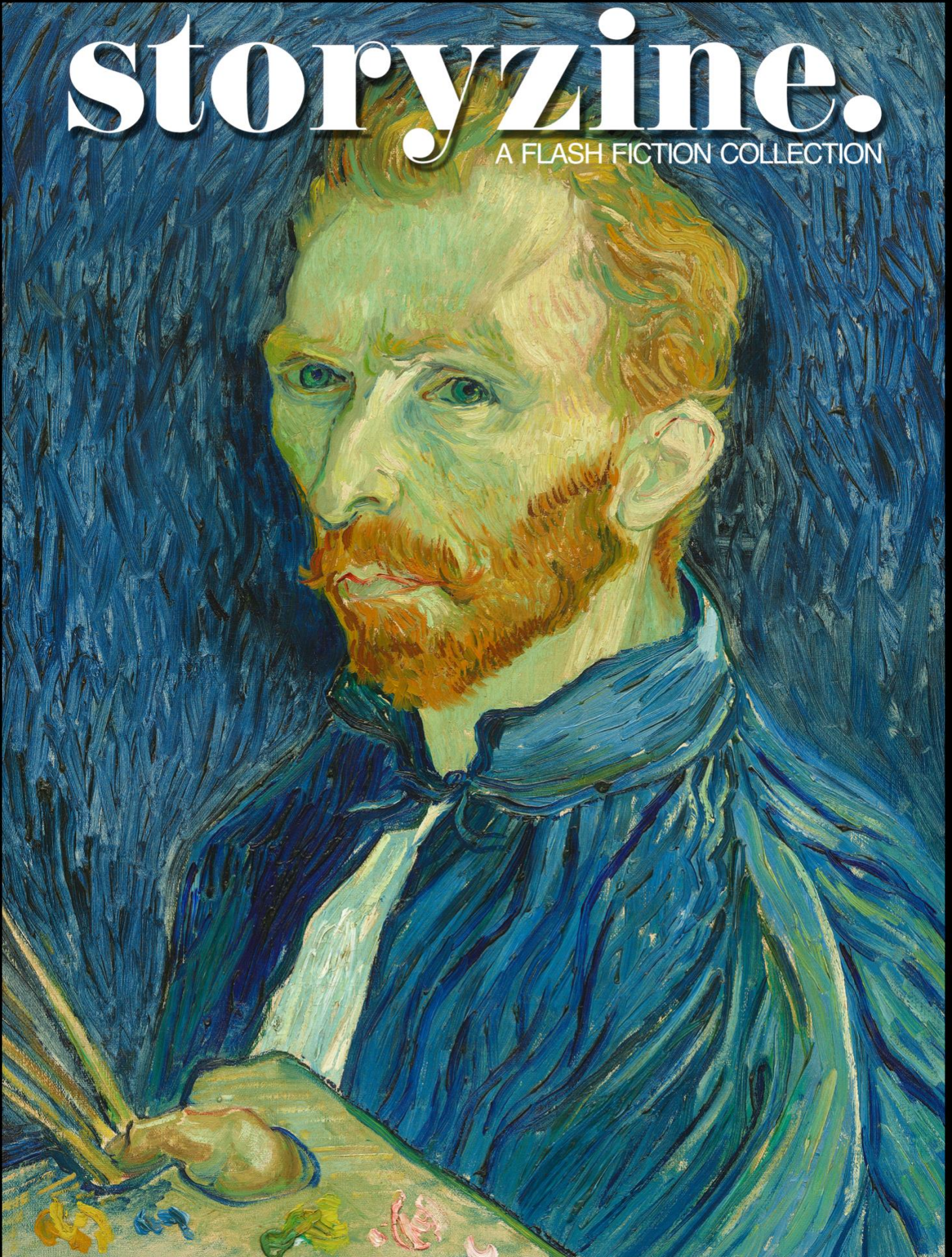


AUGUST - 2018 - VOLUME I - ISSUE VI

# storyzine.

A FLASH FICTION COLLECTION





# storyzine.

Volume I Issue VI

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### The Team

### Editor's Note

### BONUS PROMPT | ANYTHING GOES

**A Silly Landscaping Adventure**  
*Curtis McIntyre*  
[500 Words] Comedy

**Lilies**  
*Dylan Ward*  
[766 Words] Drama

### PROMPT 1 | LOST JOURNAL

**Baso's Flight**  
*David Gouldthorpe*  
[500 Words] Fantasy

**The Search for L**  
*John Woodland*  
[495 Words] Mystery

**Is this Harry**  
*Panda*  
[453 Words] Mystery

**My Mother's War of Love**  
*Draca Konrad*  
[499 Words] Romance

### PROMPT 2 | SO CLOSE, AND YET...

**Granite Acres**  
*Dylan Ward*  
[909 Words] Horror

**Wasted**  
*SymBal*  
[994 Words] Drama

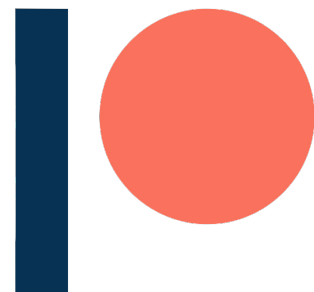
**What Lies in the Forest**  
*ScottWritesStuff*  
[494 Words] Drama

**Spirits on the Road**  
*Oarmfan*  
[389 Words] Drama

**The Hitchhiker Murders**  
*Rowan Clarke*  
[472 Words] Drama

### PROMPT 3 | ELEMENTARY

**In With the Drew**  
*Jonnell*  
[496 Words] Comedy



# CONTINUED...

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### PROMPT 4 | LUCKY DAY

Lucky Day

*N D Keller*

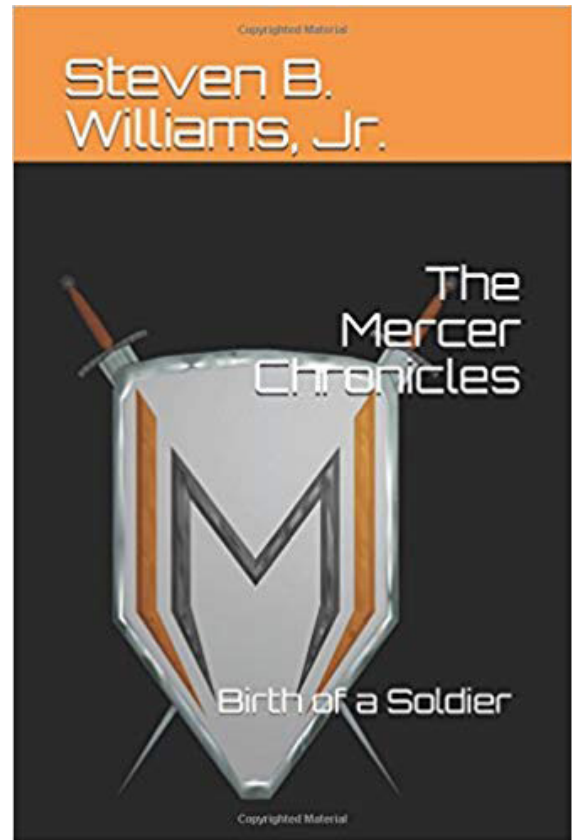
[489 Words] Drama

Feeling Lucky?

*Panda*

[500 Words] Mystery

Help Us Grow  
Become a Ziner  
Testimonial  
Volunteer



Storyzine is published monthly. Each issue contains 4 prompts provided on the 1st of every month.  
All rights to each story belongs to the original writer.

---

# storyzine.

A FLASH FICTION COLLECTION

# Editor's Note

## The Team

### Editor-in-Chief

E.L. Drayton

### Public Relations & Promotions

Jacop McGuire

### Social Media Strategist

Zak Burchell | Instagram

### Editors

T.M. de Saavedra

Juhyon Tony Bae

Amanda Tess

Miria Lyre

### FBI Designer

Lyna Pravy

### Cover Designer

E.L. Drayton

### Patrons

Cthulhu C.

Curtis M.

Dylan W.

Lyna P.

Semeo D.

First, I want to give my thanks to you, the reader, for making the decision to subscribe to Storyzine and read its stories every month. Second, I want to thank all the many contributors over these six issues. It took a lot of hard work from not just the Ziners who contributed but the team who volunteer every month to make sure the issue gets released on time! None of this would be possible without all of you.

As this is the sixth issue I wanted to celebrate by introducing a few new things into each month going forward. When I started Storyzine, it was to give the writers of my Discord server (now entering its 2nd year) a place where they could submit not just work off fiction that they wrote, but that total strangers could read.

The first new aspect of the issue you will notice is advertising. But not just any advertising. The ads you will see are for books written by up and coming authors, who have taken the ultimate step into becoming an author by putting their book up for sale on Amazon. All links have been vetted by me and I assure you will only ever lead you to the Amazon page where you may decide to purchase the book if you want.

Lastly, I want to talk to you about Patreon. I invite you to click the link to find out more about what it is directly from the site if you are not aware. In short, it is a way for individuals (or communities) who are offering something to get Patrons if people feel so inclined to give a little for what they get in return. Storyzine will ALWAYS be FREE. This I guarantee. However, there are some costs to maintaining Storyzine that you may not be aware of and that I pay for out of my own pocket. You are in no way responsible for or obligated to help pay for what I do on my own, but if you can spare it, for just \$1 a month you can help pay for the hosting, URL, security, and other costs that are incurred to run and maintain the issues as well as the website. You will start to see a Patreon link in each email as well as in each issue as a reminder that you can, if you are able, become a Patron. Every \$1 helps. That's just \$12 a year. Thank you for understanding and for being a subscriber.

 [Become a patron](#)

## BONUS STORY - ANYTHING GOES

Become a Patron today and for just \$1/m you can have your story featured first in our issues, too.

 [Become a patron](#)

# A SILLY LANDSCAPING

CURTIS  
MCINTYRE

## ADVENTURE

COMEDY

Midnight. Wish I could sleep. Too wired. Drank coffee all day. Now my thoughts won't slow down enough to let me pass out. Been tossing and turning for almost two hours.

Check the internet on my phone. The bright screen against the cavernously dark backdrop of my room burns my eyes.

Hot summer night. Fan roars beside my bed. Turn it off to hear the sounds outside my windows.

Remembering things I wish I could forget. Although, given the chance to forget, to induce selective amnesia on myself, would I really take it? How much of my personality, my soul, is built on memories? Would purging them free me from their shackles, or lead me to repeat the same sins all over again in ignorance?

I wish I was drunk.

Anxiety. Try watching TV to distract myself from it, but every show annoys me.

On a hunch, I wonder what phase the moon is in. Go to window and look at sky but it's too cloudy. I check Google and, big shock, it's supposed to be a full Moon tonight.

Work tomorrow is going to be fucked.

12 Hours Later...

Driving between accounts. Other cars on the road look like kids toys rolling about on a lopsided track.

Pull up to house. Get out of my truck.

A loud crack like a whip from the sky brings my head spinning around. I expect to see some prehistoric, leathery bird come flapping down from the sky onto my head. Instead, I find myself staring up at an American flag, a strong wind snapping it to and fro. The red and white stripes threaten to tear free and come skittering across the air at me.

I listen to the wind. I follow the rustle of every leaf on every tree, study the patterns of motion by which this ocean of invisible force flowed over my surroundings. My mind slips from my body to follow the wind storm. I connect to the great currents, feeling my way along the trail by which it traveled, seeing the entire state of Massachusetts laid out before me like a grand map. I wonder if I can lose myself completely in the maelstrom, abandoning my body forever. I faintly sense blood vessels popping back in the skull I'm trying to flee.

"Hello?" a voice calls.

Meditative state shattered, my consciousness crashes back down into its meat suit.

"Hello there? Are you okay?"

Who is bugging me? And where am I? Oh yes, a customer's house. I'm supposed to be mowing their lawn. I wonder how long I was standing there, my statuesque body staring at the sky while my soul soared the serene storm currents.

"Hello," I say. "I'm your not-crazy landscaper. Is this a good day to mow your lawn?"

"Uh... you aren't the guy who's been pooping in my bushes, are you?"

"No, that's some other guy."

This has been a Silly Landscaping Adventure. Tune in next month for more not-crazy hijinks.

# LILIES

DYLAN  
WARD

DRAMA

Louis sat crossed legged on the floor of his studio apartment and stared contemplatively at his blank canvas. The paint on his pallet had nearly dried, and yet, the inspiration failed to come to him. In his thirteen years of painting, he had completed hundreds of works, and had sold dozens. But, of all of the time to have lost his muse, it happened to be then, when he was painting what his friends and family considered to be his “most important piece.”

His father, a carpenter for over thirty years, passed away three days earlier. A sudden heart attack one evening when he and his wife were taking a stroll through the park. He was healthy, and stubborn as a mule. But, even he had to meet death as well. So, as the wake and funeral were planned, Louis’s mother approached and requested a painting to set beside the grave. Louis obliged.

The painting should have been simple, really. A close-up: shoulders up with a bright smile. His mom had hundreds of photos almost identical that he could use for reference, but an image plastered itself into Louis’s mind, and no amount of mental gymnastics would remove it. Louis imagined a man’s hands, cut and bruised, opened and facing palms up, crossing across the fingers as if asking for an offering. In the hands sat a bouquet of white lilies with specks of water on the petals.

Although he felt the close-up would be more appropriate, the lilies would not escape his mind. The painting would be fitting, he figured, since lilies were the flowers for the funeral and the battered nature of the hands reflected his father’s career as a carpenter, so Louis set off to painting. As his artwork neared completion, Louis felt a curious pang of nostalgia that he couldn’t place. Something about the mixture of those flowers with those hands overwhelmed him with a familiar sadness.

The family agreed that a joint funeral and wake would be best, so they all gathered at the cemetery one cold september morning for their final goodbyes. Louis’s father laid in the open casket in a black suit with a bouquet of white lilies

clasped between his hands. Next to the casket sat the painting. It was a modest gathering, mostly family with some close friends. Louis’s mother was often surrounded by a small crowd, but every so often someone would break off and compliment Louis on the painting. He was often told it was “non-traditional, but fitting.” Louis did his best to take that as a compliment.

There was nothing abnormal about the ceremony. The local priest came and prayed while the body was laid to rest. Louis comforted his sobbing mother, but he himself couldn’t find the tears to cry. He merely watched in contemplation. An hour after the ceremony, and all of the other mourners had left, Louis and his mother still stood by the grave, which had been freshly filled. His mother had stopped crying by then and merely offered a slight chuckle before looking toward Louis.

She asked him if he remember what made his painting so special. Louis, unaware of what she was asking, said he did not. With another chuckle and a grin she drew his attention to the flowers being held in his hands. She asked if Louis remembered his grandmother’s funeral, and again, he replied he did not. So, she reminded him of a childhood memory he had long lost.

Eighteen years prior they gathered in the same cemetery for the burial of Louis’s paternal grandmother. During the wake, the priest asked those in attendance to bow their heads in prayer, only Louis had another idea. The seven-year-old took the opportunity to leave his chair and approached the casket, where he removed the flowers from his grandmother’s hands. The family ended their prayer and opened their eyes to behold young Louis leaning into the casket and prying the flowers from death herself. Everyone was silently aghast as the little boy took the flowers to his father, who had been sobbing to no foreseeable end, and placed them in the man’s hands with a simple phrase, “G-maw wants you to have these so you can smile.”

As they stood before the grave of his father, Louis’s mother smiled one more time and hugged Louis. She said, “Thank you,” before turning and walking back to her car.

## PROMPT 1 - **LOST JOURNAL**

While cleaning out a closet, you stumble upon a journal you don't recognize. As you flip through the pages, it becomes apparent that this journal belongs to a fictional character (either an original character you've written about before, or a character from one of your favorite books). Share one of the entries.



# BASO'S FLIGHT

DAVID  
GOULDTHORPE

FANTASY

Dear journal,

I'm sorry to have been silent so long. I can't remember how long it's been - it feels like a lifetime ago that I was sitting under my porch, drinking mead from my favorite glass mug. It had been my grandfather's, with the likeness of his grandfather molded upon it: a proud rabbit who'd made a name for himself. And now it's ground to dust.

It was late morning when the king's guard came racing through the streets. The castle had fallen, the Fluyans were attacking! I'd never seen such a panic erupt. I gave myself time to race inside and grab my essentials: bread, some figs and dates and raisins, some cheese. I also have the illustrated Isstoriarate that my mother owned, a handful of silverweights, and of course my journal.

For all my good sense though, every item came paired with my own foolishness. I took dry foods, but no waterskin. I took my sacred texts and my meager remaining wealth, but no easy way to carry it. I had my journal, but no way to mark the page. I had no chance to remember them though. Even that time I took nearly cost my life.

I had dismissed the Fluyan Empire's speed as hysteria, embellished stories. But in all the time it took for me to grab what I did, shadows crossed my window. Their dragon riders already filled the sky. A fearsome Royal Fisher swooped down, and the jaws plucked one of the king's men off his horse. I did not see any more. Even remembering it to write makes my stomach curdle.

I ran. I had nothing else I could do. The king told us what the Fluyans did to us little folk; probably they're hunting the village for sport already. Sprinting away, I saw Erit trying to fight his way into the village, his pitchfork in hand. He'd always been a hot-headed fox. I don't know what became of him. I can only hope he's still alive.

I ended up joining refugees heading northwest. One raccoon had the sense I lacked and brought

a pencil. Now we're piled twenty in a wagon with an old human couple driving their cattle.. We all know where to go: Almuthul. The republic is all that stands against the Fluyans now. It may not be the comfortable life I've known until now, but it's better than chains or the sword.

I have much more to say, but the sun is setting. Gosh, the Almuth sky... already everything feels different. The great peaks of home look small and purple on the horizon. I've never seen so much flatness before. Shrubs and trees dot the landscape. Far to the north, a thunderhead bigger than any I've ever seen flashes with lightning. It's orange in the dying sun, and dark rain pours from the bottom. It's grown hotter out here, but it's gentler now. We will travel through the night, shelter when the sun rises.

I will write again,

Baso

# THE SEARCH FOR L

JOHN  
WOODLAND

Nathan Sauer, Entry 1.

MYSTERY

If the story my uncle told me is true, I doubt my father has any recollection of the night I was conceived. A few too many drinks and a hole in his heart meant that the baby he put in my mama would grow up without a man in his life to tell him off. Mama never told me his name, and for the most part she was content with pretending he had never existed. I think for my own sake, she didn't want me idolizing the man. If she had things her way, I'd have grown up thinking my conception had been of the immaculate variety, Jesus-style, but Mama never had things her way.

When I was ten, I'd been digging around in her closet and at the bottom of a weathered old trunk, tucked beneath a pile of letters, I found a picture of him. I wasn't sure at first, but over the course of the hour or so I spent scrutinizing the image I became positive of the man's identity. They were on a pier, blue pastel sky stretched out behind them, arms around each other. The man looked a lot like me but with skin baked golden brown and a mane of blonde hair swept across part of his face. My mama looked so much younger, so animated and wearing a smile so genuine that I couldn't believe it was her at first. On the back, presumably from my father:

Ocean City, 1985  
Remember me? Missing you.  
L

L. Luke? Logan? All my life, an old polaroid and the vague note on the back were all I've had to go off of. Despite Mama's best efforts to erase him from history, all I wanted was for him to be around. I wanted him to see my football games, to play Xbox with me, to take me fishing. For some reason, I've always attributed him to fishing, and that's the reason I've never been. It's tough explaining to people, but I want him to take me, nobody else.

But recently, I've started to hate the guy. Not for what he did to me, but for what he did to Ma. He tricked her, made her love him and then burdened her with me and disappeared. I've

never seen her smile the way she's smiling in that picture. It's not the wrinkles and the greying hair that made her almost unrecognizable, but a lack of joy, of that unmistakable love of life. I don't blame her for being the cold and dismissive mother she was. She loved him and he cast her away, leaving her with a hardened heart and an ungrateful kid, and I've decided to blame him.

When I was a kid, I wanted him to be my dad. For a while, I would've decked him in the face. Now, I think I just want to ask him why.

# IS THIS HARRY

PANDA

MYSTERY

I started to pile the clothes, on the wardrobe floor, on my bed. Too much stuff had slipped from the hangers and dropped down to the already overcrowded floor. 'Who knows what's down here, honestly?' I thought, as I stared at the amount of clothes and bags piled up on my bed. Squatting down to shove everything onto the stained, red carpet, I spotted a journal.

The brown, weathered spine of the book was scribbled on. "Not taken care of," I chuckled. I wondered if the journal belonged to the previous homeowners. I took a look at the cover; in huge, messy letters, read:

**"Belongs to Harry James Potter."**

'Must've been a huge Harry Potter fan,' I think, wondering where I should return it. Although I guess it's quite rude to, I opened it to the first page; maybe, I could find an address or something like that. My eyes scanned over the worn page curiously.

*Dear diary,*

*It has been another day at Hogwarts. Except for the Quidditch match coming up soon. I mean, it's totally nerve-wracking. I couldn't focus all day. Thank God Hermione agreed to share her notes on the Charms lesson. Recently I've realised how amazing Quidditch has made my time at Hogwarts, it definitely wouldn't be as enjoyable if I didn't play. The teamwork and the feeling of being up in the air. It's amazing, except the times when you're up against Draco Malfoy. But, I mean, when we win against Slytherin... The best feeling, no lie.*

*The Weasleys have invited me again for the Summer Holiday, which is great, because no human wants to spend time with the Dursleys. I do not want to see Dudley's face ever again.*

*No more time to write, I'm tired and lights are going out. And Ron is being an idiot. I'll try telling you more tomorrow, see you.*

*P.S. I put Hermione's copy of the notes here so I don't forget where I put it.*

My eyebrows furrowed, "Are they writing a story or something?" I questioned out loud. The handwriting was elegant and considering what the previous homeowners were - a rowdy teenage boy, living with his alcoholic, maybe drug-abusing mother - it didn't seem like theirs. I knew it was stupid to judge by the handwriting, but those two didn't seem like they would write in a journal. Let alone write as Harry Potter. I glanced back down at the last sentence. 'Hermione's notes? Are they still in here?' I pondered, as I flicked through the pages. Sure enough, I found a piece of parchment. Written on the parchment were proper pronunciations of spells and what the spells caused.

"What the hell? Have I found Harry Potter's diary...?"



# MY MOTHER'S WAR OF LOVE

DRACA  
KONRAD

ROMANCE

The stairs gave a painfully loud squeak. Every step is audible as I make my way up to my old bedroom in my parents' home. I came back in search of my old yearbooks, wanting to share my feelings of nostalgia with my wife.

Ah, how the time passes too quickly. It feels just like yesterday when I met her. We went through some hard times, especially with her parents, but we both survived. Our love for each other is now strong as ever.

"Hm, are they in here?" I think as I pull out a suspiciously familiar box.

"This is odd. What is this?" I find an old purple notebook, labeled, "The War to Win my Crush's Heart."

I squint and examine it closely. It feels quite old, and the papers feel like they were once wet. It must be a diary of sorts. Perhaps its contents documented a secret pursuit of love? Did Mother put this in here by mistake?

Well, there's nothing to lose if I just take a peek.

As I flip through, I find the entries amusing but nothing out of the ordinary. But, something feels off. It seemed as if there was a competition for a confession!

"September 4th - The First Day of School

At school today, a fellow classmate caught my eye. I shall not name him now. Why does he seem so interesting to me?

He likes to 'assist' everyone in their 'relationships'. What is the deal with relationships these days? The only connection to people you would ever need is if it will benefit yourself. In private, I have questioned him about his personality and traits. He stated that he is competitive, especially in the academic side of things. That is probably why he gave off a certain aura to me.

When I turned my head, I realized that his friends spied on us! In the following hours, gossip spread and not even one academic

period went by without whispers scrutinizing our conversations. Theories ranged from friendly conversations to romantic flirting. Yuck.

They claimed that I was 'in love with him'. I am not. As Sherlock said, 'Love is a dangerous disadvantage.'

After school, I decided that I needed to be more covert with my operations to gain information about him. I recruited the assistance of my information associates, my 'friends', to look around the school for any details about him.

But then, I kept on hearing the same thing. 'He is the same as you.' What do they mean? For now, I will continue to gain more information about him.

That will be all for today.

-V.K."

Oh boy, this story is very interesting. Why did Mother not show me this notebook? Also, why does this seem eerily familiar to my own love experiences? I attempt to look at the last page of the diary and...

"My son, why are you reading my old War Diary...?" my mother whispered into my ear.

I screwed up, big time.



## PROMPT 2 - **SO CLOSE, AND YET...**

You have nearly arrived at your dream destination. Thus far, the trip has been uneventful, and there's only an hour's drive left between you and vacation bliss--when suddenly the vehicle breaks down, leaving you stranded. Where are you, and what do you do?

# GRANITE ACRES

DYLAN  
WARD

HORROR

In a sputter of rancid oil and hazy smoke, only 48 miles from Granite Acres Camping & Hunting Grounds, Sophia's car broke down; deep into the wooded country roads of Tennessee where even the radio struggled to find service, let alone her cellphone. It was the last stretch of her trip, the final hour of a two day long journey from home to salvation.

The trip was sudden the first time, ten years ago, when she caved and followed the burning desires she fought since childhood. With the wind in her hair and the sea of green leaves staring down at her from above, this bi-annual trip actually managed to make her feel alive.

So much of life felt mundane to Sophia. She printed pages upon pages for executives and CEOs to sign and hand off to other "important" people she felt had sad, miserable lives. In an odd, ironic way, she envied their ignorance; their willingness to go about each moment worrying about deadlines and secret liasons their wives might discover. On occasion, she'd tamper with their emails and let their secrets loose. But even those fleeting moments felt mundane. Nothing was quite as exciting as her trips to Granite Acres.

After parking the car on the side of the road, Sophia checked the bottle of pills in her glove box. A quick rattle reassured her that there were enough, and she returned them to the compartment. She got out of the car, opened the hood, and promptly decided that she was hopeless. With the heat and smoke rising from within, she left the hood open and sat on the rock beside her broken down sedan. Thoughts fluttered around in her head and her heart raced in her chest. She imagined several passersby moseying over to her and offering a hand of help. The woods surrounding her were home to many hungry lumberjacks who had arms large enough to snap her in half with little effort.

Sophia decided to wait a moment on the rock and admired the tall oak trees. The breeze gently flowed around her and the road stayed void of traffic. She considered the possibility that no one would pass. Her feet ached at merely

the thought of walking that far and her stomach lurched at the possibility of what could happen to her car if she left it abandoned at the side of the road. She heard a slight shuffling from behind her and she quickly turned to face the trunk her car. When the noise failed to return she sighed, stood up, and gave the trunk of her car a slap.

It was an hour until a vehicle approached. It was a rusted out red pickup that hardly seemed able to run. She heard it clanking down the road well before she saw it. Sophia stood beside her car and waved frantically as she watched the vehicle approach. It slowed to a stop beside her and a man peered out at her. His skin was pale, flakey, and wrinkled but something about his demeanor screamed that he was full of life and was no nearer to the grave than when he was in his twenties. Rust chips flaked off of his truck and the man regarded her with stoic silence.

He pulled up ahead of her and parked his truck on the side of the road as well. Their conversation was bare minimum. He mostly spoke in grunts and sighs but Sophia did ascertain that his name was Robert, though that was only from a minor inquiry regarding the name tag sewn onto his overalls. He toted a large bag of tools from the bed of his truck over and set off on the engine. Sophia watched from the rear of her car where she kept her hand on the trunk.

Robert made quick work of her car but the shuffling came back, this time it was more frantic. She slapped the trunk again causing Robert to peek up at her. After an awkward smile from Sophia he set back to work. Minutes later, he was finished and asked for her keys. Sophia was defensive at first, but gave in and handed him her keys. She stayed at the end of her car as he sat in the driver's seat and started the engine. The car roared to life and Robert smiled something akin to real joy before telling Sophia she was ready to go.

With the start of the engine Sophia felt the car lurch slightly, but not from the engine. She gritted her teeth and watched carefully as Robert gathered his tools and meandered back to his

# GRANITE ACRES / CONT

DYLAN  
WARD

car. The shuffling was accompanied by muffled moans that were just barely masked by the engine. Robert started his truck and waved back at Sophia before driving off. Right as the truck began to drive off into the distance the moans erupted into full screams echoing outward from her trunk.

Sophia leaned into the passenger window and opened the glove box. With a grin she pulled out the bottle of pills and walked back to the trunk. She popped it open and looked down at the man and woman tied beneath her, both in expensive party dress. The woman had managed to undo the binding around her mouth and was screaming expletives.

Sophia shushed the woman as she began to open the pill bottle. Yes, there were certainly enough for the remainder of her trip.



# WASTED

SYMBAL

DRAMA

It was supposed to be quick.

A wasteland of dust and shrubs and a road slightly hidden below. It was all around him, a portrait begun but incomplete, left to wither away with time. There he was, in the breadth of that erasure. He sat with his head buried in his arms, back against his now useless vehicle, stranded.

“All right kid, what’s the damage?”

He banged his head against the car.

“That’s quite a shiner you got there. Guess you didn’t see it coming huh?” the stranger said pointing to his own forehead.

“...”

Tall, broad build, with a copper face sunk in from age. The man wore a large black cowboy hat that made his sight darkness, and a coat that danced like smoke in the wind. moving the world around him instead.

“Ah, it’s nothing. Accidents, you know?” The young man answered, rubbing his temple. “It’s fine really I just got tired and decided to sit for a bit.

“...riiiight.” The man immediately headed towards the car, carrying along the scent of oil and ashes.

“W-wait I said--”

“It’s my job kid, if it helps think nothing of it. Won’t take long.”

He noticed a large bag on the back of the Man of Ashes, previously hidden behind the large coat.

The Man of Ashes seemed to search the bag for hours, the silence only broken by the clanking and shuffling. The young man began pacing back and forth, occasionally rubbing the back of his neck.

“You know typically folks who come out this way have some sort of story to tell. I’d imagine kid

young as you has quite a history.”

“I-I just ended up out here.” The boy replied hastily. “I think I was meant to be out here on my own you know?” He was beaming and scratching his arm.

The Man of Ashes didn’t look up. “Looks like you’re paying for it now.”

“Yeah, yeah I guess. My old man used to tell me ‘what’s life without a little pain?’.” He laughed.

“You don’t look like the type who takes well to pain.”

The boy stopped in his tracks. He looked around searching, but all he found was sand and honesty.

“...Yeah, no, you’re right,” he muttered after the odd silence. “So uh find anything?” He approached the car. “I don’t have much but I gotta repay you somehow.”

“Ain’t much use in profits out here. You wanna scratch my back, I don’t mind the odd conversation.”

“Oh uhm... so how did you--”

“Don’t know, don’t care. Always been out in these parts, always will be.”

“...Right.”

“You thinkin’ about how you got here yourself then right?”

“Well, it’s like I said. I...needed this. I was in a place that I really, reaaally didn’t like. So I decided to go to another place, you know?”

“Looks like you ain’t sure if it’ll be worth it when you get there.”

“Yeah I guess. It’s not really about ‘worth it’ or not anymore. It’s not like I HAD to...I mean I did but I tried to stay...” He began to shake. “I know they wouldn’t understand and I didn’t want to



# WASTED / CONT.

SYMBAL

just stay there and make things worse, because that'd be wrong right?"

"Yup...So?"

"So...I did this!" The boy smiled a broken smile. "And this is right. I--"

"Deserve this?"

"No! I mean, does anyone really deserve...this? I don't know."

"Then what do you deserve?"

"I-I don't know?" He had begun pacing. "Maybe I do deserve this. I thought it'd be quick, I thought it'd be painless." He let out an exhausted sigh as he slid back to the ground.

"I was just selfish. Wow, I really..."

He hadn't noticed, but it had become quiet. Quiet enough that one could hear the sound of his tears hitting the sand. There was no road now, and only a sepia toned sky with no sun.

"So that's it then right?"

In his blind slump it was hard to find where the Man of Ashes' voice was coming from.

"Truth is, ain't nothing in this world more tragic than a story that gets cut short. Don't matter how you cut it, you'll always get a piece too tough to swallow." It grew colder. "But one way or another you get it down. Got to."

"You're right, they'll just forget about me right?" the young man's voice was somewhat muffled amid sobs and his own arms.

"That what you want?"

"Who cares what I want?"

"Well you came all the way out here 'cause you couldn't stay where you were right?"

"I was just trying to find an easy way out. Guess

it's a little late to say I wasted my time huh?"

"Won't know that till you get where you were headed. Way I see it, we all end up on this road someday, someday. Ain't nothing wasted once you're on it."

Silence. Even the whirling of thoughts were culled in it. No time, no sound, just silence. It was the first time in what felt like ages the young man felt something resembling peace.

"She's all ready to go by the way."

The young man slowly rose his head. He had forgotten about his car. To his surprise the world had gone completely dark. No moon in the sky and any scenery too shrouded to make out. The only light shined through the headlights of his car, down a path unknown. He stood, opening his mouth, hoping the words would find themselves.

"Can it. Told you, it's what I do. There ain't no time, no words, no need for either of us to explain ourselves. Not on this road."

The young man could no longer see the Man of Ashes, but it didn't matter.

"...Thank you."

"Thank me when you get there."

# WHAT LIES IN THE FOREST

SCOTTWRITESSTUFF

DRAMA

I'm driving along the winding Vermont roads to grandma's secluded forest home. It's the first time I'm going there by myself. When I was younger, my parents and I would visit often, but ever since grandpa died, we haven't been back. Whenever I'd ask why not, my parents would quickly change the subject.

But now I'm finally heading out on my own. I didn't call grandma to tell her. I figure it'd be a fun surprise just to—

BANG!

I lose control of the car. It jumps and swerves to the side. Metal against metal screeches out in pain underneath. I slam the brakes and spin off the asphalt road, shuddering to a stop on a grassy shoulder outside the woods. I breathe in. Breathe out. I'm alive.

Dashing out the door, I inspect the damage. The front tires are lopsided. I glance underneath and immediately see the problem. My rusted axle is snapped in half. I'd meant to get it fixed ages ago, but with the never-ending homework and tests at college, I never had time.

Now it looks like my secret trip to grandma's is over. I give the car a frustrated kick, pull out my cellphone, and call AAA. No private poolside lounging or fresh-baked cookies today.

But before the ring tone even comes up, there's a rustling behind me. I turn to see what it is.

A hulking humanoid creature tears out from the woods. Its eyes are the size of tennis balls, bugging out of its head. Its furry white body is covered in dirt and forest debris. It opens its mouth, letting loose a roar and waterfall of slobber, showing off its knife-sized teeth that jet out in all directions like broken glass.

I run.

I run faster than I ever have in my life.

I pound my feet against pavement, moving as quickly as I can. I glance over my shoulder. All

I see behind me is the forest and my mangled car. No sign of the beast.

My mind throbs in a mess of adrenaline. Grandma's house appears on the horizon. I have to warn her! I sprint up the driveway, my legs churning acid, my heart about to beat out of my chest.

I round the house to the backyard. Grandma is lounging by the pool in her shades and bikini, showing off her tanned saggy skin, munching on a plate of cookies.

I'm too late.

The beast is already in the pool, clawed hands in the air, ready to attack grandma.

"G-g-grandma!" I yell. "Watch out!"

There's an eruption in the pool. Water splashes everywhere as the white furry beast pounces...

...onto a foam noodle. It bounces around with it, growling happily as it bathes in the water. Grandma tosses the monster a cookie. It catches it in its mouth like an excited dog. She lowers her shades and peers over at me.

"Oh, hello dear," she says. "What a wonderful surprise. Come over and say hi to your grandfather."

# SPIRITS ON THE ROAD

OARMFAN

DRAMA

Dancing around in the desert! Swirling the sand around into the face. Spirits aroused, by body parts moving to the sound of the wind. The spirits come to dance, they always do. Following on to the rhythm of the breath. Spastic movements, shaking off the dusty grains, making sense only to the dancer. Alone, oh so alone, there where only the dancers logic applies. No one to watch, no one to be guided by.

There in the desert, dancing to the beat of the sand, together with the spirits formed by the mind. Forming visions on the retinae of the inner eye. Making pictures, abstract, captivating, yearning... yearning pictures. Making the mind of the possessor forget what and where. Making time hurt, making all stand still.

The beat stops, the dancing stops. It is not fun anymore. Screaming, loud noisy screams. All but one spirit is still left, forming a face, oh such a pretty face it is. A replica of what is out there at the end of the road.

The possessor of the visions opens its mouth and words depart from its body.

“AT THE END OF THE ROAD!”

The scream blows away the sand. Makes vortexes, turning the desert into an unsettling ocean of yellow crystals.

The wind begins to blow again and shouts back, “DANCE... DANCE!”

A destructive storm, stemming from the hottest, darkest, cracked parts of the mind.

Spirits rise, shouting commands at the mind. The possessor falls to its knees, succumbing to the unrest of the situation. The sand swallows the body. Hot, hot sand. Boiling up the mind of the possessor. Attracting spirits, but not of the beautiful kind. Smashing the joints apart. The sand drowns the scream of pain.

A cracking voice takes form beside the possessor’s mind “A...as you enter the road...” Echoes vibrating through the skull. Echoes filled

with an aurora of tears. “As you enter the road...” The words dies out and leaves only the sound of sizzling tears as they make contact with the yellow prison.

The hot lava sand leaves the roasted body. The wind subsides and only the single spirit persists, a replica of what is at the end of the road.

The possessor of the mind dusts off the yellow grains with great care to not make it cut into the burned skin. No wind is moving, but distant words can be heard haunting the landscape.

The possessor walks to the burned-out car it arrived in. It takes out an old bike and a phone. A call. The possessor of the other mind understands, it always does.

The sound of the screeching old metal horse can be heard leaving behind the broken car, biking away to the holiday. At the end of the road. Away from the dancing spirits of the mind.

# THE HITCHHIKER MURDERS

ROWAN  
CLARKE

DRAMA

With every bump and pothole of the frosty road, bursts of static crackled over the radio. “The body of missing skier James Hampton has been discovered by a roadside with one thumb removed in the typical manner of the Hitchhiker killings.”

Tyler hit the volume knob and the voice cut off. “It’s depressing enough without that.”

In the passenger seat, Lucy glanced up from her phone and gestured at the now-silent radio. “That’s why you don’t pick up hitchhikers.” She returned to her screen. “Hm. I lost reception.”

Tyler bent his head around the steering wheel to peer skyward. Thick gray clouds darkened the afternoon into a near-evening gloom. Leafless branches shifted in the wind on both sides of the road, crowding out the rest of the world. “Man, looks like it might snow.”

Lucy traded her phone for the map tucked next to the seat. The unfolding paper threatened to take over the entire dashboard. “This doesn’t seem right. It’s so empty out here. Maybe we took a wrong turn...”

“You’re the one with the directions.” Before he had the chance to argue, the car coughed a dying wheeze and dropped speed. “Oh, hell.” In the space of several seconds, they rolled to a standstill, and the needles on the speed and fuel gauges dipped to zero. “Fuck me. It was at three-quarters a minute ago. Shit. The gauge must be fucking broken.”

Lucy twisted in her seat, looking up and down the road. “We haven’t seen another car in over an hour. Maybe we can get in touch with the resort—they could send someone to get us?”

“Nah. It’s like four lake cottages and one old loon caretaker.” He opened his door and cursed at the frigid bite of early winter air. He stepped around to the trunk on the vague hope of finding some emergency kit stashed away there. “Even if we were lucky enough for her to pick up, dunno what she’d be able to do to help.” Maybe they could call roadside assistance, though.

He leaned his whole torso into the meager warmth of the trunk, shoving bags and rummaging underneath. Dry branches rustled behind him in the dark, pre-storm afternoon. When he moved Lucy’s backpack, a black case fell out of the half-zipped front pocket. Thinking of the gadgets she carried around to boost her phone’s signal and battery, he snatched the case, ready to untangle a mass of disorganized cables—but there weren’t any. Just a bunch of little white trinkets. Smooth, oblong, clinking against each other with light, hollow sounds. He picked one up.

It was a finger bone.

His stomach dropped. He whirled to find Lucy already behind him, a jackknife in one hand. The first few snowflakes danced in the air around her. She grinned and said, “Good thing we didn’t pick up any hitchhikers, or I’d have to get rid of the witness, too.”



## PROMPT 3 - **ELEMENTARY**

There's a knock on your door. Upon opening it, you find yourself facing a man dressed distinctly like Sherlock Holmes. He informs you that he is a detective, and that you are a suspect in the disappearance of a person named John Watson. What happens next?

# IN WITH THE DREW

JONNELL

COMEDY

“I didn’t know you made house calls.”

I say it over the tea in our twin cups, held just under our chins. I’m reminded of a miming class I took one summer at the local college. But when I lift my cup to sip, the man in my (favorite) armchair hardly moves an inch.

“Your friend’s stories have made you pretty famous,” I add.

“That isn’t really how you know John. Is it.”

He smiles then the way I imagine Siri would if asked to ‘feign humanness.’ Maybe it’s the calculating gaze, the floppy hat dripping from an early rain on my hook, that all seems so familiar. Or maybe I just want it to be him. I try not to glance at the newspaper on the table beside me, my hopes for a quiet night abandoned.

“He’s been here before, if that’s what you’re asking,” I say, finally.

“He’s come with cases.”

“With questions. Some of which include ‘How are you, today?’”

The detective is up and pacing before I’ve even finished my jab. I marvel at the lack of tea on my carpet.

“He was here last. Even though his last blog entry was posted from London. Today.”

“He must have set up a queue to post while he’s away-”

“Away where exactly?” he snaps, before glancing down at teacup still in hand, and it’s bright green emblazoned ‘N’. “Norah.” He finishes, confidently wrong. I sip my own tea and wait out the beast.

“Look Nadeen-”

“Wow.”

“I’ve seen his umbrella in the foyer. You also take blueberry jam on your toast so, as your decor suggests, you two share unreasonably awful tastes.”

I find my hand reaching up to brush crumbs from the corner of my lip.

“I need to know where he is,” he concludes with a sip of his tea, but I can see that this has gotten to him. Finally, I understand. He doesn’t know Watson at all. If he did he’d know that John’s not the guy who leaves.

I sigh, long and deep for my ruined evening plans. And so that this home invader will squirm a little longer. But then a look of earnest worrying passes over his eyebrows, that goes as fast as it came. I throw the monster a bone, or rather my abandoned newspaper.

I speak as he reads. “There’s a local convention in town. Anti-vaccination fanatics.”

“John wouldn’t-”

“But he would go to the counter-protest happening at the same time.”

“He would? John?”

“It’s. On. His. Blog.”

Our detective doesn’t stay much longer after that. He doesn’t apologize either. On his way out he leaves me this:

“Holmes calls.”

“What?”

“They’re Holmes calls. Not house calls.” This small smile is a good one, but my tea’s gone cold and so have I.

“How clever.”

“Quite right...This case was-”

“Elementary. Really.” The smile only grows.

“Do take care. Nancy.”

“It’s Miss Fucking Drew to you,” I finish. And the slam of my door is the best damn applause.

## PROMPT 4 - **LUCKY DAY**

You're making your way down a cobbled street when a stocky, red-bearded man beckons you into an alley. He reaches into his coat, produces a locket on a long gold chain, and hands it to you. Upon opening the locket, you find a four-leaf clover pressed beneath a small glass pane. When you look up, the red-bearded man is gone. What happens next?

# LUCKY DAY

N D  
KELLER

DRAMA

“It’s your lucky day.” The man said, as he handed me a four leaf clover. I didn’t think much of it. I was busy. It was tax season and I had to get my parents’ taxes done. They had waited till the last moment again this year. It was up to their dedicated daughter to save them. I suspected they put it off so I would have to help them.

I thanked the man and hurried on my way to get to my parents’ house. A spring thunderstorm rolled in over the hills. Hail and ice hit the roads. The locket stayed forgotten in my pocket. I leaned into each corner. The county roads that took me to my parent’s house were slick but I needed the extra time. It wasn’t easy to crunch numbers.

Suddenly a deer sprinted in front of me. I pulled right. My car skidded across the guardrail. The sound of metal on metal was so loud I thought it was another drum of thunder. My heart raced. I sat for a long moment evaluating. I had a little whiplash but nothing was broken. I did not feel very lucky.

It was then that I saw the headlights.

They peaked up through the trees from the other side of the guardrail. I got out and saw a car down the ravine. It was pushed down into the water, steam still coming from the under the hood. I saw a baby bag with its contents spilled out in the back window. I called 911 giving them the location. Then I made my way down the ravine.

I heard crying. I waded out into the water and knocked on the window. There was a young man up front, with blood leaking down his face, and the water was rising. He didn’t respond. I reached for the door, but it was stuck tight against the rocks. The cries of the baby were drowned out by thunder.

I had to act fast. I grabbed a rock from below my feet and smashed in a window. The water rushed into the car and I leaned in fumbling for the straps to the baby carrier. Finally I was able to pull the baby from the wreckage. I carried the baby, wrapping the blanket tight around it,

placing it in between a tree and a rock.

The water was getting higher and I had no time to spare. I went back for the man. I climbed in through the smashed window and unbuckled him from his seat. He was heavy but with the water I was able to float him out and pull him on land. He coughed and opened his eyes.

The paramedics said that if I hadn’t crashed and seen the lights, the water would have overtaken the man and baby both. That man became my husband. He constantly tells me it was the luckiest day of his life.

# FEELING LUCKY?

PANDA

MYSTERY

My feet pattered against the wet, cobbled street as I pondered about how Harry Potter-esque this road was. A beckoning hand called me from the alleyway. A normal person would usually run from this sight but my curious mind craved for the adventure. As I turned into the alleyway, I instantly noticed gingery-red hair.

‘The man is wearing an interesting hat,’ I thought. But when the red-bearded man started speaking, the thought disappeared from my mind, as quickly as it came. I could only focus on the piece of jewellery in his hand - the silver locket was attached to a long, golden chain. He gently placed it into my hands, as my eyes widened with awe. Something felt different about this. Very different.

My mind went blank, as I slowly opened the locket to find a four-leaf clover, laying on a small glass pane. “Red-bearded man, funny hat, four-leaf clover... How?” I muttered to myself. I looked up, ready to interrogate the man but there was no trace of anyone. I glanced down at the locket in my hand; yup, it was there.

“What the fuck?” I questioned. I shut my eyes tightly, closing the locket back up and placing it around my neck. “Keep calm, Dee, if you see him again, you’ll give it back to him. Just wear it. Now, take deep breaths and head back home. Anna, your sweet, sweet girlfriend is waiting for you,” I told myself, calmly.

The next day, I thought, was going to be like every other. As I headed into the dull office, I noticed a glum look painting everyone’s face. Aya, a close colleague, ran up to me, with worry in her eyes.

“You know our rival company? Apparently, they’re planning to sue us.” My mouth dropped, in a matter of a few seconds. “Talk about unexpected, oh my God,” I replied. Hurriedly, Aya ran back to her desk, which was covered in paperwork. As I sat down, I drank my daily coffee. The taste was hideous. Soon, I realised there were tablets, of some kind, hidden in the coffee. As I tried to spit it out, I started choking. Running to my aid, Aya, helped me spit the

tablet out.

It was my work break. I knew there was something fishy going on. There’s no chance they would sue us at this time and why were there tablets? I headed outside for a smoke, thinking about how four-leaf clovers are supposed to bring good luck – not bad.

That’s when I spotted the weird man.

“Hey, you! Take your cursed locket! Who the hell are you?” I yelled, as my anger revealed itself.

“Tut tut, my sweet lady, I thought you’d last longer than this. Oh well.”

He tossed the locket up into the air; it landed in the hands of an elderly woman passing by. She happily slipped it into her pocket.

“Let’s see how long she lasts.”

He disappeared.



# HELP US GROW

We are so glad to have you as a dedicated monthly reader! None of this would be possible without you reading the work of these many writers. We hope you enjoyed it so much you'll consider sharing within your own social circle? Copy/paste this link in your Twitter, Facebook, etc:

<http://thestoryzine.com/newsletter>

If you are looking to help in more ways than sharing, we do have a Patreon Page where for just \$1 a month you would be helping to pay for the Hosting services we use to keep the website up and running, the URL itself, and much more.

Visit our Patreon Page [Here](#).

## BECOME A ZINER

After reading all these amazing stories are you feeling inspired to contribute one yourself? Our pages are waiting for your story! Don't wait, become a ziner today. Who knows, next month YOUR story could be somewhere among these pages...Look for prompts on the 1st of every month [here](#).

## TESTIMONIAL

Have you been enjoying the flash fiction stories featured each month? We'd love to hear your thoughts and share them with any newcomers to the issue.

Let us know what you think [here](#).

## VOLUNTEER

Do your talents go beyond writing? Do you enjoy editing, formatting, or creating images using apps & computer software? Whatever your skill we might have just the fit for you. Check out our [Join the Team](#) page to learn more about each position we are trying to fill and apply today!