

## Rebirth: The Death of an (Un)known Thing

Cornell Harris'23

Neilous had always loved the rich, golden rays of the sun; color seemed to bounce off his skin and resemble the rich soil that harvested life's treasures. He was basking in the sun, enjoying the gentle breeze of the wind and the soft touch of the green grass in the meadow. The meadow in the backyard was filled with life and hope. Neilous did not enjoy staying at home. It was filled with the thick toxic fumes of disappointment and harsh reality.

The home was strict with taboos and rules; *respect and obey your parents, boys are firm and strong, boys have deep voices, boys cannot do what girls do, no talking back, and parents are always correct.* It was a place that never gave him love. The parents were not bad people; they just never really cared for the things he cared about. After all, his dad was raised in an environment that made him conform to the ways of his mother's world. Neilous' father was raised in a single parent household. His mother was a stern woman possessing strong religious convictions. It was her way, GOD's way, or no way at all. She held herself to a high standard, "holding up the blood-stained banner," enforcing this same standard on everyone in her household, especially her son. Neilous' dad constantly received whippings for disobeying her rules, which made him turn away from his mother. Eventually, he submitted to her and her ideals. He promised himself that he would never become like her, but time told a different story.

Neilous has been separated from his mother since birth. He never knew who she was. His stepmother never showed affection towards him because she never understood how to

until she had his younger sister Nina. Neilous was an outcast in a house that never quite felt like home. He questioned his existence to his parents just like they had done once before he was born. The home was a war zone filled with violent words and emotional abuse from both his father and stepmother. *Useless piece of shit... you're just like your good for nothing mom... I hate you... Sissy...you're not supposed to be like that...are you trying to make your grandmother have a heart attack...never tell anyone...I don't want to hear anything about this anymore...* The parents spewed hatred out their mouths. These were the harsh words that never left his head. These were the pain inducing phrases that were forever entrapped deep in his subconscious. They tortured him amidst the moments of happiness and pleasure, words that forever plagued his psyche.

It was hard to breathe or relax in the house. Neilous always had to wear a mask around family. Sometimes he would not eat or sleep for consecutive days. Sometimes he would stare into the depth of his mind trying to escape hell. *What had I done in a past life to deserve this torture*, he had thought? He attempted to imagine himself in a better circumstance. He never had the chance to tell his parents how he felt, because he was suspicious of his own voice, believing the lies told to him by them that his perspective was invalid. Even though Neilous was broken internally, tortured mentally, and sometimes brutalized physically, there was a shimmer of light in him that lit his low spirits with a tiny ray of optimism. *Maybe I can help them understand...At least I have a home*, he thought. *At least there is hope for my future*, he remarked.

*I can grow from this*, he hoped. Despite hearing the screams of frustration and aggression flooding out of him, he looked ahead clinging to his safe space. He had the meadow. Acres of land filled with the most beautiful flowers and plants which included his favorite sunflowers. At times he would go outside and bird watch or following the swarm of bees collecting pollen from flower to flower. Every time Neilous was in the meadow, he felt free and available to laugh and love life. From the sounds of the birds to the trickling of the stream, it filled his heart with joy and excitement.

One day his entire existence shook in the meadow. Neilous was walking to the meadow after a troubling day, and he smelled something pungent, the worst he had smelled in his life. The stench was so wretched he began to bleed from his nose, but he continued to follow the smell to find its origin. Whatever it was, it was dead. He couldn't tell whether it was a man or an animal. Its guts had been spread out across the fresh green grass. Its ligament was torn from its body and blood was still dripping from it. Its head was carved out and hung upon an oak. It was a terrifying sight, and he wanted to run away as far as possible, but his curiosity took over his body as he approached closer and closer to the dead thing. Neilous searched around, but he could not find any footprint leading up to the dead carcass. There was no trail of blood. It was shocking. Neilous was there yesterday, and he had not seen anything out of the ordinary. The creature of some sort had suffered tremendously from claw marks. Looking down in disappointment, he whimpered at the loss of life and wept before walking out of the meadow.

As Neilous walked away from the meadow, he slowly began to forget what he had seen. By the time he was home, he had forgotten where he was and what time it was. Once again, a foul smell lingered in his nose. Neilous went to bed and laid down immediately after taking a shower in hopes to cleanse the smell. Peacefully sleeping in his room absent of light, he began to picture a scene in his head. The meadow was bright and full of life but darkened by death caused by an unknown creature. Neilous imagined the carcass, once living, screaming for help and crying for mercy. He imagined each of its ligaments being torn from its body by a blood thirsty predator. Before taking its last breath, what was then prey looked at Neilous and he saw its eyes full of despair and hopelessness. Then, he saw the vicious creature turn its head, exposing its bright eyes glowing with hatred and aggression as it looked in his direction. It opened its mouth leaking out drool and blood and grinned maliciously at him. Its teeth look like sharp objects he once used to hurt himself. He tried to wake up, but it was like something or someone was trapping him within his own dream... a *nightmare*.

As it began to creep slowly in his direction on all fours, Neilous began to worry that it could kill him. As his heartbeat began to quicken so did that monster's pace until he woke up at that moment sweating profusely. His clothes and bed had been drenched with sweat and urine. This was the first time in a decade he had wet the bed. *Usually, my body signals my brain to get up whenever I have to go, but this time I don't know*, he thought. *I think my mind was too preoccupied with my nightmare*, he whispered. After going to the washroom to clean himself and the bedsheets, he tried to go back to sleep but each time he woke up drenched

with sweat and the image of the monster in his head and its malicious smile showing sharp teeth and its bright eyes.

Neilous had an awful time trying to sleep that night. Nina woke up early that day and saw him crying. She slowly walked inside of Neilous' room and comforted him. He began to see the shimmer of hope once again. *Thank you, my lovely and caring sister. You deserve a better big brother*, he whispered to her. She just began to hug him tighter. Every night after that day, his nightmares seemed to intensify. Every time he would close his eyes, he saw the image of the innocent creature screaming for help, calling out his name. A million questions filled his head after the nightmares: *Why me? What could I have done? Who was that thing? How did it know my name?* That night until dawn came, Neilous had been fidgeting at every noise and voice he heard in his head. He trembled at night, afraid of being alone and scared. He was traumatized by the sight of the malevolent creature killing the unknown seemingly benevolent thing. From twilight to dawn, Neilous was too afraid to close his eyes, too afraid to go to bed at night. Tears stained his face each night. One night, Neilous had been sobbing so much that his eyes were red, flooded with pain. *How could I feel so sorrowful for a creature I've never known? Was it because I was scared of dying or was it the fact that the creature resembled something or someone I've seen before?*

Neilous continued to have the same dreams for what felt like months until the night he went back to visit the meadow. Neilous was too tortured to care anymore about his safety in the dark. He went back to the same area where the thing had died, and the body was gone. The grass was greener than ever as if nothing had happened. Neilous looked around thinking

to himself *how crazy can I be to have imagined this?* He began to laugh hysterically looking up at the stars. The moon was full. Its face blank from the events that had occurred. Time had seemed to stop the chaos in the world.

As the dew from the midnight mist dropped ever so slightly on his face, he fell into a slumber, one containing a vision. It was reminiscent of the nightmares he had suffered picturing in the past months. Only this time had he seen the face of the innocent thing, and it was his. He was the creature that had been tortured tremendously by the monsters of this world. The feeling of withdrawal, cowardness, fear, and disbelief followed him throughout the miserable years of his childhood. Neilous woke up from the dream. He began to climb the great oak and slowly pulled out a small but sturdy rope that he hid in his pants pocket. He pulled the rope over the branch and tied a noose on one end and tied the other around the oak. Unfortunately for his family, Neilous was already dead. He could not tell them of the news, nor did he desire to. He left no suicide note nor did he say a prayer before tying the noose around his neck. Neilous hanged himself to escape the terrors, sadness, and loneliness of the world. *I can't even escape the cries through death*, he said while choking for air.

As he took his last breaths, he looked up. The sky was a beautiful bold red, mixed lightly with streaks of teal and violet. It was nothing like he had ever seen before. It was like the aurora lights, but this was way different. It was as if extra-terrestrials painted a picture in the sky depicting his life. He saw his family and the partial happy memories he shared with them. Nothing was better than those times, especially when they were savored with daydreams about crushes or future possibilities. The sky replayed those trivial yet tender

moments, which caused him to feel tremendous fear and despair. The blackened eyes caused by his father's abuse and his mother's disapproval were things that he won't miss, so his frown turned into a smile as he viewed the vibrancy of the colors in the sky that seemed to point him in a direction of a new life.

As he drew his final breath, Neilous could see someone comforting him with the most heartwarming smile and precious kiss. This gentle kiss unloosened the noose from his neck. It lifted him up far from the ground. He watched the great oak tree shrink smaller and smaller as he began to rise high above the clouds. *This is my death*, he thought. He further ascended into space and at that moment Neilous knew he was happy, content, loved, and safe.

#### Goodbye Sun

Your rays of hope and warmth shone brightly  
I think someone took your life away intentionally  
I did look over your death deliberately  
Your desire for love meant so much to me  
I watched your tears and heard you plead  
Your price was too much to pay for your life was the fee.