



# JENNIFER EATOUGH WRITING SAMPLER

E	jenna@eatough.net
P	801-503-2238
A	Eagle Mountain, UT 84005

## Character Sketches

### The Swindler

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From: Dragon's Hoard  
by Jenna Eatough  
Genre: Fantasy  
Flash fiction story available: [How to Build a Hoard](#)



Eustis is the illegitimate son of an illegitimate son of an . . . well you get the idea. Unlike his forefathers, He isn't willing to accept his station. So he is on a mission, and he is not going to let anyone stop him being recognized. To achieve his goals he needs gold, lots of it. So after a chance encounter with a dragon instead of demanding the retribution he initially craves, he glimpses an opportunity. Now if only he can convince the dragon to go along.

### The King

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From: Dragon's Hoard  
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Draxon s'l'Colchain l'Colchain inherited a burden not of his choosing, but it's his duty to protect the secret along with the kingdom. He wants the realm to remain orderly, peaceful, and above all quiet. The last is a bit hard when the largest royal family in the kingdom's history is under his roof. As if his brood wasn't enough to deal with, a dragon starts rampaging through the countryside. When the uproar increases he decides to send out his knights before the secret can be revealed or there's true chaos.

## **The Knight**

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From: Dragon's Hoard  
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Genre: Fantasy  
Flash fiction story available: How to Build a Hoard



Sophia d'l'Colchain l'Clutchden has never been the ideal princess and that's just fine with her. After all, her sister charmed the suitors being THE greatest beauty in the realm. Her brothers jostled constantly for the spotlight. All five of them. She could be shuffled out of sight, until now. Her father has an arranged marriage planned and Sophia isn't pleased. What's a princess to do except take matters into her own hands? Riding out with sword in hand she means to conquer the dragon proving her worth on her own terms.

## **The Dragon**

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From: Dragon's Hoard  
by Jenna Eatough  
Genre: Fantasy  
Flash fiction story available: How to Build a Hoard



Nuff was the born runt of the clutch. Always given the scraps and picked on by the other hatchlings. So when he defies all expectations to reach his coming of age, what's he to do to build his horde up before time runs out? Disdaining pillaging, unlike his brothers, Nuff attempts another route. He can't understand why everyone reacts with screaming and terror to his polite requests. He's a peaceful soul. Really! He can't help how he was born, but he will fight against what he might become.

## Worldbuilding Samples

### Unirath

From: The Red's Universe

by Jenna Eatough

Genre: Fantasy

*Unirath, a tiny speck lost in the depths of the sea, is torn by divides. From the Depths to the Stacks, two different cultures rule the land.*



#### History

Unirath is the smallest of the ten realms.

Laying in the middle of the ocean with only a scattering of hills and plenty of swamps, the island was considered undesirable. The few who called it home were largely ignored and by size and resources should never have joined their ranks.



However, during the first dark wars when Westergras forged their alliance with the Fae, the Ring nations turned their attention there and to Unirath. Located at a midway point between Westergras and the Ring, Unirath leveraged its position as the only safe harbor. Using this leverage, the upper class of Unirath pooled their resources and hired the Drilani wizards to employ their earth magic upon the island, shaping it to their visions.

First the docks were constructed, solid stone bulwarks extending like fingers into the ocean and offering mooring to a greater number of ships. Then the Stacks were raised, becoming the greatest creation of the Drilani outside their own halls. Pillars of stone, pulled upward from the ocean's floor and topped by platforms upon which the upper class, the patricians, built their homes. The towered so high that lifts were created to move the prominent citizens and visitors from the docks to above, a trek that would take hours otherwise.

The Stacks with the rising of the stacks, however, came the creation of the Depths. This became the realm of those left behind from the brilliance of light, living in a perpetual

twilight where the sun only falls upon most of the island at dusk or dawn. The stacks became the domain of the poor, the rowdy, and the disreputable. Visitors there must watch out not only for the grounds uncertain footing but for those waiting for opportunities.

## The Circle Marks

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From: The Red  
by Jenna Eatough  
Genre: Fantasy

*The Circle stretches across all the realms, seen and unseen. While you know they are there, only a few truly see their marks.*



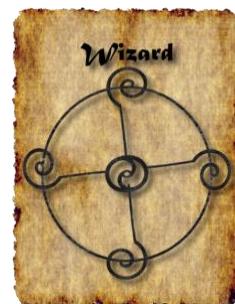
### History

Circle marks were nothing new. Being the pre-eminent band of scoff laws, they needed ways to communicate with each other, and each Circle developed their own. However, the marks in Westergras were taken to another level under the direction of that Circle's Master and with the assistance of her hedge wizard. Here the marks are not insignificant scratches but truly invisible to disenchanted eyes.

Upon joining the Westergras Circle, pads are trained first in the meaning of the marks, carefully taught within their halls. Once they have proven their loyalty to the guild, the Circle's hedge wizard enchants their sight allowing them to see the marks throughout Gazra, capital of Westergras, which aid with everything from marking escape routes to warnings about magic's presence and traps. Only then is a pad given a milky white stone with which they can create or alter marks.

### The Marks

*The Wizard Mark:* Wizards are annoyances when you're trying to remain undetected, and beyond the few hedge wizards employed by the Circles most often cause members grief. Knowing their location, or the presence of major spells can save lives. When the Wizard mark is drawn, they know to be cautious, and depending on which spiral is shaded a member can tell which type of magic to expect. In Westergras, the common most shaded spiral is the center for Gazrea is the home of the Ethrael Wizards.



*The Latch Mark:* Gazra is a city of secrets and built by the competing desires of the nobility, royalty, and Ethrael wizards. As such, many hidden stashes and passages are scattered about the city. For Circle members finding the opening to such places can mean everything from raiding stashes to survival. When a member discovers such a latch, marking it lets the next know where to find it quickly.



*The Circle Mark:* Each Circle has its own design, and members know to look out for their circles pattern to mark entrances to halls scattered across that Circle's realm. They mark home and safety. A rival Circle's mark appearing in a city is literally unknown, and the consequences of such a mark are usually dire.



## Script Samples

### Child of Star Fall

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By Jenna Eatough

Genre: Fantasy RPG

FADE IN

EXT. DEEP SPACE



We open to a view of deep space. In the darkness stars are visible as distant points of light which are drifting slowly.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

The stars.

Music plays.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

When the sun sets, the universe opens to us.

CUT TO:

INT. RURAL VILLAGE HOME

The camera is moving quickly to the door. A wooden door made of banned planks of wood with a rough door handle. The walls are stone.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

They blaze.

AUDREYN (11), a short girl is skinny and dressed in cast off clothes.

Child Audreyn's hand appears on screen reaching for the door. Turning the handle, the hand pulls the door open and late day light floods in.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

We have looked to the stars throughout time.

EXT. VILLAGE LANE – EARLY SUNSET

The village lane is packed dirt. Across the lane another house is offset to the right, with wooden walls and a rough fence surrounding the yard. Within the yard chickens and a goat wander. The camera pans right, revealing more of the lane. Further down more houses can briefly be seen, each growing in height to the heart of the village.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

Our world is guided by them.

Gilan (13), is lanky for his age. He has unkempt hair though his clothes are in good repair.

The camera pans left. Beyond the house across the street are open fields. In the distance a group of nine village children between thirteen and fifteen years old run down the street. Across the fields the edge of woods are visible.

**CHILD AUDREYN**

Gilan! Wait for me, Gilan!

Gilan pauses quickly at Child Audreyn's shout. Turning back, he scowls at her unhappily. The rest of the children stagger to stops around him. A second boy, slightly taller than Gilan, nudges him mockingly.

**MALE CHILD**

Yeah, wait for your baby sister, Gilan.

A chorus of laughter follows the male child's statement. Gilan slumps with displeasure and ducks away from the taunting boy. He waves his hands to shoo Audreyn away.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

The stars charted our places in the world. Both on land and by sea.

The group of children and Gilan turn away from Audreyn. They continue running toward the woods. The camera pulls back showing Child Audreyn, obviously younger than the other children, chasing after them. In the nearby distance gentle rolling hills can be seen within the woods. One hill rises higher than the rest. Its sides are jagged showing grey

stone beneath. At the top of the hill is a circle of stone pillars. The sky above is a murky blue, with the edges on the horizon tinting toward pink tones.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

The stars are the rhythm of our lives, determining when we plant and when we reap.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DEEP SPACE

The camera moves quickly through space now, changing direction and showing a sun sweeping past.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

In reverence we marked them individually and in constellations.

The camera settles now pointed toward a planet. On the planet oceans, clouds, and landmasses are visible. The landmasses are not those of Earth.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

Naming them. Worshipping them.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST PATH – DEEPENING SUNSET

Child Audreyn chases the group of older children and Gilan through the forest. A distinct path can be seen cutting through the woods as the ground grows steeper. The older children, however, dart on and off the path ignoring her and laughing.

**CHILD AUDREYN**

Gilan wait!

Child Audreyn struggles over the rocks and down trees the other children move past with ease. The group of children and Gilan disappears into the distance. Audreyn continues up the hill, jagged rocks showing.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

Our holiest of times were marked by and in the stars. Through their movements, their patterns.

EXT. HILL TOP – SUNSET

The woods clear revealing the stone circle seen below. The children and Gilan are standing in the circle and looking up. Beyond the edge of the hill on the horizon are vivid reds and oranges of later sunset. Above the colors the sky has deepened to bark blue through which the earliest stars are visible. In the distance across the valley, the outlines of mountains can be seen against the sunset.

The camera remains stationary as Child Audreyn runs to join the other children in the circle. Gilan visibly slumps when Child Audreyn runs to his side panting. Gilan nudges Child Audreyn away from him.

**GILAN**

Audreyn, go home. This is for big kids.

Audreyn scowls at Gilan, shoving a hand on her hip.

**CHILD AUDREYN**

I am a big kid now! I'm nearly ten and one now. Besides, you promised. You promised mother you'd bring me if I finished my chores.

General snickering from the other children met this announcement. Gilan rolls his eyes and pushes Child Audreyn slightly away from him again.

**GILAN**

Just... don't get clingy.

Child Audreyn huffs and stomps to the edge of the circle nearest the sunset.

**CHILD AUDREYN**

As if. I don't cling.

The camera moves forward once more showing Audreyn's perspective as she looks to the sky and the first evening stars. The chattering and excitement grow behind Audreyn as the children point out the stars and call out their names to each other.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

The stars were everything.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

The camera shows the planet closer. The camera is panning down slowly as the planet moves to the top of the screen.

**AUDREYN (V.O.)**

Until the night the stars betrayed us.

The camera reveals a ball of fire hurtling toward the planet. The fire is orange around the edges, but nearly pure white at the center.

CUT TO:

EXT. STONE CIRCLE – NIGHT

The camera views the children's gathering from behind. The last parts of sunset are visible with the sky a deep purple above the mountains and fading to black above. The children still stand in a cluster within the circle and watching the sky. At their front Child Audreyn is barely visible. The children have fallen silent as they look at the star filled sky.

A new point of light bursts into view growing quickly brighter.

Child Audreyn looks back over her shoulder. Pointing at the sky she looks directly at Gilan.

**CHILD AUDREYN**

What's that one, Gilan? I don't recognize it?

The children look where she points. A confused babble of voices suggests different names, and each is rejected. Gilan pushes forward through the group and puts a hand on Child Audreyn's shoulder as he scowls at the sky.

The new star grows brighter and larger as the children watch. A roar fills the air and the light bursts blindingly for a moment. The children cover their eyes and scream as the screen goes white before fading to black.

The children lower their arms in time to watch the star burn through the sky in an orange ball. It slams into the valley's ground in the distance. Gilan and the children stare shocked at where the star fell.

Child Audreyn turns back toward the sunset. Her mouth drops open, and she grabs Gilan's shirt tugging on it frantically.

**CHILD AUDREYN**

Gilan.

Gilan smacks her hand away still watching the opposite horizon.

**CHILD AUDREYN**

Gilan!

**GILAN**

Not now, Audreyn!

**CHILD AUDREYN**

But Gilan!

Audreyn pulls on Gilan's shirt more frantically. He staggers before turning back toward her, mouth open as if to yell. Instead, he follows where she is pointing and sees a myriad of new lights hurtling toward them.

Gilan grabs Child Audreyn's hand and pulls her toward the path into the forest.

**GILAN**

We've got to go!

The other children look at them confused before looking behind them as Gilan pushes through the group. Terrified screams fill the hilltop.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST PATH – NIGHT

The trees and brush burn in patches as Gilan pulls Child Audreyn down the hill. Roaring and explosions fill the air. Gilan is obviously shouting but his words are drowned out by the noise. Around them, the other children run as fire spreads through the forest.

As Gilan and Child Audreyn move down the path the number of children accompanying them dwindle until only Gilan and Child Audreyn are seen.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE'S EDGE – NIGHT

Child Audreyn and Gilan are running together as the forest opens showing the fields and village. Ahead, figures can be seen in the streets. Child Audreyn trips at the edge of the trees and falls to the ground. Her hand slips out of Gilan's grip. Gilan keeps running toward the village.

Brilliant light fills the area. Child Audreyn looks up and sees a star hurtling toward the town. Reaching out she tries to scream Gilan's name but can't even hear herself. The star lands nearby sending a blinding white light through the area.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. VILLAGE FROM ABOVE – NIGHT

The village is seen from above with a giant, dark crater between the forest and the village. In the village fires are spreading toward the center.

AUDREYN (V.O.)

I was a Child of Star Fall.

The camera pans swiftly up. The view settles on the sky from which more stars are still raining down. In the center of the screen, the title "Child of Star Fall" appears.

FADE OUT

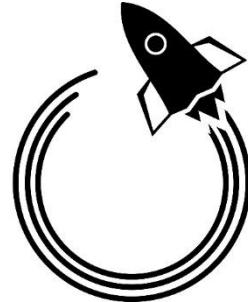
## Spaceship Ghosts

By Jenna Eatough

Genre: Science Fiction

FADE IN

INT. SHIP CONTROL



IAN (29), lean with an almost haggard look as if he's seen too little rest for an extended period of time in his recent past. Dressed a work shirt and jeans.

Ian is seated at the main control board for the Drakoni space hauler. The control panels are a mixture of worn and new parts. IAN is leaned over the controls lit by a blue glow from a screen on the console. The main screen above the console displays deep space. The interior lights are low.

A loud thump echoes from elsewhere in the rear compartments of the ship as if something has fallen. Ian quirks an eyebrow noting the noise and grins mischievously, but otherwise he does not react.

**ALEX (O.S.)**

Dust and dark!

Boots thump toward control from the rear section of the ship. IAN switches off the screen in the console, slouches back in his chair, and tucks his hands behind his head. After a second he manages to stop grinning and look disinterested.

ALEX (23), brown hair pulled back tightly. She has a healthy appearance and is dressed in work cloths of a better caliber than Ian's.

Alex slaps her hands on either side of the lock, appearing in the doorway to control.

**ALEX**

Ian!

Ian remains in his chair and does not move in response to her noisy entrance.

Alex moves to beside Ian's chair and crouches next to him. She grabs Ian's shoulder and shakes him frantically. As she does so glances nervously back toward the corridor she entered from

**ALEX**

Ian!

Ian opens one eye squinting slightly as if annoyed at having his rest disturbed. He looks at Alex and looks at Alex. Alex's bravado slips, and she is trembling slightly.

**IAN**

What's up?

Alex pauses and looks behind her at the corridor. She looks uncertain if she wants to speak but is obviously disturbed. Her voice is low when she speaks.

**ALEX**

There's someone onboard. Someone, something that doesn't belong here.

Ian began sitting up while Alex spoke, stops, and grins amusedly at Alex. She looks away from him, shifting her stance as if torn between remaining where she is and inspecting the corridor.

Ian snorts.

**IAN**

You're complaining about stowaways on the Drakoni?

Alex turns back to Ian. She shakes her head in denial. When she speaks she is loud and her voice echoes.

**ALEX**

I don't mean a stowaway, you space bump!

Ian snorts again and settles back into his seat, resting his hands on his stomach.

**IAN**

Oh good, since that's how you applied for my crew it would be rather hypocritical of you.

Alex rolls her eyes, steps closer, and leans toward Ian.

**ALEX**

I mean ghosts.

Alex glances over her shoulder. Holding the armrest of Ian's chair, she leans back far enough to inspect the ship's corridor.

Ian drops his grin and shrugs. Raising a hand, he waves dismissively before letting it plop back on the other.

**IAN**

Seeing as this is a family ship, that's a small matter to pester me for. Go back to your repairs already.

Alex shakes her head annoyed.

**ALEX**

I know it's a family ship. Stars, that's why I chose...

Alex stops mid reply, her head snapping back toward Ian instead of inspecting the corridor. She looks suspiciously at him.

**ALEX**

What do you mean "Seeing as this is a family ship"?

Ian shrugs and responds slowly.

**IAN**

Family ships mean generations live here, work here, and pass on here. Where do you think they go after? Floating off in the deep?

Alex stares at Ian displaying multiple emotions including shock and suspicion. She smacks his shoulder somewhere between playful and angry.

**ALEX**

Ian! Stop jesting. This is a serious situation.

Ian opens his eyes long enough to roll them at Alex.

**IAN**

Who's jesting? Stationers. Now go play nice with my kin and let me rest.

**ALEX**

I can't believe... Of all the... Dark take you...

Alex stomps away from Ian going back into the ship.

After several seconds, Ian sits up from his chair and swivels back to the controls. He switches the screen in the console back on.

The camera pans to display the screen fully. It shows Alex in a different section of the ship, surrounded by storage bins.

Ian's hands move across the screen, and we see him trigger the circulators which sends a cold gust of wind at Alex while activating the halo system. A transparent image of a person appears next to her as if the person is reaching toward her.

Alex's scream can be heard in control, and Ian chuckles softly with a grin. The camera pans enough to show the date on the control board and we see November 1.

FADE OUT

## Flash Fiction Samples

### How to Build a Hoard

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by Jenna Eatough

Genre: Fantasy

Character Sketches Available

“Spare some change please?” an uncultured accent inquired.  
“Gold ones, especially?”



I turned glowering. How dare some urchin beg my money? I worked hard to...

The thought perished as I looked up to the scaled face unsuccessfully peeking over the wall. It was larger than the structure. I took a step back.

A dragon, one attempting to look sheepish. I might’ve laughed but for the me-sized incisors. Instead, I held up my purse mutely.

Talons grasping the strings, the dragon perked up. “Thank you! It’s not hard gathering a hoard at all.” Spreading his wings, he launched into the sky.

### What's in Two Letters

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by Jenna Eatough

Genre: Urban Fantasy

Elsie was back. Something broke as the box she carried hit the ground. Probably dishes. “What did you do?” She rushed past me panicked.



I followed her, scuffing at the dirt. “I ordered what you wanted for the race.”

“I said to order wagons. Wagons!” She stressed the W.

Well that made more sense. I should have listened with both ears instead of one. "At least they came with saddles?"

Elsie glowered at me. I shrugged. The kids seemed pleased with my substitution. They darted excitedly around the lazing dragons as a couple trees burned. They'd remember camp this year.

## A Quest for Fane

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by Jenna Eatough  
Genre: Fantasy



Raffin Fane gripped the latch to my chambers closed door as if that contact spared him contamination. I glowered and he wrenched his hand free as if burned. I turned my attention back to my hearth.

"Aendild," he said the mostly dead flames more audible. Heh. A cough, slightly raspy, cleared his throat. "Aendild," His voice was stronger, "I've come to ask you... what's in that pan?"

Grabbing a towel, I pulled the pan from the hearth and displayed the contents: eggs, ham, and a bit of pan bread. "Breakfast. Thanks for inquiring after my diet, Majesty."

Raffin's face contorted through expressions. Plopping the food onto my trencher, I allowed him to work through the mundanity of it. "Or did another question haunt you?" I prompted finally.

"Her majesty beseeched me to seek your wisdom."

"On cooking eggs?"

"No on..." Raffin glanced over his shoulder. "Last night I dreamt I was an ostrich again."

I took a bit of the eggs. Ugh. Runny. "Best it weren't for my eggs." He scowled at my jest. Good, he'd a smidgen of strength after all.

I leaned back. The meaning was obvious, but Queen Cwynna could've been blunt herself. No, if she'd sent him this required a different approach.

What we needed was time then. Fine. I dropped my truncheon to the floor. "Have you heard of the Astiram Flightless Quest, my liege?" Interest sparked in his gaze. Spirits preserve, and curse Cwynna's sure sight for proclaiming Raffin Fane our savior and king.

## Skittering

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by Jenna Eatough

Genre: Science Fiction

"Kev?" Static buzzed from the speaker in response. "Kev?" I tried again swallowing the lump in my throat. Static again. They had him. I glanced around the room desperate. Nothing was here that could help though. Only if Kev had reached his position. But he hadn't.

My ears twitched to tiny clacks skittering over the station's metal decks in my imagination. If only the problem was imagined too.

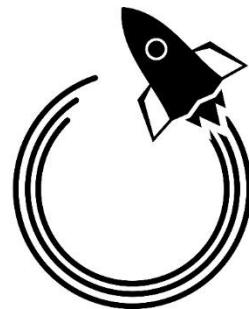
The Skittering, I thought bitterly. We shouldn't have drug the survey vessel in when it'd drifted near, powered down and abandoned. They'd had a crew of hundreds. Eos Terminal, a crew of twenty on a good day.

Today wasn't a good day.

Kev had figured it out first and the Commander had ignored him. I could still hear his screams in my mind. At least Kev's wouldn't join his.

My head snapped to the left, and I backed away from the door. Retreat was cut off. If there'd been anywhere to go. Silver specks of metal slid under door's seal. A trickle at first. Tiny objects just skittering over the ground. But the grew into a flood.

Glinting and spilling over each they grew until it was a seething mass. The attack came from the top of the pile. I swatted at them, but it was like trying to hit gnats. I screamed as the first burrowed into my skin. More followed.



Vision blurring, lines of information flooded my vision before they took me. Huh was my last thought.

## Shalt See

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by Jenna Eatough  
Genre: Fantasy



*THOU SHALT SEE THAT IT IS BARREN.*

The green world blurred stretching into dusty yellows. Helia rubbed her tongue over her drying mouth. Closing her eyes, she shook her head vehemently. "Get out of my head, Sandiel."

Reopening, her eyes she tightened her mind forcing the god's fingers away. The dusty dunes disappeared back to green hills cut by the nearing peaks of Ramua Range. "You must be getting desperate, old goat."

*OLD GOAT?*

Helia glanced to her left. Mist coiled, twisting into a man. His face was distinct – long, narrow, with a shrubby beard at the tip of his chin. "See, goat."

He huffed, tendrils of mist emerging from his incorporeal nostrils. *NEVER, NEVER DARED YOUR ANCESTORS SUCH DISRESPECT.*

Helia barked a laugh, loud in the quiet. "Their lack of imagination isn't mine, God of Lies."

The mist swirled, moving from beside her to into her path. Halted, Helia managed not to touch the mist. *IF YOU GO, I CANNOT CLAIM YOU AS MY OWN ANYMORE.*

Helia's mind flashed back to the empty village she'd left. "Why should I weep over that? You took them all."

The god stepped back, his form dissipating before her rage. *THEY WERE TAKEN FROM ME. WHAT I SEE. WHAT YOU SEE. THEY MATCH NOT. TRUST IN ME.*

Helia stepped around the god. "That I am out of."

*UNTIL THE END THEN.* Helia didn't glance back, but knew the mist followed. A god afraid of being alone. Helia held blindly to her lies.

## Clever Boy

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by Jenna Eatough

Genre: Urban Fantasy

My breath rushed out as I glanced at my phone. The text message simply said 'very clever.'



"No," I said. She couldn't have found me. Not now. Gripping the phone, I peered over the cubicle. There, past the maze of cheap fabric walls, were the deliberately ignored windows. And her.

She was light, nature, magic, and chaos floating three floors above the ground. From my coworkers' lack of reaction, she was invisible as well. I couldn't trust that to last.

Crooking a finger mischievously, she beckoned me to come play. I wouldn't go back easily though. I wasn't lost anymore.

## Short Story Samples

### Crossroads of the Sky

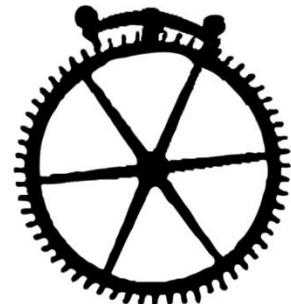
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by Jenna Eatough

Published with [Immortal Works](#)

Genre: Steampunk

“Annabelle Mable Jean Wheeler,” a voice boomed behind me, taking full advantage of my Pa’s Catholic bent when it came to names. Odd, since that hadn’t been the religion he professed believing before dying or, more important, before me being born. “A lady your age shouldn’t be working on a fueling platform.” I groaned. Was it already time for that conversation again?



Turning, I crossed my arms, eyeing Mr. Jones. “And just what would you have me doing? Ain’t no family or person to take me in below.”

He looked me over like I was some riddle to be solved. Either that or a particularly funny bone the hounds had decided to fight over. “I’m sure I could convince Miss Hardy to take you into her circle.” His voice rumbled as slowly as a passenger train pulling into station. Wasn’t me he was thinking of helping when he thought of Miss Hardy. He was just thinking of an excuse to see her sister.

“Oh, I’m sure you could,” I said, all sweetness and smiles. “But whatever would I do there? Quilting and praying?” I tapped my lips with one finger. “Supposed I could add in storytelling. Like that one time the Dart passed through...”

Jones gawked at me, the languid smile slipping off his face to be replaced with a scowl. “You wouldn’t.”

I gave him my most mischievous smile in reply. “Try me.”

Grumbling, Mr. Jones turned away. After a brief search of the deck, he decided on someone a bit easier to pick on. Muttering, he strode away. Good. Turning back to the rail, I looked over it to the Vista with a sigh. This conversation was beyond tiring. When would Jones realize I wasn’t about to get grounded and was his best motor hand besides?

I glanced over to where Archie was working—more like barely not destroying. He struck station one with his wrench and I rolled my eyes. No, I didn't have much competition in him. Besides, with three stations, three capable of motors were best. Archie was first motor, Irving was chief, and I was the second. Though honest, I should have been first. Shoving away from the rail, I walked over. I caught his wrist on a backswing. "Here, let me."

Archie shrugged and handed me the wrench then stood. He swung his arms as I crouched, like some crazed windmill. "It ain't gonna give easily." Leaning over, I grunted in response and tucked my disagreeable red hair behind my ear, wishing again Irving would let me crop it. "I've been trying to get the valve open for hours. It just ain't gonna give. Irving will have to..." He trailed off.

I glanced over my shoulder as I yanked on the wrench. A hunk of a ship drifted into view. The rusty metal sides had definitely seen better days, as had the cannon. The balloon holding it up was more patches than material, and she belched steam like Irving after bean night. But she was ours, and that was supposed to be proud or something.

A couple of the roughnecks emerged from the cover, swarming toward the dock the ship headed for. Of course, they'd pick the one close to where I was working. Mr. Jones wasn't far behind the boys. He glanced at me, and I hunched over, pressing my shoulder against the wrench. I watched his nose twitch, knowing he was thinking of at least sending me inside.

The valve finally gave before he could say anything. I yanked more tools from the pack Irving had left, and Mr. Jones snorted and turned away. "Greetings," he called out when the ship came in range. "What's the word?" I scoffed. The roughnecks hadn't even caught the lines yet and he was already demanding news.

"Not good," a voice called back from the ship, only slightly damped by the ropes whizzing through the air. No more was offered until the boys finished hauling the lines taught and tied them off. The man stepped off the ship, pulling off his gloves. Irving was already moving to connect the pumps to the ship's tanks. "They're sending an army."

Mr. Jones' brows rose to hide in his bangs. "They?"

"The US, President Buchanan in particular." The man shook his head sadly.

“Ain’t they already done enough? I mean, after trying to get requisitions out of us. Who’re they sending?” Mr. Jones turned the man away as he spoke. Probably trying to corral him and pump info out while we pumped supplies in.

“Johnston,” the man said as they neared the door. “I’ve got orders straight from Daniel Wells.” They disappeared inside before I could hear anymore. Archie came shuffling back. I blew out a breath trying to get my hair out of my eyes again. “Here,” I said, standing. I shoved the tool back in his hands. “Think you can handle the ship alone?”

“Of course,” Archie protested as I hurried away in the opposite direction of Mr. Jones and his guest. I wasn’t daft enough to try eavesdropping. Not when I had a better, easier solution.

Reaching the back of the station, I hauled the hatch open and slid down the ladder. “Irving.” I rubbed my eyes to try adjusting them to the dim light quicker. He was in the back next to the porthole. That was the only natural light in the place, and it faced the wrong direction this time of day with the platform’s positioning. “Irving.” I hurried to the edge of his table.

The man in question held up a finger, motioning me to silence. Skidding to a stop, I hopped onto the stool next to the table and watched him. His hair was graying and shaggy, hiding his expression as he leaned over the table. He was surrounded by an oddity of equipment with no distinction between what was broke, working, or experimental. I had the feeling experimental held his attention today.

Irving reached to pick up his blowtorch, the fuel sloshing in the reservoir. Pumping the tank, he frowned and lowered his goggles over his eyes. I grabbed mine as well, settling them in place before he could start the blaze. I didn’t need to be told twice anymore. Or once even. Blue flame shot out of the mouth of the torch as he twisted the valve open. Must have heated it before I showed up. As he lowered the flame to his project a white light flared, blinding me. I cried out and turned away, eyes watering.

Irving did more than cry. A string of cusses filled the room followed by the blowtorch’s rumble cutting off. “It’s ruined,” Irving said.

I hopped off my bench and put a hand on his shoulder. “You’ll get it.” I grinned at the man reassuringly. He’d cared for me since my parents’ deaths crossing the plains. I

knew better what he was capable of than anyone. He turned toward me and pressed his forehead against mine for a moment.

“Course I will.” He replaced the blowtorch and pulled his goggles off. Grabbing a cloth, he rubbed at the soot covering them. “I’m sure you didn’t come down to watch that. Who’re our guests?”

“Some legion people, I think.” I leaned closer to his project as he spoke, but it really was a charred mess.

“Ah, no wonder Jones sent you down.” Irving said. “Not a proper crowd for a young lady.” I glanced up to see him grinning. Jones might want me gone, but Irving sure didn’t.

“He didn’t send me down.”

Irving nodded his head once. “So, what’s the news distracting him from protecting your virtue?”

“Please, he ain’t worried about my virtue. He’s looking for...” I cut off, ducking my head as Irving scowled at me. “Well, he ain’t,” I muttered sullenly.

“The news, Annabelle.”

I shrugged. “Something about Johnston bringing an army here.”

Irving cleared his throat and rose before I could say anything else. “Stay here until I return.” He darted up the ladder before I could protest. Not that I would’ve. Irving would tell me everything he learned soon enough.

## A Magical Eve

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by Jenna Eatough

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"I want a glass of milk." Heidi sighed looking over at Andy who was sitting in the middle of the kitchen floor. His bright red Christmas jammies almost matched the color of his face. The happy snowman's expression did not at all. A tantrum was coming and, of course, her husband Braden was at the store getting eggs to replace what Andy had broken.

Wringing the last bit of raw yolk from the washcloth Heidi shook her head. "You've had enough today." Setting down the rag she knelt in front of Andy. "Do you want Santa to come?"

While the question forestalled a wail, it hadn't averted it completely. He still had that distrustful glint in his eyes. Lips turned down, he nodded his head as he twisted the pant cuff in his hands.

"Good," Heidi said cheerfully. "I want him to come too, but in order for him to come you know what we have to do?"

"No," Andy shrieked his little fist swinging toward Heidi's face and missing by inches. "I'm not tired." Of course it wouldn't be that easy. Nothing was this holiday.

She grabbed his hand and shook her head. "You know we don't hit, Andy." He wiggled in her grip like a fish unhappy at being caught.

"I'm not going to bed," he said, ignoring her admonition.

Again, Heidi wishing they'd stayed home for Christmas instead of visiting Grandma Kirsten's farm. Andy was never this overtaxed at home, and that would have helped his mother's frazzled nerves stay intact. Grandma Kirsten's whims wouldn't have intruded there either. Heidi hadn't been back for a Christmas since Andy was born, but with her mother's passing they'd come.

Braden had argued for it. If it had been his grandmother and he'd been the last surviving relative, he'd want to be there. Heidi had relented agreeing that Grandma Kirsten wouldn't spend this year alone. Last minute tickets were bought and bags hurriedly packed; they'd been away before Heidi could rethink.

As if summoned by the thought, Grandma rushed into the kitchen. "Come on," she said. Her bright red coat was already on one arm as she struggled to twist her other into its sleeve. "If we don't leave now, we'll miss it."

"Grandma Kirsten, we're not going anywhere." Heidi twisted, placing her hand on the floor to keep her balance. "Andy's had enough today. It's bedtime so Santa can come." She looked at Kirsten, pleading with her to drop the subject.

"Adventure," Andy said behind her, clapping his hands.

"No adventure," Heidi said at the same time Grandma Kirsten said "Yes." Andy's snow boots thudded onto the kitchen floor. Drops of dirty snow melt from when Andy had made snow angels earlier splattered across the newly cleaned floor.

"Don't be such a stick, Heidi. You used to love our adventures, when you were little." Heidi doubted her mother's enthusiasm hadn't been forced. Midnight adventures and a child up before the sun didn't mix well. Andy wasn't any different than she had been.

No wait, her mother had embraced those nights. She'd always woken Heidi if she'd fallen asleep on the couch too early, wrapping her in a blanket against night's cold. Excited whispers had banished sleep from Heidi's eyes and they'd gone.

Grandma Kirsten had knelt down and was pulling on Andy's socks before Heidi could form her next protest. Looking at Andy, Heidi relented. The red flush of a tantrum had left his face, and he was giggling happily for a change. While giving in was not a great long term solution, right now she didn't have the energy to fight Andy and Grandma Kirsten. "Okay, we'll go on the adventure. But a short one," she said pointedly grabbing Grandma Kirsten's hand. She looked at her grandmother hoping her silent please would be understood.

"As short as a wisp's glimpse." Grandma Kirsten beamed at Heidi. Let out the breath she had been holding, Heidi nodded glad for the moment she had surrendered. That was

the first time since they arrived, Heidi hadn't seen the pain in Grandma Kirsten's eyes. The pain she knew echoed in her own.

Coughing she shoved herself up from the floor. "I'll get my coat and leave Braden a note."

"Don't worry, I'll get Andy ready." Grandma Kristen turned back to the little boy making silly faces at him. Grateful, Heidi hurried out of the room swallowing hard as she willed herself not to cry. Again. She wouldn't let the holiday be tainted by pain. At least not for Andy.