

2021

Tom Samet High School Fiction Competition

Winning Entries

Residential College in the Arts and Humanities

Center *for* Poetry



*established 2007*

**MICHIGAN STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY**

Adelaide Francine Williams.

*Spinning, she was always spinning. Her hair was so long that the ends brushed the tips of the golden wheat she trampled underfoot as she danced. Sections were cascading from the immaculate updo Mama had crafted, but Mama wouldn't care; she never reprimanded Adelaide. My sister's hair was dark and luscious, more so than the ink that dripped onto my paper during calligraphy practice. Her ringlets upstaged any flowing tail I could pen, confirmed when Mama would clutch a ruler in one hand and whack my wrists while stroking Adelaide's gleaming mane with the other. The sharp smile Addie never failed to flash me as my skin reddened was the same one she wore in the meadow, whitened teeth glaring each time she spun, like a bullet from a Confederate soldier's rifle.*

Marion Everett Williams.

*My boy. His little seven-year-old body wasn't as inclined to wiley overexcitement as it should have been, but his soul seemed to float along, unmoored in a sea of his absolute curiosity, hair as black as the night sky. Mama had liked to proudly tell others that we could see the stars in his eyes to match while Father complained that he was averse to farmwork, but I thought his brain presented like a matrix of clicking gears. Even in the meadow, surrounded by nothing but shining wheat, some taller than him, he would design mazes from the stalks and miniscule rocks buried in the dirt. His thin fingers urged beetles and ants into his labyrinth, testing them, my own little Daedulus. Though unlike Daedalus' labyrinth, Marion's subjects always found their way to the exit, the same hands that drew them in releasing them again. He was scientific, but also managed to conjure compassion for even the tiniest souls.*

My siblings never wear anything but white now, and the fabric remains unstained, excluding the splatterings of deep crimson that nearly complement the clothes' starkness. Adelaide with her flowing dress, cinched at the waist, and Everett sporting fitted trousers and a silken collar shirt, I cannot help but think of how ethereal they appear. Between their gorgeous hair and clothing that practically glows under the blinding summer sun, I could not pale more in comparison. To an outsider, I probably look more like a stranger than third sibling- my hair is at odds with the others', the color of the mice that Father often smacks with a broom. Dead and brown and ugly. The black dresses and bonnets Mama insists on stuffing me into every day don't help either.

I watch them for a while, flattening wheat below my heavy skirt and trying to absorb their happiness, listening to Marion's blithe giggling until I can't stomach it anymore. I climb to my feet. Each time I tromp through the forest of rippling stalks back towards the cemetery, I hope that Adelaide will follow me, that Marion will follow her lead, but they never do. They never can. I push open the wrought iron gate.

*Adelaide Francine Williams, beloved daughter.*

*Marion Everett Williams, beloved son.*

And me, above ground and unbeloved.

They were siblings, too, their headstones don't acknowledge that, but our parents don't care to acknowledge *me*.

I tuck little periwinkle mayflowers I picked at the foot of Marion's grave. Mama and Father don't visit anymore- I'm not sure if they've given up caring or if they care too much- so upkeep is my responsibility. I've ruined many a dress pulling weeds and smoothing dirt, but I don't mind. I hate the despicable mourning dresses anyways.

I brush pollen off Marion's headstone, fallen from the swaying willows above. The smooth stone is cold, cold like his hand when I found him and Adelaide, bled out and shot through their chests. Their hearts. Their souls.

The memory is almost too much too and I gasp, pressing my forehead against the stone. I want to remember them as they were, or maybe I don't want to remember at all, so why do I see them in the meadow? Blood stained and *unreal*. Spirits or delusions? I ponder this each time I'm here but I never find an answer.

*My little Marion.* I must move on, so I kneel in front of Adelaide's grave instead. It's dirtier than Marion's. I regret this, but I can't help resenting her, even in death. *I wish I could have loved you more*, I whisper, as if her corpse six feet below will hear me. Perhaps that's why I prefer them in the meadow. Happy and present, not alive, but at least Addie's still spinning. *I wish I was with you when the soldiers came.*

I feel a twinge and instinctively look towards the meadow. I cannot see Marion, the wheat obscuring him, though I can see stalks rustling, probably pulled from the ground for maze construction. Adelaide, though, has come to a standstill. She is staring. Staring at me.

I stare back. She slowly shakes her head, inky hair waving side to side.

Before I realize, I'm washing her headstone with my tears and jumping up, swiftly moving out of the cemetery, backwards, so I can continue to watch my siblings. Her. Adelaide tilts her head as I leave, placing one hand over her heart, covering the bloodstain.

I choke and turn, speeding through the weeds, their graves the only tidy section of the cemetery. I should be there with them. But then again, I was always the odd one out.

When I turn back for the last time, almost returned to the main road, Adelaide has moved all the way to the edge of the meadow. She can't leave, but her expression says she wishes to. She shakes her head once more and presses her other hand to her heart. I don't want to look away now, but I know I must. As I leave them again, their headstones grow smaller and two figures, dressed in white, slowly fade into the landscape in the meadow beyond, remaining forevermore.

Hannah Haines  
First Place, 2021 Tom Samet Fiction Prize  
Junior, Kenowa Hills High School

## Supper for One

It says here that “The Garden” shall be serving supper at 7 PM sharp. That settles it then, I shall dine there tonight! What time is it right now anyway? By jove! It’s nearly half past five! I do believe I’m going to be tardy! And we don’t want that, of course. B.E. Courtois is never tardy!

Now let’s see, I’ve already got my Givenchy jacket and pants, and my gold Rolex is on my wrist. Now where are my- ah yes my leather Berluttis, how splendid! Now what else do I need... ah yes Fifi, my french poodle. She still needs to be picked up from her grooming session. Ah, but supper will be served in just over an hour! What am I to do? It wouldn’t be the first time I’ve left her at the groomers on her own, and it surely won’t be the last... I shall pick her up after my meal! Supper waits for no dog!

Now, how am I to get there? I could take a limousine, but that might come across as too plain, I need something that makes a statement. Hmmm... ah yes, I have just heard of this new 21st century mode of transport, I believe it’s pronounced “Oo-ber”. With just a few touches of my finger and-*boop*-a private chauffeur is now on his way to pick me up, how brilliant. I’ll bet no one at “The Garden” has taken an *Oo-ber* before. Now I must go outside and wait. Oh, how dreadful.

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What’s this? Why is there a minivan approaching me? Ugh, that beige, grey color is absolutely hideous. Now he’s lowering his window? If this peasant dares ask me for my autograph, I swear I’ll slap him right through that sad excuse of an automobile.

“Hey, do you know a guy named ‘Be Courteous’? It says I’m supposed to pick him up here.”

“It’s pronounced ‘B-E CORE-DWA’ you uncultured swine.”

“Hey man, you’re lucky I’m getting paid for this or you’d have a face full of fist right now.”

“Apologies good sir, I don’t know what came over me... however, I have no time for this, where is my Oo-ber?”

“This is it. I’m Brian. Get in.”

“Oh how ignorant of me! Of course, Oo-bare uses the most modern, casual approach to driving, how brilliant!”

“Sure, bud. Now get in.”

As I pull on the handle to make my entrance into the Uber, I am once again reminded of the luxury of the modern day passenger experience. The sticky dashboard, the disgusting scent of cigarettes, oh so brilliant!

“Alright pal, it says here the destination is half a block away, you sure you need a ride?”

“Are you joking? B.E. Courtois never walks.”

“Whatever you say. Aaaand we’re off... alright we’re at the destination.”

“Wow, very efficient. Thank you for truly giving me an enriching experience Brett.”

“It’s Brian. You gonna leave a tip?”

“I don’t have time, my reservation is in just under an hour. ‘The Garden’ waits for no man.”

“Dude... we’re at an Olive Garden.”

Mackenzie Brasseur  
Third Place, 2021 Tom Samet Fiction Prize  
Senior, Lapeer High School

## Tom Samet High School Fiction Competition

### The Deal

I sobbed. I begged. I pleaded. It didn't matter. They continued to beat me. Four of them, kicking me, punching me, beating me, until I finally lay limp. They laughed while I begged, laughed when I curled into myself, doing anything to make it stop. Then it all went away. It was sudden, but I remember the blinding pain, the agony, and then the blissful emptiness. I was no longer there, in the body they had so brutally destroyed. I was now watching, as if from a distance, watching as they continued to destroy me, long after I had stopped fighting, stopped responding. Then *He* found me. Not the body I had seemingly abandoned, but whatever was left. My soul maybe. Whatever I was now, he found me, and he offered his hand. His help. I should have known better. The second I took the proffered hand I found myself in a nightmare. A place that held all the horrors we could fathom on earth, and then what we couldn't even begin to imagine. And all I could feel was a bone deep rage. He grinned.

"This can go two different ways. You can suffer here, in this place of torture and anger, or, you may become one of my realmwalkers."

"Where am I? What is a realmwalker?" I remember snarling these foolish questions. Somewhere in my head, I knew where I had ended up. I just didn't know how *I* had ended up there. In hell. He told me that his patience was limited. That I got one question, before I had to make a decision.

"Why am I here?" I asked.

"You ended in agony, and now you will stay in agony. Now make a choice." He answered.

In hindsight I know I asked the wrong question. But my decision seemed clear then. Stay in that nightmare, in that place of desolation, agony, and anger, or become a realmwalker. I chose realmwalker. Of course, now that I know what that means, it's not the name I would have chosen for the job.

He led me up a set of stone stairs, stairs I hadn't seen a moment ago, and shoved me into a room with a threatening looking woman in it, and left. She grinned at me, in her black leather jacket, and short, choppy, black hair.

“So you chose realmwalker?” The woman asked, though it wasn’t much of a question. I wasn’t down there, in that chaotic nightmare anymore.

“It wasn’t much of a choice was it? It’s not like I could stay down there.” I snapped.

“Careful. He doesn’t offer that choice to everyone. Only the women he views to be worthy. He can revoke the choice he gave you, and drag you straight back down those stairs.” She didn’t sound angry. Just matter of fact. I remember asking why he only asked women. Had I just agreed to be some kind of mistress to him? She told me that it was because women had a different concept of honor than men did. That we operated by our own moral code, and that we did not hesitate when we had been pushed to our limits. We had been taught our whole lives to use everything we could to our advantage in a physical situation. She told me that those instincts made for the best realmwalkers. She then thrust a pile of clothes into my arms and shoved me into some kind of room.

“Change.” She demanded.

Whatever she had given me was similar to what she was wearing. Black jeans, a tight red shirt, and a black leather jacket. I exited the room, and she gave me a grin of approval. Then she turned on her heel and left the room. It had appeared that I was expected to follow so I did. She led me down corridors and into a larger room, full of every hand held weapon known to man.

“Pick one. But pick wisely, because you won’t be able to change your mind.”

“Why do I need a weapon? What exactly have I agreed to?”

She smirked at me infuriatingly. “Just pick one.”

I remember the moment I saw the twin swords, with obsidian handles and some sort of clear stone blade. They seemed to speak to me. So I grabbed them.

“Interesting choice. Follow me.”

I followed as she stalked past the other women, who grinned maniacally at me. She stalked through more dark corridors until we reached a large set of plain black doors. She motioned for me to go in. I walked in, but she didn’t follow me, she simply shut the doors. *He* was inside the room, sitting on some kind of black, glittering throne.

“Welcome to the fold, realmwalker. It’s time for your first assignment.”

I had asked what kind of assignment it was. He smirked and motioned towards a door to the right. He wasn’t going to answer.

“Go through the door. And don’t forget the swords.”

I tried to question him again, but he glared, and motioned to the door. I had known it would be bad to push further. I walked through the door, and found myself back where I had been murdered. As if no time had passed. I still felt that indescribable rage as the men who had killed me looked at me and laughed.

“You’re too late to stop us from killing her. But we wouldn’t mind killing you too. No witnesses and all, you know. No hard feelings.” Remarked their leader as he stepped forward.

And then my rage took over. Which is how I came to stand over his body, lying on the ground, my blades in his throat. I watched as the clear stone turned red, as it seemingly absorbed his blood. As I felt a rush of power run through me. His friends lurched back, white as ghosts. I



grinned and stalked towards them, blades glowing red in my hands. As they sobbed. And begged. And pleaded.

## My Whippoorwill

*It was a dusty autumn day, a swirling golden brown afternoon. Menacing and beautiful like the picture books we read as children. Opening the door, the breeze reminded me to put on a shawl. It didn't use to be necessary; the days used to be a lot sweeter, back when the migrating geese didn't fly until November.*

*But I needed it now, and anyway, it was a soft purple. The memory of receiving it from you still made me smile all these years later.*

*So I started my walk out for the mail safe and warm, protected from the flirty wind. It was Sunday, so I could hear the chapel bells ringing over the cries of blackpoll warblers. The bells were festive, rejoicing like the ones at our old service.*

*The grass leading out to the gate was long overgrown and in need of a haircut, so I resolved to have some young lad take care of it. There are so many lovely people here. I can barely remember when we were all alone-- now there's an HOA. And so many sweet little kids who'd mow over anything I asked of them.*

*You would've been so happy to see them all with eyes like violets and voices like house sparrows. As happy as your vegetable garden made you, which I've been struggling to handle, I don't have your green hands. Even the irises you once planted have wilted.*

*And those pesky weeds have expanded; I'm sorry to say so. They've even invaded the dirt path. That unending trail leading out to the newly repainted fence. I had to care for the fence because the birds had overtaken it and laid it to waste. So it's been rebuilt into one brand new baby blue; modern, chic.*

*But the clouds are washing it out and washing me out as well. I suppose I hadn't anticipated it being so difficult to live without sun; now I know why our lavender always wilts by October. Finally, I reached the mailbox. But, silly me, there was nothing inside but some cobwebs. I completely forgot that mail doesn't come on Sunday.*

I guess I'm writing this down, so you know how things are going now that you're gone. Time continues, and life moves on, so I should too. But I haven't had to live for myself in such a long time. Maybe I've forgotten how. But dusty autumn days like this make me remember. The migrating birds make me remember. You, my whippoorwill, have flown away, and alone I am glued to the floor.

Alexandre Morrison

Honorable Mention, 2021 Tom Samet Fiction Prize  
Sophomore, Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy  
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