



**2015  
TEEN  
SHORT  
STORY  
WINNERS  
COLLECTION**

**FEATURING:**

**GRADES 6-8**

**1ST PLACE: SPIRIT WOODS BY KAREN LIN**

**2ND PLACE: OVER THE FENCE BY ROBBIE HEWETT**

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**GRADES 9-12**

**1ST PLACE: THE SEVENTH YEAR BY CHELSEA BRUEN**

**2ND PLACE: THE REVOLUTIONARIES BY EMILY CURTIS**

**3RD PLACE: THE LONELY POINSETTIA BY LINA HOFFMAN**

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## Spirit Woods

By Karen Lin

She peered at the beautiful full moon. Its light went through her body. She was translucent. She sat on the stone walls that divided Spirit Woods and the Capital. She looked about 18. Her silky white hair and beautiful white flowing gown blew in the wind as a gust passed. She was very beautiful, and looked as delicate as a princess.

The girl's name is Scarlet. And she's dead.

Sometimes, being a 563 year-old ghost is pretty hard, especially if you can't leave this world. And the reason for that is because I killed myself. It turns out, taking your own life counts as a sin. Now, I'm not going to tell you how all of this started, but I can tell you this.

When I was alive, I was the princess of Trite, a small kingdom connected to Spirit Woods, the forest outside the walls of the Capital. I fell in love with a knight working for my family. His name was Jared. We wanted to get married, but my parents didn't approve. So, Jared died in an accident, and I killed myself. But because I took my own life, I couldn't go to heaven, nor could I enter hell. So I became a spirit of Spirit Woods, as punishment. And to make matters even worse, I can't leave. I'm sealed away. I was trapped here by a wandering priest a few centuries ago. That was when I first started learning how to control my spiritual powers. And then things got out of hand, and let's just say I accidentally killed a group of mercenaries traveling through the woods.

Anyway, the priest came along, and he sealed me off, calling me an evil spirit. That made me mad. I really wanted to point out to him that I didn't mean any harm. But I couldn't, because one, he couldn't see me, and two, I'm trapped in a forest.

Today is the anniversary of the day I died. I decided to take a stroll through the woods (like how I usually do every day) and visit my grave, which was well hidden by trees.

When I approached the area, I saw a figure of a young man, reading my gravestone. He had dark brown hair and light brown eyes. He looked like he was around 20. The man was wearing a soldier's uniform. The man had a sword and a small pouch wrapped around his waist. Was he a knight from the Capital?

Curious, I floated closer towards him. I wondered what someone like him was doing in such an isolated place. Perhaps, he heard about this place being so-called "haunted" and decided to come and investigate the "evil spirit."

I smirked. Not like he's going to find anything. Suddenly, a mischievous thought came over me. I grinned. This was going to be fun.

"You're not planning on hurting him, are you?" said a voice. I looked up.

"Hi, Kuru." I said, staring at a black raven. Though humans couldn't see me, animals could. And somehow, I can hear them talk.

Kuru ignored me and went on talking. "Will you be harming him, or not?" he asked, impatiently.

I stared at the human. "As long as he does no harm to the forest," I said, walking towards my grave. I heard Kuru mumble something.

Then I approached the knight. With my spiritual powers, I took on my human form. I tapped on his shoulder. He turned around and looked at me in surprise. "Who are you?" I asked.

The knight looked at me for a second. I could tell he was suspicious. But he spoke, "My name is Lucas Remington. I serve the royal family of Trite," he said. I held back a smirk and went on smiling. "May I ask why a girl like you is playing in the woods alone?" he asked. He looked grim.

I looked him in the eye and started speaking. "My name is Scarlet," I began. Then, leaves started to swirl around and the wind blew fiercely. "And you must leave." Lucas looked at my grave. He looked serious. I grinned.

He pulled out his sword, and pointed the tip at my face. Stopping the wind I laughed, lost all concentration and became translucent again. But he could still see me.

When my laughter finally stopped, Lucas was already sitting next to my grave, wondering if I was just an illusion. He turned towards me. He really could see and hear me. Finally. "You amuse me," I said. "I want you to tell me about the Capital," I said. Lucas just stared at me. "Please," I said. "It has been 500 years since I've seen my kingdom, will you please tell me what's it like there?"

He stared at me. He must've wanted to know who I was. I smiled. "My name is Scarlet, Scarlet Moon. I'm the guardian of the forest." He looked surprised. Then, he sat down once again.

I looked at him. "Can you start talking now?" I asked. Lucas grinned. We sat on the grass and he began.

He told about medicine and weapons. He also showed me an interesting object that he carried around in his little pouch, an item called a "compass". It was a beautiful object. I picked up the compass and stared at it. "Would you like to have it?" he asked. I nodded and he handed it to me. I placed it on my grave.

I guess Lucas got the idea that I was an evil spirit by hearing rumors from travelers. But I think he also believed in the rumor, because this was what's written on my grave.

Scarlet  
1358-1376

December 21st

"For taking her life, the gods will punish her.  
She will become an evil spirit who will forever  
wander these woods. May the Princess  
Rest in peace?"

As anyone can clearly see, it was nothing sentimental. The man who quoted the grave must've been an idiot.

Anyway, we talked the whole day. The sun has already set. Lucas had to return to the castle, but I enjoyed his company. I didn't want him to go.

Lucas stood up, ready to leave. I called out to him. "Wait!" I shouted. I got up and grabbed his hand. He turned around and looked at me. I smirked. "Can you come again?" I asked. I enjoyed his company.

Lucas nodded. "I shall be here again on the next night of the full moon," he said.

"Then I will wait here," I responded. We said our farewells, and I became a spirit again.

After he left, I arrived at the stone walls which divided Spirit Woods and the Capital. I sat at the edge and stared down at my kingdom. Suddenly, Kuru appeared and started talking. "When is he coming back?" he asked.

"On the day of the next full moon." I sighed.

He crowed. "You have totally fallen in love with him." Then, with those words, he flew off.

I gazed at the night sky. There was a beautiful full moon. I used my spiritual power to summon the compass I placed earlier on my grave. It floated in midair so I could see what the inside was. I thought the compass was lovely. A sign of our meeting. I gazed at it for little while before I fell asleep.

After that day, I waited for Lucas every day.

## Over the Fence

By Robbie Hewett

Young and ambitious, that is what, I was ready to take on anything in my way, but nothing could prepare me for this! I was only three years old.

I gripped my mother's hand as hard as I could while entering the door to this foreign daycare building. We walked down a long entry hallway where children's paintings hung on the wall. I grew nervous, as the hallway stretched out before me like a horror movie. Eventually, I finished trudging down the hall to the check in room where mom checked me into the daycare. We were taken to the Minnow daycare for children, who would stay overnight for several days. As soon as we entered the room, it went from a lively room of children to a dead silence. All eyes in the room faced towards me. My mother knelt on the floor and embraced me. She whispered, "Stay safe and be strong, sweetie." With tears in her eyes, she quickly jumped to her feet and swiftly left the room. The door slammed shut, the room remained silent as everyone stared at me in my tiny Spiderman jacket. Even the teacher just sat silently. I was scared, I started crying and screaming while clawing at the door wanting to find my mother. The teacher told me to keep my voice down and that screeching was a "no no." She returned to her stool and did not even introduce me. I felt so overpowered. I just curled up in the corner crying, and eventually fell asleep.

It was dark when I woke and the only light was from the moon peering through the window. I got up from sleeping and began to slowly creep forward. I felt a bundle right by my feet, I stepped back, analyzed it closely, and it began to breathe! It was a child, on a mat asleep. I noticed there were multiple mats with sleeping kids upon them. A figure then passed through an open door, and stopped right after the doorway and sternly marched toward me. She grabbed my arm and yelled, "I want you to march your disobedient behind to your mat immediately!" I tried to shrink as small as I could and turned my head facing the ground. I stopped dead in my tracks, as I realized I did not know where my mat was. Panic spread through my body. I saw the teacher's shadow roam near the door. I was afraid of getting in trouble. I leaped toward a random mat and lay on the ground near it, hoping to blend in. There I met my new best friend. His eyes fluttered open with panic when he saw me lying on the hard floor. I quickly pursed my lips and put my finger before them to signal him not to speak. He calmed slightly and, when the teacher left the room, I whispered, "Meet me in the corner tomorrow morning."

In the morning, a different teacher came running through the door with a cowbell, yelling, "Wake up kids! It's time to pl-a-a-a-ay!" I stumbled to my feet and groggily looked around the room. I noticed the boy I met last night. I was dead tired and I told him, "Thanks for not ratting me out; I'm new around here." He then told me, "I have only been here for a week myself - also, next time, dash toward your mat, not away." Then a teacher ran through the door and announced, "Time for a healthy breakfast!" or in other words, this will taste bad but you will eat it and smile!

After a horrible breakfast, a horde of kids were corralled to a small room, and out a door to a huge playground. I ran out yelling "recess!!!" I was confronted by a large boy that was triple my tiny age of three. "Yo, small fry!" he bellowed. A gang of older kids, obviously his cronies, formed behind him, backing him up and cheering him on. I slowly backed up until I hit a wall. Their leader then commanded, "This is a waste of my time, come on we are out of here!" Saddened by the confrontation of a new enemy I decided, "This place is a

bad place and I hate it. I have to escape this prison!" I began making plans and schemed with every part of my mind, but escape was impossible. Fences were double my height; sentries in every class were watching everyone. I needed freedom more than anything, not even apple juice was as good as my freedom.

The next day, I kept thinking about my plan. My scheming was interrupted by my new friend during lunch. "What do you want to play during recess?" he asked. I began thinking of how I could use him. I told my friend we should escape. "I will go get the big kids to help us," he said as he scampered away. "NO!" I shouted sternly, but he already had his mind set to unknowingly demolish my plan.

At recess, I put my plan into motion. I hid near a bush and patiently waited for my buddy to get the overseers (the teachers) to abandon their post. Five minutes later, he ran over with a wiggling worm and dangled it an inch from their faces. He turned then spun on his heels and got out of there so fast, he was like a lightning bolt. But the overseers were right on his heels, hollering and yelling louder than a jet. I stealthily made my way to the fence, but just as I got there, my friend came sprinting my way. I had to climb. I jumped and latched to the fence, like Spiderman, and began to climb. I felt a strong pull on my pant leg. I looked down to see the bully and his crew cheering him on. "You're not leaving without me!" he yelled. Just at that moment my friend ran into the bully and he released my leg. As soon as my leg was free, I began to climb. The overseers jumped to snatch me, but missed.

I made it to the top of the fence, propelled myself off the fence, and landed steadily on my feet. I began to run, sprinting as fast as I could, toward freedom. Several adults came rushing after me. I felt like I was being hunted by wolves, or running with the bulls. I couldn't keep up the pace because my short legs could not make the distance. I was snatched up and dragged back to the daycare. I was carried to the detention room. As soon as I was released from the tight grasp, this flightless bird grew wings! I ran out the door and sprinted for the nearest exit, which happened to be the fire exit. Bursting through the door set off the alarm and kids swarmed out of the tiny double doors. I rushed into their ranks and spotted my friend. As we escaped, we hid amongst the panicked crowd. I saw my father's car pulling up. I wished my friend good luck and leaped into my dad's car. Free at last, free at last, thank God I'm free at last!

After the great escape, I had a short while to enjoy the sweet taste of freedom. But my worst nightmare came true when mom brought me back to the compound, maybe this time I can dig my way out!

## Things You'd Never Realize

By Leonie Thome

Please. I just want someone to see the world like I do. I just want to show someone, make them realize how deep I see things. I have learned very well, that no part of this earth is fair. If there is a place however, I highly doubt it. Now, of course I'm not saying that the entire world is bad. I'm just saying that it's not the best. I mean, really. Who's with me? If I cannot make you realize how I see this world, give me a chance to explain.

Everybody was born to die, but born to live. Did you catch that? Okay now, bear with me. Hi, my name is Celia. I see no point in living if all lives are not eternal. My thinking may confuse some, but that's because they just don't get me. The way I see it, happiness is like a beautiful flower. It blooms when made to smile, and turns black when sad. I have a question to ask. Do you ever just take the time to stop and think about other living things? Or maybe, they're not living at all. Take the sky for example. I do, I do almost every day. The sky has emotions too. How can I tell, you ask? When it's sunny, it's happy. When it rains, it's sad. Get my point? Okay, good. I get bullied at my school a lot for the way I see things. But that's okay, because I don't mind it much. Let me tell you some things about me. If that's okay of course.

I am fourteen years old and I live with my foster parents. My mother died when I was eleven years old, from untreated lung cancer. She always mentioned about how her lungs were sore. Or in her case, hurting her so much it was literally killing her from the inside out, making breathing her worst enemy. She went to the doctors about it several times. But she always landed with nothing. They took numbers of tests but still didn't find anything. After that, it got to the point she couldn't go to work or walk too much. She stopped going to work, and we had to rely off of food banks and food stamps. But it's not like I realized we were poor. Even if I did, it wouldn't have changed how happy I was with her. Of course I still worried day and night, whether or not she'd be fine the next day.

After my mom passed away in the hospital, the police came and asked me a few questions. They wanted to see if there were any relatives that I knew of that I could live with. Unfortunately, I didn't know anybody past my mom. She was the only, and last, source of family I had. After she passed, my whole life started changing. I went into foster care homes. I've been in eight foster homes since her death. Most of the homes weren't all bad, but I can't say that they were great either. I remember this one lady, her name was Marry. She was the sweetest person I had ever met in foster care. She had a little girl named Abby, and a dog named Thunder. Abby was six years old at the time I was twelve. Oh how sweet and caring Abby was. Such an accepting little girl. My current foster home...well. It's not my favorite. I go to Clearwater middle school and I'm in many clubs. Too many to name.

I have three best friends. Cara, Alyvia, and Haylie. They are really good friends and very understanding of everything and anything. Anyways, enough about me. Back to the things that you'd never realize. See, each day has a memory. But as that day dies, the memory lives on. Sometimes inside our minds, sometimes inside our dreams. And sometimes everywhere you look. Most of the time, we can't avoid the memories that we've created. Good or bad. They will always be a part of history. Kind of like people I guess. At an old school that I used to go to, this guy named Dylan called me beautiful. I told him to be quiet because he shouldn't say things that are not true. After saying this to him, he said something to me that I could never forget. "Celia, you're kind of like a butterfly. You have wings that are stunningly beautiful but you can't see them because of where your

head is. Everybody else sees your beauty however. And they admire it. So whenever you feel like you're not pretty enough, or you're not good enough, remember. You're a butterfly."

He made my first year of middle school amazing in every possible way. Thanks Dylan. Ever since then, I've never doubted my beauty. But you see, people in middle school change. And they can change you also if you're not careful. People don't care as much about others as much as they used to. Everybody thinks they are better than everyone else. In middle school, a lot of things happen to people. Stop me if I'm getting too deep for you guys here. People get popular, people lose friends, and people gain friends. People lose and gain family members. People hang out with different groups of people, people get depressed or people start to not like people. People might start having anxiety attacks, or panic attacks. And when people start to notice these things, they can't stop noticing. That's just another problem. People don't care and don't take the time to notice or even think about others. I guess we've all grown a bit selfish.

I'm not saying I'm any better. But let me tell you what I'm like. I'm not like "other people." I stop and think about any type of battle people are going through. I always smile at anybody I see in the halls. One smile can change a lot. Remember that. I remember this one girl I always noticed back at the school I just recently came from. She wore black constantly. She barely ever ate lunch and when she did, if she did, she would walk to the very back corner of the cafeteria and eat her lunch on the floor. I've said Hi to her and hung out with her a lot. When she trusted me enough, she had told me that she was depressed and wanted to go to heaven. She told me that was before she had met me. She said that when I smiled at her I saved her and made her realize that people still care. I'm so happy that I saved that girl's life. She turned out to be the funniest person. We still keep in touch. She said that she's made friends since I've moved away. Do you ever feel like people don't get you? That's because they can't feel your pain. No matter how hard you try, they will never feel your pain. This is my story. What's your story? This is only the beginning of how I see things. How do you see things?

## The Seventh Year

By Chelsea Bruen

I watched over the graveyard, breathing in the new morning. The air was crisp and rushed a chill into my bones. It was the first of November, the first time I saw her. She walked by, slowly, in a bright orange skirt and a crow black coat. She was carrying a bag stuffed full. When she neared I asked her to please sign her name and to write who she was visiting. She kindly obliged as she looked up at me with glimmering brown eyes, and then she continued on. I looked down at the name, Maggie.

After two hours she slowly walked back, seeming to be taking in what was around her. She approached me. "Hello, I just wanted to let you know I will be leaving some things by the grave, but don't worry I'll be back to collect them tomorrow. Just wanted to make sure you knew I wasn't littering."

"That's quite all right, people leave things for their loved ones a lot. If it's just flowers you don't have to worry about clearing them, we do that once the flowers begin to die," I replied.

"Well, it's a bit more than flowers. You see, this is my first year celebrating the Day of the Dead, so I have a small makeshift altar going on for my grandfather," she said very timidly.

I paused for a moment, and then replied, "How interesting. Well, don't worry I'll make sure nothing happens to it."

"Thank you," she said, and then she was off.

The next day she was wearing a blazing red dress and had flowers in her hair. She had two bags this time. One was empty and one seemed to be only half full. "Hello again," she greeted me.

"Hello," I said. She approached me and paused for a moment to smile before signing her name and writing her grandfather's once again.

"My name is Maggie by the way, I didn't catch yours yesterday."

"Oh, it's Parker."

"That's a lovely name."

As she started to turn away I blurted, "What is the Day of the Dead?"

"Oh! Well it's a tradition in Mexico, it's a way to honor your dead relatives. You basically throw a party for them for two days and put out food and gifts. You are supposed to put out flowers, candies, this special bread that I definitely messed up, and other things as well."

"That sounds fun," I said.

"Yeah, it is. If you're allowed you can walk over and see the altar I made, it's not the best but I tried."

"Well I am supposed to go walk through the graveyard, so I guess I can do a round now." We walked along quietly, the sounds of birds chirping the only thing keeping it from silence. Maggie showed me her grandfather's tombstone and explained the decorations around it. There was a bright banner across the top she had made, and a tan blanket at the base to keep the other objects from the damp grass. A picture of her grandfather lay on the blanket with a small electric candle next to it. To the right of the photo lay a plate with some misshapen bread, and Maggie told me how it was supposed to look. A box of candy and three yellow apples rested next to the bread, she said those were her grandfather's favorite foods. There were small decorated skulls as well, that Maggie explained were traditional, and orange flowers that matched the ones in her hair. I learned that they were marigolds. When I left Maggie was reciting something in Spanish, and getting her CD player ready. She told me she planned to stay till dark and then she would pack everything up to go home.

It was November first, the next year, when I saw Maggie again. We greeted each other and she told me she was glad I still worked here, it saved her some breath because she wouldn't have to explain the Day of the Dead again. "What made you decide to start celebrating the Day of the Dead?" I asked.

"Well, it seemed fun...but also I liked the concept. We really don't do anything past a funeral here, it's kind of depressing. You die, everyone is sad, and then you're gone. The Day of the Dead isn't like that, it's fun. You celebrate death rather than trying to conceal it."

"That's a pretty good reason to start something."

Maggie came every year. November first and second, she never missed it. The third year we exchanged contact information and became close friends. I learned that she actually lived three hours away, and stayed in a hotel to come visit her grandfather's grave. The fourth year she came a day early to go to a Halloween party with me, and I got to hear about how Halloween began. One thing I could count on from her visits was learning something new. She consistently made the bread wrong, but her makeshift altar became a lot less makeshift over the years. The fourth year I stayed with her all day November second, only briefly leaving every once in a while to check the front office or make my rounds around the graveyard. We ate, we danced, and we sang. She read me things in Spanish I didn't understand, and we even watched a children's cartoon about the Day of the Dead. That became our tradition. We celebrated the Day of the Dead together every year.

The seventh year Maggie got the bread right. She was so excited about it, and she put it on her wedding china because, "Bread this good needs to be displayed." We spent the typical few hours setting up the altar at her grandfather's grave and I helped her give her grandpa an update on her year. We went back and forth naming significant events and telling him stories. The last thing we did November first was turn on the electric candles, and Maggie put an extra few around her perfect bread.

November second, we walked slowly toward the grave. "How good do you think the bread looks?" Maggie asked.

"It looks wonderful, and I bet it tastes delicious," I replied.

"Well I hope grandpa likes it."

"Do you ever eat the bread or do you just throw it out every year?"

"Oh the bread is not for me, it's for my grandpa. If anyone was going to eat it, it would have to be him," and then she giggled knowing how ridiculous that sounded. Maggie believed her grandfather was with her those two days, but she didn't believe that he could physically take any of her offerings, it was more of a symbolic thing for her. As we approached the grave Maggie got a funny look on her face, but I couldn't tell why until we were there. The perfect loaf of bread had a small bite taken right out of the top.

## The Revolutionaries

By Emily Curtis

I've lost it all. I've lost my home. I've lost my namesake. I've lost my dignity and my honor. All I have left is a determination to incite change.

The children of darkness, or "Revolutionaries," as they're called, have been converging in on the smaller villages as of late, changing the citizens into beings as decrepit as them, as is their nature. My loving queen has decided that, instead of using her powers of light to end the revolution, she is going to let them suffer, erecting barriers around the capitol to keep the high-value people safe. Like any sensible person, I escaped. I've been living rogue ever since, searching for something to match her divine powers of light with equal and opposite force and lying my way to the truth.

I place my footsteps carefully, my worn leather boots thudding softly with each step. Heading into this obsidian cavern to pursue the only option left.

Darkness.

The smell that typically accompanies the dank harshness of a cavern does not exist here. Contrary to what would be expected, the faint scent of my childhood Honeysuckle Summers fill the air. I can feel eyes probing from every crack and crevice. I can sense their breath down my neck, their feather-light touch on my arm. God, this will never get old.

I feel my way along as the light grows dimmer. That is, until a faint purplish light starts to pulse through the air. Here and there, streamlined violet wings appear in an instant and vanish just as quickly, reflecting off the walls. Creating an aura of blood-curdling comfort.

As my eyes adjust to these strange lights, I can make out more of their bodies. Their captivating death and their horrific beauty, waltzing across the black floors like awe-inspiring caricatures of gods and goddesses. I swallow the mucus that has gathered in the back of my throat as I head farther in.

Before long I'm met with Darian. A content smirk paints across his face as I get closer.

"So. The game changer decided to show up this time?" He laughs, tipping my chin with his finger the way a lover would his lost.

I shudder at his touch, but imperceptibly. "Just tell me where to go."

"Getting down to business, are we?"

"Just take me to where you'd promised."

"Ah, fine," he says, grabbing ahold of my hand. His cool touch numb to me, I pull back. He whips himself around, his demeanor no longer quite so forgiving. He crouches slightly, showing that he is the predator, and I the prey. His violet eyes warn me and his wings take on a jagged appearance, pulsing with increasing fervor. His clothing is now ripped and tattered, bloodstains permeate the fabric like a corrosive disease, the air smells of carnage and despondence. "Are you going to come, or not?" He says through his teeth.

I nod, fear clawing at the base of my spine. "Yes, I'm coming."

"Then do." He takes my hand again. His hand is much warmer and this time I can't pull back. He drags me down the natural corridor made by volcanic eruptions long past. I follow along behind him well, despite my unfamiliarity with the surroundings, each of my footsteps places nicely. After a moment, his hand grows cool again, and the Summer scent returns. The farther we go, the steeper the angle becomes, until we are nearly running through the dark. The only light granted to us being the occasional reflection of his wings on the walls. Suddenly, the floor flattens out, and Darian slows down with it. Then we're met with a dead end.

"What do we do know?" I say, standing at attention. Old habits die hard.

He turns to me once again, his wings flaring out and the smell of blood hitting me like a warm, wet wave. "Human, if you would wait," he says before smirking and turning himself once again to the smooth rock wall. He reaches to his waist and pulls a small bundle from the folds of his vest. Untying the leather cord and, in one lithe movement, brandishing a dagger. Glowing with a violet ferocity, it invites me into its being. I reach out to touch it, but Darian smacks my hand away. "Human, if you would wait," he laughs. He then raises the dagger high above his head, and my eyes widen in terror as he drives it straight into the wall.

Where it should have shattered, it continues driving straight through, but progress is slow. Concentric rings of purple light radiate from the point of impact, illuminating everything around us. The light being too bright, I look away, but Darian keeps driving through. Both hands on the hilt, he yells in effort despite his voice being drowned out by the ringing in the air. His former mask of appeal is shattered. He is his true self, the Torim Harpie, in all its gruesome glory.

When my eyes adjust enough to see once again, I see that in place of the wall is a large room. I look to Darian, and he is his more agreeable self once again. Uneasiness worms its way through my stomach, it's time.

"Is this not what you wanted?" He says, panting. "To be of pure transformation?"

"Yes, I want it."

"Then why are you backing up?"

I hadn't realized I'd been edging myself farther away as the seconds passed. I laugh, the knot in my chest refusing to loosen. I walk back in. "How does this work?" I ask him, looking down to the polished marble floors.

"You jump."

"Where?" I say, looking around the bright, bare hall.

"There," he says, pointing behind me. Where the entrance to the hall once was, a large rectangular basin now lies, the white walls reflecting the liquid inside with violet ferocity. At the midpoint to the side facing me, there are three pearly white steps, going upward to a walkway that stops midway across. Reminiscent of a royal palace, extravagance and sleek lines.

I walk forward, knees shaky and breath unsteady, as I take in the full gravity of the situation. I mount the stairs, I walk across the board, I start to step off the board. Then rethink.

The abyss below is a swirling pool of madness, all that I'd promised my father I'd never become. But I need to do this. If I don't, then no one will.

I step back, then launch myself headfirst into the violent violet. At first contact, it behaves like syru, though it rolls and boils above like water. Suspended in the turmoil, I can feel it pierce my bones, violate my being, and destroy my morality. I contort with the ravages of the currents, thrown against invisible rocks and held under nonexistent waves.

After a moment's time, I resurface, a shuddering mass. Crumpled on the ground, I take the time to regain my strength.

I have changed, that one fact is for sure.

I place my hands flat on the cool marble as I open my eyes. In the polished floor is a different version of me, with violet eyes where my green should be. I feel the darkness around me like a long lost friend. I lift my hand and see a cloud of smoky darkness swirl like mist on my skin.

Light Queen, if you can hear me, I want you to know your reign of corrupt 'benevolence' is nearing its end.

## The Lonely Poinsettia

By Lina Hoffman

Once upon a time, a lady was very down just before the Christmas season. She was in her early forties, was not married, and had just moved to a new town for work. She was very lonely ever since she moved, and being away from her family and not being able to come home for the holidays made her very sad. Not a minute went by where she wasn't homesick. She missed every part of her old town, and wanted nothing more than to be there. Yet here she was, in a strange new place, away from her family and friends.

In the same town as the lady, lived a sad and anxious Poinsettia flower. It sat at the florist shop, just waiting for someone to pick it up and take it home. The Poinsettia was not as big as the other ones, in fact, it was noticeably smaller. The florist stuck it in the middle of the stand of other Poinsettias so as to hide it from sight. This made the Poinsettia very anxious. What if nobody took it home? What if no one cared for it? Would it see all the others go, and just spend Christmas alone? The days went by, and the little Poinsettia saw the others leave the shop one by one until finally, it was on the shelf, all alone. As the flower shop emptied its shelves of all the Poinsettias, they got a call for a last-minute delivery of one, on Christmas Eve. The only one left was the smallest, loneliest one. The florist took it to the house to deliver it, and rang the doorbell. When the owner of the house came to the door, she declared it was the scrawniest, tiniest Poinsettia she had ever seen, and refused to accept it. If flowers could cry, the poinsettia would have wept. The florist turned to leave with the flower, and saw a lady walking on the sidewalk. It was the same lonely, homesick lady. The florist called out to her and hurried over. He asked her if she would take the Poinsettia. It was Christmas Eve, after all, and every Poinsettia should be in a home for Christmas. The lady was so touched by this, that she nearly wept. It was as if all the loneliness and homesickness had been wiped away by this small Poinsettia flower, which was in fact very beautiful. That made Christmas better for her that year. From that point on, she and the florist were very good friends, and the florist, after hearing her story, invited the lady to have Christmas dinner with his family.