SEPTEMBER - 2018 - VOLUME I - ISSUE VII

# SUCCEPTION A FLASH FICTION COLLECTION

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# storyzine.

### The Team Editor's Note PROMPT 1

Walter Wallace David Gouldthorpe [500 Words] Horror

### **PROMPT 2**

Heavy Memories ScottWritesStuff [499 Words] Drama

Ashes and Dandelions Sybil [432 Words] Drama

### **PROMPT 3**

**The End** *SymBal* [901 Words] Fantasy

### Become a patron

The Cape Cristina M. Miller [386 Words] Comedy

See the World Shania Kuo [494 Words] Young Adult

> **Tethered** *Erica Deel* [467 Words] Horror

### **PROMPT 4**

Ancient Delusions Dylan Ward [985 Words] Fantasy

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# **Editor's Note**

# The Team

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Cthulhu C. Curtis M. Dylan W. Lyna P. Semeo D. Hello Readers and purveyors of Flash Fiction. This month we bring to you eight really great pieces of short fiction I hope you will enjoy.

Since Storyzine came about just 8 months ago, I had a dream to make it the home of as many up and coming writers as I could possibly get. I think this issue is finally doing just that. Now, whenever someone hears about Storyzine (anywhere) and wants to submit a story, they can easily do so without the need of any social media username at all. All you need is an email address and you can be one step closer to seeing your name printed in a monthly publication! I consider myself so proud and honored to provide this type of outlet to so many writers who are just looking to get their foot in the door.

But there is still much for Storyzine to do. We still have a lot to learn and there is plenty of room for us to grow into something even better with every issue we put out.

We have introduced FREE advertising, a Patreon that allows writers to extend the length of their submissions, or readers to show their support, and with this issue we will be kicking off something new and different. From now on every other issue will be "Theme-Related" in some way. This new aspect of Storyzine will broaden the scope for new writers who might feel the pressure when presented with a specific image, word, or paragraph as a prompt to get them started. From now on, the "in-between" months will be image prompts only (feedback I received showed that images are the best prompts for writing). The goal is to bring in more writers and more great stories evey month and I hope you feel that is what you are getting?

But the changes don't stop there! While October & December will be "Theme Months" there is a great new Contest that Storyzine will be starting in 2019 that is sure to feature some longer stories by some amazing writers who are looking to showcase more than just their Flash Fiction chops! I can't wait to get started and take you along on this journey!

Become a patron

# Prompt 1



# WALTER WALLACE

All the witnesses had told the police the same thing: Walter Wallace had always been a bit odd. Everyone in Hollywood was, after all. They never guessed how far gone he was though.

HORROR

Walter had arrived in Los Angeles in the 1920s, working at one of the local hotels for a few years. Eager to work and please, his slicked hair oozed class, and the way he smiled always showed perfect teeth. His former employer shook his head; Walter was no trouble at all. Well, until one night he was given a reprimand – they didn't say for what – but Walter didn't return the following morning.

Instead he purchased a plot of land in the Hollywood hills. With the money from his labor for the past five years, he built his dream hotel. It blossomed into a palace of extravagance. His meager savings had combined with investors all the way from Manhattan, investors the FBI never managed to trace.

Walter greeted everyone who walked in his doors. He shook the men's hands and kissed the women's, got on his knees to welcome children. And always he smiled, speaking in a soft voice that could comfort a rabbit. He kept a room on the top floor for himself, but never seemed to sleep in it. Walter always kept on his feet. None of his employees could identify any kind of rhythm that could fit a sleep schedule.

From there the timelines began to tie together. Local farmers found goats and lambs missing, a dog ran off nearby. And then the fire.

It's not clear how it started; the record still lists the cause as unknown. Too quick to be accidental, but no fuel used. By the time the firemen arrived the flames had already eviscerated the tower. Tapestries blackened and curled, carpets smoldered in cinders, even the kitchenware had melted to the tables. Many guests had leapt to avoid the flames. Others were never found; Walter was one of them. The hotel books had been consumed, but from family reports no fewer than two hundred had perished... at least, perished in the fire. When the flames finally died, the firemen went room by room to seek survivors and collect the dead. They reached Walter's room, where three men had to force the door.

It was a more sensitive time, so the record tries to be tasteful. All we have is a gag order for local papers, and the recovered inventory: four steel tables; remains belonging to between three to five people; one untitled book; numerous jars containing biological samples of undetermined species; two horses, deceased; one and a half dogs, deceased; and various "metal implements".

From there all other records are classified "sensitive" by federal authorities, accepting the hotel's immediate bulldozing and the land's seizure as government property. All that remains uncertain are the rumors from local kids of what was found when the ground was dug up, and the rumors of the men in suits that carried it away.



### **OFFICIAL 2018 PROMPT LIST**

| 1. POPINJAY       | 11. JABBERWOCKY | 21. NEVER-NEVER LAND |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 2. ANTHROPOMORPHI | C 12. ACOLYTE   | 22. TEMPESTUOUS      |
| 3. WIZARD         | 13. LODESTAR    | 23. TRANSMOGRIFY     |
| 4. CARAVANSARY    | 14. THIMBLERIG  | 24. CUCKOO           |
| 5. CADAVER        | 15. MENAGERIE   | 25. MURDER           |
| 6. GOOSE BUMPS    | 16. BOONDOGGLE  | 26. BAKER            |
| 7. HORNSWOGGLE    | 17. ASYLUM      | 27. EUPHONY          |
| 8. EMBARRASS      | 18. NEBBISH     | 28. HOGWASH          |
| 9. SERPENT        | 19. WEREWOLF    | 29. ANACHRONIS       |
| 10. SACRASANCT    | 20. POOH-BAH    | 30. SANGUINE         |
|                   |                 | 31. HELLACIOUS       |
|                   |                 |                      |

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# THE CAPE

Cryss stood, head held high, arms at her waist, and stared into the Toyota's headlights.

The once midnight blue, now faded navy Camry LE glared back at her.

Are you up for this? it seemed to ask, stubborn, defiant. Despite its 95,000 miles - nearly 153,000 km! - accumulated in a mere four years, the Toyota was not at all tired. Cryss could feel its energy, even as it stood inert in her driveway.

After 60? 70? trips down Connecticut's Merritt Parkway, over the Tappan Zee Bridge from Westchester into Northern New Jersey, Cryss was tired. She wanted to park the Camry in her driveway, 30 miles outside of Boston, and throw away the keys forever.

Still, there she stood, keys jangling in her right hand, staring those headlights down.

A long, long time ago, off a NJ Garden State Parkway Exit far, far away, Cryss had made a choice. That choice was waiting for her – and the currently defiant Camry – four hours away, just off New Jersey Local Route 17. As much as Cryss wanted to stop driving, she couldn't. As often as she said, "Let his father handle it, he lives with him," she couldn't. Each and every time Cryss tried to insist to herself that "noncustodial parent" meant she didn't have to be on call 24/7 the Cape extended off her shoulders, unfurling in the unseen wind behind her. Each and every time she tried to say, "But the miles on the car," the Camry glared at her.

Each and every time there was a crisis, the Cape snapped back.

Right now, the Cape, bright red against Cryss' blue jeans and navy t-shirt, was hissing adamantly. "You are a Mom. You are needed."

Cryss straightened her spine, opened her 20 ounce can of Sugar Free Red Bull and chugged it. She promptly chased it down with a Five Hour Energy. Finally, she opened the car's driver's side door. The Camry sighed as Cryss slid behind the steering wheel and turned the key in the ignition.

Across Connecticut, her son, who could not speak for himself, needed Cryss' voice.

Cryss put the old Toyota in gear, and turned onto the highway.

"Ready or not, Autistic Spectrum, here I come," Cryss thought, smiling to herself.

The Camry's engine roared.

The Cape cheered.

# Prompt 2



### SCOTTWRITESSTUFF

# **HEAVY MEMORIES**

DRAMA

My Dearest Daughter,

The day your mother gave birth to you in this hot air balloon, your cries were like music, the sound of a possible future in a world that had lost all hope.

You took your first steps in our tiny wicker home, bobbing from your mother's lap to mine. You giggled, so pure and naive, unaware everything around you was not the way it was supposed to be.

That was when we first noticed the dying flame. We'd packed enough fuel to last for years, assumed it would be plenty to find dry land. But you were already walking and talking, and there was nothing but ocean in sight.

Your mother and I discussed our options as you slept against my chest. We have to lighten our load. We've already tossed everything that wasn't essential. All we have left is our fishing tools, water purifier, and ourselves. I know what has to go.

My daughter, words cannot express how much I love you. But perhaps this act of mine can.

Love, Dad

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My Little One,

You've grown into such a wonderful young lady. You've certainly inherited your father's brains!

Remember that time I dropped our fishing pole into the water, and you maneuvered the balloon down just in time to grab it? Or when I was too sick to clean the fish and you did it all by yourself for the first time? Now you do it for every catch, and though I don't say it often, I'm always impressed by you.

And though you are my Little One, you are getting bigger by the day. I knew what that meant long ago, back when you first asked me how long the balloon could stay in the air. Back when you asked me about what happened to Dad.

Now I'm sitting here writing this in the light of the moon while you're sleeping. This is my final gift to you, my Little One, in hoping that it will give you enough time to find a piece of the world your father and I used to tell you about.

When you wake up and read this, you will be angry. You will be sad. You will be lonely. You have every right to be. But the one thing I ask of you is to keep going.

I know you will, and I know you will make us so proud.

Love, Mom

The girl stepped out of the balloon basket, having crashed into land, the last drops of fuel spent. Unnerving grains of sand clung to her feet. Unfamiliar greens filled her vision.

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Shaking, she clenched two weathered pieces of paper to her chest. Without thinking, she tore them to pieces, throwing them into the wind as she screamed and spilled tears.

Realizing what she'd done, the girl reached after the floating pieces before they disappeared into the ocean. She only managed to clasp onto one before the rest blew away.

The single piece that remained read: "Love."

# SEE THE WORLD

Two children, a boy and a girl, sat under a tree on a hill, laughing. Darkness had fallen long ago, but neither of them intended on returning home. Books laid strewn across the ground, and one spanning the length of both of their bodies laid on their laps. On one of the book's pages was a map, one of a fantastical land.

"Do you think we'll ever get to go to a place like this?" the boy asked.

The girl sighed. The smile had left her face, and she shrugged. "I don't know. Would be nice, but since dad left, mom won't let me even walk to school on my own."

"Yeah... My parents don't let me go anywhere." The boy stood. "But I want to go to all sorts of places! I want to see the world and do all sorts of adventurous things."

A grin spread on the girl's face. "Oh yeah? Like what?"

"I'll fight pirates and defend cities from monsters! Bandits will fear my name all across the world! It'll be an adventure of a lifetime."

"You're being silly. Monsters and bandits and pirates don't exist. They're just parts of these stories."

"Don't be such a spoilsport. Come on, when we're older let's have an adventure. Wouldn't that be nice, to go anywhere we'd like with nobody telling us what we have to do?"

"How? We don't have a car or a truck."

The boy smiled. "We'd go by a hot-air balloon!"

"A hot-air balloon?"

"Yeah! Remember the old woman who lived down the street? My dad bought a hot-air balloon from her. My mom sure was mad, but we can use it!"

The girl's eyes glimmered. "Really?"

"Yeah, imagine all the places we can go to! We'd sail under a starry night just like this! We could cross oceans to unexplored lands and start a kingdom!"

The girl laughed. "And maybe we'd find all sorts of treasures too. Imagine going through dark dungeons and discovering a room filled with gold and jewels!"

"And then we'll fight other kingdoms to protect our stuff! We'll build an army filled with heroes and knights and fight off bad guys!"

The girl leapt to her feet. "And we'll meet all sorts of new people and I'll find a prince to take me away."

"Who needs that when we could be visiting more new places! We could go up into the sky above the clouds and see the people who live up there!"

"You two!" A woman stood at the base of the hill, her arms crossed. "Get down here right this instant!"

"Aww, ma!"

"No buts, mister! Clean up your mess and let's go."

The boy sighed and leaned down as he and the girl stacked the books in their arms. "Looks like our adventure will have to wait."

She looked up at him and smiled. "I'll be waiting."

The boy smiled back. "You and I, we'll go on an adventure. I promise."

# **ASHES AND DANDELIONS**

DRAMA

"Isn't this nice?" said Claire, balloon riding over the silent stillness of the sea. The night air smelled of salt as she adjusted the flame of the balloon again—a crash out here was the last thing she wanted. She held the urn close to her chest, the oaken box clasped in gloved hands. "You said you always wanted to see the sea, no matter what. And now we're here."

Memories washed over her in a wave: their first meeting, a simple boy and girl in a field of dandelions. He'd given her one, she remembered;she'd given him one too, ruffling his chestnut hair. Things were simple, back then. Simple thoughts, simple times, simple days where they could play and play and play. The world had let her be.

Then things changed.

Responsibilities shackled her, weights on her shoulders—the first time she began to wield a scythe. Masses were cut down because that was the universe's will, no matter how much the cries disturbed her. Not to mention how the world itself changed, becoming more complicated by the day—

"Oh dear." The flame was flickering again and snapped her out of her thoughts—any more and she'd plunge into darkness. She adjusted the flame again, holding the box in front of her as the folds of her purple gown covered most of the balloon's basket. "Ryan...I wish none of this ever happened. That it hadn't all ended with my scythe buried in your heart."

Those few months ago...everything had come to a head. Ryan had found out everything—the tragedies, the Reaper, her duties, all of it. He was fuming, unable to believe he'd been there all that time, stuck with someone whose job erased others. He was going to tell everyone everything...the universe could never allow that.

So she mowed him down.

The body was cremated in secret—she moved towns, changed her name, let go of all the ties that connected her to her town. Even still, she could never let go of him— through all of it, from that dandelion field to now, he had meant something to her. She stood up, looking out over the stilled sea, moonlight painting it in shades of white.

"You always wanted to see the sea." She shed a single tear, opening the urn. "Now, I'll fulfill that wish—and I pray that, no matter where you are, you'll be able to forgive me."

Under the moonlight, she poured his ashes into the sea.

Perhaps, one day, they would meet again in that field of dandelions, a warm hand ready to take hers again.

# TETHERED

I will never harm again.

My large hands grip the side of the wicker basket that keeps me tethered to the dark and cloudy sky, far from the icy waters below. I left the mainland days ago in search of a new world, an escape from the horror that lives inside me. A curse. A sickness beyond all hope.

I don't much care about the danger this affliction brings myself, but that girl last month stuck in the hospital? The families of the boys now tarnished with my disease? And the countless others. . . . It's more than I can bear.

I check the burner and adjust the size of the flame—could the weight of my memories be pulling the balloon down, or is the weather shifting? The bright fire blinds me for a moment. As my eyes adjust, the inside of the balloon fills my vision, blocking my view of the starless sky. It's like a whole other world in there. A world within a world, just like me. A beast tethered to a man's body.

I can't let the beast escape again. Upon my honor, I will keep the monster at bay.

I can almost hear the beast within laugh in derision. It knows I'll never be free of this sickness, even if I untether myself from civilization. It knows I have no control. I'll forever be bound to this burden.

I look out over the horizon. I can see it now, a bit of land in the distance. I'm almost there—even if I don't know where "there" is. Somewhere uncharted, somewhere deserted. Somewhere the beast can roam free. As if in response, the island brightens. I can now see the faint highlight of mountains and the tufts of trees.

It's the perfect paradise for my prison.

A stark realization hits me. Why can I see the island so clearly now? I glance up, dreading what I will find: the clouds have dissipated, and the sky is filled with shining stars and a big, bright moon.

A full moon. I must have lost track of the days. How many have I been out here, exactly?

It doesn't matter now. The moonlight shines on my skin as my pale arms sprout thick bristles of hair. My clothes shred as my body grows. My skull elongates to house the snout of a wolf, the jaws and teeth of a killer. I lose all sense as I thrash about, shredding the ropes that keep me tethered to safety.

I fall into the icy waters below. In the back of my mind, I know this is it. The island is too far, the water too cold. I've reached the end of my journey.

But all I can feel is the release of my binds.

All I can think is, I'm free.

# Prompt 3



# THE END

It was hard to believe only a few days prior, the prestigious College of Meridia stood here. Now it was in ruins. The pearl pillars that once held up its walls were torn to pieces and blanketed the green field like snow in spring. The corpses laid bare and the thunderous steps of soldiers in the distance made it difficult to believe it was the result of a mere army assault. It was like the hand of god laid judgment itself.

Mouna looked upon it cloaked in a white poncho with red trimmings, still as a painting.

She examined the plateau. The winds cut a path straight ahead as if commanded, blowing away dust to reveal a lone man sitting afar at the edge of the plateau. Mouna approached quietly but ardently.

"You're not who I was hoping for." He faced the cliff, kicking his legs like a child on a swing. "When I heard the King vanished I hoped he was coming my way, but I should have known better."

Mouna's pace slowed. She unlatched the poncho and let it fly, exposing a body littered with scars and bandages, some still dirtied with blood. Her tawny back was clear of such injuries, only bearing the weight of two identical weapons. They could be described as hammers but were like polearms in design, each with a stylized iron ingot at the head.

"If he thinks sending you will keep him safe, that's tragic. This won't end as long as one of us breathes." Cain rolled backwards onto his feet. He turned to face her. His chainmail was tightly woven across his frame. In his left hand was a pint sized pistol ready to be summoned. In his right, a Wakizashi, gripped tightly at the hilt in its sheath.

### Bang.

The bullet pierced through her shoulder, but her step was unfazed. With all her weight she launched a hammer. It ripped through the sky with the speed of a discus. Cain swiftly ducked under the hammer and approached, unsheathing his blade. Mouna closed the distance between them, readying her remaining mallet.

The clash of metal rang through the ruins. Cain's

sword was surprisingly durable, unbending to the force of the hammer. Cain smiled and pulled his sword back swiftly, causing Mouna to lose her balance. Cain stabbed Mouna's left leg and aimed his gun straight for her heart. Her instincts took hold and with unparalleled speed Mouna kicked the gun out of his hand.

Mouna put all her weight on her injured leg with the next swing of her mighty mallet. Cain cleared the swing, ready to respond by chopping her down the middle. Mouna clasped the head of her hammer and turned her weapon to parry the blade down. Finally in superior position, Mouna launched her attack; a "stab" with the head straight into Cain's torso.

Cain flew back, but his smile widened. Before Mouna could hear the rattling she had been cut across her left side. She groaned at the sight of the chain, attached to the hilt, as it returned to its master. Cain landed on his feet and launched his sword like whip. Mouna contorting her battered body, narrowly avoiding each consecutive swipe. Her blood splattered across the field, but she managed to pick up the hammer she launched before. It was time for retaliation.

Cain noticed the change in her approach and pulled back his sword. Mouna came in with a dual strike, an attack Cain knew better than to challenge directly. He dodged both weapons, and the attacks that followed. With deft movements he was easily able to dodge and counter between Mouna's heavy swings. Mouna felther umbrage and ferocity falter against Cain's speed and mocking cackles. She found his blade in position to take her head. She managed to back step away, but the sword still slit the very edge of her neck.

Cain threw his blade again, hoping to take advantage of Mouna's imbalance. She dropped the hammer in her right hand. The sword pierced 2 inches into her torso before she managed to grab the blade. The sword wouldn't budge through her blood soaked fingers. Cain stopped smiling.

The heat from her wounds was swelling and her legs threatened to buckle. She pulled the blade down and stabbed it into the grass, slamming it deep into the ground with her hammer. Cain desperately tried to unlatch the chain from his suit

# THE END / CONT.

**FANTASY** 

but Mouna was already pulling him in, preparing a final swing. Hands spread out, Cain searched for anything to stop his momentum. To his luck, his fingers managed to reach something.

Mouna brought her hammer crashing upon on what she hoped was Cain's head. His face was now drenched in blood, some from his now bloody broken arms and some from Mouna leaking on top of him. Between them a pistol with a broken finger on the trigger. Mouna stared deep into Cain's hysteric eyes, knowing he was desperately trying to pull the trigger.

"Well congrats," he muttered. "Fine. Bring back my head and become a hero. It won't bring your nation peace."

She sighed and brought her lips to his ear. "He said the same thing."

His face ran pale as he made sense of her words.

"At least you didn't cry." she lifted her hammer once again.

Before he could begin his last cackle the hammer was upon him.

Bang.

# books

# PROMPT 4



# **ANCIENT DELUSIONS**

The artifact floated down the river. It gleamed in the sunlight and reflected the birds who dove down at sharp angles only to find themselves seamlessly risen, no prizes within their worn beaks. To the untrained eye, it was impossible. No bird could fly upwards with such force, let alone continue on their way afterward without a hint of dizziness. To the young boy, Jorcyn, it was salvation.

He readied his handmade net with practiced precision. Two years prior, his parents had died and he had been forcefully adopted by the beggars. They lived under the limestone bridge leading out of the city where he had since caught hundreds of fish. There was not a day he went hungry, and he wouldn't allow the others to starve either, even if he did keep most of the food to himself. With a slight murmur, Jorcyn charmed the knots to keep them tied. He may be practical, but he was no deckhand like his father had been; most knots still confused him. But he retained what little magic his mother had taught him.

As the artifact drew close, Jorcyn began to notice the blue hue emanating from it. He didn't believe it to be a knife, although the artifact was certainly small enough to be so. It was relatively ball shaped and intricately marked in a script he couldn't discern from the distance. He wasn't sure how a metal object, roughly the size of his fist, could float like so, but he quickly went back to work on his net to avoid the other beggars wondering what he was looking at.

Jorcyn attached weights to the bottom of the net and the hook onto the other end. He lobbed the hook to the other side of the river. It landed just off shore, the swift current of the river pulling the net taut and the hook clasped one of the several decaying wooden posts. Once the net had settled in the river, Jorcyn took off his tunic and swam out, keeping a tight grip on the top of the net so the current didn't pull him downstream. Once he was centered in the net, he waited patiently and watched as the artifact approached and the writing became more legible.

The metal was engraved with the script of the

Ancient Ones. No man had ever replicated their work without suddenly falling into bouts of madness. It was blasphemy to even touch this artifact with his bare skin. But, the longer Jorcyn waited, the more he risked another one of the beggars noticing the artifact. If they saw it, they would use their superior strength, garnered from the extra food he offered them paired with their decade of age above his, and take it for themselves. Jorcyn would stand no chance. Since his tunic sat on the shore, he reached for the artifact and grabbed it with his bare hand.

The was a thunderous woosh that resonated from the artifact. Jorcyn felt as if his soul were ripped from his body as he levitated upward and out of the water. He watched himself from a distance. Physical sensation stayed within his body, but his consciousness drifted away slowly. Refusing to let go of the artifact, he tightened his grip and allowed it to carry him upward until the metal scraped the bottom of the stone bridge and he dangled from it. The concussion of magic made the beggars aware of the artifact. They rushed to the narrowest part of the river and reached out to the boy's legs. Jorcyn kicked at their heads.. Their grimy scarred hands raked at the boys legs, threatening to tear him apart.

He continued to hold on tightly and kick, even as his consciousness melted away into a haze. Jorcyn stood in a room with indistinct characteristics and all around him he heard disembodied voices speaking in foreign tongues. One moment he had thought the hall to be vast, constructed of finely cut marble, and the next moment the room was the size of a cupboard, barely fitting him. The scratching at his legs worsened and Jorcyn tightened his grip. He looked down and could see lines of blood beginning to form on his legs. As he examined his wounds, the room grew silent. When he looked up, an image materialized before him: a miasma of potential futures.

His life passed before him in a whir. Moments of bliss and happiness: the completion of his apprenticeship with a renowned blacksmith, his wedding, the birth of his first son. Moments of sorrow and grief: the slaughtering of the beggars

# **ANCIENT DELUSIONS / CONT.**

DYLAN WARD

under the bridge, the pollution ruining the fishing in the river, his wife's funeral. Then, with a sudden twist, the images changed again and he was staring at an entirely new set of futures. In this one, he died in a mugging before he even had the chance to sell the artifact. In the next, the artifact was taken from him and he never got away from the bridge. This continued for a hundred more futures, each more bleak than the last, and Jorcyn understood that the first future he had been shown was the only happy outcome, and even it was full of sorrow. But, in each future he chose greed and fought to keep the artifact to himself. Perhaps if...

Without hesitation, Jorcyn released the metal from his fingers. He felt himself snap back into his body and fall into the river alongside the artifact, just upstream of his net. The horde of beggars jumped into the water and wrestled for the artifact. Jorcyn swam to shore to avoid the tangle of ropes he had skillfully crafted. Once he pulled himself to land, he saw his twine coil around several beggars in a fatal grasp.

Jorcyn sighed, laid on his back, and waited for the chaos to subside so he could start fishing again.

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