

# Musings of Brescia

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Produced by the Writers of Nee



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## **The Battle**

By Melissa Jukes

A blob  
Unable to move  
Unable to change

Engulfing  
Suffocating  
All is black

One drop  
Two drop  
Three drop

The rain begins to come  
Soon to be a river  
Overflowing

The tips of the trees begin to sway  
Back and forth  
Back and forth

The forces begin to pick up  
Nature against Nature  
The battle begins

**The Weather Outside is Frightful**

By Jo Penski

Frigid and biting  
Assaulting my skin, nose, ears  
-- Think I'll hibernate

**Restless**

By Jo Penski

Focused on breathing  
But lungs are unsatisfied  
Air is not enough

## Fortune-Teller

By Lisa Kovac

“But why can’t I go to Sam’s sleep-over party?” Maggie Brandonbury demanded.

“We’ve been through this, Margaret,” said her mother. “I don’t think it’s good for you to be spending so much time with those girls across the street. They’re unimages. Not like us.”

“What’s so fun about playing with them, anyway? They’re always playing witches, and goblins, and giants. But they’re nothing like the real thing. And you know it,” said Isabella from the chair where she was manicuring her nails. Maggie thought manicures looked boring. When she was big enough to paint her own nails, she’d paint each nail a different, bright colour that would sparkle.

“I like pretend,” said Maggie. “And parties. And playing with everybody. Playing with just magic people is no fun. It’s stupid!”

“Put a dime in the bad word jar,” said her mother wearily. “We don’t say ‘stupid’ in this house. This conversation is over, Margaret.”

*We don’t say ‘Margaret’ in this house either,* thought Maggie as she thumped up the stairs like the ogre in “Jack and the Beanstalk”. Sam had lent her the book yesterday; once she was done being an ogre, she would finish reading. *I’m not Margaret. I’m Maggie today. When I grow up, nobody’ll ever call me Margaret. Ever! And anybody who does’ll have to put a whole quarter in the “Margaret Jar”.* She smiled suddenly and exuberantly, picturing a jar identical to the large ornate one which her mother kept on the kitchen counter, with a label reading “Margaret Jar” in her own writing, less elegant but more easily decipherable than her mother’s script. *Everybody who calls me Margaret will give me money. Then I can go buy lots of birthday presents for Sam to make up for the present I’m not allowed to buy her for this birthday. And when I grow up, I’ll have sleep-overs and pretends with whoever I want. So there!*

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“But why can’t we have a dog?”

“Your sister’s allergic. And there’s no room for a dog in this apartment. It would make a mess and knock over all the furniture. They’re small when they’re puppies, but they grow up quickly. They’re a lot of work. You’ve got to feed them, and walk them, and brush them, and clean up after them. How could you do all that properly when you’re almost never home?”

“I would so look after it! I’d take it everywhere with me. Sam’s got two, and she’d teach me how to take care of mine. We could get a tiny dog. It wouldn’t knock anything over. You wouldn’t have to feed or walk it as much. And it could sleep at the end of my bed. And there have to be dogs that people aren’t allergic to. Or we could find a way to make Izzie not allergic anymore. What’s the point of being witches if we can’t make people healthier?”

“Your sister’s name is Isabella. We are not getting a dog, and that’s final, Margaret.”

*I’m not Margaret. I’m Greta today. And I’ll get a dog someday. A little dog, just to show them there is such a thing.* Greta had never seen such a creature, but she imagined a small dog would not be very different from a large one. A small dog would still run boisterously and delightedly to meet her when she came home from school, chase real and imaginary sticks through the park, bark at and pounce on visible and invisible intruders, flee terrified from distant thunder, and beg at meals with pleading eyes that would seem large no matter what the size of the beast. If the dog were a small one, it could beg while hiding under the table, so that neither girl nor dog could be caught conspiring. Small dogs, being less of a perceived nuisance, might be allowed to venture where larger animals were not permitted – including, of course, the end of her bed. *I think I’d like a little one best, after all, Greta thought. It would bark at the doorbell. I’ll have a doorbell too. And a whole house. Just a little one though, to match the dog.*

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“Margaret Leonora Brandonbury, what have you done to your hair? And where do you think you’re going dressed like that?”

“You’d think I hardly had anything on, when I’m covered in all these shawls and beads. There’s a costume party. I’m going as a fortune-teller. Here’s my crystal ball.”

“Why would you want to dress up as something that doesn’t exist,” queried Isabella, “and is your boyfriend going too?”

“Your hair, Margaret!” persisted their mother.

*I’m not Margaret. I’m Peggy today.* “It’s called a wig,” she explained removing the thick white mane from her head. “It’s what unimages use when they want to change their hair for a couple hours. There’s a potion-thing they use for longer. And Bob Gardener is not my boyfriend! Can’t a girl hang around with a boy? I like Bob. He’s nice. And he shuts up once in a while, which is more than I can say for anybody in this family.”

“Including you,” added Isabella.

“That’s enough, girls. Speaking of potions, Margaret, you should be upstairs reviewing for next term. You can do better than the potions mark on that report card.”

“Aren’t I still on the honour role? And doesn’t the ninety-seven in alteration make up for not being perfect in potions like Miss Izzie?”

“Don’t argue. Just go.”

She went to the party. Her mother, in her exasperation, had failed to specify where exactly Peggy was supposed to go. *What’s wrong with alteration?* She wondered as she walked. *People do all kinds of great things with it. I could. I could get my PhD in it if I wanted to. I’d get so good I could make my own hair look like this wig if I felt like it. Or I could alter Izzie’s brain. And what’s the matter with fortune-tellers? There are unimages who make a living out of it. They even have businesses. Professional fortune-tellers don’t know anything; they just guess. Learn how to read people. And they don’t bother with all the awful stuff like natural disasters – the stuff real visionaries predict. Just basic stuff like “will I have lots of money?” and “will I end up with this person or that person?” I could do that. It would be fun.*

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“Thank you again for coming, my dear,” intoned Madam Margaret, proprietress of Madam Margaret’s Fortune-Telling, as her client rose to depart.

“Thanks for the reading, Madam Margaret,” the woman answered, accepting her change. After the client went out the front door and down the driveway, Madam Margaret turned the sign on the door to “Closed,” and retrieved her wand from under the crystal ball stand. She waved the wand in a circle around the foyer. The slightly threadbare carpet disappeared to reveal a tile floor, the chairs became a bench, the table turned into a coat rack with several coats on it, and the lighting grew brighter. In seconds, the space had transformed from the anteroom of a tiny business into an equally tiny, but ordinary, front hall.

Satisfied with her work, Madam Margaret entered the living room and repeated the procedure. This time the process was more gradual: crystal balls and decks of cards floated to their appropriate shelves, rugs thickened, chairs and couches multiplied and returned to their original places, and the cash register turned back into a large piggybank in the shape of a golden retriever. When her rather cluttered living room was restored, Madam Margaret aimed her wand at herself – a dangerous action for anyone without the years of practice and experimentation she had undergone during her PhD. Slowly, her thick white hair shortened, darkened, and curled

slightly; her shawls and beads removed themselves and flew to their drawers; her trailing white gown lost its train and its whiteness. When she had transformed from Madam Margaret into Meg Blair, she walked to the back of the house and unlatched the kitchen door. Instantly, a tiny, exuberant, wriggling bundle of fur hurtled toward her; only when the animal jumped into her arms could she make out the small furry face, the disproportionately large ears on either side of the little head, the quivering nose and the minute wagging tail.

“Hi there, Wee Dog,” she cooed.

Jim, her husband, had refused to name the creature.

“You’ve been waiting for him all your life,” he’d said. “Haven’t you got a name picked out?” She hadn’t. Meg was no good at picking a name that would stick. Jim had begun referring to the creature as “Wee Dog” until a proper name could be found, but a proper name had never been found. Wee Dog did not seem to mind; Meg was his person, and he would answer to whatever name she gave him.

Jim came home an hour later. “Hi, Meg,” he called as he came through the front door. Jim knew she was Meg tonight, even before he’d seen her. Jim always knew, somehow; later tonight she might be Peggy, or Greta, or Maggie, and he would know when the change took place. She and Wee Dog came from the kitchen to greet him.

“How was your day?” he asked.

“Went well today. Client this morning had a fit. She wanted me to pick which admirer she’d end up with, and apparently I chose the wrong one.”

“At least she knows now who the right one is. Which was the point in the first place.”

“Exactly. Using fake crystal balls has to be the most bizarre way to help people realize what they want in life, but it works. Won’t see her here again. But I hope she’s happy. Bob came by for lunch, and Sam called this morning. What about your day?”

## A Little Trick

By Shawnee Hayward

“Henry, are you mad? We cannot do this!” said the boy with the dark honey hair as the blond Henry smirked at him.

“Antoine, when did you become such a coward? We’re only going to give your brother and sister a little scare! After all,” Henry paused, dangling a rather large spider with one hand and a snake on a rope in his other, “it won’t do any harm.”

Standing down the hall, the red haired Nicolas eyed the room where Antoine’s siblings were playing and bit his lip to stop his snickers at the thought of their mischief. Henry roughly shoved the snake at Antoine, who had no choice but to take it in case the snake bit him.

“It will be fun, Antoine,” Henry promised with an especially wide grin. Antoine looked to the rope in his fist that held the snake, glanced up to the door where Gaston and Renée were plying, and finally sighed.

“Let’s be quick,” he acquiesced.

They crept to the door while Nicolas kept watch in the hall to ensure their parents did not interrupt. Henry held up three fingers and slowly began to lower them. When the third finger had been lowered, Antoine and Henry released their pests, tossing them lightly through the door Nicolas had rapidly opened. They quickly ran forward to press their ears to the wooden panel after Nicolas had closed the door. Shrill cries erupted within the room. A door opened further along the hall, and a black haired woman stampeded out followed closely by a grey dressed servant.

“What are you boys doing here?” demanded Alice, the servant, suspiciously. She grabbed hold of Nicolas and Antoine’s collars as they began to run, while Henry escaped down the stairs only to be picked up by Gustave, Antoine’s father’s valet. Carissa shoved open the door and shrieked as the snake slithered past the toes of her shoes. Gaston leapt from the room and pinned the snake’s ropey body under his fingers with a gleeful cry, and then lifted up the creature to examine it. Renée ran to Carissa and clung to her dress skirts, crying into the fabric.

“Gaston, put that down before it bites you!” Clarissa yelled as she struggled to remove her daughter’s firm grip, “and for God’s sakes, where is your father?”

“Monseigneur Clovis is out hunting with the Grand Duke, Madame Carissa!” said Gustave, struggling to hold the twisting and writhing Henry.

“Release me at once, servant!” Henry spat angrily, his sleeve tearing in his efforts to be freed. A blond woman in a large red dress with a high collar exited from within the same room that Carissa and Alice had run out of; she had a poisonous expression darkening her chiselled features.

“You heard him, did you not, you fool?” Nicole spat viciously at the valet, “release my son this minute!”

Gustave did as he was bid, and Henry was set on his feet to run towards his mother, smirking menacingly.

“Pardon me, my dear Nicole,” Carissa began with a bitter expression, “but your sons, along with my oldest, seem to think it’s funny to let snakes loose near little children!” Nicole turned to look at her, lifting her nose up to stare down at her with an air of superiority.

“Carissa, I expect that your boy would be the one to blame for such a ridiculous idea, since my children are much better taught than that,” Nicole replied, placing a hand on Henry’s shoulder. “Alice, take my sons to their lesson,” Nicole ordered, giving Henry a slight push towards the servant.

Carissa continued to glare at Nicole as Antoine was passed from Alice to Carissa. Renée sniffled and held tight to her mother’s other hand. Gaston stood near the stairs, still clutching the snake. When Nicole turned away with a tight lipped smile, Carissa released Antoine and waved for Gaston to come closer.

“Gaston,” she began, kneeling to his level, “I want for you to take that creature and do something with it for me.” Carissa leaned closer and began to whisper in the boy’s ear. Renée pressed her hands to her mouth to stop her giggles whilst Antoine endeavoured, in vain, to shush her.

Later on, near twilight, Nicole's fierce, terrified screeches could be heard from one end of the castle to other. Carissa, her sons, and her daughter could not be found, but one could be sure that they were truly laughing loud enough to wake the dead.