

Introduction

This year's *Rock River Review* begins with pieces that deal with strong or raw emotions. It begins with a collection of poems called "Through My Eyes" that sets the tone of our literary journal. "Confessions of a Sister Who Failed" and "I am..." continue with the same emotional intensity and real-life inspirations as the first. The theme continues through "Escaping the Box," "My Void," "Poem," and ends with the related art pieces "Self Destructive" and "Party Hardy."

The next two pieces are longer short-fiction that stand alone: "Miss Jackson" and "Silent Innocence." Placed next is "Poison," which reflects on the drug epidemic and its very real consequences.

After sharing in an emotional beginning, we present "Contemplations" that, not only asks deep questions of the reader, but also provides the reader with some food for thought. "Broken Love," which contemplates the death of Edgar Allan Poe, comes next.

To transition the style, we have placed "My Dad and the Cat;" this memoir piece reflects on the charm of spending a quiet weekend with a beloved father. Placed next is "King Elisha's Legacy," which provides some dark humor while breaking the mold of typical medieval fantasy. The art pieces "Pear-Pair" and "Lexie" are presented next as a break, before the action adventure pieces.

"The End of the Cessna 206" and "Wilderness Airplane Delivery" are memoir pieces that share some adventures of being a US air-mailman in the Alaskan wilderness.

Placed next are all the pieces that are the first chapter, or two, of what will eventually be completed novels. Those pieces are: chapter one of "The 1000 Kilometer Mystery," chapter one of "The Escape," and chapters one and two of "The Trennung." Before this issue come to an end, we present the art pieces "Kyras" and "Aurora."

Finally, the journal ends how it started: with strong emotional poetry. We have made "One Voice" our last piece to make a statement that everyone should make their voices heard, like all the authors included here. It is desire that you enjoy the diverse selection included this year, and that you too, will be encouraged to make your voices heard as well.

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2018 RRR, Co-Editor

Escaping the Box

The palm of my right hand slams against the wall that no one but I can see. My other hand follows the actions of the first, like it has many times before. As the pads of my fingers brush along the wall, desperately trying to find a crack, my face contorts with a sudden thought: I'm trapped.

My hand hits another wall and it doesn't take long to find out that there are four of them. A scream forms in my mouth, but no sound escapes past my lips. Kids and adults alike have gathered to watch my folly, with the sound of their laughter mocking my plight. *Calm down, I have to think clearly if I am to make it out this time.*

Beads of sweat start to mess with my face paint as the panic mounts, but wait! I lift my hands up into the air only to hit a low ceiling that confirms my worst fears: it's the box again.

I have managed to escape this same box many times before, only to find my way here again. My knees give out and I'm losing my composure once more.

A little girl, with a light blue dress, starts to cry from watching me suffer. Her parents try to convince her that I'm okay and that this is just a game, but if only it was. This little girl is the only light that I have to guide me out of my eccentric black and white fantasy. So I frantically start to search all of my pockets, but I find nothing that will help.

What can I do now? Suddenly, a lump forms in my throat and the key to my box comes out of my mouth. My hand takes the same position that one would take to hold a pencil, and I hurry to the opening that my key has made. My hand turns as my key releases me from my fears one more time. Last step. My right hand squeezes the air in front of me, and turns the knob that releases a rush of noise from my audience's hands.

The sirens are pounding in my ears, as I release my hands from the neck of this innocent man. Abacus, one of the other men in orange with me, warns me to hurry up before more guards come. My hand reaches out and clasps the black instrument of death on the guard's belt. I quickly rise, with my new tool in my right hand, to follow Abacus and the others down the gray corridors that all look the same. We reach the end of the hall and stand in front of a door.

"Do your thing Mime!" orders Abacus.

A lump comes to my throat as the pressure mounts and I regurgitate another key. The warmth that radiates from this key is unlike any I have ever used before, and I hesitate for a moment before fitting it in the lock.

As these hardened men make their way through the open doorway I have created, I prepare my instrument for action. The thick darkness swallows them all before I follow them into this land of frigid air and frosted ground.

Beams of light break through the shadows' realm and I run trying to remain in the darkness. The odds of making it to the tall gray slab that surrounds our hellhole are slim. DAT, DAT, DAT!

Some of my friends hit the dirt in front of me, but the show must continue without them. Moving in mid-air, my feet hit the ground past where the others lay. A few more yards and I'll have a chance to face my fears.

Only three men make it to the wall before myself, where we can now begin the final act. In unison, our hands meet the bottom of the wall and our fingertips scour it for an opening. Ah! My right hand finds a gap while my left hand reaches to alert my comrades. Success.

I move through the hole to freedom. On the other side, I pull myself up only to find a new obstacle I have never faced: a new audience that refuses to be pleased with my success. They order me to stop, but it is too late. DAT, DAT, DAT!

My body hits the wall and slouches to the ground of its own accord. I hear one of the men in blue calling for an ambulance, while others deal with my comrades. As my vision starts to blur and transparent streams run down my face, I realize: there is no escaping the box.

King Elisha's Legacy

After being deceived by one of his royal guards, the reign of King Elisha the Benevolent ended as he plummeted to his death from the lookout tower.

Therefore, a guard came to Prince Dominique to relay the tragic news and to announce that preparations were being made for his ascent.

Dominique's young brown eyes turn red and his hands tremble. His eyes move past the guard and fix on the beautiful comforting form of a woman who enters the room bearing a striking resemblance of himself. Dominique rises to greet her in an embrace for the healing of both of their souls.

"Guards, station yourselves outside this room," orders Queen Erin while moving to sit on her son's bed. "I'm sorry. We all need more time to mourn your father's tragic death, however, I needed to warn you as soon as possible."

"Of what mother?" says Dominique positioning himself by his mother.

"Of an old prophecy that neither I nor your father took seriously, but now it seems that it could be relevant."

"Continue."

"Your father had very few enemies as you know, but there was a witch that crossed his path years ago. It was during one of your father's campaigns, when we went out into the villages to give food to the needy. The witch had disguised herself as a beggar and when it was her turn to receive some food, she started to shout at him. She said something about your father ruling peacefully all of this time without any war was a mockery to the balance of life, and that fate had something special in store for him. So she prophesied against your father."

"Do you remember what she said?"

"I didn't have to. The witch later sent us a parchment copy. I have it here so you can read it."

When the "Benevolent" King falls from grace, his heir will have to bear his father's legacy upon his shoulders when he ascends the throne.

"What is this supposed to mean and how will this affect me?"

"I'm unsure, but I thought that you should see this since you will be the next king. For now, we just need to be brave, prepare for the funeral, and also prepare for your coronation as your father would have wanted. Do you think you will be ready in a few days for the traditional coronation hunt?"

"Yes, thank you," Dominique chokes.

Meanwhile, a new life is born from source-less flames in a rare forest clearing.

I yawn as I rise from a pebbled riverside. Gray pebbles roll off my white...fur? Since when do I have fur? I look down at my body: I am an animal. What did I do to deserve this? For the first time since I ascended the throne, I have a chance to be free. I can live how I please without having to worry about the state of the kingdom or my responsibilities. What animal am I? I see the reflected image of icy-blue eyes contrasted against white snow fur and natural black striped tattoos that cross over the majority of my body. Ah, I am a noble creature of beauty that also

bears the reputation of a brutal mercenary always on the hunt. I could live this life and be satisfied for all of the years ahead of me. But what about Erin? And Dominique? And Jade? And precious Jamie? Who will be there for them? An ache fills my soul as I this thought sink in. I won't be there when Dominique becomes a man. I will never have the chance to apologize to Jade. And I will never be there for Jamie as he grows up. This new life may have its appeal, but I just want to be there for my family.

My new acute sense of hearing senses a twig snap close by. I turn to see my beloved coming toward me. How did she know?

I start to bound to her, my heart racing with joy. Our eyes meet and I know that I couldn't be happier.

A warm feeling flows through my heart as I see her lower a bow. Suddenly, I can only stare at her unable to move in her presence. Darkness creeps into my vision even though it is midday and I feel a part of me moving on from this life.

But I have the joy of hearing her voice one last time, though I can't make out the words.

“Dominique, now you shall have a robe fit for your coronation,” says Queen Erin.