

Rolling in the Heather

Hunter Christian

Presented by

My poetic side 



Dedication

To S.M.G. ~ Never a better muse

Acknowledgement

To my dear wife, best friend, life partner, and patient editor, Stacy Marie; you inspire me.

To my daughter's: Laken, Abby, Emma, Eden and Punky, I carry you in my heart, always.

To Gabriel...To Frankie...To JLG.

About the author

I'm just a man who fears as much as he loves, but
when I sense hope on the horizon, upon the road to
that station I shall always walk.

HC

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AN INVITATION

Antebellum Road

Red Moon Aloft

By: Hunter Christian

She danced alone
In the parlor of a centuries old manor
In the wash of a red moon aloft
As she whispered on a wind so soft
The words hung in solemnity
Upon the face of a red moon aloft
Glued steadfast to the firmament

Alas the Spring rains came
So the children sang happily
And their parents clapped and smiled
Nothing feels happier -
Than the contentment of a child
No matter how cosmopolitan
Or mired in impoverishment
The wealthy lived aside their servants
Living quarters could not lessen the blood
Nor mansion or shanty
Nor color of skin
A child's laughter is honesty's purest form
Latch the shutters
Ride out the storm

With adulthood honesty wanes
Like a new moon
Truth evanesces to the wayside
The lost innocence of a virgin bride
The ebb and the flow of a drowning high tide
Warmth by day
Frigid by night
The lost letters lost amidst lost sight
Awash in a red moon aloft

Red beams advance like warriors on teak floors
Kaleidoscopic are the windowpanes
Dancing erotica with aged wooden doors
Creaking, creaky, hinges howl in agony
Drapery draped in crimson gluttony
The red goes as red does; cracking open nightscape
Shafts of shadow red roll with her in bed suddenly
The warriors escape defeat through doors agape

Red moon aloft takes measure
Measuring its canvas for leisure, for pleasure
Haunted the empty parlors sit
The heartbreak of a man she could not, would not quit
Flickering flames in the parlor that's dimly lit
As she opened her wrists lying vulnerable upon an aged chaise
To the red moon full she cast a longing gaze

When the red moon aloft came calling
She danced again like she danced before
Crimson blood to the teak floors went falling
Slammed shut we're the aged wooden doors
She was barely twenty-three
The night the red moon aloft came to set her free

But stand in the parlor, in the mansion, on West Parkland Street
Listen for the delicate rhythm of dancing feet
Upon old teak floors, in tune with the harmony of creaking doors
And the red moon aloft

Hear she whisper on a wind so soft,
"Dance with me one last time my love, before the final time in my life, I bid you adieu, and see you off".

Crimson washed away decades ago
New owners came, owned, then bequeathed away the home
All the while she danced - she danced in defiance
She danced with love; but most of all - she danced alone

Crack hard did the whip as hard and cold bludgeoned the stone
Footprints delicately danced into crimson - as she danced alone.

Scenes from a Seventies Cellar Sofa

By: Hunter Christian

Within the mind of a madman swirled
The faint belief he could live in this world
The haunting bloodline to which he was bequeathed
The bodies decaying, buried beneath

The rickety shack where his plans are hatched
The tin roof, the holes newly patched
The scent of jasmine, of pungent death
Smothered his palette with every breath

On the walls hanged rosaries upon plaster unevenly thatched
The patchwork quilt; the tiles, the stitching that never matched
The tools of his trade, so readily made
His mother's love, the love his father forbade

Swirling, swimming, diver down goes the wretched
Into the murky pond, the bones he waded into fetch it
It that cathartically racked his addled mind
It that lost time when the watch would not wind
It that stepped from the shadows to the fore, from behind

The cardboard box held steadfast with twine
His deadly vocation; its haunting evocation
The blood on the carpet seeped deep into the knotted pile
The higher the pile, the deeper defiled

Stained crimson the warf, as stained crimson the woof
Awash by moonbeams scattered through cracks in the roof
So many lives unavenged lay in shallow graves

The woman who smiles, the child who waves
The man who hitched a fatal final ride

Another woman who smiled, while yet another cried,
"Don't kill me sir, I will give you anything I can"!

"Bother me not, do you know who I am?
I am the reaper, the scythe, the cloak, and the wrath
The Merchant of Venice bathing in a crimson bloodbath
The pale horse canter along your mortal bridle path"

The rosaries, the moonbeams, the cutter that is the lath
Wind howls, it bellows, it droops as it coughs
From the madman's larynx emanates a loud guffaw
The blood that drips from his menacing jaw

Within the mind of the madman your fate thus swirled
Stealing your breath's last known to this world
Awakening from the dreamscape where around you lay curled
The madman you feared was nothing more; than your loving dream girl

Far Afield

By: Hunter Christian
My mind is far afield
To morbidity
To melancholy
I yield
Days are short
Nights are long
Empty door
An unsung song
My mind is far afield
Scant Sun
Frigid limbs
A frozen run
Heart is grim
My mind is far afield
Winter's solstice
Came and went
Big Run's coldest
Where it's bent
A season's depression
A calculated regression
Haunted by time
Starving for rhyme
The run has run dry
So too have I
My mind is far afield
My mind is far afield
My mind is far afield
I am
Far afield

Stagecraft of Grayer Dramas Lost

By: Hunter Christian

A sandstorm bleached lungs dry in wartime Morocco by day;
By night; The Great War waged on in a caustic landscape of browns, crimson, and grays;
An aged cityscape depicting old Marrakesh,
A femme fatale dybbuk stood at the ready;
A lustful apparition lying in wait for warmer flesh,
Her faint arabesque; firm and steady;
The lost shadow of she -
Elongated, stretched edgewise,
Awash within the somber night of the bereaved - trampled underfoot were dead and fallen leaves;
Her lustful eyes,
Her muscular thighs,

The plane the craftsman toiled upon end;
Oh, and how in erotica the dancer's back did bend,
Drilled countersink allowed delicate toes to glide swiftly and smoothly with right away;
Hanging posters of drama's lost; blanketed in dust - aged-like and gray,
Top screw heads held steadfast stage planks onto mighty joists while she did flit, slither, and glide;
All the while those screw heads did hide,
How swiftly over the craftsman's countersink her extremities did slide;
The master who haunted she; the male lead at her side,
Intense shafts of dead light coddled she as a demon symphony urged she to bow before onlookers
seated on a wooden bench;
The exorcism of one, the one who's drenched, drenched headlong within death's wretched stench,
The craftsman sat in awe; within earshot of the hatter's menacing guffaw;
Third row center stage he sat, to shirk presumption - to minimize assumption,
The mad hatter poisoned by mercury; seered with eyes grayed by rage - all the while - the craftsman
sat center stage,
Accosting his apprentice in kind on that lonely cold stage;
The mad hatter's madness boiled over - the animal captured, taunted, starved and caged;
From hues of reds and yellows, to steady shafts of blue, the house lights did fade,
Hanging stealthily from the entablature; the blue hue washed evenly over the dozen colonnade;

Tightly laced brunette locks adorned her trailing view with a flaxen fishtail braid;
The gentlemen who courted she, lingered briefly, but refused to marry or stay,
Bouncing, dancing, and scorned; with time the braid tattered as the rope that frayed -
Ghastly ghostly howls treated the craftsman's curiosity as the hatter's blade swung straight and true;

Slicing the windpipe of the dybuk's dancing partner as he stood amidst a wash of gray death hues
and melancholic blues,

With a curtsy and with a bow, the dybuk dancer girl rose hastily into a swirling twirl;

Oh yes! Twirling with debauchery whilst spinning within her sensual swirl;

Into the hatter the ancient demon entered to possess he, as stench rose coughing proudly from the
innocence of the virgin brown-skinned girl,

From three came one; and in a leap of fury, the hatter plunged third row deep; and the craftsman
was done!

Gray lay the stale dust as stale scents rose like velvety perfume of wanton lust;

Where life and death throes lingered in a transcendent dance within lost dramas of space and time,
The aged wax on planks of pine, that turned brown with aged grime, the dialogue spoken loudly,
loudly spoken, yet devoid of rhyme;

Three hours of stagecraft complexities unfurled before bewildering eyes who could scantily spare a
lowly silver dime,

There - past, present, and future collided in lockstep with the players of the day,

The warm hues of yellows, oranges, and reds faded fervently to muted blues - and then downward
to morbid grays -

The blues lingered for a moment, shook loose of obligatory stations, like drunkards at a wake,
pouring downward to hallowed ground their honored libations,

The blue lights lingered for lingering sake; the smiles of hypocritical truth drowned the smiles of the
players so evidently forced and faked;

The light designer tread lightly sporting a wry smile, and with the counterclockwise turn of a creaking
dial -

The blues faded away, from its cooling prominence, to scant shades of deathly grays;

Blanketing that one living soul drawn to an advertisement that promised he stagecraft nostalgia; and
the solemnity of simpler times of yesterday's;

In the dust that settled on seat backs heartily, the playbill rested on some, and there, for decades it
stayed,

The mad hatter, the femme fatale dybuk, her partner in stride; and all the lured fools who gave life
to the aged stage, who sat in awe of her beauty;

Who fell victim to the hatter's rage -

To wit, all craftsmen hired, toiled in earnest, sat three rows deep, sat in earnest at center stage,

Each watching the dybuk swirl, twirl, and glide;

With bloodletting fury, came the judge and the jury, the lives lived, the lives snuffed out, those souls
persecuted, arrested, jailed and then unfairly tried,

The mercurial smiles; mingling with mercurial cries,
The saline tears upon soft rosy cheeks quickly dried;
And, alas - the players played the haunting cast -
From the first ticket bought; until the box office sold out of its last;
The cash register chimed open, a tortured voice relayed the fateful ticket's cost -
For a final presentation, the curtain call, the end of a run, for The Grayer Drama Lost?
Until soon wandering eyes' purview rested lowly to a wanted advertisement for "a craftsman," from
which they could not refrain,
The candidate had to possess a traditional carpenter's acumen, a sharpened plane, the desire to
toil, to tinker, and to sit still in vain;
While seated third row center stage, as the sacrificial lamb, the vehicle for the demon dancer,
cometh hard did the hatter's poison induced rage -
Rain down did the bloodletting, the death blows, the sun setting,
From his body the blood completely drained, from the windpipe of that season's hired hand, the wind
howled, driving hard coarse and blackened sands;
And the consequence for the craftsman who read an advertisement for which he could not refrain;
blood flowed crimson into a cellar floor drain;
Another craftsman was sacrificed by the dybuk, the femme fatale apparition who could never bow
and leave the players' stage -
And, each season's new hire - lured to the theater, within reach of the mad hatter's psychopathic
purview and rage,
Seated erect and proudly in row three; clearly centered, sitting as the hatter's blade slashed and
entered;
And sacrificed was another season's craftsman, who answered a wanted ad from which he could
not refrain, and downward blood flowed like crimson rivers into a cold cellar drain;
Within a haunted theater's belly, where time and place were lost; and each season's new hire, lured
with a heart full of wonderment, and endless nostalgia gained - ignorant of his mortal coil, or its
inevitable cost;
Sacrificed to the God's of the demon dancer, who willfully lured in her victims, who were drunken by
wanton lust;
Lastly, the victims were fixated, hypnotized, entranced, and then ranked out and slain within an
ambiance of truth, loyalty, and trust!
Death comes to us all; and all die we must!

Forgetting to Live

By: Hunter Christian

May we just sit and talk,
for a while please?
Perhaps an evening walk;
if I can awaken these old tired knees,
and aching back too

The older I have gotten;
the greater the pain grew,
And, all I have forgotten;
make memories too few,

Remembering sunrises,
sunsets, and morning dew,
fading from me now,
still cling to the ledges of my mind somehow ?

Although, I canvas, I study, your familiar face;
I cannot remember you
Your lines I desperately trace;
still, recognition fails to breakthrough

So much slower goes my pace
Oh, how I wish to start anew
Can I remember your embrace?
I'm the forgotten soul forgotten
Forgotten are the wars I fought in
Forgotten are my labors labored
Forgotten are the loves I savored
Forgotten are my friends and neighbors
I am the forgotten, forsaken, forlorn
From my mind, my memories have been shorn

So, at the breaking dawn of this past morn;
To the ghosts of all those forgotten, forsaken, and forlorn,
I did wantonly give,
my last and final memory given;
when I had forgotten how to live.

Murdering Crow Takes Measure

By: Hunter Christian

A desolate landscape
Swampland abound
Eager saplings raped of sunlight
By skeleton trees haunting
Murdering crows take measure

A vantage-point assured
Swiftly sparrows jockey
For position in this unearthly wasteland
A spotted fawn's decomposition
Stimulates the turkey vultures' drive

Pungent death plots the dead fawn's position
For the scavengers of the sky
Diving down the vultures dive
The crows follow suit
The sparrows too

Winds blow mixtures of life and death
To the rapture and the pew
Wafting through the church window agape
To the widow's son

The preacher, his sermon, and a Medieval crossbow
The hunter preacher who deigns a gun
Of God and man and ape and evolution
Of Leviticus, the Pentecost, Ecclesiastes ? on this Sabbath Day;
Creationism hath won

To the boy, nature has its own form of justice
A judge and jury too

An executioner at the ready
Crimson stains imbue
On grassland canvases
On desertscapes
streetscapes and seascapes

A body shamed enrobes
As vanity's narcissism disrobes

Societal constructs of ethnicity, creed;
of the myriad races
Satan tests the piety of righteous Job
Old Job remains in God's good graces

God advances no legal tender
His disciples carry no currency
Gabriel has marked no sender
No angels extend wings in urgency

Nature has its order
A boy aged ten surely sees
God judges man superior naught
To the crow, the vulture, the sparrow, the tree

Whether swampland or grassland
Jungled rainforest or concrete urbane
The boy wiser than a man of God;
a forced member of a congregation insane?

Determinism contradicts free will
The boy deign to swallow that jagged pill

"Am I the fawn, the crow, the vulture, the sparrow,"
The boy sends a prayer upwards to God?

"No son, you are the instrument of death; you are the hunter's arrow"

The boy's retort sinking beneath his breath,
"But thou shall not kill, doesn't anyone find this contradiction odd?"

"Question me not boy, for I am the Lord ? your creator, your God!"
A wily sparrow plucks the fawn's eye from its socket
The vulture dining on intestines, yields the heart to the cunning crow
The hunter places a majestic feather in his pocket
A prop for his sermon on the morrow
As for the boy ? denial of nature, hypocrisy, and contradiction is all he knows
Black wings unfurl in the boy's peripheral
An ominous sense of sorrow
washes over the boy as;
upon a window's ledge, a crow claims his perch

The harbinger hits the boy hard-fast and true
Those who lurch in this wasteland church;
care not of evidentiary truth, if truth-be-told, and that doesn't require faith to prove

The boy rests his addled head against a goodly old birch
Of the boy's beliefs, do you disapprove or wish to reprove;
Or perhaps, arbitrarily castigate, discredit, berate and besmirch?
Are you the crow upon the windowsill, its cold stony perch?

Do not forget to return your hymnal, before you leave the church.

Remnants of Yesteryear's Bounty

By: Hunter Christian

An orphaned piano plays solemn tunes
In a ghost town by night
By day, the piano sits in silence
Echoes echo through the grand hall

Tapestries catalog histories abandoned
Winter to spring through summer and fall
Strong statured apparitions; court others of fairer stature
Coattails long, cocktails strong, top hats tall

Frilly laced gowns
Mundane frowns
Slender necks adorning mithril chains
From the chains hanged locket

Pellucid gents with gilded pocket watches
Watch for wryly pick-pockets
Fairer maidens courted by fair gents
Time and place abdicated;
to the supernatural

From boyhood, from maidenhood
Cosmopolitan from hardscrabble
The wildcatter made good
His chattel laborers labor under snapped whips

Whipped readily
Cracked hard upon sturdy backs
Riches came easily to easy characters
Blood spilled for meager wages

Two-bits a dance
From ladies-of-the-night
Who sold with each dance feign romance
Haunted echoes echoed into the nightscape

Robber barons of The Gilded Age
Brides hunting gilded bridegroom
The societal divergence abound
The lowly mingled alongside the upper crust

The masculine bartered its social wares with the feminine
Until the mines relinquished no more gold
The silver, copper, and salt mines too
Gone for good

Southward the profiteers migrated
Black gold shot skyward in tales of lure
Another boomtown went bust
As another boomtown boomed into life

Prosperity abound from impoverished strife
Promised wealth belied
One town's townsfolk given to flight
As wood architecture rotted, windows clouded over, wells dried to dust
as metal turned to rust,
tumbleweed clichés came to fruition,
as ghost winds raged in haunted gusts

Nouveau-riche fund ivy league tuition
Generations hence
A mansion secured with a wrought-iron fence
"New Money" earned its rung
On America's gilded social ladder

A middle class arose
The American worker, the everyman

The former became the latter
Boomtown abandoned

Families abandoned homesteads, storefronts too, the livery gone
Save for a few dozen worn headstones
No passersby would have known
A man with a name called this town home

He sweat, he toiled, he married, bore children
His final harvest for a final seed sown
An orphaned life in death
In an orphaned town a timeless figure;
plays an orphaned piano

Solemn tunes played for solemn souls
Restless souls haunting an old tired haunt
A maiden accepts an extended pale hand
A drunkard spews foolhardy taunts

A working girl accepts two-bits
Dancing phantoms of a wayward age and time; dance the night away
A tavern's clock chimes
The hall's walls send wafting good acoustics;
into the night air

Upon the fabric of time and place;
history's blade did tear; has torn
As time's tumblers tumbled
A country was born

Cogs locked on to its station
As the Texas ground and iron horses rumbled
Henceforth the glory, the story, of a prosperous nation;
grandiose and bold,
told, forgotten, and retold;
to the youth of America,

from gray-haired generations of ole

Crestfallen Forlorn Maker Man

By: Hunter Christian

Taker of heartbreak measured
The dormancy of malevolence coerced
Unplowed field that lay fallow
The verbiage coarse and terse

The sermon delivered perilously
From the remnants of the shallow
As the crestfallen forlorn maker man
Dangled wriggling from the town gallows

Maker of promiscuous carnal knowledge
The intimacy of benevolence lured
Phallic men file onward paying hallage
Thrice years forgotten, rotten, and uncured

The seamstress's wares hung precariously
From her wretched body gauntly swallow
As the crestfallen forlorn maker man
Tangled his angst within she listlessly dallow

Woebegone lay the wretched upon the screw
Tightened down the crackling bones cracked
Guffawed lyrics rise high above the pews
Incensed burned velvety ambiance of lilac
Parishioners' transient faith bade adieu
Ritual denouement wafting scents of stacte
Bloodbath be a killer with crimson imbued

Smile on crestfallen forlorn maker man

Reset does he the perpetual hourglass
Time passages fallen in spirited sands
Beset by mortal coil drowning en masse

Die on crestfallen forlorn maker man

Regret bequeathed unto lesser offspring
The Crestfallen Forlorn Maker Man
Surveyor of the Jewish Ghettoes
Blue-eyed reaper's scythe cleared the meadows

Harvest did he the gold of the dead
Upon hallowed ground his boots did tread
Upon deep slumber into the witching hour
Lay his blonde head;
in peace, guilt ridden naught, nor draped in dread

No dread

Conscience

By: Hunter Christian

I am a pestilence
I am an army of one
I am Mother Nature's bastard son
I kill without reproach
I kill, I've killed, I'll kill again
I am the resilience of the cockroach
I am the embodiment of original sin
I devour
I am the sands
I am the hours
I am the glass
I am the future
I am the past
I am the scourge
I am the vermin
I am the pathogen you want to purge
I am the sermon
I am the preacher
I am the teacher
I am the hunter
I am the gun
I am the sky
I am the stars, the moon, the sun
I am God
I wear no mask
I am the firing squad
I am the question you long to ask
I lie in wait
I seal your fate
I am the meek
I am the solace you seek

I am the night
I am the day
I am your sight
I am for whom you pray
I am the murky pond's dragonfly
I am the darkening clouds
I am the sky
I am the lightning
I am the rain
I am all that's frightening
I am the blood in your veins
I am the snow on ice-capped mountains
I am your reliever of pain
I am antiquity's marble fountains
I am your conscience
I am the whisper in your ear
I am death's rattle
I am the requiem you dread to hear
I am the battle
I am the war
I am the john
I am the whore
I am the parasite
I burrow deeply into your blood
I am the flea as I am its bite

I am the love
I am the tainted kiss
I wash over you like a flood
I am the feeling something's amiss
I am the bullet
I am the hit list
I am the assassin
I am the shadow you're endlessly passing
I am you you see
I am the man

I am the woman
I am all that you believe
I am your reflection
I am you and you are she
I am she and you are he
I am the shape in the mirror
Looking back at you
Looking back at me

Somewhere in the Borderlands

By: Hunter Christian

A gray coyote surveys;
the Colorado Plateau
Frigid nights yield to warmer days
A borderland between the ranchers of The Land of Enchantment,
and the Navajo Nation,
that spans the four corners,
of Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado

The coyote traverses through both unabated,
where western civilization and its notion of Manifest Destiny,
contrasts strikingly to the Navajo way-of-life

The scarcity of water,
has led to myriad strife
The uranium mines,
that poisoned the scarce water reserves,
in the name of capitalism and the profit motive

A proud peoples who strive to preserve,
its proud culture,
to pass down proudly to their young,
much to the chagrin of the capitalist vulture,
forced to settle on the far flung,
desert lands of the American southwest

Promises of autonomy made by a government usurper,
lest its autonomy clashes with business interests,
Tread harshly did the boots of the interloper,
upon the Navajo Nation,
hidden behind the mask of Uncle Sam,
to elicit,

Americanism, patriotism, nationalism and the like,
rendered codified treatises implicit,
prompting a young Navajo man to protest by way of a hunger strike

The hallucinations enveloped the young man quickly,
as hunger pangs pushed acid upwards from his empty stomach to his burning throat

A kindred spirit comes calling to share the protester's fire,
the flames wane as the coyote lies upon the desert floor to warm his gray coat

Christian dissenters castigate the Navajo man with vitriolic words of hellfire;
His brethren rally,
A few empathetic Americans join the protest,
within the Navajo Nation's Monument Valley,
as police and National Guardsmen fall upon the crowd to arrest

Ill-guided patriotic rhetoric spews into the crisp desert air,
toward the protests the overzealous Americans vehemently detest,
like a gaunt coyote rising up against the ferocity of a grizzly bear,
rendering the contest,
unwinnable, and wholly unfair

A desert fire crackling,
sending embers into the desert air,
as the coyote is bested by his formidable foe

Cultures' push-pull factors,
and the consummate ebb and flow,
amongst the peoples who sojourn,
with light steps upon ancient lands

The fire falls victim to the cold night, relinquishing its flames that burned,
that warmed, that gave warmth,
as the protesters disperse, the troops adjourn

The coyote lies down upon the desert floor and dies,

as does the young Navajo man

A bald eagle shrieks as it soars into a starry sky,
as frigid air falls hard upon the desert sand

Truth-be-told, all fairness be damned

Navajo tears fall upon hallowed ground,
as myriad faithful Native American folks,
while carrying heavy hearts, bury within the cold reddish-brown land;
awash in pale moonlight, while upon ornately carved pipes, elders smoke,
the coyote, in a shared grave, with the young Navajo man

Torrential rainfalls begin to fall,
breaking through earthen dams,
acutely aware ears register the mystic calls,
of the mighty bald eagle,
a majestic symbol of freedom,
ever soaring, ever beautiful, ever regal.

Comes a Caller

By: Hunter Christian

The page sat empty
The inkwell too
Feather pen broken
At half past two
The stove had gone cold
No story to be told
No literary fame
Nameless he remained
The lonely author's name
At quarter of three
With shivering knees
Death decided to call
The handwriting upon the wall
Death comes when it comes
Death comes to us all

Rings

By: Hunter Christian

Rings in the corn fields
Rings within the trees
Rings around the nucleus
of the atoms that make-up,
all we are and see
Rings around the sun,
paths the planets heed
A ring around our Earth,
grants us moonlight we need
Rings around Saturn, Neptune too
"Ring Around the Rosie,"
when children succumbed to the flu
Rings around our fingers,
symbolize vows I made to you
Rings of the Milky Way,
swirling stardust of gases and light
Rings light years away
Rings of ancient galaxies in our sky at night
The rings of heaven's gate
One ring, or two, so many, so few
When "our world" ends someday
Rings will begin the Earth anew

Hauntings at Willowbrook

By: Hunter Christian

A palatial home for the discarded;
sat in silhouette before a peaceful backdrop,
where gently rolling hills blanketed in green grasses,
covered remnants of ancient mountaintops,
perpetuating a false sense of calm,
like young children taught to sing,
the comforting words of sacred psalms

The institution was called a school;
a place where,
children from eastern New York state communities,
were sentenced to life imprisonment there

Born deviance adorned smiling faces;
parents who called their children "retarded;"
innocence thrown away and disregarded

Parental obligations tossed aside amidst feigned eyes of the guilt ridden,
casted downward to the campus lawn surrounding that peculiar institution,
a sense of self respect raped and forbidden

A courtyard blooming with myriad flowers and shrubbery,
beckoned wayward souls,
hiding the wretched conditions within,
perennial sin begat perennial sin

Deciduous trees swayed in calming breezes
In autumn, the homestead-like grounds were transformed;
peppered picturesque,

as fallen from naked trees,
by late October, through early November,
yellow, red, orange, and brown leaves,
descended to an inevitable finality,
absent from purview,
the inherent banality,
within brick-encased buildings that sat amongst those deciduous trees and leaves,
colorful, beautiful as nature can be,
hiding the evil that lay beneath the surface

A child's finger that traced,
those trees in her background,
in the condensation gathered on thinning windowpanes,
beyond walls that imprisoned,
driven borderline insane,
children mired in wanton derision,
as they were mired in the mundane

Calm silence shattered by shrieks of agony
A beautiful lie that denied the sullen and bereaved within;
children labeled disfigured, ugly, a sin

A shadowy figure stood like a sentinel;
gazing longingly beyond border walls,
from a window eight feet tall,
guarding a wretched threshold,
between a visual calm,
and the horrid innards

The putrid stench of stale disease hit unready heads hard;
mingling inside walls imprisoning the menaced,
as thickset storms of urine and feces swirled,
into the wretched air of the Willowbrook State School,
where naked souls lay on cold concrete floors,
behind locked doors,
that sequestered away souls so hauntingly cruel

Children abandoned by society, by families, by their fathers and mothers
Twisted bodies begat twisted minds,
a disturbed reality,
Surreal incongruity, if ignored,
was rendered,
unreal if only by the fates of souls who surrendered

All semblance of humanity lost
An inhumane existence molded by guardians;
rendered impressionable minds insane,
Vulnerable folks preyed upon by workers who would readily accost

Corrupted caregivers who raped their charges,
as tears of forgotten children flowed,
when abuse unrelentingly harsh,
left broken hearts and broken bones,
inside the bodies of children that called,
that hell-on-Earth home

Around darkened corridors gaunt zombie-like ghosts roamed,
Writhed agony echoed off cinder-block walls,
as distended bellies hungrily groaned

The sound of water rhythmically dripping into ignored puddles became,
a ubiquitous ambient backdrop,
as did the smell of mold and mildew, soiled bed linens and hospital-like gowns

The wretched stench permeated every room, hall, office, crawlspace, closet, and crevice,
where air could slither

Learned manipulation for staff and residents alike;
became a cunning tool-of-the-trade

Cockroaches and rats battled for food scraps fallen unto filthy floors
Body lice and myriad parasites found safe haven at Willowbrook

Vermin that fed upon the detritus,
that fed upon skin covered with seeping sores,
that fed on the blood,
that burrowed deeply into the blood

For within the blood,
the anger, the angst, the disdain, the choler
the raging emotional tempest,
that shattered silence when tortured souls screamed and hollered

Rife was the anguish
The strife of those famished
Starving for love
Starving for life
Starving from the strife
Starving from hopelessness formidably rife

The dead still walk Willowbrook;
in the halls, the rooms, in the courtyard too,
somewhere between the weeping willow and the brook,
somewhere absent of truth,
from whence the name of the place came,
where within, the scent of death still hits the curious hard,
and Willowbrook was its name

On The Fourth Measure

By: Hunter Christian

The city

Sodium light gathered within ground-cover fog,

A nineteenth century wharf, its empty warehouses, and a curious dog,

The inquisitive German Shepherd led his master; untethered, to a lifeless body,

warm to the touch, halfway sunken, still partially afloat in a gravesite bog,

A lifeless hand was presented, proudly presented to his startled master,

as it dangled loosely from the dog's salivating mouth's clutch,

And so, the backstory goes as such

The city

Its red light district's red lights

in unison come to life,

All shades and blinds had been lowered and drawn,

The mystery's five integral actors:

The Governor, the Grifter, the Barfly, the piano, the Pawn:

The five actors cross paths,

on the fourth measure, in three-quarter time at dawn,

The veteran tapper taps ? A speak easy, the piano, its player,
cracking knuckles with a yawn ?

The Steinway & Sons Model D Victorian Grand,

A witness to myriad intrigue, the occasional three-fourths time jig, or perhaps, just an ordinarily
spurious con

The Piano

Grandiose in its stature, aged yet elegant, its ornate details abound,

from its acoustic innards ? its haunting sounds ?

bellowing up from its extraordinary brawn ?

Its presence, its prevalence, its girth, its massive stance ? impressive at first glance,

the music, the beat, the rhythm, the drenched bodies that dance,
their feigned romance,

The music it sends aloft, and all the ambiance it imparts,

as the witching hour approaches the inevitable dawn;

smoke in a smoky dance hall parts ?

and then with measured caution,

as jazz rhythms echo off of the dance hall's walls,

Entering into the smoky room, the pensive Pawn,

All the while, the slumbering sun, reluctantly awakening,

readies its warmth for the eminent dawn

-

The Pawn, drops a gold eagle into a brandy snifter;

to the ready the Grifter ?

The Grifter, who is a transient vagabond,

a barrelhouse and brothel pianist, a wayward drifter,

for a bed and a whore's invitation,

the Grifter, never idle, would stealthily sidle,

to spike a mark's drink with laudanum,

Anyplace, anywhere, anytime; for a price, and at any location,

the Grifter would gladly employ his deadly vocation

-

Tap, tap, tap in common time now,

the fourth measure bellows and echoes,

When in walks the Governor ? investigating the hall for a come-hither lover,

as canvassing eyes scan the room for a wanton crime undercover,

Yes! The Governor, seeking the Grifter;

in disguise as the pianist and the undercover lover!

-

An alto sax sends aloft into smoky and velvety air,
inveterate carnal aphrodisiac whispers,
as cool steely eyes suspiciously stare, while acutely aware,
the identity of at least one of the undercover lovers,
undoubtedly, half of the tandem consists of the state's undercover Governor,
surprisingly still, not a single member of the press is present to uncover the scandal,
that even the most scrupulous of reporters would kill to expose, to personally handle
-

Within swaying bodies, upon wanton ears ? cool jazz soothes and simmers,
The wanton bodies of the Grifter and the Governor,
a dancing duo of unabashed sinners,
Their lustful words ? rise like vows, like verbal keepsakes;
debauchery long held and tawdry, deeply dyed-in-the-wool,
and to hell with the costly stakes
-

Alas, the Pawn awakes,
the occupant of a corner stool,
an integral member of a mysterious cast,

until half past,

the hour of reckoning, where upon the forlorn piano,

tap, tap, tap, the Barfly taps jazz hands upon white and ebony keys,

as the Grifter's ready relief,

With calculating nerve and smooth cool,

The Barfly sits on the bench tapping keys,

clumsily playing a crowd favorite called, "The Unsteady Fool,"

-

On the fourth measure ?

Tap, tap, the ingénue tapper taps, lost of melodic acumen,

less a pianist than a character of moderate leisure,

a person who covets, who treasures,

a scheme of adult role play,

where for a meager wage, upon life's proverbial stage,

the Barfly finds substance in a secondary role well played

-

On the fourth measure, beating incessantly in time;

the rhythm, the beat, yes the mystery too, of a curiously indignant crime,

when on a mark, an antique clock chimes, indicating the caper's start,

The Grifter knocks off from patent leather shoes, dirt, sawdust, and grime,

Springing into action, the confident Grifter deceptively lures;

the eagerly willing Governor,

a heart beating in tune with the music's sensual beat,

The motive rings true as motives surely do,

so onward goes the night's seedy chore,

The Governor; quietly demure,

follows the Grifter through the hall's swinging double doors,

Time ticks on, as the night creeps cautiously toward the waiting dawn

-

The music continues to play,

warm dancing bodies wantonly sway;

the rhythm, the beat, the time ? three-fourths,

The plan's success demands the actors stay the course,

So, without a hint of cold feet nor remorse,

the actors speak their lines, as they hit their marks,

still no single actor steps up to be the production's star,

the integral five, amidst the ambiance of the smoke, the jazz, the rhythm, the bar,

heady libations pour, downward unto a saw dusted floor ?

no one there the wiser, unaware of the events afoot, the coming deeds to be done,

already set into motion,

a crime that needn't require a loud and conspicuous gun,

hidden well amongst a speak easy's nightly commotion,

brought to fruition with a dastardly notion

-

A story unfolds with no heroes, only foes,

So, upward the tandem goes,

The Grifter, the transient drifter, with the Governor in tow,

Up one flight, then up two, upward passing the third,

lastly, the tandem finds the fourth

-

Alas! The key, the lock ? its cylinder tumbles until it clicks open,

the Grifter flings open the creaky old door,

blood red painted, with layer upon layer of paint beneath,

The room number, 444

A flickering gas light flickers in the adjacent and dimly lit corridor,

chills hit the waiting Pawn to the core,

ajar remains the blood red door

-

The Grifter enters the dark room,

offering an invocation, an invitation in gesture ?

In the cold motel room, haunted by an ominous gloom,

the Governor kneels on bended knees before,

The Governor's secret lover, the Grifter, to provide sexual pleasure,

in perfect rhythm, in perfect time, on the fourth measure ?

from a vantage-point of calm leisure,

The Pawn, on queue, abandons the stool at the bar;

never missing a beat, never too near, nor, never too far ?

-

The Grifter signals its time,

as the Pawn enters from behind

and, while still undercover, thrust into the neck of the Governor,

a letter opener, like a bayonet, plunging all the way through,

plunging in straight, plunging in true,

The Pawn and the Grifter, conspiring executioners, assassins and killers,

Never to be mistaken for society's sturdiest of pillars,

hired murderers working in perfect concert, in perfect unison, and in perfect tune,

The Grifter, the vagabond, the vagrant,

with a penchant for debauchery wildly flaunted, often flagrant,

the ne'er-do-well turned lover,

to the Governor,

drops the dying Governor to the crimson soaked rug,

lying the limp body down ominously, upon an aged teakwood floor,

The hour ticking to a quarter-past four,

The tandem takes on the task of hiding the result of their fatal chore
-

Two faces paint on masks devoid of emotion ?

so as to illicit no commotion,

the Grifter and the Pawn,

exit the warehouse turned no tell motel, and underground nightclub,

into the fading dawn,

by way of an alleyway door,

down a rickety old fire escape,

carrying with them, their chore,

tightly rolled up in that crimson soaked rug

the rug that once lay on the motel room's grimy floor,

The hour: half-past four

-

With the Governor's newly appropriated mansion under construction ?

the Governor, and the Governor's family, were given quarter in the city on the taxpayers dime;

An old nineteenth century brownstone embraced by the sensuous yet calming aroma of lavender, lilac, and mother-of-thyme -

stood in nicely for the Governor's residence

Its fascia adorned elegant stained glass windows, ornate sandstone window casing, and flower boxes that holdfast the myriad purple flowers,

The brownstone's modest grounds were secured by a stout wrought-iron fence,

and nestled beneath the cool shade of a middling aged red maple, rested an idyllic courtyard where the home's residents could ease their minds for hours and hours

-

At a quarter of nine, the old brownstone's ornate knocker knocks,

A mid-morning caller knocks several more times,

When no one answers, the caller insists once more,

by pulling a silver chain to awaken a rusty ole chime,

In no time, a curious character opens the home's large front door

The detective speaks, "My condolences dear sir, I fear that I am the bearer of ominous news;"

"Your dear wife, the Governor, is dead,"

the detective continues on as his eyes fall downward to his shiny black shoes,

"We think it was a political assassination,"

The Governor's husband, in perfect control of his senses,

removes his eyeglasses with a white handkerchief,

wiping the tears clear from its lenses,

While displaying no unduly maudlin melodrama, no peculiar stoicism, no false pretenses,

The husband's behavior does not elude to anything out of place or amiss,

"I shall keep you apprised of anything new," the detective insists,

"If you have no questions sir, I bid you good morning and adieu,"

-

The brownstone's foyer, its herringbone tile floor

becomes the production's stage; a segue closing the final scene;

With a push, and locking of the front door,

a pensive murmur begins to build while rising aloft,

echoing off the walls and herringbone floor,

building, building, building up, from a murmur to a roar,

concluding loudly as an expletive laced crescendo,

"good riddance you filthy whore!"

-

As if on queue, out from the parlor comes the Pawn, yes the Pawn!

Following right after, the Grifter enters the foyer too!

The Governor's widower hands a paper bag wrapped brick shaped object to each of the actors,

"Here's the five thousand we agreed upon, and here's another five thousand for you,"

The time: nine twenty-two

The temperature: sixty-two

The day: the first Tuesday in June

The year: 1922

A Forlorn Wintertide Beholden

By: Hunter Christian

The winter storm's winds desperately howled,

Its agonizing wails wailed,

Whispering of reprimands run afoul,

If only for sake of refuge lost,

Those whispers beckoned me in come-hither taunts,

My centuries olden sanctuary to pay the cost,

And a promised respite from my past haunts,

The hauntings that,

Left my addled mind shattered,

The relentless torturing begat,

Unrelenting madness,

I remember how my trembling hands scattered,

under the guise of guilt ridden sadness,

crimson blankets of rose pedals over hallowed graves,

amidst an encroaching flank of whipping rod,

amidst the raging storm as it beaten and battered,

blown away were the rose pedals I scattered,

In its barren stead,

The whipping rod usurped ? as remnants of its vile purpose ? left
my clothes bloodied and tattered

*

My hands too calloused;

Although feverishly desiring to touch her body, my coarse hands
never felt her skin ? the sacrament dissuaded the sin,

So to witchcraft I desperately turned,

I drank blood from a tarnished chalice,

Beaten with the whipping rod I reaped;

the bloody welts stung and burned,

The wounds seeped,

My heart wept,

Upon a bed of nails I slept,

Still, my mortal hands never touched, never caressed, never felt
her,

The only refuge existed inside the confines of the homestead,

Wood, brick, tar, plaster, and paint constructed to shelter,

The rot that time's cruelty inevitably befell her

*

During the wintertime death throes from a forlorn age,

when the madness of a winter's unrelenting rage raged,

As it sheltered us from the wintertide's alter ego masked as
summer swelter,

A southern colonial mansion's porch sufficed for a stage,

As the makeshift jailhouse locked runaway souls below in the
tormented cellar,

Father's preaching justified the peculiar institution, and impending
retribution, as he embodied a silver-tongued sage,

Oh, how his words enraged,

Verbiage precisely chosen to rattle the animals' cage,

So that without a hesitant flinch,

The riled crowd turned into a fierce mob,

Mere moments later, the mob fell hard upon the prisoners to
lynch,

Two slave boys whose failed escape,

Fueled father's tempestuous ire,

Those poor boys falsely accused of her rape,

Befallen innocence and unbeknownst victims of my lustful
desires

*

I spoke naught,

My mind fraught,

For centuries on end,

Denied repentance I have sought,

I am reaping justice for injustices I have sown

Trapped in this middling place, idly by and by, I readily, I steadily
rot,

Amongst the whipping rod, I had wantonly cultivated and grown,

Penance bygone, be damned, beholden to, for all I have reaped, I
have willingly accepted and owned,

The winter storm's winds howl and bemoan,

God hath forsaken me naught,

My blood spilt from shorn flesh hath atoned,

Ripped and gashed down to the bone,

Amidst an endless wintertide, I am trapped here, for good,

alone.

Everyday Mission of Attrition

By: Hunter Christian

Some Sunday in Everytown, U.S.A.

On a first Sunday in May,

a small seemingly devout congregation prays,

about the six days prior,

and the deceit that made them liars,

amongst the swallowed yawns,

still lingering in their dry throats, since awakening at dawn,

a townsfolk so petty, with mendacity at the ready, constant
deceitfulness rendering them tired,

Entrenched within duplicity, this small Everytown is mired,

As the preacher interprets scripture,

The same gospels spewed long ago by backcountry Medieval
friars,

He paints a pretty picture,

He pounds his fists on the pulpit when he speaks of brimstone
and fire,

Fiery words laced heavily with Old Testament stricture,

and postulations about End Times and the role of Satan the
habitual liar,

Yes indeed, the brush strokes are swift and harsh, but the canvas
lay bare,

Still, unbeknownst even to themselves, the parishioners do not
seem to care,

Their attendance depends rather on a longheld sense of guilt,

Burned into young minds as learned indoctrination, that
resembles anything, but anything honest and fair,

It's been the same since the church had been built,

Save for one hypocrite amongst the churchgoers who believes,

that she's above all the rest, who says at the very best, the others
only seek heavenly reprieve,

and all the rest, who at worst,

lazily practice feigned faith to readily deceive,

because with every single breath,

their doubt is overshadowed by their mortal fear of death,

When judgment day arrives, the lady decries,

within the line at heaven's gate, when all shall learn their fate,

for in that line, her brethren shall be the last, pitiful victims of their

pasts,

while she will be among the very first, to be quenched of her
mortal thirst,

When judgment day arrives, she claims, and the Lord judges the
parishioner's lives, saved will be the righteous, and to hell with the
cursed

As the congregation shuffles out,

And as eyes look about,

Folks wondering who's rife with envy, lust, and doubt,

Shuffling onward they do,

from the rows and rows of pews,

shared with their family, friends, and neighbors,

The judgmental ones begin again, to bear the fruit of faith's true
labors,

these labors the townsfolk savor,

yet believe somehow, if practiced, that God will still grant them all
favor

*

Here comes the everyday lay Christian lady on mission

*

There's no need to seek nor search,

For the lady of whom I speak, although appearing prim and proper, persnickety, yet meek, and with no hint of shame,

Nor any semblance of remorse, this Christian lady, will leave anyone she deems lesser, of course, lingering in the lurch,

For any transgressions lay bare at her feet, she never accepts the same, but quickly shirks, shifting away the blame,

A judgmental self-proclaimed "Christian lady" steps out through the front doors of Everytown's small Baptist Church

She takes measure as she surveys the parking lot,

high above from her righteous perch

She pulls out her do-gooder yardstick

She casts coal-black eyes that love to scrutinize,

with a bent toward flagrant arrogance, the lady enjoys cutting folks down to size,

knocking them down a peg or two, to expose their blasphemous ways,

all along the way,

etching notches into her yardstick,

while she selflessly does (she tells herself) God's good work,

the only activity that really makes her tick

*

She's the everyday lay Christian lady on a mission

*

She holds her yardstick nice and steady

With keen ears and a sharp tongue at the ready

Tools of the trade she hangs by a crucifix in her kitchen

She lacks the courage of her lofty convictions

As she spews a mouth full of derision

towards any unsuspecting parishioner

whose sins she had envisioned

foretold to her by her Lord and creator

A verbal agreement now on the table for rescission

First, she must accost the offender to litigate and debate her

Rendering a verdict relies solely upon a holier than thou decision

She the judge, as she the jury,

she the executioner too,

rife with Old Testament fury

The judgment she hands down is always free of mistakes

It's her's and her's alone to make

made alone in God's good name for goodness sake

*

Here comes the everyday lay Christian lady on a mission

*

Wanton hypocrisy seems to be her only measurable quality

If only she would turn her yardstick on herself to measure

The inequality evident when she uses her yardstick wreaks of
frivolity

Her Sunday leisure, finds its pleasure, by creating in others, a
strong sense of guilt and displeasure,

within the very folks she calls sisters and brothers

With hypocrisy abound, and without a wry whisper or a whispered
sound

she trades upon her faith while being unfaithful with another

This tawdry little story spread quickly around Everytown

*

She's the everyday lay Christian lady on a mission

*

The rapture is nigh, she claims to have previsioned, in heavenly
visions

On Judgment Day, she decries, loudly and proudly,
that most of the congregation will be left writhing in the lurch
"You don't go to church,"
She starts to preach, "to get your ears tickled"
Always right, never wrong, of her sense of superior morality, she
lives to teach and preach
to every vulnerable ear her preachy sermons may reach
With a checkered past all her own
seeds of debauchery she has willfully sown
to reap only vinegar when her seeds had grown
An eldest boy grew to manhood with a father who remained
unknown
And the third born girl, who's rumored to have a father,
other than the father who raised her as his own
She is the town busybody spreading rumors most of the day over
the phone
All the while, her coalminer husband works his fingers to the bone
Decrying for pity's sake
That she's lonely and alone
A bed of adultery she will wantonly make

She balks at the suggestion that she should atone

Yet, she's always at the head of the line to cast the first stone

From high on a hill where her glass house sits

Judgmental, mean, unfaithful, and dishonest

With a dry sense-of-humor and disposition prone to throwing
childlike fits

*

She's the everyday lay Christian lady on a mission

*

She refuses to change her two-faced ways

Her judgmental hypocrisy remains, an incessant mainstay

Life is black and white, she claims, there's no place for gray

Always a 'do as I say and not as I do' kind of friend

Casing her small-town for an eager ear-to-bend

To preach, to teach, to any bent ear she can somehow reach

Foretelling conditions of the afterlife and to where God will
ultimately send,

The souls of those wretched sinners who, with every breath taken,
anger him as they offend

*

Goodnight to the everyday lay Christian lady on a final mission

*

Early one Saturday night she went to bed,

to rest her aching head,

following the prayers she found herself deeply immersed in

She was religiously an early to bed, early to rise kind of person,

Especially for church on Sundays

In the early morning hours on that second Sunday in May,

after every last person in the house has knelt down and prayed,

the lay Christian lady's husband went up to her bedroom to make
sure she was awake

A faint smile of approval adorned her husband's face when, early
that morning, he found his wife dead

She was cold to the touch, and as stiff as a board

Her husband whispered low, "Well, she's surely with the Lord"

The everyday lay Christian lady on a mission lay lifeless atop her
bed

On her nightstand, a portrait of Saint Peter stood close to her
head,

and right beside good ole Peter, sat a glass half full with sweet
red wine

and on a nearby plate sat three cubes of even sweeter melt-in-
your-mouth leaven bread

All three were essentials required for any devout Christian to take
self-communion

However, on that morning, the lady needn't take communion,

for somewhere in the night, her last mission took flight, and she
flew to God,

to once-and-for-all, sanctify their holy union

As the lady lay there resting in peace,

just outside her bedroom window, a springtime rain took to
steadily pouring,

the everyday lay Christian lady finally met the man,

she spent a lifetime lovingly adoring

Dona nobis pacem.

Untitled the First

By: Hunter Christian

Golden waves crash over me

Fascination overcomes my resting place

O'er the landscape rich with amber

Gems of burnt sienna aglow with warmth

Glare through my body at once

I favor respite from escape

The forbidding walls encasing me give way

Awash in sienna sunglow I lie in its stead

To the sky I ponder my happenstance

Am I a soldier for the dead?

Delicately the breeze blows over me

Delicately the amber grasses caress my body

My homestead in a rickety ole shanty

Barren the place is dilapidated and shoddy

A whisper calms me somehow

For the racing thoughts race on

From her lips I hear my future call

In the lightscape of the awakening dawn

Red River to Nowhere

By: Hunter Christian

Massive rain clouds have been stalled,
Over the southern Great Plains for days
Torrential rains fall
Evacuations were ordered ? yet bullheaded folks stubbornly stay

And, the Red River of the South is rising
Its riverbanks strain to hold back;
the ebb and the flow
The mud and clay banks begin to crack

Anxiety grows
Farmers and ranchers stack sandbags on top of earthen levees
Fear reigns heavy
Darker clouds build to the north-northwest

More rain will surely come
Heretofore, sermons spewed about when the Red River will crest,
Becoming an obsession for some
The angry mob decries that, at all cost, the angry river must be tempered, must be wrest
To flood waters hardy folks deign it a damned failure to succumb
Rugged communities blessed at God's behest
Protestants, Methodists, Presbyterians, and all the rest

Including a small community of forty or so Syrians

For life, fortunes, and land; families dutifully appressed
Invested too are the Russian Orthodox Catholic Siberians
Also represented are the Eastern Orthodox Church for Liberians

A goodly priest from Algiers calms sullen fears
White men, black men, American and foreign shed God-fearing tears
Drought sent tithings into arrears
To a drunkard estranged wildcatter the face of Jesus himself appears

All stand around him with mouths agape and minds amazed
With a Godly boom from the skies above thunderclaps concuss unready ears
The Red River rises as hands raise
To the Father; to whom they pray and praise

Rumbling thunder makes the communities' children wary
A lightning bolt strike ignites fire on the parched prairie
Feuding Texans join forces with rival Oklahomans
To wrangle cattle to safety despite ongoing generational borderland disputes
All the while, Southern Baptist preachers decry End Times omens, and;
to alleged cowboy debauchery their sermon loudly imputes

The Red River of the South swells higher
as prairie fire engulfs a quaint North Texas town
Burning a Southern Baptist church from its rusted spire;
down to the reddish-brown hardpan Texan caliche ground
Floodwaters crest, grasslands afire, the situation becomes menacingly dire
Descending from the hauntingly dark clouds above without warning, a funnel cloud touchdown
smacks violently upon the hardpan within a flurry of ominous sounds

Like an angry freight train with a death wish on a runaway torrent
Trembling feet holdfast to shaking ground
In the glazed-over eyes of God's faithful subjects aghast, the sight of the a mile-wide tornado

reflects frighteningly abhorrent

From the swirling anger of the twister's blackening winds,
timber, glass, and townsfolk's keepsakes and artifacts are sent violently aloft
A voice cries out, "Did Armageddon hath begin"?

Waters break through compromised levees; trickling through walls of dirt and grass weakened and soft

The fires on amber grassland burn increasingly hotter and ever more intensely
Breathing becomes laborious as air inhaled into the inhabitants lungs weighs deadly heavy
Into action go emergency plans hatched in a frenzy

Then, hitting everyone's eyes with terror, comes the most horrific of sights;
when into the ominous blackened skies,
the tempestuous tornado plucks children from the hardpan ground, tossing their tiny trembling bodies upwards into flight
From the mouths of horrified onlookers, the words "Oh, my God!" rise, as terror invades petrified eyes

Still, the river's blood red waters spill over its broken banks

It would not relent

Frenetic paced men shovel, labor, sweat, and bleed with backs bent

To heaven, while down on bending knees, the devout and faithful folks send prayers of reprieve and thanks

Down river, within a crimson rush, a family's house dislodges from its foundation and away it went!

Chaos ensues as chaos will ?

with no leaders to lead

Amidst the chaos, intrepid shovels continue to shovel to fill ?

spots in fractured levees where the river was freed

Raging water washes away soil as it washes away planted seed

Just as the fury seemingly could not get any more ominous or any worse;

from Mother Nature's wicked deed,
the tornado tearing through the Texas panhandle like a wretched curse,
Bringing hell to the Red River Valley exactly between prime and terce,
In a blink of a tearful eye,
By the time the clocks ticked past sext and none,
The blackened skies clear
And...
God's Wicked Triad was done
After much consternation, the levees held; and the day was won

Between the following morning's prime and terce,
clouds had cleared, yielding respectfully to a scorching late springtime sun
Nary a word spoken by the townsfolk concerning forced attrition, the cost of penance, retribution, or
consequences of wayward folks punished and cursed,
Nope, back to the fields farmers went, with stern directives from ranch owners, back to the range
roughneck cowboys were sent,
And when that first Sunday after the Wicked Triad abated, off to their prospective churches went
devout fathers, mothers, daughters and sons
In the American southwest, the Red River of the South runs

Legendary

By: Hunter Christian

Could solace from the infernal affliction rely on an internally
afflicted man;

whom wade wildly into wilder flames,

shuffling kindling aside with shovel-like hands,

while sap from evergreens flowed like syrup,

amongst the maples whose syrup rendered the pine trees
envious,

and the underbrush "went up" like a Roman candle,

as baleful updrafts turned rocky outcrops into diminutive hearth
and mantle?

*

The roaring inferno roared,

onto the backdrop horizon, as it casted a sinister specter,

blanketing the twilit sky as flames soared;

From far afield the inferno's flames flickered,

reminiscent of a lighthouse's pulsating beacon,

welcoming seafarers home,

or warning wary captain's of danger ahead;

It's foreboding legend recited from aged pages rendered brittle
and amber within the bindings of a prodigious tome

*

Legends may be borne of tragedy or triumph,

in myriad fashion and form,

be it a cataclysmic happenstance, a foreboding event ? whether
diabolical or heaven-sent ?

may it take the shape of man or a hundred years' storm,

by its very trait,

although divergent its affect on time and place may be ? legend
transcends station ?

the verbiage, the rhythm, the diction, the meter chosen by the
storyteller to narrate,

as its passed-down, handed-down, from one progenitor to an
eager progeny,

burning its formidable vocation ? its enticing allure, its seductive
lure ? into ancestral folktales and time-honored lore ?

of yesteryear and of yore,

into the very annals of God's Earthly creation,

its infamy, or fame, lay in its wonderment, its historical
prevalence, its lyrical deliverance,

mired wholly in wanton fascination,

in humanity's enthrallment, intrigue, obsession ? its enchantment
? with gluttonous, gratuitous ? fatuous infatuation;

All the while,

the tragedy has grown,

as the triumph has grown,

yet would it be the afflicted man and his heroic deeds, or the
infernal affliction's minacious remnants,

that would be the legend told, the legend learned, and the legend
forever known?

Walk the Road Before You

By: Hunter Christian

Walk the road before you

Bask before your shadow

Stretched onto Carolina asphalt

Toward the horizon fate beckons

*

Going, going, gone ? the boy morphed into a man awash in the
lightscape of the wayward dawn

*

Take pride in your masculine gait

In the stride each step taken sends,

your body into the future with certitude

Westward bound your calling rings louder

*

Further, farther, farthest ? where manhood longed for boyhood
whistled in a yesteryear song

*

Rest well within God's heath and heather

If the inkwell swallows the pen and feather too,

scribe upon the ledger of your mind's eye

Revel in nature's bedchamber beneath a twilit Sugar Maple canopy

*

Sleep, sleepier, slept ? lie on fallow ground where native born folk
once longingly wept

*

Find sanctuary amongst prickly sweetbriar that nestle wild rose

Steer clear of sapling whose branches slice the sweet southern
air hard like malice aforethought

The very whipping rod that you lost into the wake,

of a speedboat's tempest as present faded to past amidst the
scent of jasmine and white magnolias.

*

Smile at the passersby who race to the holiday crab shack across
the lake's clear water to catch dinner

For grandfather taught you to catch a fish with pride from the
patchwork dock from where you stand

And, grandfather was a fisherman

Now, you are a fisherman too.

On the Morrow

By: Hunter Christian

On the morrow

Under gray clouds ubiquitous

She will measure her tears on the scale of sorrow

As she bids a solemn adieu

To the only lover she ever knew

The dark passenger of he

Took the wheel of his mortal vehicle

Careening the youthful vehicle into tumbling waters of a
thunderous sea

On the morrow

The cascading rains will slow from a wash to a trickle

As she lowers her eyes to the bronze casket that holds he

For all eternity, in solemnity

Heartbreak hath no remedy

Amidst whispers of wasteful, youthful "tragedy"

And, on the morrow

Birds of myriad varieties will fly above

To bear witness to the rising of his lost and broken soul

Upon her fragile body his departure has taken its toll

A slender frame that casts a long shadow of love

A shadow that will grow longer with the setting sun

As tidewaters roll into the shores of her mind

Upon sandy shores where upon her love affair had begun

On the morrow

When she trembles in the drenching rains of sorrow

That will surely slow to a trickle

whose delivering gray clouds will surely yield

To the sleepy sun that lengthens her shadow across a barren field

So that a measure of her love may guide him back home

With whispers of faith on the breeze

Their love roaming throughout the words of this humble poet's

poem

Infinitely cataloged upon the parchment paper of fallen leaves

Reinvigorated back to life with every spring anew

Their story gets written and rewritten upon an endless diary of
God's hallowed garden of trees

Lost are the many; found are the few.

Wintertide

By: Hunter Christian

Foreword

Donner's Sermon at Independence

Destiny manifest forespoken our rightful bounty
Westward bound we risk our futures, our fortunes, and our very lives

From scattered a field we congregate from myriad a state and county

So bound together, that if one should thrive, then all shall thrive
If one fails, we all fail

To this we do avail

*

We heeded the call to America's Midwest
Henceforth we shall join forces
Of the western wilds we must tame to best
Though our myriad stations brought us here via myriad courses;
with pride to each other we proudly attest,
we giveth our women and children, our gold and silver, our livestock and horses,
and all that implies, and all the rest
Never given in vain, nor in jest

*

From heretofore, to forevermore, to relinquish, to vanquish, the singular chore;
we ally with one another in this righteous, magnanimous, and noble accord
In one we fail, in many we afford

By the grace of God, our savior, the Almighty, our Lord

To honor your only begotten son
To never falter the forgotten ones
We band together our vocation, our wares, our currency, our funds
In search of a better morrow
Devoid of fettered sorrow
May no member beggar nor borrow

May our fortunes hath sown
Reap a bountiful harvest grown
In the name of our Lord, Amen

To the heavenly bounty of California, from whence the golden sun sets, may we, in your name, Dear Lord, humbly ascend
For we are your flock, and you are our shepherd, whom shepherds and tends
For that and so much more, we thank thee Dear Lord above, hallelujah, Amen.

PART I

Our party lost its way o'er Hastings Crossing
Trepidation nary set in crossing the Wasatch;
with Utah's plentiful landscape for restful dossing,
where all along shallow banks lay our supper's catch,
O' what a mighty batch ?
caught upon a whipping rod and line's bowed end,
a bounty of Lahontan cutthroat trout from the crisp flow of the Humboldt River,
to feed our waiting bellies the raging rapids thankfully did send

*

Our travail made all able-bodied men haulage striver;
with a herd of cattle to shepherd and to tend,
o'er rugged lands to California for survival's sake our wares must be delivered,
and with naught a single personage to lend,
all muscles were called upon to naught want, but to be wanton givers,
as the wagons bogged down at the last of the river's bends,

wherein frigid downpours strong bodies quivered and shivered,
as rainwaters swelled upriver volumes that pushed the swell downriver

*

Yes! Cold men shivered and quivered,
still we hollered "heave" and "ho,"
we pushed wagons through mud gauntlets that lined that damned road that sidled alongside the
Humboldt River,
we made those bastards Go!

*

Gone to where the Humboldt's waters flowed,
o'er rocks and stones,
o'er small pebbles and bones,
shifting downriver sand and silt,
to a deliverance thereupon gathered were the substances upon which cosmopolitan cities have
been built,
even the architectural beauty that enticed the Tower of Pisa to lean and to tilt

*

Lessening the burden of guilt,
so too we honored gravity in efforts to portage our livelihoods westward in tow,
before the pedals of springtime flowers had begun to wilt,
to an unknown destination we all prayed it would, it could, become known,
to us all,
before the first snow of the Sierra Nevada's fall

Whence upon the wind death rattles rattled
Foretold within the wind's first sullen chill,
Cloaked in black garb, with a sharpened scythe held high, the shadowy figure sat saddled,
upon his ebony horse that stood proudly tall, muscles flexed, and ominously still,
The Grim Reaper hath heard death's sweet come-hither call called,
within the void of a vacated life he rode a fortnight to fill
Even though the reader here may be rightfully appalled

Death galloped double time towards the travelers to befall, to fulfill,
As the shadowy rider rode on the torrent of a foretoken Wintertide,
It was inevitable that so many travelers who welcomed California alive and well,
would soon crossover to the inevitable "Other side,"
inevitably uncertainty embraced circumstances that from an uncertain hell,
fell hard upon the Donner Party as the unthinkable befell,
almost decimating everybody, and everyone, who had a tale to tell

PART II

Reed Journal Entry

In California, where green grasses hath grown
For centuries upon yore
Grown beneath a perennial sun perennially shone
Where a Mediterranean climate-like wind bastes the central coast's shore
May I lay me down oh Lord
May I lay down my bloodied sword
For this wandering soldier hath come home
From battles far afield I did roam
For the lives I've taken
Dear God, may I repent and atone
Please Lord, of my life, I beg I'm naught forsaken
May my sins wash away in an awash of calming sea foam
Within the lush Californian ground
May my life's blood be planted
May my plans be grounded and sound
O' Lord, may this prayer be so thankfully granted
May my homestead humbly prosper indeed
May I plant a hearty seed
For my family named Reed

PART III

There before the wilderness gave-way to barren desert land;
comprising the Great Salt Lake Desert,

an inhospitable terrain that taxed both beast and man,
from whence bewilderment arose in concert

*

Some snide, some tense;
Questions arose about the deviation from the course beset upon in Missouri at Independence

Some alert, some just curt;
in conjunction with our leaders assailed confidence, questions were asked such as, "Why from the trusted Oregon Trail did we so wantonly avert"?

To calm growing fears,
Mr. Reed and Mr. Donner, both capable, learned gents,
with their support falling steadily into irretrievable arrears,
convened in quietly solemn audience,
both equal peers,
charged with the duty to affirm,
when most happily stayed middling upon the fence
charged with the wherewithal to reaffirm,
to sure up waning confidence

*

Unbeknownst to both brave men,
The leadership of one of them would be short-lived
What should've, or would've, or could've been,
Needn't have been rehashed nor relived
Both embarked on missions mired in vanity,
And when vanity bears envy ? one of seven deadly sins
To wit, the party embarked on a journey of insanity
And that's the impetus of how their doomed journey did fatefully begin

PART IV

Alongside his horse hobbled a scraggly old mutt;
as Donner rode onward to locate Hastings in efforts to alert,

the veteran surveyor concerning his westward bound shortcut,
and to seek solace from the party's fruitless search,
for to and fro went the road,
as signage long ago fallen from dying birch,
consequently, with greater hardship infused,
the Devil became so amused,
he did prod and goad,
he stealthily hid the trajectory of the road,
like a nighthawk eyeing prey from a woodland perch,
the hidden trail sent the wagon train headlong down into a hellish lurch

*

Squashed trodden under a wagon's wheel,
drowned beneath went lowly toad,
Forks, bends, overgrowth, underbrush, and the like, further helped to conceal,
The way of that God forsaken road

*

Stuck in muddy ruts,
lost of a modicum of mean, medium, nor mode,
since no calculus of the human condition ever existed,
no variables could have supplanted the downtrodden existence that persistently persisted,
through the myriad turns betwixt twists so fervently twisted

*

With words vehemently staid
"Stay the course" their mantra became
Halt naught the party resisted
Yet, halted they were anyhow
If somehow their vanity insisted

*

Foolhardy turns left the traveler's minds weary and twisted
Even when misty eyes too bleary to survey ahead were wiped free
Presented with an obvious bend in the road, somehow, someday, the team still readily missed it,
The signs real and imagined, evident and scant,
A happenstance of circumstance,
when laboriously labored minds turned from reasoned thought to heated rants

PART V

A Letter Home

Dearest Folks,
The wilderness took its toll
Each actor played his role
The women on bended knee applying salve to venomous bites from ravenous fire ants
Shorn from many a men were his simple wares, his shirt, his boots, his undergarments, his woolen pants
All the "can do's" versus the "can'ts"
The ubiquitous bitching and moaning
To "man-up" sent lesser men on his way cursing and groaning
The young men paying unpayable dues
Logs rolled into lines to serve as pews
The wagon train trudging on in ranks of twos
The sun so sweltering that drenching perspiration will not cease
The rash that develops in a body's nether-region ? crease by crease
The axle that squeaks in need of grease
The mosquitos that bite
When malaria's purge sets folks affright
The calm in a field of fireflies light
The young mother who hears her last rites
When tainted wine makes an old man lose his sight
The plight of a crop's deadly blight
All the wickedness that creeps around in the night

*

In 1848, the list of pitfalls went on and on;

as sure as the witching hour surceases at dawn,
as sure as the rook, bishop, knight, queen, or king outranks the lowly pawn,
as sure as the mountain lion hunts down the frail spotted fawn,
as sure as the whore will always have her willing John,
as sure as the weak will always find balance in another's brawn

*

In the mid-19th century, deathly hallows lay at every turn;
just as in Salem, the accused witches did viciously burn,
ashes to ashes and dust to dust
The ashes that lay fallow in the urn

*

For the Donner Party, the indiscernible road before them feigned discerned
The mud-hardened ruts scrambled weak stomach acid
The rocking wagon made weaker bellies churn
Save for the handful of children who purported seafaring games to remain timidly placid
Placid like the pastor delivering his Sunday sermon from a Harvard lectern
Within the horn the Native Americans carried,
the pale blue glow of wanton fire still burned,
perhaps to light the way for the dead once they were given their Last Rites then buried
Your Son with Saddest Regrets,
Robert

PART VI

Embittered folks began to demand recompense
As angry men had begun to willfully assert;
verbal demands commanded with ever increased confidence
As if it were a matter of just commonsense

*

Of the Native Americans, persistent Christians desired "the savages" relent and convert

None ever converted
Although of their spirituality, the white man so readily castigated and perverted

*

The members of the party believed;
that God had predestined them for greatness;
It was readily perceived;
that they were God's chosen ones,
his preferred daughters and sons

*

Aloft went a hurried flurry of cascading voices,
Tacitly heard ?
"the Lord is my shepherd"
"I shall naught want"
Yet, humility came and went per audience and its purview
O' yes indeed, judgmental ways they did flaunt
So did the many along with the few
Towards the heathen, with hellfire they did unabashedly tease, torment, and taunt

*

So it went, that the westward bound travelers believed,
that Jesus Christ died for only the white man's original sin,
that of the Virgin Mary, he was immaculately conceived,
and what lay in their pale white skin,
was this righteous favor,
endowed unto them by the grace of the Earth's omnipotent creator;
their Lord, their God the Almighty
all wrapped up in a holy book bespoke to them alone in tidings narcissistic and tidy

*

Henceforth, the road rode long from the perch upon where they sat

Still, to the Lord in earnest they conferred about this and that
Bookended by Amen after Amen
And, then;
Came the unseemly deed of the military veteran Mr. Reed;
Who in a spat;
killed one Mr. Snyder
and that was that

PART VII

The Hangman's Jury

Driving a dagger into the aforementioned Snyder longways just below the man's collarbone
As such, an unpunishable offense,
with no remedy forcing Reed to atone,
and with no jurisprudence,
nor right to counsel, legal redress, or a defense
For within the Mexican Territory;
U.S. law had no authority

*

Just as the crackling fire's flames create;
vigilante justice rose like embers,
a justice of man with no known predate
So it rose amongst the lesser Godlike of the party's members
Some of the wayward type even took to fashioning a ready noose;
thus taken henceforth, to test its value, its dutiful worth,
upon hundred pound burlap sacks of barley and grain,
sacks of hefty girth,
to assay, to ascertain,
if the noose,
had been fashioned with a knot a tad too tight
or perhaps, just a bit too loose,
or was it tied dead to rites,
and therefore, perfectly and deadly tight

*

To carry out their vigilante deed;
some folks favored a goodly and sturdy tree;
neither too green nor too aged
See, Reed had scorned too many to ever be set free
Far too many had been enraged
By the persnickety, uppity, and braggadocios Reed

*

Somehow, cooler heads prevailed
Perhaps in the end;
an even crueler justice entailed
To no sentimentality, would the wilds bend
So, onto the wilds, in banishment the troop did send
The man called Reed
For perpetrating a wicked, wicked deed
Amongst so many long since cataloged
As many as, deep in the mud, the wagon wheels became so stubbornly bogged

*

The members had grown angry with shone defiance;
stripping Reed of past military glory,
exiling the usurped leader from the foretoken, forsaken alliance
With Reed banished without his family for the murder of Snyder;
the lead fell to Mr. Donner's young rider
By then, too much misfortune had come to pass
Could the misfortune last?

*

Fortunes soon turned ever so dire
Soon after Reed departed, so many doomed souls prayed their last
With no food, no warmth, even frigid felt the fire

What came to fruition, was Manifest Destiny aghast
Though blame naught Hastings the liar
Since the myriad transgressions of the forlorn party are well known to the past
So long ago acted out by its dutiful cast
Save for the ghosts whom still roam California's Donner's Pass

PART VIII(a.)

A Last Journal Entry

Somewhere here just below Lake Truckee
Wintertide snows blow whiteouts along this mountainside
Blankets of ivory abound as far as the eye can see
Bleary eyed men cannot see clearly to ride

*

Our Sierra Nevada's campsite sunken into a cottony dream
A frozen icy layer coats my horse's coarse hide
Fallen lame ahead are the wagons' hearty lead team
Hunger pangs deride
Empty starving bodies inside

*

Snowcaps are crystalline agleam
Upon what just was a lush summertime garden
Now, in God's abandon our courage is beseem
Our mountain stream guide to our right continues to harden ?
Fallen snows, howling winds, befallen woes
The stream guides our way to warmth in a coastal California's winter pardon
Once frozen through
A fate only a springtime thaw may undo
Once frozen and snow blankets its line
To disheartening truths we shall be resigned

*

Bogged down in drifts of newly fallen powder
The two Miwoks horns long since snuffed of its fire
Minute by minute
Hour after hour
Our situation grows dire

*

Here, amidst the wild
A young mother bares dried breasts to a crying child
To help the older children cope
We tell them of the seventeen soldiers of hope
Who have gone onward in search of rescue
With promises of their return with help in a short week or two

PART VIII(b.)

The Forlorn Hope

The story told to children to help them cope
Soon turned into "The Forlorn Hope"
Only six resilient folks would survive
Eleven others would never leave the Sierras alive

*

The two Native Americans were shot for food
By a desperate brood
So many starving souls ate their own kind
When death throes addled their tormented minds

*

Cannibalism beset the forlorn Donner Party

A doomed lot
Save for a few of the very most hearty
Befalling the lot was the most ghastly of horrors that ever wrought
A lot of folks so longingly fraught

EPILOGUE

An Unknown Author

Someday when you traverse the Sierras through California's Donner Pass
Remember those doomed folks so sadly wrought
Remember to undertake the history those forsaken folks sought
Remember how so many folks breathed their last
When in the Autumn of 1848,
a westward bounty of dreamers dreamt of the Pacific shores alas
Yet, in those dreams dreaded stead,
befell nightmares so aghast
When so many befallen dead,
were forsaken, placed asunder, then into the frigid wilds, so viciously cast

*

So coldly went their fate
When the gold rush year of 1849,
so boldly turned over the year from that fateful year of 1848
From one time and place, to another place and another time
Times when dark tales of their imminent demise were told to entice eager minds,
Told to those idle minds to tantalize, to energize, to invigorate
Do remember how frigid were their doomed fates,
during that fateful winter of 1848

*

Hear the voices
Understand their choices
Feel their wants and cares

Listen diligently to their prayers
Can you see their faces?
See their trail on the map and how in contemplation your finger slowly traces

*

Remember how the wicked snow did blow
Remember how the fire in the horn did glow
Remember when their fates led them to be fatefully caught;
within the deathly throes of frozen wintry snows,
Remember the haunted howl of a Wintertide's wind,
Remember from whence they did begin
Remember how frightened, alone, and wrought,
Those brave travelers felt when faced with the horrifying and deadly onslaught
Of a haunting Wintertide
The year was 1848
The year so many westward travelers died
The death toll was great
So, the lesser player did yield
And, then the victor declared "checkmate".
(Wintertide, November 2017)

The Rower

By: Hunter Christian

Wake and rise!

Wipe away sleepers from sleepy eyes

In a moment of nostalgic pause

You take solemn notice of the witching hour

You ponder its cause

A woebegone call-to-arms sounds from the watchtower

Your naught just a scholarly gent seeking a bachelor-of-laws

You hear her velvety voice rise like hurried trumpets in a vibrato yell ?

"Go Harvard, beat Yale!"

You temper your hearts hurried pace

Your younger self hurriedly readies for The Race

Ivy League rower ?

Tote your broken oars down to the river bend,

to gage your true reflection,

dip your face slower and lower

Seek the Harvard sons whom rowed in kind

Bask in the crimson moonscape you so long to show her

On a straight in the faithful river Thames that transcends place and time;

You and she race to the horizon,

propelled by the machinery of a veteran rower

Hear the whippoorwill call your name

You return the favor in a call much the same

You're one half the tandem of age-old players

Playing in earnest ? one of God's favorite games

For decades these riverside lowlands made you a wanton surveyor
Beneath twilit skies your torch burns a hearty flame
To the woodland's inhabitants you're an interloper purveyor

Lesser be the man who hides his shame
Lesser the risks taken,
Lesser be the game
Lost to the ghosts forgotten of name ?

Whose haunted voice calls to you in a measured whisper
You pause once more, as you did before
Bechance naught waste ? no sweeter a taste ? you wantonly kiss her
O' how kindly trumpets yield to soften the air by way of woodwinds and strings
In a mellow bellow she swears "I love you mister!"

Go

By: Hunter Christian

Patchwork fare
Indigo thread dangling low
A tawdry affair
Reaping retribution sown
Killing Hunter shot dead knot one but two
Lowly boy's turning indigo too
A screaming voice screams "Go, go go!"

Lifeless stare
No one cares
Dead eyes deathly shone
Blackened pear
Bruised down to her bones
Skin too fair to share, to bare
Just an indigo thread left to tear
"Go!"

Too many untruths told
If only half weren't so
At least his half-truths sold
Bore her lifeless indiglow
An honesty's measured cold
Washed out to sea by a cruel undertow
Her body so far gone
Needn't now to scream, "Go!"
Seascape, sunshine rapes, a helpless Dawn
"Go!"

Rolling in the Heather

Rolling in the Heather

By: Hunter Christian

Mother, no scolding needed
Father's leather lashed my back
The honor of the conceded
Broken upon the rack
Four cord, the wood I cut
Splinters in my fingers, canteen in my pack
My boot, the sole, the mud, the rut
Of self-reliance, ensured defiance, I have a knack
No "if's," no "and's," just "what's?" and such

Lover, meet me in the field
For covers, tote my flannels
From the nail in the wood panel
And, the love we've concealed
I, roll her body over
I, felt her body yield
Amidst, sweet heather, pens, feathers and clover
Naked in that moonwashed field

Farmer, in earnest you till and toil
Of your son's death, we learned of, we taught
The children how to be loyal
To eat, the trout, the walleye, shall be caught
To pray, to lay, to dance and sway
Gone, the night chases away the frightened day

Roll her in the heather

Two souls helplessly tethered
Of the storm they couldn't weather
It's just tradition, a societal condition, forced attrition
All because of faith in a myth, a folktale, a foolhardy superstition

The Kansas wind blows the heather
The field lies silent
The girl lies untethered
The retribution was violent
The field, the nothingness, the silence
Crimson stained heather sways
As remnants of the violence
As the complicit churchgoers pray

O', how they pray
It's Sunday
It's faith day
It's faith
Faith.

The Lie

By: Hunter Christian

Wrought-iron gates shoved open with rusty-aged 'creaks'
To the murky pond a lone swan lowers its beak
To the sky vacant eyes look for solace
To rounded ground eyes gaze upon *physalia physalis*
Outwardly spawned ripples leave her encircled
A girl clenches her knees listlessly postured
Her body curled
Upon the boy who lost her
Opportunity cost her

Reversal of fortune favored
A woman jasmine scented and peppermint flavored
A girl's temperament savored
The only gift God ever gave her
Making the boy cautiously braver
Making him her would be savior
Making her his eternal neighbor

By God, by-the-way, by-and-by, "what lie?"

"For goodness sake," she lashed out, she cried with shouts

She faced his face, washed off indignation's filthy disgrace, and then she said, "Good riddance, goodbye!"

"I'm glad your dead"

"Why can't you just let me die?"

"Why can't you leave my aching head?"

Sparrows will not yield nor waver

To the angry cardinal neighbors
A hawk plucked her newborn from his nest
Lonely beneath it all she's nature's unknowing guest
The goings-on, a delicate fawn
A half-hour til' its fateful dawn
Just like the boy he once was and now wasn't
She's present tense to his past tense, long gone
She'd kiss him if only she could, but she mustn't

An aged barrel of whiskey sat
Its innards elixir for the fixer
Jacks over nines said the 'grapevine'
Intermingled with 'this-an-that's'
A quarter and a dime a shoe shine
Gossip flows like wine
And, her bounty levied upon his head
Of circumstances bechance
If only the pennance paid were dread
If only those better angels of man could've halted the Devil's advance
If her words registered heard by his ears
His parlance
She'd wipe away all the years and all the tears
And, never had taken that foolhardy chance

Dice rolled cannot be unrolled
A rug and its myriad folds
To touch deathly gray skin wrought with cold
So many cuts, the bone, the blood, the laughter so bold
The man with his iron heart and precious gold
Of life, he so willfully bought and sold
So said the folktale told
For she was the one who schemed and conjoled
In the end, she was the one who grew old

Wrought-iron gates slammed shut with ageless creaks
The Earth, the inheritance, so bequeathed reads the Bible,

Hands held out, the hands of the meek, the downtrodden, the weak
With stunned faces, that shone traces, of shunned libel
For their God rested, on the seventh day of man's week
For their faith lay bested, the faith so many still seek
She sought it too
All her days through
By God, by-the-way, by-and-by - that's the 'lie!'

Five Days Dead

By: Hunter Christian

Facedown in a shallow grave I lay;
with nature's rot tugging on my body, my limbs, the fabric of my soul's construct,
wherein death fills the void that,
my murder vacated

A hole within a hole;
disparate, divergent, fragmented,
a patchwork quilt shorn at its seams;
where, threaded gruesomeness blanketed a cold charnel's finality

An imminent demise,
an aforethought reckoning,
The ghastlier reality of disturbed dreams;
dreamt within a tortured mind's disturbed beckoning

A wooded gravesite hurriedly shoddy;
the consequence of long held resentments,
My dismembered corpse lay exposed to harsh woodland elements,
Disembodied limbs,
A decapitated head,
Poorly hidden by,
a hastened concealment, hurriedly stashed away in a dark, dank, putrid muddy hole

I am five days dead

No lonesome bride who's heart aches with dread,
No sorrow as her dimly lit shadow bows her pretty diminutive head,
She sits alone in silence,
reciting scripture in muted lyrical sermons beneath her breath instead,

all the while she's contemplating humanity's want for bloodshed, vengeance, and violence

I am five days dead

Alone she prays away the day onward into night,
in melancholic vigil amidst the flickering glow of solemnity's impermanence,
Her delicate limbs shiver, her pouty lips quiver, a symptom of the staid words she sacredly delivers,
Whispering a simple rhyme from a simpler time, bound to change from present tense to past tense

It's only tense appropriate for rhyming words for the dead,
From the mouth, as from the ear, the present tense must be purged and cleansed,
Washed away so that all that remains, are the past's wretched stains,
Stained verbiage of a lesser kind, born the farthestmost behind,
The divide of what's decent and indecent,
what's kind and what is unkind,
Where dirty little secrets are sown, and the latter is reaped as characteristics bred,
Inherited by curiously nosey townsfolk who spew indecency instead,
About the living, the dying, as well as the dead,
Gossipy busybodies who feed the grapevine
When folks discover that not all is well, good, nor fine
Just simple folks with simpler heads
Dishing dirt on an average, everyday, everyman who has been done wrong and who's ?
Five days dead
Facedown rotting in his earthen deathbed
Five days dead
Just folksy filth and fodder for the townsfolk aforesaid

Just five days before
Erased from this putrid gore
Undrained pallor recoloring my skintone
Unsawed apart limbs, head, and bones
Whole again,
As raindrops pelted a rooftop made of worn asphalt shingles blanketed with sheets of tin,
Oh my, where to begin,
To speak of the step-by-step events that led to my death, to my last blood-gargling breath,
If only I had a premonition, an inkling, of the plan they hatched, what they had in store,

For me as I just lay coolly on my kitchen floor
Cooling off a hothead by the old rickety screen door
Five days before
A lovers spat about litter on the floor from her mangy cat
Led to stones thrown about this and that
From our lips the vitriolic venom poured and poured
Her hands choked up on my old aluminum bat
My head bashed in on the kitchen floor
Five days before
She called a supposedly distant and forgotten ex
As my blood coagulated and dried
The two perpetrators engaged in a tawdry fuck,
Save intimacy or simpler tales told of consensual sex,
The sickened gratuity immersed within latent harlotry,
Acted out in my wedding bed while I slowly died
Five days before
The aftermath of jealous rage
Jealously for an ex-convict and a promiscuous whore
I cannot unturn this life's page
From five days before
She said proudly that she settled the score
Five days before

Five days gone
Dane she ask that may bygones be bygones
Someday henceforth a hiker sees a bone by a mossy stone
No amicable resolution is concluded foregone
Five days gone
A hacksaw and a pact
Disposal difficult with my body intact
Hacked into pieces large and small
Into a Hefty garbage bag the two neatly stacked
He dug the hole while she patronized the mall
Five days gone
The smell of death rose up to meet the dawn
Suspicious cops interrogate and snoop

Around the cul-de-sac and the nearby loop
Neighbors drop dime without remorse
They knew our marriage may take this course
They surmised it'd be her instead, of course
Five days gone

Five days turned into five long, long years
Forgotten now
Not a single soul alive sheds a tear
Lost from history somehow
My fate is the fate I always feared
The irony strikes once more
For I was the one who killed that whore
Then I lived until a ripe old age of eight-four

At five days dead
My heart filled with dread
For judgment day before an angry jury
Would be my fate facing her family's fury
Five days dead
I confessed to offing her instead
I bashed in her pretty little head
I hacked her up as soon as she were dead
I hid her corpse under our second hand wedding bed

Under extreme duress
I came clean, I owned up, I fessed up
Damn it, I confess!
Five days dead
The jury passed its verdict to my judge
Even in death scorned folks carry a grudge
Up from my screwed-up youth those folks drudged
A moment in time
So long ago I had suppressed the crime
Five days dead
The judge and jury found me guilty as sin

The following day my punishment did begin
Again, and again, and again
Five days dead

At six days dead I began my sentence
Everyday henceforth ticks off a checklist of repentance
For one hundred years
And for one hundred days
I must relive her fears
I must die as she died for me to repay
I must cry as she cried
I must beg, and plead, get viciously beaten, and bleed as she bled
I must die as she died

Through her eyes I will beat myself until I'm dead
Day after day
For one hundred years and one hundred days
For the killing I must pay and repay
This is my just comeuppance I do agree
And if I could travel back to age twenty-three
I'd keep her safe from the younger me
I'd ask for forgiveness
I would calm my youthful impulsiveness
I would face my demons within
For your demons will catch-up with you
You will answer for your sins
No matter how many or how few
Hasten to begin
A path away from sin
For you will relive your sins again
From the viewpoint of those you've hurt
Death will not be the end my friend
For when your corpse lay in the dirt
A hundred fold hence you will make amends
Again, and again, and again...

The Visitor

By: Hunter Christian

A peculiarity of hagridden happenstance paid me a visit last night,
When the rhythmic sounds of 19th century floorboards creaking underfoot,
Awoke me from a midnight slumber with alternating footsteps heard first hard then light,
By a barefooted intruder whom tracked from room-to-room a blackened trail of stale chimney soot

With no prior invitation nor invocation might I add,
The incantation of a sinister variety freely stirred about my home,
Never before had such a thing happened in the house wherein I've lived since I were a lad,
From one room to the next, then upstairs, then down, without restriction the visitor did roam

I did nothing, how could I?
I sat there, I listened
A voice in my head prayed, "Dear God, please don't let me die!"
Lay undone were all the good deeds done since dear mother had the old Victorian home christened,

'Round every corner and behind every door,
The truth about lies,
I could no longer ignore,
Lie before my astonished eyes,
For good, for all time, and forevermore

Then, so lurid in its guise,
My midnight caller stalked my calm for weakness,
He spoke naught, dignified no shape - He shone no eyes,
His calculated gait, his misdirection, served to confuse me by way of deliberate obliqueness,
He was and he wasn't, all in one breath:

"If you call me anything, you may call me Death!"

His words rose and fell like thunder,

Spoken so violently within blaring silence,

The visitor's words shorn the night's stillness ghastly asunder

I sat atop my bed alone, beholden to a heartstricken affright,

As a strange paralysis of unknown circumstance rendered my limbs useless from head-to-toe,

With labored breaths, and my chest vise grip tight,

To the abyssal intrigue before me, I wantonly surrendered in hopes to atone

An immeasurable torment lurked just beyond my outstretched arms,

Temptation tumbled within my center,

Whose knots tightened around my windpipe,

The message was delivered with harsh clarity

So, I yielded as ordered,

No face, no name, no shape could've been assigned to my pending captor,

He just lay in wait,

Impending agony blanketed my body in a menacing torrent of confusion, terror, and then acceptance

I welcomed resolve,

I welcomed my station,

I am to be the vessel,

I am to be the courier,

My itinerary had been penned in blood,

No bloodletting may commute my sentence now,

I must do his bidding,

I must carry his deathly parcel,

To destinations known and unknown,

Unearthly, undead, unnamed, unnatural,

For now it's my turn to roam,

Unaccompanied and alone

To repent, I had to relent,

Freed from the paralysis that jailed me,

I turned from the faith that's forever failed me,

I turned,

Away I turned,
And, then I became,
One and the same,
With my captor whom had no name,
I am,
The visitor.

To Whom Shall Measure Thy Station?

By: Hunter Christian

A saltwater weathered fisher boat faced the rising Sun creeping methodically northward over a blackened seascape horizon in the far off distance

Captain Pratt throttled the vessel's diesel engine to keep the sea's persistent currents from pushing the boat into the rocky shoreline lining the crescent shaped cove

The engine's persistence granted the fisher boat necessary resistance

To ward off agonizing tooth pain from an abscess molar, the captain pushed a small piece of cloth into the throbbing tooth's cavity after soaking it in clove

The captain warmed his coffee - in a kettle handed down to him from his fisherman father - on a coal-fired cast iron stove

Being a *wet fish trawler*, Pratt's vessel had a large bounty of fish swimming in the boat's hull - where kept alive until delivered to market - the captain's lucrative catch was stowed

An aberrant look of consternation showed -

Upon the captain's prominent brow; a look that proved to be a prophetic harbinger for the strange events that followed

The black waves - now painted with strands of oranges and reds from the awakening morning Sun - pitched the boat to and fro as it wallowed

The hot coffee the captain sipped at cautiously soothed a sore throat as he swallowed

Crewmen of myriad ages and station slept quietly in their bunks

All the while, the fisher boat tread water above generations of vessels - that carried a crew, carried its bounty, carried the fish that fed hungry folks - until it was buried where it had sunk

Each crewman, allowed to stow his belongings in a trunk - carried along with them: pictures of home and loved ones, old rags for clothing, cards, cigarettes, jars of homemade whiskey, myriad other keepsakes and sundry - and of course from the captain - their obligatory guerdon

Wild-at-heart - were Pratt's Crazy Crüe - to which the lot were referred back at the port - each and every last one

This known debauchery was equaled by Captain Pratt's stern work ethic; dispersed judiciously with a childlike penchant for fun

As the hot coffee soothed his sore and scratchy throat

The incoming tide raised the creaking long-in-the-tooth fisher boat -

Higher and higher in relation to the bobbing sun soaked horizon

On similar mornings throughout the years, Captain Pratt did in fact consider all of those fishermen who had come before he, and at that very point in the turbulent sea below him, each had met their

demise in - perhaps as a background of a similar sun soaked horizon

Along with memories of the dead who came before; the captain also entertained memories of joining his fisherman grandfather, who sailed his artisan vessel, and as a child tagging along who was eager to learn, Pratt's pap put the lad in charge of the mizen

Again - just as he did before and after each invading thought about his vocation - the captain gazed back to the waking horizon

"A new day is upon us," the wryly middle-aged captain opined to himself in a raspy whisper, "and from God himself, the clear skies be a good and welcoming sign"

All the while, black waves crashed, and bashed, and lashed, the welcoming shoreline

Most of the salty sea water settled into gray foam, then the foam was briskly channeled back out to sea to recapture its midnight hue, save for the small puddles that remained trapped like so many canning jars of brine

The captain consulted his logs, charts, watch, and compass, calculations were made in reference to Greenwich Mean Time

Also known as the acronym GMT

A ubiquitous reference point for any captain at sea

He could hear the ticking of the watch his grandfather gave to him, the waves crashing into the waiting shore, the grumbling of the trusty and true diesel engine, the throbbing of an aching molar in his ear with every heartbeat, the old boat's creaking structure bending and flexing - and in that idling place perched atop the rising tidewater of a black sea -

Captain Pratt - aged forty-three - had never felt so alive, so connected to the universe, so in-touch with his sense of "self," and he also never felt so free

Free to strike out from the land and roam

Free to be a wayward transient, a vagabond, a drifter; with the sea as his home

Free to log his travels into time's hidden tome

Free to travel the world alone

Free to be that proverbial rolling stone

Free to make the mistakes to which he is prone

Free to discover mysteries known and unknown

Free to be a sinner or a man who wantonly atones

Free to be a child-at-heart, or a man whose childhood he's never outgrown

Free to be the king of the sea, and a raggedy old fisher boat shall be his golden throne

Oh yes, the captain was a thinker

And he was known at the time to had once been a heavy drinker

By then, his morning coffee sufficed

Several years on the wagon proved he could reject a destructive vice

That had had the goodly captain knocking at death's door not once, but twice

So...

With introspection mired in existentialism, the wryly captain, experienced in the Egyptian *Mukhabarat*, produced thoughts or delusions of grandeur,

But what?

Life being what it was, its unpredictability stepped in with a forced majeure

The captain's swift transition from maritime officer to fisherman transpired in a jump-cut

All due to a scathing scuttlebut

That in his youth he refused to litigate

The incident flowed through his life like a spate

Still, never one to get bogged down in hate

Pratt took his abundance of lemons and made lemonade

And as the night continued to fade

To another coming of the day

A brisk wind blew

As the captain throttled his boat's engine in efforts to put-in, as he sounded a horn to awaken his crew

The captain had another obligation to keep

Only then, could the captain consider what his addled mind truly desired; a long and dreamless sleep

As he shepherded - back to the port - his flock of weary sheep

The equally weary captain - once alone - and only alone - could he rid his mind of its angst, of its guilt, of its aching retribution; and with his head in his hands, and his hands on his knees, he would rock, and shake, and weep

The past cut him like a knife, the wounds remained as haunted memories do, and the scars too - the scars healed slowly, yet the scars ran long and deep

The horn sounded off into the waiting dawn

And with a readied brawn

Captain Pratt shook off a pending sentiment of woebegone

And began to whistle a song

All the while, Captain Pratt, welcomed the rising crew with a wry smile, a nod of his head, and an obligatory yawn -

Then, the captain finished his greetings and salutations with a traditional wink to the mighty dawn

Within mere moments, the captain, his crew, and his fisher boat were long gone.

AN INVITATION

By: Hunter Christian

Dancer paid her tribute
A shyness too shy for pretense
Sensuously seductive in form
Still, her hands trembled about
Too expensive the penance for a girl's doubt
Her mother paid dearly before her
Grandmother too
And, too many generations to be catalogued
The accountants for the many as for the few
Whom settled accounts willed onward
On parchment paper in the soul
Feather pens dried steadfast in the inkwell
They all toppled hardways down
To the stage to where they fell
Like the girls whom all toppled in their time
Whom grew into women
Whom grew into matriarchs
Whom died when the lottery called their number
From the man's hand who rotated the basket's tumbler
Dancer bowed and smiled
She loved and begrudged some too
Her hair grayed slowly as beauty dictated
That sorority of the few
She sighed when sighs were called for
She laughed to thaw cold boredom
She enriched the hope of the poor

O' dearest Dancer in the tour
Call me your dancer
For today, for tomorrow - forevermore.

Antebellum Road

By: Hunter Christian

Walk that dirt road young soldier in gray,
detached you've become from your regiment
Seek her jasmine sent, her magnolia smile,
She's waiting for you beyond that fateful mile

"To hold you, is to disarm my defenses
To kiss you, is to warm my senses
To forgive you, is to mend broken fences
To write you, in words of myriad tenses"

Stand tall southern son
Bask mightily in a southern sun
Bask lovingly in the love you've won
Stand tall now, the war is one

"You were but a girl, and I but a boy
You were but a dream, and I but a blink of your eyes
You were the one, and I came undone
As you became but a memory, and I a passing glance
To dance, to dance, to dance"

Boy, girl; woman, man
Fan her affectionately with her Chinese fan

Hear the solemnity in your regiment's band,
tinged softly with a Tennessee brand

"Come dance with me my dream girl
Come let me set you upon a twirl
Come twirl, and whirl, and curl
Your petite limbs around my limbs
Come be my girl, my world, our world"

Smoky are the mountains the generations claim
To you and she, it's one and the same
When lions and men betwixt to tame
One if naught the other in the 'dangerous game'

"Bechance you tossed fate a line,
and may you vow without shame:
'Bechance this boy be mine'
Without vanity, doubt, nor shame
In time, in time, in time
Flicker does the flame
Yes, God sent this boy a sign"

Reconstruction by way of deconstruction
Yankee valor may sour instruction
Yet, southern values remain in song
Hear the horns and strings *all the day long*

"O' my dream girl, may I have this dance?
Unwrapped this boy bechanced
To forevermore I'll cherish this wild romance
But, for now, may this Yankee traitor please have this dance?"