

Uwharrie  
Dreams

# Seize the Day



A publication of the Uwharrie Dreams Creative Writing Club, Randolph Community College



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All collected works were named “Best of the Best” in their genre categories in the 2018 Uwharrie Dreams Creative Writing Contest. Congratulations to our winners.



MAGGIE DUNN

## Ashes to Ashes

It is time for me to leave. The city and the woods beyond it that once sang my praises now whisper the unknown. *“It’s time,”* they echo, and somehow, I know they’re right.

The buildings which so longingly ache for my departure are adorned with banners, vibrant and festive. Streets are lined with tables carrying the weight of my decisions, along with pastries and the like. Even the breeze is decorated with music so warm and colorful that I could bathe in it, which I’m sure was the exact intention. The harps celebrate with a melody I’ve heard once, long ago...

*I sat in a parlor chair at another one of my father’s socials, twiddling my thumbs. What was the intention of this gala? Maybe it was to bore me into selecting a man. After all, father had held a toast to “the bravery of the village’s men,” whatever that meant.*

*“Darling, you’ve got to get yourself off that sofa and socialize,” my mother chortled. “After all, what is a lady without her hospitality?”*

*Obliging, I stifled a groan. After all, I hadn’t much of a choice, being an unwed girl of thirteen.*

*Strolling around the plaza, I remained silent, keeping my head down. There was a tenseness in the air, a tremor in the voices that choked me every time I attempted speaking, so instead, I listened.*

*“Enough of that violent talk. Did you see what Madame d’Martine was wearing? Why, I do declare, if I had associations with her—”*

*Hours passed with no interesting remarks. I thought for certain I would die of off-putting tones and boredom. Then—*

*“—and it seems the beasts have settled! Off of the Southern Forest a ways. They’re coming for us! All of us! And if we cannot fight in the morning, they’ll destroy our little town and then the rest of France! Gentlemen, please—”*

*I furrowed my brow. That the beasts had moved into the Southern Forest was common knowledge, but no one had thought of besting them! How ludicrous!*

*“Please, Monsieur Lefevre! The host’s daughter, Camille, is in our presence! Such talk is inappropriate for young ladies!”*

*I froze as the gala continued on. The only thing that registered in my mind was the notes of the harp and the fuzzy notion that something was awry, very awry.*

*Ding ding a ding...*

*Father had told me that this gala was to celebrate strong men and their courage.*

*And ding ding ding...*

*Could it be? No, it couldn’t.*

*ding ding a dinga...*

*“Shush, darling, this is a gala after all—”*

*“The beasts will be no more!”*

*Ding, ding, ding!*

*The harp concluded its jolly-turned-haunted tune.*

*I began to shake, my blood running cold. A gala to pep soldiers for battle, taking place in my own home, and I had been ignorant! Oh, to be a young girl in this world! What else could have been kept from me?*

*I made for the door and bolted, having only one destination in mind.*

The library stairs are crammed with people and glasses of wine. Not that I can blame them—it is a festival, after all. Years ago, I would have been one of them, cozying up on a library step with wine and a leather-bound book. Taking a moment, I acknowledge that I cannot do that anymore, for I am—

No. Not now. The city may be right; it may be time for me to go on, but it will take much more than this fraction of the story for me to leave. I will recall my journey as I please.

*“No!”* the library stairs hiss. *“Your time is now.”*

The building wants me to remember its involvement in my legacy. And in this moment, I believe I can give it what it wishes.

*Carpe diem.* A phrase my mother repeated to me frequently; it was one of her favorites from the Latin poetry, which she so adored. “Seize the day.”

*The bell clangs as the door slammed shut. It was a nice sound, one that I intended to hear more often. Being of higher class, my mother had hired a tutor in my earlier years, hence my ability to read. But selecting my own reading material was different.*

*“May I help you?” The man pushed his wire-rimmed spectacles to the bridge of his nose.*

*“Actually, yes.” I ball my clammy fists. “It turns out I may have been quite sheltered my whole life. A young, wealthy girl, can you believe it?” I chuckled, yet the man kept a straight face.*

*“Furthermore,” I continued, rambling, “I feel that I should learn about a topic. These beasts in the forest... of course, I had heard of them, but I thought them no different than the fey settlement over in the American colonies, or those scaled creatures who make their home in Antarctica, or—“*

*“Madame, would you like to borrow a book?” the man calmly interrupted.*

*I turned a bright red. “Apologies, Monsieur. I need to read a book about the beasts. I need to know why they have provoked us, and why it has been hidden from me.” I paused, adding, “That will be all.”*

*“Fear.” the man whispered.*

*I took a step back. “I’m sure I don’t know what you mean.”*

*He rummaged through several shelves, finally retrieving an old, yet seemingly unread copy and placed it in my hand.*

*“Here’s your how. Your “Why?” is fear. As far as I know, these beasts have not harmed anyone in this village. Yet, they are clawed, giving them potential to violence.”*

*I blinked. The library was silent.*

*“As for why you are sheltered, I suppose that people fought to keep you ignorant. They knew that you would have a say, and that’s wrong for young ladies.”*

*I stared at the book title (Man’s Guide to the Tame and Terrifying) for so long that my head buzzed. The man, in his quiet fashion, seemed to have left.*

*“The men mean to kill the beasts out of the mere possibility that they could harm us? And yet, the beasts are tame?” I called out, hoping the man could hear me.*

*And, faintly, I heard, “Power dynamics are interesting, aren’t they, darling?”*

*My father was right. I did have a say.*

*I flipped open the cover of the book.*

Looking back, I see it all clearly. They were so intent on keeping me ignorant that they never realized how ignorant they themselves had become. It may be a contradiction, but so is my entire story.

I think I am ready. To reclaim my life and legacy, however miserable they may have been. No matter how much it hurts, it is mine. The streets cannot pressure me anymore. Exhaling shakily, I allow the memories to take me.

*There I was, in the trees beyond the battlefield, torch in hand; the flame and I as one were the fears of men and beasts.*

*Was my plan possible? If one fear drove the men to battle, would the beasts' fear be enough to drive them out of it? It seemed to balance out. And if not, it would work itself out. Besides, I had nothing to lose.*

*Nothing to lose. I clung to that thought as a battle cry roared from the side, evoking an echoing roar from the beasts. I clung to it as the two sides collided, gunshots ringing and blood splattering through the air. I clung to it as I climbed down the slope, burning torch in hand. If the book had been correct, the flame and I could halt the battle. I closed my eyes, picturing the page in my head. It had been burned onto the backsides of my eyelids as I had formulated the plan. "There is nothing that clawed beasts fear more than fire. In response to this fear, they tend to flee the flaming area," my eyelids read.*

*With the explosion of chaos on the battlefield, no man or beast flinched as I slipped into a cluster of beasts. Enormous creatures surrounding me on all sides, I realized that the book had been right about their massive size, rat-like tails, unique fur patterns, and of course, their notorious claws. I couldn't help but shudder.*

*Just a shudder. That's all it took.*

*The torch collapsed from my fist, carrying the flame with it. I froze as the fire licked at the ground, the grass carrying it across the field. The beasts leapt back.*

*The book had been right about that. Another thing about which it had been correct: the beasts were loyal creatures. Though the flames expanded farther, and the smoke closed their throats, a cloud of dust arose as beasts trampled over in a desperate attempt to save their loved ones.*



*Tears ran down my cheeks as more and more anxious creatures were scorched with my flame. I spun around, observing the destruction. My knees grew wobbly, finally slamming into the ground. Face in my hands, sobs escaped my mouth, but no more tears fell. My eyes burned. My vision turned blurry, then red.*

Nothing to lose. *I let the fire consume me.*

“Are you satisfied with me now?” I choke out. The city does not respond. Of course it doesn’t.

Nobody has heard or seen me in fifty years. I am but a fragment of myself, a soul lingering on this earth.

There it is. The entirety of it.

The city nods.

“Take my festival down. I never meant to kill them,” I whimper.

And a miracle happens. The city begins to rumble, shaking so that all of its people can feel it. Pedestrians are swept onto the ground, the booths tossed aside.

I am still.

*Seize the day.*

Once again, I let go.



RACHEL HAWKS

## Unseen Beauty

I see the uniqueness.  
You see the broken edge.  
We both see a seashell.

I see a long day ahead.  
You see a chance to snuggle.  
We both see a child wake up  
from a bad dream in the middle  
of the night.

I see a chance to listen  
to the rest of my book.  
You see the brake lights and  
the smell of exhaust.  
We both see a traffic jam.

I see long hours and  
always being worn out.  
You see food on the table  
and all your needs met.  
We both see a full-time job.

I see forever and blessings received.  
You see complete heartbreak  
and devastation.  
We both see the loss of a loved one.

I see not good enough.  
You see falling short.  
We both see ourselves.

But He sees divinity and beauty.  
He sees never giving up.  
He sees the tears.  
He sees the love.

We both see the imperfect seashell  
scattered among many and feeling  
washed up.

But He sees us embracing the waves.



VICTORIA COX

## The Hourglass

To speak your way and your beliefs,  
One must do in a hurry.  
For if you do not speak your piece,  
Another will—don't you worry.

And so, when all the days are done,  
My dear, sweet dear, sing your song.  
You have never been too scared  
Or worried.

So, sing the song of people young,  
But one must never scurry.  
To run through in such quick pace,  
Time will pass by in a hurry.  
The sand falling as quick as light,

In all we do, we do in spite.  
That never-ending time take flight.

Time will fill your hands,  
If you're willing, will you let it?  
Sand runs to the bottom,

This is life ending; do you hear it?

You cannot make it turn over,  
Nor will it ever—  
Gain the time God gave you,  
And let you start all over.

I find the time passes slowly as ever  
When with you in bleak December.  
But I must write my song, my poem.  
My God!

Time running out,  
Like the sand  
That falls.



**RACHEL B. THOMPSON**

## Keep Calm

Knowledge surrounds us like the pollen in the air  
We must be careful not to be overwhelmed by its strength  
Lest we be consumed and lost at sea.  
Keep calm and take it slow  
Everyday is a new day and each and everyone is  
Thankful for the passing hours of the night,

There are those who say make this day yours  
And the one who listens thinks, How do I achieve this?  
The answer: Simply set a purpose to everything you do  
Take pride in what comes your way and be  
Not ashamed of the opportunities you take,  
for remember you only live once  
Keep calm and take the leap of faith

As for personal relation, I boost my own  
morale and remember when I awake: This is the day  
the Lord has made and I am rejoicing and being glad  
in it. So be not perplexed when one tells you to take opportunities  
because they know to keep calm and take it slow.





SARAH C. HURLEY

## Facing the Music

I sat on the cold, hard, standard middle school performance risers, listening to the low chatter of nervous students and excited parents. Anticipation filled the air as people continued to trickle through the open gym doorway and make their way over to the bleachers. I watched my parents chat with the parents of my friends and peers, each sharing the role their child would be playing in this year's band and chorus Christmas concert. Around me, my fellow chorus members whispered variations of "check my hair," "good luck," and "dude, I *really* should have gone to the bathroom before sitting down." As for myself, I thought I was going to spew chunks all over the back of some sixth grader's pressed white shirt.

This night had been lingering in the back of my mind for months. It was not my first chorus concert, but it was the first at which I was going to perform a solo—as in, singing and playing the guitar by myself at center stage (well, the almost-center of the sticky, scuffed gymnasium floor). As in, *help me*. I couldn't even remember why I'd auditioned to perform a solo in the first place. It was probably in part because my chorus teacher had been nagging me for almost a year to put myself out there, but I knew it was also because something inside of me was longing to conquer the stage fright and lack of confidence that had held me in its iron grip for years.

I'd received my first guitar as a Christmas gift when I was three years old, and the memory suddenly came rushing back to me. It had been all wrapped up in green and tied with a ribbon, sitting under the Christmas tree for weeks before I had been allowed to rip open the colorful wrappings and see what treasure could be held in such a large box. When I opened it, I was ecstatic to find a candy-red, brand-spanking-new electric guitar. That I would end up receiving a guitar at some point shouldn't have come as a surprise to me, given that my father had been playing from early adolescence, but nothing could dim my delighted smile as I cradled the beautiful, shiny contraption in my small arms. I wanted to be able to play as well as he did, and I was so proud to finally have a guitar I could call my own. From the moment he had begun teaching me to strum simple chords (which, admittedly, I'd only had the attention span to sit through a few years later), I hadn't wanted to take my fingers off the smooth, wooden fretboard

and relinquish my hold of the small guitar pick. It felt like every moment I'd spent with a guitar in my hands and a song on my tongue up until tonight had been preparing me for what I was about to do.

A piercing “*sckreeeeeeeee!*” from the microphone jolted me out of my thoughts and back to reality, where Mrs. Freeland, my chorus teacher, was standing in front of us, ready to make the usual welcome speech and begin the concert. As she spoke about how proud she was of our hard work and dedication, I nervously wiped my sweaty hands on my dress pants, wishing we had had more time to warm up our voices before the parents had begun swarming in like honey bees on the chase. I looked up and identified my own parents amongst the myriad faces upon the uncomfortable gym bleachers. My mom smiled and waved as my dad made a goofy face. I stifled a laugh and mentally hyped myself up for the night, to perform both as a solo artist and as part of the Uwharrie Middle School choral ensemble.

Before I knew it, Mrs. Freeland was motioning for us to stand up and take our places. The music began and the hesitant voices of forty (give or take a few) self-conscious students filled the gym. As we sang standard Christmas carols and more traditional holiday tunes, various characters, including “Santa,” “Mrs. Clause,” “Frosty,” and “Rudolph,” danced across the gym. This colorful display of action and Christmas cheer delighted the parents, and they gave an enthusiastic round of applause when we finished. The triumph was almost enough to make me forget about my upcoming performance, but I could still feel my stomach winding its way into an intricate knot of unease and the partly digested remains of a protein bar in anticipation.

As Mrs. Freeland moved on to lead the band in their musical selections, I headed “backstage” (behind the risers, that is) to check my guitar and take some *seriously* deep breaths. I listened to the band play their songs and quietly picked out a melancholy melody on the strings of my guitar (I now wielded a newer, acoustic model) to warm my fingers up. My heart began to race, incredible pressure blossoming against my chest. I couldn't breathe. *Welp, this is it. This is how I'm going to kick the bucket*, I thought to myself. I sat with my fingers clutched around the narrow fretboard of my instrument, my eyes fixated on one of the metal rods holding up the risers until a flicker in the corner of my field of vision caught my attention.

“Sarah, we're ready for you,” whispered Mrs. Freeland, her head peeking around the risers. She grabbed a chair for me to sit on and rolled it in front of the sea of other chorus students as I shakily stood up. I held my guitar in a death-grip as I walked to the chair and took

my seat. My cheeks began to heat up, turning a rosy color that would have been more suited to a flower than a face, as Mrs. Freeland adjusted the microphones at my mouth and my guitar (both of which were far too close for my taste). After whispering an enthusiastic “You’ve got this” and giving me a thumbs up, she went to sit down at the audio table. I strummed an open E chord while trying to wet my dry throat with saliva. It was time.

I began softly singing “Silver Nights,” a romantic holiday song by one of my favorite artists at the time, Sabrina Carpenter. I had practiced almost non-stop for so many months that my hands knew how to handle the guitar without pausing to think about it. This was a good thing, because the only thought in my head was, *wowowowowow-what-is-this?-what-am-I-doing?-this-is-crazy-I’m-going-to-puke-somebody-save-me-please*. However, I managed to sing the song out clearly, despite the pesky stream of self-doubt running a marathon through my brain and the fact that my throat had become the Sahara Desert. My voice melded with the guitar’s tune to create a coherent, flowing, and admittedly very high-pitched (I had to sing much of it an octave higher than originally intended because of my soprano-type voice) song. Those three and a half minutes were simultaneously both one of the most beautiful and most terrifying things I had ever endured.

“There’s nothing like these silver nights, nothing like these silver nights with you,” I finally sang, strumming the last chord and concluding my performance. I opened my eyes for what felt like the first time since the beginning of the song, looking out into the crowd of people but not actually seeing a single face. For a split-second, the only sounds I could hear were my own heavy breathing and the thud of my racing heart pounding against my chest. Then, the room broke out into a thunderous applause. I stood and gave a small half-smile, ready to retreat to the safety of the backside of the risers, but Mrs. Freeland gestured for me to take a bow before I could scurry off. By that time, I was already facing away from the audience for the most part, so I did more of an awkward head bob than a bow, but it got the job done. It was over.

The rest of the concert passed in a blur of beating drums and the impatient fidgeting of students who had been sitting on hard metal for two hours. After several minutes of focusing solely on slowing my heart rate to a pace that would not be deemed “critical” by a medical professional, the monumental understanding of what I had done crashed over me like a roaring wave. I had performed by myself in front of an audience that was not comprised of my parents and a plethora of stuffed animals (all of whom were obligated to think I was absolutely

fabulous). Not only that, but the crowd had *clapped* for me; they had thought I was *good*. In a snatched moment between a trumpet's hum and a flute's trill, I realized something. It didn't matter how scared I was to show my face in front of a crowd. My love of music and passion for performing were greater than my fears and insecurities, and I had proved that *nothing*—not even the feeling of a thousand butterflies throwing a frat party in my stomach—could stop me from doing what I loved.

I smiled to myself, thrilled by my newfound realization, as the concert came to a close and my parents rushed down the bleachers to congratulate me. They were closely followed by a stream of my peers and various audience members, many of whom I did not know. I smiled and thanked them all for their warm words of praise and encouragement. Among the most congratulatory was Mrs. Freeland herself, who was extremely proud of me for taking the first step in conquering my stage fright. Before the night was over, she came to me and said, "You were so good! I'm so proud of you! This means you're ready for All-State Chorus now, right?"

"Why not?" I responded with a joyous laugh. I was on top of the world.

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