



# The La Salle Academy Literary Magazine

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<i>Editor in Chief</i>	::	Steven Dumeng
<i>Managing Editor</i>	::	José Victor Duran
<i>Fiction Editor</i>	::	Yamil Sanchez
<i>Poetry Editor</i>	::	Carlos Flores
<i>Essay Editor</i>	::	Amador Mosso
<i>Art Director</i>	::	Jadyn Davis
<i>Illustrator</i>	::	José Gonzales

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### **“Origins” by Humair Ahmed**

In the beginning  
Were animals and jinns,  
Though no one knew  
Which was which.

Bored and greedy demons  
Formed an artefact of themselves,  
Which they then corrupted,  
Or became corrupted  
Through its own accord.  
The record’s never clear.

Hide the summoning key  
In a pyramid on the moon,  
A jinn told another jinn,  
And keep its true location secret  
From everyone but me.

Dark matter from the moon  
Found by humans  
Who have no use of it.

January 4th is the earthly anniversary  
Of the day two thousand jinns died  
To save the humans  
Who have no clue  
How close they came to death.

### **“Life” by José Gonzales**

Life is a beautiful experience.  
But every experience is an episode.  
There are different personalities to meet,  
New things to learn.  
People lie around like leafs in a windy autumn day,  
Waiting to be moved.  
But then there are people who work like ants.  
Life is like a gum machine filled with many experiences to enjoy.  
Life is life and no one can change it.

## “Sleep” by Carlos Flores

Someone told me that when a person distances himself from others, his brains begin to crave that attention again. It finds new ways to stimulate itself, creating its own stimuli to return to its equilibrium.

The first month of this coronacation was fine. I slept eight or more hours a day. After the first month I found myself in these crazy dreamscapes. The first of these vivid dreams occurred about five or six weeks after the lockdown started.

I’m in an empty room nothing like mine. The walls are yellow and it reeks of piss inside. There are no windows. The only thing near me is a cable and a metal cot with a white blanket so thin, it’s practically see-through. I walk over to the white metal door at the other side of the room. When I touch the door the whole room freezes like a cold alternative to hell. I’m shivering. I go back to the metal cot and attempt to sleep some more. Despite the chills, the icicles, the cot as soft as a medieval torture device, I feel oddly comfortable. And then the door bursts open and on the other side is a dark place completely void of light. A woman appears in the doorway, staring at a point above my head. I stare at her. Time stands still for hours. Then all of a sudden her body violently twitches as if she’s having a seizure. Her legs move like a horse’s. She runs straight at me, still keeping her eyes on that point as if she doesn’t even notice I’m there. I move to the side but her body runs into me. She jumps on me like a predator to its prey, striking me and biting. My body is wet with blood. But I don’t feel a thing. I know I will die if she keeps cutting me open. My hands search for something under the bed. I feel the cable in my fingers. I whack her on the side, barely connecting. She suddenly gets off and disappears back into the black void.

When I awoke, my body ached as if I had actually been attacked and bitten up by someone whose teeth felt like fangs on my skin. Yet when I looked at my skin it had no marks, no sign of any attacker. I could still feel her cold teeth on my skin. I shook, and naturally, like any sane person, I cried. What I felt the most was guilt. But why? Why guilt? I had no idea who the woman was or why she so fixed on that point above the metal cot on the yellow wall.

I didn’t go back to sleep after this. I couldn’t end up in that room again only to feel as though I had been there the whole time. I became a prisoner of sleep. I couldn’t let myself fall back to sleep. I couldn’t go back to that room again. I might not survive.

I resorted to small naps throughout the day, never longer than an hour at a tie. I wouldn’t let my body enter the REM cycle because then I would dream. I couldn’t let anyone worry about me so I just pretended to be asleep anytime someone would walk into the room. To my family it appeared I was getting the best sleep of my life, twelve hours every night. I slept maybe a third of that, though. At any rate, they got worried about me. Anytime I left my bedroom there would be constant questioning as to why I slept so much. A constant “are you okay?” Yes, I appreciated the concern, but I just didn’t ever feel like bringing up my fear of sleep. I didn’t want to be told, “It’s because you don’t believe in God,” or “It’s because you don’t pray before you go to sleep,”

or as my mom would say whenever I had nightmares as a child, “Es porque no te persinas.” The answer to me was not that simple. I just needed to wait for time to pass and it would all be over. I didn’t have to rely on some being to do the work for me.

Eventually I got so bored of being home that I went out on runs. It stopped the barrage of questions I got whenever I went left my bedroom to eat something. Running also stopped me from sleeping. Each time I went out the fresh air on my skin freshened my thoughts and the quieter atmosphere because of the coronavirus helped me just think. I could run forever. Something about constantly being on the move gave me a sense of safety. There were two cons of constant running: My body was always tired, and soon it was crying for sleep, for an escape from the escape. The second con was that my mom started to question other things. “Que pasó con esa chica con la que estabas hablando?” I didn’t want to talk about it. I didn’t want to talk about how much “esa chica” had hurt me, not even with her.

On each run I saw a man at the train station that was closest to my house. One man who went down the stairs in a haste. Where was he going? Was he going to be with his family? Or to see his mistress one last time before he couldn’t leave the house anymore? Maybe he was going to work. The big thought after seeing this man was how badly I wanted to be him. How badly I wished that I could turn back time before all this and just run down those stairs and take the E two stops over to Jamaica–Van Wyck like I did the week before when I dropped her off at her house. I wished I could get off there and take her to that corner again just so she could say, “Just this far, if my mom sees us she’ll kill me.” I so badly wanted to be there again.

Yeah, she was special and she made me happy, but sadness is joy’s shadow, never far behind. I’d let her talk to me on her own time even though I never actually got an explanation as to why I didn’t get an explanation. Then again, I never asked for one.

On my last run before I gave up on exercise for the rest of coronacation I got home and I felt a pain in my legs only describable as a bunch of needles being pierced into my leg slowly but unrelentingly. So I guessed it was time to put my body to rest. I bought some ice and did my best to fill the bathtub with the two ice bags from the bodega. The iciness was relaxing, and somehow I just fell asleep.

The room suddenly wasn’t a room. I was outside. A green field and blue sky. The peace I felt was like nothing I had ever felt in my entire life. The way the wind blew on my skin. The way the grass grumbled in my fist. Everything smelt like it was new, as if it had just been born. To my left sat an old man. He was clearly waiting for something or someone.

“Do you want a cookie?” he asked me.

I stuck my hand out and took the cookie out of the pack that he held out.

“You know it’s rude not to talk to people?”

“Uh, sorry I...”

“I’m messing with you, no need to be a bore, laugh a little.”

“What are you doing?” I asked curiously as I reached for another cookie.

“I’m waiting,” he said. His voice lowered.

“What for?”

“I don't know yet.”

“Well how do you know something's coming?”

“I just know, what are you waiting for?”

“What?”

“Well, you wouldn't be here just relaxing if you didn't know something was coming.”

As he said this a storm from the far east rolled in. This big gray smoke that shot loud bolts of thunder. It was so loud it made me shake. I got up and tried to leave, and upon getting up the old man grabbed my hand and said, “No te vayas.”

“But the st—”

“Stay, don't run away from it.”

“But we're gonna get wet!” I screamed

“A little water never killed anybody,” the old man said.

So I sat back down and the old man warmly put his hand on my shoulder and we watched the storm cloud slowly approach us. When it got over us there was one last strike of thunder almost right in front of us. It was bright and extremely loud, but I was calm. At the last strike the storm went away, and the blue sky was back except now, there were birds in the sky flying over us and the wind came to a steady end. The man got up. “Be well,” he said as he departed.

When I woke up I was still tired but the clock said only a minute had passed. The dream felt much longer than that, as if I had spent hours waiting for something that was never going to come. I cleaned the bathroom, and I went to sleep that night hoping to dream about the old man again and his green field. I didn't dream at all that day, or the day after that. I still didn't speak to anyone. A few days later I picked up the phone and called her. When she didn't pick up I got what I needed, I felt relieved. I felt suddenly okay if she no longer wanted to be part of my life — I was glad I was part of hers for as long as I could. And then I took a nap.

**“By the Bay” by Daniel Angel**

steep hills you'll climb forever  
never left to rest  
the fog rolls in, however  
from somewhere further west

but the fog is nice to see  
and the salty odor of the bay  
stays to comfort me  
after the fog's away

the skies clear a beautiful blue  
the red bridge shines golden  
a beauty stands by its crew  
a story best unspoken

a ring from the cable car  
you ride along the ledge  
a tall white pyramid afar  
this city's without edge

streets limned by slanted homes  
the ladies themselves wonder  
everyone unique as gnomes  
too much for a number

**“The Lake” by Erick Rodriguez**

The lake by the hill  
Where not many people go  
But many people know  
So calm, so small

The lake by the hill  
Shines like a crystal  
In a deep dark cave  
Its peaceful setting  
Its surroundings  
Make up  
The lake by the hill  
So calm, so small



## “White Elephant” by Yamil Sanchez

“What the hell is displacement?”

Cal types in frustration, trying to look up the question on Google. His eyes are bloodshot and he feels the heavy bags under his eyes. He shakes his hands in the air every time he feels them cramping up. He bangs his hand on the table as he reads “no results found” on his screen, stands up, and throws his computer across his dorm. He squats and then lies down on the cold floor, staring at the ceiling with a tear running down the side of his eye. He glares over to the right and stares at the NASA poster on his wall.

“I’m not gonna make it,” Cal says. “Maybe they were right. I am too dumb.” He lies there the rest of the night in a pool of his tears.

It’s the following morning at Butler U, and Cal’s roommate hovers over him.

“Aren’t you gonna be late?”

Cal’s eyes beam and he gets dressed immediately, as if he’s done this a few times before. He picks up his cracked laptop and runs to his morning class.

“Mr. Kalster, late again?” says professor Newit.

“Pardon me, professor.”

“Your assignment?”

“It is done on my laptop,” Cal says. “Unfortunately, my laptop is broken.”

“I see, Mr. Kalster. Let me ask you a question, if you proclaim to have done your assignment. What is the definition of displacement?”

His cheeks turn red and he feels eyes staring down at him. His palms fill with sweat, and he licks his lips.

“A vector quantity describing the straight-line distance between two points.”

Professor Newit raises his eyebrow, and so does Cal.

“Mr. Kalster, please come to the board and write out the relativistic mass-energy equation.”

Cal walks to the board slowly, briefly pauses, and writes the exact equation with chalk. And then he grins.

“What’s so funny, Mr. Kalster?”

Cal places the chalk down and looks at his professor.

“Is this correct, Professor Newit?”

“Go sit down now.”

“Ask me another question, Professor.”

“Don’t get smart with me, Kalster.”

“You don’t think I know it? Ask me anything.”

“Tell me how an electron leaps between atomic levels.”

“It doesn’t. An electron transitioning between atomic states does not skip any intervening space. An electron is a quantum particle. As such, it acts as a wave and as a particle simultaneously. When bound to an atom, however, an electron acts more like a wave.”

The professor looks at Cal with a puzzled face. Cal looks at his classmates, who are just as stunned.

“Mr. Kalster, did you—”

“Did I purchase your teacher’s edition and read a few chapters ahead? Nah.”

“Then how did—”

“I know you were gonna say that? I just knew.”

Cal picks up his bag and broken laptop and throws both of them in the garbage can on the way out of class. Walking back to his dorm he looks at everyone, paying attention to details of each student. A freckled kid with curly red hair walks up to him.

“Excuse me, do you know where—”

“Down the hall, up the stairs, first door on the left.”

“Huh?”

“The cafeteria right?”

“Do I look hungry or is that asked a lot?”

“Neither.”

Cal walks to his room and sits down on his chair.

“Did class end early for you?” his roommate asks.

“I know everything. Ask me anything.”

“What?”

“I just woke up and know every single thing—history, mathematics, science. I know what will happen and what is to happen. You’re gonna ask me what kind of acid I’m on, right?”

“What the hell?”

“Also, your girlfriend is cheating on you.”

“Shut up.”

“It’s true.”

“Then what’s the meaning of life?”

Cal freezes and thinks for a bit, surprised that nothing is coming to him.

“If you know everything, how come you don’t know the answer to that?” Cal’s roommate asks.

Cal’s eyes light up. “Because there is none.”

“So this is all a joke is what you’re saying? There’s no purpose in life and no will to live?”

Cal nods. The light in his eyes slowly disappears.

“You’re crazy, man. How the hell did they let you in this school?”

Cal lies down on his floor in the same spot he was in a few hours earlier, glares over to his NASA poster on his wall, and feels something wet fall down his cheek.

# Haikus

## **“The Little Leaf” by Patrick Lui**

Early winter winds,  
The leaf fell in a deep sleep,  
Never to arouse.

## **“Frogs” by José Gonzales**

There were seven frogs  
When they jumped into the lake.  
They were never found.

## **“Misty Days” by Louis Carpentier**

Misty break of day  
A gloomy gentleman walks  
Enjoying his coat

## **“Nimble Fish” by Patrick Lui**

The still-nimble fish,  
Dancing through the summer pond,  
Leaving waves behind.

## **“Bus Stop” by Jady Davis**

I walk up the subway stairs and exit on the east side of the street. The rain is coming down hard, and I have nothing to protect me. Across the intersection, the Bx 40 slows down a little as it approaches the empty bus stop and then speeds off. I could have made it in time. The light is still green, and there are 15 seconds on the countdown timer as I cross the street. My walk home is only five blocks, but it's dark, cold, and wet, and I can already feel the rain coming through my shoes. I use my sleeve to dry a spot on the bus-stop bench and sit down. There's no canopy to keep me dry. A boy, maybe seven or eight, and his mom walk up and stand a few feet to my left, also waiting for the Bx 40. He drops his snack, a honeybun, to the ground and starts crying. His mom looks as if she's been up since 6 a.m. She peers down at him and then at the fallen snack, and then she gives him a “don't even start” glare. He bites his lip to keep from crying. Momentum is hard to stop, though, and a few more silent tears fall before he can quash his feeling. I feel it too. The last thing I ate was a Christmas cookie for lunch. My stomach starts to talk as I get a whiff of Domino's coming from somewhere. A middle-aged man had walked up behind me with two medium pizzas. I wonder how much he'd charge for one of his slices. It's half-past four and the bus still isn't here. I distract myself by thinking about what Mom is making for dinner. Pineapple and ham pizza would be nice. I look up the block and see nothing but cars, trucks, and even more cars. No buses. Do the drivers know how lucky they are? A few more people show up and wait, standing an arm's length from one another. A beat-up sedan comes screeching down the street. I step back. One of the tires is bound to pop, and I don't want it to hit my face. The driver keeps on driving past us, the screech getting quieter and quieter, following him home. The rain continues to fall. It shows no sign of stopping. I grow impatient. Where is this bus? The schedule says the Bx 40 comes every eight or nine minutes. It's been just over half an hour. A young woman in her twenties calls an Uber. I wish I were older and had my own money to spend so I wouldn't be in this mess. I walk a block in the direction of my home and sit down at the next stop on my route. It's empty. A stray cat appears out of nowhere and runs down the opposite side of the street, holding a piece of soggy bread in its mouth, looking for a dry place to eat. That's no way to live. I make a promise to take care of the people and pets who have it worse than I do, a promise I immediately forget when I see the Bx 40 come sidle up next to me.

“Kyros Takes Action” by Cruz Badillo







## **“You’re My Best Friend” by Steven Dumeng**

I love my dog, Sandy. She’s a maltese-poodle mix my mom says is called a maltipoo. I walk into my house after a long day of school, and there’s nothing like the smell of maltipoo poo to let me know I’m in the right home. I can’t help but smile. Sandy will be good all day, and then I’ll go to the kitchen for some pizza rolls or something else to eat, and come back to a little brown surprise waiting for me. Luckily, Sandy is smart. She knows how much I hate cleaning up her dirty Wee-Wee pads, so she poops just a few inches next to it, on the floor. She’s also considerate. My mom used to clean our rug every week. After Sandy got to it a few times, let’s just say my mom doesn’t have to clean any rugs anymore. I know Sandy loves me back. That’s why she spends so much time in my room. Excuse me — in *our* room. She’s definitely claimed this territory enough to call it hers.

Cleaning up after a dog is gross, but Sandy pays me back with love and affection. I come home from school feeling a little down, and I’ll call out to my best friend. Sandy’s chubby little legs waddle back and forth as she runs toward me to lift her up. She’s not even two inches off the ground before she’s screeching and barking and crying bloody murder. It’s a miracle the neighbors haven’t called Protective Services on us. It’d be hard to explain to them why my best friend tries to bite my fingers off and scratches my arms until I bleed.

Normally, I would hate getting in trouble for something I didn’t do, but best friends look out for each other. Three days after my mom bought me \$700 pair of Giorgio Armani glasses — glasses that fit my face perfectly, stylish enough for my guy friends to like, trendy enough to get a girl to notice them, a birthday present my mom justified springing for because they were something “you could wear them for the rest of your life” — Sandy was there to remind me not to care about material things. I left my bedroom to get my phone, and when I got back, the lenses were out of their frames, cracked and scratched. A lesson like that is invaluable. The \$600 we paid for Sandy, even though kennels give away dogs for free, was a bargain.

But my favorite thing about my dog is how good she makes me look in front of my friends. My friend Adrian came over to my house for the first time. When he got in the front door, my mom asked him to take off his shoes, a brand-new pair of Air Jordan 14s that he wanted to show off — with a pet like Sandy, you keep a clean house — and then we watched TV for a few hours. Sandy was an angel, treating our guest with the same love and affection she treats me. We lost track of time, and Adrian was looking for his shoes. Sandy must have been helping us look because we couldn’t find her anywhere. And then I checked her bed, and there they were: a chewed-up pair of Air Jordans with the soles missing. Adrian was livid, but me, I was happy. Sure, Adrian swore he’d never come to my house again, but you know what they say — a dog is a man’s best friend.

**“As My Feet Move” by Wayne Scully**

The cold-hearted city block is just concrete,  
The sound of weathered stones makes you shiver through the rainfall.  
Tall,  
You must stand because otherwise,  
You won't stand at all.  
Sickening  
The sounds of weltering steps and the soulless glares as you stare back.  
But internally  
you are unsure if “they can see right through me.”  
continue to walk “free”  
looking over your shoulder.  
The fingers masked as these people, these streets, these lights,  
Are now pointed at you.  
So no,  
These cold-hearted city blocks are not just concrete, you can see.  
They are the tributary  
Of my anxiety.  
Hopefully  
I can make it through  
These dark waters.

**“A Dream Deferred” by Prince Tah**

I'mma say something right off my head —  
Hopefully when I grow up I'm gonna get bread.  
  
But for now I'm not grown  
So for now I'm gonna stay at my momma's home.



### **“Pad Thai” by Victor Duran**

I ordered my food in this Thai place that my mom and I had never been to before. While we waited for our food, a family of four entered the restaurant and sat at a corner table. The mom got up to use the bathroom. The two young girls threw wet napkins at each other and yelled and bumped into the man sitting behind them. The father was slouched with his mouth half open, staring at the ceiling. The waitstaff didn't seem to notice the family. Our waitress, a few years older than me, was their waitress too. She buzzed around the restaurant, never staying in the same place for long. Ignoring the napkins flying through the air, she refilled the family's half-full water glasses. After I came back from the bathroom, both my table and the family's table had been served, and the two girls ate their food.

Midway through my meal, I heard a loud crash. I turned and saw that a white plate had fallen onto the floor, and it broke into three or four shards. I looked up at the little girls and then at their father, who waited for someone else to pick up the pieces. I realized it was not them but the waitress who had dropped the plate. I went back to eating my food, some pad Thai dish with a name I can neither remember nor pronounce. The little girls had calmed, I was less frustrated about my day, and my mom smiled at me, happy with her meal. The waitress was still buzzing around and around, though, still brimming with nervous energy. She refilled our mostly full glasses with ice cold water. Then she spilled the water onto my plate, and I watched my pad Thai become wet, soggy, and cold.

### **“People Can Try” by Jerome Jose**

Monkeys can climb  
Frogs can leap  
Horses can race  
Owls can seek  
Cheetahs can chase  
Falcons can fly  
People can try  
But that's about it

**“Death Stars” by Michael Suarez**

Death stars we were like dead stars when we saw  
The death of our love a death of a movie star  
You came into my life and took my heart  
Now I roam the skies and I

Look for what’s mine  
I know you still have it stop playing with my mind  
I still have a brain and I think I’ll use it this time  
But between my words you’ll find  
The care I had  
Those are just lines  
Not really what’s inside  
You have what’s inside  
So tell me why we were

Death stars we were like dead stars when we saw  
The death of our love, a death of a movie star  
You came into my life and you took my heart  
Now I roam the skies and I

Try to find another way we could shine  
I really don’t care anymore come back be mine  
I’m a refugee but I’m tired hiding  
Now I’m trying to catch a shooting star  
I don’t know why  
I’m trying to find out why we became

Death stars, we were like dead stars when we saw  
The death of our love, a death of a movie star  
You came into my life and you took my heart  
Now I roam the skies and I

## **“Tombstone, Arizona” by Amador Mosso**

That was close.

The dark train cart was filled with deep breaths. The sounds of hooves and gunfire slowly faded. The only light source in the cart was from the slightly opened cart door. I took out my map and moved it toward the ray of light.

That crosses another one off the list, I said to myself.

I crossed the map with the pen and began planning my next move. I reached for my canteen and poured water on the brownish-red stains on my hands. Once I was done I threw the canteen into a pile of hay and heard a wince. I aimed my Smith’n toward the pile of hay.

“Stand up slowly or you’ll never stand up again,” I said to the hay.

The hay began to slide down from each side and a small figure emerged from the pile.

“I’m not armed,” the figure said.

The squeakiness of the voice told me its speaker was closer to a calf than a bull. He was skinny as a stick and holding a second stick as a weapon.

“The hell are you doing here, boy?”

“I..I..was...”

“Speak, boy. Killing you would be an insult to the bullet I shot you with.”

“I was going to find my way to Tombstone.”

“Isn’t everybody?”

“Sir?”

“Arizona? By yourself? Boy, if I’ve heard dumber things, I don’t remember when.”

There was no need for good ol’ reliable Smith’n, so I put it back in my holster and used my handkerchief to wipe off the blood and the mud on my knuckles, and then I tied it back onto my neck.

“So...good ol’ Tombstone, huh? It looks like we both got something to gain.”

“Sir?”

“Listen here, kiddo. I’ll take you to Arizona, but I’m going to need you to do me a favor. Not even bums beat their way for free.” The boy nodded when I paused. “Imma need you to play pretend. You see, I’m a bit famous, but nobody’d mistake me for a dad, so with you next to me, it could mess up the profile. Whatcha say? Can you pretend to be Li’l Jesse?”

“I’m not sure...”

I smiled. I didn’t mean for it to look sinister, but it’s a gift, I guess.

“I mean, sure thing. Sir.”

“We gonna to get along just fine. Now go on and get some sleep before another passenger mistakes you for a man and puts another hole in your head. I got no use for carcasses.”

My sleep ended when the trip did. The train came to a violent stop and I sat up. The cart was completely dark. I couldn't tell whether my eyes were open or shut. I reached for my lighter and got it halfway to my face when I heard a man's voice.

"We might as well get started..." someone said from outside the cart.

I wiped the ashes off me and cracked open the cart door to look outside. I saw little lights connected to horses.

"Well, looks like we got a couple of slingers," the man closest to me said to someone standing inside the train. "Mind if we look around?" He stepped in without waiting for a reply.

"Oy, brat wake up." I whacked the brat with my empty glove. "We gotta cheese it."

Maybe it was fatigue, but the brat had the right attitude: not to panic. The trick was not to worry too much if you lived or die. The worriers always end up dead. I slid the car doors open and whispered to the brat to follow. He was rubbing his eyes and moving his foot, looking for somewhere to place it, but his foot found only air and his face found the floor.

"Boy, you are as bright as a shadow." I heard the footsteps getting louder. "Get to the back of the train and hide like before. It's like hide-and-seek. No matter what, don't come out. I'll be the one that finds you, 'kay."

I dropped my canteen and moved further down the cart, hugging the side. I eventually got to the back. It was dark and there were lots of things to bump into and make noise. I placed my hand on my holster and hugged the wall, crouching behind a couple of crates. Whoever got caught first died. That was the only rule I knew of. They knew where we were and I sure as hell knew where they were. I still wasn't sure how many of them were there, but before I could collect all my thoughts the cart door opened and a pair of men entered shoulder to shoulder.

"You see anything?"

"Shadows. You?"

"They gotta be here somewhere. Light a match."

The one on the right lit a candle. I could now see their location and number. I also learned that we were in the silverware room with dishes, folks, spoons — the works. That would have been good to know when there was time to pilfer. The one on the left bumped into something and shot three times into the dark.

"The hell you trying to kill, Wes? Ghosts?"

The door behind them opened, emitting even more light into the room, and a third jack, a round man with a deformed face, joined the pair.

"You hit anything?" the new man asked.

"Yeah. Air."

The third jack grabbed the candle and examined the room. "Someone's here."

The other two gripped their guns and fanned out. If I waited, they'd find me. If I stood up, they'd shoot me before I could aim at all three. I was good, but I wasn't that good.

I crouched back down and peaked around the side of the crates. I could see about twelve inches of space off the ground. A leather shoe appeared, moving slowly. I cocked back the Smith'n and squeezed.

"Son of a bee sting!" the man said as he fell to the ground, rocking back and forth and grabbing his foot. I waited for his head to move back into my line of sight, aimed the Smith'n at his right temple, and squeezed. He didn't writhe anymore after that.

His two friends took shot after shot at his corpse. I guess they thought he'd shot himself and had promised to kill his killer.

With all the ruckus they were making, I don't think either of them heard the shots that killed them.

I decided not to wait for the rest of the party. I moved through cart to cart to the back of the train until I found the brat. I grabbed his arm and pulled him out. We ran around to the front of the train and liberated a couple of the marshalls' horses for ourselves, and let the others free from their reins. And then we went toward Tombstone.

"How old are you, anyway? Sixteen? Seventeen?"

"Eight."

"Eighteen?"

"No. Eight!"

"An eight-year-old's 'bout as useful as a canteen with a hole in it."

I looked left and spat. The brat did the same.

"What's an eight-year-old brat like you going to Tombstone for?"

It had been a day and a half since our run-in with the marshalls. The sun wasn't being too kind to us, blazing down on us like fire to a spit. He didn't answer.

"Well, what's your name?"

"Hickly."

"First or last?"

"First."

"Last?"

"Adams."

"Hickly Adams? Did your mother not love you?"

"Sir?"

"Your momma give you that name?"

"My father."

"No wonder you're leaving them."

"No. He's in Arizona. He's in Tombstone."

"He working?"

Hickly shrugged. "My mom only gave me this picture of him."

I looked at the photo. It sorta looked like a person. Not one that I'd risk my life to visit, but Hickly had his reasons.

"What's your name?" Hickly said.

"Jesse Woodson, but most of my pals used to call me Li'l Jesse."

"Why? Were they tall?"

"Old. Older'n me at least."

"Are you still the youngest?"

"They haven't gotten any younger, if that's what you mean. Some of them stopped getting older, though."

The freeloading brat reached for my canteen and took a sip.

"Do you have a family?"

"I got my two brothers, Smith and Wesson."

I took my canteen back and drank from it.

"I prefer to travel alone now. Keep my canteen to myself. I like that stick you've got in your hand," I said. "Makes me feel safer."

The boy smiled at me. As far as useless things went, he was one of the better ones.

"Tombstone, Arizona, this place looks great."

I got off the horse and placed it by the others.

"Come on down, I got you."

I helped the boy down, and the both of us were deciding what to do next.

"I need a drink. How 'bout you, Hickly? You go for a drink? Hey, mister. Can you point us to a place where we can find some good women and cheap whiskey?"

"I know a place that has good whiskey and cheap women," the man said.

"I'm listening."

"Go around the corner and to the end of the road and you'll find Big Kate's Saloon."

"How will I know when I find it?"

"You'll see a sign that says Big Kate's Saloon."

"Much obliged."

Underneath a sign saying Big Kate's Saloon I signalled to the boy to follow me inside. A round man as ugly as a mud fence told me to leave all weapons in the front. I picked a speck of dirt off his collar and told him that if my Smith'n happened to go missing, he would too.

The boy looked at the guns and the man and threw his stick onto the pile of weapons. I laughed and grabbed the boy by his shoulders. I went to the front and ordered some whiskey from the woman behind the bar. She looked at me.

"You are aware that you aren't supposed to bring children here."

"Oy, nothing to worry. Li'l Hickly here can hold his liquor."

"I don't care to find out."

"There isn't a problem, isn't that right, Jesse?"

I turned around and there was no kid to be found.

“What is that boy up to now?”

I spotted the boy at the far wall looking at posters and came up behind him.

“Hey, Jesse, this one looks like you.”

“Let’s not say that out loud. People can get money if they see me.”

“It says ‘notorious legendary gunslinger.’”

“That don’t mean much without my gun to sling, though.”

I had my whiskey and went to pick up my Smith’n, but as soon as I was about to get my gun, the door opened and a familiar deformed face appeared.

“I’m looking for a man with a moustache.”

Everybody in the bar turned his eyes on me. I don’t know why, though. They all had moustaches too.

The marshall turned on me and fired. I tackled the boy and dove out behind the bannister. Shots came raining down. Hickly and I sneaked to the back of the tavern, looking for a way out. The marshall kept shooting at the wood as if the two of them had a blood feud.

“Listen. I’m going to go left, and once you hear him fire, go as fast as you can the other direction,” I told Hickely. “Do you remember the horse we took?”

“The white one?”

“Go and get it and don’t wait for me. If that guy leaves the bar before me, just go.”

The boy nodded and waited for the signal. I dashed as fast as I could into the kitchen, and shots were fired as fast as I got up. The boy scurried the other way, and the marshall followed me. I grabbed a knife off the wall hooks and crouched behind a prep table. The man entered the kitchen and grinned.

“It is always somewhere with plates with you, isn’t it?” he said.

The room was brightly illuminated. There was no hiding.

It was only a matter of time. He was too dangerous to approach with just a knife, and he had plenty of bullets to use. I wasn’t confident I could reach him before he finished reloading. I dashed through the service door back to the main room. I weaved to the right and crouched and waited.

As soon as he barged through the door I stabbed him in the gut. He dropped his six-shooter. He punched me with all his force and busted my nose. He looked down at the knife that was stuck in his gut. He left it alone and continued toward me. I made a beeline for the weapon section. The guns were gone, but there was one thing that remained.

A bullet grazed my right arm. My shirt got the worst of it. I spun around and dove toward him and used the best weapon I had.

“The hell?”

I whacked him on the head with the stick. It wasn’t anything fatal, but it wasn’t anything friendly, either. His hat fell off, and he fired up, hitting no one. I hit him again and again with the stick until the noises of chains breaking could be heard above us. The chandelier was coming

down. I tried to jump out of the way, but the chandelier connected with my leg and I collapsed on the ground.

I looked toward where the marshall was. He was groaning in pain from the stab wound. It looked like the chandelier had hit him too. I looked around my surroundings and saw his gun on the floor. I began to crawl toward the gun, slowly getting back on my feet. I went to pick up the gun, but I was greeted with a kick.

“I think not.”

I pushed the gun further up the room and we raced toward the gun. We grabbed each other, punching and pushing and biting what we could. The two of us were gasping for air.. He gained the upper hand and pinned me down on the floor. I grabbed the knife that was in his stomach and twisted it. He screamed and punched me in the mouth. I don't know how many times he hit me — after the first couple I lost count. My eyes started to wander and led me to his badge. I read the name of my would-be killer, Marshall H. Adams. I stopped struggling. Everyone does eventually.

“This was fun,” Marshall Adams said. I couldn't move. I decided to save my remaining energy for the afterlife. I had a good run.

He walked a few steps toward the back of the bar, picked up his gun, and aimed.

“But I won't be completely satisfied unless you're dead.”

His finger clenched the trigger and I took a deep breath.

*Bang.*

The marshall dropped to his knees. He was clutching his stomach, the one with the knife in it.

Behind him, Hickly was holding my Smith'n with both hands. I looked toward the marshall and he fell on top of me. I pushed his body off me and moved back.

I grabbed his gun and got up to my knees. Hiccups emanated from Hickly.

“Nice shot.”

“I *hic* killed *hic* him.”

“Give me that.”

My Smith'n was safe. I don't know what would have done if I had lost it. I put it in my holster.

“Are you okay?”

“Besides the graze, burn, and bruises, I'm fine.”

I got up and limped towards the door.

“I might have broken something. Did you bring the horse?”

He nodded.

“I don't think Tombstone wants us here, Hickly.”

We left the bar and saw a herd of men on horse approaching Big Kate's Saloon. I put Hickly on the horse and then got up myself. Their horses sped up when they spotted us.

“Stop!”



We didn't listen.

"My bounty price might have gone up a bit," I said. I looked at Hickly and smiled and handed him the sheriff's gun. "You probably have a price now too, huh."

The posse of four men kept pace with us to the outskirts of Tombstone and we took cover behind a bolder. The men gripped their guns and we gripped ours. Hickly gripped my sleeve and was adjusting the gun in his hands to get used to it.

"Not as deadly as your stick, but it'll do," I said. "Aim for the one in the middle."

The distance between us shortened, and then the shots began.

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