

storyzine.

III

**A BOOK OF CHANCE
UNEXPECTED INKING
A FABLE RETOLD**

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A NOTE FROM THE CREATOR

This second issue was definitely NOT as easily as I hoped it would be to put together. With over 100 subscribers I was bound to receive some feedback as to how everything took place from various point of views. There were some positive as well as negative feedback and I took them all into consideration when I put together this latest issue. I hope some of them have been resolved from both a writer and reader stand-point. But, if there is anything that you feel still needs fixing or is missing, please do let me know by replying to the email where you got this or directly on our website where you can easily Contact the Creator.

This issue will be the last issue where prompts are given once a week. It was helpful for some but a deterrent for much more. I hope the new set-up will bring more new storytellers with great new ideas for you to read.

I try to challenge the storyteller with new and interesting prompts that make them stop and think before they jump right into writing. I hope you, the reader, finish each story with more questions and curiosity than answers.

In the coming issue I will be looking to expand not only the content but the reach of those who write for each issue. This Fall, specifically the sixth issue, will be a great milestone filled with tremendous possibilities. We hope you will stick with us as these first few issues will bring about some hiccups and challenges.

Welcome to storyzine: Where dreams become goals & goals come true!

Storyzine is published monthly. Each issue contains between 4 – 5 prompts given each week to Discord Members only. If you would like to participate in one of the weekly prompts join the Writers Lounge Discord (it's FREE). All rights to each story belongs to the original writer and storyzine.

WEEK ONE
A BOOK OF CHANCE

WE GOT TO SAVE HER BY N.D. KELLER

“We got to save her!” Jason and his partner rushed to the scene where the masked villain had grabbed a young lady and pulled her into an alley. His partner couldn’t reply, he was too busy trying to breath. Jason had told him not to skip leg day.

The masked villain robbed a bank at gunpoint and now was heading for the getaway car. He hadn’t been kind either. One of the bank tellers was lying with a bullet in her chest. Who knew whom else this masked villain would shoot on the way out. They couldn’t stop him.

The woman let out a startled scream. They turned the corner to find a gun pointed to her head. “Stop right there,” said Jason. Maybe they shouldn’t have chased him. If they hadn’t maybe the masked villain would have left the woman alone. No amount of money was worth this woman’s life. He had to find a way to save her and stop the masked villain.

“No, she comes with me as insurance.” The masked villain tugged her, edging along the wall of the alley.

Jason looked at the woman expecting her to be terrified, but she looked strangely calm as she stumbled along. Her eyes looked at him and then around quickly before she suddenly slipped her head back knocking the masked villain in the teeth. Her hand placed itself gently on the gun pushing it away from her as it fired into the wall. She spun. The masked villain was on the ground. She had a knee in his back.

The gun clattered, thrown under a nearby dumpster.

“What?” Jason gasped, jaws agape as this tiny woman, easily a head shorter than him, took care of the masked villain.

“Got any cuffs.” she asked.

UNDERNEATH THE RUINS BY SOPHIE LE VANDER

Original line: another new boy sleeps up there

On the wintery night of 1891, a long drawn out battle rages on. No bloodshed or rampant cry dominates the battlefields. Rather, the shattering rain pours over the citizens of Old Tenant – a village on the south-east of Temme Planes – damaging crops and sending sickness throughout the ruins. It drowns the rusted metal works that don the cobblestoned paths – drowns the town itself.

Along the edges of Old Tenant, the murky oceans of the Mare swish to the edge of a particular cottage, where a bitter woman called Ena Rostmon curls up on the edge of her sofa with an open book in her hands and listens to the harsh patter of rain and sea water thrash against the edge of the brick walls as it seeps through the holes under the doors, through the creaking windows and down from the ceiling. Drips of water tangle her hair. It bloats on the crinkled papers of her novel – the lines that read ‘another new boy sleeps up there’ becomes a thick blob of ink rather than the scribbles of her father’s work.

Ena recalls a time long ago when she was a young girl, innocent from all the horrors of the world. It was a lively town, where market stalls set up every morning till nightfall, where mercenaries and musicians and comedians entertain the land. In that time, her father is alive. In that time, she spends countless hours watching her father work on his novel – a pianist, a protégée, who spends her hours trapped within the confinements of the factories. Born to a peasant family, unable to be herself, the young woman only fifteen years of age breaks into the musical performance academy when the night is late, and the inhabitants are asleep, and plays for hours upon hours. For years, nobody discovers her crimes. Not until the night of the wintery ball, when the academy’s guest pianist, a famous one, Grigori Testemali, catches her.

But as months and months rage on with sickness of the Earth, and the cottages and farmlands sink beneath the rising snow and sea levels, the inhabitants of this town flood to another. To a replacement. To New Tenant.

During those long years before both he and the town falls, Ena's father writes the progression of events, but when the final chapters comes to a close in the middle of her father's workings and a sentence still fresh in his mind, a gang who names themselves Scelus finds themselves upon their abode in preparation to harm her.

In exchange for her life, her father gives his up.

They throw him into the Mare, along with all the other fallen bodies. A graveyard.

As the years grow and the winters become colder, Esta comes to detest rather than accept his death, if only for the feelings of unfulfillment that dawns upon her. All those months of dedication are a waste.

The world robs him of his right to speak out, even within the confinements of his novel.

Her father grants a task to her: his last words, as the Scelus drags him bloodily by the ear, are to complete the novel.

The seasons wage on. Ena is not able to. Not until now.

The Mare continues to rise. She will be under the currents in no more than a month. Her time will come soon: a time of ends, of death. When the town sinks, so shall she, and it was a harsh reality, but one she has foreseen. Perhaps she was already sinking underneath the rising currents. Perhaps all these years she is submerging beneath the water, beneath the rage.

The words finally come to her.

It is a shame nobody will be able to hear it. Perhaps she would tell her father, if there is an afterlife.

Their little protégée, Anastasia Forlon, is no longer with them. She passes... onto her next life: a life with the famous Grigori Testemali. A life with love and luxuries and languorous days. In the darkest hours of the night, when another new boy—a broken one, like their dear Anastasia—sleeps up there, in that broken attic, the orphanage headmistress realises this: Time may stand still, where they are, but they will move forward. She counts on it.

WEEK TWO
UNEXPECTED INKING

THE UNEXPECTED TAT BY LYNA PRAVY

It is Saturday morning, more specifically five thirty; what a time to be awake! An aura of orange and red cracks above the horizon, making me smile. The cold tile nips at my feet while making my way through the unlit bathroom. I step into my gray shower and turn the knob all the way to hot. My body shivers under the falling icy cold water until it gets warmer; that was the quickest way I'd found to wake up. My stomach feels a bit more queasy than usual, for a hangover at least, and I have a weird headache, but I brush it off as going to bed a little late. A squeeze of the shampoo bottle applies a gracious amount to my head before my hands delicately finger and stroke the brown hair cascading down my back. I then take the bar of lavender soap and lather my body, starting from my face and working my way downward.

The bar of soap slips from my hand and falls with a splash onto the shower floor. I looked down and begrudgingly reached for it; the gentle rays of light peeking into my bathroom were enough to reveal something. My mouth hung open; on my left hip there was a tattoo of a rainbow robot unicorn with a rad looking mane flowing in some imagined breeze. I carefully touched my finger to the tattoo and, sure enough, it was real. I poked, pulled, and scratched at it but it wouldn't come off. It wasn't one of those kiddy ones that sparkle but turn to clumps when wet. No, this was an actual tattoo with actual ink that wouldn't come off.

The water continues to pour over me. What happened yesterday? This tattoo certainly wasn't on me yesterday morning. I recalled going to the bar after work with some coworkers and getting a few drinks, but I thought I made it home alright. Memories of the taxi ride with the handsome man floods my mind but I could have sworn I didn't-

My gaze drops while thinking about what happened during the taxi ride home. Unfortunately, my fingertips are getting wrinkled; perhaps I'll ponder last night after getting dressed. After turning off the shower I wrap my hair in a red towel and pat my body dry with another red towel. Putting together an

outfit is easy for me: panties, a bra, leggings, and an oversized t-shirt. It's simple because pants don't do my rear enough justice.

I turn on my phone and look through my recent messages. While scrolling, on the screen there are texts from a person named "Totally Hot". The messages were definitely sent when I was drunk. What was I thinking, drinking so much? One of the texts read, "wer r u I ned mor booze". Well, if anything maybe this guy would know what happened last night. I really need to learn more about this tattoo; it's such a permanent thing. At least it isn't bad looking; in fact, it is rather majestic. My finger hovers over the call button before I finally press it. Ringing commences for a few moments before "Totally Hot" answers.

"Hey babe. What a night! I've been looking forward to your call."

"Uh, yeah ok. What's the deal with my tattoo? Do you know anything about it?"

"Yeah that was wild. We were headed to your place, but you suddenly thought getting a tattoo would be fun. You even said you'd love one of a majestic unicorn. You started babbling about some game you used to play about a robot unicorn attacking giant stars?"

"O-oh. Um. What's your name again?" My head poundings as I try matching a voice with a face while my face contorts.

"Don't joke like that! You must have been pretty wasted. You're lucky I'm here for you."

"Really?" I collect my thoughts. His voice did sound familiar.

"Yeah we met online a few months ago and I recognized your voice in the bar. I walked up, and we started chatting like always. You really don't remember, do you?"

“You’re Alpha1337? Uh....”

“There you go! Just call me Steve. I gave you my number and everything. Want to meet up sometime?”

“Yeah ok. How about at eight tonight?” I really need to get to the bottom of this tattoo and I need to know what happened after I got it.

“Fine by me. Same bar, ok? And, try not to drink too much this time.”

“Alright see you then.” I end the call and prance to my closet. I need to pick something to wear later that would show off my new tattoo.

THE LETTER BY LAWRENCE N. HARROW

Nathan woke up from a restless night's sleep. He was sprawled sideways on his bed; part of him wondered how he managed to sleep like this. After multiple yawns, he decided that it was time to get up and take a shower. He scratched his week-old beard weakly, his brown hair almost went down to his eyes. He badly needed a haircut but had never got around to booking one.

He noticed he'd gone to bed in the same clothes he wore the night before. With a sigh, he got up and felt something heavy in his right pocket. He put both hands in his pockets and could only feel his phone in his right pocket, but not his wallet. Panicked, he looked around hoping to see it on his bed and felt relief when he saw it lying on his bed.

He took out his cellphone, and saw its screen cracked in multiple pieces, he let out a long sigh of frustration. This was the last thing he needed, he tossed the broken phone on his bed, but when he did, noticed something interesting. He saw what at first looked like a smudge. But when he focused on it, his tiredness of last night waning, he made out two words. Carpe Diem, Nathan recognized them from an old movie, Dead Poets Society. He enjoyed it but saw no need to do something like this. He could not afford to spend his life in artistic pursuits, years in a worthless college major left him with decades of dept. As it was, he had to work two jobs just to make rent and to not go to bed starving.

He tried his best to recall what exactly happened last night but couldn't remember a thing. With a shrug of resignation, he went to take a shower.

It had been almost a week since Nathan woke up with the tattoo. By now he has given up on all efforts to try find out why he got it. It was Monday when he found a letter was mailed to him. At first, he was confused, he wasn't behind on any bills, and who even sends letters anymore?

He tore it open and found a folded piece of paper inside. There was something about the letter, the smell of the parchment ached him somehow. As if he knew that smell, but he could not figure out where he smelt it before. He read the letter.

“My dearest Nathan,

I hope this letter finds you well. It is the first and last one I will send. I want to begin by telling you that I will never forget the night I met you. That night, it seemed like I finally found a friend. Someone I can open up to without fear of being mocked. Someone that I can talk to and know he will listen to me. I thought I finally found someone I could trust. When i finally opened up to you I'll never forget the words of encouragement you gave me. Nor when you told me about living life to the fullest, not putting it off until you retire and then realize you're too old to do anything. Although I still maintain, tattooing those words from Dead Poets Society on your arm may have been a little too much.

But I can't take it anymore. I can't pretend my life will be like in the movies with a happy ending. I feel cold, even when it's a bright and sunny day outside. I feel alone, even when I'm in a room surrounded with family. I feel sad and miserable on the inside, even when it's my birthday and my friends try to make me feel better. I know many have the same story as I do, growing up with abusive parents, a dead brother, a drinking problem. But not everyone has a happy ending, I have accepted that, I hope you do too when you read this. I can't go on like this, I can't go through each day, I can't look at my scars of self-abuse, I can't live with my abusive parents anymore and keep telling myself that one day, somewhere somehow, it's gonna be okay.

You're probably wondering why I'm telling you this in a letter. I'm doing so because if I called you, or told you in person, I know that you would do whatever you could to stop me. But I don't want you to, I have made up my mind. I have accepted this, I hope you do too. But for now, at least, I think this is goodbye. I always wondered what it would be like, to one day go to sleep and not wake up? To finally be at peace. I guess I'll find out soon enough.

Remember me,
Samantha”

Nathan wiped the tears off his face. His knees felt weak, he struggled to sit down on the floor and suppressed a weak sob.

So that’s how he got the tattoo, he told himself. He tried as best as he could to remember who she was. He tried desperately to find even a fleeting glimpse of her in his mind or what it was that he told her that seemed to affect her in such a way. She held him in such high esteem, and she’s gone now, and doesn’t even remember what she looked like.

By the time he felt that he could walk again, he slowly stumbled into his room. He opened his cupboard and fumbled around for a large notepad he eventually found in the back. He took it out and wiped the dust off of it. He flipped through the pages and saw the many pieces of artwork he did back in college.

He’d been told he had talent, that he could achieve something as an artist one day. But as soon as he graduated, and he found himself trapped in the rat race that is daily life, he threw his passion away. He remembered the words from the letter. ‘Living life to the fullest, not putting it off until you retire and then realize you’re too old to do anything.’

He decided not to go to work today, one day off couldn’t hurt anyone. He opened a drawer and took out a half sharp pencil. He flicked to a blank page, and after a few deep breaths to suppress any upcoming tears. He began to draw one again.

INK BUTTERFLY BY N.D. KELLER

The first time she saw the butterfly it was on her stomach. Lavender wings spread delicately across her skin right next to her bellybutton. Her fingers traced the outline as the water from the shower head rolled down her back. It was beautiful with spotted patterns that branched out from the center.

The next day it had traveled to her chest, comfortable like it was resting on a flower in spring. She found herself tracing the outline again before reluctantly putting her shirt on. She took her time on her makeup, careful to apply her wings and just enough blush to give her the look of smiling so she wouldn't have to as much. It was required of all the baristas.

In the usual morning rush of the coffee shop her coworker caught sight of the butterfly slipping down her arm. "Did you get a tattoo?"

"It's only temporary." She answered. It would move from that spot soon enough. Throughout the day it danced down across hand and squeezed in between her fingers. It was a two dimensional being and her body was its canvas.

A shot of cerulean blue caught her eye. A young man wearing gages and a shirt that didn't match was at the counter. "I like your scarf." she said, intrigued by the color.

"Nice butterfly." said the man across the counter. "I'd like a double shot of espresso and your number."

"One shot of espresso coming up." she smiled. Internally she was put off but did not let her face show it. She needed this job to keep her small apartment running and unhappy customers complained to the manager.

The young man was not deterred; he asked for her number every day after that. She soon tried to time her breaks for when she spotted that cerulean scarf. It didn't work because he came back behind the counter to find her.

“What are you doing back here? This is employees only.”

“I’m the manager’s son.” He grinned. “It’s all good. I was hoping to ask you out dinner.”

“No thanks.” She said firmly. Why couldn’t he leave her alone? She couldn’t leave work and he followed her even into the safe place for breaks.

His advances continued, and she pulled the manager aside to quietly suggest that he was disturbing her during work. The manager’s response was, “I’ll have a talk with him.”

It did nothing.

On Valentine’s day he brought her roses while she was working at the counter. She couldn’t escape, and he wouldn’t leave until she finally awkwardly accepted them. They were red, not blue or lavender. The card was pink written in flowing language and addressed to Amanda.

Her name was Nina.

Her coworker, the real Amanda, noticed her discomfort. “Do you not like the flowers?” she asked when they had a slow moment.

“Gerald won’t stop bothering me. I don’t like him.”

“But it’s sweet. Even if he got the name wrong, he tried.”

Nina did not find it sweet at all. She found it annoying, and she couldn’t escape him. The roses were tossed in the dumpster and she returned home and searched for her butterfly. For a moment she thought it might be missing but she found it resting happily on her back. She beckoned to it and watched as it migrated up to her shoulder where she could trace its wings. Purple

came away on her fingers and she felt more relaxed. She made herself some tea and wished that she could stay in this peaceful spot forever.

The cerulean scarf was in the back when she came in. It was looped over the chair. She knew what it meant but was drawn to it. She found herself running her fingers across the silky surface.

“I thought you didn’t like Gerald.”

“I don’t.”

“Then why are you playing with his scarf.” Amanda grinned, giving her arm a little nudge.

“I thought this color would look good on a butterfly’s wings.”

Gerald came back and wrapped himself in his scarf. It didn’t suit him. “Hey Amanda,” he stared at her.

“I’m Nina.” She interjected.

“Nina, whatever.” He waved a hand dismissing the correction. “I have a cabin up by Ten Mile Lake. You should come with me this weekend. I know you have the day off.”

“I’m sorry, I’m unavailable.”

“It will be fun. I’ll bring up some steaks to grill.”

“No thank you.” She replied as politely as she could. His persistence was unwelcome. Had she not been at work she would have not let him within sight of her. She couldn’t avoid him.

That Friday, there was a knock at her door. Nina had not invited anyone over but if they were knocking this late, it might be important. She was in the

middle of food prep and set her knife down on the table as she walked the short distance to answer the door. At the flash of cerulean, she immediately tried to close it.

“Hey, I’m ready to go. Let’s head over to the cabin.” He put his foot in the door, so she couldn’t close it.

“I’m in the middle of cooking. I can’t go.”

“Just stick it in the fridge. What I’m cooking tonight is much better. And then after that, we can have some wine.” From the alcohol on his breath, she’d say he had enough wine. The pungent smell that contrasted the beautiful silk fabric assaulted her nose.

He pushed his way in. She was trapped. Her heart thumped faster like butterfly wings.

“Come on.” he grabbed her wrist. “Let’s go.” He was holding too hard. She couldn’t feel her fingers. She tried to pull away, but he wouldn’t let her.

“Please leave,” she whispered.

“I said let’s go.” His hand found the knife. He pointed at her. “I gave you flowers, and good tips. The least you could do is go on one date with me. You owe me that.”

“No. Go away.” The shiny blade was all she could see now. She struggled trying to jerk away but it pulled him with her. The knife came closer. Too close. She couldn’t see it anymore. Hot fiery pain shot up from her breast.

She woke up alone. Blood pooled on the ground with a strange splattering that looked like lavender butterfly wings in the middle.

She panicked checking her body. It was gone. A full body check revealed a thin white scar, and no butterfly. Her friend, her wonderful companion had left this world in place of her life.

She cried in the shower as she washed off the blood. What would she do? She couldn't go back to work, the next time she really would be dead. Even if she didn't, he knew where she lived. She couldn't travel far enough.

He and his dreaded cerulean scarf had taken her joy. They had sliced through her safety and simple life. She had to do something. She had to make sure this didn't happen again. She wouldn't live her life in the shadows.

She went to his house. Finding the address was simple; he posted it boldly on the internet for all to see.

"What? How?" he stuttered as she entered his unlocked door. The alcoholic smells that assaulted her nose were worst now. Her knife was here, and she would have it back. But first she grabbed a hold of his scarf and pulled. She pulled and pulled until it unwound spinning him to the ground. His body went limp and she left him, taking only her kitchen knife back home with her.

Sunday night, there was a new butterfly, posed just above the crease of her thigh. She traced the new patterns, as it shined full of renewed life. The butterfly became even more vibrant in the droplets of water as the rain fell down on her.

"Did you hear? Gerald had a heart attack. He was so young too. They think it was the alcohol that did him in," whispered Amanda before they opened.

"He should have taken better care of himself." Nina couldn't disguise the discontent she felt at the mention of his name. Even with him gone he haunted her.

Amanda shook her head. "There will be a funeral..."

“I’ll cover you for that day.”

Amanda sighed and then spotted the new butterfly. “You went with blue this time. Why do you like butterflies so much?”

“Oh, I just think it’s interesting how they transform from something so creepy like a caterpillar and then become something beautiful.” She traced her fingers over the cerulean butterfly.

BOOM BOOM AND THE KID BY PAUL METAXAS

“You imbeciles are what our tax dollars pay for??” the shopkeep yells at Detectives Thompson and Brimley. “How long will this reign of terror continue unabated?”

“I understand your being upset, ma’am.” Thompson says. “We and the boys are doing our best to track these miscreants down.”

“Do you even have the name of their gang? This lawlessness has been abided for too long!” she says.

“Well, we have a few aliases, but we don’t know how many there are or what their motivation is.” Brimley responds.

“Then can I at least know the aliases? I am entitled to that! They destroyed all of my floral arrangements with Valentine’s this Sunday!”

“Well, uh... we have...one actually... it’s - we’re told one of them is called...”
Brimley gulps,

“Boom Boom.” Thompson says, eyes on the floor.

“Come again?” the shopkeep asks, blinking in disbelief.

“Boom... Boom.” Brimley echoes, wringing his hat in his hands.

“Get out!” she yells.

The detectives scramble for the door, Thompson offers over his shoulder, “We’ll be sure to keep you updated on our discoveries ma’am. Justice will be served!”

“Feeble-minded pigs!” she throws an unpotted tulip at the glass door as it shuts behind them, dirt crumbling through the air and bursting as it hits.

“That went better than the thrift shop last week, all things considered.” Brimley says. They stare at the giant middle finger arranged on the sidewalk with shattered flower pots, wilted roses, and upheaved petunias.

“Yeah, that one is a rabbit’s hole. How the hell did that place burn down so quickly?” Thompson asks.

“Had to be Molotov cocktails. These thugs are ruthless. Didn’t steal anything, either.” Brimley responds.

“Bell Bottoms and ashes everywhere.” Thompson shakes his head. “It looked like a congregation of disappointments spontaneously combusted.”

“My wife,” Brimley says, voice quivering, “she might leave me, Thompson. Says she’s done with the long hours of the job. Says I’m an absent father. This case is driving us apart.”

“Look Brimley, we are going to solve this.” Thompson puts his hands on Brimley’s shoulders. “I know it’s taking a long time. I know all the footage has Kennedy and Nixon masks and our leads are all over the place. But we will find these thugs and make them pay. Then we’ll get our lives back.”

“So far the only common denominator we have other than dead president masks is the crimes always happen late Friday nights...”

Thompson’s phone rings, he answers. Brimley can see him frown as he listens, then hangs up.

“We’ve got a late report on a burglary at a convenience store on 5th and Johnson Street, might be the same gang.”

The closed sign is showing on the shop front as the detectives arrive to a disgruntled store owner. The man unlocks the door and they shuffled into a retail shelf-stocker’s nightmare.

“Dey rhoon my business!” he says in a thick Hungarian accent. He is visibly shaken, confectionaries and commodities strewn about in disarray.

“We’re here to help,” Brimley says, “What’s your name sir?”

“I am Laszlo. I own store.”

“I know you reported to our colleagues already, but we’ve been tracking similar vandalism for months now, we think there might be a connection. It’s our understanding that this happened last night late? Why didn’t you report it right away?” Brimley asks.

“Dey scare me! Big masks and want strange tings. Take only Tahvinkies and M and M and M’s, say dey are true American goodies. Have old kahrappy gun in my face! Knock my product off shelf. Say to go hug tree.”

“Huh... Twinkies... how many robbers were there?” Thompson asks.

“I tink two, maybe tree. Is blur. Vee do not have crime like dis back in Budapesht. Tings make sense dere. Crook take moneys, not shoogar treats.”

“Did you notice anything at all about them that might set them apart? Height? Weight?”

“Dey were not big... but fierce! Raspy voices, say crazy tings. Say Roosevelt Street better dan Johnson Street. One man name is Roy I tink, he is con - like how you say, ummm, vas prisoner in pasht, he also called Kid or Infant or someting. Gun man have new tattoo on arm, under sleeve, look red and puffy. Vave it in my face, it say Boom or Boomer I tink.”

Brimley slams his fist on the counter. “Damn you, Boom Boom.” he growls. “Kids these days and their rampant buffoonery. Going to get someone killed!”

“Cholesterol levels Brimley, deep breaths.” Thompson says.

Laszlo rubs his golden necklace chain anxiously, its green edges buried in the unruly chest hair escaping his tank top. “Oh, one more ting. Dey smell like mint and alcohol. Very strong mint...” He grimaces in reflection.

They all stare at each other, baffled.

“It’s the educational system.” Thompson finally says. “No other explanation for it.” The three of them grumble in agreement.

“Yes sir. The Kid, sir. Yes, and Boom Boom. Yep, he came up again.” Thompson says over the phone. Brimley pales as he sips his coffee. “No, you’re right sir, this is unacceptable. Definitely.” Thompson is looking grim. “What sir? Yes, that’s right. Twinkies. Yes with a gun. Yes that’s all. Oh - wait... uh, also... M&M’s. Yes sir. Sorry sir.” Brimley sinks deeper into the booth of the diner. “Yes, shop was on 5th and Johnson Street. We’ll update when we... well... when we.... uh, yes sir. Goodbye sir.”

They both exhale. “Chief says our salaries are a ‘substantial termination of resources.’ Thompson relays.

“We can’t keep going on like this! All willy-nilly forever amidst inexplicable chaos! I mean what kind of ruffian would comment on Roosevelt Street being better than Johnson? It’s gobbledygook!”

Thompson rockets up straight in the booth. “Brimley! That’s it! There’s a tattoo shop on Roosevelt Street near 5th! Braslo said Boom Boom had a fresh tattoo! Let’s go!”

“His name was Laszlo...”

“Priorities Brimley!”

Tires squeal as Thompson and Brimley pull up to Kinks4Inks.

A burly man is receiving what appears to be a dilapidated hot air balloon tattoo above his navel as they walk in.

“Hello gentlemen,” Brimley says, “I’m Detective Brimley, this is Detective Thompson - we are hoping to borrow a few minutes of your time.”

“If this is about that botched Big Bird tattoo I am not speaking to anyone without my lawyer. The guy didn’t specify what era of *Sesame Street*.” the tattoo artist says.

“Uh, no, actually.” Thompson responds, “We were wondering if you gave anyone a tattoo that said ‘Boom’ over the last few nights?”

“Well people don’t usually say things like ‘Boom!’ when you tattoo them. It’s pretty painful. Usually just grunts and cursing. I guess that could be someone’s catch phrase for pain. Boom! What do you think Jimmy?”

“Boom!” Jimmy says.

“Let me rephrase,” Thompson says, “Did you give someone a ‘Boom’ tattoo? Spell it onto their skin.”

“Oh,” the tattoo artist sits up, “Nope, but I don’t do nights either. Too degenerate for my taste. I prefer the more sophisticated day crowd.” He returns to inking the hot air balloon’s basket.

“Come to think of it though, our night guy, Sinclair, he mentioned a real scary couple of guys from last night, texted me saying he wants a raise. Said they were hammered and smelled weird. Rambling on about wood or something. Weird stuff, like woodstock and brindlewood. They skipped out on paying for their tats too, real belligerent.”

“Boom!” Jimmy yells.

“Sorry Jimmy did that hurt?”

“No just trying it out in case. I don’t think it fits.”

Outside the tattoo shop Brimley says, “I don’t think Big Bird changed during the eras of *Sesame Street*.”

“Brimley! Get your head straight man! We’ve got a hot lead, these guys might be part of a new gang called Brindlewood or Woodstock or something.” Thompson says.

“I’m sorry. I just can’t go on like this much longer. I was supposed to cook dinner for my wife and kids tonight. A nice quiche, not over the top. Tasteful, like my uncle used to make.” Brimley says.

“This could be a break for us! We could uncover something huge, get those promotions we deserve! We’ll stop and get a rotisserie chicken okay? We are gonna be winners! Winner winner chicken dinner, alright?”

“Okay...” Brimley says, shoulders sagging.

“You want to hug it out? Like they say in the P.E.E.R. support class?” Thompson asks.

“Yeah...”

“Alright, bring it on in. We’re gonna do this buddy.”

Thompson’s phone rings.

“Yeah? Really? Alright. On our way.” Thompson responds. “We have another burglary from last night. Address is 1930 Dewar Road.”

As the detectives pull up, their jaws drop.

“Brindlewood Assisted Living Home.” They say in unison.

As they enter they're greeted by the facilities director.

"I'm sorry to bother you detectives, but we have an issue that's been happening for quite some time and I felt it necessary to report after last night's escalation. We have a recurring thief breaking into our festivities closet." she says.

"Any security footage?" Brimley asks.

"Unfortunately, no." she says, "Furthermore, it appears to have been happening for weeks now, we just didn't notice we were missing some of the goods right away. Until last night."

"What sort of goods, ma'am?" Thompson asks.

"Well... we keep certain liqueurs for special occasions with our tenants, buy them bulk to allow for budget constraints. Thirty bottles went missing last night, and we suspect smaller amounts were taken before that."

"What kind of liqueurs, specifically ma'am - if you don't mind my asking?" Thompson says.

"Well, if you must know - *Archers* peach schnapps and *Rumple Minze*."

"*Rumple Minze*?" Brimley asks.

"It's a peppermint schnapps." Thompson says.

A disheveled nurse rushes to the director, "There's something you need to see... right away."

"What is it?" the director asks.

“It’s Conroy, he’s... well we were giving him an afternoon sponge bath since he was napping all morning... he tried to refuse and shower himself... then he just started yelling. There are... um... well there are... tattoos... on his arms... now. New tattoos...”

“How is this possible??” the director yells.

“We aren’t sure ma’am... one word on each arm... ‘Down’ and ‘Baby’. He can’t remember how he got them.”

“Take us to Conroy.” Thompson says.

The director leads them to an irritable man easily in his nineties, sitting in his room.

“Rotten hippies...” Conroy mumbles to himself, “Ruining our country! Nixon’s fault! Get him out of office!” He reeks of a variety of schnapps. A second nurse appears, flustered and leading another elderly man into the room.

“You aren’t going to believe this - come on Eustice - you’re usually so spry...” the new nurse says, then stops short as she sees Conroy scratching his tattoos. The detectives and director turn to look at the other man. He smells too, and can barely stand.

“I, uh... I think Eustice is... hungover.” the new nurse says.

The detectives move toward Eustice, reaching for his sleeves.

Eustice flinches, “You keep your filthy hands off me!” he wheels, tumbling over as the nurse catches him. “That’s no way to treat someone who flew in the war!”

“That’s right! That’s 2nd Lieutenant Pilot Eustice Miller you’re talking to! We’re part of the greatest generation, you daffodil sniffing rascallions!” Conroy says.

“I’ll give them the pistol if they keep it up, Conroy! Teach them Boomers how to dress like a man.” Eustice says as he sits and pulls a Twinkie out of his pocket, shoving it into his mouth.

“Were they... on the premises last night, director?” asks Brimley.

“No, actually... Every Friday Conroy’s daughter checks them out for family visit, brings them back Saturday mornings. They’re WWII vets, grew up together.” The first nurse says.

“Nurses,” Thompson gulps, “Would you be so kind as to bring them together and roll up their sleeves?”

The nurses struggle as Miller and Conroy are sat next to each other, arms forced out, sleeves rolled up.

Their tattoos read “Down” “With” “Baby” “Boomers”.

WEEK THREE
A FABLE RETOLD

CAESAR'S HEIR BY LAWRENCE N. HARROW

B.C. 45, The Aftermath of the Battle of Munda
Victory of Julius Caesar over Pompey and the Optimates

Octavian rode his horse till it was at the point of collapsing. He would have spurred the damn beast further if it didn't look so close to death. The sun was setting, and he knew not how much distance was left between him and the battlefield.

Sickness had plagued him that day, forcing him to stay behind with the wounded, unable to join Caesar and the legions for the final battle. It had all come down to this, the final battle against the traitor Pompey, they had him trapped in the city. But they had no advantage, Pompey's legions outnumbered them almost two-to-one. They would need an act from the Gods themselves to win that day, but if there was one thing Caesar was, it was a man favored by the gods. Octavius drew a breath of relief as in the horizon he saw soldiers move but felt a tinge of panic as he knew not the outcome of the battle. As he got closer he could make out the standards the banner-carrier was holding; it was the standard of Caesar.

He found Caesar alone, on his horse watching the soldiers move the prisoners, "You're late..." Caesar said when he saw him coming, "but at least you came."

Caesar pointed towards two men, part of a line of nobles about to get executed. "see them?"

"Titus Labienus and Publius Varus, but where is Pompey?"

"He fled like the coward he is," Caesar said calmly. "I sent Lucius Lento after him and told him not to come back without his head in a bag."

Caesar was silent for a moment. He turned to Octavian. "When we are back at Rome, I will name you my heir."

Octavian was shocked, at first, he was unable to utter a reply. He waited for a jibe, expecting Caesar to finish the joke, but nothing came,

"I can see you are confused as to why I would choose you, but it's simple: you are my nephew, and my adopted son. I have seen you both in the senate and out in battle. You are surprisingly competent in both. People will ask me why I choose you. Not Mark Antony, one of my most trusted generals, or Marcus Lepidus, one of the few allies I can trust. But it's not a hard choice once you get to know them. Mark Antony is a general above all, a man whose career was built upon a foundation of countless dead soldiers, and Lepidus is weak, he is marginalized too often, unfit to be my heir."

Octavian was speechless, hearing it all but refusing to believe it. It seemed too good to be true, but he could not believe what he heard about Antony and Lepidus. They were among the most respected men in the Senate, and Octavian admired and respected them dearly. But to hear what they were truly like, that even Caesar doesn't trust them was bewildering.

"When I die, you can not trust them. They are ruthless, ambitious, and quick to action. If you show weakness, they will fall on you, and they will tear you to shreds like wild jackals. You must cut them off."

B.C. 44, Octavian's palace, After the Death of Caesar
Meeting of Lepidus, Mark Antony and Octavian after Caesar's
assassination

Mark Antony's face was a sight of pure rage. He was walking to and fro, struggling to contain his anger. Lepidus and Octavian watched him, Lepidus feeling childish glee at seeing him act like a child.

"I will not have it!" Mark yelled eventually, "I deserved to be Caesar's heir, not you!" he said, stabbing a finger in Octavian's direction. Octavian felt slight panic at this.

"It was Caesar's wishes. We have to respect them," Lepidus said calmly, trying to calm Antony down,

"Caesar was wrong!" Mark replied, but his throat was caught as he realized what he said about Caesar, "he... he is a child, he doesn't deserve to be Caesar's heir. I was in control of all of Caesar's armies."

"Yes, you are" replied Lepidus, "but you were wrong to disobey Caesar and the senate. If you disobey them, you disobey Rome."

Mark turned his acidic glare at Octavian, "And you? Don't you have anything to say for yourself? Must you hide behind him?"

Octavian had nothing to say, he was too afraid. He deeply regretted his decision to allow them to invite themselves to his palace. At first, he thought Caesar was exaggerating, but now he knew Caesar was right. Mark began almost immediately, telling Octavian that it would be best for Rome if he stepped down as heir.

Mark shook his head in disgust, "I would rather die than be beneath him. I was the commander, I was the one who chased away the traitors. I protected Rome after Caesar fell."

“And you went against the council and Caesar before he became Caesar. Do you think he forgot that? Who could?” interjected Lepidus. “We have bigger things to worry about. Brutus is still alive. The man who killed Caesar is alive and we are here arguing like children!”

Octavian was relieved to see that Mark was considering his words. He seemed to calm down slightly. Octavian was grateful that Lepidus was on his side, for now at least.

Lepidus then turned to Octavian. “We need to find and kill the assassins. But you cannot do it all on your own, you are not Caesar, remember that. You need us Octavian. Without our support, your life in the senate will be worse than you can imagine. But for now, in exchange for our help and support, you could help us too. It’s only fair isn’t it? A Triumvirate, before Caesar became dictator, before the great civil war.”

“You have a lot to learn from us boy, you are going to need a lot of help in the future.” added Mark.

B.C. 36, Fall of Lepidus

Lepidus being stripped of his power by Octavian after a political mistake

“How dare you?! I trusted you! I... I helped you!” screamed Lepidus.

“You acted on your own. you did not receive the senate’s consent, or even mention it to them or me that you were raising an army.” replied Octavian calmly,

“An army? I was helping you, you damned fool! I took Sicily for you, for Rome! But you cared not did you? The moment you heard of my aid, your ego could not bear it. You went to the Senate like the milksob you are and cried about my attempting a rebellion!”

Lepidus’ eyes were welling tears. The sight of it wrenched Octavian’s heart slightly. He loved Lepidus as a friend, but he never trusted him. He knew Lepidus schemed behind his back, they all did. It’s what politicians do, it certainly was no secret. He could not prove it yet, but that’s because they haven’t been caught yet.

“You broke the code of the senate, you acted on your own. That army you raised was the second largest army mustered at that time. If a rebellion was what you have had truly planned, we both know Mark Antony would side with you. Both of you hated me from the beginning. You merely tolerated me because you could not kill me, and don’t you deny it.”

“I wanted no rebellion, I never wanted a war. All I asked for is that you treat me as an equal Octavian, do you hear me?! An equal!!”

Lepidus was silent, neither wanted to say anything now, both the silence was worse,

“So now what will happen to me?”

“I personally made the senate strip you of all powers, but of Pontifex Maximus.”

Lepidus let out a chuckle, “High priest, that is what you leave me with?”

“Not just that. You are exiled.”

Lepidus’ face filled with shock, he couldn’t believe what he heard, his jaw dropped.

“Exiled! What have I ever done to you Octavian? What did I ever do to you to deserve this? Tell me...”

“What you deserved? You should be happy Lepidus. Mark Antony was right, I learned a lot from you too. I learned how to plot, how to trick people into believing me, into making them think I was their friend until I stabbed them in the back. I am your prodigal son.”

For a moment, Octavian was silent, he walked closer to Lepidus

“You will spend the rest of your days in Cicerrii, and if you ever dare to plot against me again, I will have you and your entire family killed in front of you, remember it Lepidus.”

Lepidus could not bring himself to say a single word, as he watched the monster that became Caesar’s heir leave.

B.C. 30, Death of Mark Antony

Mark Antony's death after losing the war Octavian started against him

Octavian had Mark Antony trapped, alone. Antony was looking at Octavian and two of his bodyguards, he knew there was no way out of this. Octavian felt pleasure, seeing Mark Antony subdued like this, the great statesman, all alone in Egypt. No one with him now on the day of his death.

Octavian had been patient with him, giving him control of Egypt, and even allowing him to marry Caesar's former wife Cleopatra. But he had showed no sign of gratitude, questioning Octavian whenever he could, taking measure to ensure his personal control over Egypt. Making sure that Octavian would find Egypt slipping.

"I must congratulate you, Markus. You were very clever here, but you have always underestimated me, haven't you?"

Antony's face swelled with the rage Octavian was used to seeing; it began to almost amuse him.

"You, insolent brat. You deserved none of this. Me and Lepidus, we deserved it. We were Caesar's closest allies, we aided him longer than you could ever hope to. You! You were his nephew, and you weaseled your way into his confidence."

Mark smiled slightly,

"I do wish he could see you now. Caesar's heir, a backstabber, one of the least trustworthy, but most powerful men in Rome. Me and Lepidus were the reason you even got to where you are today. And you betrayed us! Lepidus was your ally, he was aiding you in war, and look what happened to him. Now he is nothing, a poor old man, waiting for death. But I was happy here, I was content. For once in my life I was content, but you had to come, and burn Egypt just to spite me, didn't you?"

Octavian could not help to smile.

“Of course, Mark, of course. Nor did I forget the words Caesar told me not to trust you and Lepidus. He told me that you would try to usurp my position, and that you would tear at me like jackals the first opportunity you would get. And you tried before, didn’t you? Back at the palace, Lepidus was the only thing that kept you at bay; we both know it. But I no longer needed him, and now it was time to remove the last and only thorn in my side. What I did to Lepidus was mercy, because he can be controlled, like you control a mongrel.”

“I have already given orders Mark. The Praetorian Guard has been dispatched, they are under orders to kill each and every one of your children, and Cleopatra too. And not just them, even Caesar’s youngest born, Caesarius, I knew you have kept him here. I will take out all threats, all suspicions today. With you all gone, the only ones left in the senate will be those in my favor. If Caesar were to see me now, he would be proud Mark, because at least with me, all assassins failed. Now, I remember you saying you would rather die than be beneath me.”

Octavian unsheathed his sword, examining it for a moment. He threw it at Mark Antony.

“Time to prove you are a man of your word.”

The Swallow and the Other Birds

THE LION AND THE TORTOISE BY C.E.S. DRAIN

The Lion was walking in the woods one day when he came across the Tortoise sitting on the bank of a river. He was happy to see the Tortoise and especially his great protective shell, since the Lion had recruited a new pack of Dogs that needed training. He spoke to the Tortoise, and asked him, "Would you do me this favour and come to this place every day at noon so that the Dogs may practice attacking your shell?" The Tortoise agreed, knowing that a favour from the Lion was hard to come by.

The next day he arrived to find not just the Lion but also three Dogs waiting for him. He settled down on the earth and withdrew inside his shell, and for an hour or so the Dogs practiced attacking their target. The same thing happened the next day and the day after that. Each time, the Dogs got better and faster at attacking, but the Tortoise remained quite safe inside his shell.

One day, however, the Tortoise overslept and was late to the meeting. The Lion was angry that he was made to wait and ordered his Dogs to immediately attack the Tortoise. They'd become so quick with their attacks that the Tortoise did not have time to retract his head. In fact, thanks to their training, the Tortoise could do nothing at all. He was killed, and his body returned to the earth, but his shell was left for the Dogs to keep practicing with.

"We often give our enemies the means for our own destruction."

CHILDHOOD BY LYNA PRAVY

There was a young boy around the age of ten who, every day, would go on exuberant adventures in his neighborhood. He loved the warm summer breezes messing up his hair and the squishing sounds his sneakers made in the mud by the stream. He carried around a small pouch, so he could collect awesome looking rocks and minerals and give them to his parents as presents at the end of the day. Sometimes during the summer, he watched one or two of his neighbors play, but he was too shy to talk to them. Instead, he continued gallivanting in the forest.

As the young boy played outside and visibly had a lot of fun, more and more children his age begged their parents to play outside as well. Before the boy knew it, there were four others his age joining him on adventures. They would eat breakfast, run outside to meet up, go home for lunch, and meet back up to play until dinner time. The parents were thrilled that their children were socializing and using their imagination. It was refreshing to hear the innocent childhood laughter, and watching the kids play brought them a sense of nostalgia.

The children were inseparable, and even sat together at school. Eventually, they asked their parents if they could take trips together, like going to the beach or the park, or the public pool down the road. The parents happily agreed to each and every request.

The young boy no longer felt alone. No one knew he was lonely because he always seemed content and happy. However, having friends made him feel whole and unbreakable. He had friends who stuck up for him making him feel confident and valued.

The Bundle of Sticks

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