



MUNDELEIN
WRITES

ISSUE NO. 04
WINTER 2019

“ M O U N T A I N S ”

Mundelein Writes
Issue No. 04: “Mountains”
Winter 2019



Published by the
Mundelein Arts Commission

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WINNING ENTRIES

Breaking the Chain (First Place)	1
<i>by Alma Genevieve</i>	
Scaling the Summit (Second Place).....	16
<i>by Linda J. Frederick</i>	
The Dreamer (Third Place).....	32
<i>by Dorothy Bakirtjy</i>	

HONORABLE MENTIONS

No Names	40
<i>by Jerry Cornille</i>	
Hephaestus & Mercury	52
<i>by Chance Procter</i>	

FEATURED ARTWORK

Benjamin Johnson , <i>Untitled</i>	14
Stacey Kalmanovsky , <i>Winter</i>	30
John Kivlehan , <i>Settler's Journey</i>	38
Ruth Hutter , <i>Untitled</i>	51
Stan Kirschner , <i>Untitled</i>	65

NOTE: These stories are recreated exactly as they were received for the contest. There has been no editing other than the occasional spelling or punctuation error. Authors retain their copyright, though the stories or any part thereof may be reproduced by the Village of Mundelein for publicity purposes with proper credit but with no payment given to the authors other than the contest prizes.

BREAKING THE CHAIN

By Alma Genevieve

First Place

I am consciousness, and my last human name was Lucas Forester. I'm no longer physical, and can't waste energy explaining that. The last date that I can recall is August 5th, 2022. But I've got to hurry. This isn't a matter of time, but rather, if I will have enough light. It's about to get dark for the third time. I'll start from the linear beginning, as humans would, and the only way I know how to tell it.

Someone or something launched the code. The combustion was instantaneous. Every human being that held a cell phone, computer, smart watch, was in front of a screen, or within 100 meters of a cell phone tower, was transformed. It was the final moment of the Internet. No pink mist, as you might first assume, when you think of humans detonating.

It was magnificent. If the media were still in existence, somehow it would have been hash-tagged as the most beautiful finishing of the human race. People everywhere exploded into a vibrant, sparkling dust cloud

instantly and simultaneously. Each blasted into their own unique color. A symphony of all shades that ever existed. A millisecond pause later, the flecks of glitter began separating in a freeze-frame slow motion. They drifted about and away from their original dust cloud, where once stood a human being.

Finally, as if unfrozen and released, the sparkling specks began to drift in all directions, carried away from the Earth's surface. I know, because I saw it happen. I, too, was transformed. I now understand we weren't dust, but light.

My memory of *The Beginning of the End*, as I call it, was like a magic trick gone wrong. I was standing next to my mountain bike, fixing the chain, then glanced at the text notification on my watch, and POOF! I blasted apart and into millions of dark green particles. I was reduced to one sparkle of emerald light and saw the rest of my body cloud dispersing about me. It was painless, and shockingly familiar. Warm and peaceful. A body buzz without a body. It reminded me of the time I took Vicodin for a tooth extraction. I was unafraid. In fact, I felt at home as I was. As if I was *back*, but the totality of back to what, I didn't yet know. It all happened so fast.

My vision, hearing, and consciousness were functioning, but I had no control of my movement. Something was pulling me farther and farther away from my green cloud-cluster. Soon all that remained where I had been was my bike, laying on the grass, the chain still broken.

I began floating upwards near the roof of my apartment, about 40 feet from the ground. That's when I saw the others. Like a bolt of lightning, a deposit of understanding infused my new, yet familiar, reality. As far as I could see, all people had been transformed, and were different spectrums of light sparkles. Tiny, twinkling, ghosts meandering into an unknown dimension. It was indescribable. The majesty of color; the clusters of glowing dots rising up from the Earth's surface. The form we now took was light energy.

And then I saw her.

In the distance, a golden white beam shot up from the Earth toward the sky—a flushing geyser that would never drain again, from the hole in which it came? No, a comet traveling in the wrong direction.

She had to be a she. I could feel it was of female energy. A wildfire, warrior spirit, softened by an ember glow at her fiery bodice. The fireworks twinkling at her tail resembled children clamoring at their mother's hem.

A magnetic sensation was pulling me towards her, yet I felt suspended in a world away. The involuntary desire took complete control of me. I wanted more than anything to join with her. An impossible star to wish on. It was then I discovered I had the sensation of heartache. My heart-brain burned for her. She stayed true to her course and, too soon, melted from my view and into the blue sky above.

My heart sank but was soon replaced by disbelief. Because I hadn't felt any movement, I was surprised at the great distance I'd covered. The best way I can describe it

would be *motionless travel*. I had been magnetized to her! Where I then hovered was several more meters in altitude, and much farther southeast from my home. I scanned below, located my apartment, and in a blink, was retracted back to my bike.

For what seemed to be most of the afternoon, I remained buoyant near my apartment roof. The concentrated color bombs had disbanded and were long gone, leaving lone glowing orbs like myself. I made observations about them in hopes of gaining more understanding. They had a variance in brightness. I saw highlights and lowlights, and the brightest seemed to maneuver faster with calculated navigation. The lowlights were haphazard, and conveyed confusion. I wondered how bright I was. As the evening sky turned from blue to an ashy gray, most of us simply bobbed or dipped about in place.

Dusk was approaching fast. We became an optical illusion as the sunlight faded because we appeared brighter than we had been during the daylight hours. Darkness commenced further, and the only difference between us and the stars in the sky was our array of color.

When I became bored of watching the others, I gazed in the direction of where my comet had disappeared. I wished for her to return. I thought about what her fire would feel like up close.

Nightfall blended the gaps in the low sky. When it was pitch black, my first reincarnation happened—the first that I am aware of.

In an instant, as fast and unpredictable as the initial combustion, I was transformed into a flame. It took me by surprise and my first thought was I'd passed over into Hell. But no, I was luminous energy within the framework of a roaring fire. With the same perceptive ability I'd had as a minuscule slice of light lingering near my apartment, I could only be present in observation.

Stacked logs burned with obedience, and red-hot whips snapped above me. Micro-bursts exploded in all directions. Fire-breathing tornados sucked up and shredded the fueling oxygen. Below me, powdery ash pooled then collapsed under the weight of added burnt droppings. I had no sense of smell in this space and time, but it was reminiscent of smoky campfires from my youth. Every element of the pyre was alive, and I was a part of it, a magnificent thrill. I felt more powerful than ever in my human life.

Beyond the confines of the flames, people of an earlier time sat cross-legged around the bonfire. They looked solemn, kind, and focused on something very important. Tears streamed between deep creases on the face of an aged woman. Her eyes were sullen and peaceful, but from inside the fire I could sense her pain. The empathy I felt for her was overwhelming. I felt a wrench in my heart for her loss. I had no such emotions for anyone, ever, in my past life as Lucas. It was an odd new ability.

Hymnal chants began rising up from outside of the circle, and echoes of a tribal drum thumped as would a time-keeping metronome. A second drum strengthened

the beat of the first, and a wind instrument brought the chorale its harmonic melody.

Two young men stood up from the circle, bowed, ceased their chanting, and turned away into the darkness of the night. The aperture was filled when a slender woman walked in step with the drum beat and sat down in their place. She cradled a large stick in which a linen cloth was wrapped tight around the tip. She closed her eyes, bowed, and appeared to be praying. She then looked at me. Modest tears glossed over her eyes. I wanted to hold her. My heart swelled for her. The emotion that took hold of me, more than the power of the fire, was love. I loved her but didn't know why.

The woman shifted and moved from a seated position to kneeling closer to the rocks that lined the fire. I knew she couldn't see me, but I wanted her to know I was there. She closed her eyes to shield them from the blinding heat. From me.

With the unlit torch still at her side, she leaned over, taking her bow all the way to the ground this time. Sleek jet-black hair cascaded onto the earth, revealing a singular snow-white streak: an unfurled halo.

Daylight broke, and as the first rays of sunlight came in contact with my reserved spot in the atmosphere, I was back to hovering above my apartment. The other multi-colored lights were bobbing about as well. Nothing had changed, except fewer of the highlights were present, or so it seemed. And I remembered every detail about my journey to the fire pit. I wasn't sure which dream I was

waking up from now.

I scanned the city and didn't see any signs of human life. I began thinking about my life as Lucas when the sun passed over me around noon. *I've been working so hard and for what? For this?* I was an investment banker, and extremely good at it. Young and attractive, I was a cliché bachelor who couldn't be tied down by any woman. When I wasn't making money, I would take off on a remote bike ride, but even that had been taking a back seat. Until today—or was it yesterday?

The hours of the day were shorter in this static state of being. What should have been nine hours felt like three. I became aware of this as the sun swept over and behind me in a matter of thirty or so minutes.

Just before dark, I amused myself by contemplating which of the glowing green lights were former human bodies and which ones were actual fireflies. While scanning the sky for my comet, I started thinking about the torch the tribal woman had been carrying.

Complete darkness struck abruptly and I was teleported again, just like the night before. But in this dimension, dusk was moments from fading into a black night. The faint silhouette of a glacier or mountain range could be seen across a widespread tundra. The sensation of heat and power returned; I was inside a fire again. Yellow tornados swirled at the top while blue and white flames managed the oxygen intake. A strong wind pushed and pulled this way and that. It wasn't calm. No wood, ashes, or instruments.

Up, down, up, down. I was being carried. *I'm in the torch flame! Is she holding the torch? Is it her?!* My hyper-empathetic ability was back, and from this person, greed and evil was imminent. It wasn't who I'd hoped for. An over-sized male figure advanced with conviction through a fresh layer of icy snow as I heard sharp crunching under each foot fall.

The man's marching halted at an inflatable, metallic-colored enclosure. The door flaps were being unzipped from the inside and then whipped open from a strong gust of wind. A petite woman emerged in haste. She moved surprisingly quickly in her thick parka that cocooned all but her face and most of her body. The man pushed the torch into her gloved hands without a word, barreled past her, and ducked inside the stockade. Male voices held loud conversation following his arrival.

The woman held the torch out with two hands, narrowed her eyes, and looked at me through slivered pupils. I could feel her fear. She was terrified about something much bigger than her own mortal fate. With a shove, she thrust the torch to the ground. Heat sizzled and broke through the crusty snow, but not all was extinguished. The wind momentarily calmed, and the woman removed her gloves to take a candle from her pocket. She slid the wick into the center of what remained burning on the ground. I stayed with her and ignited the it, leaving the torch behind me. Cupping the lit candle, she then placed it inside a small lantern, and rushed back inside the enclosure. She avoided the conversing men and

stayed close to the sturdy walls until reaching a cluttered table in a dark corner. The woman cleared a space, and pulled a white note card out of her pocket. Her hands were shaking, and I could sense her heart racing. With her back to the men, she held the card up in front of my flame. It was sloppy, but I could read it:

It's January 4th, 2044

The chain will break! Don't fix it! This is the kill code!!

\$.@www.><><><EWIC&\$!!@\$www..

Next, I watched her feed the note card into the candlelight. My flame flared up, destroying it. Hungry to help, I consumed the code but not fast enough for her. I could see her hands still shaking through the glass. Curled ash fluttered within the smoky lantern walls, and the last bits of the note card finally came to rest on the old wax at the base of the lantern.

She was finally at ease when the evidence was nonexistent. I could feel her calm, and I was glad to have helped her. She pulled her parka hood back, revealing frizzy, light brown hair with one white streak. I was dumbfounded but couldn't stay on that, as she bent over the table, now face to face with me and mouthed, "Thank you."

She pursed her lips and blew out the candle.

August 4th, 2022

Lucas Forrester was fed up with work. He needed a break. No, he needed to quit. The investment banking job was lucrative, but he had more than enough money now. He believed he was ready to pursue what he'd always dreamed of: owning a canoe outfitter in the Boundary Waters. The best he could do for now was to pack up and get the hell out of the city. He made a camping reservation in the Upper Peninsula and prepared for the six-hour drive.

Lucas was angry and impatient. He flung his bike onto the vehicle rack with force and heard a metallic fracture.

“Damn it!” He'd suspected the chain already to be damaged and was certain now. *Should I fix this now? Forget it, I need to leave. I'll deal with this up there. If I stay, I'll be stuck here.* A surprising and strong wind gust blew, causing Lucas to take a step back. *That settles that. I'm out of here.* Securing his bike to the rack, retracting the roof of his jeep, finally Lucas was on his way.

When Lake Michigan replaced the agricultural fields of Wisconsin, he pulled over and yanked his phone from the charger cord. He took a long look at it. More messages than he could count were flooding in. He didn't scroll through them, he knew who they were from. Work, always work. Lucas pulled over and walked towards the shore.

“Thank you for giving me the lessons I needed to arrive here. I needed the work to afford this choice, and for

that I am thankful. I can't be a part of it anymore. Raping the Earth for profit is what this business has become. I'm out." Lucas pitched his phone into the lake. He removed his smart watch as well and threw it even farther. Disgusted at what he knew those two devices had created, he was relieved to be rid of them. He could only be free if he were offline. He resumed driving in peace.

Lucas checked in at the campground and started on a hike before unpacking his Jeep completely. He pitched his tent at his usual spot and built a fire. He laid down on his bed roll under the luminescent stars. He was dozing off when he felt the vibration beneath him. A shock wave? Earthquake? He shot up into a sitting position and looked around. Nothing. Then, overhead was the most beautiful ball of light. A comet! The sky lit up and it looked as if it were headed right for him, but it continued on her path and disappeared beyond the tall trees. Lucas laid back down and smiled. His heart was full of gratitude for the sight. He was ready to love life again, and the beauty of natural surprises. He just hoped his new life would be long-lasting and outlive the planet being destroyed by man.

Something stirred in the woods. Lucas propped himself up onto his elbows and scanned his surroundings. He decided to move into his tent for the night. He fell asleep thinking about the comet and not work for the first time in years.

Waking up with the sunrise was Lucas' favorite part of camping. He rekindled the fire and reignited what was left of charred logs from the night before. He brewed

decadent coffee, heated a cast iron skillet over the fire, and thought about his business plan.

A noise rustled on the trail. Lucas stood up and locked eyes with a slender woman. She wore white jeans and vest and had shiny golden hair with one snow-white streak tucked behind her ear. His heart swelled. Not because of her beauty, but of the light-travel dreams he'd been having for the past three years. *Was she real?* The woman blushed and smiled and said, "We wouldn't be here without you."

She walked to Lucas and stopped at the inviting flames. "I like your fire," she whispered, while pulling the ends of her bleach-white streak. Without hesitation, Lucas went to her and finally held her in his arms.





Artwork by Benjamin Johnson

SCALING THE SUMMIT

By Linda J. Frederick

Second Place

Kurt and Ingrid immigrated to the United States in 1937, escaping from Nazi Germany and Hitler's anti-Semitism and bigotry. Freed from prejudice and persecution, they began building a future in America. When Ingrid announced her pregnancy, the young couple joyously prepared for parenthood in the spring of 1939. At the first signs of labor, they left for the hospital. The maternity nurses prepared for a long evening; the first baby was always slow to arrive.

Hours passed, and the physical demands of childbirth exhausted Ingrid. In the early morning hours, she was finally wheeled into the delivery room where she was met by a first-year resident.

"Where's Doctor Walters?" Ingrid asked.

"He's unavailable. But I assure you, Mrs. Hauser, I'm quite capable of delivering your baby."

The young intern spoke with confidence and flashed her a reassuring smile.

“All the same, I’d prefer that someone from his practice were here,” Ingrid said nervously.

“We can certainly see who’s on call, but by the time they get here, you’ll be holding your baby in your arms,” the student doctor replied while supportively squeezing her hand. Ingrid simply nodded her acknowledgement.

Once her abdomen was palpated, the atmosphere in the delivery room took an ugly turn. Medical staff began talking in low urgent voices; the young doctor was obviously flustered when confronted with a breach birth. The baby was positioned with feet facing the birth canal. Unless the infant could be flipped head first, the delivery could not proceed. Consumed by panic, Ingrid became hysterical. In an attempt to calm her, ether anesthesia was administered. As she became groggy her fear subsided and she drifted off into unconsciousness.

For nearly three hours, efforts to reposition the baby failed. All the while, Ingrid remained anesthetized. Finally, a seasoned obstetrician arrived and successfully maneuvered the baby into position. Though deprived of oxygen for far too long, miraculously, the infant survived. Through the diligent efforts of the medical team, the baby’s cold, blue, listless body began to stir and vocalize.

That first year with Robert went by quickly. Caring for him was trouble-free, but Ingrid still worried. Something wasn’t quite right. Other children his age appeared more coordinated. Robert didn’t stand until

he was fifteen months old. Two months later, he began walking with a slightly unusual outward turn of his legs. Kurt didn't see any cause for concern, dismissing his wife's anxieties as "first-time mother's jitters." Though Ingrid was new to motherhood, she couldn't ignore her intuition.

Beginning a solo crusade, she made an appointment with a prominent pediatrician. This doctor said abnormal bone development in Robert's knees was causing his unique gait. A simple surgery to rotate his kneecaps outward, accompanied by a few months in leg braces, would completely fix the problem. *Surgery? Surely, he was joking! How could she look into her toddler's trusting face and subject him to something so radical?* This doctor was never going to see her son again.

Not knowing where to turn next, Ingrid's search for answers took on a new urgency. She sought out a pediatric development expert at one of the leading children's hospitals. This specialist was every bit a professional. Cordial and compassionate, the man was brilliant. After a preliminary examination and neurological testing, the condition that had plagued Robert since birth was diagnosed.

"Your son's prolonged exposure to anesthesia, and the resulting lack of oxygen, has caused irreversible brain damage. Robert has cerebral palsy," Dr. Greengard stated. Ingrid was speechless, unable to react. Realizing that he'd overwhelmed her, the doctor continued his explanation. "There's no way of determining the severity of his handicap, or how it will affect him long-term. Robert's learning

abilities might be limited, but it's too soon to speculate to what degree."

Ingrid was finally able to verbalize her thoughts. "What do we do? Does he need special care or medication? How can we help our son?"

"Don't panic. Cerebral palsy is not life-threatening. Children with this condition live normal fulfilling lives but face some physical handicaps as well as mental challenges. There is no treatment or medication for this, but there are organizations and schools dedicated to working with afflicted children.

"Here are some pamphlets for you and your husband to read. I believe once you're properly educated, your fears will be alleviated. If you have any further questions, just give me a call, but stop worrying. You have a fine healthy boy here."

Ingrid left his office a different person. Her life, Kurt's life—and Robert's, would be permanently changed by this news. She loved her son and would overcome any hurdles to assure he'd have the same opportunities as any other child.

Bobby, as he liked to be called, had an outgoing personality and a gentle disposition. He was a mindful, obedient, kind-hearted son that never had to be told to do anything a second time. Ingrid and Kurt saw beyond his labored gait and uncoordinated movements; they were proud to have been blessed with such a loving child.

The teachers at the Burbank School for the Handicapped admired his enthusiasm; no one tried

harder in the classroom than Bobby. Despite all his efforts, Bobby's learning abilities plateaued at a seventh-grade level. Pushing him beyond his intellectual limits would only cause unnecessary frustration. He was content socializing with his classmates and learning at his own pace throughout sophomore year of high school.

Bobby was unaware that he was different from everyone else. Sadly, the neighborhood children made it their mission to remind him of his imperfections.

"Hey, look it's Frankenstein's Monster!" Marty jeered as he watched Bobby walking down the sidewalk dragging his pigeon-toed left foot.

"My dad says his family are Nazis, sent here during the war to spy on us!" David remarked with self-importance.

"What are you going to do to him?" Suzie asked.

"Just wait, you'll see," David answered. He signaled Marty to open the bag of marbles. As Bobby approached, they each took a handful and tossed them at him.

"Sta-sta-sta-stop that! It's not very na-na-nice of you." Bobby stammered when he became anxious or nervous.

"We're *sa-sa-sorry* and won't *da-da-do* it again," Marty mocked.

"Let's be friends, okay?" David asked, baiting Bobby for further humiliation.

"I'd like that," Bobby replied, wearing a big innocent smile.

"Suzie, take Bobby's hand and walk him to our

secret clubhouse,” David ordered.

“I don’t want to touch his—” Suzie was interrupted mid-sentence.

“You’ll do what I tell you. OR ELSE.” David threatened his kid sister.

Suzie obediently reached out, taking Bobby’s hand. All four of them walked to the house on the corner of the block and turned into the gangway. Once they reached the backyard, David and Marty ducked into the garden shed, returning with a water balloon. Suzie dropped Bobby’s hand and ran off. Before Bobby could react, the balloon hit his chest, soaking the front of his shirt. Bobby stood there shocked and betrayed. His lower lip began quivering, a telltale sign that he was fighting back the urge to cry. “Why di-di-did you do that? I thought you were my fr-fr-friends,” Bobby asked in bewilderment.

“No one wants to be friends with a Nazi retard like you!” David yelled. A dejected Bobby merely turned about-face and walked away from the laughter and taunting, heading for the safety of home.

That evening, as the Hausers sat down to dinner, they were interrupted by knocking at the front door. Kurt was startled to see two police officers standing on the porch. “Can I help you, officers?” he asked tentatively.

“Yes, sir. Are you Mr. Hauser? And do you have a son named Robert?”

“Yes to both questions. What is this about?” Kurt was perplexed.

“Sir, we’ve had a formal complaint from one of

your neighbors regarding your son's behavior. I'm sorry, but we've got to interview Robert at police headquarters to sort this out," Officer Dobson stated.

"Can't we handle this here? My son is a minor and handicapped. He needs my assistance."

"Mr. Hauser, these are serious charges and require a formal hearing in front of a judge. Normally, we take the suspect into custody and hold them in jail." The officer's tone was rigid.

"Please officer, you don't understand the situation. Please, let me introduce you to Bobby and then you'll see there are special circumstances here." Kurt was desperate to shield Bobby from a terrifying trip to the precinct. "Bobby, can you come here for a minute?"

"Sure, Dad. I'll be right there." The chair scraped against the tile floor signaling Bobby's departure from the dining room table. Once the officers evaluated Bobby, they realized standard police procedures needed to be modified for him.

"Mr. Hauser, I think under the circumstances, house confinement would be satisfactory. Are you willing to take responsibility for your son's internment until the hearing?" Officer Stevens asked.

"Yes, certainly. But I'd like to know the name of the person who filed the police report," Kurt respectfully requested.

"Of course, sir. That's your right. May we come in and go over this?"

“Sure, right this way.” Kurt walked the officers into the living room. Ingrid put dinner back into the oven and joined them on the couch. Her facial expression conveyed a high level of anxiety.

“A Mr. Morrish has alleged that Bobby inappropriately touched his daughter, Suzie. He said his son, David, and another boy, Marty Ferguson, were witnesses to the event. He’s filed formal charges. For this type of offense, a hearing is mandatory. Unfortunately, if there’s a conviction, Bobby will face sentencing for the crime.” Officer Dobson’s tone sounded apologetic.

“That’s ridiculous!” declared Ingrid. “Bobby isn’t capable of that. He’s an innocent boy with the maturity of a ten-year-old. He doesn’t know about such things.

“Bobby, honey, tell us what you did today. Did you see these children this afternoon?”

“Yes. Da-Da-David offered to be my fr-fr-friend and told Su-Su-Suzie to take my ha-ha-hand as we walked to th-th-their club house.” Bobby accurately recited the events.

“Is that all that happened?” Ingrid inquired.

“No. Th-Th-They didn’t wa-wa-want to be fr-fr-friends. We got to th-th-the club house and Su-Su-Suzie let go of my ha-ha-hand and ran away. Then Da-Da-David threw a wa-wa-water balloon at me and ga-ga-got me all wet. I le-le-left so they wa-wa-wouldn’t see me cry.” Bobby hung his head in shame.

With tears in her eyes, Ingrid said, “That’s okay, son. You did the right thing and we love you for being so

brave.

“I’m going to march right over to the Morris’ house and give them a piece of mind! Such shameful behavior towards Bobby should not go unpunished. Lying about what happened is disgraceful!” Ingrid was fuming.

“Ma’am, it’s best to let the courts handle this. You’ll only make matters worse. I’d suggest you retain legal counsel and get proper advice and representation for Bobby,” Officer Stevens suggested.

“Do we really need a lawyer?” Kurt questioned.

“I think that would be the wise thing to do, considering the seriousness of the charges. Thank you for your time, and we’re sorry for having interrupted your dinner.” With that, the officers departed.

Kurt looked at Ingrid in disbelief. “Could this really be happening? Why would the neighborhood children gang up on Bobby like that?” Sadly, there were no easy answers.

Ingrid preferred not to discuss this any further in front of Bobby. Recounting the day’s events for the police had obviously upset him. Instead, she served dinner with an extra helping of kindness for her son.

The next several weeks were not easy for Bobby. Being confined to the house deprived him of his independence. He missed his daily visits with Byron, the owner of the corner newsstand. Byron was a delightful middle-aged gentleman who knew all too well the social stigmatization that plagued the handicapped. He truly judged people on the basis of their deeds and was incapable

of being influenced by appearances and mannerisms. His uncommon ability to assess character without physical bias or discrimination was the foundation of his friendship with Bobby. Byron was a rare individual—his uniqueness was further augmented by his blindness since birth.

After some small talk with Byron, Bobby would visit the local merchants on his walk home. He'd stop at the bowling alley to chat with Ed, who always gave him a free bag of popcorn from his machine. No day was complete without visiting Mildred at the doughnut shop. Each morning, she put aside a freshly baked bear claw for his special treat.

Though Bobby's days might not have been considered critically significant by some, they were purposeful and pleasing to him. Each morning, he awoke in anticipation of visiting his friends in the familiar surroundings of the neighborhood. It seemed unnecessarily cruel that he was deprived of this routine until his court date.

On one particular afternoon of Bobby's confinement, the sun shone brightly and a trace of honeysuckle wafted in the breeze. There was no reason for him to remain inside on such a glorious summer day. He took his transistor radio into the backyard to listen to the baseball game while having a cool glass of lemonade. He leaned back in the lawn chair and tuned in the radio station.

"Bobby! Hey, Bobby! Help me! It's my brother, David. He's hurt bad." Suzie's frantic yelling from the alley

drowned out the radio announcer's voice.

"The la-la-la-lawyer said I ca-ca-can't talk to you," Bobby blurted out.

"I know, but David is bleeding and can't walk. Marty and I think his leg is broken!" Suzie started crying.

"I'm sa-sa-sorry, but I ha-ha-have to stay here." Bobby genuinely want to help, but he couldn't disobey his parents' orders.

"Bobby, PLEASE! My parents are at work and David needs you. Just help carry him to our house, so I can phone my mom. It'll be real quick. No one will even know you left the yard." Suzie's desperate plea appealed to Bobby's soft-hearted nature.

"Wh-Wh-Where is he?" Bobby asked.

"He's at the abandoned house that's being torn down two streets over. He was exploring with Marty and some boards fell on him. His leg is pinned down. Hurry!"

"Don't cry. I'm ca-ca-coming." Bobby was out of that chair and through the backyard gate within seconds. Suzie grabbed his hand and dragged him down the alley as fast as they could run.

After climbing through the construction fencing, they found David lying near the partially demolished foundation, his leg trapped under a wooden beam. Bobby bent down, and with all the strength he possessed, began lifting the joist. Using equal amounts of muscle and determination, he raised it high enough for David to swing his leg free.

"He's out! He's okay!" Suzie declared. With David

out of harm's way, Bobby released his grip, letting the heavy wooden support fall to the ground with a pounding thud.

"Bobby, help me get David up. He's bleeding pretty bad." Suzie took off her sweater and wrapped it around her brother's leg.

Bobby hoisted David into his arms saying, "I'll ca-ca-carry you home. Da-Da-Don't worry."

"Thanks, Bobby. That's real nice of you considering how mean I've been." David's contrite voice conveyed his appreciation.

They'd only traveled a short distance when a squad car pulled up. The vehicle came to an abrupt stop and out jumped Marty with officers Dobson and Stevens. They quickly raced to David's aid, loading him into the back seat.

Bobby stood frozen in place; he'd disobeyed the police by leaving the house and would surely be arrested. Before he could speak, Officer Dobson sternly asked, "Bobby, what are you doing here?"

Suzie replied, "It's my fault. I made Bobby come. David was in trouble and needed help."

"Regardless, Bobby has violated the terms of his house arrest and that's serious business." Officer Dobson's tone was uncompromising. "We'll sort all of this out at the hospital. Everyone, into the back seat now."

Officer Stevens turned on the siren and blazed down the streets, arriving at the emergency room in record time. As David was being transported to the x-ray

department, the officers phoned his parents.

Mr. Morris was first on the scene. “What’s *he* doing here?” He shot a piercing glance at Bobby. “This child molester should be locked up and nowhere near my daughter! You’re not protecting the public or doing your jobs. I’ll be talking to your Captain about this!”

Before Officer Stevens could respond, Suzie said, “Dad, please forget about it. Bobby never did anything to me. David and Marty made me say that he did, just to get him in trouble. I’m real sorry, Dad.”

“It’s true, Mr. Morris. We lied about it,” Marty confessed.

“WHAT?! You made this up?! Do you realize the trouble you’ve caused? Lying to the police is a serious crime. If David doesn’t have a broken leg, I’ll give him one when we get home!” Mr. Morris’ face was crimson with rage.

“Sir, please calm down. David is hurt and needs your support right now. Go get a cup of coffee, and then have a seat while we wait for the doctor.” Officer Stevens’ suggestion quite effectively deescalated the situation.

Once the drama at the hospital concluded, David was released after being treated for two deep lacerations and a broken leg. Shortly after his son’s discharge, Mr. Morris dropped the false accusations, and Bobby was free to roam his beloved neighborhood.

Despite David’s vindictiveness, Bobby held no malice and heroically came to his rescue that day, risking his own well-being in the process. Bobby’s good deed did

not go unrewarded: he and David became friends for life.

Apparently, David's fascination with demolition and construction wasn't diminished after breaking his leg. As an adult, he became a general contractor. The most rewarding project of his career was building an independent living center for the handicapped—Bobby became its first resident.





Artwork by Stacey Kalmanovsky, *Winter*, 2009
Ink, Glitter, Foil on Cold Press Paper

THE DREAMER

By Dorothy Bakirtjy

Third Place

Roberto looked down at his ankles in shackles and his wrists in handcuffs. He looked around at the other men on the plane. Most of the men had their heads bowed. Were they praying? The plane smelled of sweat and fear and resignation. All heading home to Mexico—except Mexico is a foreign country to him. He doesn't remember Mexico at all. The only thing he remembers is the long walk and the heat of the desert as his family sought the security and prosperity of America. He remembers how thirsty he was when the water ran out. At one point, he couldn't take another step. His father picked him up and carried him until nightfall. The nights in the desert were so cold he couldn't stop shaking. His father and mother would put him between them to give him their warmth. When they finally crossed the border, people with blankets and bottles of water greeted them. He was so thankful to be in a country that was so welcoming. He was three years old when he reached his new home.

Roberto thought about the paper in his pocket. He

was so excited to be accepted into a special Dreamer Program at Princeton University. The program was funded by a wealthy American who wanted to share his good fortune. Roberto's parents were so amazed that he received a full college scholarship to his dream school, they told him, "Of course a dreamer would be accepted to his dream school." They all laughed and celebrated. He wondered what would happen to his scholarship now that he was being deported back to Mexico.

Roberto's friend, Juan, looked at him across the aisle. Juan just shook his head and laughed. He remembered how Juan had warned him not to join the Dreamer Program.

They were at the skate park in the city. It was a beautiful summer day. The noise of the skateboards was clicking on the ramps.

"You are just signing up to be deported." Juan told him.

"You don't understand what an opportunity this is!" Roberto retorted.

"The government just wants to know who and where we are!" Juan replied angrily.

"I can't believe that you're not signing up! You're stupid!" Roberto shouted.

"I can't believe that you believe this is some big opportunity! You're an idiot!" Juan shouted as he walked away.

Roberto believed that the Dreamer Program was his ticket to stay in America. He told Juan that he was going

to stay here because of the program. He felt more American than Mexican. He joined the program and received a full college scholarship targeted to Dreamers. Juan refused to join, but here they both were, being deported. Roberto realized that it didn't matter either way.

Roberto closed his eyes and thought about his life in America. He remembered watching children's television shows in English. He spoke English before he started Kindergarten. It seemed so strange to be put into an all-English classroom. Spanish was spoken at home because his parents hadn't learned English. Most of his friends were in the bilingual program. He spoke only English in the classroom and Spanish at lunch and at home.

Would he see his brother and sister again? They were both American citizens, born in America after the family migrated. Who would teach his brother how to play football? He laughed to himself that in America football was called soccer. To him and the rest of the world it would always be football. Who would watch over his sister? His younger brother would have to take over this role for him.

He thought about how much fun he had with his Mexican friends. They knew how to party. He would get into trouble with his parents over staying out too late with his friends. His parents were always worried about drawing too much attention to themselves.

"Roberto, you are always looking for trouble. The problem is you may end up getting your whole family deported. Is this what you want?" his father demanded.

“I’m just having fun with my friends.” Roberto said.

“Your partying has to stop. It’s starting to make your grades go down in school.” his father responded. “You have to get good grades, so you can become a success!”

“School is getting harder, that’s all.” Roberto shrugged.

He knew his father was right, but it was hard to say no to his friends. Party versus homework? He would always choose party. Finally, his father found a solution to the problem. Roberto remembered with a smile how angry he had been when they moved from the city to the suburbs. His father took a job as a groundskeeper that came with a small cottage. He had to leave all his friends behind. He was forced to make new friends, and work even harder in school, there was so much competition for high grades in his new school environment. He was attending a school where the expectation was that everyone would be attending college. He realized that he too wanted to attend college. In his new school, he was speaking English all day long, even at lunch. He missed his Mexican friends but was rapidly making new friends. They talked about attending Princeton, Yale, and Harvard. This was an impossible dream for him, until his guidance counselor invited him to apply for a special scholarship for Dreamers. Roberto applied and was accepted—life in America was a dream.

After getting accepted into Princeton, Roberto began to worry about how he was going to afford the living expenses. His friend Juan suggested that he apply for a job

at the factory for the summer. Juan was a friend from his old neighborhood in the city who quit high school to take a full-time job at the factory. “You can make good money at the factory, so you can go to that fancy school of yours.” Juan told him. It seemed like a great idea. Roberto was fluent in English and Spanish, so he could work for a supervisor that spoke either language. Most of the factory workers were Spanish-speaking illegal aliens.

When the factory raid happened, Roberto thought his Dreamer status would prevent him from being deported. The authorities didn’t care about his “special status.” They saw him as someone who was in the country illegally. The response was “Show me your green card.” Roberto didn’t have a green card. The group was put in shackles and handcuffs before being boarded onto a bus that took the group to a chartered plane.

Roberto felt the plane as it touched down onto a Mexican runway. He looked out the window to a foreign land. He saw the semi-arid brown countryside of Mexico, so different from the green of his home. He wondered what his life in his new country would be like. He laughed at himself for having ambition. Juan was right. He was an idiot. It didn’t matter that he had a perfect ACT score. It didn’t matter that he worked hard for his straight-A average. Nothing mattered. He wondered if his parents even knew what had happened to him. Did they know where he was? Were they worried when he hadn’t returned home? Would they be deported too? If they were deported, who would care for his brother and sister?





Artwork by John Kivlehan, *Settler's Journey*
Graphite and Charcoal

NO NAMES

By Jerry Cornille
Honorable Mention

Lucien felt like he had been climbing these foothills all his life. He picked a level spot to rest. He hadn't climbed far. When he was younger and his wife, H el ene, was alive, they picnicked with their daughter, C ecile, higher up than this. He rested his back against a boulder and took a sip from his thermos of coffee. The gurgling of the creek on the edge of the mountains still reached his ears. The tapping of a woodpecker made him cringe as it brought to mind the most fearsome sound of his life—the sound of boots on cobblestone when he was young. He shook it off and leaned on his cane to stand. His next goal, a little higher up the animal path, was the stone chapel erected by his forebears over a century ago. *I'll certainly make that in my next push*, he thought. Then, *Why am I doing this today?*

Arthritis in his nearly seventy-year-old back stopped him again before the chapel. Maybe this hike was too much for him? *Nonsense! I was born with my family's mountain-climbing feet!* That is what his grandfather had told him as a boy, explaining that his high arches were

from centuries of his ancestors living in the Pyrenees.

Later, but still before midday, Lucien was sitting on a thick slab of weathered wood in the dark, bare room that was the chapel. A simple wooden cross hung on the wall opposite the door. He was dizzy with exertion yet energated by the familiar smell of wet earth. This usually was the first milestone on a hike into the mountains. H el ene always enforced a stop here; the chapel could not be passed without a moment of prayer. Today for Lucien, it was a weary pause with thoughts of his departed wife.

He was about to leave when another, earlier memory arrested him. Two nameless children had said an awkward goodbye in this chapel decades ago. This time he drew a flask instead of the thermos from his small leather pack and took a solid draught of Armagnac. He remembered the shy girl with piercing hazel eyes looking deep into his young soul. He tried pushing this memory aside to think about the terrain above and whether his walk was over. He realized tears were streaming down his creviced cheeks. *Did she ever find freedom? Did she survive? And suddenly shivering, Is this what brought him here today?*

They weren't starving, but everyday items like eggs and bakery bread were now occasional luxuries. So, when Lucien arrived home carrying a fresh-baked baguette under his 13-year-old arm, he felt older and important.

"Where did you get that?" his mother demanded.

"A friendly soldier gave it to me," replied Lucien.

With her sternest face his mother stared into his

eyes and said, "You take nothing from those soldiers," emphasizing *rien—nothing*. "Do you understand me? You do not speak to them unless they address you." She softened her face, took the bread saying, "Lucien, they are not your friends. They are not our friends."

But they ate the bread. And when his mother fixed a basket of food for the woman and child who were in their attic, she included some of the baguette with her homemade plum jam. Butter had long been absent from their table—except when Uncle Mathieu would visit and produce a little bit folded in his handkerchief. Uncle Mathieu was his mother's older brother who kept a tiny farm on the edge of their small town. It was Uncle Mathieu who stopped most mornings on his way to the market to give his sister some small gift from the farm—and once every month or so to let off a person or two who would stay in their attic. These people remained there usually that night or the next, until his father would take them, into the mountains. Lucien sometimes was sent to give them food. The boy could more easily squeeze through the gap when certain ceiling slats were pushed aside. He was not allowed to tell them his name, nor to ask theirs. "No names." This was his father's strict directive to the visitors and to family alike.

This woman and her daughter, who was about Lucien's age, had been there much longer than was usual. That clearly made his mother very nervous. Lucien asked if he could bring them some of his books. His mother looked at his father, who shrugged, "Why not?" Then sharply, "No

names!”

The girl and her mother seemed so happy whenever he visited. They didn't want to keep him long but didn't want to let him go either. “What is the weather like?” was a daily question from the mother. After a couple days of shy silence, the young girl, with an educated voice and a northern accent, began to ask him about what he like to do and what he liked to read. When Lucien mentioned liking to walk with his dog, the girl tearfully recollected the small dog she was forced to leave with a neighbor. Lucien felt so sad for her. He brought her books from his room, and she received them as though they were birthday presents.

Weeks passed. Every day when his father returned from the shop where he worked with his own father selling supplies for fishing and hunting, Lucien's mother would ask anxiously, “Any word?”

One day, Lucien had heard his father reply to his mother, “Nothing, and the moon is getting stronger.”

Danger became more real to Lucien one morning when walking to school. He saw fresh blood on the wall of the building next to his school and had to walk around a large puddle of blood below. His schoolmate, Hélène, was not in class that day. Her father had been executed by soldiers for suspicion of working with the Resistance--a word that was only ever whispered.

Now in the chapel, Lucien shivered slightly. He told himself it was from the dank air. Arthritis pain dictated that he would hike no farther today. But he didn't move to get

up. He was allowing carefully buried memories to come back. His daughter Cécile was coming to visit from Paris in a couple of days. As an adult, she had grown curious about her family's history. She was especially interested in her mom, who had died of cancer when Cécile was sixteen years old. For many years, Lucien and Hélène had shielded her from the horrors of occupation and the brutality of their own childhoods. Cécile was twelve before she learned that her grandfathers had both died at the hands of German soldiers. Her mother often told her, "Your father was my support and comfort in hard times."

Lucien spoke very little to Cécile about the war and was dismissive about his family's role in smuggling goods across the Pyrenees. Until she was an adult, he was completely silent about the family's role in smuggling human goods—Jews whose lives were at stake—across the frontier. They had felt there was no need for anyone to know.

After a while, he wiped his face and let his mind return to mundane things. He needed to plan good country meals for Cécile. He had already spoken with his nephew, Jean Marc, about this. After Mathieu died, Jean Marc kept up his father's farm. He had a bit of everything on a tiny plot. Jean Marc said he would be on the lookout for game or choice parts left after a slaughter to fill an order in town. Like his father, Jean Marc spent almost all his daylight hours tending goats, lambs, chickens, ducks, rabbits, and a large vegetable patch behind rows of fruit trees. His wife, Marie, spent the day stirring kettles, feeding spinach to snails, preserving, cooking, and baking. She was planning

a duck pâté and peach pie for when Cécile arrived.

When word finally came that they were to bring the girl and her mother to the pre-arranged spot in the foothills, young Lucien saw the fear his mother struggled to hide. His father became brusque. His mother asked, “When?”

His father said, “In a few hours,” and turned away to avoid more questions.

It had been a day of low clouds pushed against the wall of mountains—a smuggler’s idea of perfect weather. But now the wind was shifting, and the clouds were thinning. The moon was nearly full and rising early. The path from town, across the river, and into the foothills would be visible to watchers. The occupiers always had watchers.

Lucien was sent to the attic with a package wrapped in cloth. He was told to tell the mother it was for their journey that would begin tonight. Lucien had expected perhaps happiness, or at least, questions. Yet when she heard this news, the mother was silent and expressionless. He said, “I wish you well, and I will miss you both.” He blushed a little at this and added, “We’ll pray for you.”

The mother said, “We are always grateful to you and your family.”

The girl lifted her eyes and said, “I will miss you, too.”

On these dangerous missions, Antoine always went alone. Lucien would sit with his mother until his father crept back into the house. This night would be different. He had heard his father and mother softly but urgently

arguing in the kitchen. He moved closer to hear, but at first didn't realize that he was the subject of their intense conversation. Then he heard his mother say, "I don't want my son in danger!"

"Nor do I!" his father replied sharply. "But the moon will be bright. He will be alone on the path and will not be exposed. He will just be the scout—like I was for my father when I was a boy."

"Your father had only to worry about the police, not soldiers!"

Lucien slowly realized that his father wanted him to help. He was surprised, a little scared, and more than a little proud to be asked to help these people escape. Lucien strode into the kitchen, "I can help and be safe."

In the end, his mother relented. Lucien was to go alone to a spot above the chapel. On the way, he was to stop at Uncle Mathieu's and get a freshly-killed rabbit to take with him. If he ran into German soldiers, he was to produce the rabbit and say he was checking snares for his uncle. If the exchange went well, he would return with his father, and if challenged, say that they had checked traps together. It was forbidden to have meat or game without declaring it to the occupiers, but it was a small offense. The Germans knew that the people were hungry, and that this was a way of life for many.

After picking up the rabbit, he would take the overgrown path that the sheep and goats had used before the war. There were no animals these days. The French army had requisitioned all available meat in the early days of

the invasion. The occupiers had taken what was left. He had a bird call and instructions on how to use it to signal *soldiers by the river*, or *soldiers in the hills*, or *open trail to the chapel*. He was to stay in a lookout perch until his father signaled that their contacts had come down from the mountains and met them at the chapel. The clouds were all but gone. The moon was like a shiny franc coin rising over the mountains.

Lucien used his knowledge of shortcuts to make his way to his uncle's farm, avoiding places with dogs that would bark when he passed. His aunt Marie materialized with a rabbit in a sack and her own muzzled dog. She kissed Lucien's cheek and whispered, "May God watch over you."

Both of the town's bridges would be watched, so he walked downstream to a wide bend that ran shallow and he crossed there. He scrambled quickly up the trail, making good progress. Perhaps twenty minutes above the river, he was jolted by the sound of footsteps coming rapidly down the path toward him. Lucien threw himself into a hollow behind boulders and trees. His breathing seemed so loud. The footsteps passed, and he allowed himself a glance. It was a lone goat! He almost laughed. His heart still pounding, he stood to resume his trek. Then a shot rang out, and another. He was instantly back in a crouch as he heard the goat tumbling downhill and excited voices in German rushing to meet the unfortunate animal.

The soldiers had been walking a path parallel to the stream. Lucien realized that he had narrowly avoided the goat's fate. The excited soldiers lugged the goat down to

share with their comrades in town. The path would soon be clear for his father and the fugitives. He waited for his heart to calm down, but it didn't. He resumed his climb, overwhelmed with fear—for his own safety, his father's safety, and the safety of those with no names.

An hour later, Lucien arrived at The Eagle's Nest, as smugglers had named this spot. The moon now became his ally. Thick brush had blocked any view on the way up, but from this spot, the entire approach was in view. In the moonlight, he saw everything clearly, including a roaring fire by the German encampment, where he imagined the soldiers dressing the goat for the spit. A faint hint of smoke reminded him of his hunger. He removed his bird call and gave a series of long and short trills to tell his father that the path was clear. Three shadows crossed the bright shallows and disappeared in the brush.

Nearly two hours passed before he heard his father's signal. He scrambled down to the chapel. His eyes took a few seconds to discern his father, the mother and daughter, and two rugged, bearded men he had never seen before. Everyone was silent.

The girl gave a nervous smile when Lucien looked at her.

Finally, his father broke the awkward silence with a soft whisper, "Come now. Let them go. The vast mountains and long night lie ahead."

One of the mountain men blocked the doorway as the other stepped out to look around and to listen. Then the man in the doorway silently waved everyone through the door. Lucien and the young girl lingered. Her hazel

eyes caught the moonlight as she turned to him. He gently lifted her hand and kissed it, whispering, “Au revoir—until we see each other again.” She blushed, put her hand on his shoulder and responded, “Au revoir.”

Eight days later, the Germans came for his father at the shop. A neighbor had denounced him. Word quickly reached Lucien and his mother. But by the time they arrived, his father’s blood was on the wall of the *Mairie*—the mayor’s office—in the town center. His body lay in a dark pool.

Just two days later, the Germans were gone, and the townspeople were swift to take revenge on two known collaborators. They were brought to the town center for their justice. The butcher brandished a pistol as the two cowered against the wall of the *Mairie*. When he saw Lucien, the butcher offered the pistol to him to avenge his father. After a pause, Lucien shook his head and implored, “Please, not here. Do not let the blood of these traitors mix in the ground with that of my father.”

Then he took his mother’s hand and led her away. He was surprised to feel nothing when they heard the shots a few minutes later.

Lucien soon quit school and went to work in his grandfather’s shop. It was a year or so before he began transporting relatively innocent contraband into the mountains for his grandfather.

Lucien would often wonder about his father’s sacrifice and if the girl and her mother had survived. No word ever ar-

rived. The old man now wondered aloud, “How strange is this life.” He stood and left the chapel.

As a youth, going down the mountain was easier than the climb up. As an old man, down was more difficult. Yet today the descent passed quickly while he was lost in thought.

The chair on his porch held a basket of apricots resting on a note. Undoubtedly, both were from Jean Marc. The note read, *Everything is fine, but please come as quickly as possible to the farm.* That could only mean that Jean Marc had something special for Cécile’s visit. Maybe it was freshly slaughtered lamb that needed to be cooked right away, to last until Cécile’s arrival. He put down his small leather pack and started the brief walk to Jean Marc’s farm. *Perhaps Jean Marc has gotten a deer.* Venison was a favorite of his and of his daughter’s. *It is the season...*

Letting himself in the gate, Lucien called to Jean Marc’s wife, sitting on the porch, “Bonjour, Marie!” She returned the greeting excitedly. Behind her the door opened, and Jean Marc and an older woman came out onto the porch.

Jean Marc began to introduce the woman, but his voice trailed off as she walked past him down the porch stairs. “I have a thousand questions,” she said, striding toward Lucien.

“And so do I,” Lucien said, beaming as he looked at her eyes. “So do I. The first is: What is your name?”



Artwork by Ruth Hutter

HEPHAESTUS & MERCURY

By Chance Procter
Honorable Mention

The following is a real conversation that happened between the Greek god Hephaestus, lord of the forge, and the Roman god Mercury, messenger of the gods, near the Gulf of Naples in modern-day Italy almost 2,000 years ago. Some words and details of the event are inconsistent among recorded accounts and translations, so this interpretation has been chosen to best represent the appropriate sentiments of the speakers as well as to improve the narrative quality of the story. It should be noted that, although good friends, both gods were speaking in their native tongues and had only a cursory understanding of each other's language. It is also worth adding that some of the more delicate words have been modernized to a contemporary lexicon.

We find our protagonists after dinner on the porch of a 1st Century hostel for magickal travelers.

As the sun set, birds of all size and shape could be seen flocking away. It was still early in the evening ritual, yet the shadows of flying creatures dimmed the landscape as far as either deity could discern. Dark days, indeed.

Finishing his pipe, Hephaestus wondered what message had brought Mercury this far from Olympus. In his seat on the porch of the hostel, he could only see the familiar outline of the messenger's winged helmet against the bright sun setting across the water. As Mercury turned, he caught the look of the blacksmith and, offering a smile, sauntered over to join him in the corner of the porch.

"May I smoke some of your pipe?" he cutely inquired, gesturing to the rather large smoking apparatus Hephaestus had been enjoying.

"For a celebrity such as yourself? Why of course!" The sarcasm in Hephaestus' voice was at just the right level to amuse without insulting. "I have some new stuff Apollo told me he got from Luna, you should like it," he further offered, pulling a pouch from his pocket and reloading the pipe.

Laughing, Mercury only replied "Luna's stuff is over the moon." He gently removed his helmet and set it on the table between them as he watched Hephaestus' hands work. "I take it you are in Italy to visit Aetna?"

"We broke up," was the only clue into the drama given to Mercury before Hephaestus tried to change the subject. "How is your helmet holding up?" he asked briskly.

“Oh, as good as the day you forged it, you know that. Tell me more about the Aetna thing.”

Hephaestus hastily retorted, “She is a fountain of fire, much like the actual fountain I am in Naples to see. That is all I will say on the matter, Mr. Messenger, because I know how you gossip.” Sliding the overfull pipe in front of Mercury, he asked, “Now tell me, what brings you to Naples?”

Pausing to think, peering over his shoulder back towards the setting sun and then again looking at Hephaestus, Mercury picked up the pipe and used the universal hand motion to request a lighter. As Hephaestus produced flame, the blacksmith reiterated, “Alright, Prometheus, tell me why you’re here.” The joke caught Mercury off-guard, who coughed up smoke between chuckles.

Once again composed, the messenger continued to avoid the question. “Did you say that you’re in Naples to see a fountain?”

Releasing a resigned sigh, the blacksmith replied, “Yes, I have heard from Khronos that there would be one here to interest me. He said it would shoot flames from the top and be useful for a project I am working on for Athena. I expect to find it any day now.”

“Fascinating.” Taking a long draw of the pipe, Mercury again peered towards the sunset as he exhaled. The smoke cloud, taking the shape of a bird, appeared to drift over the gulf and join the other birds in flight.

Contemplating Mercury’s demeanor, Hephaestus had a sudden realization. “Are they—have the augurs

taken the auspices? Is that why you're here? The birds?" Hephaestus was now visibly startled and eager for a reply, but the messenger was unwavering in his ambivalence.

"They love me in Italy. They put me on their coins. Winged hat and everything. What more could a god ask for?"

"Mercury!"

"Oh, stop. Of course it's the birds. Look at them! All of the witches agree."

"All...three?"

"All three." Another long pull from the pipe.

If he was startled before, Hephaestus was now downright unsettled. He gestured for the pipe and Mercury obliged without comment. They passed it back and forth for a few silent moments as the sun continued to set.

"How are Larunda and the Lares?" Hephaestus asked, trying to break the silence. He knew Mercury couldn't resist discussing his wife and kids, and the shift in mood was immediately apparent on the messenger's face.

"They're good, they're good," he said, smiling. "Lara is doing some modeling work for a Trojan company and I think she really enjoys it. The kids have been building all sorts of new things and become household gods next year already!"

Mercury appreciated Hephaestus and decided to be upfront about the situation. "Look, there's nothing to be worried about. The omens pointed towards here, the birds agreed, and the witches insisted. I am simply here to

observe and report back to Olympus. You know, that place you're no longer banished from but somehow never seem to visit."

Hephaestus didn't appreciate the jab and, without thinking, responded, "Oh, and has Jupiter finally forgiven you and Lara for that whole thing, too?" As soon as the words left his lips, he regretted them, for the smile quickly left Mercury's face.

"No, no, not yet. She meant well, you know? She's just honest. And I would have delivered her to Pluto but..." Hephaestus knew it was a sore subject as Mercury drifted off.

"Sorry to bring it up. The whole banishment thing, though, I guess I'm still sore, too." The two friends smiled at each other again, knowing the troubles of their personal lives could never outweigh what would soon happen where they were.

"Tell me more about the fountain," Mercury asked.

"Well, see, Athena killed one of those giant evil snakes that she's always on about and another cult popped up to worship her over on Crete. Damned snake wasn't even on the island but whatever. Anyway, long story short, she wants a new chariot to commemorate the occasion and asked me to forge a few parts. Wouldn't be a problem except that she wants it to be completely hex-proof. You know, because of the Loki thing."

"Loki thing?"

"You didn't hear? Messenger of the gods and you missed the memo? You're usually up on all the gossip."

“Is he one of those Vikings?”

Now it was Hephaestus’ turn to choke on the pipe smoke. Placing the pipe back on the table, alternating between choked coughs and chortled giggles, he caught the attention of a server and motioned, indicating a beer. “Not exactly,” was all he could say before the beverage arrived and he cleared his throat.

“Yes, he is one of the Asgardians, but he is not a ‘Viking’ and I’m pretty sure that’s a slur.”

“Well, whatever,” was all Mercury cared to add on that topic. “So this Loki put a hex on one of Athena’s chariots? Wait, was that—did she—the whole Helios thing? That was because of a Viking god!?”

Nodding and smiling, Hephaestus simply stated, “They’re not all savages.”

Mercury started smoking again. He had a lot to consider. “Wait, okay, well, anyways, back to the fountain. What’s wrong with your forge?”

“Nothing’s wrong with it. I just want to make sure her chariot is perfect, you know, to avoid another blackout. And I need a specialized tool, okay?” Hephaestus knew that Mercury knew that Hephaestus knew that Mercury could see right through his defensiveness. It was a part of their dynamic, the back and forth, and although Mercury hoped that his friend would one day settle down as he had, he knew better than to pry too much.

“Fine, fine, it’s fine.” Mercury took a final pull from the pipe before emptying its contents of ash. “It’s casaii’d.”

Finishing his beer already, Hephaestus looked at

Mercury and grinned. "Let's not bicker about women. I can load another pipe, we'll get a round of these beers."

"No, I should go."

"The apocalypse can wait."

"It's not the apocalypse."

"Then you have time."

Mercury stood up, looked down at the blacksmith, the pipe, the empty beer glass, and then towards the setting sun before responding. "Time, time. Why did Khronos tell you about the fountain?"

"Sit down. Why do you care about the fountain so much?" Hephaestus again motioned to the server, this time indicating 2 beers, before pulling the smoke pouch back out.

Taking the pouch from the blacksmith's weathered hands, Mercury admitted, "you pack it too tight. Here, let me." Hephaestus didn't resist as Mercury sat back down.

"It's just not like a titan to have an appreciation of craft supplies," the messenger continued. "Khronos has never demonstrated an interest in forging."

"He can see all of time. He knows when to find something. And he owed me a favor."

"You called in a favor. From the god of time. To impress a girl!?" Mercury had heard some far-flung myths in his day, but this was surprising. "What did you even do to get a favor from Father Time?"

"Doesn't matter what." The beers arrived. "But he owed me, so he told me."

Mercury sipped his drink without response. He

had nothing to say. Khronos didn't give out many of his favors precisely because of how useful they were.

After the sun had set a few more degrees along the horizon, Mercury finally said something.

"Oh, the mountains we climb." He wasn't referring to anything, not to whatever Hephaestus had done to win Khronos' favor, nor to whatever he had done to lose Aetna's, nor even to his own adventure finding whatever the witches had predicted. It was just something to say.

"What did you say?"

"The mountains we climb. You know, like Sisyphus."

"That's not the word you've been using."

"What word?"

"Mountain. You've been saying 'fountain.'"

"You said fountain, Aetna was a fountain of fire—"

"Mountain of fire. She is a mountain of fire, much like the one Khronos told me I could find now in Naples. Wait, did you think I was saying fountain this whole time? How could I forge with a water fountain?"

"It's been a stressful week." Mercury felt silly for the misunderstanding, but it wasn't the first time. For a messenger, his grasp of language had always been tenuous at best, and Hephaestus' soothing voice was easy to get lost in. They both sipped their beer in quiet reflection.

"In any event," Hephaestus eventually said, "there's quite a few mountains in the area and I've been hiking several a day looking for signs of eruption, so, yes, I can literally attest to the mountains we climb, just like Sisyphus."

Mercury released some laughter at this but his at-

tention was clearly elsewhere so Hephaestus continued, “and tomorrow morning I will ascend Vesuvius before lunch. It just erupted, like, 300 years ago, so I’m not expecting much but...” Hephaestus trailed off. It was getting dark.

As the final rays of sunlight passed the edge of the world, the truth dawned on Mercury; the beer was strong and the pipe potent but suddenly he was sure.

“We’re here for the same thing.”

“What?” Hephaestus was visibly confused, even in the twilight.

“Khronos sent you to forge Athena’s chariot in my apocalypse.”

“You said it wasn’t an apocalypse. And that doesn’t even make sense.”

“For someone it will be. And of course it makes sense. You asked Khronos for the most powerful forge available and he pointed you to one. One so powerful, the birds are terrified and the augers are auspicious.” They both considered the consequences of what was being discussed until Mercury continued, “For all we know, Khronos altered the sequences of time to grant your favor and create this whole mess. I hope she’s worth it.” Hephaestus glared back, no longer amused.

“What, exactly, are you implying?” With that utterance, the blacksmith took a long deep breath from the pipe until the burning embers fizzled out and it was once again finished.

“Vesuvius. You just said it. Right next to Pompeii,

which is essentially the center of whatever the birds are fleeing from. If you hike it tomorrow, I would bet all the gold on Olympus it's ready to erupt."

"And you're saying that I caused this by asking Khronos for help?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

Hephaestus picked up his pipe to leave. He took the last gulp of his beer and sullenly looked at his friend's visage, noticing Mercury's sense of existential dread that mirrored Hephaestus' own. Sighing for the second time of the evening, the blacksmith took only two steps away before turning again to address the messenger.

"Meet me here in the morning. You can join me. We can fix this."

Finishing his own beer and collecting his winged helmet, Mercury only responded, "fine."

The next morning, there were no birds. Hephaestus and Mercury discussed their plans over the hostel's version of muesli and yogurt. Before the sun had risen, however, they were overheard by the masked jackal Anubis who was visiting from Cynopolis in Africa. The dark Egyptian had a working relationship with the messenger god and had had chariot parts forged by Hephaestus in the past, so he approached the duo and offered his assistance on their trek. Hoping to gain reputation with the factions of the underworld, especially Pluto, Mercury agreed without Hephaes-

tus' objection.

The hostel's rental camels dropped them off at the base of Mt. Vesuvius, making the approximately 10-kilometer journey in a mere 15 minutes. All three gods peered up the mountain together and began to ascend, cutting through the foliage and overcoming a boulder or three. They quickly reached the access hatch that allowed them entrance to the inner bowels of the volcano.

As Mercury searched for the control room to check its status and shut down eruption protocols, Hephaestus calmly made his way to the lower lava levels. The blacksmith had brought a collection of precious stones and metals in his satchel and only needed the extreme heat of Vesuvius to forge the intricate internal mechanisms of Athena's chariot's driveshaft and transmission. This ensured they could resist any hexes he was familiar with, Viking or otherwise.

Both European deities lost track of their African companion which was rather convenient for the masked jackal.

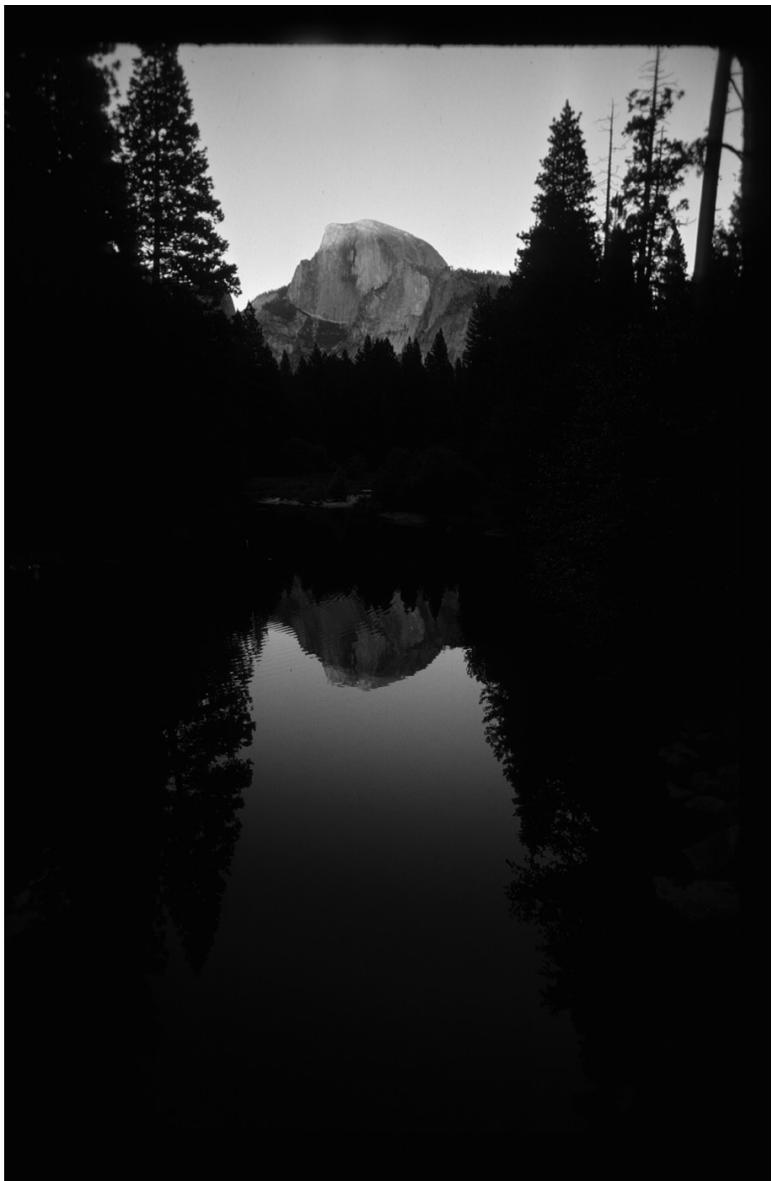
Being less familiar with 1st Century Italian architecture than he would have preferred, Mercury had very little luck finding what he was looking for down the winding hallways and antechambers inside of Mt. Vesuvius. Eventually, he crossed paths with Hephaestus and took a break to watch his favorite blacksmith work. After all, how often did anyone get the chance to see the greatest smith in existence work in a literally apocalyptic-level volcano's heat? The craftsmanship was awe-inspiring.

Together again, they found the control room without ever running into Anubis. They were confident the Egyptian had simply gotten lost in the labyrinth-like catacombs of the mountain and were thus immensely surprised to find an iron ankh irreparably wedged into the crankshaft of the volcano's operative locking wheel. Impossible to remove, the eruption was now inevitable, and Pompeii's fate had been sealed.

A note left at the scene claimed the betrayal represented the ire of all of Egypt, mentioning the burning of a library, some princess "Cleo," and even some misattributed nonsense about someone's Judean aunt, Iochus Ivey. Of course, Mercury assumed it was simply a message to him from Pluto about his wife's debacle with Jupiter. Hephaestus, who had avoided these types of political situations since his own banishment from Olympus, simply shook his head, pocketed the note, and vowed to join Mercury on his quest to report back what they had discovered.

Out of sight, watching them from the shadows as if made of shadow himself, the silhouette of the jackal transformed into a horned Viking helmet. His laughter now indistinguishable to the Greek and the Roman from the ever-louder grumblings of the mountain he had climbed, Loki the Trickster was proud. Not only was he about to wipe Pompeii off of the map, he had switched several of Hephaestus' freshly forged parts for clever but weak duplicates, ensuring Athena's next chariot would be just as vulnerable to his shenanigans as the last. What's more, once word spread around Olympus, even the mightiest ti-

tans would be so preoccupied with the Egyptian conflict that both Greek and Roman pantheons would surely leave Loki's native Scandinavia alone for at least a few more centuries.



Photograph by Stan Kirschner

JUDGE BIO

Shawn P. Killackey was born and raised in Pittsfield, Massachusetts where he earned an Associate & Bachelor Degree in commercial art & illustration. After college, he moved to Orlando, Florida where he lived for 12 years and ended up meeting his future wife, Kim.

In 2001, Shawn & Kim moved to Los Angeles for 4 years before deciding to move to Mundelein, Illinois in order to start raising a family. They have been living in Mundelein since 2005 where they adopted their daughter Nicole in 2006 & their son Marcus in 2012.

In 2009, as a member of the Mundelein Centennial Committee, he was provided the pictures and information he used for writing his book Mundelein. He hopes that this book will show how Mundelein came into being and what it is like to grow up in and be a part of the village that he now calls home.

Shawn is a stay-at-home dad for their two children, gets commissioned often to create artwork, is on the Board of Education for the Fremont School District 79 in Mundelein, a sworn-in member of the Mundelein Historical Commission and has worked part-time at Barnes & Noble for over 13 years.

The Village of Mundelein Arts Commission, established in August of 2016, hosts writing contests for Lake County residents. Winners and Honorable Mentions are featured in issues of the *Mundelein Writes* publication. If you would like copies of the publication or are interested in participating in a future writing contest, please visit the Arts Commission website at: www.mundelein.org/mac for more information, or contact:

Village of Mundelein
Community Development
planning@mundelein.org
(847) 949-3282





Photo: "Cascade Mountain" by josullivan.59