

Crosscut Literary Magazine

Husson University, 2021-2022

Letter from the Editors:

We proudly present the **29th edition of *Crosscut,*** Husson University's literary magazine that showcases the poetry, prose, fiction, photography, and artwork of our talented students. This edition of *Crosscut* is quite special because it is our first online edition. Our hope is that an online format will encourage and enable a larger readership and an even greater appreciation of Husson University's creative students and their talents. Also, for this first online edition, our editors decided to include a few artistic selections by university alums. Our hope is that by including work from previous students, we can more fully illustrate the strong community found at Husson. We sincerely hope that you enjoy this publication and that, should you be creatively inclined, you will find your own work located inside the pages of our next edition.

Crosscut remains a labor of love.

Maria J. Cahill, Ph.D., Editor
Kaitlyn Hill, Managing Editor
Sandip Wilson, Ph.D., Faculty Editor
Anna Coleman, Autumn Rhodes, Olivia Carson, Paulette Clapp, Assistant Editors

A special thanks to Husson administration for their continued support.

***Crosscut 2022-2023* Editors needed:**

We seek assistant editors from any major and, also, outside the immediate Husson community, for our *Crosscut 2022-2023* edition. Many professional opportunities are provided for our students if they choose to join us. Assistant editors may participate and be placed according to their interests, skills, and professional goals. For example, assistant editors may work with the technical and design aspects of publishing, or they may choose to edit our contributors' creative texts. All assistant editors participate in the selection of content. If interested in joining our editorial team, please contact Dr. Maria Cahill at cahillm@husson.edu.

***Crosscut* 2022-2023 Contributors needed:**

Full or part-time students who attend Husson University are eligible to submit their fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, photography/art for the next edition of *Crosscut.* E-mail your submissions to Dr. Maria J. Cahill, cahillm@husson.edu.

***Crosscut* 2021-2022**

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Riley Bridges

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David Cahill

Crosscut 2021-2022 Editors:

Anna Coleman is a sophomore English major at Husson University. She is a member and officer of "Get Lit." She enjoys reading fantasy and young adult fiction, as well as writing poetry. She works at the Waldo County YMCA in childcare and in the summers as a camp counselor. *Crosscut* is her first big editing opportunity, and it's taught her skills that she can use in the future.

Autumn Rhodes is a NESCom Journalism major who will graduate in May 2022. She is a member of "Get Lit." After graduating, Autumn will pursue a career in freelance writing.

Olivia Carson is a sophomore at Husson University majoring in Business and Professional Studies with a minor in accounting. She is a member of "Get Lit," enjoyer of the book club, and granddaughter to Paulette Clapp.

Paulette Clapp's high school teaching career launched in 1972. Her love of teaching has taken her to the college level, to the country of China, and to the Department of Defense Stem Starbase. She also instructs those who find themselves incarcerated.

Kaitlyn Hill graduated from Husson University in May 2018. Since then, she has worked as an in-home childcare provider to two different families, enjoying the opportunity to help young children interact with and understand the world around them. She spends most of her free time working on *Crosscut*, working as an editorial assistant for Dr. Cahill, and working on her own writing projects.



Janessa Corrigan

Husson Alum Contributors:

Rachele Tatosky, English: Rachele is a May 2020 Husson graduate who has recently started working for a non-profit called PSL Services/STRIVE, particularly for one of their transitional programs for students with intellectual disabilities in their fifth, sixth, or seventh years of high school. She works as an Ed Tech III for this program, teaching and creating a wide range of lesson topics-from descriptive language to personal hygiene. She is happy to continue learning in a new and exciting school environment.

Janessa Corrigan, English: Janessa is a May 2020 Husson graduate who is living in Portland, Maine and pursuing a career in commercial insurance. She spends her free time learning yoga and being an auntie to three New Hampshire toddlers.

Malorie Martin, English: Malorie graduated from Husson in May of 2020 and moved back to her hometown, with the pandemic putting her grad school plans on hold. As of 2022, Malorie works as a full-time artist and is in the process of opening a studio and co-creating space in her hometown, Struthers, Ohio. In March of 2022, her first solo printmaking exhibition, "Gardens Near and Far" opened and received positive reviews. Besides working as an artist, Malorie co-founded *Art Scene Zine*, a monthly arts and culture zine that shares work from local artists and writers, as well as news of local events.

Autumn Holzworth, English: Autumn graduated from Husson May of 2020. In August of 2021, she started working in the Skowhegan School District at North Elementary School. Autumn works as a Special Ed Educational Technician with Kindergarten students.

David Cahill, Video/Film: David is an aspiring indie feature producer with experience writing, directing, and producing narrative shorts and music videos. He began his film career at Husson and acquired valuable skills from NESCom faculty. He then transferred to Woodbury University in California, enabling him to acquire internships at studios such as Paramount and Studio-Canal. Currently, he works on the crew of *NCIS* as the head of the Health and Safety team whenever he's not working on his own passion projects.

Sun Shower
By Candace Chase

Have I ever seen a sun shower?

Bright and beautiful
glistening and airy
leaving a softness all around me.
That's her.
I never spot her coming,
only knowing she's arrived when she wants me to.
She takes me by surprise
with her warmth
and sound
in the best possible way.

Sun showers always amaze me;
she leaves the world better than she found it.
She brings life to those around her,
yet, she doesn't even know.
When the sun shower appears,
all I can do is sit and stare at her,
trying to feel her raindrops on my arms
and her sunshine on my face.
To be completely encompassed by her
is my only wish.



Lealia Chadwick

Through the Fog
By Anna Coleman

Every day after school, I would go to Nightingale Park. It was right in between the high school and my house, so I walked. Nightingale was my own little sanctuary. Not many kids went there after school; so, I saw mostly a few inattentive nannies with children and a few old couples. The park was my time after school where I went to unwind before going home to my dad and Sharon. Sharon's my stepmother. She's a combination of Maleficent and the evil stepmother from Cinderella, but worse. Anyway, the park. It's perfect. Well, it used to be perfect. Until that one time…

It all started on Halloween. It was on Thursday, which meant I wouldn't be able to go to any parties or do anything fun. Sharon, the Wicked Witch, complained to my dad that going out wouldn't help my already below average grades. Below average to her was an A minus; I guess she was an Einstein in school. I didn't even bother to ask. I hurried to get ready that morning.

Ugh, why did my hair have to be so light? Stupid light hair and pale skin; I loved being called an albino at school. Everyone teased me for my paleness, and the light hair didn't help.

Even though I got ready in a hurry in order to try and avoid Sharon, it didn't work. I walked into the kitchen and, as always, got smacked in the face with the smell of Clorox. Sharon was an OCD get-rid-of- the-germs freak. I could practically see my reflection in the granite countertop.

"Happyyyy Halloweeeeeen, Megan," she said in her ghostly voice. Sometimes she tried to be funny. Her attempts didn't work.

"Thanks. You, too."

"Just as a reminder, no parties tonight. I know it's Halloween and all, but it's a school night and–"

"–And I need to have time to do my homework and get enough sleep so I can keep up. Blah, blah, blah. Yeah. I get it. No need for the lecture."

Sharon looked over her shoulder and behind her. When she did that quick surveillance, she was making sure my dad was out of earshot, readying herself before making a threatening comment.

"I don't care how much you hate me," she hissed. "I don't lose sleep at night. But remember, I'm the one your father listens to. So, when I say you can't do something, that decision stands. Don't try me." When Sharon was angry, all of her features grew sharper than when she appeared sweetly pleasant. She switched between her charming face and her cold witchy one, changing her light musical voice to an intimidating one.

Before I had time to respond with my smart ass comment to fend off her warning, my dad came in. Just like that, Sharon switched from the Ice Queen to Miss Smiley in seconds. Maybe "Chameleon" would be a better name for her.

"Morning, Kiddo. Happy Halloween!" he said and smiled. Whenever he smiled, his eyes crinkled; everyone could see how genuine he was. I still don't know how someone so kind ended up with a snake.

"Morning, Dad. You, too. I'm going to leave now. Gotta get to school early."

"Sounds good to me. Just be careful today. I don't know how many weirdos will be out trying to scare people, especially near Nightingale Park. Oh, and nice outfit." My dad always complimented me on my clothes because I liked to dress differently from other kids. That day's outfit consisted of black capris, an orange short-sleeved shirt over a black long-sleeved shirt, and a Halloween pencil tie. I think he liked complimenting me because Sharon hated my choices in clothes.

"Yeah, I will be. Don't worry. Thanks. Bye!"

"See you this afternoon," he called after me.

"Bye, Meggie!" Sharon added. She knew I hated being called Meggie. I gritted my teeth and left without answering her.

I looked at my watch. Only 7:20, and I didn't have to be at school until 8:00. If I was quick and didn't stop to look at every tree and patch of grass, I'd have time to do the loop through Nightingale Park.

It was the end of October, so the morning was brisk. As I walked across the grass to the park, I felt the crunch of the leaves and frost underfoot. Everything in the park glistened with frost, and as I walked on the path, I saw how each of the trees that lined the path twinkled in the sunlight. I slid my bare hand along the back of one of the metal benches and felt the cold morning dew. No one was in the park, which surprised me. Usually, people were walking their dogs or going for a run. Where was everyone? Something seemed off. Something wasn't quite right, but I couldn't figure out what it was.

I was halfway through the loop. Only 7:30. I figured I needed only another ten minutes to finish the loop and five more after that to get to school. I'd not only get to school early, but I'd have enough time to eat breakfast, which was something I tended not to do at home in order to limit my Cruella de Sharon time.

"Not too shabby, Megan. Keep up the pace," I said to myself. I kept walking until I heard my name.

"Megan."

I heard my name whispered. I turned around but didn't see anyone. I looked into the woods. No one there. I walked back a few paces to see if maybe someone was coming along the path. No one. I looked ahead to see if someone was in front of me, but didn't see anyone. I shrugged off the thought of my whispered name, figuring I had heard the wind. I kept walking. I was almost done with the loop when I heard my name again, but this time, I heard it shouted.

"MEGAN!"

I turned. Nobody was there. Just me. Alone. "Hello? Anybody out here?" I asked. No response. "If you're trying to scare me, it isn't working," I said, lying.

I quickened my pace. 7:38. I had only a short distance to go along the path to finish the loop. As I walked, I noticed a low fog just above the ground. I had never seen anything like that fog before. It crept up from the ground, and as it grew higher, it grew thicker. After a few moments, I could barely see in front of me. I'm not someone who scares easily, but hearing my name called when no one was there, watching the fog creep toward me, and remembering the day was Halloween, seemed like the makings of a horror movie that I didn't want to be cast in. I panicked. I ran.

I ran until the end of the loop. I could barely see my feet through the fog. I walked to the gate. It wasn't there. I walked to the spot where the gate always was, but, instead, I found frost-covered grass. The fog cleared. I turned around and looked back into the park. Only, it was different. Rather than seeing the loop I usually follow, I saw a winding path that covered the whole length of the park. I had the sense I had arrived at the back side of the park, even though I walked the same way I always do and ran back in the direction I had come, or thought I had.

"This can't be happening right now. What did I do?"

"Megan?"

This time when I turned around, I found a woman standing in front of me with green eyes and dark brown hair that had one blonde streak. She looked at me, puzzled, waiting for an answer.

"Um, yeah. I'm Megan. Do I know you?" For some reason, my question made her sad. Her shoulders sagged. Her raised eyebrows dropped, and a frown formed in its place.

"Well, yes and no. It's a complicated story that we don't have time for this morning. Please, sit with me."

She walked over to the nearest bench and sat down. Hesitantly, I followed. I had no idea who this woman was. Yet, something about her face looked familiar, as though I'd seen her somewhere, but I couldn't figure out where or when. She looked pale, ghostly. She looked like she was part of the fog.

"Do you need something? Have you been following me this whole time?" I was confused. Maybe we were supposed to be here; some reason had brought us together. I wasn't afraid of her, even though she was a complete stranger who followed me through the woods.

"I don't want to hold you up; I know you want to get to school early. I just wanted to see you. You've grown since last I saw you. And your hair is still light. Don't worry, it'll get darker later on as you get older. How's Ben?"

“Ben? As in my dad? He’s good. Well, he’s as good as anyone can be when they’re married to a witch like Sharon. How do you know him?” Once more, I felt I had said something to upset her. When I said the word “married,” she looked as though I told her that her entire family had been hit by a bus. She looked away and then looked at me again.

“He’s married? That’s good. That’s good. Hmm. I hope he’s happy.”

Even though her words sounded sincere, she looked pained. Who was this woman? “I don’t know whether he is happy. Sharon’s the worst. I don’t know how he can stand her. Maybe his niceness balances out her bitterness. How do you know my Dad?”

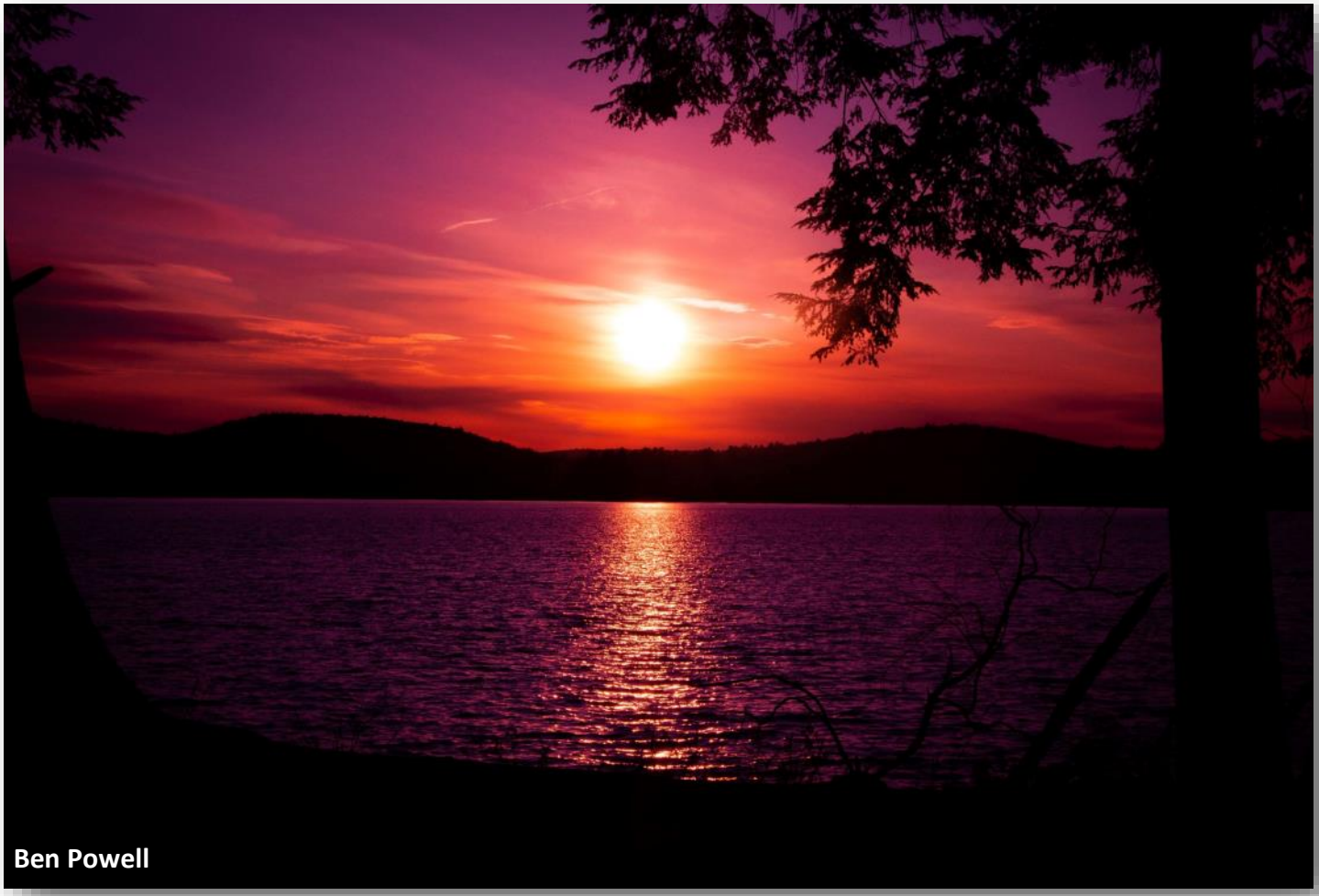
“I have to go now. I’m going to leave you something. I don’t know when I’ll see you again. Thank you for talking with me. Goodbye, Megan.”

The woman stood, ready to walk away. As I reached out to grab her arm to stop her, my hand went right through her, grasping the chilly air. She turned around and looked at me with a smile. I heard something hit the ground, as light as a leaf. Looking down I saw a photo. I picked it up and saw a picture of me when I was two or three years old. Beside me was my Dad with a big smile on his face. And beside him was a woman with green eyes and dark brown hair with a blonde streak.

“Wait! Before you go, I need to ask you some…”

When I looked up, she was gone. The fog had cleared, and I was sitting on the bench next to the entrance of Nightingale Park. I looked at my watch. 7:45. I had to leave for school. Before I left, I turned the photo over. On the back was the message:

To my dearest Megan. Love, Mom.



Ben Powell

Another Year
By James Belanger

The sun hides his face; the sky perspires.
The wind breathes icy chills, and the leaves catch fire.
Once blue skies turn grey, school buses emerge.

The dying grass is covered in fields of white, and shopping mothers splurge.
The holidays allow us to come together and enjoy a break and rest,
as kids battle in snow ball engagements, putting their skills to the test.

As the waves of white recede and show off a pattern of green and brown,
honey dew covers windows and grass, putting a film over the town.
The plants and trees are reborn with newfound life,
and a year starts again with all the same old strife.



Anna Coleman


Rachele Tatosky

Be Kind to Others
By Anna Coleman

Everyone walks around
with a cloud.
Some clouds are
heavier than others.
It is easy to bring
doom and gloom where you go,
to share some of your rain.
However, the best thing to do,
instead of sharing the rain,
is to share your sun.
Because maybe, someone will take notice.
And when your cloud is heavy,
they'll share their sun with you, too.

The Cloud
By Jillian Shorey

"Look at that big cloud."
"It looks like a mean dragon."
"It looks like a cloud?"
"No, the cloud looks like a dragon, a mean dragon."
"I don't see it."
"Maybe if you used your imagination you would see things differently
and not as they are."

Cheerful Birds
By Autumn Holzworth

I sat outside one day
by the maple trees
and heard birds chirping
joyfully.

Their tune was melodious, happy, and high pitched.
I wondered what they were singing about
as they hopped from branch to branch.

The branches, they bounced
when the little birds landed.
To keep themselves steady
their delicate wings expanded.

As one branch became still,
I saw one bird by itself.
It had paused, looked at me,
and made me smile to myself.

Lifeline
By Jacob Day

There.

I set down my pencil, pick up my sketchpad, and look over my drawing. I'd been attempting to pencil-sketch a portrait of my cat, Kibbles. She's old and gray, but still sleek enough to look elegant while sleeping on my rickety, misshapen bed, equally aged. Even though the synthwood frame groans every time I lie down for sleep time, and I can feel it splintering when I roll over in the wrong spot, it feels, well, comfortable enough. Besides, if it's enough for Kibbles, it's enough for me. Right? Momma and Poppa can't afford much else, and I would be selfish to ask for more.

I pull my gaze away from the bed. When I think like this about drawing, I always feel sad, but I shouldn't. I have a beautiful piece of art. Looking it over again fills me with excitement. I know that it's not perfect, but I spent a long time on it, and it really paid off. I feel I've taken a big step forward. I tried hard to draw texture into her fur so her coat looked real, and the drawing is coming along. It's certainly better than the harsh scribbling I used to do. I can't help but giggle as I scan my work. I've drawn it in a way that is a new style for me. The lines are rough and rugged and short instead of long and clean, and I think I like it!

I jump out of my chair, giddy and excited. Each floorboard creaks as I pick up the sketch pad and run to my door. With my sketchpad in one hand, I flip it open with my other one. Big brother always complains about the lack of locks on our doors, but I think it's convenient. Momma says she'll make Poppa install them again soon, but Poppa doesn't like that idea.

Rushing into the kitchen, I see him there, hacking up veal for our meat-and-potatoes dinner. His knife makes loud, sharp chops against the cutting board as he carves up the meat. I rush up to him, holding my portrait of Kibbles out in front of me.

"Poppa, Poppa!"

His knife makes a final sharp chop against the board, louder than the others. It sticks into the board. I flinch.

"What?"

"I…I…. Look at what I made!" I say, beaming.

"God...dammit, Melody! Have you finished your homework yet?"

My smile falters.

"But… Daddy, we're not in school anymore… Remember?"

"Of course, I fucking remember. I meant your chores! The floors, the laundry, the dishes," he drones.

"Y-yeah. I, I did them this morning with Russel."

"Does this floor look clean to you?" He points his finger toward the floor; his face is contorted in a snarl of disgust. I follow his finger down. The raw, chocolate-brown wooden flooring around Poppa is splattered with bits of meat fat and stains of blood. I look up at him.

"I… I"

"Does it?"

"No, Daddy." I lower my eyes and the sketchpad with my portrait, tentatively holding my arm with my other arm, finding comfort.

"I gave you that piece of junk years ago. You didn't do a damn thing to deserve it, and you haven't yet. How about you start doing work around the house, instead of drawing your pointless shitty pictures, huh? Give me that!"

Poppa snatches the sketchpad away from me. I try not to let my eyes well with tears and only shrink back. He analyzes my drawing I wanted to show him, staining the page with prints from his greasy fingers.

"What is this shit? Some kind of bush? Angry scribbling?"

"I-It's Kibbles, Poppa, I…," I say and grip my arm tighter.

"By God, if you're not gonna do shit around the house, at least try and pick up a skill that's useful, for

fuck's sake!'

"Yes, Poppa…"

A silence falls between us. I keep my gaze lowered, but I can feel his gaze boring into me. I want to cry, and holding back the tears hurts. But I can't handle him yelling at me anymore.

"That cat is getting too damn expensive. I can't afford to keep feeding it with you and Russel in the house."

"Dad." Before I can plead with him, the front door, directly across from the kitchen, bursts open, cutting off my words. Momma's voice barks.

"Randall fucking Crawford!" she yells, marching into the house. She slams the door behind her.

"Ah! Welcome home! You're only late by four and a half hours!"

"I can hear your shouting from all the way outside! How dare you treat my daughter like that!"

"Your daughter? She's mine, too. We made that little hell spawn together, and you know that damn well!" Poppa yells, throwing my sketchpad to the ground.

"Well, not for long!"

"Are you threatening me, Lisa?"

"Yeah, I think I am!"

"And where, oh where, would you go without me?"

The overwhelming sound of their shouting is agonizing. It hurts me. I grab my sketchpad with its art-work as the heated battle continues and rush to my room, throwing my door shut with a bang. I collapse on my bed, drop my art on the ground next to it, and bury my face in my pillow. I'm no longer able to hold back the tears, and they stream down my cheeks, soaking my face and the scratchy pillowcase. I use the pillow to mask the sound of my crying and cover my ears tightly with my hands to try and drown out the noise outside my room. I hate the fighting between momma and poppa. They always fight now. I don't think they love each other anymore. The thin walls do little to stop the sound still coming into my room. All I can manage to do is muffle its volume.

I can't help but curl into myself. I wish they would stop. I wish they would just make up. I wish our lives could go back to the way they used to be. I know our life as a family wasn't perfect. I know poppa didn't like it, but he's much more upset now than he was, then. I miss the way momma used to laugh and the way poppa used to smile when I made things for him. Now, the only time I get the feeling he doesn't hate us is when he smells like medicine. It must be something he takes. It hurts to know he needs that to be happy.

My tears eventually slow, but they don't stop. The way time passes feels blurred and sluggish. When the howling between my parents finally draws to a close, I hesitantly pull my hands from my ears and pull Kibbles up close so I can cradle and pet him. The sudden movement wakes him, but he doesn't try to go. He lies down and lets me hold him close as he cleans his ears with his paws. Despite my tears, he still manages to make me smile as I comb my fingers through his fur. Poppa was just mad when he said what he did. He must have been. He wouldn't get rid of Kibbles. Momma wouldn't let him.

There's a soft knock on my door. Three small raps. Instinctively, I wrap my arms around the cat, partly to be protective, partly because I don't want to talk to anyone. I don't answer or speak. But the door opens anyway. Now, I wish we had locks.

Soft steps approach my bed, and I feel someone sit down at the edge of my bed. Then a hand on my side. I can feel him looking at me, and I can see that it's my older brother, the human of the two of us. His short blonde hair and rugged clothes are dirty. Ever since the water supply got contaminated, we haven't been able to shower or wash our clothes. We won't until Poppa pays the maintenance man.

"Are you alright?"

I say nothing.

"Yeah, I suppose that was a bit of a dumb question," he says, pulling his hand back. He sighs. "I know it hurts. I'm sorry."

I don't want to talk.

“It won’t always be like this, you know. It’ll change. I promise. It’ll get better.”

“How do you know?” I ask, caving into his soothing words.

“Because. It just can’t stay like this. Things have been going wrong ever since we moved. Something has to give eventually, right?”

I hug Kibbles tighter. “Even Momma feels weird now. It’s like she’s only here when she needs to be.”

“Momma has…her own problems to deal with,” Russel says. “Poppa is hurting her, too. Just like he hurts us.”

“Why doesn’t she come talk to us, then?”

“Because. She doesn’t want to burden us with her troubles, too. She doesn’t want to worry us.”

For another moment, I’m quiet. I think of something to say, but Russel speaks first.

“For what it’s worth, it wasn’t cool what he said back there. You’re not a ‘hell spawn,’ even if you aren’t quite like the rest of us. It doesn’t matter what you are; you’re still a part of my family, and you always will be. Okay?”

I cuddle Kibbles closer.

“And I won’t let him get rid of Kibbles, even if I have to fight him for it. Kibbles is family, too.”

“Thank you.”

“Of course. I love you, Melody.”

“I love you, too.”

There’s another moment of silence. Finally, I gather the courage to ask something I’d been thinking about for a long time.

“Russel?”

“Yeah?”

“Are you gonna leave?”

“What are you talking about?”

“You’re almost old enough to get a job, now,” I say.

“Well, yeah. I’m gonna go to work. I, we need the money.”

“But doesn’t that mean you’ll be gone?”

“Well, I won’t be gone all day.”

“But I’ll still be alone.”

“You won’t be alone. You’ll have Kibbles!”

I wasn’t looking at him, but I avert my gaze anyway. “That’s different. Kibbles can’t stand up for me, or, or talk to me, like you can.”

“Well…”

The quiet returns. A headache throbs against the sides of my head.

“I don’t want to talk anymore,” I tell him.

“Hey, now,” Russel said. “I’ll try to be here as much as I can. But we really do need the money. I’ll tell you what. First paycheck I get? I’ll use part of it to buy you a new sketchpad!”

Russel picks up my sketchpad, takes a look at my drawing, and says, “You did a really good job, Mel. This portrait is really good. I bet you’ll do great if you practice more.”

“Poppa said it looks like a bush and scribbles.”

“Poppa’s an asshole.”

I finally look at Russel, if only in shock at what he says.

“I meant what I said. I can tell it’s Kibbles. Anyone could. He’s just being mean.”

My headache grows worse, but I reach out for my sketchpad. Russel gives it back to me. I feel over the rough sketch lines. The grease spots and wet red blots the picture picked up while on the floor marred it, but it still looks pretty if I ignore them. My headache grows worse.

“You think so?”

“I think so.”

“Why would Poppa be mean like that?”

“He’s… I don’t know. I couldn’t tell you if I tried,” Russel says. “But hey, why don’t you come with me to my room? I, uh, borrowed a really good book from the library for you. I think you’ll like it.”

“Really? Can Kibbles come?”

“Of course he can,” Russel says, offering me a hand to get up. I take it, cradling Kibbles in my arms as I stand. He lets out an exhausted yawn, being moved again; but the lazy cat can’t help but relax again, burrowing his head into my arm.

My head is pounding, now. I’ve been trying to ignore it, but I shift Kibbles so that I can hold him in one arm and rub my temple with my free hand, letting Russel lead me to the door. When he opens it — suddenly — the world changes. There’s a cry, and it’s coming from me. I see fire — fire — all around the room. It is hot. It burns, and I can’t breathe. I hear coughing. I see Momma, not moving, and I see a rope on the ceiling. I want to scream, but I can’t. My lungs fill with smoke and I…

...I snap awake in a cold sweat, breathing heavily. As the terror fades, I raise my hands up to look at them. It’s still 2082. I’m still an adult. My head is still pounding. No smoke. No fire. No sound of coughing. I can breathe. I’m still on Floor 24 of the El Castillo Hotel, Room 212.

Something in the corner on the bed stand catches my eye: two empty bottles. One of them is lying on its side. They had contained some kind of liquor. In bed with me, on my other side, she lies asleep. A tuft of fluffy, pink-and-blue hair faintly conceals her peaceful, resting face. The soft blue hue of the lights outside dimly illuminate the two of us as the covers rise and fall with her breathing. I stare for a couple of seconds, analyzing the situation. With a prayer to whatever higher power might be listening, I lift my covers and look down at myself. Still clothed.

With a sigh of relief, I lay my head back down on my pillow. Then, I turn over to face her. She’s still asleep, I know, but I’m hopeful she is someone to talk to.

“Blitz?” I ask aloud. My voice cracks. Predictably and understandably, I do not hear a response. I hunker down underneath the covers more and reach a hand out from under the covers to touch her. She shifts, and I stop. She doesn’t wake, but she turns her body in her sleep, facing away from me. My hand falls back to the covers, and I pull a little bit of the blanket that she pulled away back up to me. I don’t want to fall back asleep again. Not after that. With my headache, I’m not even sure that I can.

Still cold and feeling alone, I curl up on myself, tucking my legs up and staring blankly down. The sounds of the city, car horns, the whisper of the wind as an occasional vehicle whizzes by, and disgruntled night-time travelers drift into the room. Somehow, they make me feel lonelier. I close my eyes. If I can’t sleep, I can at least rest my eyes and try to stop thinking.

I hope morning comes soon.



Lealia Chadwick

Saying Goodbye
By Nancy Langley

The end is near
She lies in bed propped on a pillow
The concentrator is running as it helps her breathe
Her skin is frail and wrinkly like the skin of an elephant
She has had a hard life, but a good life
Her daughter sits upon the chair holding her hand
They say she will not last another day
Death awaits at the gate
Saying goodbye is never easy
I thought we had more time
The evening air was breezy
I wish we had one more day together
I wish we could kiss one last time
Time will never slow
I know the time has come that you must go
I will miss you forever my mother and friend

Life is Short
By Samantha Dorr

I was in a car traveling, surrounded by my family, and I started thinking...
There are a million ideas flowing through my head, and when I say a flowing, I mean a constant stream of ideas that I know will never make it to paper:
a million lifesavers that will never save lives;
a million book ideas that will never make the page;
A million movie ideas that will never make the screen.
I have a million more ideas that I couldn't describe!
But when I say "couldn't describe," I really mean I could tell you every perfect detail of each idea.
But no one has asked yet...
That's okay; that's fine.
Just kidding; it's not fine.
I'm bursting at the seams to share my ideas:
a song about how much I care;
a book about my town and its secrets;
a movie where the girl is the underdog and gets the courage to ask the guy.
See!
Ideas flow through my head, but there's no one to share them with
Or, at least, someone who cares...
And when I say cares, I mean someone who loves and believes in those ideas just as much as I
do!
Someone who is there with me every step of the way...
But hey, this poem was just an idea...
and here I am,
writing it down in perfect detail with people who care by my side.



Malorie Martin

My Second Home and Family
By Sam Stone

"Knock-knock! It's us! Is anyone home?" My mom poked her head into Janice's apartment as she cheerfully announced our presence. Janice, my mom's best friend, always left her door unlocked because—between her big family and many friends—people were constantly going in and out of her home. We were no exception; this, and the fact that we were shivering from the brisk, fall breeze, drove the two of us into the small apartment before receiving a reply. As usual, crossing the threshold of Janice's front door transported us into a welcoming and homey atmosphere.

Mom and I were first greeted with a rush of heat followed by the tantalizing aroma of an apple pie. The smell made our stomachs scream and mouths water as we laughed about this to ourselves in the breezeway. Seconds into this unexpected invasion, we began to take our coats off when Emily, Janice's daughter-in-law, danced around the corner to the sound of our familiar voices. I hadn't seen Emily in months and was surprised that she now had the eyes of a young, sleep-deprived mother; yet, her eyes still sparkled along with her infectious, bright smile.

"Hey you guys! The others aren't here right now," Emily informed us. "And Janice is at Granma O's. It's just me and Sofia for now, but Sofia is napping."

"That's perfectly fine. We just stopped by to drop off some stuff for everyone. Besides," my mom took Emily into her arms for a warm hug, "we don't mind being stuck with you!"

The three of us migrated to the oversized dining table that was placed in the middle of the well-loved kitchen. The table had eight chairs surrounding it and it looked absurd in such a small space, especially considering Janice lived alone. However, her apartment would be incomplete without it. I remembered countless birthday parties and holiday dinners where we somehow managed to seat eight or more people around the table while others leaned against the cabinets or sat on the countertops. Many memories were made in this kitchen and around this ridiculously massive table. Simply put, this was the heart of Janice's apartment.

Most days, the table wasn't crowded, but we still found ourselves sitting around it to chat and laugh with whomever happened to be there. Today, we sat with Emily. Shortly after seating ourselves, Lady, Janice's Labrador, finally greeted us before plopping down in front of me. As usual, I leaned back and half-listened to the conversation between Mom and Emily as I gave most of my attention to Lady. My mom and Emily, being the talkative and gossip-loving creatures they are, seemed to talk for hours.

Most of their conversation went unnoticed by me until my mom suddenly jumped out of her chair and chirped "Oh!" She disappeared into the breezeway for a moment before coming back with a folder of pictures. "I wanted to give these to Janice. They're the extra pictures we had from Kevin's memorial service, and she's in some of them. So, I figured she might want them," Mom said. "I just have to find the ones with Janice in them. They're mixed with pictures that I wanna keep." She opened the folder and spread all the pictures out on the table. Mom handed Emily a picture and said, "See, here's Janice at the Special Friend's Christmas party. She might want to put this in her photo album."

But Emily ignored my mom and gasped as she picked up a different one. "Oh my God, Lillian… Who is this?"

Curiosity caused me to stop petting Lady. I stood up to look over Emily's shoulder and saw that she was holding a picture of my recently deceased uncle, Kevin. He was 61 years old in the picture and his blue eyes were big and full of life. Just below his small, pointy nose was his usual goofy smile. It was the kind of smile that could brighten up his entire face, making him look ten years younger than he actually was, despite all the wrinkles.

"That's my Uncle Kevin. He was my dad's brother," I said, confused. Despite my mom and me being close to Janice and most of her family, they were not familiar with my dad's side of the family. "Why, did you meet him before?"

Emily spoke quickly and excitedly. "Guys, he looks like Sofia's great-grandpa, Roy. He looks exactly like him. Like, this is a spitting image of Grandpa Roy when he was in his 60s. We have to show Janice this!

Albert, too!"

"Wait. So, I might be related to Albert and Sofia, then?" I looked at my mom, who seemed just as surprised and confused as me. "How is that possible? We need to draw out a family tree," I stated.

Emily said, "Let me FaceTime Nana, and she can put Grandpa Roy on. You guys need to see the resemblance."

After two rings, Nana's face appeared on Emily's phone. We explained everything and asked if Roy was there. Within a minute, I saw an 80-year-old version of my Uncle Kevin. He had the same blue eyes, the same nose and lips, the same cheeks, and the same thin, curly hair. Emily showed him the picture of my uncle when he was 61.

Roy squinted and asked, "Is that picture of me?"

We were bewildered. But it made sense: my paternal grandma's maiden name was Ouellette, and Janice had married a Ouellette. There must be a connection somewhere.

The shock and excitement of discovering a new family tie eventually faded. I realized that, either way—whether we were related by blood and marriage or not—my mom and I had always viewed Janice and her family as a part of our own family. They were always warm, loving, and fun to be around. We can call this place our second home because of the people, the atmosphere, and the countless memories we have made, especially the memories made in this kitchen and around the table. Overall, these experiences have shown us that you don't have to be related by blood to be considered family, and, even today, this idea shapes my relationship with others.



Malorie Martin

Paradise
By Jarod Girouard

Soft and soothing, sea sweat slowly skiing south.
The air is heavy like an anvil, the turtle in the rabbit race.
A beautiful orange glows around, like the fields in Florida.
The ocean's depth fills my mouth,
an aqua vortex that cannot be escaped.
Everything here is paradise — the Shangri La for the living.
Soft singing slightly stinging the air — a sailor's delight.



Janessa Corrigan

Summer
By Anna Coleman

The days are long.
The sun slowly rises
blanketing everything in gold.
Morning glories open to release their
beauty to the world for another day.
As the sun moves higher into the sky,
the temps rise.
Nothing feels better than a big
splash
as you immerse yourself into the cool water.
The smell of sunscreen fills the air
as you reapply SPF 50
and hope not to look like a lobster
by sundown.
Once again, you see that golden glow
that illuminates the tall grass and wildflowers.
Its last moments of warmth and light before
the pinks and blues and purples of the sky
bleed into each other.
With the sunset comes that cool breeze,
so you put your sweatshirt on.
The smell of sunscreen is exchanged for
bug spray as the mosquitoes swarm.
Once the last light dies and the crackle of
fire ceases, the soft touch
of warm sheets excites you
so you can be ready to do it all over
again.

Heart of Stone
By Samantha Dorr

Not all love stories have happy endings. It is a hard lesson we learn in life, and some of us learn it younger than others. Jenny was 19 when she learned this lesson, and Benjamin was approaching 20. It was at the beautiful Green Stone Memorial Park, surrounded by green trees for miles and lovely flowers, where they both had fallen in love for the first time in their lives. The sun was shining bright and the clouds made charming pictures in the sky. In the center of it all was a fountain. As grey and old as it was, the green ivy vines and vividly colored flowers that covered it seemed to give the fountain a new life. It was from across this fountain that Jenny and Benjamin first locked eyes on one another. It was like a cosmic explosion. Each knew there and then they were meant for each other and nothing could stop them. However, this is not where our story takes place.

Our story begins with the end. Not all cosmic explosions create new life. No, in fact, most bring devastation. It was at that very fountain where two had fallen in love that it all ended. The sky was not so bright, but rather dark, and rain poured down on the two as if the sky knew and wept for them. The trees' leaves were gone now and the once bright flowers had perished in the cold weather. Both knew what was coming, but at the same time neither expected it to actually happen. The conversation they had that night could be heard for what seemed like miles. Anyone passing by would have gotten a show, but at that moment it was just them.

"I loved you!" Jenny cried. "I did everything for you, Benjamin. And I never once gave up on us! But you chose her." Jenny's voice softened. "You chose her, and I fell apart." Jenny's tears fell, mixing with the pouring rain.

Jenny was now shivering; her sweater and jeans were no match for the cold, hard rain. Her curly dark brown hair was now beaten down by the rain. She looked at Benjamin as he stood before her in his favorite yellow sweatshirt and staple black jeans. His black hair now seemed darker than ever from the rain, and his clothes were soaking wet, though he was probably warmer than Jenny.

"Jenny, I…," he muttered, trying to choke back his tears. He could see in her honey-brown eyes all of the pain he had caused her. This is what he tried so hard to avoid. Benjamin loved her. He loved how bright and innocent, kind and sweet she was. Why would he take that away? He did not want her to lose her beauty. He swept out his hand toward her face, but she shook her head.

"I can't, I can't keep doing this." Jenny ran off into the wooded area of the park.

Benjamin now realized he did the very thing he hoped not to. This conversation by the fountain was the moment she finally broke, and unknowingly so would he.

"Jenny, wait!" Benjamin screamed, but she kept running. Jenny ran for what seemed like miles. She only looked back once; she wanted to know if Benjamin was running after her. This only broke her more when she did not see him.

Distraught, as Jenny ran, she tripped. She looked back to see what she might have tripped over, and there was nothing there. When she looked back up, she saw a door. The door was red with a dark oak trim and was roundish with a pointed top. It had what looked to be Celtic carvings on it.

"A door in the middle of a forest?" she said out loud. She walked all around the door, grazing her hand on it, almost as if she was trying to ensure it was real and she was not hallucinating. There was nothing on either side. *How peculiar,* she thought. *How could there just be a singular door in the middle of the woods*, she wondered.

Suddenly, little firefly-like beings came out of the surrounding trees, flying by Jenny's head. They were making an elegant humming sound; it reminded her of a lullaby her mother used to hum. Jenny watched in awe, making her completely forget about the events that had happened earlier with Benjamin. She watched as these things flew towards the door and began hovering around it, lighting it up. Jenny, now more curious than ever, reached her hand out for the doorknob. As she did so, the hum of the creatures began to intensify.

She slowly turned the doorknob, and as she began opening it, light emitted through the crack. Meanwhile, the creatures' hum turned into a very loud shriek.

Tens of thousands of the little creatures broke through the door Jenny had opened. They burst through all at once, knocking Jenny down to the ground. Her eyes widened in wonder, as she had never seen anything like it. Behind all of the creatures came a tall handsome man. He was wearing what looked to be Victorian clothing.

Jenny was confused. *How is any of this possible? There is nothing on the other side of the door, so how can things be coming through it?* She looked up at the stranger to see him smile smugly as he looked down at her.

"Why hello, dear." His voice was deep. Jenny scooched back, trying to create distance between him and her, but with every move backward he moved forwards towards her. Jenny backed up onto a tree and realized she had nowhere else to back up.

"Who are you?" Jenny asked with panic in her voice. "And where did you come from?"

"Simply put, I am Death." He reached out his hand offering Jenny help up.

"Death?" Jenny whimpered.

The man smiled the most attractive smile Jenny had ever seen; it almost distracted her from what he had even said.

"Yes, Death," the man said in such a comforting tone. He extended his hand a little further, and Jenny reluctantly took it. Jenny dusted herself off and looked back at the man.

"Why are you here?" Jenny asked, fearing the answer.

"I think you know, my dear," Death said, gesturing over to where Jenny had fallen. Jenny gasped as she looked at herself lying on the ground, lifeless. She could see that she had tripped over a log and hit her head on a rock. She knelt down, moved back her hair, and saw that her eyes were closed.

"Am… am I dead?" Jenny asked.

"Not yet," said Death.

"Well, then, what is going on?" Jenny was bewildered. *If I am not dead, but Death is here, then what is happening?*

"Well, you are dying," Death said and paused. The two broke their gaze from Jenny's body back to each other. "But you have a choice," Death said.

"What is my choice?" Jenny asked.

"You may stay here and find out what is to come, or you may come with me now through the door."

"So, I get to choose if I want to keep living or… die?" Jenny asked.

Death let out a little chuckle.

"Oh, no, I am already here. You made that choice when you opened the door," he said. "But you have the choice to see what happens to you after, or you can come with me now and get a head start on your afterlife."

Jenny looked up at Death and back to her body. "What more could happen? I am in the woods behind a park, and no one knows where I might be beside Benjamin." She looked at Death, and he gave her an I-think-you-know look.

"But he didn't even run after me. I doubt he would find me."

"So, what is your choice, my dear?" Death peered down at her as she looked toward the direction she had come.

"I'll stay."

"Fine choice, my dear." Death gave her a warm smile. They both stood and watched. Jenny looked around hoping someone might find her. That was when she heard the most beautiful sound ever.

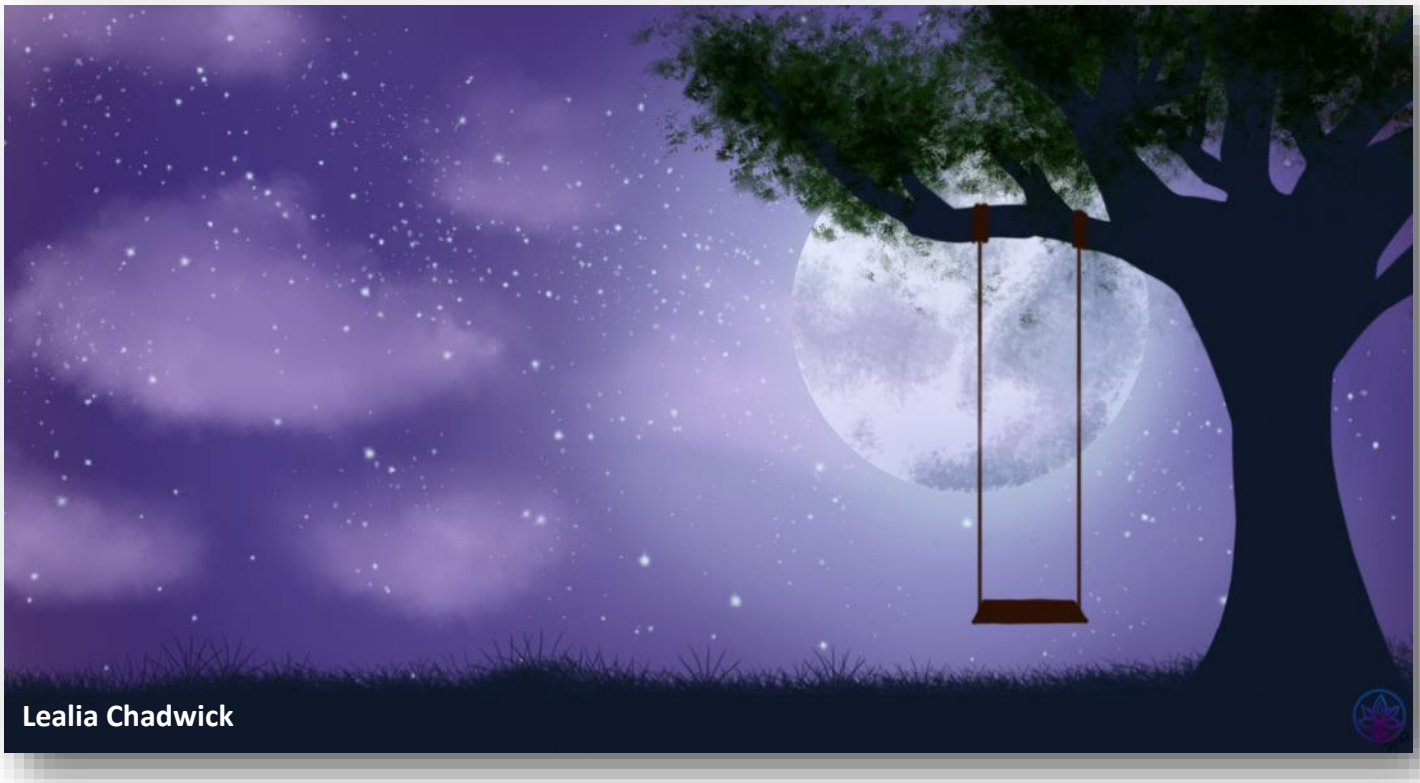
"Jenny!" A voice screamed from the distance. "Jenny, come back!" The voice was getting closer.

Jenny knew exactly who it was. "Benjamin," she said in sweet relief and a single tear dropped from her eye. "You came."

Jenny smiled and looked at Death. “I wish to go now, if that is okay.”

“Of course, my dear,” Death said, turned around and waved. The door opened, and the light glistened on Jenny’s face; it was so warm and welcoming. Death reached out his hand, and Jenny took it as they went through the red door together.

Benjamin found Jenny’s body lying on the cold wet ground. He screamed out her name as he cried and clung onto her body. He never got over Jenny. She was his first love. Some may argue that Jenny was his only love. This was because every year on the anniversary of Jenny’s death, Benjamin would come to the fountain where they had first laid eyes one on another and would clean and polish her name that was engraved after the words Green Stone Memorial Park.



The Search for Someone Special
By Jillian Shorey

The rain sounded on her windshield,
like someone pounding at her front door.

The night was dark and gloomy.
Her heart felt dark and gloomy just as the night did.
She searched
for days on end.
The rain didn't stop.

She was looking for someone;
he meant the world to her.
She did not rest for five days.

The search was over.
She did not find him.
The police did.
She would not see him again
until she went to heaven.

The rain stopped.
It was her birthday.
He gave her the most beautiful
sunset for her birthday,
almost as if he were saying,
"Thank you. I love you, and
I am always with you."


Lealia Chadwick

Life Philosophy
By Samuel Roy

A dog never worries about the future.
A dog never worries about the past.
A dog is always happy to see you.
A dog hates it when you just walk past.
A dog never stays mad.
A dog is always glad.
Even if you are having a bad day,
a dog will always be able to stay.
To a human, a dog is a key component.
Because of the fact dogs live in the moment,
be more like a dog.


Anna Coleman

The End of Everything
By Jacob Day

I've lived a long, long life.

These walls of mine... They groan and splinter with age. The oaken planks that make up the floor, once vibrant in their color, now appear old and decrepit. Each one creaks solemnly as I pass over them, leaving footprints in the dust. The soft amber light that once filled my shop--my home--is gone, now. What little red light filters through the front window causes the wooden racks, the counter, and the bookshelf to cast looming shadows over the rest of the room. I reach out, placing my hand carefully, caringly, against the back wall. The pressure from that alone causes some dust and rubble to fall from the ceiling.

Just how old have I become?

I've lost track of time. After this world's sentient life disappeared, it ceased to be relevant. Looking at the state of nature outside tells me that some millennia must have gone by. But I've lived far longer than that. Why, then, has my time on this planet felt so much longer? In fact, what made me choose this form? A female human figure of average standing--perhaps a little on the taller side--with vibrant scarlet hair. My clothes most resemble those of a Victorian era charlatan, complete with a fanciful tailcoat, dress shirt, and top hat. I suppose the clothes make sense. They were to look the part for my establishment. But why did I choose to look like them? What was the purpose? I could have been anything I wanted. I could have remained in my natural state, but I changed.

I turn, shifting my attention over to the countless strange, disconnected, and disorganized items still cluttering my dusty shelves: a palm-sized handheld clock with thirteen labeled hands; a small, swirling flame, encased within a glass globe; a bottle with a thunderstorm brewing inside. I inspect each of them. After all this time, they haven't changed a bit, a realization that puts a smile on my face. They're not what I'm looking for, though. I search, and it doesn't take me long to find it; it's a golden yen coin. A red sash has been threaded through its center, making it easy to hang. When the coin is spun through the air, for some unexplained reason, it causes an audible low hum. It's my favorite fidget. It helps me to think.

I twirl the coin through the air by its crimson sash, spinning circles by my side. The familiar hum of the coin breaks the dreadful silence, giving me something to latch onto, to help me focus. With it, I ponder the question.

In the end, I reach the conclusion: I wanted to fit in, but not for any deceptive purpose. No. I was lonely from the time of my "birth," through the eons I'd spent alone and drifting through space and to the time I had discovered them. I wanted to be a part of something, anything at all. The way they greeted one another, the way they spoke, the way they interacted made me aware of something I never realized I was missing. I can't say I understood their mingling, but feeling connected to them that way made me feel less alone.

I wonder how much time is left. As I approach my front door, I stop twirling the coin and pocket it. Opening the door causes the morning air to splash against my face and reveals the outside world to me once more. I step out onto the island. The wind is stronger than usual, causing the flowers and grass to ripple in waves and the palm trees to sway. The crisp smell of the ocean carries over the breeze. It's particularly fresh today.

I look up to the clear sky. Slowly rising over the land, I see it. Our star. The humans once called it the Sun. In their day, it was a gorgeous, glowing golden disk. However dangerous it was to look upon directly, it brought their world light. Now, its deep red form consumes the horizon. Watching it rise is like witnessing a lumbering, monstrous titan wake from slumber. I hear its cosmic murmurs from where I stand.

Today is the day the Sun will die.

I sit down on the grass and gaze at the beautiful and imposing star. It really is the end, isn't it? I'm going to miss this place. It offered me much. It taught me many things. If my calculations are correct, then, I only have a few more minutes before the star's core collapses. I take this time to reflect and drink in the scen-

ery around me, one last time.

For as long as I've been here, I've been fascinated by the unexplained and abnormal. Items with anomalous properties and places with aberrant features have always been captivating. I've searched for, collected, and studied them ever since my first discovery. I always told myself it was just a matter of curiosity that brought about my obsession. After all, who wouldn't be curious about the discovery of such anomalies? The clock with many hands: I discovered that was a timer. Each hand marched at a different pace around the clock's face, and each label could be connected to something real. An empire, a specific person, an action, or even a concept were all viable subjects. Whenever one of those hands passed over position twelve, the label changed to something new, and whatever was connected to the previous label would terminate or change in some drastic way. It was fascinating; yet, I was never able to discover why or how the object operated.

Another favorite anomaly of mine was a thick, leather-bound book titled *Our History*, inscribed in gold lettering. When sitting on a table on its own, the book was blank. When someone held and opened the book, it filled with the details of the individual's past. As long as that person held the book, the life chronicle remained that way. Then, once lying down, free of anyone's touch, the book's page, once again, became blank. How did it capture one's history in such a manner? How could it sense people and their unique lives? I asked myself these and other kinds of questions day in and day out.

Except curiosity isn't the true reason behind why I'm so captivated by these objects. Subconsciously, I reached out to them because, more than anything, more than wanting to feel connected to something, I wanted to be able to relate to something. When it comes down to it, I truly can't explain myself, either — why I exist, how I exist the way I do, or how I came into being. All I remember is simply waking up one day. And as much as I deny it, not being able to understand myself to such a basic degree has troubled me. Being alone this way has been scary.

This collection of mine couldn't be explained, either. No one item had an identifiable origin. Their properties and features were inexplicable in nature, deflecting normality. Like me. They understood. And in that I found comfort. I don't know why I had so much difficulty admitting that to myself. Emotions were never my strong suit.

The star's murmurs get louder. I watch as its edges warp against the sky. Time is up. Slowly, the flaming titan collapses in on itself, warping further into a warbling ball of unstable, deep red, orange, and white plasma, barely a tenth of its former size. Smaller and smaller it shrinks, its sounds becoming akin to cosmic cries. Then, nothing. For a split second, all sound is silenced. I stand up during this small moment of serenity.


Lealia Chadwick

THOOM

Blue. White. The sky lights up like never before in an array of swirling, expanding colors. It's been so long since I've seen something like this. I've forgotten how beautiful it is. I'd best step inside before the shockwave reaches me.

I turn, walking back toward my home, allowing the chaotic, billowing colors to consume the sky behind me. Then, I step inside, casting one final glance backward and, hesitantly, close my doors to this planet forevermore.

Goodbye, Earth.
I'll miss you.
Thank you.

Remote
By Allison Foster

Life does not have a remote.
When you want to start a new chapter,
you must turn the page.
When you want to march to a new beat,
you must write a new song.
When you want to switch up the play,
you must switch up your strategy.
It will never be as easy as pushing a button.
A life worth living takes work.



Harvest in the County
By MacKenna Smith

Early mornings, the entire county dead asleep,
the sun just barely waking up,
the early fog blankets the endless acres of brown.
The wind bites at the nose, bringing the smell of dirt and gas.
The sounds of harvest roll in the wind across the county.
Potatoes tumble on conveyor belts;
tractors growl and whir.
Only headlights illuminate the field.
Tastes of potato dirt and coffee fill the early morning.
Inside the tractor, away from the wind outside,
hot air from the heater warms the cab.
A radio floods the silence with news and music.

Fishing
By MacKenna Smith

Just a grandfather and granddaughter
out on the open water —
a beautiful day, sunny and warm,
waves and birds singing the only noise.
Watch the fish tease by biting and then leaving.
Cheeks are burnt from the sun;
stomachs growl for lunch.
Laughter rolls across the lake.
The smile when she reels in a fish,
like the best thing in the world.
Wishing the day would never end,
the fish never stop biting.
Being a grandfather is amazing.
Watching your granddaughter smile
is the best feeling in the world.



My Hands
By Matija Mamula

My hands are an equal amount chunky as they are long. My fingers are shaped like sausages, although they do not have the same taste. My left pinky is a steady two and a half inches long as its mobility is not ideal. Although there is a ring on my left finger, it does not belong to my boyfriend. My mother gifted me a ring for my 21st birthday over a year ago. It has rested on my left finger as a “placeholder” for my engagement ring that will, hopefully, come in the next few years. My left middle finger is used to show appreciation to people whom I may not like. My left pointer finger gets the most use for pointing at objects flying in the sky, including shooting stars in the dead of the night.

My thumb is a strong finger as it is good at winning thumb wars. A ring sits at its base for fidgeting because of anxiety that comes and goes. As we move to my right hand, my fingers seem mostly bare. I have found that this hand is more sensitive to metals that are cheap.

My right thumb, slightly longer than my left, has a scar next to the nail where I pick at my skin because of my anxiety. My pointer finger has a mole in the middle of it. My favorite finger, the right middle finger, is again used to show my appreciation for people who are not smart.

My ring finger has a promise ring on it from my mother, promising her I will be safe through college and make smart decisions. Lastly, my pinky, nothing out of the ordinary, is slightly bent because of a sprain I got many years ago while playing basketball.

The palms of my hands are wrinkly with lines that make me unique compared to everyone else in the world. The backs of my hands are softer than a baby's butt, as I always moisturize my hands. I was told that moles are where past lovers in a past life kissed a lot. My hands must have been a hot commodity, as I have more than 10 moles.

Unexpected Love
By Brianna Langlais

"Good morning, Mom!" my daughter Sylvia yelled, jumping on the bed, waking me up.

"Ugh, really Sylvia?" I asked, not ready to be up for the day.

"Sorry not sorry, mom," she replied, jumping up and down on my messy, unmade bed.

"Alright. Time to get up, I suppose," I said, rolling myself out of bed, looking out the window at the gloomy dark day that was before us.

"Can we go check the mail?" Sylvia asked excitedly, still in her sparkly pink pajamas.

She was an odd kid; for some reason checking the mail was her favorite thing to do. "Yes, of course," I replied with a groggy tone, still not awake for the day. I rolled out of bed and walked to my tiny closet to grab a jacket.

"Ok, I'll go get my jacket, too!" Sylvia said, skipping out of the room. I pulled my blue warm rain jacket on and walked over to the mirror on my vanity. My hair was a disaster from tossing and turning the night before, so I grabbed my hairbrush and brushed through my graying red hair. I had recently cut it short because I was tired of taking care of the knots that I woke up with every morning. This was a bold step for me because my whole life my hair had been to my waist, and, now, it was above my shoulders. I wasn't quite sure yet if it suited me, but it needed to be done. My hands ached with every stroke of the brush even now after the cut. I was getting older and weaker, and it was happening quickly. I had to act like I wasn't and that everything was fine for Sylvia's sake. I smiled through physical and emotional pain for her. We had recently moved into a tiny brick home that we could barely afford to rent. It had been extremely difficult for her since her father had left us. If she saw how much I was struggling, she would begin to struggle again, too.

"Ok Mom, let's go," Sylvia said, jumping into the room all bundled up in her pink and white polka dot rain jacket, hat, and gloves.

"How cold do you think it is out there? I think maybe you should lose a couple of layers, sweetie. It's like 50 degrees out," I told her.

"No, you know I hate the cold. I want to be warm!" she replied.

"Whatever you say, my girl." Usually, it wasn't worth it to debate with Sylvia, especially over something so trivial like this.

"Hurry up slowpoke!" she said, galloping out of my bedroom towards the front door. I moved as fast as I could behind her. She made it out the screen door, and I stopped on the porch while she made her way to the mailbox.

"Remember to look both ways, sweetie," I yelled after her, knowing that cars traveled well over the speed limit, especially in the mornings.

"Yes, Mom, I know," she yelled back as she stopped at the edge of the road.

"See, look!" she said as she heavily exaggerated looking both ways.

"Good job, sweetie," I said, laughing to myself. Sylvia had such a big personality. Her father and I were both very reserved, so I wasn't sure where she got it from. She made it safely across the road and retrieved the mail. It looked like a small load this morning. Sylvia looked both ways and ran back across the road. She ran up to the porch and handed me the mail.

"Thank you, sweetie. Great job being safe crossing the road," I said, patting her on the back.

"Yes, of course, I'm safe Mom! You taught me to be," she said confidently.

"Don't act like you do everything I taught you. When was the last time you did the laundry or the dishes?" I asked, putting my hands on my hips.

"Uh, I don't know what you're talking about," Sylvia said, running into the house. I laughed, walking in after her. I was so lucky to have her; she kept me wanting to keep going.

When I got back to the kitchen, she was reaching for the cereal to make herself some breakfast.

"Do you want some, Mom?" she asked generously with a smile on her face, hopping up to grab some

of the crunchy goodness and creamy ice-cold milk.

"Yes, I would love some. Thank you, sweetie," I said, sitting down to look over the mail, my eyes barely open from exhaustion. I dreaded looking at the mail. There was never anything of interest in the pile. All that was in the mountain of mail was the newspaper and a few bills. I threw the bills aside onto the countertop and started to flip through the newspaper. As usual, nothing really grabbed my attention. All of a sudden something jumped out at me. I gasped loudly and dropped the newspaper.

"Oh my goodness, Mom, are you ok?" Sylvia asked as she rushed over to me, looking over my shoulder. "What's an obituary, Mom?" she asked.

"An obituary is something in the newspaper that shows people who have died recently. It has their picture and a little summary of their life," I said calmly, trying not to scare Sylvia, still choked up about what I had seen.

"Oh ok," Sylvia replied nonchalantly, seemingly unfazed.

I, however, was not unfazed in the slightest. The obituary was of my high school best friend, Hailey Hall. We had drifted apart since high school, but I still viewed our memories fondly. We had simply grown up and grown apart from each other. We each had our own husbands and families to take care of, so we were too busy to maintain our friendship. If we saw each other around town, we would smile and make small talk, but nothing more. As far as I knew, she hadn't been sick in any way, and her obituary offered no clues as to what happened to her. What the obituary did mention, however, was when her service would be held. It was being held the next day at 10 am at the local funeral home. I was in complete shock over the news. I felt lost in my own body, not knowing what to do next.

"Here you go, Mom," Sylvia said, handing me some cereal.

"Thank you, sweetie," I said, although I had lost my appetite. I ate the cereal so that Sylvia would not question me, but I barely had feeling in my face from the pure shock of the loss of my best friend. When we were both finished, I added our cereal bowls to the pile of unwashed dishes in the sink, and we spent the rest of our day playing board games and card games. Even though I was distraught, I wanted Sylvia to think everything was normal. At nine that night, we crawled into our unmade beds, with sheets that hadn't been washed in a month.

I slept horribly, wondering what had happened to Hailey. She was the sweetest person I had ever met, and she lit up every room she entered. Finally, I fell asleep as tears rolled down my cheeks.

When the bright sun awakened me in the morning, I rose and began looking through my closet for something to wear. At last, I settled on something from the back of my closet. Just as I finished getting dressed, Sylvia plowed into the room.

"What are you wearing that for, Mom?" she asked, looking me up and down.

"Remember how I told you yesterday about the obituary in the newspaper?" I asked, sitting on the bed.

"Yeah, what about it?" she asked, sitting down next to me.

"The reason that I gasped was because I saw someone I knew in the obituary," I explained.

"Who?" she asked, looking concerned.

"Oh, sweetie, don't worry about it. You never met her. Her name was Hailey, and she was my best friend in high school," I said, trying not to show Sylvia my emotions and worry her.

"Oh, so why are you wearing this black dress?" she asked, looking down at her lap.

"When someone passes away, their family holds something called a funeral. It is a chance to say goodbye to the person one last time. People wear black to funerals because it's a sad color," I explained to her, only giving her enough information for her to briefly understand the situation.

"Oh, so do I have to wear black too?" Sylvia asked innocently.

"No, sweetie. I'm going to drop you off at Grandma's house today while I go to the funeral," I said, rubbing her back.

"Yay, Grandma's house!" she exclaimed loudly, immediately forgetting everything that I had told

her.

"Ok, go get ready for Grandma's," I said.

Sylvia ran out of my cluttered room in excitement. "Grandma's! Grandma's! I'm going to Grandma's" she sang, entering her room that was filled with sparkly butterflies and rainbows painted on the walls.

Soon enough, Sylvia came back into my room ready to leave. I noticed that she'd decided to wear her only black t-shirt. All of her other clothes were pink and purple with unicorns on them. I chose not to mention anything since I'd done all I could to explain the situation. Sylvia was just trying to understand.

We headed out the door, and I drove her to her grandmother's house. I pulled into the driveway and unlocked the back door of my gray beat-up Camry.

"Have fun at your grandmother's, sweetie. Tell her I say hi," I said, waving at her as she went to the door.

"Bye Mom. Have fun," she said, not understanding where I was going or the situation. Clearly, I didn't really explain a funeral too well. She was only nine and innocent. I wasn't sure how much more of an explanation she could handle.

Once she was safely inside the house with my mom, I pulled out of the driveway. The funeral home was only a short distance from my mother's house. I pulled into the parking lot of the funeral home. The windows of the building were darkened by curtains, and it did not look very inviting. As I pulled in, I was flooded with all sorts of emotions. I sat in the car for ten long minutes trying to contain myself. I wanted to collect myself before I went to the funeral, so I wiped away my stream of tears, finally controlling myself enough to feel comfortable going inside. I got out of my car and walked into the place no one ever wants to go: the funeral home. All of the emotions that I had pushed down in the car came back to the surface. Standing at the door were Hailey's parents.

"Oh, Suzanne. How are you, darling? We were hoping you would show up," said Charlene, Hailey's mom. She drew me into a hug, and I began to cry. My parents were not fantastic when I was growing up, so I spent most of my time at Hailey's house in high school. Charlene had blonde hair, was fit, and had a kind smile. She had not only been a second mom to me, but she was also my cheer coach in high school. Daryl was always on the sidelines supporting Hailey and me at every cheer competition and football game. Charlene and Daryl were parents to me when mine weren't. They watched Hailey and my friendship through thick and thin, as well as supported me during my breakup with my high school sweetheart. I had since made up with my parents, but that didn't change how I felt about Charlene and Daryl.

"Charlene, I was so devastated when I heard. She was far too young," I said, pulling back from our hug.

"Yes, darling. She had been sick for a while, but she never wanted anyone to know. We were lucky to get as much time with her as we did," Daryl said, pulling me into a hug.

"I feel so regretful. We lived fifteen minutes from each other and had hardly talked since high school," I said with tears rolling uncontrollably down my face.

"Oh darling, don't be like that. Remember the times you did have together. You have so many amazing memories together. If you spend your time full of regret, you will only be miserable," Charlene said with care. Charlene and Daryl had always called me darling in high school, and hearing them call me that again brought me so much comfort.

"Why don't you go find a seat, darling. The service is about to start," Daryl said, attempting to comfort me by rubbing my back.

"Ok. I'm so happy to see you guys," I said, giving them one last hug as I went to find a seat. I walked into the funeral room and picked up a program at the door with Hailey's smiling face on it. I found a seat near the middle of the funeral home in an almost empty row. I sat down and began to look at all the pictures on the program. I was touched to find that one of the pictures in the program was of me and Hailey in high school.

"Well, if it isn't Suzanne Henderson," said a very familiar voice. I nearly jumped out of my seat as I

had been in my own world. When I looked up and saw who it was, my jaw almost hit the floor.

"Mitchell Johnson?" I exclaimed in disbelief. Mitchell had been my high school sweetheart. He looked just as he did the day we graduated, just a bit grayer. He broke my heart on the day of graduation. He was a hot-shot football player and was going to college across the country at a division one college. He didn't think that long-distance would work for us. I heavily disagreed, but we ultimately went our separate ways. He went to college, and I stayed in our small hometown in a dead-end job. I silently followed his college football career. He had suffered a devastating knee injury his junior year.

"Oh, Suzanne you haven't changed a bit," he said, moving and sitting in the empty seat next to me.

"Mitchell, don't lie. I look like death warmed over. You, however, haven't aged a day," I said, looking him up and down. He was still in fantastic shape and was the definition of tall, dark, and handsome. As he sat next to me I could see the slightest crow's feet by his eyes. He was gorgeous as ever, but I could tell he had been through a lot since I had last seen him.

"Suzanne, I see you're still overly critical of yourself. You look fantastic," he said, flashing his beautiful smile at me. Just as he finished speaking, the music for the funeral procession began to play. We sat in silence throughout the funeral; it was peaceful yet devastating. When Mitchell saw that I was crying, he reached out and grabbed my hand.

When the funeral was over, Charlene announced that there would be refreshments in the room next to where the funeral was being held. Mitchell stood up and extended his hand to me.

"Let's go get a drink and talk more," he said. I grabbed his hand and stood up. We followed the rest of the funeral guests into the next room and got in line for the food and drinks.

"Well, isn't this something? Suzanne Henderson and Mitchell Johnson," Charlene said with a reminiscent tone. I could feel myself blush.

"Yes, doesn't she look fantastic, Charlene?" Mitchell asked her, making me blush even more.

"Yes, she does. As do you, Mitchell," Charlene said, as she went to find a seat. When she walked by me she gave me a look that was not hard to decipher. She had always told me that he was the one for me. Charlene was probably just as devastated when we broke up as I was. She always told me that the world has funny ways of treating soulmates. Mitchell and I made our way through the line and found somewhere to sit.

"So how have you been? I heard you have a daughter. How is she?" he asked, taking a drink of the bitter lemonade.

"Yes, I have a daughter named Sylvia. She is nine years old. I'm so lucky to have her. Since it's just me and her now, she keeps me going," I said, assembling a cheese and cracker sandwich.

"Just you two? Where is her father?" he asked curiously.

"Her father left us almost a year ago. Our relationship was doomed from the start. We hadn't known each other long before I became pregnant with Sylvia. Honestly, I am grateful that he stuck around for as long as he did. I was ready to be in a relationship, but he wasn't. I could tell from the beginning that he was staying around for Sylvia. Guess he had enough one day and left in the middle of the night. I woke up alone one morning," I said. Bringing back all of those emotions made tears well up in my eyes.

"That's horrible, Suzanne. I'm in the same boat. It's just me and my youngest son, Derek, these days. My wife, Meredith, was out one day with our daughter, Grace, and son, Stephen. They hit black ice and went off the road. All three were killed instantly. I had stayed home that day with Derek because he was sick. That was the worst phone call I have ever received. That was years ago, now. It never really gets easier," Mitchell said, tears also welling up in his eyes. We talked for the rest of the funeral and caught up with each other. Much to my dismay, the funeral was soon over.

"Let's go out to dinner, Suzanne. I've really enjoyed talking to you and would love to catch up more. It's been a long time," he said, smiling.

"Let me call my mother. That's where Sylvia is right now. She'll have no problem keeping her for longer. I'll call her right now," I said, pulling out my phone.

“Yes, I'll call Derek’s babysitter. I’ll give her a pretty penny if she has any problems staying,” Mitchell said, also pulling his phone out. We each made phone calls and were soon picking a restaurant for dinner.

We had a fantastic time at dinner at a small local restaurant that we used to go to in high school. At the restaurant, Mitchell reminisced about his late wife and how lovely she was. He also told me about his three lovely children, tears rolling down his face when he described the two he had lost. I caught him up on my life and all of my crazy endeavors. We had both been through a lot, but we somehow had landed back in each other's laps after all those years since high school.

After dinner, we went for a walk at Bialek Park. Taking a seat on a bench, we star-gazed for what felt like days. The sky was full of bright shining stars that illuminated the entire night sky. While in high school, we had gone there often to do the same thing. I had missed Mitchell. We continued to catch up on each other's lives since high school. Then, he drove me back to my car at the funeral home.

“I had a fantastic night with you, Suzanne,” he said, while we stood next to my car.

“I had a great night, too. I’ve missed you, Mitchell. But how do I know you won’t break my heart again?” I asked, staring into his perfect brown eyes.

“I loved my wife with all my heart. But no matter how much I tried to forget you, I never could. She never even slightly compared to you. I dated so many women in college, and they went nowhere because I was always looking for you. You are my soulmate and the one I want forever. I have never been able to forget you or replace you,” he said, holding my face in his hands.

“Mitchell, I could never forget you, either. I watched every single one of your college games. I was devastated when I saw you injure your knee. I was always rooting for you; I’ve always rooted for you,” I said, leaning in close to him. He looked into my eyes and pulled me in for a kiss. At that moment time stopped. Nothing else mattered but the two of us. We were in high school again — on the football field on a cold Friday night — Mitchell in his football uniform and me in my cheer uniform. We were the most popular couple in the school. We were even voted most likely to get married in our senior yearbook. With that kiss, I was transported back to those times so many years ago.

After what felt like an eternity, Mitchell finally broke our kiss.

“Please take me back, Suzanne. My biggest regret in my life was letting you go. Take me back, and I will never hurt you or let you down again,” he said, still holding my face in his hands.

“Yes, Mitchell, yes. Not a day has gone by that I haven’t thought about you. I would love to be with you again,” I said. I pulled him back in for another kiss.



“Thank you, Suzanne. Thank you,” Mitchell said, tears of joy welling up in his eyes.

Mitchell and I continued to go on special dates and reconnect with each other after years of not seeing each other. After a month of dating and spending time together, we decided it was time to bring our families together and let our children meet each other. Sylvia and Derek became close friends quickly. It seemed like they were meant to be brother and sister, and they enjoyed being around one another. I felt like I could breathe for the first time in forever and that I was whole again. We were a family.

Lealia Chadwick

Coffee
By Jillian Shorey

My morning coffee.
The ice swirls around the cup
like the waves hitting the beach.
As the ice swirls, so does the
beige-looking coffee.
I take the first sip.
It tastes like fall
and
feels like cold ice-water running
down my throat.
What would I do without my morning
coffee?

The Ocean
By Candace Chase

The air is cold.
A slight breeze blows through
and goosebumps rise.
The air carries the salt from the water
and makes that bitter taste form on the tongue.
The waves rush towards the sand,
a soft beat forming in the distance.
The sun is bright,
making the shells in the sand easy to find,
like little pieces of glass.
Taking a deep breath,
it smells like home.



Anna Coleman

My Dad's Truck
By Kora Hunter

With comfy, almost fuzzy seats,
I have found myself a casualty to deep sleep here,
time and time again.
With the pungent smell of metal due to his work equipment
accompanied by the scent of pine from the outdoors
bringing mass amounts of comfort to my busy mind.
Lifted high above the ground
belonging to a protector of mine
I often forget how common vehicle crashes are.
Followed by a soft but punctual voice that is always present in this vehicle
and the same albums playing over and over again,
I can recognize the slam of his driver's side door in a parking lot of 1,000 trucks.
In my dad's truck,
the world disappears.
I am a little girl all over again.
A weathered hand placed gently on my cheek,
I find myself a casualty to deep sleep once again.



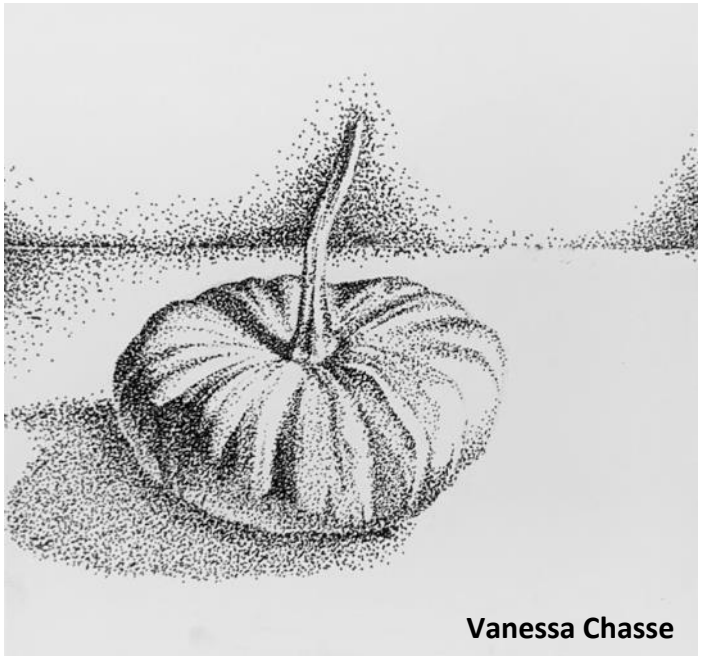
Janessa Corrigan

The First Snow
MacKenna Smith

Perfect white snowflakes
fall slowly to the ground.
The sky is a perfect shade of deep blue.
Everything is quiet.
Everything is perfect.
Cold winds, hot drinks,
bitter wind outside, warm fire inside,
a good movie, or a good book—
the perfect combination for a simple, calm night.
Everything is perfect.
Snow builds up on the ground.
Kids play, making snowmen,
having snowball fights,
laughing, giggling, and smiling.
Everything is perfect.

The End of the Season
By Nancy Langley

She sits in her rocking chair
Watching the leaves fall
They saunter onto the ground in a soft pile
The wind blows a cool breeze across her cheeks
The trees are barer now
The leaves have reached their peak
The air smells of rotten bile
As autumn starts to flow in despair
Leaves lay on the ground in a heap of decay
The children will soon be in costume
Waiting for the day
To bring their bounty home to consume



Vanessa Chasse

Goodbye, Summer
By Anna Coleman

Sunset starts to come earlier.
The sun is out, but the air is cool.
One by one the leaves shift from their
chlorophyll green to rusty orange and red.
Pumpkin spice and apple cider
pushes out the summer scents of ocean
mist and sunscreen.
During the day, a murder of crows
lingers around in the yard;
at night the bats take their place.
The moon lights up the sky
as day becomes night,
and the seasons change once again.
Goodbye, Summer.
Until next time.

The Open Field
By Sean Hyatt

A fresh open field.
The sight of green grass and blue sky.
The blowing wind's pitch is so high.
The smell of freshly mowed grass brings memories
of childhood.
I'd leap into the cotton candy clouds if I could.
A light drizzle of rain mists over my head.
The taste of fresh tomatoes, so red.
I feel at peace in the open field.
To it all my struggles I yield.



David Bubar



The Tall Ones
By Anna Coleman

The rain hits the windows -- p*itter-patter, pitter-patter, pitter-patter* -- over and over and over again. At first, Sarah is annoyed, but after a while the sound melds into her thoughts. If not for the pitter-patter, Sarah's mind would be all over the place, and her anxiety and paranoia would send her into an episode. She doesn't mind the rain too much after all. It keeps her thoughts at bay. She twirls a piece of her long, straggly, brown hair through her thin shaking fingers while trying to drown out the dark thoughts that keep trying to overtake her. Eventually, all she can hear inside her head is *pitter-patter, pitter-patter, pitter-patter.*

She stares out the window, waiting to see the detective that she called earlier. It has been an hour, and no one has shown up yet. She paces back and forth in front of the window. Every time a car slows down (which is often, considering she lives on a busy main street in the middle of the city), she thinks it might be him. But it never is.

"Where the hell is that guy? It's been forever. I thought he would be here by now." Back and forth, again and again, Sarah paces as she mumbles to herself. Through the window, she can just barely see her reflection; you can tell she hasn't slept from the dark circles under her eyes and sickly color of her face. The Tall Ones keep her up at night. For months now, the Tall Ones have antagonized Sarah. At first, she only saw them in her nightmares. But now, they show up in real life, too.

Still looking out the window, Sarah is becoming anxious and annoyed. She knows the cops think she is crazy because they never saw the Tall Ones like Sarah did. They never saw them lurking everywhere she went, cloaked in long dark clothes, watching her every move. They never saw them waiting for Sarah to get out of work. They never saw them watching her from the parking lot across from her local grocery store. Their first experience with her was the parking lot incident.

It all started one day at Sarah's local grocery store. Sarah was outside getting ready to leave the store when she saw the Tall Ones. They had been waiting for her. This time, she thought it was different. This time, they were too close.

"I've got you this time. You can't get away!" Sarah shouted at them. While yelling, she pushed shopping carts into the car where she saw the Tall Ones. Sarah thought that everyone around her was crazy because they didn't see the Tall Ones in the back of the car; they weren't afraid like Sarah was. In reality, Sarah seemed like the crazy one to everybody else.

Eventually, someone called the police and said that some psycho was shouting at the air and wrecking people's cars. They took Sarah down to the station to talk. The police station looked like every police station you see in crime shows. Rows of desks had stacks of papers on them, most likely files to complete and be signed. A combination of people sat at desks along with uniformed cops moving around in between shifts. The whole station was illuminated by a yellow tint, and the air smelled of old coffee. Most of the detectives sitting at desks seemed like they'd been there awhile. They probably started out in uniform working in the field until they couldn't keep up with the work.

Sarah followed Detective Rhodes to his desk in the back. It was neat, without many papers on it. The papers that were on it were stacked in one neat pile inside of a folder. There was not a pencil or paper out of place. Detective Rhodes also had pictures on his desk, which one could assume were of him and his family. One photo on the left showed him, a woman that looked about his age, and two young boys. They were on a beach, and they were all smiling with sunscreen covering all of their noses. On the other side of his desk sat a photo of the two boys when they were older, probably in high school.

"Hello, Sarah. I'm Detective Rhodes. So uh, can ya tell me what happened back at the store?" Detective Rhodes is tall and has a stocky frame. His mustache hangs down below his chin. His face is kind, yet seems somewhat pained.

"I was protecting myself from the Tall Ones," Sarah said, rolling her eyes as if it was common sense.

“They follow me everywhere I go. There’s no getting rid of those damn things. But this time, they were getting too close.” As Sarah explained the Tall Ones, she eased up a little bit. Her once bouncing leg ceased to shake, and her fingers stopped molesting the rings she held in her hands. Maybe Detective Rhodes actually cared.

“The… Tall Ones you say? Can you explain them a little bit more?” Detective Rhodes seemed confused, but gave Sarah a chance to tell her story.

“Yeah. They’re tall. They wear dark long robes, and you can never see their faces. They follow me everywhere: to the store, to work, to my house. I see them all the time, but usually they’re gone before I can get anyone else’s attention. Today, they got really close, and I wanted to show them I wasn’t afraid. I don’t know what they want with me. Why me?” Sarah’s voice quivered near the end, and she looked at Detective Rhodes with sad eyes.

“Hm. That’s uh. We’ve never heard anything like it, that's for sure.” Detective Rhodes was becoming suspicious.

“So, what are you going to do about it? Can I get some protection or something?”

At this question, Detective Rhodes let out a small laugh before he could stop himself, which he regretted after seeing Sarah’s facial expression. She looked up at him with a face of hurt, embarrassment, and anger.

“Well, um, you see Sarah, we don’t really have the, uh, the manpower for that sorta thing right now. We’re kinda under-manned right now, and, and um-” he didn’t have time to finish before Sarah lost it.

“I’m just a joke to you, aren’t I?! Crazy Sarah, huh. How would you feel if you had these demons following you around? What kind of police department is this? This won’t be the last time you see me.”

Detective Rhodes gave her a warning and sent her off as some crazy, harmless person, but didn’t keep her at the station. With that, Sarah stormed out of the police station and went home.

The cops never believed her. During the cart incident, all of the witness statements said there was no one unusual standing in the parking lot and that Sarah was just shoving carts into nothing and hitting cars like a crazy person. The police always took Sarah’s calls and listened when she would come into the station, but those reports always ended up in the same place: the trash.

Now, Sarah gazes out the window, hoping someone will actually come. She sees a car slowing down and realizes it is the detective.

“Bout friggin’ time,” she mumbles under her breath before racing down the stairs to get to the door. On her way, she looks at the piles of clothes that sit on the floor, the empty takeout containers on her dining room table, and the dust that is rising along the top of the book shelf. Her already small apartment seems even smaller with all the closed curtains and walls covered in notes and sketches of the Tall Ones. Between the cluttered mess and her sketches and notes all over the place, there was barely room to breathe. Ever since the Tall Ones started to follow her more, Sarah stopped leaving the house. She quit her job, and no one ever saw her except the takeout delivery guys and occasionally a neighbor when Sarah opened the apartment door to make sure no one was there.

She unlocks the top bolt then the one at the door knob and opens it just before Detective Rhodes can knock. Detective Rhodes is with someone Sarah doesn’t recognize. She thinks it must be a newbie because Sarah has met pretty much everyone down at the station.

“Morning, Sarah. This is Officer Smith. She’s in training, and I thought I’d bring her out on this uh…this follow-up.” Detective Rhodes wears the same face as the first time Sarah saw him: kind, yet pained.

Officer Smith is a tall woman, no older than mid-twenties. She wears her jet black hair back in a tight, slick bun. She fidgets with her hands, visibly nervous. She has heard the stories of Psycho Sarah from the other officers and doesn’t know how she will respond. However, even though her hands show nervousness, her eyes show confidence. She stares directly at Sarah, which makes her feel nervous. There is something off-putting about Officer Smith that Sarah can’t figure out. She makes her feel uneasy and even more anxious

than she already is.

"Do you want to talk here or should we…" Before Detective Rhodes can finish his question, Sarah has an answer.

"Of course you're coming inside. Are you crazy? I can't stand out here where *they* can *see* me." Sarah rushes Detective Rhodes and Officer Smith inside of the apartment, making sure to lock the door and dead-bolt before heading upstairs. They follow her hesitantly up the stairs, through the messy dining room, and to the living room.

"Have a seat," Sarah says as she throws a pile of clothes off the couch and onto the floor, making a spot for them.

Detective Rhodes sits down. Officer Smith, however, stands and looks around, observing her surroundings. She looks at all of the clothes on the floor and furniture, the takeout boxes, and the dust. But her eyes aren't drawn to those things. Instead, she focuses on the drawings and notes Sarah has taped up to the wall.

"What are these you have here?" she asks Sarah.

"Oh, this is how I keep track of the Tall Ones. I keep a running log of when and where I see them. I also have sketches I've made of them in case the police department ever decides to get their heads out of their asses and actually help me."

This comment makes Detective Rhodes look at the ground sheepishly. While Sarah seems crazy, he still wants to try and help. That's why he and Officer Smith are there, even though the other detectives and officers have told him countless times that she is a lost cause. Detective Rhodes feels like he owes something to Sarah, but he can't figure out why. Officer Smith stands looking at the wall, occasionally nodding and mumbling to herself.

"Seems like you see these… Tall Ones quite often, Sarah," Officer Smith says as she scans over one of the running logs.

"Practically every day. And if I don't see them, they leave me a message so I know they're around. That's why I called you guys. They've been in my house. They were here last night." As she says this, Sarah rolls up the sleeve of her oversized sweatshirt and reveals long scratch marks on her forearm just above her line-drawn tattoo of a lotus flower. Before Sarah's life went to shit, she enjoyed many eastern religious practices, and the lotus flower is a common symbol in many of them.

"These aren't the only ones either," Sarah says. "I have them on my other arm, too, and my back. And look here." She rolls up her other sleeve and also pulls down the collar of her sweatshirt, which show more scratches and bruising around her neck. The scratches are long and bright red. Sarah has scratches and deep bruises that look like someone tried to strangle her.

"They're trying to kill me. I don't think you understand how serious this is."

Detective Rhodes stands up to observe the markings closer. Officer Smith glances at Sarah; then, she continues looking over her taped-up notes.

"I'll say. That definitely is serious, Sarah. Those aren't just little scratches and bruises. Has anyone else been staying here? Or does anyone else have access to your apartment that-"

"That wants to kill me? No, no one else has access. Do you see my locks on the doors? No one can get in. This isn't something being done by a person, Rhodes." Sarah looks at Detective Rhodes, irritated. She starts pacing back and forth again and twirling a lock of her hair.

"Maybe you're just possessed. Ever had any supernatural experiences before?" Officer Smith asks nonchalantly.

Sarah stops pacing and looks at Officer Smith. Something about her lack of care for her scratches and the calmness in her voice sends a chill down Sarah's spine. *She is so calm. Why is she calm? She seems like she knows more than she should, or like she's trying to come up with excuses. What does she know?* Sarah thinks to herself.

"No, I don't think it's ghosts. I don't believe in that kinda stuff anyways. Even if I did, I think this is

different. I *see* the Tall Ones. They aren't ghosts. This isn't some random pissed off person from the afterlife trying to get back at me. They are real life demons. I even fought back. I mean, I don't remember it because I woke up afterwards, but my nails are chipped and hurt this morning because I think I tried to scratch them back." As Sarah is saying this, she looks at Officer Smith who is staring at her. On the left side of her face, Officer Smith has four small scratches that look fairly new. They kind of look like scratches someone would make trying to claw at something.

"Well, Sarah, all we can really do is look around and see if it looks like anyone has broken in. I can file a report, but there isn't a lot we can do right now," Detective Rhodes says as he starts to look around Sarah's apartment. He checks the windows in the living room and dining room while Officer Smith heads towards the bathroom and bedroom.

Sarah stands there a moment, thinking. *That's irrational. Those scratches on her face are probably from an animal or something. She isn't one of them. She isn't one of them.* Sarah tries to convince herself that Officer Smith isn't one of the Tall Ones. However, she cannot shake the feeling of panic that has been with her ever since she opened the door. She follows Officer Smith as she goes through the rooms checking the windows for any forced entry.

"I didn't find anything in the front. Whatcha got back here, Smith?" Detective Rhodes asks.

"Nothing here either. Windows are all locked. No forced entry, broken glass or anything. I think we're all set." Officer Smith turns and says this with a smile. As she does this, Sarah notices something new about Officer Smith.

"Rose Garden?" Sarah asks Officer Smith.

"What's that?" Officer Smith turns and looks at Sarah as if she doesn't know what she's talking about.

"Your lipstick," Sarah says coldly. "The shade is called Rose Garden. Isn't it?"

"Oh," Officer Smith laughs. "Uh, yeah, I think so."

Sarah's body goes cold. A couple of weeks ago, Sarah got out of the shower and saw a message in lipstick on her bathroom mirror that she assumed was from the Tall Ones. Without doing anything to it, she called Detective Rhodes and asked him to come down to see it. He brought someone from CSI to take a sample of the lipstick in case that would bring them any leads. The shade was Rose Garden. *Oh my god. Officer Smith is one of the Tall Ones.*

Calmly, Sarah quietly closes the bathroom door so that Detective Rhodes can't hear them. Without much thought, she grabs the lamp on the side of the table. Before Officer Smith can turn around, Sarah strikes her in the head. Blood hits the mirror as Officer Smith falls on the ground. Sarah slides her to the side of the tub and gently rolls her in. With a quick scan she makes sure there isn't any blood on her before leaving the bathroom. She walks past Detective Rhodes to go to her bedroom.

"I'm not really finding anything, Sarah," Detective Rhodes says to her.

"That's alright. I'm not sure if they'll be bothering me anymore anyways," she says as she walks past him to her bedroom. In the back of her closet is a backpack full of essentials: ID, passport, cash, and some clothes. She has everything she needs to get away. "I just have to run out for a moment. I'll be right back," she tells Detective Rhodes.

That's the last time anyone saw Psycho Sarah.

One Month Later…

A woman is reading a newspaper on a sunny beachside. The air is warm, but there's a cool breeze from the ocean mist. The headline reads: "Schizophrenic Woman Kills Cop: Still Missing One Month Later."

While the woman reads, she glances at a man on the beach. He looks at her occasionally and smiles. She twirls a piece of her hair and smiles back. She has short black hair, clearly dyed and cut on her own because the ends aren't even and some of her brown roots are coming through. Past the newspaper, the woman looks down at the tattoo on her forearm: a lotus flower.

"This is what enlightenment feels like," she says to herself. "No more Tall Ones to worry about."

HOME
By Willow Ward

Home isn't a place
It isn't something with structure
It is simply something with a face
It's the one that gives you butterflies
It's the one that gives you happiness
And makes you feel like you can fly
Right on top of the world
They have that unforgettable smell
It could be that of cologne
Or that of which you can't quite tell
But whatever it may be
You miss it when it's not there
It's a warm-to-touch body
It can be smooth or with some hair
You can be blind and just know
That with their voice
You are home


David Cahill

FOR HER
By Willow Ward

I do miss her
The memories I had with her
The laughs I had with her
The overall things I had been through
With her
I didn't get the chance to say goodbye
And maybe one day I will
Everything reminds me of her
The things we used to do
Can be brought to my mind
And make me think about her
She was my best friend
No one can be like her
But in a way that's a good thing
I had many good times with her
But the bad times were there too
Eventually the bad outweighed the good
And that was because of her
With that this is my silent goodbye
The one I will never get to say
To her

The Wise
By Jarod Girouard

Visiting the wise and old,
seeing the past as their future moves forward and ways remain.
Classic Kennedy days fill the air, as does the plastic covering the furniture.
Seeing them again reminds me of the sea,
always continuing forward forever until
they introduce expired games of their time. The wise always win.
The wise show me when to laugh and when to cry.
The wise ease my mind of my youthful worries. Their examples show,
like a calculator, I can always count on them.

Death
By Allison Foster

Death leaves behind an ocean of sadness;
it leaves behind a stench.
One that resembles the tobacco smoke
etched permanently into my mind.

A grave holds a soul
that the Earth no longer can.
The sky holds the same stars
that he hung in my eyes.

But still,
death leaves behind so much.
It leaves the potential of something so wonderful
created by someone so unknown.

Made by a greater force,
we try to wrap our heads around.
There is no definite answer,
just a lasting sense of wonder.



Vanessa Chasse

Suicide Watch
By Alan Medina Contreras

Act I

Scene I

SCENE: *Hancock County Jail is painted light blue on the inside. The paint is chipped and flaking from the cement blocks that make up the walls. In Howard's cell there is nothing but a hole in the ground with four metal bars covering it to use as a toilet. The cell block is lit by a single amber bulb.*

0700: *We are in Cell Block H. HOWARD BOWIE is sitting on a green mattress, placed in the back of the cell. He is wearing a green anti-suicide smock with a green anti-suicide blanket on top of him, like a cape. Howard is a tall, thin, lanky man in his 60s with grey hair. He speaks in a polite manner. However, his speech is slow, as if he is constantly distracted by a passing thought. In front of the cell door, there is a black foldable chair. OFFICER KANE is sitting on it, with a clipboard and a pen. KANE is a new officer. He is given the task of suicide risk observation because none of the other officers want to do it. KANE seems to be exhausted at all times, yet, unlike the other officers, his uniform and hair are kempt. KANE has a soft voice and does not raise it often. The 0700 shift change has just taken place, and KANE will be observing HOWARD for the next 12 hours until the next shift change at 1900.*

HOWARD: Hello, sir. You must be new here. How are you?

KANE: (*Sighs)* Not amazing, but I'm powering through.

HOWARD: What's wrong?

KANE: (*Pauses for a brief moment in shock, and stutters*) It. It's a long story.

HOWARD: You seem startled. Do people not ask you how you're doing very often?

KANE: They do, but I don't think they really mean it.

HOWARD: Ah, yes. Most people are quite fickle these days. (*Begins to sit up straight, seemingly excited. Then sits in silence for a few seconds.*) Well?

KANE: What?

HOWARD: You said it was a long story, and we have quite a while until your shift ends.

KANE: I'm not supposed to talk about my personal life with inmates.

HOWARD: That's understandable. (*Laughing as he speaks.*) Can't go breaking the rules so early in your career. Let me tell you about myself, then! My name is Howard Bowie, from Massachusetts and I...

KANE: (*Sits up straight in chair)* Where in Massachusetts?

HOWARD: You probably don't know the town, but I'm from a little town off of the coast called Cohasset.

KANE: I used to live in Hingham.

HOWARD: Wow! Look at that. We are practically neighbors! What brings you all the way up to Maine, my friend?

KANE: I was tired of living so close to the cities. Life is kind of rushed down there. It's a lot calmer up here.

HOWARD: Couldn't agree more. I moved up to Maine in 1981 with my wife. We were looking for a safe place to settle down and start a family. God, that noise that the guards are playing outside is torture, right? (*Pauses and waits for Kane to respond, but Kane stays silent in his confusion.)* Don't you hear that? It's like a passing car. Like (*Extends hand and moves it horizontally, slowly.*)

KANE: Right... I came up here... for school and I ended it up loving it here so much that I stayed for work.

HOWARD: Were you planning on becoming a Corrections Officer?

KANE: Not really. I want to work for the state police. I'm just getting some experience and building my resume with this job.

HOWARD: Why law enforcement? A smart kid like you should be a lawyer. Good money there.

KANE: I want to help people. Lawyers say they help people, but they charge them thousands of dollars at the same time. I just want to be there for people when they are at their worst.

HOWARD: I don't doubt it. I can tell you really mean that. I know because you're like me. I appreciate you being so nice to me. The other guards ignore me. They stuffed me into that solitary cell in J block and ignored me. What did they expect me to do?

KANE: Must have been hell.

HOWARD: Hell? No, hell is much worse. What do you think hell is?

KANE: I don't know if I really believe that it exists.

HOWARD: Oh, it exists. It hides in plain sight. I'm a doctor. You know why I became a doctor? I always said that it was because I wanted to help people. But I just wanted to help myself. I wanted to be happy and rich. But she didn't care about the money. The money wasn't enough. I spent all that time studying, working, exercising, but it still wasn't enough. That noise needs to STOP! (*Holds his own face.*)

Hell is being under the illusion of control, Officer Kane. Because if you believe that you have it, then, you'll spend your whole life being afraid of losing it. That fear that you put yourself in, that is hell. We all desperately try to create a sense of control through things like "God" (S*mirks*). Do yourself a favor and give up. Abandon control and just live. (C*laps hands together once and chuckles.*) Or don't.

KANE: I'm sorry that happened to you, Howard. You might think that you can't live without her. But this isn't the end.

HOWARD: Yeah. You know what? Yeah! You can help me. You can tell the *Ellsworth American* that this jail is mistreating its inmates, and my case could get dropped! When you finish your shift, you go right to them and let them know.

KANE: I'm sorry, I….

HOWARD: *(Jumps up to standing position.)* THERE IT IS AGAIN! Do you hear it?

KANE: *(Waits a few seconds to listen.)* I don't hear anything other than the light buzzing.

HOWARD: No, no. That isn't it! Listen closely! *(Pauses for a few seconds again.)* Do you think you could do that for me, buddy?

KANE: Do what?

HOWARD: Are you ignoring me, too? Can you deliver the message to the *Ellsworth American?*

KANE: I'm sorry, Howard. I am not allowed to pass messages between inmates or people on the outside for safety reasons.

HOWARD: That's exactly why you have to tell them my message. I'm in danger. You might be, too. There's something wrong with the other guards. They are trying to get me. They are probably watching through that camera. They are probably listening. If they are, then you're in danger too. *(Starts to yell.)* If you think you're being targeted, then you get the hell out of here! You forget about me, and you get to safety. You're worth more than I am; you're talented! *(Speaks in a whisper)* You have to get that message to them.

KANE: I can't give messages. I could get fired.

HOWARD: *(Voice breaks, as if he's about to cry.)* I thought you wanted to help people. I'm at my worst, and you won't help me. Why? I thought we were friends.

KANE: Howard, I do want to help you, but I can't lose my job. I have bills to pay.

HOWARD: FORGET BILLS! I never missed a payment in my life, and look where I am! Haven't you been listening?! Why won't you help me? Why aren't you listening? Why aren't you…. You're one of them. You pretend that you don't hear the noise because you're trying to make me look crazy.

KANE: Howard, I honestly don't have a clue what you're talking about.

HOWARD: *(Charges Kane) GET AWAY FROM ME!*

Kane grabs a can of pepper spray and sprays Howard across the eyes. Howard screams in agony and falls to the floor of the cell. Kane closes the cell door.



Garden
By Syrena Clark

Wine-stained, blueberry tomatoes and
tawny, chamomile flowers,
hanging heavy in a golden sun.
Plum hot peppers
drip like drops of water from green stems.
Brightly colored yellow blossoms
open slowly,
expanding,
soon pregnant with plump little squashes.
We hope to grow a giant pumpkin this year,
coming to rest eventually, like a fat bear in the garden bed.
This year the elderberries are taking off;
tart purples grow in round fans.
My hands are dark with dirt.
I take some time to lie in the grass,
as if this is the last thing I'll ever see.
Surrounded by earthen garden beds,
plants rise up from where we planted many a seed.

Never Knew This Day Would Come
By MacKenzie Austin

I saw the blood;
it was in a flood.
There was a big mess;
I was in distress.
I tasted the fear
and saw their tears.
I had a hard time
with the chyme.
I heard the scream;
I thought it was all a dream.
It was just in my head
with all the red.
I felt sad
and mad.
We could have done more,
but I just laid on the floor.
It smelled like death.
I couldn't hold my breath.
This was the end
with the loss of a best friend.

Nature
By McKenna Harriman

The colors of the sky make my soul fly
The smell after it rains makes me sniff with pleasure
The feeling of the waves crashing against my feet
make me feel at the top of the world
The tastes of the berries I collect off the branches
keep my belly full and myself full of joy
The sound of the crickets chirping me to sleep keep
me relaxed and well-rested



Janessa Corrigan

Rain
By Anna Coleman

Clear drops falling from the sky,
saturating your clothes and leaving a
cool sensation on your skin.
You're surrounded by the *pitter-patter* on
rooftops and an earthiness that
fills your lungs.
The first drop that touches your tongue
is refreshing and icy:
a moment of remembrance
for the days of youth.



Moondog

When You Know
By Allison Foster

It’s not what you told me
the night we met.
It’s the way my eyes softened
the moment that they landed on you.

Without a glimpse of your face,
my soul whispered, “Home.”
Broken and hopeless,
my faith restored as you walked in the room.

It’s the way you held me,
knuckles white from squeezing,
as if at any moment,
I could slip through.

It was always startling,
but not once did I question
the purest sense of safety
radiating off of you.

Cheers in the Dark
By Jarod Girouard

It's completely dark
in this empty hollow where I reside.
Everyone feels empty like a cup
with liquid courage ‘till
another toast to tomorrow.

It's shining bright
like the moon in space,
making the stars fill with glee.
Everyone is jolly as they raise a glass to me;
another cheers for all to see.

Seasons Change
By Nancy Langley

The rooster crows in the morning
He is bold, loud, and boisterous
The earth is in mourning
As the summer season is gone
Autumn is covering the earth
Soon we will be chilled to the bone
And sitting by the hearth
Snow will be glistening on the ground
Children will be playing all around
The pines will be lit with lights
The travelers will be abounding
And the geese will take flight
The bells will ring with an astounding shrill
And the earth will stand still



David Cahill

Love is Special
By Samantha Dorr

It was on a day much like today but turned cold and dark.
A woman lay on unhallowed ground, lamenting her lover's death.
She was crying over his body, a vestige of his soul.
This man and woman were madly in love,
and despite their best efforts, it was no secret.
They knew that what they had was magical and special.
To speak of such love would make it no longer... special.
To speak of it would turn their world dark.
Their world was built with bricks for secrets
and lies for cement. One brick fell and with it brought death.
But what best brings out love,
other than the loss of a soul?
The loss of a soul
always brings something special.
A lesson perhaps? A lesson of Love?
Or perhaps bringing a lesson much darker.
For tales laced with love and death
are often brought on by secrets.
And so it was that their world was crushed by their secrets.
She was now left lamenting over his lost soul,
wishing it was her death.
That's how you know that they were special.
Consequently, on this day that turned cold and dark,
we see a story of true love.
Afterward, we are left with this memory of their love,
Itself, a secret.
When the world seemed too dark,
a connection was made so strong they were bound by their souls.
This brings light and makes even one feel special,
even after death.

Blue Blood
By Samantha Dorr

Blood is red,
but my veins are blue.
It was bittersweet
when I left you.



Riley Bridges

A Cold March
By Jacob Dexter

March opens cold,
a frost over forty-years-old.
The bombardments rain
under stone-finger reign,
commanding rock slides.
Millions wish to hide
in countries whose fingers
are no less tense.

The sirens wail
at the approach of a forty-mile jail.
Underground, pleading for an escape
to fiery landscapes
of disappearing history.
When is it allowed to be?
Berlin was erased.
Remember Kyiv.



Lealia Chadwick

Nor'easter
By Syrena Clark

Trees here
in winter's grasp,
expand white on white until the darkness comes.
Chestnuts tasting of wooden cherries.
Decades in the space between.
Beyond the window trees lie torpid.
Twisting.
Bare.
Dusk light on my waxen skin,
and within the hour a storm moves in,
so coats the sod in impassivity.

Silence settles,
and bones won't rattle here.
Despite trees as gaunt as skeletons,
even as the wind moves between them,
there is secrecy.
Snow smells crisp and cold,
breaking in my mouth like ice.

Voices at the forest's edge
anesthetize and draw me in,
writing love letters,
frozen to the surface of my alabaster skin.

I tear away
as nighttime arrives.
A sense of silence overwhelms,
as if noise could consume us whole.



Anna Coleman

Autumn Lakes
By Allison Foster

Silently I kneel
before a lake of silver glass.
I see my reflection
as clearly as my hand in front of my face.

I reach out to my identical image;
my shaky hand touches my mirror face,
but it wrinkles as if cringing at my touch.
A cool breeze blows
sending a shiver down my spine.

Inhaling brings the flavor of tobacco,
smoky with a hint of bitter.
I exhale the smoke that permanently stains my scent,
leaving me with a stench my mother despises,
but reminds my grandfather of home.

Soon I hear the familiar crunch,
autumn leaves underneath the feet of strangers.
The lake starts draining away,
taking the rippling image I call my face,
disappearing into the distance
until it's gone.

There is no more silver glass
in the hollow lake,
only an empty memory
of my wrinkled face
in the silver glass water.



David Bubar

Schizophrenia
By Syrena Clark

It's in trips around the sun,
many battles fought and won.

Somehow delusional.
Somehow is a way I cannot believe.
And the next thing you know,
I cannot breathe.

"It's not like grocery shopping; this requires commitment."
She says that as if I am not well acquainted with that particular necessity.

I am my own testament to commitment,
aren't I?
I have created this mess in my own image,
haven't I?

To stare into the sun,
until all I see is light.

"You want to get better, don't you?"
"I want to disappear."

To step me free of panicked flesh.
A cat
on some cushion.
A queen
on a throne of night
handing out sanity,
reason,
and vision for the blind.
"It's medication time."

If not a cat
then a canary.
If not a queen,
then a mercenary.

"It's a new beginning."
"It's a death sentence."



OLD DAYS
By William Tracy

Through the leaves of the forest
shines the sun on the rocks.
Sitting proud, high and mighty,
the native men talk.
One is short, black hair flowing,
eyes dart with the breeze.
The other quiet, face is churning
as he chews tobacco leaves.
All is well, both are tranquil
as they talk of days of old —
days of hunting, salmon fishing,
of fires in the cold.

They sometimes laugh, often smile,
sometimes stare away and gaze.
On the tree line slowly fading,
receded from the old days
While they sit proud - their hearts are crying,
yearning for the past.
The short one wonders to himself
how long the view will last.
Everyday trees fall, and with it their culture
fades away,
like a glacier slowly melting as the summers
come to stay.

Yet, they hang on like stubborn mules
to all they ever knew —
the ceremonies and traditions
of the small but cherished few.
Getting dark the quiet one stands,
turns to his friend and says the solemn
words,
"Let us go, Chaske, and see what else they
burned."

The Perfect Couple
By Willow Ward

The end of high school can be rough for relationships. As you get closer to graduation, you have to figure out where you want to go next. You have the decision to go to college or not. Marie was having a tough time figuring out what she wanted to do. But her boyfriend, Jack, knew he wanted to go to the community college in town. That idea worried Marie because even though she could go to the private or public college in town, or one just 20 minutes from town, when would they be able to see each other? She constantly wondered how their relationship could work, and, even, if she wanted it to work.

Marie and Jack were perceived as the perfect couple: they had stayed together for the past two years. Jack had asked her out at a football game their sophomore year. Marie was a cheerleader, and Jack was the star football player. It was a classic fairytale stereotype, but it was their reality. The only problem was that people only saw them as perfect because of how they were in front of friends, families, and strangers, but behind closed doors things weren't as perfect.

Jack was a transfer from another high school, and within his first month, he asked Marie to go out with him. He seemed sweet, and to all the girls he was dreamy. He had pretty blue eyes, dark brown hair, and was tall and muscular, but wasn't too bulky. He was a dream. Marie caught his eye, with her green-blue eyes, blonde hair, and short and slim body. Just by the pictures and how they were in public, their relationship was exactly how it would be in the movies with a high school setting. But Marie made the mistake of not getting to know Jack or where he came from before she started dating him.

In study hall on May 29, 2021, a Thursday, Marie was looking at colleges to apply to, still not knowing the major or minor she would choose. Her friend, Layla, was sitting next to her and asked if she was okay.

"I have a lot on my mind right now."

"With college or Jack?"

"Both I guess… I just don't think me and Jack should be together anymore. I feel like we started dating too early, without truly knowing each other. I just don't see us working after graduation, and I'm not happy. He hurts me."

"He what?!"

"Shhhh."

In a whisper, Layla restated, "He what???"

"When we fight, he gets mad. Too mad."

"He doesn't seem like that guy. He just seems so nice."

"That's the thing. I thought so, too. But I don't even know him. I only know he went to school 20 minutes away before coming here. He still lives there, so why did he even need to transfer?"

"Maybe he was being bullied?"

"It just doesn't make sense."

"Maybe he transferred because his school doesn't have a football team? Other than you, that seems to be his priority. Let's see if they have one."

Layla loved to get herself into "FBI mode" where she found out every detail about a situation. Before she dated a guy, she would deep-dive into his past and find out any dark secrets he might have. Marie always thought Layla should go to college for a criminal justice major, but for some reason she chose to become a teacher.

After just three minutes, Layla saw that Jack's old school had a football team, but he had never been on it during his freshman year or the previous years in middle school. What was weird was that when looking up the school, a missing persons list popped up.

Marie and Layla grew distracted from looking into Jack, and, instead, looked into the people who had gone missing recently. They hadn't paid attention to these posts before because it wasn't anyone they had personally known. However, every year at least one person was reported missing. Looking at the pictures, each girl was pretty and around their age. Where Marie and Layla lived, there were two girls who had gone

missing their freshman year, but they didn't understand how it wasn't big news and something they had even heard about.

"Both of these girls look the same," Layla said.

"Don't say it."

"This one has the same anklet as you. And this one has the same style neckla-"

"No!" Marie stopped her; then, she whispered, "Jack has nothing to do with this. Just because I look like them doesn't mean it's him. The mall is in between this town and where he lives. Anyone could have that jewelry."

"Okay, Marie, I'm sorry. Maybe these girls were just people Jack knew then? Maybe that's why he's here? To prevent it from happening to more girls?"

"Maybe, but there's still girls that were missing from his old school before our freshman year. They just aren't the same."

"It doesn't make sense, and there's no need to jump to conclusions. Let's just forget it. But, if you're not happy, you need to break up with him. You can't just be with him for his sake. It seems like that's what you have been doing. You're going to college and will be doing your own thing. Be single and be free."

"You're right." Marie texted Jack and told him she wanted to talk later that day.

"At my house?" he asked, texting back.

"No. Can we meet at the bench next to the big fountain at the park?"

"Where we had our first date?"

"Yes, but after dinner. Mom is making my favorite: spaghetti and biscuits."

"Ok, see you at 7."

After going through the day, constantly wondering how she wanted to start the conversation, Jack and Maria met at the garden…

"I love this place at night. Don't you?" asked Jack.

"I do…"

"Are you okay? You seem different."

"I think we should go separate ways..."

"What? You can't do that to me. What are you talking about?" Jack replied and stood up.

"I just think it makes sense. We're going to have very different futures; I just don't see how we can make it work. And.."

"No. No. Just NO! You can't do that!"

Marie felt that the other couples walking around were staring at them. In a way, it made her feel safe knowing others were around.

"What?"

"We have to stay together. We just have to. You can't leave me. Let's go talk somewhere more private. There's a garden nobody goes to just around the corner."

"No. I don't feel safe with you. Let's talk here, in this park, and on this bench. This was our bench, remember? I need to not only figure out my future, but be on my own and be happ-"

"You're not happy? How? I give you EVERYTHING!"

"No. Everything is always about YOU! If something doesn't go your way, you hurt me."

"Let's go to the garden," Jack said sternly.

He grabbed Marie's arm, compressing the fluffy, pink jacket she was wearing and forced her to go with him. She didn't want to make a scene, but she also didn't feel safe and wanted to cry for help. She knew this night was going to end badly. She knew she should've had a friend on standby in case something were to go wrong, but she thought he loved her. Though there were plenty of downs in the relationship, there were still some ups and happy memories.

As they approached the garden, Marie noticed there was little to no lighting. Only the moon delicately shone through holes in the tall bushes. It was a creepy place, and it gave her a sickening feeling. The smell was strong, like mold or something rotten. Jack and Marie made their way through the garden that seemed

to be a maze made by tall bushes instead of what was normally corn. He finally loosened his grip, letting her go. She could feel it throbbing as the blood was trying to rush back.

"I'm not going to let you break up with me," Jack said, freaking Marie out, as lightning struck and thunder rumbled.

"Jack… It's for the best. We have our own lives to live. It's time."

Usually Marie would keep giving Jack chances to keep the relationship going. He always made her stay by reminding her of their happy memories, making her not focus on the verbal and physical abuse. It was also hard to let go before, knowing she would see him every day. But this time was different. She figured that she wouldn't have to see him again after graduation. He knew her whole schedule and where she lived, but now college would become her escape. With that, she decided she wasn't going to tell him her plans; that way, he couldn't find her and show up wherever she might be.

"I'm sorry, then."

"For what?" Marie said, confused.

He had never apologized for anything before. He had never taken responsibility for any of his actions, ever. Then, she noticed a scary look in his eyes. Something bad was going to happen. Marie started to back up, but Jack followed.

"Jack, back up."

"No. I'm not going to let you live your life without me. I can't live my life without you, without knowing where you are at all times. This way I'll always know where you are."

"What do you mean?" Marie saw Jack looking around. What was he looking for? He seemed to have found it with his eyes. Something was wrong. He pulled out something long, wooden or metal. She couldn't make out what it was, but she ran.

Marie couldn't remember how they got to that point in the garden, so she made turns but couldn't find the exit. She knew he wasn't going to be far behind and just kept running. She hoped the sounds of thunder would help cover the sound of her feet hitting the puddled grass. But, like in the movies, Marie tripped over something. She quickly got herself up and looked down by her feet to see what that something was. The moon shone right on it, revealing a leg that appeared to be wearing black leggings, and an anklet with a charm engraved with a "J" dangling right above a black low-top converse shoe.

Marie heard Jack's steps getting closer and knew that she couldn't stay there. She started to cry and was desperate to find her way out. She stopped for a minute and no longer heard Jack. *He must be waiting somewhere.* Marie texted 911, knowing that if she called, he would hear her.

With time, knowing Jack wasn't running anymore, she found a good bush to hide in. But deeper in the bush the smell of something rotting grew stronger.

Without moving, Marie was successful in hiding, and she saw a bright light shining on her. It was the police. *Finally.*

Marie went to step out of the bush, and out fell another victim. Knowing she was safe, she finally let out a scream.

"You're okay. I'm officer Jeremy Barnes. You're safe now. We just have some questions to ask whenever you're comfortable."

"Where's Jack?"

"We found him sitting right outside the entrance of this garden. Don't worry. He can't hurt you anymore."

"How many girls are in there?"

"We have the two that fell out of the bushes tonight that you found. My fellow officers are looking right now."

As they left the garden, Marie saw the medical examiners going in to find and collect Jack's victims, passing by on her left. She then looked right and locked eyes with Jack, who gave her a smirk and yelled,

"I WILL FIND A WAY TO GET YOU! YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT ME!"



Memories of an Orange Cat
By Syrena Clark

The day we brought you home,
autumn bathed the world in a dusty sunshine.
Creamsicle fur,
awash with white and pastel orange.
I wonder,
were you always waiting for us?

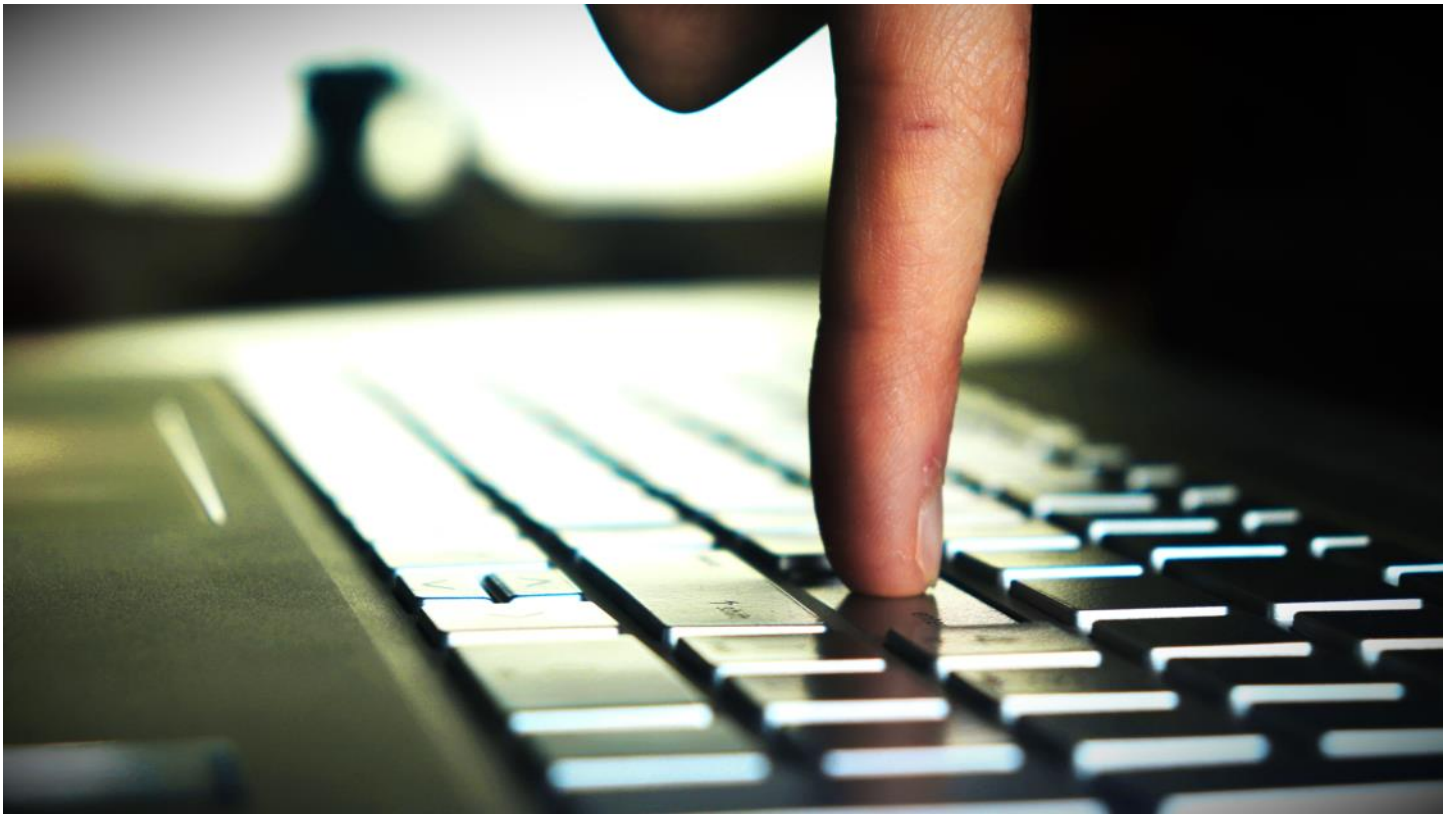
His urn,
clutched between your two sad hands.

The night you died,
I held you to my chest,
until you went limp and soft as hourglass sand.
Your eyes were still open,
and what beautiful apricot eyes.

The night you died,
I sobbed.

All our memories lay before us;
you were like a pile of warm blankets in my arms.

To not have you here
means an empty world,
even in autumn
with the world alight
and all the trees burning in colorful titian colors.
You are a ghost now,
and in your memory,
all the world is orange.



David Bubar



"I Think You Have Cancer"
By Crystal Bell

"Everyone remembers the moment they were first told they had cancer."

I've seen this commercial a dozen times, and yet I shift my focus and watch it again. An elderly man on-screen reaches out to his wife, squeezing her hand in reassurance. A middle-aged blonde woman looks the camera dead on and stares. In every new frame, a doctor delivers a speech that turns someone's life upside down. All of these people, collectively, represent one of the worst experiences of my life.

It's a simple reminder, but there's a sharp point at the end of that probing statement, one that gets under my skin. Of course, I remember the moment I was told, the numb terror and confusion that spread through every part of me. The cancer made a home in my neck, but the fear took hold everywhere. My doctor said, "I think you have thyroid cancer," and my whole world stopped turning.

I remember sitting in that small, clean hospital room and feeling smaller than I ever had before. If I were more important, it would have turned dreary, with pouring rain and gloomy fog. Instead, the world beyond me plunged unflinchingly onward, the sky staying clear blue and the sun shining just as bright. What a lovely day for a picnic.

I probably seemed to be processing the news, but in reality, I could hardly remember my own name. My brain had frozen over. The doctor watched me carefully, awaiting a reaction. His tired eyes held sympathy, but no surprise. He'd said those words to dozens of other women, just like me. I thought of all the people I knew who'd once had some variation of this conversation. I thought of my grandmother, a woman I'd never gotten the chance to know.

The doctor didn't know this was one of my worst fears. He only knew this was bad news, no matter whom he was telling it to.

"Do you have someone you can call to sit in on this appointment?" he asked.

In strict accordance with COVID restrictions, my mom had been waiting in the parking lot to drive me home, so I called her first. I didn't know what to tell her, so I just asked her to come up to the office. She didn't question why, but I knew she could hear it in my voice. My terror bled right through the phone line. While waiting for her, we sat in silence.

The next few days dragged slowly onward. I still had to finish research papers and take final exams. On my 20th birthday, the results from my biopsy came back positive, and I wound up responding to birthday wishes from my best friends with news of my diagnosis. Every person I told made me feel worse and worse. Why was I telling people about something I didn't fully understand myself?

The real kicker about cancer is that it's not real until the diagnosis. It's something that happens to other people: old people, poor kids on TV, Facebook friends I felt a vague sense of pity for. It isn't for me, it couldn't possibly be for me. But then it hit–an apathetic demolition of the belief that my life is somehow different from others, just because I am the main character. It turned out I wasn't as exempt from suffering as I'd thought.

Looking back, I could see it coming. Cancer takes many forms and manifests in a variety of symptoms. For me, it showed up first in a bump in my neck, which I quickly brushed off. At first, I thought it was *just* a swollen lymph node. And then, when it stuck around, I thought that *maybe* I'd always had a bump there. I mentioned it on a phone call with my mom, and she told me not to worry.

Over the next couple of months, a half-dozen colds left my throat constantly scratchy and sore. My gag reflex became so bad that I threw up most mornings before heading off to class. I'd always brush my teeth again, to get the bitter taste out. "I'm just tired," I told myself. I needed more sleep. With insurmountable amounts of schoolwork and my anxiety breathing down my neck, I pushed my health aside.

Then, came the pressure in my neck. Unbeknown to me, as the tumor grew, it pressed into my throat. One morning, I awakened with the bizarre feeling of being choked, which finally drove me to the doctor's office. The strange sensation proved hard to explain. Everyone assumed that I had a sore throat, no matter how many times I told them that the pressure came from outside. They thought it was strep or

mono, but I knew that this was different. After some bloodwork, the doctor found out there was something wrong with my thyroid.

"It's probably a thyroid autoimmune disease," the doctor said. I clung to that hypothesis, happy to have a condition that didn't seem too intimidating. According to *WebMD*, I'd probably need some medication. I told my mom this over the phone, finally feeling back in control.

By the time I saw a specialist, I'd already made up my mind. As I walked into that hospital, I didn't have cancer. However, the moment the doctor said those words out loud, I had a physical change. One moment I had hypothyroidism and some inconvenient swelling, and the next I had cancer. Knowing the truth hurt because I'd never have the safety of ignorance again. The fear would never entirely leave.

For months afterward, I was terrified. As I bounced from appointment to appointment, from major surgery to radioactive iodine pills, I stayed on my toes, waiting for another moment just like my diagnosis. The doctor would sit me down with that same familiar wave of pity cresting in his eyes and tell me that my cancer had worsened. The treatment hadn't worked. He'd have to open me up, again, and cut out my whole goddamn throat. Fortunately, that never happened, but the fear of my cancer worsening hung so big over my head that it's a wonder everyone around me couldn't see how I cowered in its shadow. I flinched when my parents asked questions about how we would know if the cancer had spread. My dad often thought about my grandmother: her diagnosis, her chemo, and her surgeries. It scared me that the gaping scar on my throat reminded him of a dying woman.

Now, with my treatment behind me, I can breathe a little easier. However, the memories remain. Tragedy hits a thousand times harder than relief. The diagnosis felt like getting hit by a runaway train, but the news that I was cancer-free was a breath of fresh air on a busy morning. It was wonderful to hear, of course, but it wasn't earth-shattering. Cancer turned my whole world around, in a way that can't ever be righted. Scars heal, but they don't disappear. Sometimes, when my mind gets the better of me, I feel that fear pressing in again, taunting me.

"Everyone remembers the moment they were first told they had cancer."

Those words always shock me into remembering my own past, but I never change the channel. Believe it or not, I actually enjoy this commercial. It reminds me of the universality of the cancer experience. For all of my suffering, other people have experienced cancer, too, and they have come out stronger.

Since my diagnosis, I've found so many other people who've had thyroid cancer: my mom's coworker, my dad's friend, my great-grandmother, and my primary care physician. All of them lived through this moment. The reason this commercial works is because everyone does remember. Most people alive today will get cancer at some point during their life. It will strike them, sudden and powerful, the same way it struck me. Many people I know already have had it, and sometimes it feels like their words have come from my own mouth.

Once, talking to my 80-year-old boss about his diagnosis, he said something that caught me by surprise. "You're just walking down the street one day, and, suddenly, you have cancer."

With those words, I knew that he remembered the first moment he had it. He looked back and pinpointed that change and the upending chaos that accompanied it. Just like me, it didn't become real for him until his doctor said it out loud.

It shocks me to realize that though separated by a lifetime of experience, our cancer gives us a thread of commonality, an experience that hangs tightly around us. I wonder sometimes about my grandmother and her breast cancer. Had the second and final diagnosis felt different? Had her cloud, that looming threat of getting worse, dissipated when they told her she was going to die?

I never had the opportunity to know my grandmother, but I felt more connected to her during those few months of treatment than I ever had before. I developed connections with the doctors, PAs, and nurses who saved my life, and with my family and friends whose hearts stayed with me during the more difficult times. I even developed connections with random patients that I passed in the hospital. Even now, as I move beyond the cancer, I am more connected to life, with all its sufferings and triumphs, than ever before. The world is as beautiful and horrible as the creatures living in it. Better times are coming. I am waiting for them.

So This is Their House
By Candace Chase

The breeze goes by at a slow pace,
causing ripples to form over the water's
surface. The wooden dock feels rough.
Yet, comfort is found in its memories.

On either side, those dear old dogs,
the ones that don't belong there,
yet, make themselves at home, splashing
at the water's edge and asking for attention.

So, this is their house.
A Saturday afternoon: August. Sitting upon
a homemade piece of land,
a memory waiting every way you turn.

Behind a red house built by hand,
circled by hand-stacked logs, planted flowers,
and showered in sunlight, a child kicks
off their shoes and welcomes freedom.

You feel like that; you feel like letting
your worries go flat, like letting the sandbox
fill your hair, like being no more than
a small child once again.

Laughing. You feel like stopping time
and dancing to your own beat. You sigh
instead and let the sun shine down
on you, as you close your eyes,
and continue to reminisce.



Lealia Chadwick



Ben Powell

Naomi
By Allison Foster

The air smelled of salt and seaweed; the breeze floated over Naomi's long, dark red hair. The nimbus clouds shone in front of the sunset; the dark blue storm clouds turned a pastel pink in the sky. She looked up and took a deep breath, the rainbows in the sky shaping the edge of the cliff that she rested her legs over. As the sun sank lower, creating a mosaic of colors, the wind picked up, releasing red and orange leaves into the wind. She grabbed a leaf that floated by her head, tilted her chin up towards the sun, and smiled. The bright of her blue eyes shone from a distance, the corners of them creasing with her soft grin.

Naomi stood up, wiped her small hands on her blue denim jeans, and turned back towards the trees. She took one last glance at the ocean, smiling, clearly at peace. As she turned back around, her blue tigers' eye crystal necklace swayed on her neck. She jumped up the ledge and back onto the hiking trail. Her house was a short distance from the drop-off where she would find her maternal grandmother whom she cared for during the week.

Naomi walked in the door, the smell of pumpkin chocolate chip cookies hitting her in the face. She threw her bag on the bench that, for the last ten years, never moved from its spot next to the door. She turned the corner into the living room, following the noise of the news that played on the television.

"Hi Nana, I'm home," she whispered as she kissed the frail old lady on the head. The old lady's shampoo smelled of lavender and mint as the gray and red curls fell around her thin face. It was obvious where Naomi got her beauty, with her grandmother carrying the same dark red hair, bright blue eyes, and thin face and body. The lady stood about 5 feet tall, but was almost 5 inches shorter with the hunch in her back. She did the best she could at her age but was losing the ability to care for herself every day.

Naomi's grandmother stood up from her yellow rocking chair, her pink polka dot nightgown falling loosely around her tiny body. Naomi helped her up, smiling as she did so, clearly showing her love and appreciation for the old lady. She tucked her arm under the old lady's shoulder and helped her to the kitchen, grabbing a cookie and shoving the whole thing in her mouth on the way past the dining room table.

Once her grandmother was situated at the table, Naomi grabbed two clean glasses from the cupboard. She opened the fridge and poured milk in each and then sat down with her grandmother and drank the whole cup. The news continued to play in the living room as the two got up from the table and sauntered around the small, antique-filled kitchen to prepare a dinner for them to share.

Cats
By Matija Mamula

Cats are small and little; they prance around plotting death.
Their four paws hit the floor stalking you.
Quietly, in the night, they make a decision on whether to pounce on their prey.
Must I say their prey?
Their prey is you, the owner who trusts a vicious creature,
this creature that rules the house without your consent,
that thrives off of biting and scratching when you are “playing.”
Cats are the devil reincarnated to make life a living hell.

Cats are majestic creatures that hold themselves with poise.
Following you around as you are their master and they love you,
meowing for attention and begging to be pet.
Cuddling and purring as their needs have been met,
their salmon cooked properly and their treats given daily.
The creature that only loves to play and show fondness through snuggles,
they thrive off of sleep and love and affection.
Cats are not devils but angels from above.

Northern Maine
By Matija Mamula

Northern Maine: leaves are full of autumn foliage.
Colors consist of orange, red, yellow, and brown.
Peaks of the mountain above the trees.
All of the tourists scurry to see the leaves.

Northern Maine: the sound of ducks and geese fly south.
Leaves hit the dewy grass as children laugh.
Axes slice wood in preparation of winter.
The bells ring as a signal for children to come in for supper.

Northern Maine: the smell of cinnamon fills the air as mom burns a candle.
Spices intermingle from pumpkin pie in the oven to
a hint of chili simmering in the living room on the old-fashioned wood stove.
Mom warms up apple cider to help warm up our bodies.

Northern Maine: apple cider fills everyone's cups; father’s is full of beer.
The crisp and bitter taste of Macintosh hits the lips of the children,
warm chili filling the stomachs with a hint of cumin reaching the back of their throats.
Pumpkin pie bakes in the oven, only to make everyone hungry again.

Northern Maine: wool socks bound to our feet tightened by Bean Boots.
Falling to the ground the dew soaks into jeans, only allowing our knees to be wet.
Soft gloves that grandpa gave the grandchildren protect fingers from becoming chilly.
Northern Maine: the fall is how everyone feels content as winter rolls around the corner.

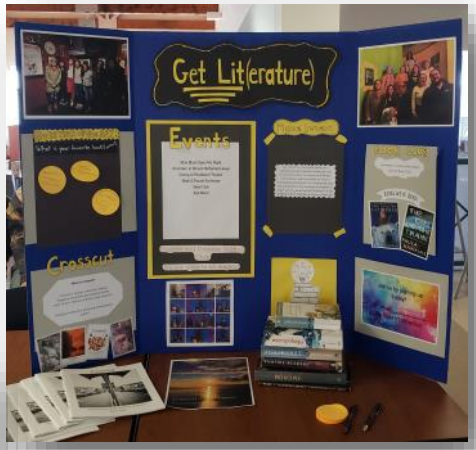
“Get Lit”: Husson University’s English and Creative Writing Club

Mission Statement: Our mission is to promote literacy and creativity, as well as develop leadership through service within the Husson University community and in Bangor and its surrounding communities. “Get Lit” fosters a comfortable environment of collaboration, and we welcome all students in hopes to bring awareness and attention to the English Program at Husson University.

Officers, 2021-2022: Faculty Advisor, Maria J. Cahill, Ph.D.
Dhesorae Labreck, President; Anna Coleman, Vice President and Secretary; Sam Stone, Treasurer.

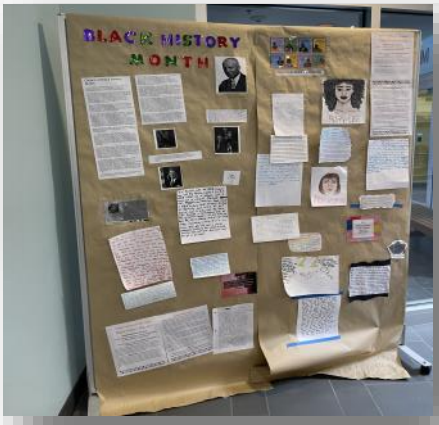
Activities/Events, 2021-2022

Club Fairs: September, January, and April
Urban Poetry and Art, National Day on Writing Celebration (October)
Urban Poetry and Art: Black History Month (February) (DEI Event)
BlueBlack Evenings, Open Mic: October
BlueBlack Evenings, Open Mic: March, Women’s History Month (DEI Event)
Fall and Spring Book Club
Movie Night/Supper (1)
Movie Night (2)
Penobscot Theatre: Miracle on 34th Street (Musical)
Service Activity — Earth Day: Book and Puzzle Swap
Service Activity — Ronald McDonald House Dinner (April)
Service Activity — Ronald McDonald House Library (April)
End of Year Get-Together



Club Fair


RMHC Library Team



Black History Month


Ronald McDonald House, Guest Chefs



RMHC Volunteers


Penobscot Theatre


***BlueBlack Evenings*, Open Mic**


National Day on Writing


Movie Night

