael could hardly flap his wings or keep his eyes open anymore. The warm rays caressed his face gently and melted the frost, but he continued on, water dripping down his face. After a few more hours, he felt so exhausted that his mind shut down, and he began to fall slowly towards the ground, like a leaf in autumn. He landed on the grass and tumbled along until he was stopped by a tall oak.

When his eyes opened again, he was greeted by Jane's smile. Jane, the girl whom he hardly ever noticed. She told him that she found him lying on the front

lawn of her house, under the oak tree, when she came back from school. She and her mother had cared for him.

“My mom called your mom a while ago. Your mom was going crazy, looking for you all over town since yesterday.”

Michael muttered softly, “Thanks.”

She leaned over and kissed his cheek. Then, she turned around and left him there, in bed, alone with his thoughts. Suddenly, he remembered his wings. He checked his back and realized with a mix of sadness and relief that they were gone. He must have lost them during his landing. His arms hurt, and his knees were scraped. Though it had been a useless gift, he was sad of having been stripped of his wings. He was now forced to keep his feet on the ground, instead of being amongst the clouds as he wished he could.

Wings Themed Poems

Her Babylon

by Dulbeat

An angel drops down from heaven,
Broken wings spread, but can't
break her fall.
Alone she crashes in the sand.

Hopeless in solitude, she weeps to
the stars.
The night is dark and the plain is
vast,
But only the silence drives her mad.

Wings strain to fly, but prove too
brittle.
Infected by a mistake, she tears
them away.
She cares not for the pain that she
deserves.

Isolation illuminates the path to
salvation.
So exhausting is the lengthy walk,
But she's content with her burden.

Soon, a gate rises into the horizon.
Light pours from between its lips,
And she smiles with confident glee.

She forgets her virtue and runs to
its foot,
And doors sink into the sand,
Taking her faith with its steadfast
locks.

She found the truth and let it slip
away.
Never again will she look for shelter.
Forever is her name buried...

In a desert that swallows everyone.

I Wish to Fly Away, Away

by Wings-of-Shadow

I wish to fly away away,
Find my voice to sing and soar.
Somewhere I'll find a brighter
day;
Gehenna night I want no more.

To beat my wings and lift far
past
This choking city all aglow:
To feel the wind at long, at last,
And leave my ashes far below—

My only heaven's in your eyes.
You found me—how? down in
the dark.
You know I cannot reach the
skies;
My fires here have left their
mark.

Mend my shattered wings my
love,
So we may flee to blue above!

Wings

by coldmyst

White feathery
wings,
beating to keep me
aloft.
Flying fantasies.

Icarus' Fall

by coldmyst

There was a boy named
Icarus
who thought he could soar
above us.
But he flew too high
and his wings went bye bye,
so sadly he's no longer with
us.

Do You Think I Can Fly?

by coldmyst

Do you think I can fly?
If I jumped over the ledge will I soar?
Will wings magically appear and take me
high?
Will the winds rush past my ears in a
deafening roar?

I hear the wind rush past my ears,
but where are my wings?
Why can't I fly?
Am I falling?

Do you think I can fly?
Will I touch the clouds?
Will I soar like an eagle or flit like a
butterfly?
Would you like a piece of fluff from the
clouds?

I'm soaring but I can't reach the clouds.
Why am I going down instead of up?
Where are my wings?
Am I falling?

Do you think I can fly?
If I jumped over the ledge will I soar?
No I will not,
I am only human and nothing more.

Non-Wings Themed Submissions

Retribution

by Harry Durnan / sjwatden

The Reaper sat on his throne satisfied that the city was indeed his. The Justice Fellows had broken ranks and fled before his power, he had proven that Captain Invincible was inappropriately named, and the skulls of dozens of would be heroes were stacked into pyramids to decorate his sanctum. He thoughtfully rolled his magical scythe back and forth while he contemplated the image displayed on the bank of monitors set into a wall. After getting dressed in his gaudy black robes, decorated with silver skulls, and a skull shaped half-mask covered the top portion of his face, he hoped that he wouldn't be killing his visitor right away.

He watched as Lady Fate, wearing a conservative-by-costumed-adventurer standards gold and blue form fitting costume, stood patiently outside the his chambers. She had been one of the Justice Fellows, able to catch glimpses of the future, or bend spoons with her mind, or something like that. He was never clear what her powers were supposed to be exactly. His minions were scanning a large red box with a green ribbon that she had brought with her. The taller lackey on the left gave the camera the thumbs up sign: no explosives, no poisons, and no virulent diseases. He flicked a switch on the side of his throne and the vault-like door to his chamber rolled open.

"Thank you for seeing me," she said with a small curtsy.

"How could I turn away someone bearing gifts? After all, the mayor and the governor have already come to pay tribute. It's gratifying to see that even the self-proclaimed heroes are seeking to get into my good graces now," he replied.

His mask did nothing to hide a grin as she crossed the room towards him. He eyed her appraisingly, pondering why everyone who got into this business had such toned good looks. Did it come from chasing after villains all day, or did they all work out in the gym in preparation? Her face was covered by a gold and blue mask, framed by lightly curled golden blond hair. Reaper leaned forward in his throne as she approached.

"So, why have you come? Seeking to switch to the winning team?" he inquired.

"I found something which I feel belongs to you. Something that I think you should have. Nothing more, nothing less," she replied.

"Interesting. Let me see," he said reaching for the box.

It would be a shame to kill her, but he didn't truly believe she would try to face him alone. Besides, his minions had already confirmed that there was nothing dangerous within the box itself. While keeping a hand on his scythe, he reached out and pulled the bow away. He threw off the top of the box revealing an empty square expanse. He looked up in alarm, the blade of his scythe beginning to dance with a dark energy, as she grasped his wrist with her free hand.

"This is my gift to you," she said quietly.

A stream of images and emotions, not his own, ran up his arm and flooded into his mind. An endless procession of wakes, funerals, and grieving families paraded across his mind. Collapsing to the floor with a howl he grasped the sides of his head, as the scythe clattered to the floor and shrunk down to a mundane cane..

"What have... you done... to me?" he gasped.

"I visited the friends, the families, the lovers of all your victims. Collected up all their pain, all their anguish, all the suffering that you have caused. I stored them all up, compressed them into a little ball in my mind, and gave them to you. After all, they do truly belong to you," she replied.

"Take them out! Take them out or I'll kill you!" he screamed, crawling across the floor.

"No, they are yours now and forever. Kill me if you must. After all, you've killed my friends, my teammates... my lover. What is one more victim to you? But know that my death will not remove them from your mind," she replied as she turned and began to walk away.

The guards outside the door thought nothing of it when she left. Only hours later, when bringing lunch to their leader, did they find anything wrong. The room was empty, with the throne knocked on its side and the skulls scattered across the room. Panic swept the compound as word quickly spread through that Lady Fate had defeated Reaper. As the days passed with no sign of him appearing to claim revenge, it became widely believed that she killed him. When questioned by reporters if she had indeed defeated the infamous super villain, all she would say was:

"Perhaps. Perhaps, in the end, he defeated himself."

Twenty Years

by Wings-of-Shadow

I was tired. My eyes sagged from the exhaustion of the plane ride and my knees were sore from the times I had tripped over my suitcase. Growing older, it seemed, had done nothing to lessen my klutziness and tendencies to overwork myself. The Boise airport was larger, now, I thought as I walked through the automatic sliding doors. With a sigh I hailed a taxi. I told the cab driver the address and received a blank stare. "Next to Delsas, the ice cream shop," I added. Still no recognition. I sighed again. "In Bayspring... The neighborhood on Rowpark and Lancaster..." Finally I saw a light go off in his head. He could do Rowpark and Lancaster.

I settled in for the twenty minute ride, getting about as comfortable as one can get in a taxi cab and reviewing in my mind what I was going to say when I got home. Home... It wasn't home anymore, I thought. It used to be. I pulled out my ever-present laptop and switched it on. The familiar hum soothed my nerves.

"Big, tidy, beige, neat, very green, well-kept yard, clean garage," I typed. "Smell of the small pink roses by the front door. That other 'house' smell that always clung to my clothes." My fingers typed faster now as I left my weariness behind in the cab. My mind escaped into the white, glowing computer screen. "Suburban subdivision, a maze of cul-de-sacs. Mommy, Daddy, Janae, Jake. Peanuts, rabbit cages, play gym, noise of neighbors... little silver Chevy car in the driveway..."

And then we were there. The outside was much the same as I remembered, but it was a bit more faded. The tree out in front had been chopped down; Dad must have deemed it was growing too big.

I paid the cab driver and inhaled. The spring popcorn trees were in full glory. Their blossoms waved in the slight breeze and the sickly sweet smell I remembered so well drifted across it toward me. Rolling my suitcase across the now-weathered bricks, I knocked on the door. The door was still green, only now it looked like it had a fresh coat of paint. It opened almost immediately and my parent's faces greeted me. My parents were much older, I noted as they ushered me inside. Mom's hair was a glorious silver and Dad was completely bald. I hardly had a chance to take them in before they glommed me. I grinned and hugged back.

The rooms were bare, since Mom and Dad had packed up most of their things to either be sold or moved to their smaller apartment. With all three children gone they no longer had any need for a large house. It echoed strangely

as I walked the halls, staring at what furniture was left. It had changed, gone from small and busy to quiet and empty in these twenty years.

I climbed gratefully into bed that night. My old bedroom had been converted into a sewing room for my mother, so I slept in what used to be my sister's room. It was plain now, the basic bedspread and wall color bereft of her personality.

I slipped into the stiff covers, and as I fell asleep I dreamed of the life this house once had, before it was an empty shell.