

Teen Zine



Winter 2019-2020

Table of Contents:

Cover Illustration – Karin Thogersen

The 700 Club: Part 12 – Melanie Andersen

Untitled – Melanie Andersen

Princess for Rescue: Part 7 – Sam Andersen

Quinten Malvolia Was Last Seen in All Black: Part 2 – Melanie Andersen

Can You Hear Anxiety – Melanie Andersen

Anxiety images – Karin Thogersen

Cowards – Melanie Andersen

Tiny Bunny – Karin Thogersen

The 700 Club (Part 12) – by Melanie Andersen

In person, Mrs. Kisher is a lot plumper than I expected. Her husband answered the door, and he is a living representative of fifty years of working out, but the Missus herself certainly has had more than a few cookies for a snack.

They were both a little surprised to discover that I'm young, considering the fact that I said I was Rodney's boss and he turned out to be a forty-year-old man, but they shrugged it off rather quickly when I rushed to explain that my father had also been in the journalism business.

Right now, they're both sitting in front of me on an old cream loveseat that barely fits the two of them while I'm across from them on another loveseat, staring at the coffee table that creates a gap between us. It's covered in scratches and looks very worn, most likely having been in this house for over ten years.

After driving through the neighborhood on my way here I noticed that a lot of the houses are made completely of wood and seem quite rustic; Lauren's is probably the only one with any sort of modernism inside, and that's because it's newly built. The rest of these buildings were probably here for over fifty years at least, but that's not a bad thing. It just gives the place character, and honestly, Lauren's house sticks out like a sore thumb compared to the rest of the charming little town.

Mr. Kisher clears his throat in an effort to gain my attention, and I quickly look up at him and give him a bashful smile.

"Sorry, um." I clear my throat, too, and look down at the notebook in my hands. There are no questions written down or anything, but I thought I should look the part when I came over here. "When exactly did you two first realize Ryan was missing?"

"Sunday," Mr. Kisher answers. Of course. Saturday night was when Andrew realized Clovis was gone. "He was going to meet his friends at the park, and when I came to pick him up he wasn't there. His friends said he never showed up."

I write this down even though it's not entirely necessary. At least my journalist act will seem believable.

"And when did he return?"

"Wednesday morning we found him in his bed," he answers. "Initially we thought he had run away and then just decided to come home, but it was pretty apparent something was wrong with him the second he opened his mouth. He would not stop going on and on about the green eyes."

Again with the green eyes!

"I'm sorry, I'm not entirely positive what you mean by that," I say. Mr. and Mrs. Kisher look at each other and sigh. Finally, Mr. Kisher turns back to me.

"It's probably best if you just speak with him yourself," he says, standing up. Mrs. Kisher and I get up also and follow him upstairs to a small bedroom with posters of various football players hung up on the walls. Ryan's staring wide-eyed at the ceiling when we walk in, his forehead covered in sweat, his eyes frantic even though all he must be seeing is a white wall. He's gripping his bed sheets with his life. It's kind of overdramatic to keep someone with missing powers and amnesia in a bed for five days, but the second Ryan opens his mouth I know why they chose to do that.

"Who-who is this?!" he exclaims, ripping his attention from the ceiling and focusing it on me. He looks absolutely terrified. His parents rush to his side while I hang back a bit, by the door.

"This is Alexis. She's also from the newspaper," Mrs. Kisher explains, sounding a bit frightened herself.

Ryan ignores her. "Come closer, let me see."

"See what?" I ask, slightly concerned. I stay by the door.

"Let me see your eyes!" he practically shrieks, so I quickly hurry to his side. He peers at me intently, and I'm not quite certain where to look so I gaze into his eyes, too. They're bright blue, but quite alert.

After he stares at me for another minute, I begin to grow really uncomfortable and look at his parents for help. They shrug, their expressions speaking for them. *We warned you about the eyes.*

"They're hazel," Ryan finally mutters, looking down at his hands. They ball into fists, and he pounds the bed. "They're *hazel!*"

"Is that bad?" I whisper, but his parents are on the other side of the bed so they don't hear me.

Ryan starts shaking his head back and forth and muttering, "not green" to himself, but I look down at my notebook as if searching for a question to ask him, choosing to ignore his strange actions.

"Ryan, do you know what happened to you?" I question. Mr. and Mrs. Kisher exchange nervous glances, seemingly worried he'll have another outburst.

"I know what happened!" he shouts. I ready my pen. This might actually be useful, and I really could do with an explanation of the eye color fascination. "On my way to the park to meet with my friends, I was hit on the back of the head! Taken, by green eyes! They took my powers, took some of my memory, but I can never forget those eyes. They're so intensely green they almost looked fake; you could spot them a mile away! They stared at me lovingly. They were happy I was there!"

I don't know how to react to this incredibly weird account, so I just nod and write down "green eyes" on my notebook and circle it over and over.

"Do you remember anything else?"

"What else is there to remember? What else is important? If I ever see anybody with green eyes, I will *strangle* them."

It's almost funny how passionate this kid is being about someone's eye color, but I suppose it would be traumatizing to lose such a large part of yourself and be taken from your home and held hostage for a few days. Any memories of such an incident, even just remembering the color of someone's eyes, can trigger a lot of fear.

And in Ryan's case, it can be a little maddening.

The only thing I'm confused about is, who has eyes like that? Clovis's are a beautiful brown, and I imagine Dynah's are brown, too. Joshua has murky black eyes, but Ryan did say they were fake-looking, so maybe it's part of a disguise. I know that Clovis and Dynah wouldn't care to do something like change their eye color, but Joshua is a businessman, and if he gets caught for something like this it would ruin everything for him. It would make sense for him to take extra precautions.

"Do you know where you were?" I question.

"I told you – in the house of the man with the green eyes!"

"Yes, I understand the person's eyes were green, but is there anything else that you can remember? Anything at all?"

"Nothing else is important."

I let out a frustrated groan. This kid's a bit less helpful than I was hoping for. At least now I understand what his parents meant by him going on and on.

Mrs. Kisher notices my slight upset and she points to the door, so I nod and we all walk out, leaving Ryan. She shuts the door quietly.

"I know things look bad, but I ask that you leave his instability out of the article. Though Rodney didn't mention the eyes, he said Ryan is mad multiple times in the article, and that isn't correct at all."

It doesn't seem too incorrect to me, but I nod. "I promise I won't mention anything about his current condition. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the incident?"

"Yes." Mrs. Kisher folds her chubby arms. "Make sure to put in there that there will be justice! No one gets to do this to my family and get away with it. And Ryan's football career is ruined. They can't do that to my son; he was the star football player."

Of course that's due to the fact that he'd cheat, but I don't mention it.

"Don't worry, ma'am." I look her straight in the eye so she knows I'm serious. "There will be justice. Whoever did this to your son will get punished."

My sudden seriousness catches her by surprise, so she hesitates a moment before saying, "You'd better be right."

"I'll make sure of it," I promise, then turn away and head out of the house.

Chapter 18

The second I return to Lauren's house I begin my search for anything that could paint Joshua as suspicious. Lauren is watching a reality TV show in the den, and she is so invested in it that I know she won't catch me snooping in their private rooms, most importantly the master bathroom. That's typically where contacts are kept, and even if Joshua didn't leave them out in such an obvious place it can't hurt to check, right?

The longer I think about Joshua being a member of the 700 Club, the more it makes sense. He's suddenly distant, he just disappeared on a so-called business trip without telling Lauren when he was leaving, and he left at such an odd time, too. Moreover, it seems that Lauren is completely clueless as to Ryan's kidnapping and this town is rather small, so one of the only ways to keep this information from her is to monitor what she sees closely right from under her roof. Lauren being socially reclusive from most other people probably helps, too, but I figure by now Joshua's seen the

article and is already working on getting rid of it. That's probably why he's gone; he's figuring out how to quiet the town.

And yet, just like what often seems to happen, I'm short on proof. My strong intuition is nice, but after a while even Andrew might stop believing all of my theories if I can't come across anything solid. If I can't find those contacts – which is quite possible, seeing as Joshua left and probably took them with him – then I'll have to find something else, and if I can't then I have nothing to show for myself. I'll be back at square one and left with nothing but a hunch and a ton of questions.

Though if Joshua really is the one who kidnapped Ryan, then where are Clovis and Dynah? Is it possible they're helping here, too, or are they in another town? While it's safe to say this kidnapping is the work of the 700 Club, it's difficult to figure out exactly which member committed the crime, and if it is Joshua then I still have to find out where the other two went and what they're doing while somehow putting him behind bars.

I wonder if Lauren would hate me for that. I guess that's something I have to risk.

An hour later, and I've found nothing out of the ordinary. No contacts, no rope or other weaponry that could've kept Ryan trapped, no ether or chloroform which could be used to knock somebody out for long periods of time, as I doubt Ryan being hit on the head once kept him out for two days. No, Joshua is clean and I am left feeling stupid. I haven't completely given up on the idea of him being the culprit, but I think it's time I try to consider more possibilities. Perhaps there really is someone in town with impossibly green eyes?

I ponder this as I head into the den, checking to see if Lauren's still here. She is, so I take a seat next to her as she turns her attention away from the spoiled brats she's watching on TV and gives it to me.

"How was your time visiting your grandmother?"

Right, that's what I pretended I was doing today.

"It went well. Though she's a bit more forgetful, she seems satisfied with where she is and how she's being cared for, and that's all that really matters to me. And she says hello back, by the way," I answer. Lauren claps her hands together, delighted that I remembered that small request she made this morning.

"I wonder if she'd like it if I visited her one of these days. Have you mentioned me to her? I get kind of lonely when Joshua leaves, and I think it'd be good for both of us if we had a friend in town," Lauren replies. Sadly, as much as I'd like both of them to have another friend, that's going to be difficult when one of them is dead.

"She doesn't know you," I state, hoping that'll be enough to stop Lauren from wanting to meet her. "You never really came up in conversation."

"Aw, well, I guess that makes sense. Do you think she'd like to meet me, though? I could check up on her once a week after you leave, maybe more, and I'd let you know how she's doing," Lauren says, seeming quite fond of this idea. I feel bad for shutting it down, but it has to be done.

"I think she'd really prefer if just family visits. With her memory leaving, she's already forgetting some of us a little bit, and suddenly having a stranger enter her life at a time when everything's becoming fuzzy will probably only confuse her more."

"Yeah, that makes sense." Lauren is noticeably disappointed, but she covers it with a sudden grin. "How are you liking town so far, Alexis?"

"It's really cute here," I answer honestly, thankful to be telling the truth finally. Lying all the time doesn't sit too well with me, even though it's been necessary lately. "I feel like this community is very tight-knit."

"It is, though I'm a little bit... less tightly knit with the rest of them." She shrugs. "I'm not sure how much they liked it when my house was built here. It does sort of distract from the charm of all the little old houses, doesn't it? But I wanted to move here to get away and keep Joshua away from the city, and since he refused to move into anything smaller than this, we had to compromise. Though, I'm fine with the extra space, sometimes it really does feel empty.

"Is that why you have your old friends visiting you in town all the time?" I ask. Lauren nods.

"Yeah, I try to visit public places here, but no one seems too taken with me, so I've made a habit out of inviting some of my other friends and family to visit. I would've invited you sooner, but you're in college and I don't want to distract you from your schoolwork." Her eyes twinkle with mischief. "It's very important, you know. If you don't go to school and get your degree, there's no way you'll ever be successful in life, period. Certainly you can't just date someone rich and expect them to support you. This is reality we're talking about."

"And that's everything your parents always told you?"

"Pretty much, but now that I'm actually with someone successful and I live in a big house, they don't seem to mind my lack of a college education so much," Lauren jokes. "People are so easily bought, though I guess I'm one of them."

“Hey, as long as you and Joshua are happy, does it really matter?”

“I guess not, though Joshua doesn’t seem as happy anymore. I hope he doesn’t get into trouble in the city,” she says, sighing. If she can’t handle the idea of her boyfriend even looking at another girl the wrong way, I can’t imagine what she’d be like if she found out there’s a possibility he kidnapped a kid and stole his magic. There are definitely some things that are better kept to yourself.

“Don’t be so worried,” I instruct, even though I’m worried about Joshua myself at the moment. “You’re adorable, and he’s working, and there’s no way he’d ruin your relationship.”

“I know. You’re probably right. I just worry a lot. But at least I’m not trapped in a constant state of denial, unlike some people,” she quips, bringing up a conversation we had around two weeks ago.

“Will you drop that?”

“No, *never*,” Lauren teases. She then shuts off the TV so she can focus all of her attention on me, and we talk the rest of the night even though something screaming in my brain, telling me to pay attention to the matter at hand, the reason I came here, and that’s to shut down the 700 Club.

And the second I get up the next morning I feel determination rushing through my body. I quickly get ready for the day and eat breakfast, saying hello to Lauren and telling her what I plan on doing (visiting the park, then dropping by my grandmother’s place – Gigi offered to join me in my park visit, but I had to decline for obvious reasons) and then I headed out. While visiting my grandmother is definitely not on my to-do list, a trip to the park is, since that’s where Ryan was supposedly headed. I’m not sure what I think I’ll find there, and it’ll probably be nothing, but the scene of the kidnapping is a decent place to search for clues when you’ve basically got nothing.

It doesn’t take me too long to reach the park, which is a large plot of land off the side of a main road with an inadequately sized parking lot for the number of people that seem to be here. Still, I manage to find an open spot and hop out of my car, then proceed to investigate.

Asphalt, dead leaves, an abandoned coffee cup. Cars of all shapes and sizes, but no hint of something useful to me. I step out of the parking lot because the kidnapping probably happened before Ryan actually reached the park, anyways, since his friends said he never showed up.

I follow the sidewalk on the edge of the road in the direction of Ryan’s house, assuming this is the route he took. More dead leaves, a pillbug, gum – all of these make perfect sense, and I’m left with a horrible feeling growing inside me. Ryan wasn’t nearly as useful as I’d been hoping, I’m certainly no detective, and clues aren’t jumping out at me as I had foolishly hoped, which means determining who kidnapped Ryan is not going to be easy. I’ll have to find some way to ask around about somebody with intensely green eyes without alerting the person themselves.

Fantastic.

Disappointed, I check my watch and see that it’s only ten o’ six. I’m kind of tired, so I decide that starting by asking around in a coffee shop is a good option. After all, there’s bound to be a lot of people to talk to there, right?

Once I convince myself that taking a coffee break is okay, I get back into my car and drive to the part of town that has Nathan’s Pub in it, because I remember there being a shop called The Kindling nearby.

Sure enough, once I pass by Nathan’s Pub a small building with a light brown awning comes into view. I step out of my car and go inside, a high-pitched bell jangling to signal my arrival.

Instantly, the overwhelming and mouth-watering smell of coffee fills my nose, and the chattering of people gathered at tables to eat breakfast together puts me at ease as I make my way to a barstool by the counter. The various browns and oranges that the coffee shop is colored with is quite easy on the eyes, and I feel very content as I take a seat on the stool.

Well, content until my phone rings, drawing annoyed glances from the other customers, I rush to answer it.

“Lauren!” I hiss, slightly peeved that her call is causing these strangers to give me such blatant disapproval. “Why are you calling?”

“I knew it, Alexis, I knew it and you were wrong,” she wails into the phone, clearly in tears. Last time someone I loved called me crying, it was because Amorie went missing, and that spiraled out of control into the situation I’m in now.

Scared, my heart starts beating faster, but before I can reply to Lauren a voice asks, “What can I get you, Miss?”

I throw a quick glance at my barista, snap, “Medium coffee. *Black*,” and then return to staring at nothing in particular as I ask Lauren, “What’s wrong?”

“Joshua!”

Oh my God, did she find out that he kidnapped Ryan?

While I don't like it when Lauren is upset, this could actually be a good thing. If she somehow stumbled upon proof, that's one member of the 700 Club down and two more to go.

"What'd he do?"

"I called his apartment phone just now, since I figured he'd be up. I ran the risk of him missing the call because he'd probably be at work, and I didn't call his cell because if he was at work, I'd bother him and he'd be upset with me. But I thought I could at least leave a message." Her voice breaks off in the middle of the sentence, causing the rest of her statement to be difficult to understand. "Someone did answer the phone, but it wasn't Joshua."

untitled may 2 2019 – by Melanie Andersen

sometimes i purge up the stars,
not to shake the solar systems but simply because
i can see pieces of myself in the galaxy,
and i take comfort in the fact that
stardust pumps through my veins
and pours out of me along with my blood.
my heart is but a ball of gas
filled to the brim with sparkling sunshine--
i thought it died out years ago but sometimes
inside my guilty comfort i can see traces of the rays.
but don't mistake my nebulas for vanity,
i'm not doing this to impress you;
i'm just making sure my soul
still hasn't succumbed to a black hole.

Princess for Rescue Part 7 (Days 11, 12, 13) – by Samantha Andersen

A knock sounds at my bedroom door before Aamon pokes his head in. “Sir?”

“Leave me alone.”

“Sir, I have left you alone for two days now. I believe it’s time to get up.”

I groan and roll over. The pain in my arms, legs, and face have subsided, but my heart is going to ache forever. “I’m never leaving this bed.”

The lights switch on, blinding me. “I am afraid I cannot let you do that, Sir. Something must be done.”

“I don’t think I’m going to do anything ever again, Aamon. Sorry, but you should find a new demon king to serve,” I mumble.

“Well, if I did that, I wouldn’t be a very good second-in-command would I, Sir?” I don’t say anything in response, so he moves to the other side of the bed in an attempt to catch my spaced-out gaze. “I know you miss Miss Eve, Sir.”

I don’t even have the energy to deny it, and that’s all the answer he needs. “I have decided to help you get her back, Sir!”

I laugh dryly. “What are you talking about? She doesn’t want to come back here. She was rescued by her dream guy. You think she would give up everything to be with someone she doesn’t even like?”

“You’ve got it all wrong, Sir. Miss Eve likes you very much.”

“No, she doesn’t.”

“Yes, she does, Sir.”

“Aamon, just drop it!” I go to throw one of the nearby pillows at him, but after I pick it up, I notice something was hidden under it.

A book with a sparkly pink cover greets me. I pick it up and open to the first page. It reads: Property of Princess Genevieve Rosalinda Mary Bethany Birmingham.

“What is that, Sir?”

“It’s Eve’s diary,” I reply, paging through the book. Since she left in such a rush, all of her belongings have remained here. Which only served to encourage my sulking. I’m not even sure if she was ever going to come back for them.

“Should you really be reading it, Sir?” Aamon asks, tentatively.

“Why not? She’s not here to tell me not to.” Great. I just made myself unbelievably sad again.

I dive into the diary and read her thoughts on arriving here and her initial opinion on me, which (surprise, surprise) wasn’t great.

As if matters could not be worse, Arthur Westenfield was the person to show up and rescue me. There was no possible way I was going to marry him. Luckily, Azazel was nice enough to get rid of him even though that meant another night with me. It saved me from an unhappy life, so I will always be grateful for his actions.

My heart lifts a little after reading her thoughts written in her pretty cursive.

I do not know what my Father was talking about. Azazel seems to be very nice. He is very hospitable and, despite his somewhat rude commentary, treats me well. My stay in the Underland is less terrible than I imagined it would be.

He asked me if Frederick was my knight. Frederick is a decent guy, but not exactly what I aim for in a husband. And since Azazel was giving me a choice, I decided against going with him. He really is a fairly good dancer – Azazel, not Frederick – and he claims to have not danced before! The way his tail swishes when he sways is kind of cute.

Kind of cute. She thinks my tail is kind of cute?

It has been a week since I came to the Underland. I have gotten many “intruders” as Aamon calls them, but none of them seem good enough to marry. In fact, Azazel seems a better partner than any of them. We went dancing again. He seems to have improved drastically. I wonder if he was practicing without my knowledge.

I was...

I am very confused. My head and heart seem to be at battle. Gideon attempted to “save me” today – yes, THAT Gideon, the one I had a crush on for years – but I said no. If he had come the first day I guarantee I would be married to him now, but the truth is...I do not want to leave. I like the Underland. I like helping Azazel rule it. I like Azazel...

Those butterflies start back up in my stomach, but I tell myself that this was the “friendship” like she was referring to. I read on.

I have a predicament. I don’t want to marry any of the knights from the Land of the Light. I want to marry Azazel. He is funny, and sweet, and caring, and cute in a demony kind of way. He is attentive and asks me for my opinion on things. He lets me make decisions. He dances with me and teases me and treats me like an equal. He is the man my heart wants, but the many my head condones. I can’t marry him. I was raised with the notion that I would marry a knight worthy of my status. I was to rule the Land of Light in my Father’s wake and be a good, obedient daughter. Marrying Azazel would mean giving up the life I spent my entire life preparing for. What should I do?

“She said she wants to marry me!” I exclaim to Aamon, who has been silently watching me read this entire time.

“See, Sir? I knew she liked you!”

“Hang on, there’s more.”

What a mess I have made of things. Azazel confessed his feelings to me, and I panicked. It is one thing for me to fantasize about us being together, but when he announced his feelings for me every reality came crashing down on top of me all at once. I did not know how to properly react, so I lied and said I only viewed him as a friend. I was hoping that would buy me some time to figure everything out, but it crushed him. And that in turn, crushed me. Oh, this is everything you want, Eve! Are you honestly going to be too scared to live a life lead by your heart? I am sure Father would come to grips with the marriage eventually. Isabella could always run the Land for me. I could make this work. I WANT to make this work. I want to be his wife. I want to be the queen he thinks I can be. That is what I want and I am done living my life the way others want me to. I will confess my feelings to Azazel in the morning and apologize for lying. I hope he can forgive me and we can make this work.

I nearly throw the book at the wall. “I’m such an idiot!” I howl.

“Sir?”

“She was going to apologize! She was going to say she liked me back! And what did I do? I insulted her and rejected a confession that I didn’t even know was coming! Me and my stupid mouth!”

I practically jump out of bed. "Aamon, we have to go to the Land of the Light. I need to clear up this giant misunderstanding."

"I thought you would come around eventually, Sir. That is why I fired up the chariot."

"Aamon, you are the best!"

"I know, Sir. Now, let's go get Miss Eve."

* * * * *

The Land of Light is a lot brighter than I remember, and I squint my eyes against the blinding sunlight. Aamon drives the black pegasi while I practice what I'm going to say to Eve. Apparently, Aamon caught wind that today is her wedding day to the lunatic who stole her (which I am a little upset that she would even entertain the thought of marrying him), so guess we will be crashing that.

When we land in the castle's courtyard, I expect to have to deal with the guards of some sort, but the place is surprisingly clear. Guess everyone is watching the wedding. That doesn't add any pressure to an already stressful situation.

"Would you like me to go in with you, Sir?" Aamon asks, while stroking one of the pegasus' neck.

"No, that's alright. I wouldn't want you to suffer any more potential casualties on my part. Besides, we may need to make a quick getaway. That's assuming everything goes well."

"I believe in you, Sir."

"Thanks." I take a deep breath and enter the castle.

Ok, seriously, Greg? Do you need such wide hallways? And the chandeliers every ten feet are very obnoxious. You get enough light as is from the gaping windows.

Each golden-framed picture and ornate rug I pass fills me with more and more doubt. Why would Eve ever want to give all this up for the literal opposite of living conditions. I mean, I don't even have a spare bedroom and here you can probably fit the whole kingdom and then some comfortably. Being a queen of light is a thousand times more impressive than being a queen of death.

But still...I have to at least try. Even if she decides not to come back with me, I can't possibly leave things the way they were when she was taken away.

I come across the room I am assuming is holding the ceremony as I can hear some faint classical music coming from behind the large doors that just shut. Two guards stand on either side of the entrance with pointed spears in hand. Their armor catches the golden light streaking in through the window.

Shrieking Souls, everything is just so bright here. Aside from the doormats actually wearing the armor, that is. Lucky for me, because it means I have a better shot of getting in.

I take a deep breath, fix my cape, and casually walk up to the guards.

"Who goes there?" One of them questions with a booming voice that literally echoes in the entryway. For magma's sake, even Greg's guards are dramatic.

"Uh, yeah. Hi. You see, I kind of have a terrible sense of time and I totally forgot when the wedding started, so if I could just sneak in really quickly and quietly, that would be great," I lie with a smile.

Unfortunately for me, it seems Greg managed to hire the only two competent guards to patrol his daughter's wedding. "Invitation?" the one demands, holding out a hand.

Of course. "Right, see, here's the thing. You're gonna laugh when I tell you this, but because I was freaking out about running late I kind of left my invitation on the kitchen table. What an idiot, right? So I, um--"

"Wait, I know you," says the other guard as he squints his eyes and stares at me. "You are the King of the Underland, are you not?"

I'm taken aback that he knows me. That's actually kind of flattering. "Uh..."

I am not given any time to answer, because the first guard points his spear at me and bellows, "We were given strict orders not to let you in. Now leave before we have to use force."

"Okay, okay!" I hold up both hands to show I mean no harm, but just as I start to turn away, I ball up a fist and sock one of the guards in the face. The force of it sends him falling backwards where he slams his head against the wall and sinks to the floor unconscious.

I don't have time to react to this incredible feat as the other guard recovers from shock and starts charging me with his spear. I quickly grab the weapon that fell out of the other guard's hand, and use it to block the oncoming attack. Apparently, he was not prepared for that because he steps back a few paces and blinks in surprise. I take this window of opportunity to flip my spear around and knock his weapon out of his hands. It clatters to the ground, leaving him powerless.

I point the tip of the spear at his neck. "Leave now. And don't even think about running off to get reinforcements, because if you do..."

I let the threat hang in the air because I don't actually know what I would do if she called for backup. It's not like I have powers where I can just summon the dead to rise and steal his soul. In fact, the stunt I just pulled was probably the coolest thing I have ever done in my entire life.

The guard is ghost white and he inches along the wall until he is out of range of my spear. Then he runs off, armor clinking with every step.

Adrenaline course through me as I throw the spear on the ground. Alright, let's use this momentum to win Eve back!

I push the doors open and shout, "As a matter of fact, I object to this union!"

I decided there would be absolutely no way I could subtly crash a wedding, so I figured I would go big or go home.

The entire ballroom goes silent aside from the one random voice that shouts, "It's not even that part yet!"

"Oh, really? Well, whatever. I still object!" I shout as I make my way down the aisle.

"Azazel?"

I stop dead in my tracks as Eve turns to face me. She's dressed in a poufy, milk white gown with a silver crown attached to a veil that drapes down past her feet. Her blue eyes are shining directly at me. She looks like a goddess.

"I-uh-I...um." Okay, this is not going according to plan. I have forgotten everything that I practiced on the ride up here.

"How did you get in here?" an obnoxious voice demands.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath before turning to the left and smiling. "Hello, Greg. Always a pleasure."

The angry blond man with the hideous mustache stands up and glowers at me. "Underground Rat! What are you doing here? You were not invited."

I roll my eyes. "Yeah, I know. I am never invited. To anything. Ever. I don't care, though. I am only here to ask Eve a question."

He raises an eyebrow, that nearly reaches to his gaudy crown. "Eve?"
He's asking like he forgot his own daughter's name.

"Yes, Eve. As in your daughter. As in the person standing right in front of me." I gesture to Eve who takes a step closer to me.

She clasps her hands together and holds them near her heart. "What do you have to ask me?"

She seems especially eager to hear what I have to say. Her father, however, is quite the opposite.

"No! No questions, no talking, no presence. Guards! I need someone to escort this rat out of here," he bellows.

"Wait, wait!" I cry frantically, as two guards emerge from the doorway and start making their way towards me. "I just need to ask her a question. That's it. No matter her answer I'll leave. I promise!"

Greg sneers. "What good is a demon king's promise? Guards, take him away."

They start to close in on me and I'm about a second away from implementing the backup plan I made of just jumping off the balcony behind the altar, when Eve commands them to stop.

"I want to hear what he has to say," she says, and relief floods through me.

But Greg is having none of it. "He is interrupting your wedding, dear Genevieve. Guards!"

They start toward me again, and I'm about to run off when Eve stares them dead in the eye and barks, "I said wait."

I have never heard such a cold and commanding tone of voice come out of her mouth before. It's both frightening and exciting.

She turns her focus back to me and her features soften. "What's your question, Azazel?"

Suddenly it feels as if the magma fall is raining down on me. I can't breathe and I'm pretty sure my heart is a beat or two away from jumping out of me and off the balcony.

But I can't lose my nerve now. Not when so much is on the line.

Quinten Malvolia Was Last Seen in All Black (Part 2) – by Melanie Andersen

“Come back with your mother, and maybe we’ll be able to do somethin’ then, alright?” Officer Clemanto said, looking at me holding Scarlet’s little hand with what could best be described as poorly masked disdain.

“Please,” I begged, dropping Scarlet’s hand and taking a step forward to the front desk. “I need to find my father.”

“Your mother filed a missing person’s report already,” he responded shortly, typing on his computer. “But I can’t legally disclose more than that without her present.”

“But I’m family!”

“You’re a kid.” The officer glanced up from his computer and turned his attention to Scarlet, raising an eyebrow. “Shouldn’t you be here with a parent anyway? She looks six.”

“I’m eight,” she piped up, stepping forward to be by my side. Officer Clemanto appeared unimpressed.

“Listen, if you don’t go home soon, I’ll have to call your mother to pick you up,” he warned, resuming his typing. My pulse quickened.

“You can do that?”

“Can’t I? we have her number on file since she reported your father.”

“Please don’t do that!”

My sudden outburst took Officer Clemanto by surprise, and his expression finally softened at the sight of my obvious distress. I stared hard into his eyes, feeling a knot in my throat.

“Please don’t do that,” I repeated softly.

The police officer sighed, rubbing his temples, not saying anything for a long moment. Scarlet and I exchanged confused glances with one another, but we looked at him again when we heard the sound of him typing furiously on his computer.

“Quinten Malvolia,” he started, clearing his throat. “Quinten Malvolia was last seen in all black.”

I stared at him, unsure of what to say. On one hand, I was grateful to know anything, but hearing that random tidbit of information threw me for a loop. I tested my luck.

“Who was the one who last saw him?”

“Go.”

Even I recognized that I’d finally pushed the officer too far. I grabbed Scarlet’s hand and did as I was told.

* * *

My father didn’t take everything with him when he left, like I’d originally assumed. All his clothes and shoes were gone, his books missing, even his shaver was plucked from its usual spot by the bathroom sink. However, there was one thing he left behind: a pen.

Now, I certainly wasn’t in the habit of checking to see which pen belonged to who in my household, but it was quite obvious to tell this was my father’s pen after I found it hidden under my parents’ bed and I clicked it. Nothing happened. Well, to be more precise, I couldn’t even click the pen because it felt like something was jammed inside.

And that’s how I knew it was his.

This was a few days after I talked to Officer Clemanto, and Scarlet and I were being babysat after I asked Mom not to send us to the Y, so I could investigate more at home without the possibility of her finding out. Our babysitter was a seventeen-year-old who couldn’t care less what we were up to, so rifling through my parents’ stuff was no problem. In the unlikely event that she cared what I was up to, I stuck Scarlet on distraction duty, and she assured me she was ready to randomly start screaming if necessary.

Which brought me to my current situation, crawling under my parents’ bed until I found this pen.

My father told me once that if you don’t know how to hide things, you’ll never succeed in business. To him, dark hypnosis wasn’t a hobby or an art form, it was all business, and we spent just as much time together learning hypnosis as how to gain clients and make money.

So, naturally hiding information was a pivotal lesson. After all, he warned me that if I walked around with sensitive information on me all the time, I was just asking to be attacked, and when I inevitably was everything would be taken from me. Sure, phone numbers and the addresses of the victims, but my clients’ trust in me would drop, and I’d soon have no business.

However, if I were to be attacked, the attacker would be looking for my wallet, for scraps of paper. They wouldn’t care for something small like a coin, or a gum wrapper, or...a pen.

Eager, I pulled open the barrel of the pen to find not an ink cartridge, but a miniscule roll of paper. I unfolded it and peered at the name scribbled on it – JASPER CROWLEY – along with a phone number. Important information hidden away, just like he always said.

My hands started shaking, but I wasn't sure if it was from nervousness or excitement. I put the pen back together and tucked it, along with the piece of paper, in my pocket, then fled the bedroom to report my findings to Scarlet.

I threw a small wave to the babysitter as I ran past her to Scarlet's and my bedroom, rushing to her side and practically ripping the paper out of my pocket.

"Look at this!" I handed the paper to her giddily. "He left me a clue and I found it."

"Ellis!" she squealed, reading it excitedly over and over again, even though she definitely had no idea who Jasper Crowley was. "You're gonna find him!"

"I told you I would," I responded in fake offense, folding my arms. But I couldn't hide the fact that I was beaming.

"Now you just gotta call him and ask where Daddy is."

"Wait." My smile morphed into a frown. "I can't just call him and ask him stuff like that. This is a *client*."

"A client?"

"Yeah. Someone who hired Father," I explained. "I know you don't know much about that stuff. But with clients, you can't just say important stuff over the phone. That's what Father called *sensitive information*. You have to set up a meeting in a *secure location*."

Scarlet frowned and handed the paper back to me. "How are ya gonna do that? Mommy's not gonna get us a babysitter all the time."

I nodded at her words, beginning to fold the paper over and over again in my hands as I thought. "You're right. Even *she* might notice a meeting. And this place isn't very secure..."

The whole situation was much more complicated than I'd hoped for, but since I'd discovered one of my father's clues I knew I was on the right track. Suddenly, an obvious idea came to mind and the grin I was wearing earlier reappeared on my face.

"I'll just ask Mr. Crowley where he wants to meet up," I said, looking down at Scarlet seriously. "And whenever and wherever he wants to meet, I'll need your help making sure Mom isn't there, okay?"

Scarlet nodded. "Course."

"Good." I glanced down at the number in my hands and grinned. "I know I'll pass his test. You just wait."

* * *

"I want to talk to Jasper Crowley."

"I told ya, there ain't no Jasper with this number, kid," the man on the other end of the line growled. "Have a good life, pal."

"I'm the son of the Dark Hypnotist in All White," I rushed to say before he hung up. I heard the man on the line inhale sharply.

"Prove it."

"But we're on the phone..." I cleared my throat, realizing my whining probably didn't sound professional. "Shall we set up a meeting? I can prove it to you then."

"Gimme a second, will ya?"

I heard shuffling on the other end of the line, and pursed my lips as I awaited his response. I was alone in the kitchen, since Scarlet was in our bedroom forcing the babysitter to play with her, and suddenly I felt very unnerved. What was I getting into?

"Got a pen, kid? If ya miss this I ain't tellin' you again."

Immediately, I scrambled to find a scrap of paper and a pencil, the landline dropping out of my hands and dangling from its wire as I rifled through the kitchen drawers. Finding a crumpled up post-it note and a dull pencil, I raced back to pick up the phone again.

"I got it."

"Good, now listen up. I'll meet with ya in two days, twelve o'clock sharp, Harlem River Park. I'll be wearin' a blue hoodie and be sittin' on a bench and I'm gonna ask you if you're 987. Then you're gonna tell me you're 643. And if ya don't, I ain't gonna say shit to you and the meeting's off," the man explained. "Got that?"

"Yes," I replied, rushing to write the information down to the post-it. "Twelve o'clock, Harlem River Park, bench, numbers..."

"Attaboy. Have a nice day, now. And hey, tell your pops Snail says hello."

The man on the phone laughed and hung up, and I was left with a mixture of excitement and nervousness swelling up in my stomach. I placed the phone back on the wall and tucked the information in my pocket for safe keeping, then headed to our bedroom to find Scarlet. She definitely would want to hear this.

* * *

My father's pen is in the breast pocket of my button down, Jasper's phone number tucked back inside the barrel. I knew Snail would be wearing a blue hoodie, but I decided to dress up, since this *is* a meeting, after all (well, more like a pre-meeting, to prove I'm good enough for an actual meeting). My shoes are polished, my shirt tucked into my dress pants, and, most importantly, the expensive pocket watch my father gave me was just waiting to be used.

And there Snail was, sitting alone on a wooden bench, drumming his fingers along the arm rest as if he was bored out of his mind.

I cleared my throat as I sat beside him, resisting the urge to swing my legs back and forth. My sleeve was rolled up to reveal my watch, and when Snail glanced over at me and noticed this, he smirked.

"Are you 987?" he asked curiously, turning to face me. I shook my head.

"No, I'm 643."

Hearing the confirmation, Snail's smirk transformed into a grin, and he started laughing.

"I didn't 'spect the son of the great Dark Hypnotist to be under five feet tall."

"I'm still growing. The doctor said I could be six feet one day." I felt my face heat up, realizing that I was just embarrassing myself. To distract Snail, I held out my hand for him to shake. "Ellis Malvolia, pleasure to meet you."

He took my hand and shook it firmly, saying, "I'll believe it when I see it."

"Well." I dropped his hand and pulled out my watch. "What do you want me to do?"

Snail paused for a moment, then slipped out a note and began scribbling down on it. After he was done, he held it up to me. It said that I had made him forget he cut the tip of his finger, and below that statement was his signature.

"What...?"

"Take this," he instructed, placing it in my hands. "I'm gonna cut my fingertip with a knife, and you're gonna make me forget it. When I'm confused as to why the hell I'm bleedin', hand me the paper and I'll know you're legit."

"Okay." I felt myself get a little squeamish as Snail pulled a small Swiss Army knife from his pocket, placing the tip against his finger. "Are you sure you wanna—"

"Oh, can't handle blood?" Snail laughed as he gently cut a thin line into his finger, blood filling up the wound. "Ya sure this is the right line of business for ya, kid?"

"I'm sure." I held the pocket watch up to be level with Snail's eyes. "You ready?"

"I'm not 'posed to be ready, pal, this is a test!"

A test.

I was determined to pass all of my father's tests, determined to prove I was worthy of being his son. So I did what I had been studying for the past three years, I made him forget. When he asked why the hell he was bleedin', I did what I was told and handed him the paper.

And then I set up a meeting with Jasper Crowley.

* * *

I'd been hiding things from my mom for a long time, pretending not to know as much as I did, telling her I wouldn't go into the Dark Hypnotism field as a career. It was just a hobby for me.

But now, after setting up not one but two secret meetings, I began to feel a little guilty for being so secretive. Was this how my father felt all the time? Or did he just not care?

No, he would tell me it was just business. Business was something my mom wasn't supposed to be a part of.

But Scarlet wasn't supposed to either, and I knew I couldn't do this without her. After all, she was the one who offered to cover for me today if Mom came to pick us up from the Y and I wasn't there. In her own way, she seemed just as determined as I was to make sure Father came home.

Jasper Crowley offered to meet me in a local café, so we could talk in public and I could be assured that I was going to come to no harm. He said he'd get a corner table, and he'd have a red handkerchief tucked into his breast pocket so I'd know it was him.

As I had little to no money of my own, I was a bit worried about meeting in a restaurant because he'd quickly discover I wasn't planning on ordering anything. A businessman should never let others know how much money he has in his pocket, according to my father.

Especially if he has *none*.

I pulled open the door to the restaurant and tried to steady my pulse, knowing it was going a mile a minute. Admittedly, I didn't know much about Jasper – I didn't know if he worked with my father, for him, was hired by him; how old he was, if he was dangerous; what kind of business he was involved with; if he was meeting with me to help me or harm me.

All I knew was that he was in contact with my father at one point, but given that Father left his pen for me to find, I'd say I'm on the brink of bringing him home.

I'm on the brink of passing my test.

After informing the hostess that I was meeting someone, she let me breeze past her to the table in the corner, where Jasper was sitting with his hands clasped together, staring down the cup of tea in front of him like it had wronged him personally.

I cleared my throat as I sat down across from him, and he looked up at me strangely fondly.

"Hello," I greeted quietly, feeling nervous under his gaze. Was he evaluating me? Was he going to report back to Father and tell him if I'm worthy or not?

"Pleasure, little Quinten," Jasper returned with a laugh. "You're the spitting image of your father, you know that?"

"I'm glad to be."

I started thumbing the watch in my pocket as a waitress stopped by our table, asking for my drink order. When I refused anything, Jasper laughed and waved off my concern, then ordered us both a cup of mint tea.

"You know, I used to think tea wasn't a very masculine drink," he commented matter-of-factly, finishing off the cup in front of him and gently setting it back down. "Quinten was the one who convinced me it was the gentleman's drink of choice."

"That's just 'cuz he's British."

"He was a quirky little fellow, wasn't he?" Jasper chuckled, more to himself than anyone else. He shook his head and smiled. "So, Ellis, what is it you wanted to meet with me for?"

I took a second to gather my courage, then asked, "You hired my father before, right? To hypnotize someone for you?"

"Hired him? Well, perhaps it started off that way, yes. I don't suppose he talked about me much."

Jasper became quiet as the waitress returned with the cups of tea, and she placed them gingerly down on the table before walking away again. I thought Jasper would elaborate on his statements, but he simply picked up the cup of tea and started blowing on it.

"So what did it become then?" I questioned curiously, watching the steam rise up from the cup in front of me. "Honestly, I hadn't heard of you before I found Father's pen. He talked to me a lot about Dark Hypnotism and business, but not much about himself specifically."

"That's how he was." Jasper shrugged, taking a small sip of tea. "Quinten and I ended up becoming partners, of a sort. You're not often supposed to make friends when you're like us, but he continually proved himself as an honest man to me. He helped me tie up loose ends, I gave him more clients..." Finally remembering that he was talking to a child, he cleared his throat. "The details matter little, I suppose."

"But you were close?"

"Close is a dangerous word, but for lack of a better one, yes."

"Do you...do you know where he went?" I asked hesitantly, holding my breath. I was so eager and so terrified for a response, I thought I was going to throw up. Jasper paused, then finally let out a small sigh.

"No, unfortunately."

My heart dropped to my shoes, and suddenly I felt a large knot in my throat that made it difficult to speak.

"Oh."

"Ellis," Jasper started, voice softening, "I'm sorry. I don't think anyone knows where your father is except himself."

"That's not true, there has to be someone," I said desperately, trying to think hard, but suddenly my brain felt like it was malfunctioning. I slipped the pen out of my breast pocket and handed it to him. "Didn't he leave me this so I could find you? I thought it was a clue!"

"There were no clues. This isn't some game. He must have forgotten it on accident."

"Well, that's okay, I'm sure someone else has some idea where-"

"Ellis, listen to me, you're wasting your time-"

“Oh!” I clapped my hands together, an idea suddenly springing in my head. “I went to the police, and the officer there said he was last seen in all black. If I locate the person who saw him last, I’d have something to go off of-”

“That isn’t going to work.”

“How do you know? Have you tried?” I demanded, my voice rising. “*Someone’s* got to look for him, and that someone is me! This is my task – bringing him back – and the person who saw him last is the key!”

“I was the last person who saw Quinten.”

Jasper’s statement practically knocked the air out of me, and I stared at him in disbelief.

“No,” I said quietly, but even I finally realized how I sounded. I tried to swallow the knot in my throat. “Really?”

Jasper nodded, taking a deep breath before admitting softly, “Before Quinten left, he spoke to me. He told me that our partnership would have to come to an end. I asked him why, and he refused to explain.” He frowned, unable to meet my eyes. “He said he wasn’t going to come back. I’m sorry.”

“No...”

“Ellis. You are never going to find your father.”

My father told me once that showing emotion was a sign of weakness, and if anyone saw me cry, my business was as good as done. But sitting there in that café, I finally realized something. Not everything was hypnosis and business, and sometimes a boy just has to cry because he misses his father.

* * *

I never did find him. There was no test, and the pen was never meant to be found.

It took a long time for me to finally accept that, but once I did, my admiration for him quickly dissipated into hurt and anger. It was hard for me to fathom that someone I loved so much could disappear from my life without a word, and I still don’t know why he left.

When I was ten, I wanted nothing more than to be just like my father.

But now, at twenty-two, I realize that was a dream I’m better off forgetting.

Can You Hear Anxiety – by Melanie Andersen

in, out
can you hear me
b r e a t h i n g
because that's all i hear
the air filling my nose
rushing in my ears
but you can't hear it
yet
in, out, in, out
can you hear me
s c r e a m i n g
that's okay
it's all in my head
i wouldn't expect you
to understand
in, out, in, out, in, out
can you hear me
l e a v i n g
it's a quiet descent
down a long and empty
hole
and waiting for me at the bottom
absolutely nothing
in, out, in, out, in, out, in, out
can you hear anxiety
it's okay if you can't
i've been told
it's an invisible illness



Cowards – by Melanie Andersen

Come on cowards,
face your demons head on
instead of drinking them away and hoping
when you wake up they won't be
drooling on your pillow
on the other side of the bed.
Come on cowards,
stop binge-watching TV shows
that show you the lives of people
who process their problems like robots-
they cry once and get over their traumas,
but I want you to slice yours open
with the sharp edge of a sword
and bleed and bleed and bleed
out with me
over and over again
until you can sew yourself up
with switches made of nothing but
love and validation from yourself.
Stop justifying yourself to others-
their stitches are just temporary
and will fall out at the slightest doubt,
but if you heal yourself I swear to you
no one else will be able to penetrate your skin
and pierce your heart.
Come on cowards,
stare hard into the mirror
and don't look away from yourself
for even a second;
you need to grow and heal for
years and years and years
over and over again
and I promise eventually you'll be able
to see yourself for who you really are
and softly whisper,
"I love you."



Tiny Bunny – by Karin Thogersen

teen zine contributors:

Melanie Andersen, Samantha Andersen, Tucker Bradley, Ashton Miller, Cory Poirier, and Olivia Schlossmann

Please join us at our next meeting!

teen zine is a publication of the Huntley Area Public Library's teen writers' club and includes members' work as well as submissions from area teens in grades 6 – 12. If you would like to submit your writing or artwork for review and possible inclusion in a future issue of the zine, please fill out a submission form (available at the library's Information Desk), or use our online submission form: www.huntleylibrary.org/teen-zine