

# FRONTIER

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Wildcard

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# War

by Donnie Denome



We all cheer when it's over.

All except for

the parents who were baking a 'welcome home' cake when they heard,

the brothers and sisters who were out buying beer for the party when they heard,

the spouses who were tidying up the house when they heard,

the children who were making brightly colored drawings in school when they heard,

the admirers who had finally got the courage to make that phone call when they heard,

the lovers who were going to send another angry letter about marriage equality when they heard,

the best friends who were planning the fishing trip of a lifetime when they heard,

the bosses who were waiting for the final draft of the article when they heard,

the listeners who just wanted to hear their favorite radio program when they heard,

the arch-enemies who couldn't bring themselves to cheer when they heard,

the fiancés who were polishing their ring when they heard,

the yoga partners who were doing a sunrise salutation when they heard,

the high-school teachers who were grading papers when they heard,

the soccer coaches who playing goalie for their team when they heard,

the roommates who were finally used to making toast for only one when they heard,

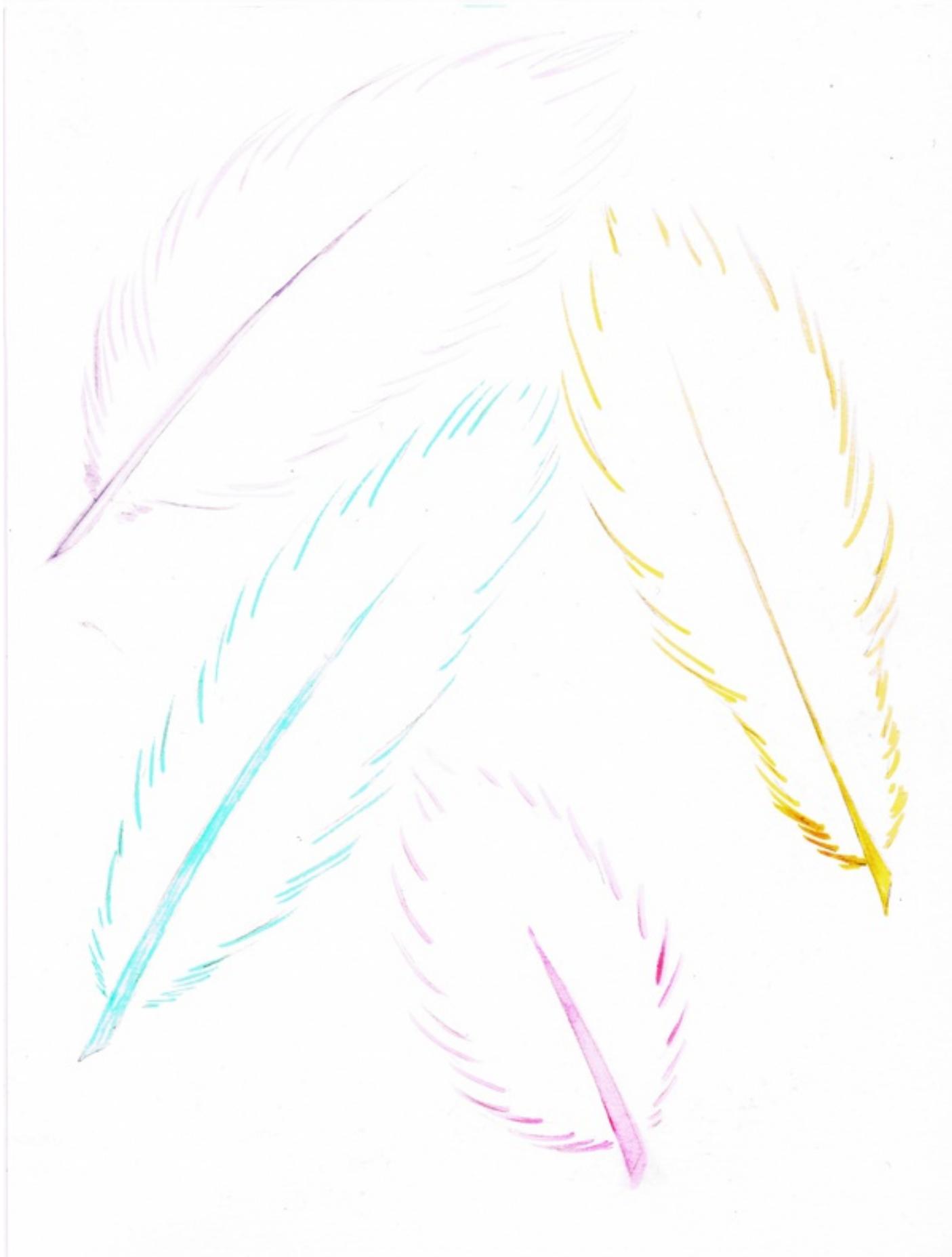
the old colleagues who were reminiscing with their yearbooks when they heard,

the men and women who had to repeat the phrase,

"I'm sorry. They were killed in action."

over and over again.

who all cry in their little corners and know that it'll never be all right again.



**Plumes**  
by Elena Kamas

# Weather, Under The

by Kellyann Ye

Penny knows she's sick mostly because it's raining. It always rains when she gets sick, almost always on accident.

She snuffles and clicks the window open with a snap of her fingers. Which, strictly she shouldn't be doing, because even though there isn't a Wizarding Ministry, there is a Magician's Guild, and they are pretty focused on not letting the general populace know that magic does kind of exist.

But she wants to know how bad the sickness is, and since she can check the city's weather and know, she might as well take advantage of it.

It's a mopey sort of rain, the kind that dribbles down gutters and clogs them with leaves and candy wrappers and old parking tickets. It's just a little stronger than the pretty misty kind that leaves you soaked without noticing if you stay out for too long, so she knows it's going to be a horrible week at least.

Bartley swoops in, knocking his black-feathered head on the doorframe because he likes to pretend he's tall. "Penelope," he starts, the way he always does when something of no interest at all has happened and he wants to bother her, but then he interrupts himself to say, "You look like something I wouldn't pick up off the streets."

"Gross, Bart," mumbles Penny, stifling a cough as she rolls over and tangles her legs in the sheets. "You're a crow, not a magpie."

"Hey, I just happen to like shiny things," Bartley ruffles his back feathers in fake nonchalance, adding, "It's not my fault there's no exchange rate between leaves and any type of human money."

"That's because leaves are worth absolutely nothing and you know it."

"Shush, you're delirious," says Bartley. "I'm going to close that window you so foolishly opened and then leave before you burn down the house."

"It's not going to burn down because it's raining," Penny means to say, but then somehow she's got her face mashed into her pillow and it's too much effort to lift her head.

Bartley keeps prattling as he glides over to the window and tugs it closed, "Remember that time when you were twenty-two and you got pneumonia? It snowed for two weeks in the middle of May and the entire school system was messed up." There's a hint of a proud smile in his voice as he adds, "The mayor tried to see you to complain, but you tried to make him go away and turned his tie into a live squirrel."

"It was an accident," mumbles Penny, but the mention of alive things reminds her that she has duties other than to her city. "Bart, can you make sure Bertha, Fred, and Henry are watered before you go? And Margret needs to be fed – I think the crickets are in the microwave from last night."

"Oh yeah, sure, sure, leave all the

plant care to the crow," mutters Bartley as he dives out of the room, but there's an undertone to it that means he doesn't really mind.

Penny rolls back over and drapes the covers over her head, snorting and sniffing in an attempt to clear her nasal passageways. It goes less than well, so she resigns herself to breathing through her mouth and fogging up the air under the thick blanket her coverlet had suddenly become.

She only means to close her eyes for a little while, but she must have fallen asleep, because she's woken (rather rudely, she thinks) by pounding on her door that implies that the occupant of her front step has been there for a while, and intends to stay there until the house burns down or the door opens.

Penny flails, coughs, and falls out of bed with a thump. A thump that is apparently clearly audible to the occupant of her front step, which turns out to be Maggie from the library, when her voice bursts through the door and shoots up the staircase, "Hello? Penny, are you alright?"

Oh buggering poodles.

It had been mostly an accident that Mr. Stevenson's tie had turned into an actual, live squirrel that one time, but not completely. Penny lost control of her magic when she got sick just like any other magician. It was something about how her brain was occupied trying to fight off the sickness and therefore

temporarily couldn't be bothered to deal with the little matter of controlling her magic.

It wasn't like she lost all control of it and went back to being three years old and magicking the greengrocer's wedding cake into her kitchen because she wanted something sweet to eat and couldn't quite reach the cookie jar. She had control of her magic, just not ... fine motor control. Like she could walk, just not necessarily in a straight line. Or for more than say, two minutes.

Which was all a long way to say that she really shouldn't be around non-magic people while she was sick because things might happen that would require her to move out of the city and also wipe the memories of every single person in the city.

"Penny?" Except Maggie was still there, and measures had to be taken.

She could pretend not to be there, except Maggie had already heard her fall out of bed, and probably heard her try to scramble back in, so that wasn't really an option. She could fall asleep again and say that she'd meant to get up but had fallen asleep again before she'd gotten around to it the next time she saw Maggie, which would get her out pretty much scot-free. Or, because she was going to go through all of the possibilities, not just stop at the best one, she could let Maggie in. But she kind of really liked Maggie, and if Maggie came in she would really not like Penny back. In any way, shape, or form. Which was in two words, not good.

So she tries to fall asleep, she really does.

But there must be some small (or maybe, she doesn't want to admit, a not so small) part of her that wants Maggie to see her house and what

she really is, just to see what would happen.

(After all, Maggie was the city's head librarian. She spent her time trying to convince small children that magic was pretty much real. If anybody could deal with the rather large and inconvenient idea of Penny is actually magic, it would be her.)

Which was why Penny couldn't fall asleep, even after Maggie had fallen silent. But Penny could tell she was still there, because her rock on the map of the city, this pretty sparkly one that was kind of black and gold, was sparking with proximity.

Penny finally gives in, shoves her feet into slippers and slumps her way downstairs, tripping over Henry's new vine and jostling several star charts into disorder as she passes. As long as the crickets aren't in the microwave and Maggie doesn't go into her bedroom, she should be fine.

She opens the door.

"Oh, Penny, you look terrible," says Maggie when she sees her. But then she stutters over her words in embarrassment, "oh no, I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that, you're really pretty, but have you been eating? Or drinking? Or sleeping? Oh no, did I wake you? I'm really sorry, I was just really worried and I – I brought you some soup, but it's gone cold, I can warm it up for you if you want, it's not any trouble at all."

She stops abruptly, without looking at all like she was out of breath and breaks into a tiny, hopeful smile. Penny definitely doesn't find that cute. Of course not. Because denial is a thing.

Penny opens her mouth to say –

she's not sure what she'll say, because on the one hand she's a full-fledged magician and she can heat soup with a snap of her fingers, but on the other hand she's sick, so that might work out less than well, and on the third hand she kind of wants to see Maggie's reaction to the house. As an experiment, she tells herself, because she's never let another non-magician see the inside of her house.

(Other magicians have, she knows, like that guy, Finn Whatsisname, in New York, but he was a special case. His familiar was a cat. Much easier to disguise.)

But luckily, in this scenario at least, she's lost her voice sometime between ordering Bartley to water the plants and waking up again, and when she goes to speak nothing comes out.

Maggie, apparently, takes this as a sign that Penny is too ill to do anything, and goes inside.

Maggie's polite about bursting into Penny's house, but she's also surprisingly forceful about it. "Alright," she says when she's toed off her shoes and dumped her purse-cum-satchel onto the hall table, "alright. Penny, go sit on the sofa or something, I mean, if you want. But. I'll heat up some soup for you, and then go away again."

And now Penny's really glad she can't speak, because it keeps her from saying something stupid like, "Don't ever go away." As it is, she makes a bit of a mumbling noise she hopes comes off as an affirmative, and then coughs.

"Your apartment is really nice," says Maggie, and Penny freezes in terror, not relaxing even when Maggie continues, "Are you into astrology? I really like your star

Cont. >

charts.”

The couch is scratchy, and mustier than she remembers, but it’s pretty soft, and once she’s sat there for a while, it’s relatively warm, too. She rests her head on the back of the sofa and listens to Maggie pattering around in the kitchen. It’s really domestic, she thinks, and then wishes she hadn’t thought it.

Maggie pokes her head out of the doorway to the kitchen to ask where the pots are, and Penny almost absentmindedly tells Henry to show her. But that wouldn’t do, so she mumbles something that sounds like, “Dishwasher,” before turning to squint blearily at Henry in his new brown pot on the kitchen counter and gurgle, “No.”

Maggie comes out later with chickn noodle soup, the kind with elbow noodles that isn’t from the store in a bowl on a tray, along with a glass of water and another glass of orange juice. “Did you know some of your plants move by themselves?”

Penny chokes on her sip of orange juice, which recovers her voice enough for her to say, “Ye – no. They shouldn’t.”

Maggie laughs, and Penny’s going to be super stereotypical and cliched here and say it was a tinkling sort of laugh, but regardless of poor descriptors, it was a really pretty laugh, and Penny kind of really likes

it. “Oh no, don’t worry, it was really nice. It showed me where the pots were.”

Penny doesn’t ask, or (in her opinion) do anything at all that would encourage Maggie to stay, unless gurgling helplessly and pretending not to know that the entire apartment is full of magic is bodice-rippingly sexy, but Maggie does. Sits down in the armchair with a book (Penny peeks while she tries not to slurp her soup. It’s *The Once and Future King*) and unfolds a pair of thick-rimmed reading glasses and everything.

This is still really, really domestic, Penny’s mind reminds her, and she sort of doesn’t imagine the possibilities, because she keeps sniffing as she eats, and that is probably the singularly most unattractive thing a person can do, right up there with breathing through a mouthful of half-chewed food. Which she is also doing.

Which is when she remembers to wonder where Bartley is. She gives up that train of thought almost as soon as it starts, because the possibilities are endless and it takes too much energy, or at least more than she can spare right now, between eating soup without sounding like a heathen and very carefully not glancing at Maggie reading a book every so often.

Maggie leaves when Penny’s finished the soup and is curled on

the armchair watching *Orange Is the New Black* on Netflix nursing her glass of orange juice with a straw. But she takes the rest of the tray to the kitchen, and by the sounds of it, washes it and dries it, and puts it away, because she is some sort of amazing human being.

“I’ll see you soon?” asks Maggie as she leaves in what Penny thinks is a hopeful tone, though that might (probably is) just her projecting.

Penny nods, empathetically.

“Awesome,” says Maggie, her hopeful little smile widening to show her gums. Then she goes, waving to Henry when he waggles a green-striped leaf at her, and closing the door carefully after herself. The apartment seems really empty once she’s gone, the muted noise of the television doing little to help ease the silence.

Bartley chooses about then to jet down the stairs in a steep dive, pulling to a screeching stop half an inch from Penny’s face. She doesn’t flinch, because it’s been seventeen years since she’d started her apprenticeship in the Guild, and she’s gotten used to it.

“You’re a complete sap,” says Bartley, smirking, “Absolutely head-over-heels.”

“Shut up,” says Penny in return, by which she means, “I know.” She smiles a little bit to herself just thinking about it.



# Taken

by Desmond Kamas



The room is empty  
It is filled with hate and sorrow  
With horror

Her gloves hold the frame of a polaroid camera  
She fills the room with light  
her momentary exultation broken only  
by the click of the shutter

His hair is as messy as he always left it  
His teeth as clean  
Beard trimmed, nails clipped

His clothes are the exception.  
He never wore red.

She leaves the camera on the floor.

She always hated photos  
how people dressed up for simulated events  
their emotions hidden behind  
smiling masks

She smiles as she exits.

And at least now,  
Life had been captured.



# What Remains

by Clem Chou

# This Is The Day

by Kellyann Ye



This is the day she loses him.

The train clatters out of the station on shining tracks to a shining city seven hours away – seven lightyears away for all she will be able to follow it, the steam from its exit billowing up behind it and obscuring the clock faces welded onto the station nameplates.

Even so, she knows she will remember this moment forever, or at least, for long enough that she will forget a time when this moment didn't haunt her, and that will be almost the same thing.

Seven twenty-three in the morning, on a crowded station platform in the middle of the city, lost in the smoke and sound of the train pulling out even though there is no way the train can be louder than the roar of the milling crowd.

This is the day he disappears from her life and tears a sizable chunk of her out with him.

She knows it's seven twenty-two because the train stopped boarding at seven eighteen and her ticket swiped through the turnstile at seven twenty.

"Hey, write me, yeah?"

A brief hesitation, where she isn't quite sure she heard him right, then, "Of course."

He flashes her that slant of a smile, the one that first made her look at him across a crowded room for the second time, the one that made her introduce herself to him at the afterparty, the one that she said yes to when he asked her to

lunch.

"You'll write back, right?" she asks, despite herself, because there's still a tiny, desperate part of her that's afraid he won't.

"Always," he says, and then he's on the train and gone.

She doesn't write him letters, in the end.

She doesn't write him because that never happened. They were never the people to write each other letters, never the sort that really talked. But they'd gone to lunch together once, and she keeps finding herself glancing over at him when he enters a room, keeps catching him sneaking looks at her when she leaves.

What happens, that first day, is this:

She wakes up on the fourteenth of June at precisely seven and falls out of bed with the blankets tangled around her legs and her alarm clock silent and fear beating a frantic tattoo against the inside of her chest. It doesn't matter the year, because from here on out this will happen every year, every single fourteenth of June until she dies or forgets the significance of this date, and honestly the first is more likely.

Up until the night before she wasn't going to do anything, but then she thinks, forces herself to properly think about how life would be like without him, and finds it a more than a little bit unbearable. So she tears out of bed to the train station, elbows her way

to the front of the line shouting something about true love, because even if it's not that – and it isn't, she knows it's not, even if she believed in love she knows that's not what this is – somehow she doesn't think she'd know how to go about her life without him in it.

And miraculously the line parts and she gets a ticket and doesn't check the time because that would just waste precious seconds and no matter what, what happens happens, and hopefully for a reason.

She's never wanted to believe that more.

Her heart is rising in her chest, beating so hard it hurts, and she's never felt like this before, so alive, so certain that for once the universe will work out however she wants it to because even if she doesn't know what she wants to happen, some higher power must know, because nothing's worked out for her before, and if just this once whatever happens would make her happy, then she'll stop sniping about it for the rest of her life.

But she bursts out of the row of turnstiles onto the station platform just too late, just as smoke and steam burst up in a cloud from the tracks and the train squeals away in a shower of sparks like a lightning storm.

And suddenly everything goes grey, melodramatically, like when you've been staring up at the sun with your eyes closed for too long, and when you open your eyes again

Cont. >

it seems like a cloud's passed over the sun even though it hasn't.

Except she hasn't blinked, won't blink, because blinking would erase the image she has of him in his coat and scarf despite the heat pulling himself up the stairs to the train car with the handrail so he could go faster, because nothing's ever fast enough for him, pulling himself inside and disappearing forever.

And in a film the soundtrack would change here (in a film the girl would get the guy and it would turn out that they were meant for each other all along) but in a film the cacophany of the station would die down until all the audience could hear would be the sombre, slowing

pulse of her heart and the rising pitch of the train leaving.

But this isn't a film, and the train leaves, and suddenly she can barely hear it over the hubbub of the the crowd and she's never hated large groups of people so much before, because somehow it seems like if she could only hang on to the sound of his train leaving she'd have a chance of hanging onto him.

Except she doesn't, because the noise of the crowd and the surrounding conversations are drowning out the noise of the train, erasing it from her memory as fast as it arrived, and she almost cries but doesn't at the last moment, because she's lost something

important, but by god her dignity isn't going to go with it.

She stands on the station platform for the rest of the day, numb, her hands langing loosely at her sides and sweat staining the back of her t-shirt, staring at the exit of the station, never turning her head even as trains pull in and she is jostled from side to side by passengers embarking and disembarking.

When the announcement for the last train of the night comes, she watches it go in her unfocused vision and then walks alone out of the swinging station doors.





put the paper down and frowned.

"Looks like your duck problem is bigger than you thought," Joe remarked.

"This is about the highway. It's got to be."

"The new highway?"

Tony gulped down more watery coffee and nodded slowly. Something was beginning to tug at his fishing line. He gripped the pole and began reeling it in. His mind was churning.

"Mayor Gordon's pushing for construction. I heard FETA's filing a lawsuit," he revealed.

The duck lawsuit. Only legal busybodies knew about it, really. Some hidden political machine was keeping it out of the papers. FETA was an animal rights activist group that had been raising protests against the highway for months. The concrete monster, they argued, would plow right through sacred summer duck habitat. In the deep end of the ocean, the great white sharks of commerce peered irately at the scrambling activists. The construction company was rumored to be providing a large sum for the mayor's endorsement, but FETA's lawsuit was a bane, a steel trap around the bait. However shrimplike they appeared compared to the great whites circling menacingly above, FETA and its precious ducks had some serious teeth. The mayor was caught in the middle.

"Reelection is next year," Joe commented, absently rubbing his chin. "The highway's a big deal. This could make or break him."

Tony's eyes narrowed as he downed the rest of his lukewarm coffee. He was certain he had hooked the right man and motive.

Now, to reel the catch in and net it, he needed the method.

Bzzzzzt. Bzzzzzt. Tony yanked the vibrating device out of his pocket, glanced at the screen, and pressed it to his ear.

"Ms. Bowers?" he answered.

"Yes, um—Detective Powell, I just remembered something."

"What?"

"You asked if Daisy had left my yard recently. I took her out for a walk at the park two days ago."

Who the hell walks a duck? Tony thought to himself.

"Great. Good to know. Did you notice anything there?" he asked.

"Nothing suspicious. We were by the duck pond. I wanted her to socialize."

Tony almost rolled his eyes.

"That all?" he asks.

"Yes. That's all I can remember."

"Alright, thanks."

"No problem."

Tony said goodbye and hung up.

He patrolled down the gravel pathway. Adjusting his darkened aviator shades, he strolled unhurriedly around the rippling mirror in the center of the park as the cool afternoon breeze drifted past him. He eyed a scowling young man that was standing on the banks and tossing spongy white scraps toward the pond from a plastic bag. Tony seated himself on a bench some distance away, observing unnoticed. This was no ordinary cooing duck feeder. The ducks were barely gathering, and the supposed duck feeder hardly seemed eager to attract any more. And the most peculiar thing—the gloves. White latex gloves. The kind that starts to feel rather disgustingly moist inside

when you sweat. It was a summer afternoon, probably 80 degrees out. Who wears gloves on a day like this? And to feed ducks? Either this guy was some nutjob, or he really didn't want to touch the bread.

Tony got up and drifted inconspicuously over.

"Hey," he spoke from behind.

The young man jumped and whipped around, surprised.

"W-What do you want?"

Tony got a good look at the face. This was just a kid. 18 or 19 years old, he estimated. He glanced at the left forearm. There was a curious mark, barely a few days old by the slight red swelling and fresh-looking black ink. Tony recognized the local gang symbol.

"Just saw you feeding the ducks and was wondering if I could toss a few?" he said disarmingly. He nodded at the bread bag.

The kid stared at Tony, glanced down at the bag, and then at Tony's bare hands.

"Uh—I—I don't have much left. Sorry."

"No problem. I just haven't done it in ages." Tony offered an assuaging grin. He took out a pack of cigarettes and offered one to the kid, who declined. Tony shrugged and lit one for himself. Wary of the older stranger standing next to him, the duck feeder resumed tossing the remainder of the bread pieces into the water. Smoking was a nasty behavior, and Tony detested it wholeheartedly. It was just useful on the job sometimes. The smoke began to trail off the end of the paper tube, but he never put it between his teeth. He watched the orange flame at the tip as he lowered it and dropped it on the ground. Using his shoe, he gently rolled it,

still burning, toward a fallen lump of bread. Seconds later, the bread began to char.

The pungent garlic-like odor was immediate and unmistakable. As Tony unclipped the hidden set of handcuffs from the phone case hooked to his belt, he turned to the jittery kid next to him.

“Mind telling me just why there’s arsenic in that bread?”

The room was empty except for a long metal table and three chairs. Marcus shifted and fidgeted in one, looking a little haggard and shaky from a few solitary hours in a Tristate Police Station holding cell. Technically, Tony couldn’t make legal arrests, but his buddies down at the station were rather interested in meeting the duck killer. Marcus was only one of a team of hired mercenaries in the duck war. It was a local gang. Tony had figured that much out at the park, from Marcus’s forearm tattoo. Though

he was new to the gang, Marcus knew surprisingly plenty. Still, it wasn’t until half an hour later and a bail offer that he spilled the facts.

“The Mayor.”

Tony looked up immediately.

“Mayor Gordon talked to your gang?”

Marcus nodded quickly.

“What did he want?”

“A solution. He came and said he wanted to get the highway built—it’s how he planned to get reelected next year. But he didn’t want to deal with all the legal schmutz with the ducks in the way and FETA on his back. He just wanted the issue dealt with quickly.”

“So what’d he do then?”

Marcus’s eyes barely flickered.

“Well, it’s pretty simple,” he replied. “He wanted to get rid of the problem, so he started getting rid of the ducks.”

Tony blinked incredulously at

the young man.

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*“Is that all?” asks the discussion director. Tony dips his chin once. The therapist writes a little note on his clipboard. Tony doesn’t wonder what it is.*

*“What happened to the mayor?” the nurse demands.*

*“Convicted and removed from office.”*

*A series of harrumphs and mbms rippled around the circle.*

*Tony grins.*

*Of course, the most obvious solution isn’t guaranteed to be the best. A logical answer turns out absurd. The greatest crimes are committed for the most ridiculous reasons. As a private investigator, Tony Powell’s job is to uncover the truth. And sometimes, the truth makes no sense.*



# In Blue (You Look So Good)

by Kellyann Ye

“Tina, why did you color in this part of the dinosaur black? If you read the directions, which I’m sure you did, because everything else is done correctly, you would have known to color it sky blue.”

Mrs. Oglethorpe’s face is stern, and her eyes are brown and angry.

Tina, who is five years old and sitting in her chair with her legs crossed at the knees and crossed again at the ankles like she’s trying to make herself as small as she can be, doesn’t respond, only twists her fingers into an approximation of her legs.

“Why are you asking her this? You already know what’s going on. There are thousands of books on the subject.” Tina’s father, Mr. Burton, menacing in his slate grey suit despite being crammed in a desk meant for a kindergartener.

“Please, calm yourself, Mr. Burton. I assure you I know what I’m doing. Yes, SPCB is the most likely reason, but it never hurts to double check, to make sure it wasn’t just an accident.” Mrs. Oglethorpe reaches into her desk, picks out two crayons, with black and sky blue printed in tiny colors on their jackets.

She turns back to Tina, softening her voice into the one she uses during story time, when all of the students race to sit next to their friends on the Rainbow Rug. “Can you point to the black crayon, please?”

Tina bites her lip, untwists her

fingers, and points.

Mrs. Oglethorpe looks at the crayon in her left hand, with the words sky blue printed too small for Tina to read, and smiles back at Tina, “Very good, Tina. Thank you, Tina and Mr. Burton. That’s all, I look forward to seeing you in class on Monday.”

“Yes, Mrs. O,” says Tina in a reedy whistle of a voice, and trails out of the classroom after her father.

This is why crayons have the names of their color printed real small in the bottom left-hand corner of their paper jackets:

Humans, homo sapiens, are born into the world having a soulmate. This was discovered following investigation into the theory of separation, the name that is now given to the idea that humans were put into the world as half of a whole, and that at some point earlier in time, something changed so that those two halves were introduced into the world separately, and thus spend their entire lives searching for their other half.

From the time of their birth, until they first meet that soulmate, any specific homo sapiens will be unable to see a certain color, most often blue, brown, or green. Recent studies conducted by professors from many prodigious universities suggest that this is due to the color of the eyes of the soulmate, as there is a strong correlation between the

two events.

This specific type of temporary color-blindness, named in the medical field as SPCB, or Soulmate Pattern Color-Blindness, does not usually manifest itself until schooling begins, around four to five years of age, when colors become a more often used part of an individual’s daily life. It has not been shown to have any detrimental effects on infants’ ability to learn and recognize their environment.

Other recent studies show that in place of shades and tints of that specific color, individuals will instead see in shades and tints of black, namely differing hues of grey, until they encounter their soulmate. And of course, SPCB has been proven to disappear upon meeting with one’s soulmate, as the majority of coupled adults can view the entire color spectrum.

Regulated testing is carried out beginning in kindergarten and first grade, depending on the school district, and all results are carefully recorded and filed away.

Tina is sixteen when she moves for the fourth time in as many years, sixteen when she sits down at her desk for her first day in English and another girl sits down by her moments later.

The girl has grey eyes, Tina notices, because that’s the first thing she notices, the first thing anybody notices when they meet someone new. And it’s impolite to stare, but

everybody's eyes flick up to look in the eyes of the other person when they meet, but somehow Tina has managed to go sixteen years without ever meeting the other person's eyes when she does so.

But she looks up again, just to check, because grey could mean blue, flicks a look up at the other girl from under her eyelashes while keeping her head bent towards her paper, and the girl is looking back. Not even making an attempt to hide her stare. Just looking.

"...hi," whispers Tina, because suddenly she can't look away from the other girl, can't look away from her eyes or the way her blonde hair falls down her back in ringlets, how she's alarmingly pretty even without makeup and she knows

that because one of the girl's other friends was remarking about that as class started.

And suddenly her breath has caught somewhere in her chest and there's a hollow sort of feeling bubbled at her sternum, hollow with anticipation, she thinks. Tina gives a little smile and half a wave.

"Hi," says the other girl, waving properly back. "I'm Sophie."

"Tina," says Tina, and fights the urge to glance at Sophie every few minutes for the rest of the class.

It doesn't happen all at once, doesn't even happen fast enough for Tina to notice, but suddenly one day, she opens her crayon box and none of them look the same. She pours them out into a giant, waxy pile on her bed, just to check.

Then she lines them up on the floor, just to check again.

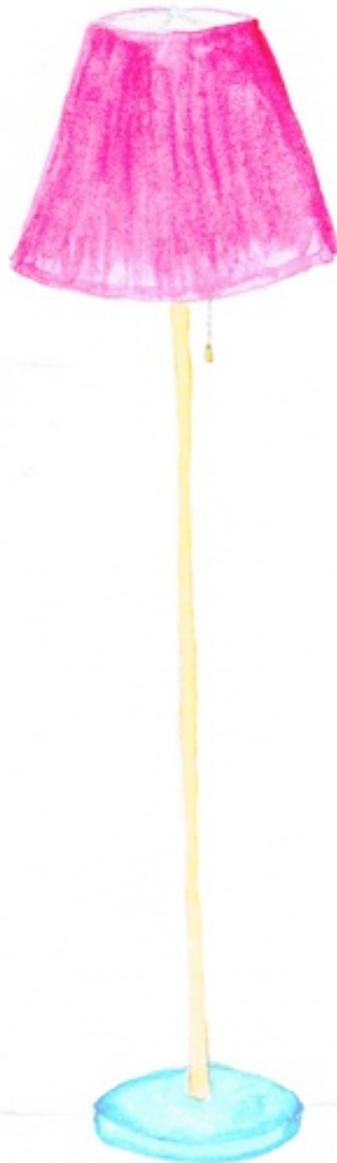
Still, none of them match.

This is why schools no longer have assigned seating alphabetically by last name anymore:

Studies have shown that, despite not being able to describe any aspect of one's soulmate conciously, other than the now obvious eye color of their soulmate, individuals are subconsciously drawn to their other halves.

There is little concrete evidence of this, but there have been enough coincidences that the majority of the population regards it as fact.





# Enlightenment

by Elena Kamas