

The Jonah Complex

Jonah Stroup

The bird of Hermes is my name
eating my wings to make me tame.
– The Ripley Scroll

I drool
as my hungry eyes
find the slop,
that delicious goop
that flavorless gruel.
so easy to chew,
so easy, no teeth are needed.
I have no teeth.

They all fell out
in a dream.
a dream in a land of weird toothless imps.
They conjured candy,
sweets of all kinds.

An imp never absent,
offered sweet satisfaction

to my endless hunger.
I took sick joy in indulgence . . .
But the gnashing of hungry hyenas
in my stomach were a constant reminder
that the candy was never fulfilling
for long. I desperately longed
for the taste of true sustenance.

My blood pumped
a sugary river. I wanted no more
candy from the imps.
But it doesn't hurt to try
the new and improved flavors.
Sometimes the taste made my brain feel just right.
Sometimes it made it spin so fast I got dizzy and couldn't walk straight.
But I laughed and tumbled into the flour-soft ground in joy.
Right?

Sometimes the candy sickened
me, and I coughed and threw up
the especially potent sweets,
and I would want to eat no more of them. Ever.
Sometimes, I found a tooth in the discharge
Brown, thin, and fragile. Not my own, surely.
Those silly imps, hiding teeth in the candy.
Surely?

Eventually I smelled a freshness of milk and honey
with warm and buttery baked bread,
not infused with the empty promises of sweets,
wafting down a small mountain.
Something with meaningful vegetables,
fulfilling grains, and satisfying proteins.
My heart throbbed with sugary blood,
my mouth watered with sweet saliva.
This would finally sate my hunger.

I climbed to mountain's timberline and fell

to the sweet sickness that takes over
whenever I go without sweets for too long.
My limbs had grown dark, fleshy, and purple.
I could no longer walk, but crawled
with my elbows and knees.

Off the trail, an imp lounged on a lavish couch
stained with comfort. Gumming up chips,
and watching TV,
it looked down at me, past its potbelly.
"You look like you need a boost!"
"Stay a while, eat, and enjoy new pleasures."
It used its sparkling and alluring magic to sit me next to it.
It put its hand in its bag of Doritos,
and brought out a bunch of sweetened chips
that changed flavors every second:
the taste of funnier videos,
the taste of a better high,
the taste of carnal desire.
Each flavor lasted hours.
I stayed for days.

Eventually, the chips ran dry,
chip bags piled into a mound
taller than myself aside the couch.
I could move again.
So, I thought,
about getting back on my way
to the top of the mountain.

But the imp tugged at my sweet-stained shirt.
"Say, I've got another bag."
"Give me a moment to go get it."
"Looks like you could use a nap anyway."
And so, I rested.
The rest was never enough.
Each time I drowsily awoke to the imp
with its big gummy impish smile, and dangling

a new bag of chips under my nose.
I ate them all, demanded more,
then went back to sleep.

Each day, the imp grew weaker
and thinner. Until one day,
it returned with more chips
and died of exhaustion
before I could send it for more.
I crunched through most of the bag,
and began to panic.
I frantically searched all the empty
bags of chips for any remnants of sweets.

The smell of fresh bread and steak then hit me again.
I frantically climbed
to the mountain top.

Scrambling, I crested the summit
and saw a feast upon a thick and lavish oak table.
With the glimmering food on shimmering plates.
Salivating, I raced to it and
sunk my teeth into a juicy steak,
and shivered as a dull, uncomfortable snap
fractured through my gums
as my teeth shattered
into jagged pieces of dull, yellow-brown
shards of weak, bloody enamel.

In fear, I tried to scream,
but choked to death.

I awoke from the dream
and pried out all my teeth.
The enamel ripped from my gums,
and I threw the bloody nubs into a Doritos bag
I was eating from before I fell asleep.

I impishly smiled,
my gums bared in bloody relief.
That I would never hunger
again, for the temptations of real
food and incorruptible
from charming sweets.
My teeth weren't strong enough
to consume real food anyway.

Jonah Stroup is in his last year at UND and is majoring in computer science, minoring in English, and getting a certificate in creative writing. Jonah is passionate about expressing creativity through various mediums, but primarily those of writing and painting. He hopes that, with his art, he is able to inspire creativity in others.