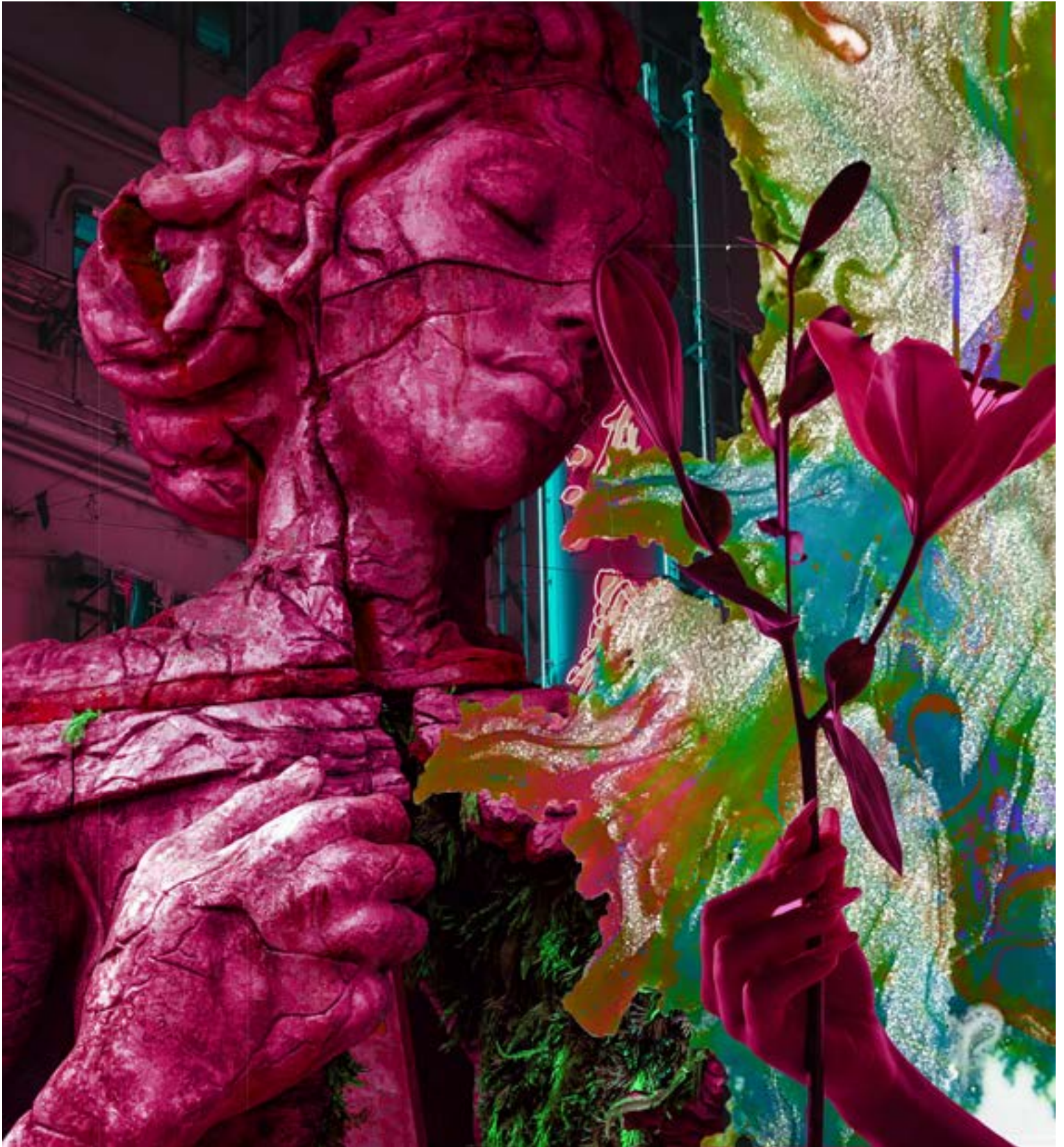


fanfiction review

MARCH 2023 EDITION





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Note From The Editor

When we launched FanFiction Review in 2021, our motto was “Keep it simple and launch with a minimally viable product.” But after reviewing the first fifty submissions, we realized our “minimally viable” publication was attracting serious talent.

We’ve been motivated since then to evolve our strategy to create higher-quality publications that honor our authors’ confidence in us to showcase their skills. And this sixth edition and our efforts thus far in 2023 are precisely that - the next chapter of FanFiction Review.

As editor, I am honored to share the fanfiction works of BlackWriter09 and Nora Nichols. These authors demonstrate the ability to dissect the human condition and our emotional need for security. But before I give away the plot of each story, let me say - from all of us at FanFiction Review, thank you, BlackWriter09 and Nora Nichols, for allowing us to showcase your work.

This edition also features a guest reviewer, Leigh Hull. Leigh is an editor at AspenHouse Publishing and co-host of the Writing Roots podcast. We thank Leigh for donating her time to FanFiction Review and providing her professional expertise. We hope Leigh will be a guest reviewer again in the future.

From all of us at FanFiction Review, we hope you enjoy the March Edition of FanFiction Review and everything we have in store for the future.

Yours in writing,

Cat M. F. Stubbs

Cat M. F. Stubbs | Chief Content Officer



LESSONS AT LON LON RANCH

by BlackWriter09

Trevor had an idea.

"WHAT ABOUT DEATH MOUNTAIN?" he asked in his usual booming voice as he slammed his palms on the wooden dining table before him. Startled, the other children seated at the table pulled their meals closer to themselves. Trevor stared at them intensely, waiting for answers.

Jerome Bailey sighed. He was Trevor's best friend, a tall and quiet kid from Chicago. Trevor always admired his bravery which, strangely enough, mixed well with his humble, gentle spirit.

"The Gorons don't know anything," he said, picking up a forkful of eggs.

"Can we stop by there and ask them again?" Trevor asked.

Jerome shook his head. "Bro, you know the Gorons don't know anything. They told you that when I was knocked out."

Trevor palmed his forehead. "Yeah... you're right. Wait –" Trevor pointed at a meekly postured girl with a raven bob and red eyes. "Sheila! Do your psychic thing. Come on, tell us where to go next!"

Sheila Norwood scrunched her forehead. "That's not how it works," she said, her voice as soft as the gentlest wind. "It has to come to me."

"Then make it!"

"That's not how it works." Sheila's voice wasn't as gentle that time around. "If it worked like that, we would have found Rebecca by now."

Trevor slumped at the mention of Rebecca Santos. How did he forget about her? She was the last Oak Shire kid yet to be found.

Rebecca grew up in Oak Shire, just like Trevor and Sheila. She first became friends with Sheila in kindergarten, but the bond spread to Trevor in due time. When Jerome moved to town two years ago, she welcomed him into their circle, and the children became inseparable.

Then one day at the local park, the sky blackened. A violent earthquake shook the town – or maybe even the world – and tore the ground open. Suddenly, Trevor found himself hurtling toward a vortex of golden light. He tried to hold onto anything to aid in escape. His hands found Rebecca's, and they both hoped that was enough. Fate had other plans. As desperately as they clung to one another, the vortex's strong winds wrenched them apart. Everything turned dark after that.

"Well," said Trevor, as he ran a hand through his hair. "Maybe you'll receive a vision that will help us find her soon. Maybe you'll

see everything we need to do to rescue her!"

"I hope so," said Sheila, "Rebecca...I hope she's OK."

"Me too," Jerome said in agreement. "I think we all can agree that we're not a full group without her."

"That's why we gotta get on the road!" Trevor exclaimed as he flung both his arms in the air. "We have a friend to save and a home to get back to! Isn't that right, Mr. Hero? Don't you want to go back to the woods with your lost boys and girls?"

Trevor now looked at a quiet boy garbed in green with blue eyes that held a steely expression. Beside him was a glowing orb of blue-white light that floated with help from a quartet of transparent wings. He truly reminded Trevor of Peter Pan from the tales his mother used to read to him when he was little.

"I do," said Link. "But we need to rest a little. Our journey's been tiring."

Trevor clawed at his brown hair. "But that desert king might get ahead of us!"

Link kept his calm gaze. "Without the Spiritual Stones, I don't think Ganondorf can do anything. He doesn't even know about us, Trevor."

This was true. According to legend, the Triforce was a relic created at the beginning of the world by the three golden goddesses. It was supposed to grant its wielder a wish – or maybe more. Trevor didn't know if this was true but hoped for the best. After seeing so much of Hyrule, Trevor couldn't help but think that the relic would make everything right again. He truly believed that Triforce could solve all of the Oak Shire Kids' problems, one by one, with the last wish being a trip back home. However, one needed to have all three Spiritual Stones to obtain the Triforce. Luckily, the group already had two.

"Can you figure out where we need to go?" asked Trevor.

Link shrugged and shook his head. "If I did, we'd already be on our way."

Trevor rolled his eyes. "Great, so we're stuck here forever."

"That's a little dramatic."

The winged orb of light floated across the table. As it closed in on Trevor, the image of a girl took shape within the glow. She had ivory skin, blue hair, and cerulean eyes that shined like polished marbles.

"We've been lucky so far," said Navi, Link's guardian fairy. She had guided the Kokiri boy through all his trials, keeping him

balanced and encouraged. It often spread out to the others in the group but not so much to Trevor. "Why don't you soak up the rest for a moment?"

Trevor thought if Navi were a full-sized human, he'd bump his forehead against hers to show her he meant business.

"Resting won't get us home," he said through gritted teeth. "Continuing will."

"But Hyrule's safe for now. It couldn't be safer. We have two of the Spiritual Stones, and Ganondorf has no idea about us. I bet he doesn't know how to get the last one either."

"Which makes us leaving here even more important."

"What makes you in such a hurry to leave? All you talk about is going home to Oak Shire. I get that, and I'm sorry you're lost. But honestly, you don't seem to care all that much about helping or giving to others. You just complain about your itchy clothes or something else weird like that, and it's honestly just getting on my nerves! And everyone else's, I'm sure. Do you have something better to do than just whine at us?"

"Yeah. I do." Trevor hopped down from his chair and stormed out of the farmhouse's dining room. He stomped past a gaggle of Cuccos in the next room, shoved the farmhouse's front door open,

and froze at the gasp he heard on the other side.

"Oh, will you be careful?!" A chirpy country drawl boomed directly at Trevor. "Your strut nearly knocked me over! What gives, Green Eyes?"

Trevor looked to his right and met the glare of young Malon. She was the daughter of Talon, who owned Lon Lon Ranch, and the first person Trevor trusted in this unknown, strange land. While Malon wasn't the only person to offer Trevor kindness, she did stand out the most. They shared their dire situations in Hyrule Castle Town, where they met. After hearing that Malon's father was lost, Trevor decided to help. The farm girl gave him an egg and told him it would help wake up her father when he found him. Eventually, the egg hatched, and Trevor cared for the baby Cucco while facing new challenges across Hyrule. Then as he held the baby Cucco after the battle on Death Mountain, Trevor realized he had to return it to Malon. So the children traveled to the ranch.

After returning the Cucco, Trevor was ready to say goodbye, but Malon grabbed him by the arm with a bright look on her face. "Y'all should stay here!" she said. "You look sooo tired. You could take a small break just for a day or two!"

Trevor opened his mouth to protest, but everyone else eagerly

accepted the offer. Malon giggled in delight. Trevor grumbled about this delay; however, he couldn't really complain about a warm bed, cooked meals, and a wide open space where the sun always shined. It was four against one, anyway.

"Where are you heading?" Malon asked as she placed a hand on her hip. "I was about to ask if y'all wanted to ride horses."

Trevor didn't look Malon in the eye. "I'll...pass."

He sensed Malon's jaw dropping as if he had said a bad word. "You'll pass?" she echoed. "Are you scared of horses, Trevor Berenson of Oak Shire, Illinois?"

"Do you have to say my name like that?"

"It rolls off the tongue pretty well. Answer my question."

"I just don't like horses all that much."

Malon rolled her eyes. "You also didn't like baling hay. Or feeding the big Cuccos. Or milking the cows. Or anything else. Is there anything you like about the Lon Lon Ranch?"

"No, there isn't. I don't even want to be here!"

Trevor heard the wind whispering through the ranch's sudden silence. Malon's eyes wilted. She was a girl who constantly carried happiness, especially in how she bobbed about from place to place.

Nobody would've ever expected her expression to dim so much. Of course, Trevor would be the one to hurt her feelings, to make her look out into the distance so she wouldn't have to remember that he was there.

"I..." The words were caught in Trevor's throat. "I just meant –"

"You know what?" Malon glared at Trevor. He was sure he would shrink from her anger. "Fine, Trevor Berenson of Oak Shire, Illinois. I don't understand why you don't like me saying that. You're always saying the name of that town of yours. Figured you'd want to hear it, too, since it's all you care about. You're just raring to get your running shoes on and dash back to Oak Shire! I guess roughhousing with your buddies is a lot better than the no-good ranch my Papa and I allowed you to stay on."

"I'm really –"

"I'm going to ask the fairy boy and your other friends about the horses. I can let them know you need time for yourself. That's all you seem to want – Trevor this, Trevor that, everything for Trevor, but no one else."

Malon went inside the farmhouse, slamming the door as she went in. Trevor wanted to disappear. He swore under his breath as he stormed down a path leading to the ranch's front entrance.

He sat with his back against the ranch's outer fence, staring out at the endless stretch of green grass beyond the property. Unfamiliar mountains stood over the land like giants, casting overbearing shadows on the ground. They blocked whatever rested beyond them. Trevor didn't know what else there was of Hyrule, but he knew none of it was familiar. None of it would ever feel familiar.

None of Hyrule should have been real, but here it was. Life was different than what Trevor had seen. Of course, he should have expected it.

After all, he had a gift. A gift that couldn't be real. He had –
A presence.

Trevor failed to recognize the presence looming over him. It came silently, landing high above his head. Before Trevor could react, its shadow cast itself over him like a net.

Trevor's body stiffened.

He backed away from the creature that swooped down upon him. Thinking it to be the end possibly, he closed his eyes. He thought of how he needed to beg for his life.

"I didn't think myself to be so frightening, Trevor Berenson."

Trevor paused. His fear left him at the sound of the familiar, wise voice.

"Then again –"

Kaepora Gaebora, the Owl, calmly perched himself on the grass, observing a startled Trevor with his keen blue eyes. He gave his broad wings one last flap before tucking them against his sides.

"Maybe," said Kaepora, "I'm not anyone you will ever be used to."

Trevor's heart drummed for another couple more beats before slowing down. He sighed and slouched against the fence again as if he had lost all his energy.

"You can't do that!" he said. "That freaked me out!"

"I apologize for startling you."

Kaepora turned his head upside down. His eyes and forehead were where his ruffled chin should have been, and vice versa. Trevor's gut flipped. The owl made nothing better, but Trevor didn't say anything.

"You're alone out here," said Kaepora. "I wouldn't suggest making a habit of it."

Trevor glowered out towards Hyrule Field. "Whatever," he

muttered. "Fine."

"You're in low spirits, Trevor. And a bit out of yourself. Is there a reason for this, young man?"

"I... don't want to talk about it."

Kaepora turned his right side up, much to Trevor's relief, and hopped closer to him. Instead of making eye contact with the boy, the giant owl also gazed out at the countryside.

"Would I be right in guessing," Kaepora said, "That you feel... lost?"

"Well," said Trevor. "This isn't my hometown. It's a completely different place. I'm wearing different clothes, and I've been here for a week or so. Actually, I don't even remember how many days I've spent here!" Trevor threw his arms up, finally showing his full frustration. "And...my Mom and Dad are probably worried to death. I had so much left to do back home and ..."

Kaepora closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He hooted softly before rustling his feathers with his beak.

"It's difficult being in a strange land, isn't it?" said Kaepora.

"Yeah, it is. And having no way to get back is..."

"Even worse? Do you really find Hyrule difficult to embrace?"

Kaepora kept his eyes on the land. "For all my lifetime, I've seen Hyrule change. Its people have been at war and peace. I've seen children at birth. I've seen boys and girls like you growing into men and women with their own families. They live their lives before their hair turns grey from age. I've seen plenty of lives end as well. Of the many experiences I've witnessed in this realm, one truth prevails: Hyrule is their home, and this nation is a beacon for the rest of the world. It's the center of existence for reasons that even I am still discovering to this very day."

Kaepora finally turned to face Trevor. The wisdom in his eyes was stronger than ever.

"Hyrule represents good. There is a reason we must protect it. It is wonderful when you look at Hyrule's beauty and understand it. Look around. Isn't Hyrule beautiful, Trevor?"

Trevor shrugged and raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, sure. I guess it is."

"I urge you to look, Trevor, look out at the land. See it for what it is. Stay in the moment."

Trevor looked out at the field again. Its grass, covered in beautiful flowers, glowed. The breeze guided petals as they waved back and forth. A flock of birds flew in the distance. Snow covered

several mountain peaks. There were parts of the land Trevor agreed were beautiful. He simply couldn't describe some parts other than using just that word: beautiful.

"It's not bad," said Trevor. "It...I feel really calm when I'm by myself. So I can think."

"Your thoughts are not on this place." Kaepora Gaebora hopped to stand between Trevor and Hyrule Field. "I understand. Jerome's mind couldn't recall your home. Sheila is probably thinking of your missing friend. Were you thinking of her, by chance?" Trevor hung his head without a word. "I see – Link, on the other hand, I feel for him the most. He has a heavy burden. One I can actually relate to, believe it or not. He had to leave his home after losing his father. He had to take a sword to battle an unknown evil and save a land he barely knew. Destiny called him, and he answered. He knew that no one else could take up the task but him, though I see that there are others who need to be by his side until the journey is finished."

Trevor nodded. "...This place needs protectors. I get it. And we need to find Rebecca. Sure. I'll help with that. I promise. I just wish we knew where to go."

"I would try Zora's Domain." Kaepora's beak seemed to change its shape. Trevor wondered if owls in this world could smile. "Yes, the

Zora nation should have it. They live at the waterfall in Zora River, to the northeast."

Zora's Domain. Zora people. To the northeast. Trevor repeated these thoughts to himself so he could relay the information to the others.

"Thanks," he said.

"You're absolutely welcome. Appreciate your gifts, young Trevor."

Kaepora Gaebora gave Trevor an intense look. Trevor wondered what all a talking owl could do in Hyrule. Could they read minds? Did they know everything about everyone they met? Trevor didn't want to think about it. He rushed back into the ranch and called out to his friends, letting them know what he had just been told. As he hurried away, he heard Kaepora Gaebora's wings flapping until the sound grew distant and faded away.

Trevor told the others rapidly what he had learned from Kaepora. His lungs had lost air from his mad dash toward the stables.

Navi demanded Trevor slow down and repeat himself.

"You're such a spaz," she said. "It pays to be calm, you know?"

Trevor almost shot back at her but kept quiet instead. There wasn't time for arguing.

He repeated what Kaepora told him. The Zora's Sapphire. At Zora's Domain. At the end of the river that runs through Hyrule. We have a journey to fulfill, right? Everyone in the group agreed. They quickly began packing their belongings in their satchels. While preparing, Trevor looked around and noticed Malon's absence.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Where's who?" Navi inquired in response.

"The farm girl –" Trevor caught himself. "Malon. Where is she?"

"Now you care about her." Navi put her hands on her hips as if she were a mother scolding her child. "She didn't feel like you actually did, from what I heard."

Trevor had never wanted to sink further into the ground than he did at this moment. He bowed his head, scratched his scalp, and sighed aloud.

"I'll... I'll tell her we have to go," he said. "I'm done packing anyway."

When he left the farmhouse, Trevor looked out at the ranch's stable, a vast space brimming with horses galloping within its wooden

fencing borders. He knew Malon usually stood in the center on most days, singing an unknown song. Her voice floated melodically, revealing an unforgettable tune. Trevor often found himself listening to Malon's voice. He dwelled on the song, honestly wanting to know it himself.

It was the type of tune he considered far more beautiful than anything he heard from Link's ocarina. She sang so well that a young horse would come up to her. It had a dark red hide, a white mane, and gentle eyes. The horse would come up to Malon and nuzzle itself against her while grazing on the grass around the farm girl's feet. It was as if the two were a family despite being of different species. Trevor's memories of this moment were so clear it felt as if it were happening right before his eyes.

However, Malon was nowhere in sight. He wanted to sink even further down.

"Where is she?" Trevor asked, staring at Malon's usual spot.

Trevor thought of another place. He dashed to a small barn on the other side of the ranch. He swung the door open and poked his head in as he gasped for air. To his delight, Malon sat on a stool, facing a cow chewing on cud.

"Malon, I'm sorry!"

The farm girl's eyes widened and darted around in surprise.

"I'm sorry," Trevor repeated. "For what I said. It wasn't nice. I like the ranch. It's so peaceful. But I'm not from here. And I'm homesick. And you're home. So...I get frustrated that I can't go home and I can't do anything about it. That's why I want to do something about it now. But I shouldn't have been mean. I'm so sorry...and I like the Cuccos best...um...and we're leaving as soon as possible."

Malon's eyes ticked back and forth as Trevor blabbed at her as if she needed to escape. Trevor didn't blame her; he seemed to come across as crazy. Malon looked like she was thinking the same thing until he mentioned the group leaving. After that, her eyes turned glossy, making her blink several times. As Malon bowed her head, Trevor's stomach swiveled into a guilty knot.

Then, to his surprise, Malon lifted her face and wore a new smile.

"Do you all like milk?" Malon asked. "I got a couple of buckets full from Betsey here –" she gently patted the cow beside her. "I have to fill up a ton of jars – Papa isn't really much about being awake on this day of the week. I could use some extra hands."

The knot in Trevor's gut rapidly unraveled. "I can be your extra hands," he declared.

"Wonderful! Grab a bucket."

Trevor wanted to carry both buckets of milk to the farmhouse, but Malon wouldn't have it. Together, they hauled the milk to the farmhouse and into the kitchen. When she saw the rest of the group with their bags, her expression dimmed again, and Trevor hated seeing that.

"I can get you all enough food for the trip," Malon said while hiding the sadness at the counter. "A loaf of bread for each of you should do. And we can't keep all the milk. The cows will give us plenty of milk before the next delivery."

Malon filled four glass jars with the milk from Betsey. Trevor helped seal them with cork, laboring to ensure they stayed snug and secure. He glanced in Malon's direction every so often, wondering what was on her mind. Trevor didn't know if she was upset, sad, frustrated, or happy. Every one of those emotions was probably going through her, he thought. She had probably sorted through them all, trying to know which feeling felt best for the moment.

"So," Malon said suddenly. "You liked the Cuccos best, huh?" Her voice was bright, even as her gaze focused on filling the last milk jar.

"Yeah," said Trevor. "I helped hatch one of them after all."

Malon chuckled while bringing the jar of milk over to Trevor. "He was going to hatch without you," she said. "He would do whatever it took to be alive and out in the world!"

"I helped a little."

"...No, you didn't."

"Fine, I didn't."

"But you're a good caretaker. The Cucco's really happy! Thank you so much."

Malon sealed the last of the Lon Lon milk herself. She offered it to Trevor as if it were the greatest gift in all Hyrule – no, in all the world.

"Drink it before the end of the day," she said, "Or else it'll spoil."

"Thanks."

Trevor took the milk jar and held it against his chest. His eagerness to leave grew, but Malon's dim expression gave him second thoughts. He wanted to speak again so the farm girl could be at ease, but she beat him to the punch.

"I'm going to miss you."

Malon gazed at the jars while drumming her fingers on the

wooden countertop. She stared out the room's only window, which revealed another sight of the ranch's green pastures.

"All of us?" Trevor asked, looking out the same window with her. He realized he liked the horses and wished he'd had a chance to ride one of them.

Malon's face looked thoughtful before she smirked and answered. "Yeah. Even you, Green Eyes." Malon placed a hand on Trevor's arm. Warmth coursed through Trevor's body.

"The next time you think of this place," said Malon, "Come back and visit us as soon as you can, you hear?"

"If we could, we would...but I don't think we're coming back."

"Oh." Malon sighed. "That's how life goes...people come and go, and sometimes they move on to a better place. I guess it's Oak Shire for you."

"Oak Shire's home," Trevor said. "But it's not the only good place. Lon Lon Ranch is nice too. I wouldn't have minded making a home out of this."

"You're far too kind, Trevor Berenson of Oak Shire, Illinois."

Without warning, Malon wrapped her arms around Trevor and squeezed him tight. Trevor returned the embrace.

"Safe travels," she whispered into Trevor's ear. "Don't forget Lon Lon Ranch when you go home, OK? Just try to remember me."

In his heart, Trevor promised. He and Malon went to the next room, where the others awaited. All their satchels were packed. Malon and Trevor handed out the milk jars. As they said goodbye, Malon gave each person one last hug worth cherishing.

"You were such good guests," said Malon. "You'll be sorely missed."

The children echoed their appreciation for the hospitality. Link and Navi were especially grateful to the farm girl. Malon smiled warmly at the forest boy, giving him a nod of approval.

"You're a good horse rider!" she declared. "I can't believe you managed to get Epona to take a liking to you! It's like you were made for each other!"

Link looked embarrassed to be put on the spot. Navi bailed him out by thanking Malon and urging the group out the door.

"We have a world to save," said Navi. "Let's not waste too much time."

The children bid the ranch one final farewell. As they traveled off the ranch property, Trevor lingered behind the group.

He looked back at Malon, who looked more upbeat despite the goodbye. She waved endlessly at the group.

Trevor mirrored the act and kept looking at her until the group turned a corner, and she was suddenly in their past.

"I can lead us to Zora River," said Navi, "I've seen maps of Hyrule and memorized them."

Link readjusted his things and double-checked to ensure his sword was secure in its sheath. "That's great," he said. "Do you think we'll run into trouble?"

Navi smiled. "Nothing you can't stop. How are you feeling, Link?"

"Good... I'm just ready to take on the next journey."

Jerome clapped Link on the back. "All of us are, bro!"

"We're going on a new adventure!" Sheila exclaimed, bouncing with excitement. A new kind of hope filled her eyes – the kind that no doubt involved finding Rebecca.

"Yeah," Trevor said, his eyes still dwelling on the ranch. "It'll be interesting to see."

He said nothing more. The group was now on their way, ready to take on an adventure they hoped would take them back home.



ONE BAD NIGHT

by Nora Nichols

"Ding Dong, the Bat is dead," Riddler concluded, making the iconic cowl spin around the crook of his cane. "Or I should say, the ding-dong Bat is dead. This should come as no surprise. As this city's TRUE intellectual champion, it was only a matter of time until I, Edward Nygma, single-mindedly succeeded in besting him. Well, sweet dreams, Gotham. Tomorrow is a brilliant, new day."

As the red RECORD light on the camera faded, so did the villain's grin. The anxiety that had been plucking at his heart since the end of the Game now had full permission to seize. His gaze dropped to the corpse lying at his feet. The Batman's unmasked corpse. "Riddle me this: what the Hell am I supposed to do with the rest of my life?"

Setting Batman's cowl aside, Edward rose from his chair and paced pensively around the body, addressing it. "A brain? Were you serious? Cracked at times, some insist I need treatment? And you answered with 'a brain?' No, Bruce, the answer is clearly 'a window,' and now my whole future has gone straight out of one! I just... I mean... how could you be SO STUPID?"

The victor slumped defeatedly back into his chair. "There was a whole series of other challenges, you know, at the trap site. Ingeniously constructed challenges have now all gone to waste! You wouldn't have solved them all, but like pieces of a jigsaw, each

answer fit exquisitely together to form a clear picture: 575 Park Avenue, unit 21. You always wanted to find my hideout location. But you're here now, aren't you? Dead as a mackerel. Never again to swim in the...."

Like a lightning bolt, a genius thought struck his head, silencing his tongue temporarily. "Wait! I can fix this! I'll be back in a minute!"

Reenergized with hope, Riddler raced to his basement lab, throwing open cabinets and drawers. It took longer than a minute, but he finally found it: a vial half-full with a green liquid, and the word, "Lazarus" handwritten across the label.

Edward returned to the corpse and knelt over it, but no sooner had he done so than the vial was plucked from his hand. "You won't be needing that," a familiar voice resonated from behind. Edward whipped around to find his number one rival, alive and cowed, towering formidably above him.

"Batman," he breathed, wide-eyed and staggering back. "B-but you're dead. I killed you. I..." His gaze shot to the corpse. Its hands, as if on cue, suddenly flattened and bulged, tinting a mud brown before the rest of its body followed suit. In a matter of seconds, the heap bubbled up into a familiar and monstrous shape, its head nearly touching the high ceiling.

"Basil Karlo, you slimeball!" Edward scolded, his eyes turned up and narrowed.

"Not personal," Clayface growled. "Ten years off my sentence if I accepted the role." The shapeshifter then tossed something into Batman's gloved hand. It was a hidden earpiece he'd been wearing the whole night. Then per their arrangement, Karlo morphed into his human form and surrendered to the GCPD waiting outside.

"575 Park Avenue, unit 21," recited the hero. "You're right. I might not have pieced it all together. But it's no riddle that you love to hear yourself talk."

The green villain was seeing red, and exasperation made his head spin. He clutched it. "No, no, no! I finally beat you! This isn't fair! Why didn't you come face me yourself, you cheat?"

Calmly, Batman withdrew a pair of cuffs from his utility belt, and began to secure Edward's wrists. "You weren't the only Game in town tonight, Nygma. I chose to work smarter, not harder. Surely, you, of all people, can appreciate that." The faintest of smiles crossed his lips before adding, "Besides, I couldn't miss your trying to resurrect me with a spit's worth of Lazarus water."

"Don't flatter yourself," Edward muttered, resigning to his fate. "I knew it wasn't you all along."

Batman walked him towards the exit. "Of course, you did. I hope you realized something tonight, Edward... maybe find a new pastime."

Riddler scoffed. "You'd be so lost without me, Dark Knight, and that brain of yours would turn to mush in the absence of REAL challenge."

"Huh. You really don't know when to keep quiet, do you?"

The villain held his tongue all the way to Arkham, only too happy for the second chance to try and prove the Batman wrong.

REAL EMOTIONS IN THE COZY WORLD OF HYRULE

by Leigh Hull



As a fan of The Legend of Zelda and its many iterations, it was wonderful to read references to the characters I know and love through the eyes of an original story and characters. BlackWriter09 showed his depth of knowledge of the Zelda universe through his story, “Lessons at Lon Lon Ranch.” He shows us what all of us would likely go through if we were suddenly transported to an unfamiliar world.

In this portal tale, we experience the world of Hyrule from the perspective of Trevor Berenson of Oak Shire, Illinois. He and his friends have joined forces with The Legend of Zelda’s famous protagonist, Link, and his trusty guardian fairy, Navi. We see hints of the larger story BlackWriter09 is building all while experiencing the emotional distress of knowing a friend is lost while feeling lost themselves. The original characters mix easily with the ones from other Zelda stories as they collaborate on what to do—both in the immediate and in the long term story.

BlackWriter09 does a great job representing the emotional rollercoaster

that any one of us might experience in a similar situation. Trevor is all at once filled with despair, sorrow, and an ever-driving need to press forward, even if they aren’t sure of the way.

I loved noticing the references to all things Zelda, from characters such as Malon and Kaepora who played a large role in BlackWriter09’s story, to simple mentions of Gorons, Ganondorf, and Epona. He also takes a moment to describe the breathtaking views of Hyrule reminiscent of the art we see from the games.

I would be fascinated to see how BlackWriter09 continues the journey of these heroes and how much more it goes into the world of Hyrule. After all, a hero is destined to appear, and this time it may be Trevor.

A NIGHT OUT IN GOTHAM

by Ken Davidson



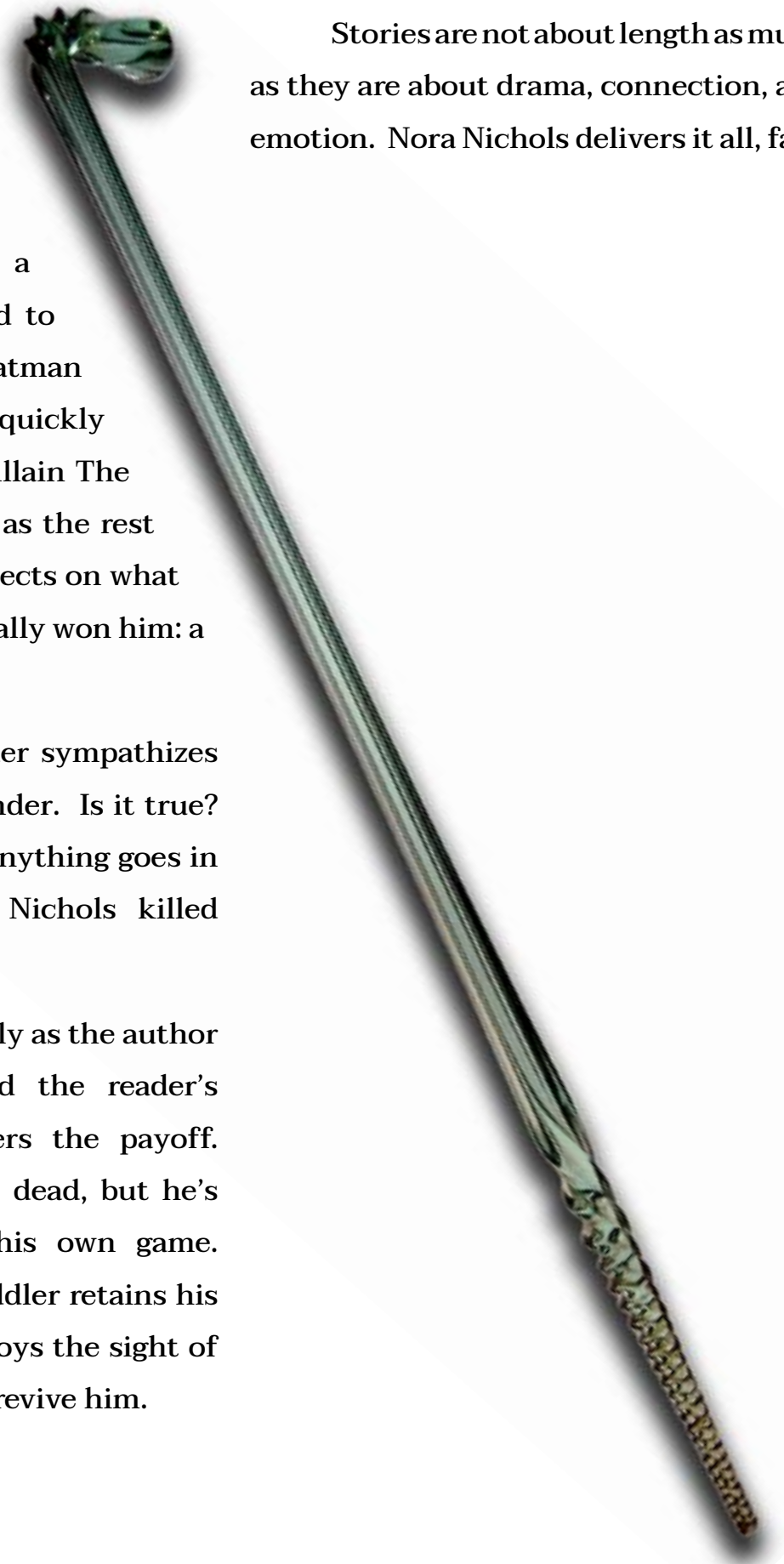
This short and sweet story by Nora Nichols covers a lot of ground.

It opens with a victorious villain, thrilled to be the one to defeat Batman once and for all. But we quickly see that genius-turned-villain The Riddler is just as human as the rest of us. We watch as he reflects on what his achievement has actually won him: a loss of life's purpose.

And while the reader sympathizes with Riddler, we also wonder. Is it true? Is Batman really dead? Anything goes in fan fiction after all. Has Nichols killed off The Bat?

But just as efficiently as the author tugs on Riddler's - and the reader's - emotions, she delivers the payoff. Batman is not only NOT dead, but he's beaten the Riddler at his own game. Gotham remains safe, Riddler retains his purpose, and Batman enjoys the sight of a sworn enemy racing to revive him.

Stories are not about length as much as they are about drama, connection, and emotion. Nora Nichols delivers it all, fast.



CONTRIBUTORS



BLACKWRITER09 *Writer*

“Writing fanfiction is like a love letter; you’re expressing your passion for that favorite book, that favorite movie, that favorite TV show, that favorite video game. You’re validating the stories that have been told to you through many mediums and you’re participating in the fandom in a very exciting way.”

BlackWriter09 has been writing for over 25 years, influenced by authors such as Sharon Draper, Geoff Johns, Brian Michael Bendis, and Neil Gaiman. He is an avid fan of many things ranging from sports to pro wrestling to Saturday morning cartoons from the 90s to old-school R&B and hip-hop.

BlackWriter09 currently lives in Queens, New York, USA.



NORA NICHOLS *Writer*

“The best characters are the ones whose stories you never want to end. Writing fanfiction is a way of breathing new life into your favorite characters, and allowing their adventures to continue in imaginative ways. The characters, themselves, may not be your original work, but how they grow and develop is entirely up to you through the art of fanfiction.”

Nora Nichols has been writing creatively since 1996; her favorite literary forms are fiction and poetry. “The beauty of the written word, in and of itself, inspires me to write. Pictures may speak a thousand words, but the right words in the right order can paint a masterpiece. Writing is at once my creative outlet and labor of love in the pursuit of perfection.”

Nora currently lives in Southern California, USA. | Wattpad Username: EdwardNashton8



LEIGH HULL *Writer*

When Leigh Hull was a child, she was pretty sure living with entire worlds inside your head was entirely normal — as she got older, she realized she should be writing them down. She can also sew whenever her cosplaying habit demands it and dabbles in graphic design for fun. Leigh is currently the host of the Writing Roots podcast, a show that helps authors put their creativity first and get their stories onto paper.

Leigh currently lives in sunny Northern California, USA. | Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook Username: @leighhullauthor



ADLEY *Artist (Cover Art)*

Adley is an independent digital artist with a focus on digital collages/design. She manages everything from the creation of the collages to the forms of commercialization. Before working as a freelance ad designer, Adley worked as an interior design technician in an architectural firm, which is her initial formation.

Adley Art has collaborations in South Korea, Germany, Chicago, and Los Angeles, as well as clients in her home country of Brasil. His mission is to help his clients bring meaning to their brands and companies through art.

Adley currently lives in Brasil. | AdleyArt Website <https://linktr.ee/adleyart>

ADDITIONAL ART CREDITS

Inside Cover: “Liquid abstract painting using paint poured over cream” by Susan Wilkinson; Page 4: “Lady Seated at a Table (recto)” by George Romney; Page 6: “green grass field and horses during daytime” by Tim Peterson; Page 30: “road during night” by Marc-Olivier Paquin; Page 36: “Green grass field under cloudy sky during daytime” by Kevin Payan; Page 39: “Green Glass Cane” by Unknown; Back Cover: “Grecian male statue looks up on red background” by Wilhelm Gunkel.

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