

# The Odyssey Youth

L i t e r a r y M a g a z i n e



*Issue I*

—ADVENTURE—

<https://www.theodysseyyouth.com/>

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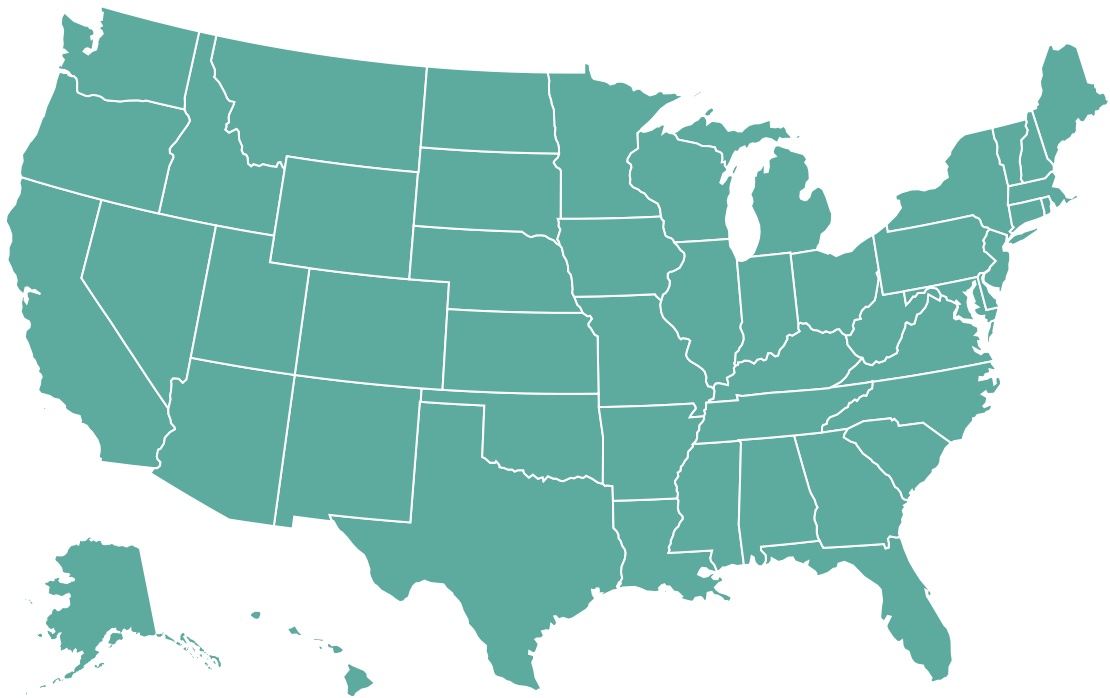
Poetry  
Editor

Hannah Phillips

# The Origin of the Stories



South Africa



United States of America

# A Message From The Team



We at The Odyssey Youth Literary Magazine are unspeakably grateful to all the writers, readers, and supporters who have made this journey the most wonderful we have seen yet! Even so, we are certain that this is only the beginning. There will be more journeys—or should we say, odysseys—ahead, and we cannot wait to embark on them. So, on behalf of the team here at The Odyssey Youth Literary Magazine, may we all embark on sensational journeys, and may we embark on them together!

**--The Odyssey Youth Literary Magazine**

# Our Talented Writers Chosen for Issue I Publication:

*Poetry:*

Indiego, Jasper Franco, Ozzy  
Lebron Aromin, Brenden Driskill,  
Lana Hirsh, & Lauren Fox.

*Prose:*

Michelle Parasnath, Isabella Bucy,  
& Madeline Rosales.

We would like to extend our gratitude for each and every talented writer that submitted their work to us!

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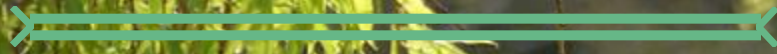


Part I  
*Poetry*





# *A Girl of Glass by Jasper Franco*



A school bell chimed in Salem,  
sending students out to play.  
They ran about the schoolyard,  
sown with songs of early May.  
Though the smallest boy was tired,  
his classmates picked on him all day.  
He toddled to the willow tree,  
where he often sought to lay.

Upon sweeping aside the branches  
the boy let out a gasp,  
for hidden in the blossoms  
was a schoolgirl made of glass.  
She was broken into tiny shards  
where light shone through the cracks,  
and hidden in her eyes were tears  
left forgotten and uncast.

The boy sat down beside her;  
his curiosity reeled him in.  
When he asked why she was shattered,  
the girl then turned to him.  
She told the boy her story,  
and the words that made her split,  
and the rumors to her name,  
and the names that wouldn't quit.

The boy then raised an eyebrow,  
and asked how that could be.  
How could the words of her friends hurt  
if the words of his friends left him peace?  
The girl then balled her fists up,  
and took a moment just to breathe.  
She gathered all her thoughts inside,  
and explained to him her grief.

“Sticks and stones were what broke my  
bones,  
but while the town gathered their rocks,  
I heard the awful words they said,  
and when asked I just forgot.  
And so then did the sheriff,  
with the protection he might have brought,  
and so then did the law,  
and so the laws were all for naught.”

The boy then kept his eyes shut,  
as the girl gave him her tears,  
and when his eyes had opened,  
the girl had disappeared.  
She had vanished into nothing,  
and just as the boy had feared,  
when he glanced through the willow tree,  
his friends held rocks like spears.

Jasper Franco is a student in the kind of small town where words are thrown around more often than stones. He specializes in writing speeches and non-fiction works, but finds poetry to be a simple yet satisfying creative outlet.

# *Time and time again was all we needed by Ozzy Lebron Aromin*



Out of the film screen, with pageant smiles  
And a tempest fever for miles and miles,  
The wind shrieks in my ears with a deafening blow,  
As you step on the plane — low and behold.  
The years sprint across a reddish-brown university track,  
Files and files of handwritten notes never seem to come back.

In these notes, hills and valleys of cursive  
Are so silent — so apprehensive.  
As the years have formed — like bread finely kneaded,  
It seems like time and time again was all that I needed.

When the morning comes, the earth feels empty —  
But when you were here all I heard were farmers' cheers  
“The fruits are bountiful and the crops so plenty!”  
But it seems that right now: the orchards are watered with my tears.

The gravel road up to the mountain spits dust in my face,  
I run far and wide — your memory catching up to my pace.  
What would it have been like if there was more time?  
Would there have been space to write just one more line?

As the forest walks past me — leaving me hanging from the cliff's knife,  
And the woods pierce me through my head, and right through my eyes,  
It seems that no pain would be worse than an unkempt secret,  
Because time and time again was all that I needed .

When the poet drops his pen to the ground  
A quill tattered with pitch-black ink makes no sound,  
For all the city hears is a high pitched wail,  
And me strewn across the floor needing the holy grail.

When I see you next, time gone by like a loom of thread,  
Strings bound across a linoleum floor  
Tattered and dented with the spear through my head,  
Time and time again knocks and pounds on my door.

At the bus stop just down by Main Road,  
I hear the soft and dying creaking of a toad,  
Glimpses of you flash back in the reflection;  
Time was not there, but the moment was perfection.

And yet no matter the stamps that depart to your newfound home,  
With chandeliers and a golden-brass throne,  
It seems to me that time and time again  
Has no story pent up for ahead.

Ozzy is a third-year law student at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. His academic interests are immigration reform and sustainable development in Africa. During his downtime, he often buries himself in writing poetry and prose, or reading.

# *this is a teenager by Brenden Driskill*



being diametrically opposed  
both within and outside  
of oneself.

musty,  
pristine.  
elated,  
depressed.

fortunate,  
woeful.  
bored,  
obsessed.

making up faces and minds,  
and switching them incessantly.  
seeking attention or validation,  
and never wanting to be seen.  
giving flawless advice,  
and still being a hypocrite.

loving and hating someone at the same time.  
becoming emotional at the drop of a dime.  
distressing ideations,  
scarring implementations.  
wise beyond years,  
dumb within tears.

to have lived numerous lives  
while barely old enough to vote.  
to be riddled with hives;  
to have the wisest quote.

growing up and growing out -  
this is what the glory years look like.  
this is what a teenager is.

we all keep our teenage hearts.

Brenden Driskill is a highly-dedicated, young, Black author from Memphis, TN. He self-published his first poetry collection entitled "Waiting for Time's Kiss" (available on Amazon) at 17 years old. His goal through his work is to uplift others. He is very thankful to be featured in this magazine!

# *Pasta by Lana Hirsh*



Do you know how to cook pasta?  
To put the pot to flame, full of water  
and do you know what it is to simmer?  
Not boil over, not explode, not even bubble  
just.

Simmer.  
At the tipping point  
and slowly being added to  
slowly does the water rise  
slowly does the heat pull through  
and do you know what it is to simmer?  
To listen to mindless words  
and feel your lungs inflate  
but not screaming yet  
a respectful tone  
a decibel lower than the superior  
and do you know what it is to simmer?  
To sit politely and quietly  
while others scream and fight  
gentle and kind  
hypocritical and perfect  
full of rage and violence  
and hatred for who even knows anymore  
sitting inside you  
not growing or changing  
just.

Simmering.  
When your skin wants to crawl away from you  
on its own new limbs  
when your eyes are red and you body shakes-  
No, no, it's not shaking.  
It's not bubbling, or boiling over,  
nor evaporating into thin air.  
Do you know how to cook pasta?  
Do you know what it is  
to simmer?

Lana Hirsh is a high school sophomore from Atlanta, Georgia. In her downtime, she enjoys baking, reading, listening to music, and cuddling with her dog. Her favorite school subject is English. She writes as a way to share herself with the world and connect with others when spoken conversations fail.

# *At the End of the Day by Lauren Fox*



At the end of the day:  
It was just another crush.  
At the end of the day:  
It was another delusion.  
At the end of the day:  
It was made of metal to rust.  
At the end of the day:  
Maybe you meant to cause the confusion.  
At the end of the day:  
I'm better off alone.  
At the end of the day:  
You had your eyes not on me.  
At the end of the day:  
I sit on a lonesome throne.  
At the end of the day:  
"There are other fish in the sea."  
At the end of the day:  
The stars were knocked out of place.  
At the end of the day:  
It wasn't meant to be.  
At the end of the day:  
I stand with a black veil over my face.  
At the end of the day:  
It will forever affect me

Lauren is a 14-year-old writer and author. When she is not writing, she enjoys reading. She is part of many school clubs and extracurriculars including performing arts club and dance classes.



Part II  
*Prase*



# *Africa, My Africa!* by Michelle Parasnath



They built me strong and mighty. They laid each plank with precision so that I could withstand a storm. I am a vessel of the sea. I seize the ocean and capture the waves among them. Yet, despite how strong they built me, I couldn't bear the weight of the traumas that lurk within me.

I made my first journey to the tip of an unknown land. The days grew long and weary as I sailed across the waters. I grew despondent watching the sun rise and set each day, thinking that we'd never reach our destination. I wished on the stars at night and pleaded for a swifter journey. They must have heard my cries, for we arrived at the port in less than four months.

When we reached our destination, there were humans waiting in anticipation, their eyes following the drift of the water as I sailed nearer to the dock. They called it Africa. I was awe-struck by its beauty and condemned myself for not experiencing such incandescence sooner. Africa was different from England, my homeland. The sun seemed to shine forever and the rain was scarce. The stars were brighter in Africa and I thanked them for bringing me to such a special place.

My bliss was short-lived, for what felt like a mere few days later, it was time to depart from Africa, the place fondly known as my second home. The weather was uncharacteristically gloomy as I waited for the cargo to be loaded onto me. The sky tore apart and allowed its water to escape into the pores of the earth. The raindrops grew vigorously and covered my sails with their flesh. I looked at the clouds and they tried to warn me, but nothing could foreshadow the terror that awaited me.

There were hundreds of humans, shackled and distraught, being dragged by their limbs onto me. Some of them resisted, punching and kicking, and screaming for dear life, but nothing could prevent their impending doom. It dawned upon them, like a predator to its prey. I felt helpless in my stationary state. As the humans begged and clawed for mercy, I merely stood. There was nothing I could do; I was the predator and they were the prey.

The journey back was even longer and wearier than the first. The air grew thick and ghastly as screams filled every corner of me. The screams, oh, the screams. They spoke of horrors beyond human comprehension. Each scream revealed a fear buried deep beneath the sea. The stench of human excretion remained on my walls, a symbol of the fear that resided in their hearts. Hands and nails clawed at me. The humans pleaded with my walls and begged my floors for clemency. Blood and sweat covered me like a second skin. I was no longer strong; I was a broken vessel.

I began to shiver violently and pleaded once more to the skies for peace. I rocked back and forth, swinging to the beat of the storm, as the vicious seas took control of me. All at once, thunderstorms engulfed the sky. The clouds unleashed a fire, which destroyed my sails with a fierce crack that penetrated through the echoes of the wind. The screams seemed to overpower the treacherous drums of the sky. A wave crashed down on me, detaining my ropes, and pushed me underwater. Then, with wave after wave, we slowly sank to the bottom of the ocean, leaving the sky and her stars behind.

The ocean floor welcomed me despite my brokenness. The air was tranquil and void of any tremors. I inhaled the freshness of the salt as it cleansed my wounds. I was broken, but I was free. We were free.

# *The Dollhouse by Michelle Parasnath*



I woke frantically, with sweat dripping down from my temples and settling into the crevices of my ears. My eyelids felt heavy and rigid as I adjusted to the dim lighting of the hospital room. I remember being quite weary of the blackened walls as the mould spitefully crept up from the corner of the tiles, getting nearer...

My limbs were inert, not only due to the chains shackling me to my bed, but also because it felt as if the earth was folding in and pulling me down into the abyss. The world around me faded out, sending me into an entity of darkness. There I was, with nothing but my barren soul to confront. My bones creaked with a familiar tremor as I tried to gain consciousness. *Stay awake.*

The faintest bit of sunlight trickled through the tiny window to my right, signalling to me that it was daytime. I stared at the light and gripped onto its forlorn hope as if it were my very own. I imagined my skin tingling under the warmth, making me feel something, *anything*. Tears seeped from the corners of my eyes and rolled down my cheeks as I thought of the prospect of someday feeling that warmth again.

A luminous figure in the corner of my vision dared me to look at it. Like a lamb to the slaughter, I felt drawn to it. I tore my eyes away from the window, in search of that same figure. And there it was. Her dollhouse. *Carrie's dollhouse.*

*Carrie, my sweet, venomous, Carrie. She seeps into my nightmares and sucks my bones dry. How I missed her tiny hands and hair of daffodils; her careful eyes as she watched me, almost as if she knew...*

In my mind's eye I saw her, playing with her beloved dolls in her dollhouse. I saw her kissing them and feeding them, as if she had a single nurturing bone on her skeleton, as if I wasn't the one who purchased those dolls. *Foolish child.*

She was larger, brighter and more painful than I could recall. I glared at the sacred dollhouse, with her Victorian-like structure and pale French windows. The tiniest glimmer of sunlight perched on top of her, as if she were chosen by the gods themselves. How joyous she seemed within these four walls. I wondered if, like me, she too would be sucked into the horrors of these walls. I wondered if her nostalgic, fairytale-like colours would gradually disappear, like the ink on the yellowish pages of an ancient scripture. What a pity it would've been for her to cease to exist, forgotten, a mere remnant of her fears. She was Carrie's most prized-possession, until...

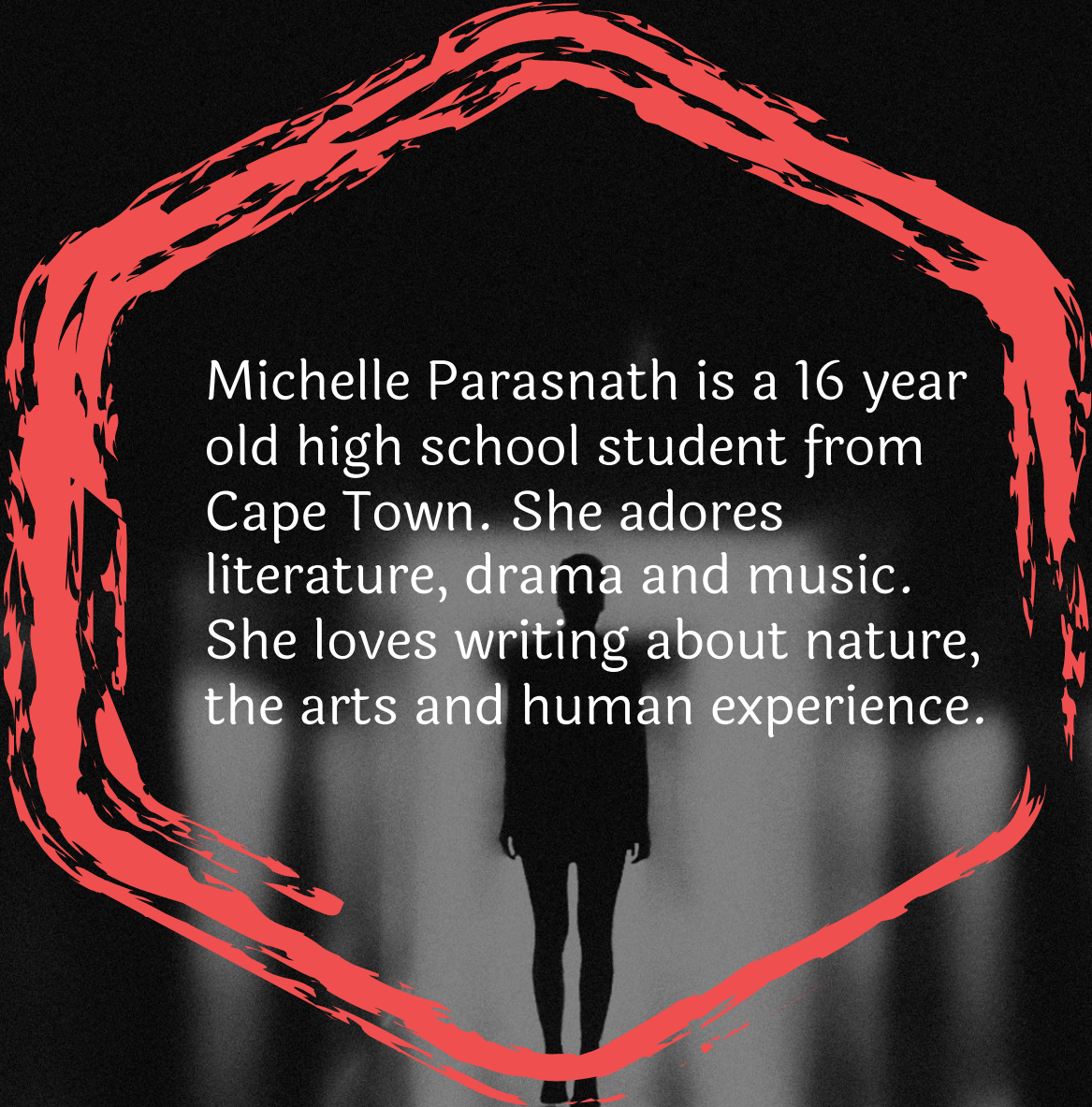
I urged myself to refrain from pondering about Carrie. If I didn't think about her, I wouldn't pierce my conscience so terribly. Back then, I tormented myself for what happened. I would wake up in the early hours and think of her in that bathtub, screaming as if conjuring up spirits. I hated myself for becoming too impatient with her.

Afterwards, they'd tell me that she was only a baby. And I believed them.

I believed their awful, awful lies! They told me that it would change, that being a single mother would somehow become more manageable. *She is innocent and would never hurt you.* They were all wrong. Liars! Deceitful fiends!

But I was smarter. I discerned what no mother in the world could. I saw that demon for who she truly was. I knew that she was only moments away from breaking her goody-two-shoes facade and allowing her true, devilish self to break loose. But I stopped it before it happened. I stopped it! I stopped her!

And you can judge me for all that I've done, but let me tell you, I wouldn't hesitate to do it again. I saved us. I saved all of us. That wasn't my child; that was Lucifer himself in human form.

A silhouette of a person standing in a hallway, framed by a thick, red, hand-drawn border. The person is centered in the background, and their reflection is visible on the floor. The text is overlaid on the red border.

Michelle Parasnath is a 16 year old high school student from Cape Town. She adores literature, drama and music. She loves writing about nature, the arts and human experience.

# *The King's Daughter by Isabella Bucy*

The King's daughter first carried a handgun at fourteen. In the bone-dry summer night, she fumbled with the latch on her window. Warm streetlight washed the path to the open desert in a dreamlike glow. A plastic alarm mechanism dangled lifelessly from the rim as she moved out – a testament to its shortcomings. She'd accidentally broken it six months ago – a desperate effort to air her room of the sour, acrid smell of marijuana. The device had emitted a shrill noise and, in a panic, she'd killed it with the blunt end of a hairbrush and haphazardly glued it back in place. Now, she stood, one leg caught in the threshold between her window and bed, another propped firmly on the headboard.

A set of yellowed teeth caught slighted fragments of light, flashing like pieces of dried shrimp. Her cousin raised his bloated wrist to his jaw, then to the ground, sweeping the dust from his shoes. The King's daughter eased out as silently as she could. She'd done this hundreds of times before.

Her heel, bare and calloused, caught on a piece of rough side paneling and she cringed. The moon was wide and all-encompassing. She found her mind slipping, drifting to when she was young. She wholeheartedly believed that angels lived in the stars, born from the enigmatic, glowing womb of another planet. They clustered at the edges of the sky, only visible when the world lost its breath, or when Sam took her into the flat expanses of the valley on a dune buggy. It was there, telling stories in the sediment and brush, or behind a pair of worn blue drums and palmwood sticks, that he lost all his austere—and the world unfurled like one of the tangent orchids their mom would bring back from work trips. The stars bundled and burned, like a smattering of milk on tarmac. The nauseatingly sweet taste of mazapan on her tongue, stolen from their mother's purse.

The King's daughter wriggled her toes, feeling for a steady grip on the wall. Milk. Candy. Her hands slid down the pillar, hoisting herself upwards. Bougainvillea thorns that clung to the sides grazed her forearm. Sam lingered below tense and ready to catch her if she lost her footing.

Her fingers reached upward, firm and methodical. Leaves hovered just above her skin, featherlight and daunting. Her slim legs perched ready to pull her down, closer to the ground. The metal bit at her waist, the outline concealed by an oversized zip-up. When her feet touched the bare earth, she raced for her shoes. Palm trees, illuminated by the moon, sway and break under the weight of virulent wind. Clouds simmering on the horizon grew tired and threadbare, the moon partially obscured in a nest of violet fog. She would go on to spend her first little bit of drug money on a glass paperweight; La Virgen de Guadalupe, robed in dewy emeralds and golds, standing on the moon.

The King's daughter first carried a handgun at fourteen. She knew a lot of things about herself. She knew she believed in angels and stars and the bruises written into her best friend's palms like desperate prayer because he always forgot hand wraps when they sparred. She liked watching college wrestling and playing on his Xbox. She liked fountain pens, new-age rappers, and nauseatingly sweet perfume. She liked blue nail polish and the smell of the palo santo her mom burned when she was trying to cleanse the house of negative energy, but hated the way the smoke danced through the hallways. The omnipresent desperation clinging to every slighted movement of her fingers, the oraciones lingering on her breath like spirits. Or orchid petals. Or the taste of sugar. Her favorite constellation was Orion's belt. On nights like these, nights where she felt small and impassive in the context of a larger world, a trilogy of stars was hiding in plain sight, like the universe's most obvious secret. A dichotomy to the illogical and senseless pattern of the sky, Orion was a hunter, like her—wielding a weapon at his hip, engaged in an eternal battle with the proverbial scorpion of Greek legend. She liked to believe he was guarding her, forever poised and immortalized in those three inlets.

Sam's car stalled a few streets down. It was laboring over the sound of wind thrashing, flattening rolling hills of sand, and pulling new ones from the ground in one fluid hypnotic movement. The peak of the dune scooped out from underneath new piles of rock, revealing a beat-down road marred by untamed shrubbery. The blue striping of PM10 illuminated the path. He was rearranging a mountain of black trash bags in the back when she clambered into the front seat. A hot-pink electronic cigarette, a six-pack ring, and twin mazapan wrappers rested in the cupholder.

The wind was growing violent now. At the cusp of summer's end, it felt like a drawn-out exhale washing over the valley. Quiet pulses of heat and powerful throes of wind presage a movement of bitter cold trickling down from the north. The trunk slammed shut making the car rattle on its hinges. Sam keeled over as he climbed in and closed the door behind him. Smoke poured from his lips. In the moonlight, his hair glittered clean-shaven and blond. She noted how much more tired he looked, the cool tint to his Guero skin, the way his cuticles were pushed back and swollen, bleeding in places. His hand loosened on the steering wheel as the key turned in the ignition. He swallowed dryly, his jaw bobbing as the car jerked forward with a vocal resignation.

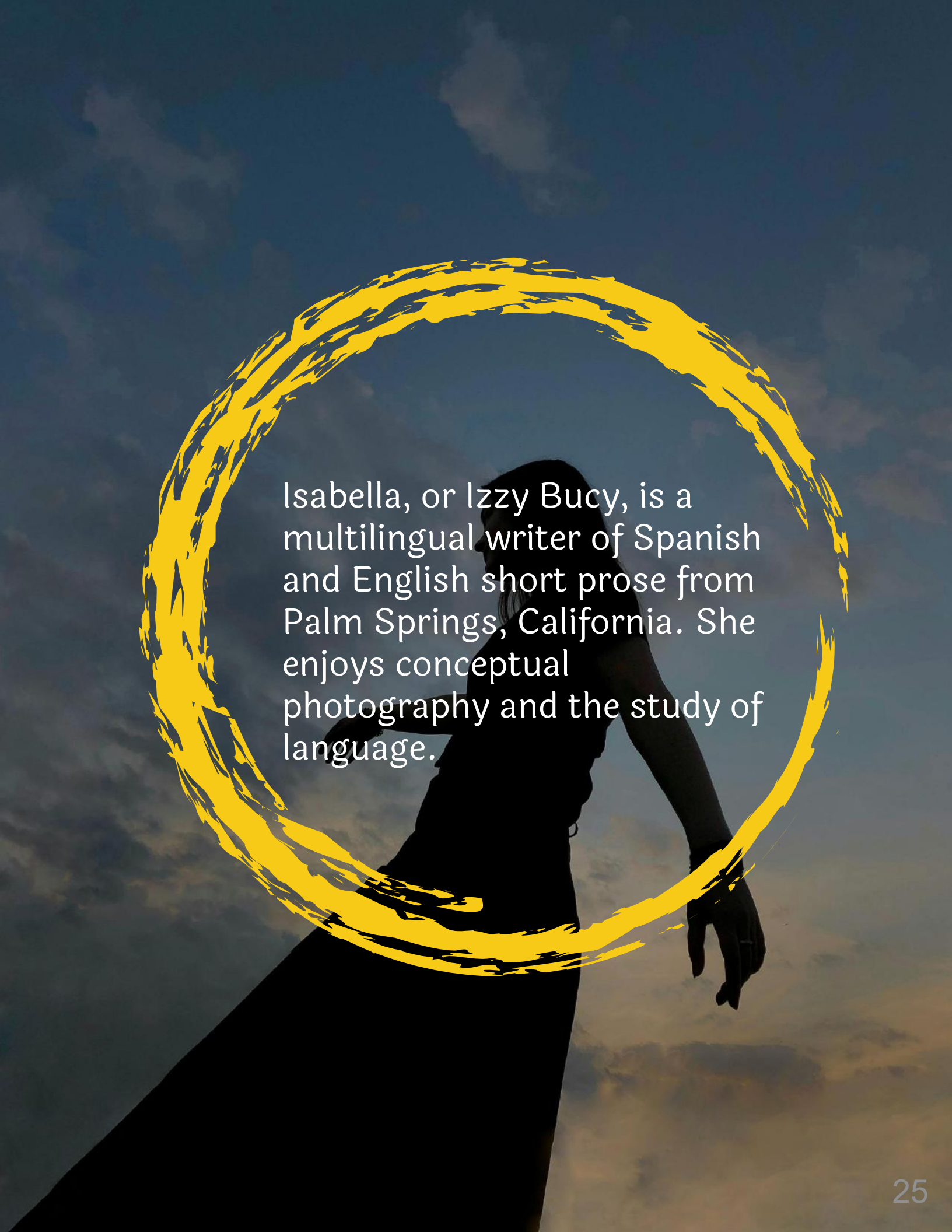
His wrist lurched to turn the wheel, a series of disjointed movements. The tires ground down on raw desert, earth spurring and clouding behind them. Her heart was thrumming, quietly, like a trapped dove. Her backpack sat on her lap, full and weighted, a boulder that kept her rooted in place. Sam's foot rested on the accelerator, and he pushed the car into second gear. The windows fell open, hot air spilled in drawing basalt tears from her eyes. He eased off the pedal, tender filaments of light materializing from the darkness that burned ahead. A trap house, windows smashed in and caged in flashy tags.

“You good for this?” He smiled, his nostrils flared and his eyelashes stuttered in the low exposure.

The King's daughter first carried a handgun at fourteen. She can't see the stars tonight, a mixture of desert haze and dry lightning obscuring the sky. Hair snapped around her like mesquite boughs, flyaway hairs spilling out from her hoodie. In prayer, her eyes dark and hot, she reached for her waistband instead.

“Let's get it.” She threw her head back, swallowing her pulse. The wind was taking her voice and running with it, carrying it home. She imagined her words being laid at the foot of her mother's bed like an apology.



A silhouette of a woman in a long, dark dress stands against a sky transitioning from blue to orange. A large, thick, yellow brushstroke circle is drawn around her, framing her. The text is centered within this circle.

Isabella, or Izzy Bucy, is a multilingual writer of Spanish and English short prose from Palm Springs, California. She enjoys conceptual photography and the study of language.

# *Where the Stories Go by Madeline Rosales*

## **Introduction**

Following are the details of my investigation regarding those that are commonly referred to as 'fae' creatures.

On a night that couldn't quite make up its mind between autumn and winter, in which the air was so chilled that it could turn a dragon's breath into armies of snowmen. I found myself wide awake in my bed during the witching hour. A few minutes had passed when I spotted a goblin making a spirited attempt at yanking my wool blanket off my bed.

Immediately I took hold of my blanket and tugged it from his grip, "Unhand my bedspread!" I cried.

Startled by my obvious alertness, and taken aback by my harsh tone, the goblin sprang away. His feet fumbling over themselves like a drunk dwarf in a barrel race. His legs, barely half the length of his torso, proved woefully inadequate for his flight. He stumbled to the ground at least three times on the short journey from my bed to the door and I nabbed him effortlessly.

"Ah! The wretched-faced human has captured me!" The goblin cried.

*Wretched-faced?* To the individual reading this essay, I'd like to clarify that I am a man of lofty stature with a sharply cut jaw and well-matted hair. Considering my fairly considerable age, I'd say I have maintained my physical appeal. The goblin, however, could not make a similar assertion.

"I may be wretched-faced," I said, though I did not believe this concession, "But at least my skin does not at all resemble leather as yours so painfully does."

The goblin scoffed. "It's a beauty standard for my race."

Gathering my bearings, I pressed forward, “And does your race often engage in breaking and entering?”

“I haven’t broken a thing!”

“You have at least disturbed my peaceful slumber.” I grabbed hold of the cloth that covered his figure. It was a thin fabric, wrapped haphazardly around his chest and waist. He looked practically barbaric. “And you are focusing entirely on the wrong thing. What brought you here, hm? Because I would’ve remembered had I ever agreed to provide lodgings for a hairless proboscis monkey.”

The goblin then resigned himself to silence.

“Alright. Do not speak for now, if you so desire.” I grumbled, “But you are only permitted to leave this room provided that you explain yourself.”

I dispensed the ugly thing to a nearby wooden stool with a huff. As he sat there, arms tautly twisted across his torso, I lifted the old blanket from the floor and began smoothing it over my mattress. *What an absurd crime, I thought, to steal a man’s blanket in the twilight hour. It’s far too trivial to be malicious. Yet just bothersome enough to be dubious.*

Then, a small snuffle came from the corner. I turned and saw the goblin, red-eyed and wet-cheeked.

“Oh my goodness, you look a mess.”

The goblin snorted out into his dressings. “You’re so mean.”

“You broke into my house, yet I’m the villain? Your logic continues to baffle me.”

“You called me a hairless proboscis monkey.”

“You must admit there’s a resemblance.”

“You’re so mean!” The goblin repeated before bursting into sobs, his face then buried into his hands.

Though I was utterly exhausted, and tired of his moaning, I couldn’t bear the anguish upon his wrinkled visage. I was not a bully during my time in school, and I had no intention of becoming one that evening. *Lord give me strength.* I coaxed myself.

Taking tentative steps, I approached the goblin. “There, there,” I said with a strained throat. “What if I apologized? Would that heal your pain?”

The goblin whimpered affirmatively.

“Then I’m verily sorry for calling you a hairless proboscis monkey. You’re very handsome.” I gave his back a tense pat.

“Thank you. Yes, I am very handsome.” He once again made an awful sound with his nose.

Cruelty proved an ultimately fruitless endeavor against this young goblin. Honestly, it would have made infinitely more sense to hastily shoo him from my house... alas, my brilliant mind refused to leave any mystery, regardless of how troublesome or absurd, unsolved. And what other time would I have the opportunity to interview a primary source for fae behavior in the comfort of my own bedroom, in which I have the absolute advantage? Never.

I needed to switch tactics and, naturally, bribery made the most sense. Anyone with a quarter to half a brain knows that goblins would spill even their most closely guarded secrets at the mere promise of a glittering bauble.

“This is a half dime.” I held out to him a small silver coin, “Do you like it?”

The goblin’s eyes twinkled, and he responded with an eager nod. “How very shiny! Mother will definitely adore such a trinket!”

Before he could snatch the half dime, I pulled my hand away. “Then we have found a compromise, haven’t we? You must tell me all the relevant details regarding your ambitions for breaking into my home and in return... you can keep this precious half dime.”

The goblin furrowed his brow, thinking silently for an odd minute. “Two half dimes.”

“One half dime and one hay penny.”

“It’s a deal.”

And thus, my generous goblin friend spun a rapid yarn, regaling me with historical tidbits for, he claimed, they were ‘context’.

“We’ve always done nasty tricks on humans.”

“Who are you referring to? Who’s ‘we’?”

“Goblins, elves, faeries, orcs, what have you. For one, my friend, ƒdϙ, took pleasure in rotting crops through Europe for a time.”

This immediately caught my attention. “When was this?”

“Possibly... five hundred years ago?”

“The 1300s?” A spark of recognition flitted across my head, “1315? The Great Famine? A goblin couldn’t have!”

“And yet he did.”

“Millions of humans died! Some of them were killed by other people turning into cannibals!”

“The cannibalism was not ƒdϙ’s fault.” The goblin scoffed with displeasure, clearly offended, “Then you might wish to know what else occurred in the 1300s.”

“Oh goodness.” I racked my brain for any residual information of the 14th century I had received during my schooling. The reign of Edward II, the Hundred Years' War... “The black death?”

“The rat illness?”

“That’s the one, indeed.”

“That was *zob!*’s doing, surely!” The goblin laughed, “She hadn’t a clue what the disease was, admittedly. However it had infected much of our young, nothing beyond a meager fever, mind you, and she wondered how rats might react to it. She never thought that the rat would spread it to our ever so revered humans.” He added sarcastically.

“You’re all horrible.” I felt sick at this wretch’s words.

“Then there were those imps that claimed to have set a bakery’s oven ablaze in London. Possibly two hundred years ago. But my clan didn’t at all believe them.”

I wondered how many deaths these horrible creatures had caused. And how many they were currently causing. “Now don’t tell me that Napoleon’s empire is the result of an orc.”

“Goodness no! Napoleon frightens the orcs!” The goblin gasped, “And us fae are more altruistic nowadays.”

“I can’t imagine what altruistic means to your kind.”

“Ever pondered the disappearance of your missing socks?”

“Nearly daily.”

“Chances are that one of my brethren swiped it straight from your drawer. And those random knots and tangles in your hair? Possibly an elf, weaving tricks into your locks. That’s why I was trying to steal your blanket! You’d be oh-so frustrated if you awoke on a winter’s morning without your wool coverings.”

“Ah, so you’ve domesticated yourselves.” I took a slight breath of relief. 30

“I like to call us the *Ministry of Minor Annoyances!*” The goblin declared with pride.

“Surely that doesn’t satisfy your cataclysmic habits. What else do you goblins do to preoccupy yourselves?” I asked, then intrigued.

“Well,” My goblin companion blushed and became suddenly captivated by rubbing his talons, “we steal things.”

“Steal things? What sorts of things? From who?”

“From humans. We steal...” The goblin, who seemed to be quite the chatterbox before suddenly clammed up at this particular topic. Despite his earlier enthusiasm, prying the information from him was like extracting teeth from a chimera jaw.

It seemed the shiny coins would not coax him into unveiling the details, so I made a calculated threat. “I will tell you my name.”

A glimmer of excitement emerged from behind his eyes. “Your name? And all I have to do is...”

“Tell me what you know. Yes. And my name is all yours.”

The goblin pouted with contemplation, before nodding. “But you must provide your name first.”

“And I have your word?”

“You have my word.”

“You will tell me what you know, and leave nothing out?”

“I will tell you what I know and leave nothing out.”

“And for my own sake, what do goblins do with names?”

I'd heard rumors. The most prevalent being that goblins write the human names they collect on stone tablets, which they may then bind the human's life to. If the tablet breaks, the human dies. However the opposite effect occurs as well: if the tablet never breaks, the human can never die, and lives forever as the goblin's servant, hoping to one day be released from immortality.

"My mother is expecting an egg, and we need ideas for names." The goblin responded simply, "And the human language is so beautiful."

"Oh." My tone was short with surprise, "My name is Theodore."

"I don't think we'll be using that." The goblin laughed, "Poor man... to be named Theodore. Well, I suppose I still owe you information, don't I?" His blush returned, "But it's rather embarrassing."

"I swear, I will not judge."

The goblin relented a minute later. "We steal the tiny lives and people inside the heads of humans."

"Excuse me?"

"Surely you're aware of these tiny lives and people. They live in that special chamber inside the human head, a place where miniature lives are crafted and stashed away."

"I'm afraid I'm not familiar with such a concept. I don't have a chamber inside of my head." I rubbed my temples as if I could feel the outline of this peculiar room he claimed was inside me.

"You know!" The goblin cried out, frustrated as his countless trains of thought scattered like birds fluttering from his mind, "Once upon a time?" He offered desperately. Then it struck me, and I realized that the goblin was alluding to the human knack for conjuring and crafting stories. It dawned on me that, owing to the fae creatures' petite stature with the tallest species barely reaching a mere four vertical feet, their brains were comparatively smaller. And stories, it would appear, occupy a substantial chunk of headspace. Alas, the fae, in the compact compartments of their diminutive craniums, find themselves lacking in the brain real estate department, unable to accommodate the sprawling landscapes of imagination that humans effortlessly harbor.

The goblin cried out, "Why isn't my head able to hold tiny humans in it?" <sup>32</sup>



“Fae creatures can’t make fairy tales?”

“We’ve tried!” He continued, clearly becoming upset, “But we don’t have anywhere to store them once we think of them! They escape from us before we have the chance to finish them!”

“So you’ve turned to stealing them instead of developing them yourself? That’s impossible!” From prior knowledge, I knew that goblins had the most primitive technology of all fae creatures. The idea that they had somehow managed to hone this technology to investigate human minds was absolutely absurd!

“It was a necessary measure. Fae creatures share their own produce — music, springtime, among other things — yet the humans refuse to give us their stories! Stealing them is only a means to establish a perfectly equitable distribution of possessions between the human and fae realms. Furthermore,” he announced with a puffed chest, “the story trade is very lucrative.”

I asked him to elaborate.

### **The Goblins**

“After a story — or *fairy tale*, as you call it — is born, it grows very bored from sitting forgotten in its creator’s mind. This boredom leaves them very vulnerable to us clever goblins, and we attack! We know particular pan flute tunes that are like siren calls to them. And when we play our flutes close to a human’s head, the stories feel a strong pull, as if being led by a thread, closer and closer to the nearest orifice, which is usually the ear. So they poke their heads—”

“Stories have heads?”

“It’d be awfully rude for the creator to not give them heads, wouldn’t it? How would they be able to see? Please don’t interrupt, I’m trying to concentrate. Well, once they poke their heads out of the ear, we snatch them up and tuck them into little glass jars. Then, accordingly, the stories are sold. Most stories cost an arm and a horn amongst fae creatures.”

I am unsure of what use they generally make of these, but my goblin companion proceeded to explain the many rumored uses.

“This elf in a fancy suit,” The goblin provided an example, “once insisted to me that stories serve as natural fertilizers for marsh flora. But her sister claimed that stories taste just fine when paired with rye bread in the winter!”

“But a wise Goblin,” which my goblin friend insisted he was, “understands the true value of the more elaborate and exhilarating stories, and deems them too valuable for the bustling markets, regardless of how fervently customers haggle. Instead, they embark on a path to the heart of the forest where the hollow trees stand, veiling the secrecy of pixie hideaways.”

### **The Pixies and Imps**

“But the trickiness has just begun!” The goblin wagged a gnarled finger, “Because the pixies only speak the language of groves. Which is an English variant, only much harder several times over. I swear, they have one word for every little idea *except* for ‘thank you’. Well, the goblins’ native dialect is nonverbal. It’s stomping and whatnot. But the pixies interpret stomplings as declarations of war in their culture!”

This linguistic and cultural gap has apparently presented a formidable challenge in their fae trade dealings. With communication and negotiation rendered utterly impractical, any disagreements inevitably escalate into full-blown warfare. The disputes persist until either the embroiled goblin tribes or the pixie kingdoms are wiped out entirely, the sole resolution to their fae fracas.

“Need not worry!” The goblin assured me with a pat on the shoulder, “because no amount of war and genocide would ever keep us from engaging in the story trade.”

“What do the pixies give you in return?”

“Bulk quantities of pixie dust, of course!”

“Pixie dust? The hallucinogen?” I had *heard*, not from first-hand experience, that pixie dust, with its purportedly lysergic properties, holds the potential for medicinal applications. However, it has also a highly addictive quality that has gripped goblin society by its throat for decades.

“That’s awful! You ought to put an end to this bargain! Goblin culture and technology have been sent back hundreds of years because of their reliance on pixie dust!”

“But it’s very tasty. Well worth the harm, surely.”

The Pixies are well aware of the addictive allure of their pixie dust and have utilized the trade of this enchanting substance to establish a more lucrative market for themselves.

Nevertheless, the Pixies come into the ultimate possession of copious amounts of Stories.

## **The Tree**

“Luckily,” The goblin continued, “Pixies are very transparent about what they do with the stories. They assert that, with expert care, they plant the stories in fertile soil. And almost immediately, plants start to sprout! Then they swiftly burgeon into full-fledged trees, known simply in pixie realms as ‘The Trees.’”

It is said the Trees, apparently made from Stories, are the most magnificent feats of nature. Its bark, woven of rich and vibrant shades of colors that don’t exist on the human spectrum of visible light, presents itself with an almost otherworldly glow. While humans may not grasp the full extent of its physical brilliance, they manage to recognize its incomprehensible beauty through the mere grace of the silhouette it casts against the grove. In the gentle caress of the breeze, the tree’s branches sway with an inviting elegance, reaching out to embrace wanderers. However, it’s an embrace that’s neither oppressive nor suffocating, instead, it is comforting holding the warmth of being tucked into bed as a babe, accompanied by a mother’s soft lullabies echoing off chamber walls mingling with your incoherent babbles. These branches are decorated with delicate leaves that flutter with the poise of a siren’s tail, luring onlookers in with an almost ethereal quality of beauty.

“And in the veins of the leaves, the Pixies can find music.”

“Music?” I raised an eyebrow.

“Yes,” The goblin nodded eagerly, “music grows in the leaves on the branches of the trees made from stories. They travel in stringy patterns through the leaves, where they slowly develop a bond with the natural world.”

“How? Because of physical proximity?”

“This is the issue! This is why it’s so hard to explain to your people! Humans could never even imagine achieving such a bond, try as they might. Your church steeples could never be a snow-capped mountain top that shelters the elk, eagles, and the bears.”

“But our instruments are highly developed. Clear as a bell.” I crossed my arms.

“But your odd combination of plunking, stringing, and drumming could never compare, to any extent, to the music that the trees create. It’s music in its purest form! It’s music as it was intended to exist by the powers that be!”

And that is where the stories go.

## **Conclusion**

As I listened to the goblin complete his tale with a flourish, I couldn’t help but feel utterly drained.

“I must write this.” I immediately decided and pulled out my quill.

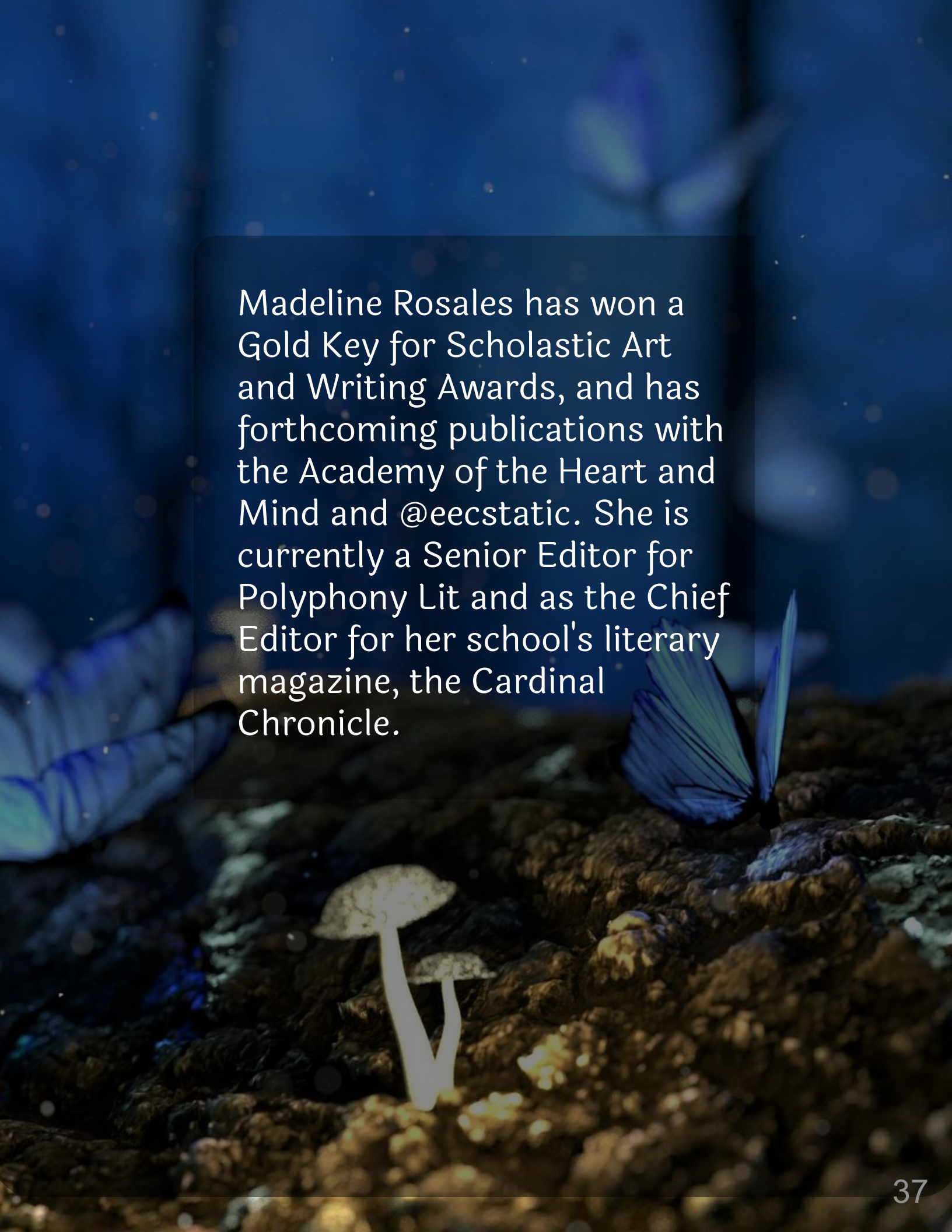
“Why?” The goblin tilted his head at me.

“Because this interaction would make an excellent story, would it not?” I rushed myself through the words so quickly that they came out as chicken scratches more so than anything legible, yet I persisted.

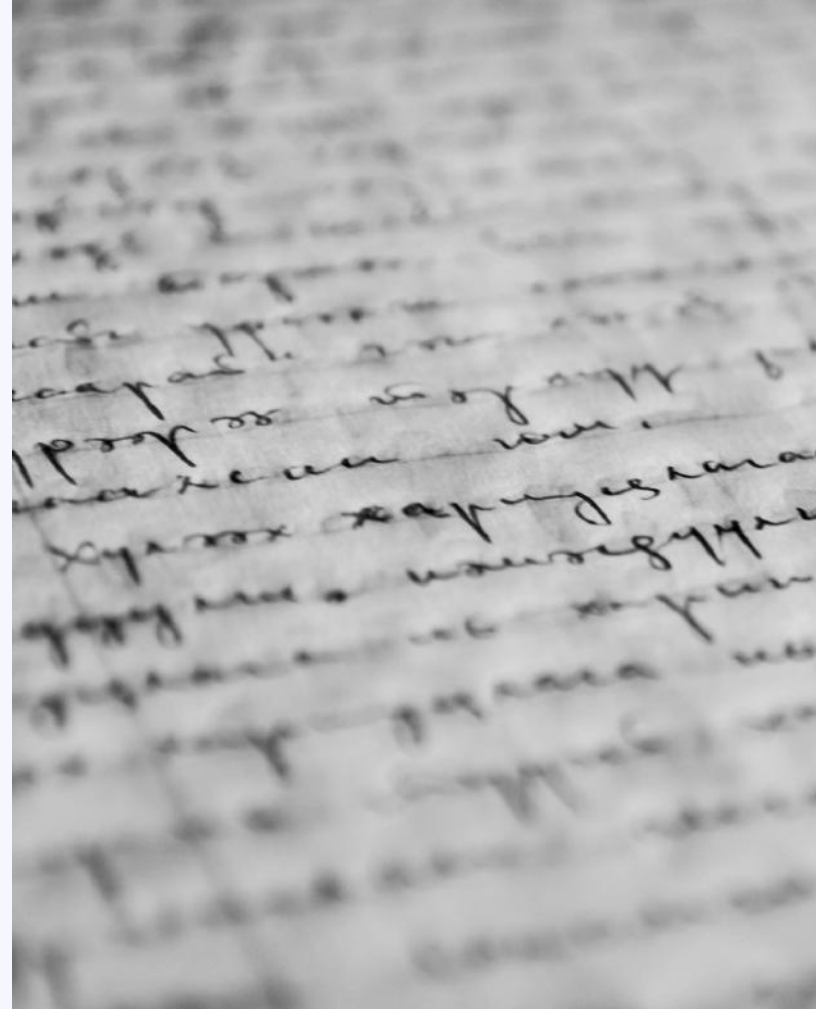
He mumbled. “It would.”

And now he is sitting in the corner, softly playing upon his pan flute. I’ve only just noticed that it’s an exceptionally delightful tune. It’s how I would imagine a raindrop would dance upon a star, or an icicle glide across the lake. A gentle, pure sound. Surely, no other noise could ever compare to something so effortlessly masterful. So utterly...

Oh. Now where has the story gone?



Madeline Rosales has won a Gold Key for Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and has forthcoming publications with the Academy of the Heart and Mind and @eecstatic. She is currently a Senior Editor for Polyphony Lit and as the Chief Editor for her school's literary magazine, the Cardinal Chronicle.



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