

**Fallen****David Anderson***winner in Sigma Tau Delta's creative writing contest for high school students*

I sit here among the damp leaves and my dark deed staring at the blood on my hand. Rancid thoughts etch my skull, and a horrible fire burns away at my sanity. The dirt beneath me might hide what I have done, but nothing can erase my stain from the world.

All houses will fall one day just like leaves in the wind. Autumn has faded from the glade where I rest my sinful bones. Winter's cold and cruel song is ending, yet snow still falls, blanketing the unspeakable horrors that lay about me. As it falls around me silence and the silvery light of the moon are my only coverings, but nothing can ever cover up what I have done.

I rise up, my robe of moonlight sliding off my flesh and pooling itself around my feet. As I stalk amongst wooden giants, the sound of my footsteps is absorbed by the thick carpet of moss and snow on the ground. My bloody feet leave a sanguine trail through the trees and up to the edge of a small pond. I gaze in.

A demon stares back at me.

Long, blood-dampened hair mats my face and shoulders. Deep wounds mar my once white flesh and ooze blood across my body, staining my skin for eternity. I was once a man, forged by thousands of years of human existence. Every birth, every death of my house have led to what I am. Oh how they would weep to see what I have become.

It wasn't always this way. There is a cabin that once housed my family and I that stands near the very pond I kneel at.

What a lovely little place and time that was, once, so long ago, but all houses fall. It now stands in mute testament to all that once was.

Images dance through my mind of days long past. Days when I used to run through morning rays of sunshine, nearly crying from the cloying scent of the fresh spring blossoms.

I look up, and the memories are so thick I have to brush them from my face. I can almost see myself running beneath the trees with a deep blue sky and fresh leaves on the branches above me.

What a monster I've become. How did this happen? What twisted me towards this horrid fate. It's over, all over. What a fool I've been to think that my happiness could endure. I could curse the gods for their cruelty, but it would be futile. The cruelest of creatures is truly man, that I know all too well now.

I didn't know it then.

Specters of my past leap through my thoughts and before my eyes. I was invincible then. In the summer that I thought would never end. Lounging amongst the toadstools and trees with a girl. My girl. She smelt so sweet with her hair down and the dull green sunlight, barely piercing the leaves overhead, shining on her face. Nothing could touch us then. Not the fierce midday sun, nor the tainted call of humanity. Not as long as that summer lasted. The summer that I never wanted to end.

But all houses will fall and end, just like that summer.

I lay down in the snow, no longer able to gaze upon the shattered visage in the silvery pond. I shut my eyes, and silent horrors cloud my thoughts, forcing them to open.

I open my eyes to an autumn that once was. My girl and I are married and standing outside watching the sunset amongst leaves of rusted gold. My hand softly

caresses her smooth stomach, where the next of my house awaits to come into this world and have never-ending summers of his own. A smile begins to form on my face.

The image is shattered, and I am thrust back into the cold cruel reality that I exist in.

The smile instantly slips from my face and my transgressions of the night are revealed to me once again.

The deadly silver blade curled in my long pale fingers. My father died first. I can see his face ripped wide open staring blankly at the sky where I was moments ago.

My mother joined him next. She struggled little. Nothing to live for with her love dead. Her face is buried in my father's chest, and her torso lay just at his feet.

And the girl. My girl. My lovely girl from that never-ending summer, from that autumn sunset that didn't want to let go of the sky. My girl, that lies with her face submerged in the pond I lay near, and with that long silvery blade buried into her smooth back.

Already the snow begins to hide the bodies, but never can it hide what I have done. My house has fallen, and so, too, I fall.

Dawn breaks softly through the barren trees. It sheds a cold light on the scene of carnage hidden beneath the snow.

A man steps away from the cabin, carrying the baby of autumn. Its cries echo throughout the deep woods, but the only one who hears is the man.

He quickly walks away, not knowing of the horrors that occurred just the night before, but feeling an unsettling dread hanging in the air.

In his haste he knocks a puff of snow from a low-hanging branch, yet doesn't stop to see it.

A bright new leaf hangs on that branch, stark green against the landscape of a fading winter.