

3rd issue...

# THE PEN



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**At His Altar**  
Gabriella Gastaldo

He is stoic, like a marble statue of old,  
carven with infinite care.  
He is Hades. So silent, so still in some moments  
that if he isn't directly watched, he disappears.  
In others,  
his presence cannot be overlooked.  
Buried gold, curly hair;  
his laugh is more precious than  
the jewels strewn about his feet,  
richer than the soil he rules beneath.  
He has smile lines, faint faint faint--  
no one is ever close enough to see.  
He plays games for the ending;  
it is all about the victor and the trophy.  
Nevertheless, he values a leisure throne,  
revered and respected in equal measures.

Hades,  
whose eyes are darker than the cavern he rules in,  
mesmerizing shades of brown and black.

Hades,  
who falls into companionable silence frequently,  
for enjoyment of serenity over senseless sound.

Hades,  
who holds a pomegranate that lacks four seeds.

Hades.

He will be greeting a much beloved visitor soon.

**Waterlilies**  
Jaelyn Jackson









## Girl

Irene Wiegand-Vera

Girl,

You were born with fire inside.  
Warm with self-esteem, confidence, love,  
Glowing with joy, crackling with  
determination  
Sparks of hope shooting off like fireworks  
When your mother first saw the light  
dancing in your eyes.  
She vowed as long as the Earth kept turning,  
She would keep your fire burning

Five,

Legs fly as you run to grab some toys  
Yours the pink basket, but you reach for the  
one marked boys  
You grab a plastic truck, a rocket ship,  
Swing them above your head, laughing  
Until daddy snatches them back,  
Saying *"Here sweetie, play with this  
barbie"*  
You do as you're told, though it doesn't  
seem fair,  
Your flame shrinks

Ten,

Sprinting past the girls to the soccer field,  
Eagerly bouncing from foot to foot as you  
wait to be picked.

Avi,

Josh,

Max,

Oliver,

Liam,

One of the captains is pointing,  
Beginning your name, but you hear  
*"Seriously? She's a girl!"*  
Confusion whirls

Up inside

But before you muster courage to reply  
Everyone has left.  
Your flame shrinks.

Fifteen

A long day done and you're headed home.  
Coming from school, walking alone.  
A whistle slices through the night, a hand  
slips into yours  
*"Wooo baby, you look fiiine girl."*  
You tug away and dart home.  
Tears crash down your face as forceful as a  
waterfall  
You throw yourself onto the bed.  
Sobbing,  
A thousand thoughts rushing through your  
head  
Anger,  
Confusion,  
Shock,  
They jostle each other for room  
As you cry yourself to sleep.  
And no matter how long goes by  
You can't get the image out of your head  
The feeling out of your hand,  
The coldness out of your heart,  
You can't forget what happened  
Your flame shrinks.

Every time it happens another bucket of  
water douses your flame  
No matter what your mom says it is always  
the same  
Too surprised to speak, then the moment has  
gone

Like you are in a game of chess where  
you're only a pawn.  
A piece with no power, no purpose, or value  
A piece sacrificed without a thought.

Twenty

The tight dress required stands out  
Around the table where suited men shout  
To be heard over one another they stand  
Making their cases, gesturing with hands  
Gathering courage, you rise to your feet,  
Raise your voice to their level and speak  
The room falls silent as all eyes turn to you  
*"Oh, well excuse us, looks like little Miss  
has something to say"*  
One man sarcastically remarks  
*"An ambitious one"* another sneers  
You mumble and sink into your chair  
Flushed face redder than the dress you wear  
You spent the same time studying  
Took the same tests, same interview  
Yet they still look down on you  
when you dared rise to their level they  
thought it was wrong, rude

Anger boils in your stomach  
A man makes a suggestion  
It's the same thing you just said  
The men sit down, nodding heads.  
The boiling anger has grown into a volcano,  
threatening to explode out of your mouth,  
But once it has erupted, your fight has gone,  
and  
Your flame dies

Norms and rules written in rocks, rotting  
with time,  
Rotting the mind, rotting the world,  
The lives of every woman and girl  
Yet still too heavy to budge  
The carvings have faded but the problem  
remains.  
The story could have been different  
If instead of ridiculing we had respected  
Instead of stereotyping we had supported  
Instead of laughing we had listened.  
*Listen*, because every time something like  
this happens, another flame dies.







**Rome; the City of Love**

Phoebe Sabar

A marble statue,  
A silk nightgown.  
A bird who only flew.  
An undeserved crown.  
A skinny dancer,  
Who's frame is from smoking.  
This boy was a cancer,  
'I'm only joking.'  
A broken castle.  
I feel like I'm choking.  
Are you sure it isn't a hassle?  
A torrid affair.  
A lifetime of laughter.  
A white dove.  
It was certainly a baffle.  
A lock of her hair.  
The sky was falling above.  
I won the raffle.  
Rome, the city of love.



**Untitled Poem**

Anneke Risch

The pink blush  
Of your skin  
The way you move  
And shake your hips  
Quiet  
And Soft

A worm

**Leaf**

Anneke Risch



## **When Summer Lasts Forever**

Sonja Talwani

This was bad. Nothing made sense and everything was going wrong. I stared up at the sky and began to wonder what possibly could have led me up to this moment.

I supposed it was just an hour before. I remembered lying on the forest floor, gazing at the clouds. A storm was coming, I noticed. The sky was a deep grey color and the clouds were angry. Every second I looked at the sky, it became darker and darker as the orange sun sunk deeper into the distant hills.

That's when a red leaf fell from a tree in the corner of my eye and landed right on my forehead. A small, simple reminder of what was happening and how little control I had over it.

The end of summer was just around the corner, taunting me every day from the autumn leaves to the stormy sky. And with the end of summer came leaving my dad's house in rural Montana for my mom's apartment in urban California. I wished I could stay forever, but alas, there was no way it was possible.

I sat up from my comfortable position on the ground and put my hood up and my hands in my pockets. That's when I felt one quarter in my pocket that I had left there, and a wonderful idea sparked in my brain.

And that was when everything went downhill.

I had a sudden burst of optimism. My eyes lit up as I clutched the quarter in my fist and began to speed walk, nearly a jog, straight into the forest. I had seen an old, dry well previously during the summer, and all I could think was that I needed to find it and make a wish. So despite the sun being nearly set and a storm so obviously coming, I began to the well.

After a while of walking-- I wasn't exactly sure of the time, just the fact that it was dark and the only thing illuminating my path was the full moon-- I arrived at the well. It was different than I remembered. Maybe it was the darkness or the light rain that began to pour, but everything seemed eerie.

Finally, it was time to make my wish. I carefully took the coin from my pocket and looked down the well. It was pitch black down there. I flicked the coin into the fountain while making a wish to not have to go back to the city. I heard as the coin hit the bottom of the empty well and took a sigh of relief.

After a moment, before I could turn around and leave the well for my home, I saw a faint glow from inside. I looked down to the well to see a bright light getting more aggressive every second I stared. At some point it began making a long noise, piercing my ears.

Everything was bright, loud, and confusing. I tried to close my eyes and plug my ears but it didn't do anything for me.

The rain picked up and the wind began to blow, knocking down a tree next to me. That's when I realized what I had done. My wish came true. I would never have to go back to the city.





**The Little Mermaid**  
Anneke Risch

## Secret Hum of a Daisy (Excerpt)

Elena Vol

If you were to remember the day you were born, I'd imagine that your eyes would be too sensitive to the newly discovered light, especially that of a hospital, to be of much use. You'd fall back on your ears, taking in your surroundings through sound. The meaningless, though loud chatter coming from everywhere, the constant beeping of various hospital machines, your mother's uneven breathing.

Riley didn't have the luxury of sound. Not only were her eyes unable to make anything out in their sudden introduction to light, but from the moment she was born, Riley was deaf. Yes, she smelled that distinct hospital smell and felt the doctor's warm hands lift her, followed by all sorts of poking and prodding but her experience was not like that of other babies, even other deaf ones.

You see, though she was deaf, and at sixteen still is, she did hear something upon entering the world. Riley heard a soft almost silky noise, one that we might describe as harplike coming from a corner of the hospital room.

Though Riley cannot hear what we can, she in turn can hear what we cannot. She hears the music of plants.

Of all places Riley had frequented in her near seventeen years of life, the classroom had to have been one of the worst. In her house and outside, Riley could be surrounded by plants and their music. No matter how varied the sounds each flower, tree, or vine made, somehow they all blended into a beautiful, balanced song. In the classroom, however, teachers rarely had plants, robbing Riley of all sound, the void of silence a shock against the music that had once rung.

When a teacher did happen to have a plant, it was a definite relief, however each plant only has one song. Riley's school also happened to be very small, meaning teachers switched classes not students. As much as Riley loved the music only she could hear, a song on repeat made it hard to focus, and stuck in her head even when she got home. She had the same classroom the entire year, so yeah, not ideal. Sometimes, if she was lucky, she would find herself near a window, and could just make out the harmony of grass, trees, and bushes through the thick glass.

All this to say, Riley was not looking forward to going to school that August day which marked the start of Junior year. Yet, there she was, enclosed in the labyrinth of brick, and trapped in a soundless room, the slightly too powerful air conditioner raising little bumps on her skin. The room she was in had no greenery whatsoever, resulting in a tranquil silence Riley was already tired of that wildly contrasted with the atmosphere of the classroom. People bustled around, the quick movement of their mouths suggesting animated chatter, obviously looking for the best place to sit. At some point, Riley's head hit the cool fake wood of her desk. Someone would let her know when class started, but for now, she was to be dead to the world.

Well, that was the plan. Riley was used to things not going to plan. It was that awful paradox one encountered when they planned every day to bring an umbrella to school, and the



one day it rains, was the one day they forgot the umbrella. So it was no real shock when she was jerked out of her self-imposed isolation.

As Riley had been willing the classroom into inexistence, she heard something. Now, as Riley only ever heard the sound of plants, it is impossible for her to explain what she heard as she had nothing to compare it to. Emotions, however, made it easier for her to explain. What she heard was a sort of subdued joy. A happy melody with an underlying hint of calm. Whipping her head up, Riley immediately saw the source of the sound, a small daisy tucked amongst dark curls, the owner of whom was headed towards her which like, wow, pause.

She was gorgeous. Riley really wasn't picky, she found most, if not all women attractive, but Daisy Girl stood out for sure. She had beautiful black hair that twirled just past her shoulders and lashes that matched in color which surrounded deep chocolate eyes framed by caramel skin. Inevitably, like one would admire a piece of artwork, Riley's eyes dipped lower as the girl's long legs carried her closer, along with the song that emitted from her hair.

She was stunning. Full breasts, and a not-so-narrow waist that made her look real, and all the more breathtaking. Her waist gave way to jean hugged hips and endless legs. Eyes back up! God those lips. Plush, pink, full, moving. Shit, they were moving! Riley tore her eyes away and grabbed her whiteboard, writing quickly but taking care that her words were still legible.

*Sorry, could you slow down? I'm deaf, and reading lips can be difficult.*

Clenching her jaw, Riley watched as Daisy Girl read her message, and cursed herself internally. Why did she write something so impersonal? Jeez, she didn't even write hi, what would Daisy girl think of.

Daisy Girl tipped forward, the daisy's bouncy tune growing louder, and Riley completely lost her train of thought as she started writing, moving her lips at the same time. Riley did not look at where her shirt dipped, displaying the expanse of smooth skin that lay below. Well, maybe a little, but Daisy Girl's lips were equally enrapturing, and Riley looked back up just in time to catch them curl around the word Elvira. Tilting her head to see what Daisy Girl wrote, Riley found herself smiling for the first time that day.

*Nice to meet you! What's your name? I'm Elvira :)*

A month or so into school, the weather became colder, green leaves fading to a light orange or a deep red, clutching the tree branches as if they knew they would fall soon. Flower's petals curled in, and they bowed a little, almost unrecognizable as the same plants who held such a proud stance in the summer. Riley was unphased by this shift. Plants were always the same at their core, therefore their song never changed.



## Perspective

### Dylan Park



## Confirmation

Anonymous

It was during high school, the time of heavy nights and tears. Of kids rattling around in the halls, of work, work, work. To few, she was a breath of fresh air. To others, a strange, loquacious girl.

These uptight, knitted groups, backstabbing friends who you still hung out with after school, people who confuse you. It scares her, overwhelms her and she cries often.

She used to be free, independent of weighty assumptions and fear of loneliness. She was fine with sitting by herself in the mornings, at lunch, and in classrooms, while others talked with their friends. Fine being perceived as different and unapproachable.

Until she met me. I was the normal boy, chill with people I met, learning to drive, I had a job, I kept decent grades. But one day, I got a sudden email where she corrected me on my English paper. Apparently, I had written “inferiour” instead of “inferior,” which was strange because I knew how to spell that, you know?

The next day, I approached her and asked how she got my email. She replied, “off your Instagram.” I told her thanks for her constructive criticism and we ended up walking to our next classes together. Before she left for calculus she smiled at me, a real genuine smile. The type you make when you see you have all As on your report card.

I didn't know how I felt. She wasn't linked with the normal, cool students, the others who did normal things. She was quiet and not interesting, or so I thought until we ended up texting each other about the deepest things like dreams and tea parties. She would say things like "I really appreciate you" and "sorry if I seem like a stalker" and "you are a very chill dude." I couldn't tell if these things were coming from her heart or not. I didn't know that they were.

I didn't realize that every time we talked, it was her who texted me first. I didn't know that before she did, she would contemplate, in deep thought, about whether I wanted her as a friend, wanted her as more, even just appreciated her back, or if I was just being polite. I didn't realize that my replies of "I appreciate you too" were empty, but they gave her confirmation. Still, let her just see, just a little more confirmation?

We would joke, have friendly arguments, wave in the hallways. But I noticed she herself began to change. Her clothes became more like the ones the "popular" people wore, and she acted different, changing her vocabulary and agreeing with almost everything I said. She sat with new friends at lunch, friends who were not really friends but people who just liked her new hair color.

Gradually, as our relationship progressed, it became clear that she liked me. And I wondered, how long? How long were we friends before one of us began to try just a little too hard? When had she decided that she would take that leap to pursue me?

Then, one day, she ran up to me on the sidewalk and kissed me. The ultimate test of confirmations. I didn't know what to do. I didn't like her.

I pulled away and said, "What was that?"

I tried to smile like it was some big joke.

The pain in her eyes sunk deep into my stomach. But my rejection sunk deeper into hers. It turned her into a bottomless pit, a pit that constantly cursed her for wanting to take on more than she could carry. I told her we were still friends, but I didn't know what she was feeling, so I stayed distant. I didn't know that we had already been growing distant for a long time. Ever since I knew her feelings.

That moment, the suddenness, of course I wasn't gonna just... kiss her back. What was she expecting? Couldn't she understand the obvious signs I gave her? It takes two hands to clap. She needed to get that and stop hoping for some fairytale ending.

Why? Why did she do that? Why did she ignore them? Why did she have to shatter our fragile,



strange friendship of two years so stupidly?

Now, life has reverted to before she sent me that email. She doesn't look me in the eyes. This hurts me, more than it should.

Now, she's in pain every time I enter the room. She appears like she's moved on, but she has not. This person I've gotten to know seems so far away. She can't even so much as look in my direction without being reminded of the shame I gave her that forbidden day.

It makes me feel like a villain when I snub her back.

We could have been something. Our friendship could have thrived. Yet as I reflect on it, I realize it was really unnatural and stiff. Now, we've both given up hope.

I understand now that when she decided to run to me that day, she took a great leap. In that moment, she was the same person she was before she met me. Courageous. Free, unafraid of the outcome. Until reality pivoted and slammed into her unguarded back.

She still has her friends. She still has her new haircut, her growing Instagram followers. But she doesn't have me.

She still has her friends. She still has her new haircut, her growing Instagram followers. But she doesn't have me.



RTJM  
Abbey Locker



## Death During Discovery (excerpt)

Sirin Toal

This is the story of how I died. The story of my murder. Honestly, now that I'm dead, I can properly appreciate the work my murderer put into killing me. His plan was manipulative and diabolical, of course, but it was also meticulous and fool-proof. It was the type of plan you can't help but admire, just a little. And of course, there's the fact that it was so good no one but him will ever know what *truly* happened when the Chauvet Cave was discovered. Except me. I know exactly what happened. But I'm dead, and I can't do much about that.

Everything started about four months before my unfortunate downfall, in August 1994. A letter arrived in my mailbox in Lille, France. It was from my old friend, Jean-Marie Chauvet. He and I had met during my college years in the seventies, and we'd bonded over our mutual love of caves. Our friendship was strong yet brief, so I was surprised to see a letter from him. Regardless, I opened the letter without any hesitation.

*Dear Monique,*

*Long time no see! I know this is an abrupt letter since we haven't spoken in years, but I've recently decided to catch up with old friends. I know this is spontaneous, but perhaps you'd like to visit me at my home in Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, in the south of France. We can reminisce about our youth, and discuss how our lives have been going since we last spoke. It'd be delightful if you could come around early December, and perhaps stay for the holidays. Write back so we can figure out the exact logistics of this get-together.*

*Sincerely,*

*Jean-Marie Chauvet*

I wish I could say I was skeptical of this invitation from the start, but truthfully, I wasn't. Sure, I hadn't seen Jean-Marie in a decade, but I'd been feeling lonely, I missed my old friends, and being a speleologist (a cave researcher), was starting to get dull. I felt like I no longer enjoyed observing caves. So when this letter came, I jumped into action, and wrote back immediately to confirm my visit. Three months later, I was on a train to Vallon-Pont d'Arc. It was this naivety that killed me in the end.

As I approached Jean-Marie's apartment complex in the chilly December air, I marveled at the beauty of his quaint little village. The houses all looked like mini-villas, the streets were narrow yet charming. Any foreigner could instantly tell it was a European town.

Eventually, I arrived before Jean-Marie's apartment door. I took a deep breath and knocked on the door twice. I heard a little bustling from inside, and then Jean-Marie opened the door.

"Monique!" he exclaimed.

"Jean-Marie!" I replied, suddenly overwhelmed with emotion.

We embraced, and at that moment, I was back in 1974. I relived being an awkward twenty-year-old college student meeting this mysterious man who'd dropped out of school at 14, yet had an impressive amount of knowledge, especially in speleology. Now, this same man was standing right before me, and he looked just as I remembered. He had a large nose, thick eyebrows, dark locks of hair, and a shadow of a beard. He *was* middle-aged, but so was I.



He briefly showed me around his apartment and the room where I'd be staying. The whole space was small yet charming, very much like the village it was in.

I was taking a little time to settle in, putting all my various things away, when Jean-Marie poked his head through my door.

"Let me know when you're finished getting settled in, because I thought we'd go on a walk to catch up."

"I'm just about done unpacking, so we can go now, if you want," I replied.

"Perfect! Let me just grab my jacket."

We wandered through the streets of Vallon Pont-d'Arc, talking about everything and nothing at the same time. I was worried my conversations with him would be awkward and uncomfortable, but we interacted with ease, as if no time had passed.

"So what do you do for a living nowadays, Jean-Marie?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm working as a caretaker on the government payroll," he replied unenthusiastically. "It's a good job, I know, it's just not what I want to be doing in life, you know?"

I nodded.

"If it were up to me, I'd be a professional speleologist. That's my dream. It's too late to reach it, but it's my dream nonetheless. But tell me about yourself. What have you been up to?"

"Honestly, not that much. I actually did become a speleologist, which is great of course, but it's been getting dull recently." The moment the words were out of my mouth, I regretted them. I was trying to show him that he wasn't missing out on much, but I just sounded ungrateful and, to be perfectly honest, cocky. I mean, how obnoxious is it to tell your friend that the career they want and that you have is *boring* to you?

"Oh, so you *don't* like being able to work on caves all day? You *don't* like having the job you always wanted to have? I'd *kill* for your job!" he replied, sounding more than exasperated, as if he was genuinely mad at me.

"I'm so sorry, that came out wrong. I know how lucky I am to have my job, it's just... I don't know. It feels like something's missing," I apologized.

"I--yeah, okay. I didn't mean to be rude, it's just a lot, realizing that studying caves will only ever be a hobby for me."

I decided to change the subject before we got into a serious argument on the first day of my visit. Luckily, it wasn't before long when we were back to geeking out about caves, just like in the seventies.

For the next couple of days, neither he nor I brought up our argument. Instead, we focused on learning what the other had been doing for the past decade and a half.

But let's not get off track. This *is* the story of my death, so we should hurry along and get to it. On December 17th, a week after my arrival, we went on a hike. We were accompanied by Jean-Marie's friends Éliette Brunel and Christian Hillaire. They'd suggested we walk by the Cirque d'Estré, a remarkable landmark in Vallon Pont-d'Arc.







**Dear Hood**

Mrs. Jones-Hinnant

Dear Hood, From the ladies

I am grateful for my adopted parents. My last home was filled with screaming, drugs, and domestic violence. My father would come home and terrorize all of us, especially my mom. She would walk on eggshells. When we went to bed, she would blast the music so it would drown out her screams. One day he came home drunk and angry and the next day my mom was gone. A woman from the Social Government Office came and took me to a new family. My new family greets me in the morning and kisses me good night. Family is not always where you start but where you land.

Sincerely,

Cindy

