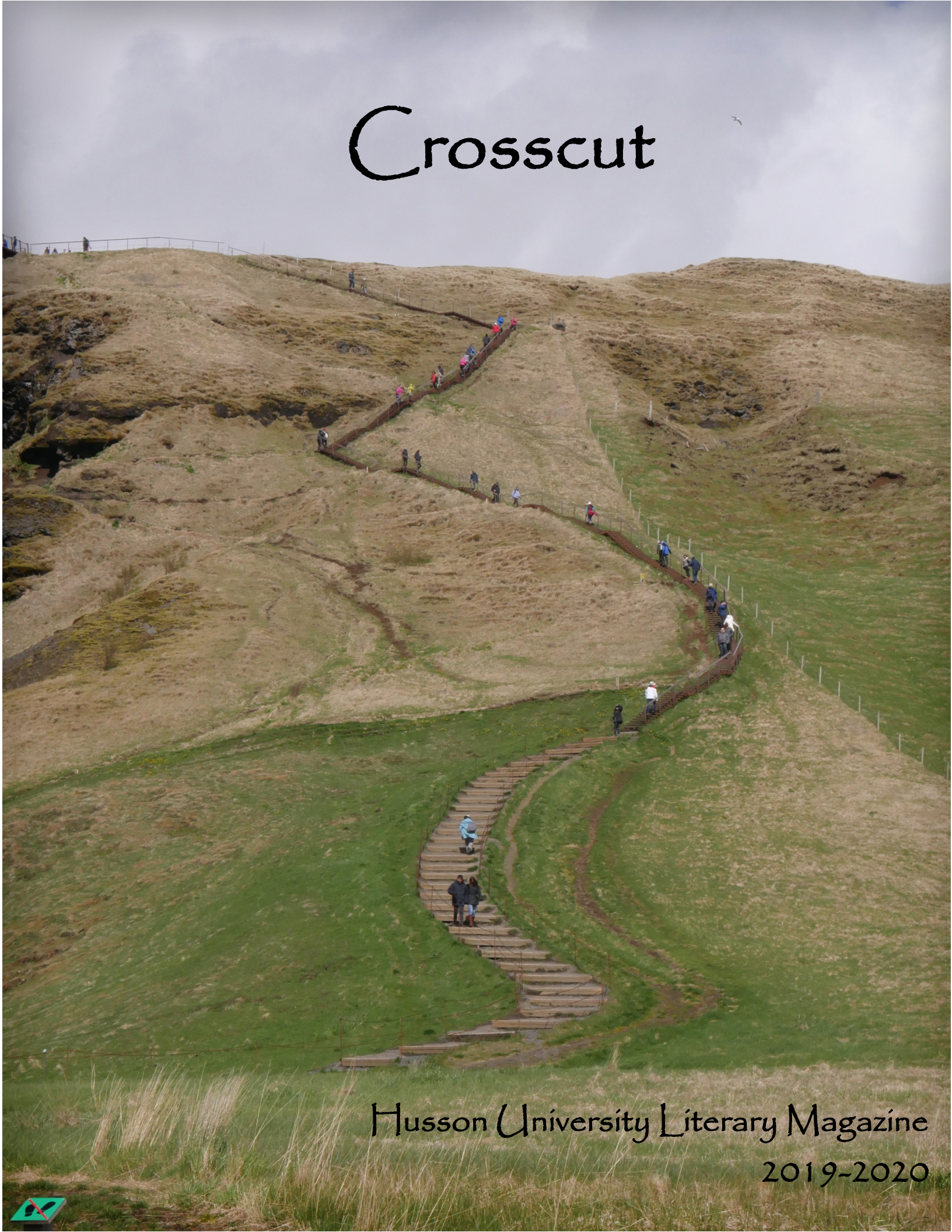
Crosscut



Husson University Literary Magazine

2019-2020

Welcome to the 27th edition of *Crosscut,* Husson University's literary magazine!

We hope that you will find, located in the pages of this magazine, writing and art that reflects, inspires, and entertains. *Crosscut* showcases the poetry, prose, essays, photography, and art of Husson University students in a quality publication. Each student submission to the magazine is selected through a juried process where the merits of the piece are carefully reviewed by the editors. We are proud to note that every student who submitted work to this edition of *Crosscut* is represented within its pages. We are fortunate to have students who produce such high-quality work participating in the arts and representing our school and its surrounding community.

We would like to specifically mention the selection process of this edition's front cover. We believe the photograph effectively symbolizes life's journey, the individual paths we, as humans, find ourselves embarking on, and the way that art allows us to express and reflect upon the "crosscut" of our lives and the relationships we have with others.

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 the next edition. We, the editors, would like to remind all readers that any full or part-time students who attend Husson University any time between September of 2019 and August of 2020 are eligible to submit work for the next edition.

The editors would like to thank the Husson University administration for their support and offer a special thanks to Dr. Patricia Bixel, Dean of the College of Science and Humanities.

Crosscut 2019-2020 has been a labor of love. Enjoy!

Maria J. Cahill, Ph.D., Editor
Kaitlyn Hill, Managing Editor
Janessa Corrigan, Associate Editor
Autumn Holzworth, Assistant Editor
Jade Hichborn, Assistant Editor
Kristen Polky, Assistant Editor
Malorie Martin, Assistant Editor
Rachele Tatosky, Assistant Editor

About the Editors

Each of this year's assistant, associate, and managing editors are either current students or recent graduates of the Husson University English program. They have all been active members of the Husson University Writing Center and the English and Creative Writing Club: Get Lit(erature), as well. Filling roles ranging from consultant to manager at the Writing Center, and from participant to officer in the English club, each editor has played a significant role in the growing presence of the English major at Husson University.

Kaitlyn Hill is a 2018 HU graduate who served as the president of Get Lit(erature) and as a Writing Center consultant and manager. Janessa Corrigan is a senior at HU and serves as the president of Get Lit(erature) and as a Writing Center consultant and manager. Autumn Holzworth is a senior at HU and participant of Get Lit(erature) as well as a Writing Center consultant. Jade Hichborn is a senior at HU, a participant of Get Lit(erature), and a Writing Center consultant. Kristen Polky is a 2019 HU graduate who served as the treasurer of Get Lit(erature) and as a Writing Center consultant. Malorie Martin is a senior at HU and serves as the vice president of Get Lit(erature) and as a Writing Center consultant. Rachele Tatosky is also a 2019 HU graduate who served as the vice president of Get Lit(erature) and as a Writing Center consultant and manager.

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Our contributors represent Husson University from a wide variety of degree programs. This year, our contributors are from marketing, communication technology, computer information systems, audio engineering, film/cinema studies, nursing, journalism, occupational therapy, psychology, journalism, video production, radio broadcasting, criminal justice, public health, healthcare administration, English, and secondary education.

English Degree

The English major at Husson University offers a degree that promotes the professional success of students and supports them within a close, highly interactive departmental family. Students who complete the English degree at Husson University find themselves prepared for a broad array of employment opportunities upon graduation. English students study with accomplished faculty from a variety of interdisciplinary backgrounds as they intensify critical thinking abilities, strengthen communication skills, and utilize current technologies. English majors become astute readers of literature and culture, builders of critical arguments, and writers of creative narrative and poetic texts. English majors and Husson students across disciplines are able to explore and hone their writing skills through a unique array of English and communications courses, such as creative writing, creative nonfiction, professional communication, technical communication, science writing, and playwriting.

English Graduates: Our recent graduates have found careers in a broad array of fields, including public relations, fundraising, finance, and teaching. Several have gone on to pursue advanced degrees in literature, law, rhetoric and composition, business, and health care.

Creative Participation: Students may challenge and express their creativity by participating in the English and Creative Writing Club: Get Lit(erature), the Husson University literary magazine, *Crosscut,* the annual celebration of the National Day on Writing, the newly established Husson Arts and Culture trip to Portland, Maine, and the biannual open mic event, "BlueBlack Evenings."

Opportunities for Service: Service is an important component of Husson University as a whole. Get Lit(erature) has teamed up with the Bangor area's Ronald McDonald House Charities in an effort to promote literacy beyond our campus by helping to supply and maintain the RMHC library. The club also volunteers at the Ronald McDonald House by cooking dinner for the families once a semester.

Writing Center: The aim of Husson University's Writing Center is to help students across campus develop effective writing strategies. To achieve this aim, the Writing Center employs undergraduate English majors, offering them the opportunity to use their skills to assist their peers in becoming better writers. In addition to guiding students through the challenges associated with writing, writing consultants also further develop their own writing abilities as they "do the work" in the field.

Crosscut Assistant/Associate/Managing Editors: Opportunities are available for English majors and other students across campus who are interested in working as editors for *Crosscut.*

The College of Science and Humanities offers these various intellectual, creative, service, and professional opportunities that allow students to publish, perform, organize, lead, and contribute not only to the English program but also to the Husson campus and the Bangor area community. For more information, contact Dr. Clifton Guthrie, Chair of Humanities, at guthriec@husson.edu or Dr. Maria J. Cahill, *Crosscut* editor and Get Lit(erature) faculty advisor at cahillm@husson.edu.

Please join us!

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By Janessa Corrigan

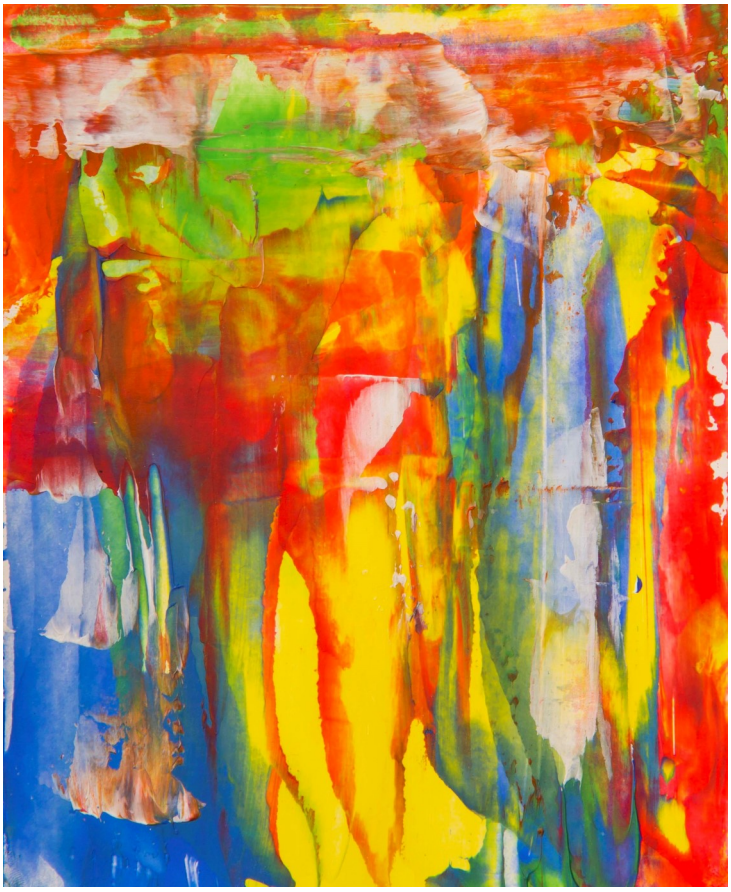
Anxiety and I
By Jade Hichborn

Anxiety and I sit together, squished, in the same chair.
We are two separate entities, but you would be hard-pressed to see where I end, and anxiety begins.
As my time to escape runs out, I realize it is here to stay.

I want space, but it does not. I try to stand and flee,
but it grabs me and wraps me in its arms. I try and focus,
but anxiety is slowly applying pressure to my ribcage and stomach. Our chair grows smaller by the minute.

When things seem to be at their worst between us,
anxiety calls for help. Not for me, of course.
Panic is its closest and only friend, but it is a powerful one.
Together, the three of us create a ménage à trois of the most painful proportions.

When we get home, I rip my clothes off and try and stop the feeling of suffocation.
I will move on, and we will try this again tomorrow.



By Allison Leighton



By Malorie Martin

You are You; I am Me
By Daisy Apraku

I come with no wrapping or beautiful pink bows.
I am who I am from my head to my toes.
I tend to get loud when speaking my mind,
even a tad bit crazy some of the time.
I'm not a size 0, nor do I want to be.
You are you, and I am me.
I try to stay strong when pain bottles me down.
And the times I break, there is no one to be found.
We are all human, not God, after all.
Embrace it and do not be dull.
“To error is human,” I think that's what they say.
Well, to me no one is perfect, anyway.

Traveling Thrift Store
By Malorie Martin

When I travel,
I can get nervous, anxious.
The traffic laws aren't the same
and people look at you funny
if you don't do the right thing.
It's the people who make me nervous,
not the new places or sights.
But there's one place that's always the same,
from Boston to Paris,
and it's the local thrift store
filled with second-hand clothes
and kitschy knick-knacks.
Here, I feel perfectly at home.



By Hannah Goodine

Accidents Happen
By Erica Larrivee

Accidents happen, so the saying goes.
They happen every day.
But what happens to those
who can't walk away,
who don't walk away,
are not speeding away?
Bloodied tires on pavement,
lives are cut short
in an instant.
Those who live another day,
those who make it across say
they see these figures
wandering the road, looking for what they
LOST.

Alone
By Julia Desrosiers

I have skin as white as snow.
I have hair as black as night.
I have lips just like a rose.
But I am just out of sight.
Beauty is my name.
My heart as cold as stone.
I am perfect from head to toe.
And yet I'm all alone.

Voice by the Ocean

By Autumn Holzworth

With a jolt, I regained my consciousness. Looking around me, I found myself lying on a rock and close to a sandy beach. My clothes were soaking wet. How did I get here? I wondered. Anxiety crept in my mind as I tried to recall how I ended up on the rock, with waves crashing and dying at my feet.

I noticed suddenly that the clouds appeared ominous, and I must have washed up during the storm that looked to be ending. Had I been on a boat? A surfboard? The memories were not registering or resurfacing… As I pondered the possibilities in my head, I realized that I recognized the beach that lay behind me. I grew up there. The memories that came to mind were of my family going there every summer when I was little. We went there so much that I felt the beach was my happy place, partly my home away from home.

The crackle of a wave hitting a nearby rock and the spray hitting my face brought me back to reality. It really bothered me that I couldn't figure out how I got there, and then I remembered that there was a phone in the hotel that stood past the beach. I could call my parents and see if they knew anything and if they could come pick me up. Deciding that this was what I wanted to do, I took a few steps away from the water's edge and heard a voice.

"Stay!" it whispered.

"What?" I said. No one appeared to be around or on the beach at all, so I was a little confused and fearful.

"Stay," the voice repeated. "Stay here a little longer."

"I must be going crazy," I said aloud. "First no memory and now hearing voices! Wow, something is wrong."

"Nothing is wrong. Just enjoy these peaceful moments, and you will be taken care of," the voice replied.

"Taken care of? What does that mean?" I asked. I began to look for any trace of where the voice could be coming from. Who was messing with me?

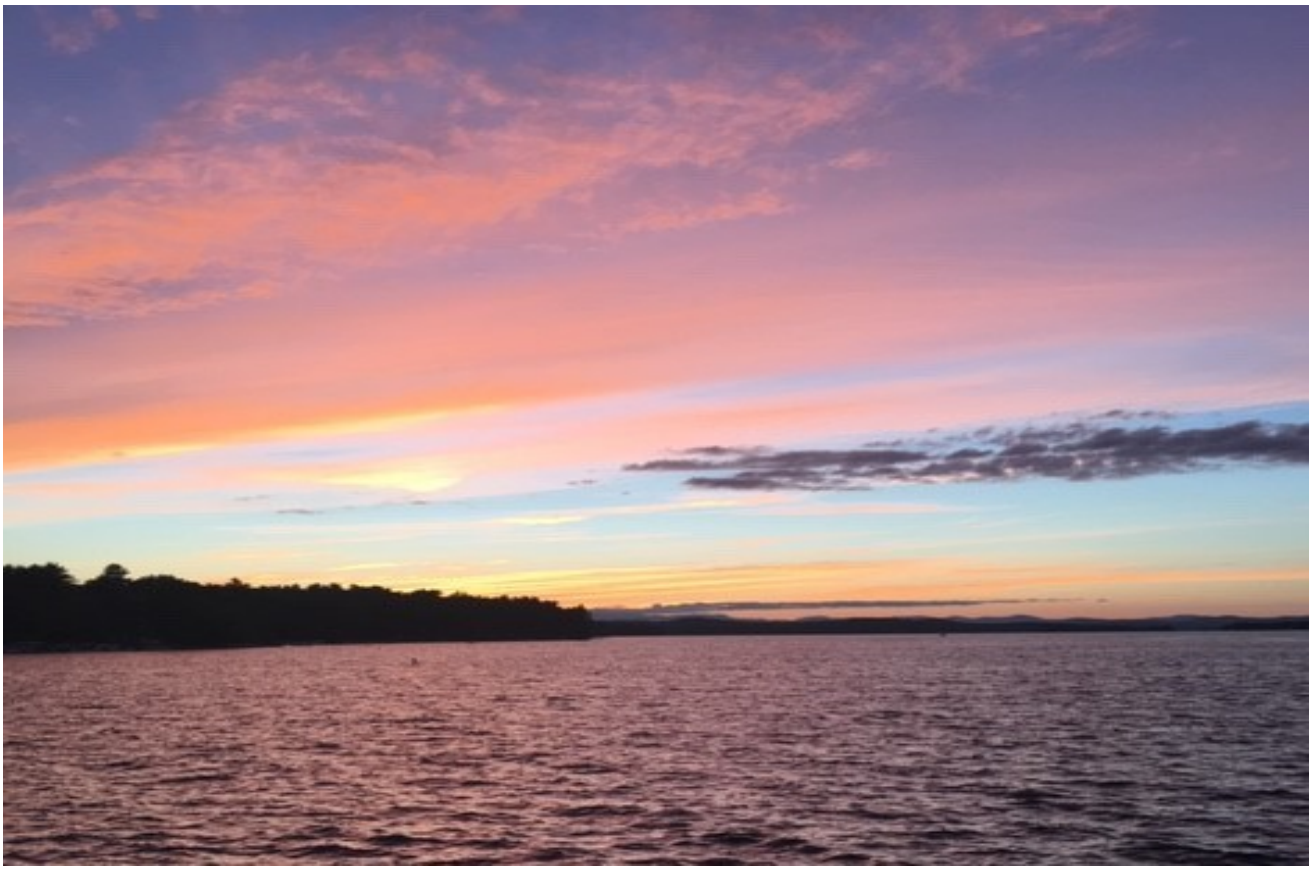
"As a child, do you know why you used to go to this exact rock?"

"No, I don't… What difference does it make?" As soon as I asked this question, I headed towards the hotel.

"You used to come here as a child to pray. Remember now?" the voice asked.

Halting to a complete stop, I almost tripped and fell into the cool sand beneath my feet. "Who are you?"

"I am that I am…"



By Janessa Corrigan



By Haley Morel

Numbers
By Julia Desrosiers

Three is the number of a crowd
that no one wanted me in.
Two is the number of a couple
that shares each other's sins.
One is the number of a loner,
which both of us have become.
Zero is the number I am
because without you, I'm not even one.

They Call Me
By Kristen Polky

They call me a fallen star,
the one who weeps without reason,
and who walks with no destination.

They call me a broken spirit,
the one who shivers in the blazing sun,
and who bleeds with no open wounds.

They call me a lost cause,
the one who acts with no purpose,
and who sins with a smile.

But I'll tell you a secret:

fallen stars bring lightened wishes,
broken objects become treasured antiques,
and most people who become lost never want
to be found.



By Cody Kalinka

Oculus
By Marcos Argueta Guevara

I'm staring in the mirror,
my reflection becoming clearer.
Yet, my view of myself is no different from staring
through a shattered mirror.
My vision a kaleidoscope of distorted images.
I cannot bear to witness these atrocities.
Fuck these damn mirrors.

Falling
By Malorie Martin

An old wooden fence,
a fragment of a picket
of an old dead tree.
Here longer than I will ever know,
and will remain
long after I lean on it
for support,
down the icy hill
to the sea.

Dolly Copp Campground: The Peabody River

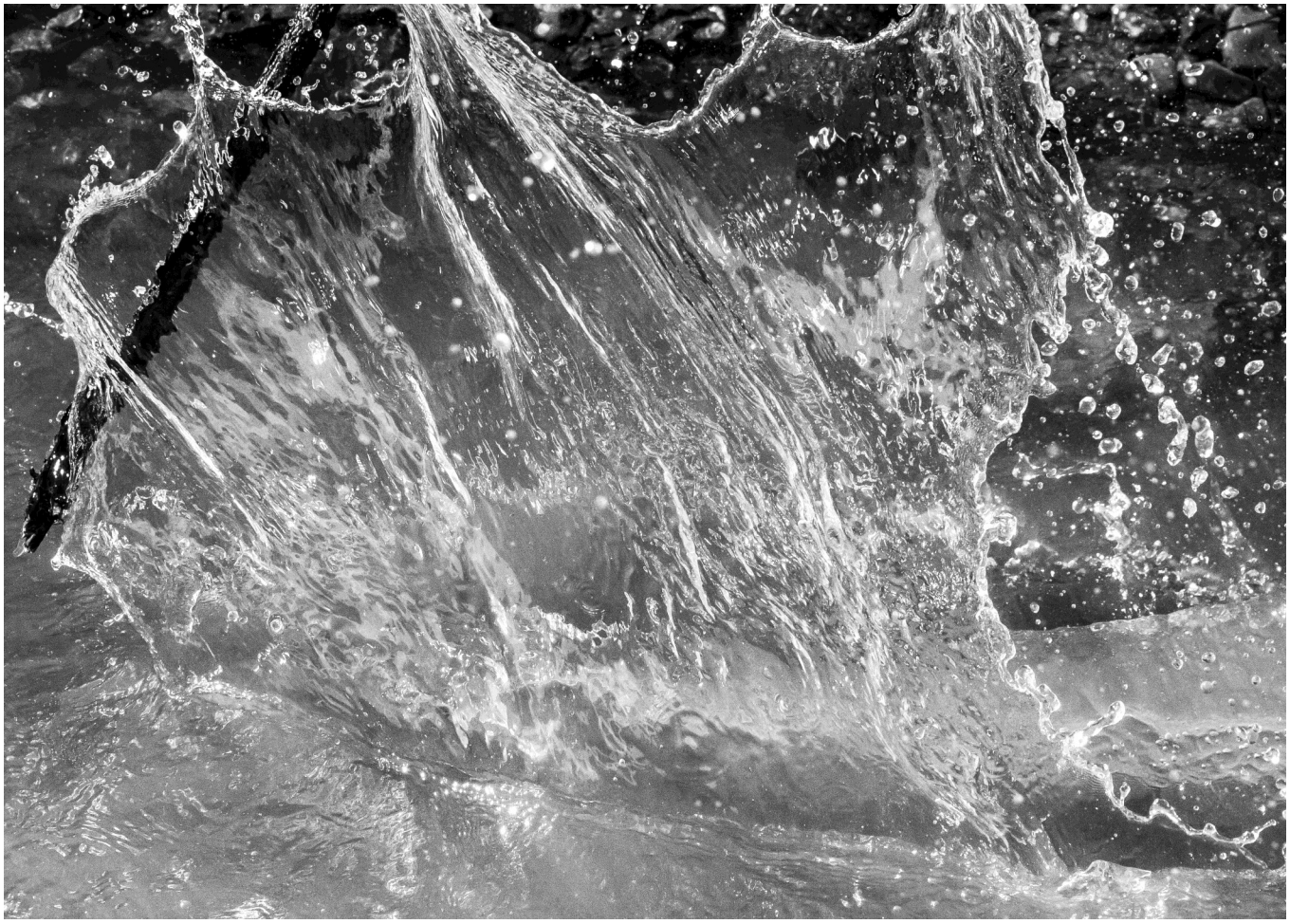
By Rachele Tatosky

Tall grass tickles my ankles as I take careful leaps to the river that my family and I only visit once a year — each step bigger than the one before it as the excitement in my twelve-year-old head gets more intense. The trickling of the water that flows steadily down from Mt. Washington gets louder and louder with each stride. The narrow path we are walking along gradually widens until I am standing in an open area of bliss.

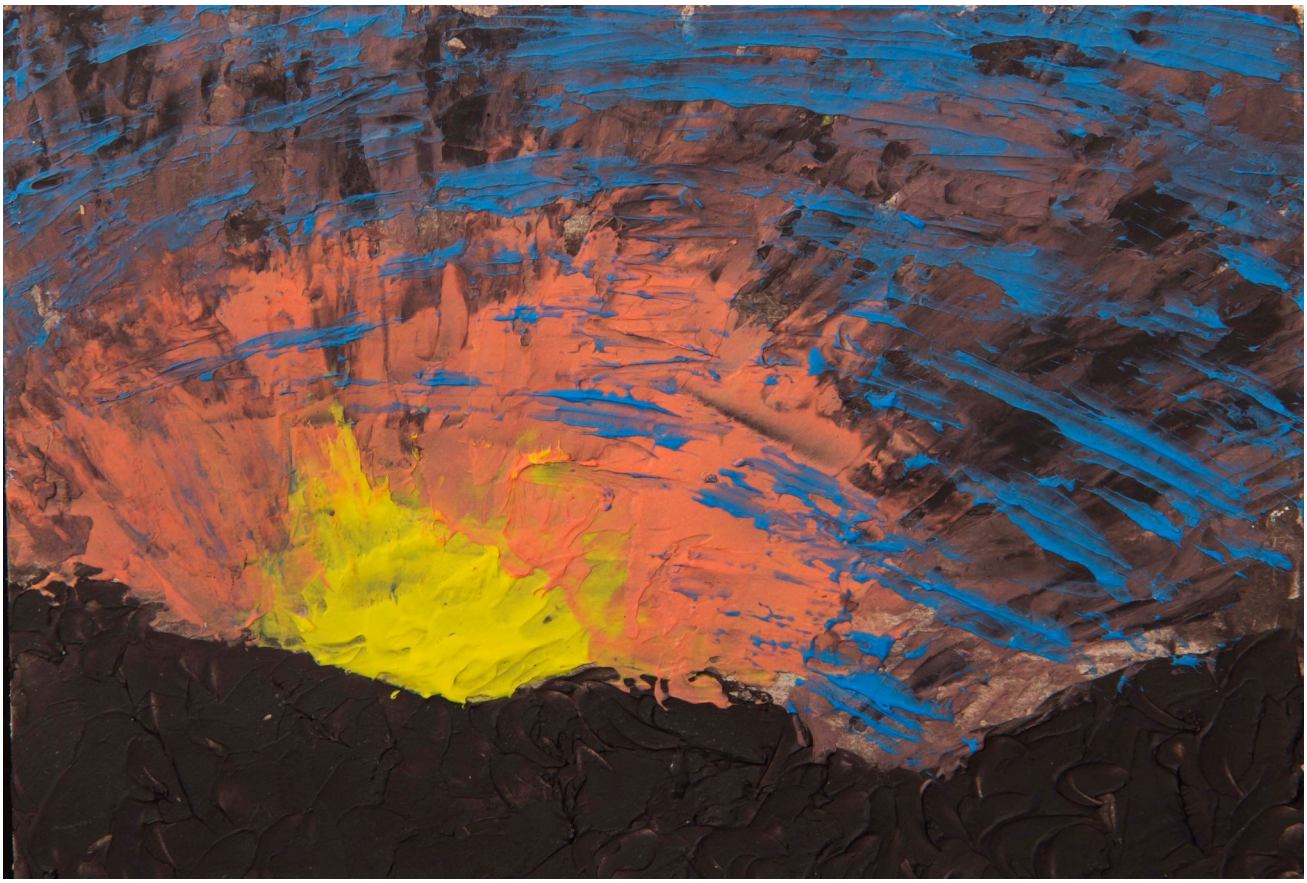
Before I am able to take one step closer to the river, my little brother flies by me like he has just discovered water. The wind from his fast movement chills my forearm. In this moment, I recognize the cold air that marks the transition from the woodsy area to the windy openness in which I am standing. My mother locks her left arm in mine but says nothing. I can hear her eagerness in her clenching teeth from smiling so hard. Together, we walk down to the river before taking our shoes and socks off and setting them on a bench hidden underneath a tree.

Touching my toes to the edge of the current, I am surprised by how cold it feels — a shock that should not be so shocking, as it is the beginning of September and we are reaching the colder months. I see tiny fish swimming amongst each other in front of me. I wonder to myself what they are called and why there are so many. I glance up and see my brother splashing his bare feet in the water; I then wonder how the fish are reacting to such movement.

I look to my left and all I see is more water, more trees, more open skies. I look to my right, and I see the same. Where does the river end? Why have I never wondered this before? The campground we are staying at is not that big, so I wonder how other people enjoy this same feeling, this same river. Does it end in someone's backyard, or next to the highway, a momentary glimpse that people experience going to work? The answers to these questions feel like they are miles away, like the end to this river I can't help but fixate on. SPLASH. My brother hurls water in my face, and I run after him for revenge, ignoring the cold and the swimming fish.



By Noah Hyde



By Hannah Goodine

Winter to Spring
By Rachele Tatosky

It finally feels like Spring.
Nighttime walks without mittens
or an extra pair of socks
to keep my toes from turning as red
as my cheeks did when the winter wind
skimmed my skin with the slightest touch.
Melted snow forming puddles of last season's
struggles that I now step over onto wet pavement.
Tar that is recovering from its hibernation.
Deep breaths of air on the verge of warmer weather.
Soil soaking up last month's snowstorm.
Sprouting flowers waiting to fully bloom—
beauty that is too vulnerable to mingle with the snowflakes
for four months straight.
I'm still sidestepping ice patches
and pulling my hat over my chilled ears,
but full fields of grass gasping for air remind me that
it finally feels like Spring.

Hidden Place
By Malorie Martin

Glimpses through the trees
of a land far away.
Untouched and unused
by man and his whim.
A doe's footprints lead me
down an icy, slippery slope.
And I know if I fall now,
no one will ever find me.

Wounded Warriors
By Julia Desrosiers

Chocolate hair and ocean eyes.
Sweet to the taste and mysterious to the mind.
A wounded warrior in a battlefield
with the scent of roses and blood.
Her crying eyes bring tears to all.
Her smiles bring lips to a grin.
And in the field, she found a soul
much weaker than her own.
So, trudging through mud and iron barbs,
she brought this soul home.

Breaking the Stigma: My Journey as a Foster Child

By Angelica Cain

"Goddamn it, Angel!" my dad screamed as I dodged the ceramic coffee cup he had just attempted to throw at my head. I cringed as he sat there infuriated. The cup hit the wall across the room and smashed. It left a clearly visible dent. I looked at him and tried to bite back tears. My eyes betrayed me, and I stared at my feet.

"I... I didn't mean to," I managed to stutter. My mother grabbed a towel to wipe up the coffee I had accidentally spilled in my dad's lap while attempting to hug him. This was his morning routine, minus the cup throwing. He would make his coffee and sit in his plush chair.

It was on a Sunday that a worker from the state decided to come to my house. I was twelve years old and I had been out of school for a while, terrified that something would happen to my mom if I left her alone with my dad. The teachers began to worry and called DHHS to send someone to check on me. There was a knock on the door, and I rushed to open it. I looked at the woman standing before me. She was the stereotypical business type: dark hair pulled back into a bun, crisp clothing, frown lines, and a clipboard that seemed to be permanently attached to her. She stared intently at me. Her eyes were a piercing blue and she gave me a kind smile. I stepped away to invite her in, and that's when my world was turned on its head. She asked my name and I told her. The next few hours were a blur. Before I knew it, I was packing a few things and being ushered off to my aunt's house "for a few days." Well, that few days turned into a few months, and now I've been in foster care for ten years.

About a month into my foster care experience, the state gave my mother a choice: she could either stay with my half-sister and me on the condition that she leave my abusive father, or she could stay with him and lose us. You can probably guess what she chose. My half-sister and I said our teary goodbyes, and after about three months passed, I was moved into a new foster home. These people were nice to me and they treated me with respect. The day my mother decided to abandon me was the best and worst day of my life. It was the day I decided to take my life into my own hands. It was the day I decided that I would make a better life for myself.

My time in foster care has become the biggest influence in my life because of my foster parents. They took me in, they showed me love, they didn't give up on me, and they showed me what a real family was. These people might not have given birth to me, but they are my parents as far as I am concerned. I do not consider this a temporary house — this is my home. For years I lived with guilt. I beat myself up emotionally for my mother leaving and my father's abuse. One day, I woke up and I realized that it wasn't my fault. I no longer sat on my ass and cried. I got up and did something about it. My grades improved greatly, and I was on the fast track to honor roll. One day my foster mom brought up something I had never had the opportunity to even consider back in my biological home: college.

I was excited at the prospect of the opportunity to make something of myself. I didn't have to live like my mom or my dad. I had the chance to pave a path of my own instead of following the one everyone expected or thought I was going to take because of the stigma on foster children. I didn't have to choose that life. I studied harder, worked harder, and tested better. Now, here I am with almost three years of college behind me. I couldn't be happier.

Back with my biological parents, college wasn't an option. We didn't make a lot of money and my parents weren't very educated. My own education wasn't a top priority until foster care came into my life. My foster parents are huge supporters, and they have been here for me through everything: my worst and my best. They taught me how to be a good person and that college could be a reality for me. I never thought I would be where I am today. I will never be able to thank my parents enough for the mistakes they made, and I will never be able to thank my foster family enough for supporting me.

Foster care has played such an important role in my life. I could have chosen to shut up and continue to live with the abuse. I could have stayed with my biological parents and dropped out of high school. However, I would never have gone to college. I never would have been able to have a career. Everyone thought I was going to end up like my parents or end up like other foster children: dependent on the state for the rest of my life. I had the free will to go or to stay — and I went. I was not going to allow the stigma on foster children to define me.



By Steve Densil

The Funeral Home

By Kristen Polky

The funeral home is a deathly quiet place with spacious rooms and a hollow atmosphere. The windows are draped with heavy velvet curtains, blocking out the morning sunlight and cascading the room in shadows.

I wait with the rest of my family, holding onto my mother's hand tightly. My older brother is here, and so are a few of my aunts and uncles. They talk quietly to the man who runs the funeral home. I stay silent and play with a loose string on my sleeve.

"I'm not going in," my brother states, going rigid at the sight of the door in front of us.

"You don't have to," my mother assures him. "It's alright. You can wait here."

My brother might not want to go in, but I do. I don't feel scared, nor do I feel mournful. If anything, I am curious and eager to see my father again. It's been three days now, but I still don't believe it. I don't believe that he could possibly be dead.

What is death, really? At ten years old, the concept is foreign to me. I don't really know what to expect behind that door, but I know my father is there, and I want more than anything to hug him. We are supposed to be saying goodbye, but I plan to ask him to stay. Surely if I begged hard enough, he would not leave us. My father always listens to me, and this time will be no different.

I enter the room with my mother. It is empty, save for a long and narrow casket by the window. The drapes are open in here, and the natural sunlight shines onto the casket to make the wood shimmer. I let go of my mother's hand and move forward hesitantly. My family stays back, but I know they are watching with bated breath as I peer inside the casket.

I am able to conclude straight away that the man in the casket is not my dad. He's wearing the same clothes, yes, and he has the same sickly pale face that he's had for months since the tumor's growth. But it's also not him. My dad, even at his weakest, is the warmest person in the world. This man, he is grey and cold and stiff.

I gently pick up his hand. It feels too heavy, and the skin is waxy and slippery. I let go, and it falls back to his side with a small thunk.

I feel my heart go as cold as the body before me. A whirlwind of emotions rattle my weary heart. I understand now that I should have stayed outside with my brother. When they told me that my father was here to say goodbye, this was not what I had been expecting.

I leave the room quietly, going back to the lobby where my brother waits. The remaining members of our family stay in the room with the casket.

"It's not him," I tell my brother, who stares at me with eyes that are a thousand thoughts away right now. "It's not Dad."

He doesn't answer me, but I don't mind. I understand death a little better now.



By Angela Daigle

The Human and the Queen of the Fae

By Erica Larrivee

It was a cold night when the Human met the Queen of the Fae. This would not initially come off as odd. However, the Human met the Queen of the Fae in the middle of summer, yet with her came a chill so powerful one could see their exhaling breath. Even this did not come as much of a surprise, as the Queen of the Fae's arrival was announced well in advance. A week prior, a note mysteriously appeared pinned to the town's message board located in the center of the small village, its source never seen. There, infinite black ink against pristine white parchment was a request. The Unseelie Fae, fairies most commonly associated with winter, wished to hold a court within the village boundaries to discuss several topics. The Fae, of course, were neighbors to this village. The Fae, being creatures of supernatural descent, live in places parallel to humans. A different realm so close and yet so far away, with spaces that overlap and influence each other. And because of these influences, agreements must be made.

The village really didn't have a choice. One simply does not write a letter to the Queen of Air and Darkness, Queen Mab, denying her request. And so, for a week, the town was abuzz with fear and anxiety. Humans did not truly understand the nature of the Fae; to them, the strange creatures were dangerous and unpredictable. So what could they possibly want with their village? To provoke the Queen of the Fae could bring a century of frost and shadow to their homes. Despite this, there was not a single soul frightened by the coming visitors, and they instead were filled with pesky curiosity. The Human was Nedeni, the town's courier who had knack for getting into mischief. She was known to meddle with forces beyond her, all for the pursuit of adventure. She was not nervous for a court to be held, but instead could feel her mind filling with dozens of questions she could ask these strange creatures.

Everyone knew when the time had come: the wind began to whip and grow frigid. The clouds began to gather overhead, blocking out the glow of the moon. Somewhere, in the distance and yet all around the village, the sounds of laughter and drums could be heard. From the mixed deciduous and coniferous woods that surrounded the village, figures began to leap, forming rows not like a marching army, but like a procession. The village fell silent; those of weaker constitution hid behind those who faked bravery. The group of villagers parted the way for the passing parade of creatures, nearly human but with features that reminded one of their chaotic nature: eyes slightly too large, smiles slightly too wide, limbs slightly too long.

As these creatures marched through town, Nedeni smiled, not finding the Fae at all scary or threatening, waving to some of the strange creatures. Then, a villager turned to her, eyes dark and jaw tensed.

"Do not let them see you," he said.

"Why not?" asked Nedeni, her own smile fading as she tilted her head.

"They are not your friends; they will never be your friends." He pointed forward toward one Fae holding a dark and tattered banner. “See how it smiles? It only does that because it craves flesh."

Then, she was seen: The Queen of the Fae. Flanked to her sides were creatures more animal and insect than human. Yet she stood out against all of these odd beings, for she was beautiful. Her limbs were not too long, her eyes were not too large, and her face was serene and commanding. Her skin was like porcelain with two long dark horns sprouting out of her head. Her hair wore a crown of silver spikes. She walked through the village streets with the confidence of a God, the air around her so cold it was nearly painful. Candles shook and extinguished in her wake, light itself repelling. The villagers trembled, much like the candle's flame. But Nedeni did not shiver in fear, but excitement. The excitement of the unknown. The excitement of seeing such a powerful creature.

"She's beautiful,” her voice was but a whisper; an exhale of wonder.

The strange creatures began to settle themselves at the back of the village, in and around the tavern, as it had two things the Fae desired for their court: a wide stage in the front, and a large chair for the Queen herself to sit upon. The court began innocently, well, it was about as innocent as it could be. The Queen of the Fae called forth several members of the town to request favors or commemorate them for their deeds. Thus was the nature of Fae Courts: not to decide justice or law, but to create formal requests. Soon, these requests became strange, calling forth all people with the letter “R” in their names, for no reason except the letter “R” is funny.

When this was called, and several people stepped forward reluctantly, the smaller Fae creatures fell into fits of laughter, proving the nature of the Fae to be unpredictable, and at times, childish. Then came the call for those who wore bells. Everyone turned to Nedeni, the village's big-hearted courier, whose tunic shone with dozens of tiny, silver, clamshell bells.

Her friends throughout the standing audience around the tavern stage turned to her with faces full of worry.

"Please, don't say anything stupid."

Nedeni walked by them, unfazed, walking through the crowd of people that surrounded the tavern. Other villagers just tutted their tongues sadly.

"It's too late for this one; she’s doomed."

Nedeni made her way to the edge of the stage, bells ringing through the silent crowd with every step. The smaller Fae creatures recoiled away, the sounds of bells painful to their sensitive ears. Nedeni looked up, a friendly smile plastered on her face as her eyes met with the Queen of the Fae’s. Bright blue eyes of a human met the infinite void of the Fae. There was a moment of silence, a breathless moment for those in the audience, until Queen Mab leaned forward, face nearly flush with the human’s.

"Why, aren't you precious?"

Nedeni let out an embarrassed, or perhaps flattered, giggle, clasping her hands together and swaying back and forth, trying to contain her excitement.

"Thank you!" said the human. "I try!"

The audience held their collective breaths as the Queen of the Fae let out a laugh of her own, a dark and deep chuckle that sent an icy wind through the village. They grew fearful that their beloved courier had misspoken. To upset such a powerful creature would certainly mean a curse, to speak only in rhymes or to be fearful of one's shadow. The Queen of the Fae once again spoke, a heavy silence falling upon the humans.

"And you succeed. How would you like a gift?"

Nedeni beamed, a large smile spreading across her face. A gift? From such a powerful creature? That was something that happened in story books, and tales of great heroes! And while she was no hero, she liked receiving gifts, especially from the powerful creatures.

"Oh boy! I'd love one!"

The Queen of the Fae smiled again, a grin that could send chills down the spines of fully grown men, but struck no fear into Nedeni. The Queen of the Fae beckoned Nedeni forward, and placed a single icy finger upon her forehead. This action filled the human's mind with the knowledge of the dark and forbidden forests that surround the small village, the gift of safe passage through the surrounding lands.

"You know," the Queen said, leaning back into her seat, "you would make a fine addition to my court."

The rest of the evening went by in a blur. Nedeni watched from the back of the audience as more and more people were called forth by the Fae for one reason or another — some for good deeds — but many more for bad ones. Eventually, the court came to an end, with droves of strange creatures once again leaving for the woods. Even the Queen made her graceful exit, and with her departure, the warm night air returned. But the thoughts of the Fae could not leave Nedeni's mind.

That night, Nedeni sat in her home — it was small and simple but cozy all the same — writing a letter by moonlight and the dancing flame of a stubby candle. Her quill scratched along the rough paper, her letters big and blocky. The voices of her friends and the other townsfolk raced through her head, warning her that she was being foolish, and that she would regret this. But as she wrote, she felt no regret, no hesitation. She felt as if she was meant to do this.

"Never tell your name to a Fae, Nedeni. Names hold power," a wise friend once told her.

Nedeni's quill left the paper, and she began to blow upon the ink to speed up its drying. She left her small home quietly, letter in hand. She travelled the short distance to the edge of town, to the edge of the dark and forbidden forest where the Fae were said to live. She placed the letter down upon a flat stone, paper glowing in the moonlight. With a slight tug, she ripped a single bell off her tunic, setting it next to the letter. With a content look on her face, the human walked home. The letter read: "My name is Nedeni Silvernote. I would like to join your Court."

The next day, the letter was gone, and the rock it once sat upon was glistening with frost.

Several months passed before the human again had contact with the Fae. It was midway through August, and the boiling humidity made it well known with muggy and motionless air. The townsfolk continued on as normal, living their everyday lives, as if they had forgotten about their brush with the supernatural. The courier, however, did not forget her chance meeting with the Fae or the note she wrote, the promise she left on the stone that fateful night, as she went about her normal daily duties. Things did not remain normal for long, as the hot evening of August suddenly grew cold, and an icy wind ripped through the town.

The small township began to jitter with nerves; people fled into their homes or remained frozen in the streets with fear. Nedeni, however, once again began to swell with renewed excitement. The people of this town knew that the Fae, especially those of the night and winter, rarely arrived unannounced. This could only mean bad things for the town. This could only mean death and destruction. People began to panic, pray, and question what they could have done to invoke the wrath of the Fae. Voices silenced themselves when the sound of a single drumbeat began to emanate from the woods.

DUM.

DUM.

DUM.

DUM.

DUM.

DUM.

DUM.

DUM.

DUM.

DUM.

DUM.

DUM.

The drums grew louder and louder and closer and closer. More people began to flee, the echoing of the drum inspiring terror. The courier did not feel terror. Instead, she found herself drawn to bounce up and down to the beat of the drum, in some sort of enchanted dance.

The bells along her tunic joined the sound. She laughed in glee as she danced to the drumbeat; the other villagers watched in horror and confusion. Two figures emerged from the treeline, both inhuman and strange in their own ways. On the left stood a tall robed man, pale skinned, with dark rings around his glowing yellow eyes. In his hand, a book and quill. At a moment's glance, he looked human, but the same could not be said about the creature to the right.

There stood a large, twisted Fae with the body and face of a large hog but the limbs of a man. Protruding from his back were eight twitching and fuzzy spider legs that clung to the nearby branches of the forest. In his hands was a simple hide drum, which he continued to beat as the pair of Fae entered the town. The two headed right for the courier, who was resting quietly at the edge of the village in a grassy patch. Several people hurried to her defense, as if they feared the creatures would be malicious towards her, but they found themselves physically driven away by the presence of the Fae.

The two creatures loomed over Nedeni, glowing eyes glaring and twitching spider legs rubbing her face. She did not cower. The pale man spoke first, a breathy and strained voice.

"Small human. We found your letter. Our Queen was quite..."

“Amused!” the hog-faced man chimed in, squealing.

The pale man rolled his eyes and continued. “Yes… amused… and she has considered your offer… and accepted.”

Nedeni's heart beat faster, nearly drowning out the man's voice in her ears. She blinked several times, as if trying to wake herself from a dream.

“She… She did?" her voice sounded less confident than she hoped.

The pale man nodded.

“Well... what do I do? How do I join?" Nedeni asked.

"Speak your wish aloud, three times!" the hog-faced man shrieked.

“Such is the nature of the Fae. To speak it aloud three times is to make it so,” the pale man continued.

Nedeni drew a deep breath. She closed her eyes. “I wish to join the Fae court.” She paused a moment, opening one eye and looking for the reactions of the two Fae before her. "I wish to join the Fae court," her voice trailed off into the silent village. She exhaled, opening her eyes. "I wish to join the Fae court!"

The two figures reached out, both grabbing a shoulder. Everything around Nedeni grew dark. The voices of the humans in the village faded as all she could hear was the rushing wind. The falling snow. The Void.

Nedeni felt strange, nearly frozen in place as the strange figures departed through the woods, leaving just as suddenly as they arrived. Her friends gathered around her, trying to get her to respond. Her whole body felt cold, impossibly cold, as if winter itself had entered her very being and struck her to the bone. She had never felt so alive. She smiled, exhaling a plume of breath into the chilly air around her.

But not everyone in the village was as excited as Nedeni. In fact, people she used to call neighbors and friends began to see the young human as a threat. They began to alienate her, pushing her away. They avoided her, both out of fear of the Queen and their fear of this unknown union. Humans did not join the courts of the Fae. This was unheard of. And on the days and nights that Nedeni felt the most alone, she journeyed to the land of the Fae, traveling through the twisting paths of the dark and forbidden forests, to spend time with creatures who did not fear her. In fact, the Fae reveled in her bravery and in her spontaneity. And during these trips, Nedeni found herself visiting Queen Mab.

In a way, everything about the realm of the Fae, and by extension, the Castle of the Queen of Air and Darkness, was foreign. The realm sat in perpetual twilight, the sky a dusty gray with small specks of starlight. The trees grew impossibly large and impossibly dark, their bark near ink in color. Even the castle itself, large and imposing with silver spires and dark marble halls, was empty: devoid of other creatures or decoration. Nedeni’s bells echoed through the vast space. It should have been frightening, but the courier felt at home here. The throne chamber of the castle was beautiful in a tragic way. Ice and frost clung to the dark stone walls and floor; silver and iron pillars stretched into the shadowed ceilings. Queen Mab sat alone in this room upon a throne of bone and ice.

At first, these visits were short and formal. Nedeni would enter and bow and ask about the going-ons of the court. But Nedeni quickly noticed that the Queen did not wish to talk about politics. Instead, she wanted to talk about everything except politics: how Nedeni's day was going, what she enjoyed eating, her favorite books and stories. Nedeni gladly told her about all aspects of her life, and as she spoke, Queen Mab listened with intent and care. At first, Nedeni was shocked; a creature beyond mortality was speaking of topics that all humans talked about. And more than that, Queen Mab desired a companion to play with, such as cards and dice games and games of storytelling and charades, just like a human would.

"I don't understand,” Nedeni said one day while the two engaged in a card game. "Why is everyone so afraid of you? You've been nothing but kind to me. You've taken me in and never harmed another human. And yet, everyone is still afraid of you."

Mab waited a moment before answering, resting her cards on the floor.

”I think, my dear Nedeni, people fear what I represent. Winter… darkness… They’re associated with aspects mortals fear: starvation, danger, death. All of these concepts brush up against my domain. Because of this, I make mortals nervous and afraid; they are afraid of all the bad I oversee."

Mab smiled, and Nedeni could feel something stir in her stomach.

"But you, my dear Nedeni, you do not fear me because you can look beyond what is bad and frightening about me and

into the positive things that I am. I am rest and I am the fresh snow in the morning. I am wind in the leaves, and I am the starry sky. Because you can see these, you do not fear me. I suppose that is why I have taken a liking to you. My halls are far too quiet without your bells."

Nedeni blushed, a rosy tone brushing across her cheeks.

News spreads quickly in the lands of man, and the same could be said about the whispers of Nedeni's budding relationship with Queen Mab: of how the young girl snuck into the woods at night and returned with skin and hair covered with ice. This only struck more fear and hatred into the hearts of the villagers. Some feared that Nedeni had lost her soul to the Queen of Darkness. Others feared that Nedeni was going to betray the village and set forth an army of chaotic forces. Most began to avoid her altogether, some rallying for her banishment, others pleading with her to leave the Fae court, as it would be the only way to preserve her mortal soul.

One of the other villagers, an elderly man, humored the younger human. He was a traveling tinker, new to the village. He had lived a long life and thought he had seen it all, until he met Nedeni. One night, as friends began to gather around the fire pit in the center of the village to discuss the day, he began to question her about her involvement with the Fae court.

"Nedeni, I've heard some rather… odd rumors about you and the Fae."

Nedeni frowned and turned her head away slightly.

"I won't judge you, and I certainly don't want to accuse you of anything," he said quickly, noting the young girl's sullen expression. "But...why that Fae court? You're so… joyful and full of life! The Unseelie court… Well, to be honest, they are creepy." The man quickly held up his hands, defensively. "No offense!"

Nedeni grinned, shaking her head. "None taken!"

The man continued, his face still quizzical. "And the ruler..." he lowered his voice, "Queen Mab… isn't she… cruel? How can… how can you…?"

"Love her?" Nedeni interjected. The man just nodded.

"Well, for awhile, I really didn't know. She frightens people, and the domains she lords over are often seen as frightening or evil. But I've gotten to know her better than most humans ever will. And the more time I spend with her the more… human… she feels to me. She's not a monster. I think she's lonely. She lives in a palace of ice and darkness where even her subjects fear her. People warn me that she isn't capable of love, but I don't think anyone's ever tried to love her. And I think that's what she needs."

The tinker listened thoughtfully, nodding along. And once Nedeni stopped speaking, he grinned, ruffling her hair affectionately before turning back to the fire.

"You'll be alright, Nedeni. You're in good hands."

From there, things only began to grow more tense in the passing months, as the summer found its end and the fall's beginning. This tension was not between Nedeni and the Fae, whom she now called her friends, but between the courier and the humans she used to consider family. They chastised her. How could she be so foolish? How could she be so naïve? These creatures would corrupt her very soul. In the end, she would be discarded, like a child growing tired of a beloved toy. But Nedeni refused to believe this. Every encounter she had with the Fae was pleasant and playful. They led her through the dark forests when she got turned around. They sang her songs and told her riddles in the glow of the moon. They spoke of her with such respect.

Things reached a breaking point when the small Fae began to venture into the village, looking to play with Nedeni, only to be met with blades. Nedeni stood over the bloodied corpses, shocked and confused. How could the townsfolk hurt innocent creatures just wanting to play? But the other humans did not see the Fae in the same way. They saw creatures of chaotic natures coming to corrupt their homes, to spread darkness and cold like a plague. Nedeni refused to hear these justifications, these superstitions. Without a word, she left the village, walking with no destination in mind, confusion and pain clouding her heart. Eventually, she found herself off the path and into the wintery realm that the Fae inhabit. She wandered through the inky blackness, walking around the pines drooping with snow despite the summer heat that took over the rest of the world. Eventually, she found herself in the throne of her beloved Queen.

The Queen of the Fae looked down upon the weeping human as Nedeni began to pour her heart out, weeping into her hands.

"I just don't understand. How can they not see you, and see the Fae, in the same way I do? I thought that by joining this court, I could show the humans of my village that there is nothing to fear, that we can live together in harmony. But I see now that this is impossible. The humans will never be able to see past their fears. Our people will never be able to understand each other, and there is nothing I can do about it."

After a few moments of silence, the Queen of the Fae reached down, scooping the human off the floor and into her freezing cold lap. Nedeni found that she didn't mind the cold.

"You have been very brave, my little human, standing up for what you believe in, even when all others cast you aside. The humans of this village, they do not understand us, and they do not understand you. They think of you as a victim, a child who cannot find her own way. And I think it's about time they are given something to think about."

The Queen of the Fae again brushed aside the hair on the human's forehead, pressing her cold lips against her flushed flesh. Darkness took over.

The next morning, Nedeni was again seen in town, chipper and silly as always. But the townsfolk stood confused. Something was different about their beloved courier. Her limbs looked longer, her eyes larger, her skin paler. On her forehead was a single inky kiss mark.

Nedeni smiled, a puff of icy air escaping from her parted lips.



By Sommer DeAguilar

Dad

By Hailey Akers

Most people would look at the day a baby is born as an amazing, happy day they will never forget. A new baby has been added to the family! The whole family gathers to experience this unforgettable event, borrowing tissues and taking photographs of the new blessing that has joined the world. In my case, it is a different story. Two healthy babies were born into my family, but their birthdays were somewhat tarnished by the fact that their father had passed away two hours before they were born in the very same hospital that they were delivered in. The family did not know how to react, how to help this mother that would now have to take on the world with two newborns and her husband lost to cancer. How would she be able to give these babies the lives they deserved? Was she mentally in the right place to bring home newborns to an empty house? I am one of the twins who was born under these bittersweet circumstances, and this is my story about living with the emotional turmoil of my dad's absence.

Growing up as a family of three was normal to me. Three places to set at the dinner table every night, one driver chauffeuring the two of us around in the back seats, one mother with two laps for both of us to sit on. Laughter and happiness always radiated from our home; "The Three Musketeers!" was what we'd announce as we left the house or arrived at our destination. It wasn't until I was around eight years old that I noticed something was a little bit off with my family. My friends would be dropped off at school with their fathers driving the cars and their mothers kissing them goodbye from the passenger seat, which I found funny since my mom was always the one to drive me and my sister places. Teachers would skip me when the class activity was creating Father's Day crafts, saying, "Maybe there's something else you'd rather make?" with a sad glint in their eyes, an expression that confused me. I asked myself why my teacher was sad and why people avoided talking about their fathers when I was around. *Why don't they get it? I simply don't have a dad like the rest of you,* I would think, annoyed that people didn't understand.

As I grew older, I realized that I longed for a male role-model in my life. I became more curious about my father and found myself spending late nights investigating old scrapbooks and photo albums that my mom had kept in the bottom of her closet. I would bring a flashlight and spend hours wondering who this foreign man was that was hugging and kissing my mother. He was tall, dorky even, with a lopsided smile glued to his face in the majority of these pictures I began to cherish. I started to become angry at the world that I had lost my father before I even met him. I found myself becoming attached to my male basketball coaches and would take their game advice to be life advice as if it were from my dad. I also found an outlet in my mom's brother. He is a woodsman, just like my father was. When he embraced me, I would squeeze his strong, sturdy arms and pretend that it was my father's embrace.

At the age of thirteen, I became even more avid about how we didn't fit into the social norm.

"Why haven't you gotten a new father for us?" I asked my mom. "This isn't normal. All of my friends have dads and it isn't fair." I stomped up to my room, jerked the covers over my face, and curled into an angry, rebellious ball. *It isn't fair! Why doesn't mom want to give us a new dad?* My friends sometimes asked if my mother was seeing anyone, clearly a question mimicked from the mouths of their parents. Well, why wasn't she? It had been thirteen years, and she hadn't even tried.

Looking back now, I see that my mother was fiercely protective of her twins. She had always been the only person to protect us, and my family says that she wouldn't date until we had grown up because she didn't want to bring an outsider into our home. Just at the apex of my multi-directional frustration and in the prime of my young teenage years, my mom found a boyfriend — one I didn't initially like. I had always pictured our new father looking just like the man from the pictures, but this man was a short, stout stranger. *How could she just replace my dad? This was not what I was hoping for!*

I spent time thinking about what my family was like before the new man. Things should be "normal" again, with just my mother and my sister. I spent long, restless nights staring out my bedroom window gazing at the stars. What would my dad think of what my mom was doing? There was a storm traveling carelessly throughout my mind, a whirlwind of what-ifs, what-could-have-beens, why the universe had wanted things to be this way. Then I realized: all my dad would have wanted was for my mom to be happy. So much time had passed since he had been gone, and he would want someone to take his place and finally give my mother some rest. This new man, named Clayton, now sat in the empty seat on the couch where there used to be an absence. He cooked for us, made us laugh, treated us to dinners, and made all three of us feel special. He began to drive us around, introduce us to his family, and build a relationship with me. I even slip up sometimes and call him dad.

I still long to know my father, to hear his voice and to feel his embrace. I cope with these emotions by knowing that there must have been a reason for my life to begin the way it did, and that there is a time and a place where I will finally get to meet him. My mother is one of the most driven, hard-working people I have ever met, and I know that losing her husband shaped her into this incredible role model for her children. I find deep peace in knowing that she is being taken care of now, maybe even that there is a burden lifted off my shoulders. Growing up with a single mom has opened my eyes widely on how to appreciate life and love as hard as possible. Growing up with a father in heaven has taught me to work hard, to be a good person, and to be compassionate to make him proud.

This Time of Year

By Syrena Clark

Trees burst with yellow. So, dust to dust. Maine sighs the last taste of summer from her mouth. We bundle ourselves fast beneath our jackets. We steel ourselves against the growing hum of winter weather. Rain threatens ice. We breathe fog into the cold air. I am at peace during this time of year. Loose-fitting sweaters hang placid from my frame, and I can tuck a scarf beneath my chin, or press a hat against my head. I am at home underneath big red maple trees. I love the way stories of New England hauntings sound when read aloud from dog-eared thrift store books with bent bindings. I love sweet apple cider. I love when round pumpkins with funny grins begin appearing on old porches. I love chimneys exhaling, their ragged and tired throats expelling pale grey smoke. I love the sound of boots clattering and the sight of children fetching their costumes as they laugh into a dark night sky.

My voices like it, too. Constantly whispering in awe at the beauty, they too steel themselves in anticipation, covering my brain in a soft blanket.

Soon it will be winter.

Winter means depression, or worsening depression, anyway. But right now, it's autumn and there are pumpkin pies and ghost stories to be had. A cozy night clasps hot chamomile tea in her hands.

She says, "Drink up." And I do. I sleep best this time of year. Buried beneath a mound of comforters, the cool air slows my too-fast heart.

"Slow down," says the cool autumn air, "slow down. Don't miss this."

Standing at the base of an old maple tree, arms wrapped around her trunk my fingers cannot reach. A great, wide, trunk juts off into the sky. It has lived three or four times the length of my own life. Each autumn she dies and in the spring she is reborn.

"Look at my resiliency," she mutters. Her big branches shiver in the cold, and her leaves fall into a pile at my feet. "I can show you how to be this way."

Autumn is, after all, a practice in the acceptance of our own shortcomings.

"We all need time to rest," she whispers.

All the pumpkins smile. A black cat, who is not mine, yawns on my porch and stretches to life. He is a big tomcat, who knows it, too. He lets out a silly noise from between his teeth. Cats rest when they need it, which is often enough. The tomcat naps in the apricot autumn sunshine.

"Winter is for resting," says Nighttime, her body stretched across the sky.

"And in the spring," the cat purrs, "we will stretch to live again."

The cool air captivates me.

"Winter is okay," I say.

The cat agrees, lazy voice full of sleep, "Don't fear time for recuperation."

The trees shift. "We couldn't go on so long without it," the trees say, their voices like the wind, talking all at once.

Bittersweet and rose and wine. Cherries and chestnuts. The colors this time of year are without names. Wordless colors tossed across treetops and all the way across mountains which will soon be powdered in light, quiet snow. And against the blue sky, birds fly south, squirrels gather acorns, and the resident porcupine steals corn cobs from the aged corn fields. Cobwebs gather and the furnace kicks on. Each morning grows colder. Hot soups in hot, steamy kitchens are stirred. Ghosts come out at night and stand around their ghostly fires that burn the color of nothingness.

Everything is still, except a lone buck that stands at the edge of the woods, hooves stamping in the dirt. Antlers like strong arms grow stronger with each exercise. He grunts and twists his head to look into the forest. A great silence beats within it. Suddenly, he turns and runs against the winter wind, his dark eyes like two black marbles inside his head.

The trees shudder. The pumpkins grin. The cat is lazy and warm. Nighttime, with her heavy arms, comes earlier now. And against the dark, a deer races, his heart pounding beneath his chest muscles. His bovine skeleton will come apart and vanish into the soil before the spring.

"Rest," says the cat. "You're tired."

I try to sleep. I'm always trying to sleep. I feel like I become an impression of a ghost: sheet thin and thinking about tombstones. One second, I am the great hibernation, the next, a hummingbird, with two heartbeats and a mouth full of language.

The deer races.

The deer races.

Behind him, the forest turns pale and blushes at her naked body. Fall is her favorite season to be naked. Autumn reassures us that spring will come. After all, you cannot have life without death.

Sunday Breakfast Candy

By Nicholas Schlosser

The Journey

The Sunday breakfast of pancakes was only possible because of the syrup acquired for them. The syrup was the most quintessential part of the meal, as it tied everything together like a beautiful and tasty bow. The grade A maple syrup came from Suga County Products. It was probably a 40-45 minute drive from my house in Winthrop. The rural roads and weather can cause this trip to be far further than just quickly running to the supermarket for some fake syrup concentrate, a journey well worth it. On the way there, one could see two other sugar shacks, but their maple syrup just didn't compare. I had been consuming this maple syrup since I was a toddler at my grandparents' house. They fed me that syrup, as well as my dad, aunt, and uncle when they were kids. This syrup holds a special place in our family's heart, and it wouldn't be a proper pancake breakfast without it on the table.

The Call to Action

Two of my friends decided to stay over last night. That meant a late night of playing video games, laughs, and shenanigans. These nights are usually fueled by a 12-pack of Mountain Dew shared between the trio, and this night was no different, except that this Mountain Dew was the Voltage flavor instead of Original. We ended up going to bed at around two in the morning. Honestly, it was earlier than normal, but we had a long day of Airsoft battles in my backyard prior to the night. We went to bed, and the only thing collectively on our minds was the pancakes to be served upon our awakening.

"Are you boys ready?" My dad's yell boomed through the house, waking Jake up.

Jake turned over and noticed me and Berry still fast asleep in my bed, so he scurried over to wake us. He shook us so violently you would have thought the house was burning down to the foundation. We woke up in a fluster, questioning Jake for his actions, but then a sweet smell came wafting under the bedroom door and into all three of our noses.

"I said, 'are you boys ready?'" My dad yelled a second time following the silence returning his last call.

A group "yes!" came from the bedroom where the three of us bolted out of the room and the mad rush for pancake supremacy began. Berry forgot to put on a shirt, so when he turned the corner, my sister yelped in fright, causing Berry to go back for a shirt. *Great, he just lost his place in line for pancakes. I'm one closer.* I always had to let guests go first when the pancake selection process began, but this gave me a reason to sneak ahead. *How can I become first?* I saw Jake heading to the fork drawer and asked him if he could find me the one with the blue and green handle. The joke was on him: we didn't own one like that in the house. While he was digging away, I walked over to the main dining table with my plate, and like the savage my parents tried not to raise, I stuck my bare hands into the pile, looking for the ones with the goldest, most crispiest edges of the bunch. When it comes to these pancakes, all hope is lost. Everything goes blank once those pancakes make it into my line of sight.

Jake finally realized what I did after my dad asked what he was doing, and gave me up. Berry had come back with his beaten up Metallica t-shirt on. They then picked through the remains while I sat there eating the best of the best. Am I selfish? No, not normally, but breakfast candy causes a weaker moral code to be followed in my mind.

The Recipe

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 3 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 cup sugar (I usually beg for more)
- 1 1/4 cups whole milk
- 1 egg
- 3 tablespoons butter melted
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract

Steps

1. Mix all dry ingredients in a bowl.
2. Mix all wet ingredients in a separate bowl.
3. Whisk both together in a single bowl.
4. Heat skillet to medium-high heat and melt a knob of butter (has to be butter) in the pan.
5. Use a small ladle, enough to make a silver dollar-sized pancake. Ladle a portion into a freshly melted sea of butter. (This allows for a golden round crust atop the pancakes, giving the pancakes their candy-like qualities.)
6. Cook on one side until bubbles appear, then consistently check for browning on the opposite side of the pancake. Once a good crust has formed, flip the pancake and cook until the underside has a nice brown color and the pancake feels firm to touch, indicating no wet dough remains.
7. Serve with Suga County Products grade A maple syrup.

Moral Pancake Contention

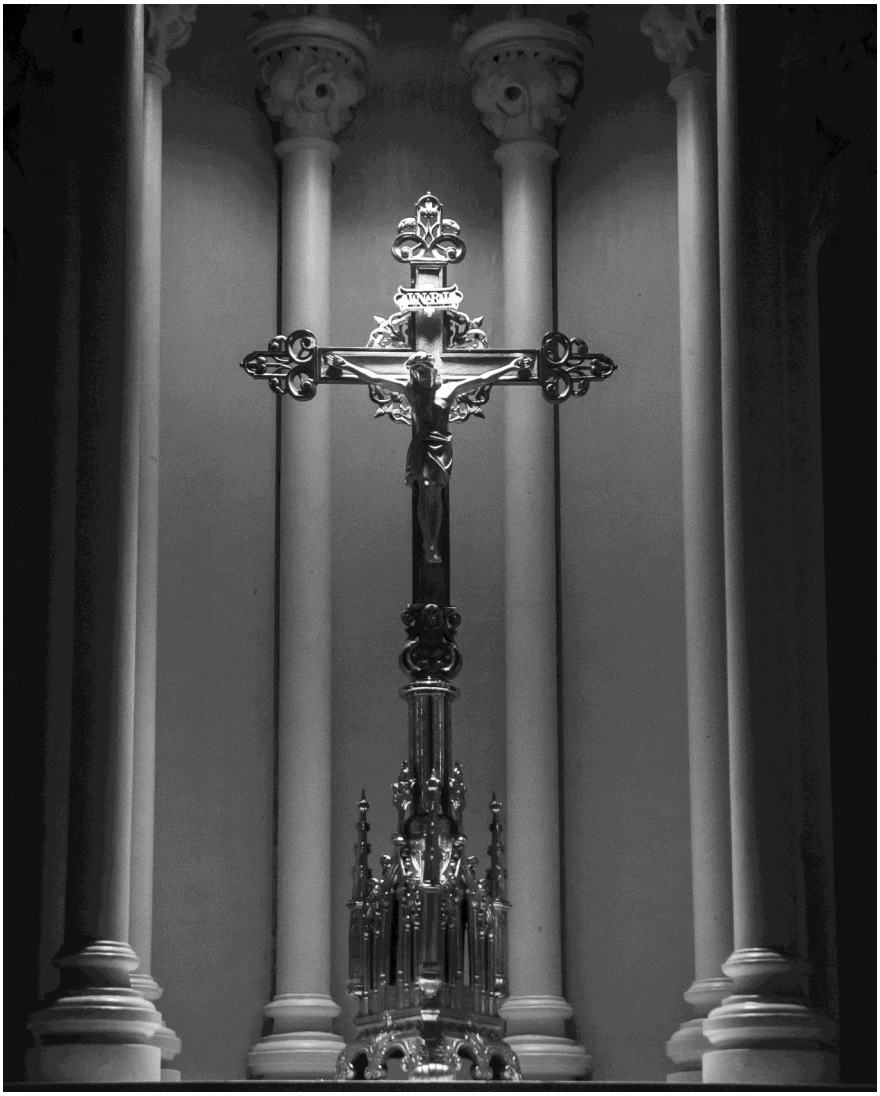
Aromas of sweetness fill the air
The scents should be served without a care
Usually cooked with a bit of flair
The first batch tends to cause a scare
Who would be the first recipient?
In my head I know its I
Oh my, I need those fluffy pancakes in the sky
If my sister goes unfed, she would surely cry
She is four years older than I
But with pancakes looming in my eyes
All hope of civility surely dies



By Zachary DeFosse

Grant Me Serenity
By Autumn Holzworth

Anxiety ridden and work piled high,
I sigh deeply and look to the clear blue sky.
How does this fit into my plan, Lord?
Suddenly I'm reminded of some of God's words.
"Have faith," these words say,
when times get tough.
"Remember the truth and wonder of God's love."
Serenity is what I need, as I think of that prayer
that always calms me down when anxiety is there.
To accept the things I cannot change,
to stop those pesky and nagging thoughts in my brain.
The courage to change things I can,
and remember that this is all part of God's plan.
The wisdom to know the difference between these two,
and know that Jesus is here with me through and through.



By Claire Mucha

When God Called You Home
By Daisy Apraku

God looked around his garden
and He thought something was missing
from this place.
He then looked down to Earth,
and saw your weary face.

He put his arms around you
and lifted you to rest.
I imagine God's garden is beautiful,
He always takes the best.

He knew you were hurting.
He knew you were in pain.
He also knew that you could never
get better on this Earth again.

He called upon you
and you answered with glee.
You did not want to leave us, we know,
but you could not live in this misery.

It was devastating to lose you,
but you didn't go all alone.
Our hearts went with you
when God called you home.

Red Lace Panties

By Cassandra Blaszczak

It could have been the most embarrassing and significant moment a young girl could have gone through. It all happened so fast and in such a flash. I stood there in shock and in disbelief. Why did this happen? And in front of him? I knew at the start of my morning that it was going to be a struggle; however, I never would have thought that my first day of 8th grade would end in such a catastrophic way. And yet, I found myself pondering what my life would be like if I hadn't gone through such a traumatic event. Everything happens for a reason.

I used to be shy and quiet. I always had a desire to keep to myself and go through life uninterrupted. I had a big family: my mom, dad, three brothers and two sisters, including myself. I was the second youngest of the family, and I was going to start my first day of 8th grade and last first day of middle school. I had a small friend circle and a very simple life with drama few and far between. I'd say my life had been uneventful until that first day.

My alarm buzzed at 6:15am, another Monday morning. My anxious body woke me hours in advance to my alarm, but luckily, I forced myself back asleep. I took a shower and stood inside creating scenarios of how my last first day of middle school could play out. Maybe it would be just like any other first day experience: a couple of friendly "hellos" and "how was your summer?" Then again, maybe people would start to take an interest in me. Maybe they'd notice that I got my ears pierced or cut my hair a little shorter than usual. I'd always had a long mane, all natural and completely untouched by chemicals. This year I cut it about three inches shorter than usual, a pivotal moment in my life.

I hopped out of the shower, dried off, threw my hair into a bun, and brushed my teeth. I stood there examining my body while brushing and I began to wonder if anyone would notice things about my physical appearance, too. They say that your first day outfit is the impression that people will have of you for the rest of the year, and I wanted mine to be just right. The weather was said to be clear skies with a blazing hot sun. I dropped my robe, clipped into my training bra, and put on a very adorable bright white tank top with thick straps coming up onto the shoulders. It had a light pink and yellow tribal design with patterns on the front that slowly faded at the bottom. My mother bought it me for my birthday that was earlier in the summer, so I felt that now was a better time than ever to wear it.

What to wear for bottoms? It so happened that previously that night I overheard my older sister, Claire, talking to one of her girlfriends on the phone about her first day. I respected my sibling's privacy and usually never eavesdropped, however, that night I was feeling especially bored. I crept into the hallway and stood close enough to the cracked open door but far enough that she wouldn't be able to see me. My sister was in high school and was beautiful. She had great grades and a hunk of a boyfriend.

"No seriously, that's what she said," my sister said.

"Unbelievable. That girl is a real piece of work, isn't she?" chatted the friend.

"So, what are you thinking of wearing tomorrow? Big day. New year and new boys. My mom bought me this black and purple dress. It's so cute. Oh my god, and I got these gold sandals that will go perfect with them!" my sister exclaimed.

squeals "Girl, yes! That'll be perfect. I think I'll wear some white shorts with that blue tank top I got from the mall. I can only imagine all the potential cuties this year," her friend said.

"They have this new women's lingerie store that just opened up near the mall. I got some pretty cute stuff. Took the longest time to convince my mom to let me get them. I mean, she can't stop me. I am practically a woman now."

"Wow, I bet Devin will love that. My mom can be such a pain about that stuff. We're growing up; what do they expect?"

I could see my sister lying on her bed, painting her nails and talking with her friend on the phone. I stepped back from the door and wondered to myself, *lingerie? Why would my sister want to wear that stuff? Isn't it for, like, adults?* The conversation started again, and I approached the door once more. I'd never actually worn lingerie, and I hadn't seen my sister ever buy anything like that.

"Oh yeah, he is gonna love it. I got so many different colored panties. They were having some kind of deal that weekend," my sister said while laughing and blowing back and forth on her nails.

"I can't wait for tomorrow!" her friend stated.

Their conversation faded into another topic, one that I was less interested in hearing about. All I could think about were panties and the possible idea of owning a pair.

So many different colors and options to choose from: endless possibilities. I wish I could be more like my sister; she had it all. *Wait*, I thought to myself, *what if I could be like her?* She had so much self-confidence, maybe those panties were like her superpower. A light bulb went off in my head, and I came up with a plan. Could this be the key to being looked at as a young adult? I crept back down the hallway and slipped into my room. I fell asleep that night wondering about the first day the next morning and the possibilities the day could bring.

After brushing my teeth, I knew my sister's alarm would be going off shortly. I stood inside of my bedroom at the door and waited to hear her walk down the hallway into the bathroom. This was my only chance. I tiptoed down the hallway into my sister's room, closed the door, and walked toward her dresser. I opened the top left drawer and that's when I saw them: the red lace panties. Behold, the key to my future. I picked them and stared at them in awe. They were beautiful. They felt so nice to the touch and were so light to hold. I stuffed them into my training bra, closed the drawer, and left her room.

I stood in front of my mirror wearing red lace panties for the first time; I felt empowered. I felt sexy, like I was finally turning into a woman. It had been a long time since I'd stood in front of a mirror and examined my body. It made me feel weird, but all at the same time, it felt right. I decided then that I was going to make it a point to have this year be my year. I put on a pair of blue denim shorts over my red lace panties, slipped on my grey Vans, changed tops at the last minute, grabbed my backpack, and hit the road. I was on my way to kiss middle school goodbye.

The first two class periods went by fairly smoothly, nothing too crazy. Brief introductions about yourself and what everyone did for fun that summer. There was one new teacher this year in history class. *Great.* I had a couple classes with some friends whom I had spent most of the summer with. They were Amber, Grace, and Penny. We had all been best friends since around first grade. We had made it this far together, so why would I think this year would be any different? Although, I did wake up with a feeling that maybe this year was going to be different. We were growing up and developing into the people we'd be the rest of our adult lives. I'd hoped our friendship wouldn't be affected by it. However, I might have thought that too soon.

Grace and I had gym class together, which was awesome because I was good at sports and so was Grace. She was always my competition and I was hers. I'd probably consider Grace to be my bestest friend out of the other two girls, but, of course, I would never actually say that. Grace was a great friend and never was a girly-girl like Amber and Penny. She was much more understanding and trustworthy than anyone else I'd known.

After gym was over, the girls headed to one side of the gym and boys to the other. We made our way into the locker room to change back into our street clothes and go to our next class period. In our case, however, we didn't have another class; we had lunch next. My day was going pretty good so far; I was wearing lingerie as an 8th grader, my schedule was perfect, and I had my best friend in a majority of my classes. Honestly, I was feeling myself that day, and nothing was going to bring me down.

"Melody?" Grace asked.

"Yeah?" I replied, turning towards her direction.

"Are you wearing red underwear?" she asked.

I stood up slowly, adjusting my posture and pulling my shirt down and over my back side. I felt as if a spotlight had just been shined onto me.

"Um, yeah, I am." I was nervous enough to be wearing them, so for someone to call me out about them was a whole other story.

"Wow," she said, "those are cute! Where did you get those? Can I see them?" Grace asked eagerly.

"Yeah, sure!" Excited, I walked over with my shorts covering one butt cheek and half of my crotch. I did a little spin in a circle as if I was a Victoria's Secret model. We both giggled and I pulled my shorts up and buttoned them fast before anyone walked in and saw my dirty secret.

"Those are wicked cute, Melody." She walked back to her locker and continued to change back into her streets. "But it seems kind of bold of you, though, don't you think?"

In that moment I felt a wave of judgement rush over me. I began to question my decision about wearing them and whether I was even supposed to wear something like that. *I'm only thirteen, for God's sake. What was I thinking?* I looked down at the ground and began to tie my laces.

"Oh no, Melody, I didn't mean it like that. You look great, honest. I just didn't know that you were there yet, ya know," said Grace, trying to comfort me after realizing how I'd taken it.

"What do you mean, 'there yet?'" I asked, puzzled, looking up from the ground to her face.

"Well, ya know. Like Amber." She slammed her locker door shut and threw on her sweatshirt.

"What?"

"Oh, wow. You didn't hear? So, I guess Amber spent some one-on-one time with a couple boys this summer when she went to camp. She's always been more physically advanced, but now I guess she is letting everyone see her physical advancements," she giggled and rolled her eyes.

I stood there in shock, thinking to myself, *where did the old Amber go? Amber was having sex?! Amber was letting boys see her body and touch it? How long has she been wearing red lace panties?*

"I can't believe it. Why wouldn't Amber tell us that?" I asked Grace.

"Well, she did. She told Penny, Penny told me, and I guess now I'm telling you."

"Why wouldn't Amber tell me? I thought we were friends." I stood there with my gym locker door open, kind of like how my mouth was. The bell rang.

"C'mon, the bell just rang, and if we hurry, we can be first in line for lunch. I think we're having mac n' cheese today," said Grace.

We darted out of the locker room and into the hallway. Kids were falling out of classrooms in every direction, locker doors were being slammed, and kids were shouting with excitement and hunger. Grace and I had the best shot of making it down to the cafeteria out of anyone else because the girls' locker room was the closest. We could see no other kids in front of us, so what else did middle school girls do in excitement other than screech? Run. We started to gallop to the cafeteria, soaring through the air as we skipped past the brick wall that began to fade with the increase of our speed. *Almost there, just another corner to round and we'll be there,* I thought. As we were galloping through the air down the hallway, about to take our last corner, my body hit something, and my momentum was put to a colliding halt. I almost fell to the ground, but I caught myself at the last minute by

spinning and then, with a stutter step, found my balance again. I stopped in place and noticed Grace kept going and had left me behind. I regrouped and looked back to see who I had run into. It was him: Jacob Green, the cutest boy in the entire 8th grade. I ran into Jacob Green. My heart stopped and my knees got weak.

"Wow, didn't see you there. You alright?" asked Jacob as he fixed himself from the collision.

I looked up and definitely realized who I had run into. In that moment, I was starstruck. *Is he talking to me? He is talking to me. And here I am galloping through the hallways like a wild horse. Jesus, great first impression.*

"Hello?" Jacob asked again, now with a confused look on his face.

"Oh yeah, sorry. I'm fine. Sorry I ran into you. I guess I was excited to see what the lunch ladies prepared this afternoon," I said, laughing way too aggressively and unnaturally.

"Right."

I looked down at the ground and fiddled with my fingers. I wished the conversation would just end. He probably felt bad for me and was only talking to me out of sympathy. I was never good at talking with boys, especially Jacob Green.

"Well, I hope they've whipped up something nice. Maybe you could save me a seat and we can become the next best food critics," said Jacob with a big smile.

I looked up from the ground and gave him a smile. "Uh, yeah, I'll look for you. Just keep an eye for a chef's top hat and you'll find me," I said. He laughed and shook his head.

"That was good. I'll see you, Melody."

"Bye, Jacob."

Could this day have gotten any better? I was here to kick middle school's ass and I was taking names. There was nothing that was going to bring this self-confidence down. It was me and my red lace panties against the world, and we were winning. Maybe I wasn't some lame loser after all; maybe this year was going to be different from the rest.

Finally, I made it to the cafeteria and got my place in line for mac n' cheese. I grabbed a tray, my rollup of silverware, a carton of chocolate milk, and then a messy display of noodles smothered in a creamy sauce landed onto my plate. I also grabbed a dinner roll at the last minute: temptation is a sneaky bitch. I found Grace and Penny sitting towards the back wall on the right side of the cafeteria in the corner, our favorite spot the past two years.

"Hey, guys. Mind if I sit next to you, Penny?" I asked.

"Hey, Melody! Not at all, of course," exclaimed Penny. She was playing with the pasta and pushing the noodles through the sauce. She was not eating it but was merely entertaining herself.

I sat down next to Penny with Grace facing us from across the table. I unwrapped my silverware, placed my napkin on my lap, and began to dig in with the other girls. It was clear we were all enjoying it, as not many words were exchanged between us for a couple of minutes. Grace and I weren't like other girls, the ones who wouldn't eat in front of people or felt embarrassed about eating certain food. This was just another reason why she was my best friend.

As I continued to shovel copious amounts of noodles into my face, I glanced up towards the front of the lunchroom. I stop chewing and sat up straight. I could see a familiar face: Jacob. He was walking out of one of the lines and was headed in my direction. He made it about three steps until he abruptly stopped by another familiar face I know: Amber. She grabbed his shoulder and shifted his attention from me towards her. I felt a knot tighten up inside me and an awful taste in my mouth that then led to a displeased look on my face.

"Everything alright, Melody?" asked Grace.

"Um, yeah. Everything is fine." I looked away from Jacob and Amber and stared down at my tray.

"Oh, I see," said Penny. "She just caught a glimpse of Amber's new victim for the school year." Both Grace and I looked up at Penny, then to each other, and then back to Penny.

"Victim? What is she, some kind of venomous spider now?" asked Grace. I chuckled under my breath but kept my head down.

"Amber has had her eyes on Jacob Green for years. I think since this summer she has finally built up enough courage, or boobs, to ask him out." Penny began laughing at her own comment; however, neither Grace nor I gave much satisfaction to it.

"Oh, yes, now that Amber has turned from a 32A to a 34A, she must really have the boys drooling over her," said Grace as she rolled her eyes and began to laugh.

I looked down at my own chest and then back up at Amber and then back down to me. Was I flat chested? Was I ever going to get boobs?

"Whatever," said Penny, "at least she won't be seen as completely hopeless when we get into high school."

"What is that supposed to mean?" I asked.

"It means that no guy is going to want some inexperienced freshmen, especially those who haven't even had their first kiss."

"Oh, shut up, Penny. Leave her alone and let's drop it. Here comes Amber, anyway," said Grace. I pulled down my shirt to my back again and pushed a strand of hair behind my ear. I felt embarrassed.

Amber walked over to the table and sat between Grace and Penny. She had a small fruit bowl with lettuce, three cucumber slices, shavings of carrots and a boiled egg inside. She had a grin on her face as if she just executed a well-thought-out plan. She tossed her hair over her shoulder and squared up her shoulders as if ready to give some big meeting.

"So, guess who's coming over to sit with us? Jacob!" *high pitch squeal* "I cannot believe it," squealed Amber.

"That's great, Amber. Good idea grabbing that rabbit food. Now you won't embarrass yourself while you eat. Wouldn't want Jacob thinking a big developed woman like you can't handle what goes into her mouth," snickered Grace.

"Ha-ha, Grace. Well, for your information, this is the latest diet all the celebrities are doing this year."

"Right, cause that's what you should be doing at thirteen, joining weightwatchers.com." Grace stabbed one of Amber's cucumbers right out of her bowl with her fork and snatched it into her mouth while staring dead on at Amber, waiting for a reaction. Amber just rolled her eyes and flipped her hair once more.

"Oh, here he comes!" squealed Amber again. I looked around just to make sure it was truly him headed over to us. I looked back down at my food and pretended I didn't see him coming.

"Hello ladies," said Jacob, standing in between Amber and Grace.

"Hey," said Grace and Penny.

"Hey, Jacob. Long time no see," said Amber as she snickered like a little girl. She pulled out the chair that was next to her, implying for him to sit down. However, his attention was drawn elsewhere.

"Hey. Well, hello there, judge. And what is our verdict? Have the lunch ladies fulfilled their promises?" asked Jacob, directing the question and attention to me. I looked up, not expecting for him to acknowledge me. I tried to speak but had too much food in my mouth, so I looked like a hamster trying to open my jaws.

"I guess we can say it was divine meal, one that is fit for a queen," Jacob said and then winked at me. Our eyes met and didn't break contact until we were interrupted.

"Um, okay then," said Grace as she watched. "Why don't you sit down here?" Grace pulled out the chair right next to me while smirking at Amber as he came over to our side of the table. He sat down and smiled. I could feel Amber's eyes burning holes into my new shirt. This was not good. We all continued to make small talk about how our summers went and classes we had this semester. All the while, I could tell that Amber never took her eyes off of us. I could tell that her level of anger was only rising, as if at any moment she'd explode like a volcano. However, I couldn't help but not care what Amber thought, as it was me that was finally getting the attention from the crowd for once.

There were 6 minutes left for lunch, which meant students were beginning to leave for their last class. We all stood up together, threw our trash away, and proceeded to exit the cafeteria. Jacob and I walked in the front of the group while Grace was right behind us and Amber and Penny walked in the back. I could feel the scowls on my back as we made our way through the halls.

"I can't believe Melody. She is such a little sly bitch," said Amber, sticking her nose into the air like some upper-class citizen.

"Ugh, totally. She is a prude and honestly, isn't even that interesting," said Penny.

"Yeah, if only Jacob could see that. Then he'd realize what a real girl is like." I could hear their some of their whispers and chatter, but struggled to make out what they were saying. You ever get that feeling that someone is talking about you? You ever get that feeling that someone is planning something about you? I didn't want Amber mad at me, but I hadn't done anything wrong. What was I supposed to do? I continued to keep walking with Jacob until I was able to reach my locker, then hoped that Amber and Penny would go to their class. However, it doesn't always go the way we want it to, does it?

Things took a turn for the worst. As we approached the wing with all the classrooms and lockers, Amber had an idea, an awful and cruel idea.

"Ha. Makes me laugh to think that Jacob could be actually attracted to Melody. I mean, c'mon, she looks like she is in 6th grade. Gimme a break. Training bra, much?" said Amber to Penny.

"I bet if he saw what a baby she really was, he'd lose his interest in her fast," said Penny.

"You think so?" Amber turned in closer to Penny. "How do you mean?"

"What is the last thing that your mom stops you from getting when you're turning into a woman?"

"Um, I don't know. Hair spray?"

"No. Your underwear. No parents want to know that their daughter has sexy clothes. I bet that Melody still wears clothes from elementary." Both the girls snickered and leaned in closer as they watched me and Jacob chatting across the hall at my locker.

I stood there and continued to grab my books for class. Jacob was still talking to me. Our conversation was great, and it was flowing so easily that I didn't really have to try. All this time I was afraid and intimidated by him, but he was kind and wasn't shallow like the rest of the boys in 8th grade. My back was facing the set of stairs that were located across from my locker while Jacob stood off to the side of me and chatted for our last couple of moments until the bell rang.

"Well, this was nice, Melody. Honestly, I'd love for it to happen again this week. Maybe tomorrow? Another episode of MJ versus the lunch ladies?" asked Jacob.

"Um, yeah. Sure. I'd love that, totally. It has been nice getting to know you, Mr. Jacob Green. And I look forward to tomorrow," I said with a little bit of sass in my tone.

"Well, the pleasure is all mine Miss Melody. Until tomorrow."

"Until tomorrow," I said. Just as we stared at each other for just another moment, I felt someone behind me, running and reaching for me. Before I was able to turn around to see who it was, the next thing I realized was that my shorts were coming

down to my knees, while Amber and Penny bolted past me, laughing hysterically. Before I was able to reach down, the entire 8th grade class was staring at me and burst out laughing and pointing. Everyone was jumping and yelling, acting as if they were wild animals. I could feel the exposure to my legs all the way up to my butt cheeks. I was humiliated and completely horrified. I was in shock, and my eyes welled up with tears. My red lace panties were exposed to everyone in my class, including the guy I'd been in love with since I was little. I fumbled with my books as they fell onto the ground, ripped my shorts up and ran down the stairs. I couldn't breathe as I ran down the stairs and found an empty handicapped bathroom around the corner. I slammed the door and squeezed my eyes shut. I wanted to run away and crawl into my bed. The embarrassment was too much.

Through the door, I heard footsteps as Amber and Penny ran down the hall. Then, I heard more footsteps pounding on the concrete, getting louder and closer to where Amber and Penny had gone.

"What the fuck, Amber? What the hell is your problem?" yelled Jacob.

"Oh, come on. We're just having a bit of fun. No harm here. Just a little prank," said Amber.

"Wow, Amber. Are you that much of an ignorant bitch? Or do you get off on other people's pain?" said Jacob in disgust. Through the bathroom door, I heared Jacob picking up my books. Everyone else left, and the hallways became silent.

I sat on the toilet and planted my face into my hands into a pool of tears that continued to pour down my cheeks. I hated everything about today. I hated my friends, this school, Amber. I hated that Jacob saw me in such a state of vulnerability. And there I was, just me and my red lace panties, until I heard a soft knock on the door and a gentle voice.

"Melody? I know you're in there. Listen, I'm sorry Amber did such a cruel thing. That girl has more issues in one of her pinkies than anyone does in their entire brain." The tap on the door was so soft and innocent. I wanted to thank him but couldn't. I couldn't answer him. I was too embarrassed and traumatized to move. All I could do was listen to his words and hope he'd leave me alone.

"Hey, for what it's worth, I didn't see anything, but even if I did, I think you are pretty awesome. I'd love to have lunch with you tomorrow still, if you'd like," said Jacob.

I stood up and waited a moment. I opened the door and stood there in tears while he looked at me. I felt comfortable being able to cry in front of him.

"Come on, I'll walk you to class, and then I'll find you after school gets out and walk you home, okay?" asked Jacob.

"Okay," I said. We didn't say another word the rest of the day. He was there for me, and I needed that. He was a kind and sweet person, and I needed that in my life, too. He stayed kind and sweet for many years to come after that. He showed others compassion and kindness no matter who they were. I've been in love with Jacob Green since I was a little girl, and I think that he knew even then that he loved me, too.

I have to thank one thing that I believe created the momentum in my life that is now so full of taking chances: my red lace panties. They'll forever be a part of who I am today and who I was when I was in 8th grade.



By Sarah Doucette

Ironbound Pond

By Autumn Holzworth

Amidst tall pine, birch, and hemlock trees lies my old camp. The road to camp consists of crunchy gravel and trees that tower above it like ancient columns, while fall leaves cascade down. The leaves twirl and dance in mid-air as the wind from the nearby pond draws them near, and they then land on the camp's rocky driveway. The driveway slopes downward slightly, with a thin rope across its middle and tied to two trees on opposing sides to show ownership. Once past the crusty brown rope, the entire camp is visible. From there, the driveway curves to the left and hugs the tree line, outlined by large rocks to distinguish where it ends.

Directly in front of this curve in the driveway lies the camp itself. It is a good-sized shabby building propped up on four stilts, not too big and not too small for my family. Olive green paint that coats its exterior is now chipping in numerous places and leaving white patches scattered here and there. Attached to one side of the camp is a blue wooden deck, which is the place where a grill is usually set up, a red and white cooler full of drinks sits, and a light brown chair that resembles a "director's chair" is placed in an opposite corner. Inside the camp at this time of year everything is stored, put away, and crowded, making the interior look like a tornado came through. The floor, sofa, and bunk beds (in a smaller separate room) are covered with tarps, large pool noodles, an even larger swan float, and other miscellaneous necessities. Despite this mess of things scattered about, the interior walls are covered with memories: pictures drawn by my brother and me in our childhood, unused/packaged glow sticks attached to the wall, pictures of loons, fishing poles, Yahtzee score sheets, and even an owl and parrot hanging on perches from the ceiling. All of these things carry memories from many different visits, and each memory is more special than the last.



By Melanie Rielly

Back outside of the camp, the chattering of squirrels and chirps of birds can be heard. Ten or so feet away from the outside of the camp (the side that faces the pond) there is a large rock and tree sitting next to each other. This rock and tree are no ordinary things in nature to me; they carry more memories from my childhood. My brother and me chasing each other around them and climbing on the rock to become "king of the mountain" (which is what we saw the rock as) is what I picture when I look at them. A few feet further beyond this tree and rock sits a picnic table. This picnic table's white paint is severely chipped and even more aged and weathered than my camp, and carries with it memories of countless lunches, dinners, and board games.

To the left of the picnic table is a fire pit, outlined with medium-sized rocks that fit together like a puzzle. Many nights have been spent around this fire pit with my family making s'mores, telling stories, listening to peeper frogs, and gazing up at the clear sky full of glinting stars. Now, the fire pit has burnt ashes of wood from our last fire, which was sometime in late August. The wind blows, bringing a rush of cool air that tosses tree limbs and their leaves every which way. Some of these leaves land not far from the fire pit, nestling themselves on my mom's swing. Facing the water, its blue metal pipe frame holds it into place and protects it from getting knocked over by the wind. The seat itself is a brown bus seat that is very comfy and relaxing to sit on.

From where my mom's swing sits, it is a short walk to the edge of the water. Trees stand on both sides of the water's edge and frame the view for anyone who chooses to stand before it. To the left, in this frame, are a few small bushes and a rock nestled next to them. This smooth rock, cool to the touch, offers a good spot to sit and dip feet into the water. From this spot I can always see the little island that lies far across the pond, and I always wonder if I'll ever visit it again. Between this rock and some trees are a set of rock steps that lead onto the rock patio that my dad made several years ago. To the right in this frame is a tree that I call "my tree," which I use to sit on and look out at the water. This is my favorite spot at camp and where I feel most peaceful. I could sit at this spot for hours because I can see and hear the small rippling waves bump into the rocks that lead to shore, making a barely noticeable sloshing sound as they meet. For this reason and many others, my camp is my favorite place on Earth.

Mirror

By Erica Larrivee

Headaches are common at LARP events. They are sporting events, in a way, and sometimes you get bumped around. But you don't often wake up feeling this achy. You sit up, the sleeping bag you slept in — despite the summer heat — falling away from your torso. It's morning, evident by the birds chirping outside and the gentle glow that fills your tent, and yet you still feel… off.

Your head is pounding. You sigh, rifling through your camping supplies for some water and something for your headache. You take a moment, trying to force out your headache with some quiet reflection. You are, after all, in your favorite place on earth, no need to let a headache get in the way. Yep, Jefferson, Maine, but while you are here, you can call it the Mystwood Keep, a place of adventure and magic! You met up with your friends on Friday to set up your tents, you got into costume and played into the night, and someone even found something weird in the woods to explore! The game masters must have outdone themselves. But that's weird… you don't remember going to bed. You… don't remember anything past your pal saying, “You need to come see this.” And yet, you're in your tent, headache almost passing. It couldn't have been alcohol, since it's banned on the site, and yet your memories are so fuzzy you almost consider it.

You remember that you have a long day of adventuring ahead and that you need to get the day started. You unzip your tent, grimacing in the bright sun, and make your way to the privy: a wooden shack hiding a Porta Potty a few yards outside of the camping area. You walk quietly, not wanting to wake your neighbors, and close the splintery door behind you. You are about to do your business when something stops you: your reflection in the tiny mirror nailed to the wall. You chuckle to yourself. You forgot to take off your fake elf ears before going to bed. You reach up and grab the tips of the ears, yanking down quickly. But pain shoots through your head, and not just the normal pain you feel from taking off the glued-on ears. And not just that: the ears don't come off. You let out another gasp, trying again to pull off the ears but they are… attached to your head… as if they had grown out of it. In your panic, you look closer, and you look… different: brighter eyes, scruffier hair — the way you always imagined your LARP character — but she's real and she's you!

You are pulled from your musing by the sound of screaming: your friend, Cole! You leap out of the privy, panicked, to see a bright light in the distance: a fireball leaping from the ground. You hurry back to the camping area, trying to find your friend. Cole is frantically waving his arms through the air, trying to extinguish the flames leaping from his hands. He looks different, too: slimmer features, darker eyes, just like his character. Before you get a chance to speak, another one of your friends, Tyler, emerges from his tent, blinking the sleep from his eyes. But the dark bags under his eyes that he normally applies with makeup don’t smudge as he rubs them, and the pointed teeth evident in his yawns are not fake.

Cole eventually puts out his hands. Tyler suddenly realizes what is happening. You speak first.

"Holy shit, guys. We turned into our characters."

The three of you hurry through the camping area, and the small game space that acts as your town, trying to find others. Every person you wake comes to the same realization: their elf ears are real, their pointed canines are real, the magic dancing from their fingertips is real. At first, you all rejoice: this is awesome! Real magic! Real adventure! You even let loose a spell or two you recalled your character learning.

But the rejoicing quickly stops when you all hear a roar from the woods. Suddenly a large swarm of beastmen leap from the woods. They who once swung latex masks and foam horns now swing weapons of iron and pointed arrows. You all take your positions, hoping that real battle isn't too different from make-believe.



By Jason Pierce

Sleepless Nights

By Janessa Corrigan

**The following is the first chapter written during National Novel Writing Month in 2018*

"And now we wait for what lies ahead," Sam addressed his classmates, along with countless friends, family members, and strangers in the audience. "Although I am told it isn't all so glorious."

He chuckled, shifted his weight, and reached for the Poland Springs bottle beneath the podium. After taking a sip, Sam scanned the sheet of paper before him to find where he left off in his speech. "From what I hear, we are about to experience crappy cafeteria food, painful 8am classes, unbearable final exams, and many sleepless nights."

At this, the crowd let out a low chuckle, and Sam saw many nod their heads in agreement. "But hey, that's college, right? And who knows what greatness will be found hidden in between all of those overly dramatic, all too frequently experienced meltdowns. I don't know about the rest of you guys, but I'm ready to find out. So, on that note, congratulations to the class of 2020. I wish you all the best. Thank you."

Sam gathered his speech in his hands, took one last look at the sea of people before him, and returned to his seat. The rest of the graduation ceremony seemed to pass very quickly. It was almost trance-like; caught up in the adrenaline of giving his own speech, and having done so without any colossal mistakes, as he had foreseen, Sam didn't retain a single word of the principal's. Sam's neighbor, Maverick, had to elbow him back to reality when it came time to receive their diplomas. Sam's last name was Walker, so he was one of the last few to be called.

This, too, slid by in a way that felt like a dream. It was a monumental night, the night of Sam's high school graduation, and yet he couldn't find it in himself to focus on what was going on around him.

The truth was, Sam wasn't looking forward to college as much as he'd said in his speech. In fact, his feelings were just the opposite. He was so nervous he could barely sleep. It wasn't the same for Sam as it was for the others; it was harder. For months he had listened to his friends preach about how excited they were — excited to be free from their parents and their childish curfews, excited to get drunk without the fear of the entire town finding out, excited to have the chance to date girls they hadn't known their whole lives. And they all seemed so confident in their futures, too. Cameron was going to be a pharmacist, Andrew a chemistry teacher, Hunter a physical therapist, and Gavin a sports journalist.

As for Sam, well, Sam didn't even know what college he wanted to go to. He didn't have a major, didn't care that he was only allowed out until 11pm on weekends, had never been drunk, and didn't know how to talk to girls. College, if anything, was going to be embarrassing. He had made friends in Hamlin, but that's because it was Hamlin. There wasn't anyone else to be friends with. Sam knew that once he got to college, he'd feel out of place again, just like he did when he first moved to Hamlin in first grade, except this time, his peers wouldn't be as welcoming as six year olds are.

After months of touring schools, Sam had decided on Middlebury College in Vermont. There, he hoped he could at least find comfort in knowing there might be other kids like him; after all, the school's acceptance rate was only 17.4%. Maybe there would be other 18 year old virgins who didn't know what it was like to go to parties and who preferred to play chess over basketball. But, he feared, maybe there wouldn't be.

Either way, there was nothing he could do about it. So Sam did his best to suppress the thought of college, even as move-in day came nearer and nearer. He spent his summer the way he always did: working with his dad at his screen printing business and rereading the Harry Potter series. Oh, and carting his little sister around, too. Natalie was three years younger than Sam, and ever since he'd turned sixteen, it was like she had somewhere different to be everyday. And, as Sam wasn't often as preoccupied as his sister was, he endured the burden of driving her to and from her wide range of school-related and social events.

That's what he was doing the day he found out who his roommate at school would be. It was mid-July by then. He had hopped into the driver's seat of their mom's white Jeep Compass and deposited his iPhone in the cupholder as he always did. The radio was set to 97.9, as it always was, and Sam was bringing Natalie to her friend Ashley's house, as he always seemed to be doing. Despite his outward displays of annoyance, Sam truly didn't mind the mundane regularity of it all. He liked routine. But this time was different from any other ride he had given Natalie.

As he sped along the highway and nodded his head to the music on the radio, a low buzzing disrupted the melody. It was his phone vibrating in the cupholder. Before he had a chance to grab it, it was already in Natalie's hands, and she read aloud the contents of the message on his phone screen.

"Ooh, a message from Chase Falter on Facebook," she said. "Who is Chase Falter? Is he another one of those nerds you play video games with online?" she snickered. Sam didn't recognize the name, but didn't have time to say so before his sister let out a loud whoop. She turned the radio down and read the message.

"'Hey, man, it looks like we are rooming together this year. I just got the email today. Patch Hall, the worst freshman dorm there is. Figures, right?'"

"What? Patch Hall? Why didn't I get this email? Give me that," Sam reached across the car for his phone.

Natalie dodged him, holding the phone farther out of reach. "No, you're driving. Here, I'll reply to him for you." She started guessing Sam's passcode in front of him. "4, 7, 4, 7. What? You changed it? Come on, you didn't like it when I asked Sarah to homecoming for you last fall? She even almost said yes, all thanks to me," Natalie jabbed, continuing to move Sam's phone out of

his reach. “Ah hah! Your birthday, Sam? Don’t you know that’s the worst password a person can use? And mom says *you’re* the genius.”

“Shut up,” Sam muttered. “Please, Natalie, don’t.” Sam had already started to pull the car over, and it was a good thing he did, because when he finally snatched his phone from her, Natalie had typed a paragraph-long response. He erased it without even reading it. Knowing Natalie, it was nothing like what Sam would’ve sent.

Sam began to type his own response, but didn’t know exactly what to say. He was about to be living with this guy for 9 months out of the year; he didn’t want Chase to think he was weird before they even met. He tried out a couple lines, but ended up erasing them and restarting every time. Sam paused, his thumbs still hovering over the keyboard on his phone screen, and looked up toward the mountains outside, thinking of what to write.

“Oh, for God’s sake, Sam. It’s not a letter to the president, although I bet you wish it was. Just respond already. I’m supposed to be at Ashley’s by now,” Natalie groaned.

He scowled at his little sister, but Sam knew she was right. Without giving it too much thought, Sam replied, “Oh, yeah, Patch? I had a feeling that might be where I’d end up. Can’t be too bad, though.”

After typing the response, Sam locked his phone and this time, placed it to his left, where it would be safe from Natalie’s grasp. Without saying a word, he turned the radio back up, put his left blinker on, and eased back onto the road. Natalie knew better than to prod further; this wasn’t her first time getting under her brother’s skin. She knew just how to do it, but she also knew when to stop.

After dropping her off, Sam finally let his mind wander. “Chase,” he repeated to himself. He’d never met a Chase before, and wondered what he’d be like. *Probably some football player, with my luck,* Sam thought, absentmindedly drumming his fingers on the leather steering wheel throughout the rest of the drive home.

When he got there, he had another message waiting from Chase. Before even opening it, though, he went to Chase’s profile to see what he looked like. Sam had been right, except it wasn’t football, it was soccer. Chase looked exactly the opposite of Sam: he was short, muscular, had long, shaggy blonde hair, and was smiling in every photo Sam came across. *Of course,* Sam thought. *Of course.* He exited Facebook and tossed his phone on the chair in his cluttered bedroom, letting himself sink into his mattress.

He tried to calm down, reminding himself not to judge a book by its cover, but it was hard. After about a half hour of tormented silence in which he let his thoughts conjure all of the horribly awkward situations that were undoubtedly soon to be his future, Sam went to the bathroom to brush his teeth. As he looked at himself in the mirror, he sized up what he saw. He was tall and thin, but not too lanky, as he once was. He had light brown hair that he’d never let grow long enough to cover his forehead, and his green eyes were bloodshot, standing out against his pale skin. In this lighting, Sam even noticed the freckles scattered across his nose and cheeks, which he hadn’t paid any attention to in months.

Though he used to curse his appearance years before, being the stereotypically smart kid with long limbs, visible ribs, and big ears to match, Sam didn’t feel that way tonight. It had been a long time since he’d really looked at himself, but now that he was, he realized he didn’t look so painfully awkward anymore. His arms and torso had filled out some, and his ears were a bit more hidden since he’d abandoned his traditional buzz-cut. Even his freckles didn’t bother him anymore.

He spit the remaining toothpaste into the sink and swished with mouthwash before leaving the bathroom. At the last moment, Sam flashed a cheesy smile at his reflection, and felt oddly at ease as he made his way down the hallway and retired to his bedroom. *Maybe Chase won’t be so bad,* he thought. *And maybe I don’t have to be the weird one, either.* With the prospect of reshaping the way people saw him lingering in his mind, Sam felt relief about the situation for the first time since he applied to colleges in October, and fell asleep, as he always did, to the droning sound of his fan.

Around 8am, Sam woke to the sound of his alarm. He had to be at work by 8:30, but Sam was the kind of person who could get up and ready quickly, unlike Natalie. He wasn’t necessarily a morning person, either; he hated getting up and going to work just like everyone else, only he didn’t lay in bed for thirty minutes after his alarm went off each morning the way a lot of kids do. He saw no point in that. Once you’re up, you’re up, so why prolong the process? That’s the way Sam saw it, anyway.

He carried out his morning with ease. He grabbed the navy blue polo that he always wore to work off of his floor, turned it right-side out, and slipped it over his head. The polo was faded from wearing it so much, and the lettering that read “Walker Screen Printing & Designs” was barely even legible anymore. He knew his dad would give him a hard time for this, but he didn’t care. No customers at work ever saw him, anyway; he was always in the office working at the computer. Besides, there were probably ten other shirts just like this one at the shop if his father really did put up a fuss about it.

Since he was about 15, Sam had been the primary graphic designer for his father’s business. His dad, Nelson, showed him all of the ins and outs of the program, and once he got good enough, Sam was tasked with creating almost every design that was requested, which was a lot, since the shop was one of the only screen printing businesses in all of Northern Maine. This allowed Nelson to focus more on the hands-on part of the job: the actual screen printing itself. He had let Sam help with this before, too, but Sam didn’t like it much. He didn’t like the strong smell of the ink that permeated the printing room, and hated the smell the dryer made as the freshly-made shirts ran through it even more. Plus, it was messy work, and Sam would rather use a computer than an ink press. One of the other perks of his job was that Sam never had to deal with customers directly, either. That was Natalie’s job, which she started at the beginning of the summer. Nelson finally thought she was ready to represent his business publicly, but be-

fore that she was stuck cleaning ink trays and restocking the merchandise room. As far as he saw it, Sam had the best job offered at Walker Screen Printing & Designs.

When Sam finished getting ready for the day, which only took about ten minutes, he went downstairs for breakfast. His mom, Eve, was an elementary school teacher, so she worked much less during the summertime. This meant that Natalie and Sam were fed a home-cooked breakfast almost every day during the three months of every summer. Today it was pancakes. Blueberry pancakes, to be exact (Eve insisted on having at least some presence of fruit at each meal), a side of bacon, and some home fries. The kitchen table was set only for three because Nelson had already gone into work for the day. The remnants of his breakfast were still visible near the fourth seat, though, where the family's cat, Zerbert, now sat.

"Orange juice, Sam?" Eve asked while carrying the plate of pancakes in one hand and the plate of home fries in her other to the table.

"Yeah, I got it," he replied, making his way toward the fridge.

"Natalie?" Eve asked, still bringing the rest of the food to the table.

"Coffee, if there's any left," said Natalie.

"Yes, but make it yourself. I'm not in the mood to get criticized for not adding enough sugar like last time," Eve answered, but softened the jab with a smile in her daughter's direction.

"So," Eve continued, "I'm not going into the shop today. I need to work on lesson plans, instead. School is coming up quick. Always does, huh?" She was speaking to both kids, but her eyes hadn't yet landed on either of them. She was fixing her plate, eyes darting from each food to the next, seemingly impressed with her own work. Finally, she finished and looked across the table to Natalie and Sam. "So, Sam, you can take the car to work. I won't need it until after you're home." Most days Eve worked at her husband's shop, too, keeping tabs on the financials, but occasionally she stayed home. After all, it could get pretty overwhelming to live and work with the same people.

"Sounds good," Sam said over a mouthful of food. Natalie nodded and sipped her coffee but didn't say anything.

The family ate breakfast quickly, not allowing for much further conversation. After looking at the clock and noticing it was 8:20 am, Sam broke up his remaining piece of bacon into tiny bits and placed them in front of Zerbert, who had been waiting patiently for his daily morning snack. Then, Sam headed for the door. He slipped on his gray Nike sneakers and grabbed the car keys off of the counter.

"Let's go, Nat," he said.

She raised her coffee mug and finished its contents in one large swig, then proceeded to bring her plate to the sink. On her way to the shoe rack she stopped briefly at her mom's seat and kissed her on the cheek. "Thanks for breakfast, mama," she said and continued to the door.

As soon as they got outside, Sam flashed a grin at Natalie. "Suck up," he said.

"Oh, shut up and drive," she retorted. And so he did.

The drive was only five minutes long. This had been convenient for Sam before his driving days, although it did take a bit longer by bike. Sam parked his mother's car alongside his dad's red Ford pickup truck in the parking lot behind the building, turned off the ignition, and made his way toward the door as Natalie trailed behind, frantically using her phone in the last few minutes she could without her dad threatening to hide it during the work day. There were some perks to working for their parents, but that did not mean Sam and Natalie got off easy; they were still treated like regular employees. In fact, if anything, they were treated even more harshly than regular employees. If they showed up late, they were required to work late, and if they used their phones on the job, it sometimes resulted in phone privileges being taken away for days. Nelson couldn't do this to the other workers, and after it happened to Sam once the previous summer, he hadn't touched his phone during a work day again. Natalie still did, and the other secretary, Linda, noticed, but Nelson often couldn't, as he was usually in the printing room.

When they got inside, their dad was already working on an order. He had the radio turned up high, dancing around the room to an old Journey song as he worked. When he noticed them enter, Nelson shuffled over to the corner and turned the volume down.

"Well, well, well, look who decided to show up," he said, although his tone was light-hearted. He said this almost every morning, no matter what time they arrived.

"It's 8:27," Natalie said.

"That's right," their dad answered, having gone back to his work already. "That means you have only three minutes to get to work. We have a big day today."

"Yeah?" Sam asked, headed toward the office where he spent his days. The shop was small enough that even if everyone was in different rooms, they could usually still hold a conversation.

"Yep. We had three new voicemails requesting 50 shirts each this morning, not to mention the shipment we still have to finish for Ryker," their dad answered. "There's a report on your desk, Sam, so you can get started on their designs. And Natalie, could you call those folks back and let 'em know we'll get started as soon as we can? Leave voicemails if you have to."

Sam and Natalie knew the daily drill, but Nelson always told them, anyway. It was mostly just so he could process his own thoughts and make sure everything was on track. He'd owned the business now for 9 years, and the summer always proved to be his busiest season.

With their tasks laid out for them, Natalie and Sam went about their work, and their dad raised the volume of the radio back up as he worked to finish the previous week's orders. It wasn't always just the three of them working. Some days other printers came in to help Nelson, too. Either way, each day functioned about the same.

Sam carried out the rest of the summer in a similar fashion, each morning eating breakfast with his mom, Natalie, and Zerbert, creating designs for new customers each day, and either reading or binge-watching Netflix at night. On weekends, he went to the beach with his friends from school or hung out in the local park, where he had spent many of his adolescent days in summers past. Sam's feelings about college continued to fluctuate each day, and he continued to repress the thought of it. What would happen, would happen, he knew, so he decided to keep out of it. Soon enough, though, it was late August, and he could no longer ignore it. Move-in day was August 27th, a Saturday. It took nearly a week for him to pack all of his belongings, Eve having made list upon list of items to make sure he wouldn't forget anything.

As it turned out, they did forget one thing: bandaids. On his first night at Middlebury, Sam tumbled out of his raised bed during a nightmare, and cut his leg on the corner of his desk, waking Chase and who knows how many other students on their floor. *Great first impression*, Sam thought, as he lay in the dark, bleeding on the cold tile floor of his dorm room.



By Abigail Williams

A Day of John

By Scott Eichel

John wakes up to the usual morning chirping in his home. He is calm under a thick down blanket. Eyes widening, he stares upwards at the plain ceiling. He knows it is time to begin the day; his internal body clock is highly regulated. Whether he wants to begin the day or not is beside the fact; the only thing that matters is that he knows he is obligated to do so.

The home's automatic lighting system begins to illuminate as soon as his feet are on the ground. Shocked by the bite of the morning tile floor, John's mind briefly flashes back to a moment from last night in which he had the urge to sleep with socks on, predicting the uncomfortable temperature of the morning floor. John realizes he's hungry as he walks towards the living room. He pulls out his phone and turns it on. With muscle memory, he draws out the shape of a pizza slice on the blank white screen: the universally accepted symbol for food. He waits for the problem to be solved.

John is relieved once again. He sits down on a white couch near the center of the living room, plugging his phone into a socket on a nearby wall so it can recharge. He sits and waits with his head down and phone in hand, confined to an area with about a two-foot radius.

Upon research on his device, John discovers that there is a social gathering in the process of being scheduled for later that night. The time is undetermined as of the moment, but he knows the friends will debate over it highly until the ideal time is decided on. Social gatherings are not taken lightly in John's life. He begins scrolling through the news of his friends, which had accumulated overnight.

John suddenly realizes he forgot all about his morning hunger after half an hour of occupying himself with his device. He picks himself up and walks over to the door of the house. He swings the heavy door open and out into the short hallway most people would refer to as a "mudroom." There on the grey rug is a polystyrene box. He picks it up, glad to find that the box has not grown completely cold due to his accidental neglect. He walks back into the house, closing and locking the door behind him. On the way back to his spot in the living room, John grabs a fork, a knife, and a handful of napkins from the kitchen. His kitchen has a sterile gleam covering the countertops and appliances. John looks at the fork and wonders if forks are supposed to have three or four points. He has a strong suspicion that they are supposed to have four, but he has never noticed that all the forks in his personal house only have three points. A trickle of anxiety rises inside of him, but he shrugs it off.

John opens up the polystyrene container. He has two pancakes cooked golden brown. He also has a pile of home fries which have been cooked almost burnt, just how he likes it. To top it off, there is an orange swelling with juice, brighter than any other orange he has gotten in a box to this point. John's mind begins to drift, forgetting about the full meal in front of him. All he can think about right now is how he wishes the box had some sausage links in it because that's what he really wanted for breakfast. John begins cutting up the pancakes regardless, only slightly bothered. He is a couple of bites in before dismay over the lack of sausage links evolves into distraction. He turns to his phone to briefly vent his frustration. After eating half a pancake and two forkfuls of home fries, John realizes he's not hungry enough to warrant peeling the orange. He throws the leftovers into the trash, polystyrene box and all, and continues on with his morning routine.

After getting dressed, showering, and every other little morning whatnot, the sun is almost up in the sky. John realizes he hasn't seen his parents in well over a week. He doesn't want them to think he has become a recluse, or worse yet, neglecting his elders, so he decides to invite them over. Mulling over how to make himself seem more presentable, he exchanges the plain t-shirt he's wearing for one of the few professional button down shirts he owns. He tidies up the house, neatens the bed, polishes the windows, and fixes up the few items of the living room. He sits down on the couch and twiddles his thumbs.

A few minutes pass, and a hologram of John's parents appear in front of him. His mind is gripped with an insecure fear of their parental judgement towards him and his accomplishments. He begins to stand up to acknowledge their presence, but before he can stand up fully, his parents glance back at him and nod their heads to acknowledge that they have been acknowledged. They spin to look around the house and are impressed with the organization which he appears to maintain. Not a single sign of unhappiness or discontent can be observed in the faces of John's parents. They smile briefly at him, and then their image disappears. Not a single word is exchanged during the whole visit, reassuring John that he passed the expectation test of his parents once again. He feels for a moment that he is successful.

Moments later, John comes up with a brilliant idea. In preparation for the night's social gathering, John thinks it would be a good idea to converse in person with a friend, Flint, who lives two blocks down the street. He wants to talk to him about where the gathering should take place and what the group of friends might possibly do to spend time together, plus it would be a good way to kill some time during the day. Turning the door knob, he is just about to step outside before he realizes that he has no idea what the weather is like. John is particularly afraid of wearing too many layers, for he tends to get hot easily. He doesn't want to be very sweaty when he reaches Flint's house. He also has no idea if it is precipitating outside or not. John takes off his shoes, returns to the living room, sits on the couch, and takes out his phone. He knows he can find on his phone what the weather outside is like.

John sits down to consult the weather application. He draws a (cloud?) on his phone, hoping the machine will be able to give him an answer. A few seconds pass, and he gets a response back: (a sun and thumbs-up). He decides that he only needs to wear a light coat outside. The application's response didn't say anything about it being windy or not, but John wears a light coat

normally, so he thinks if it is windy he'll be fine, and if it's not windy he'll still be fine. With shoes on again and coat zipped, John is ready to leave the house.

John swings the door open, letting it slam shut behind him. He walks down the short mudroom hallway toward the road that runs perpendicular to the entrance of the house. He knows Flint lives two blocks over, right on the next street. As he walks, John wonders what his other friends are doing right now. It's been a few minutes since he last looked at his phone and he already feels left out of the loop. He looks around at the houses that line the street as he passes them, wondering what all these people could be doing. After he passes by several houses with no signs of activity, he passes by the old man who lives halfway in between Flint and himself. The old man is sitting outside with a smile on his face, leaning back in a comfortable yard chair and enjoying the afternoon. John's heart rate begins to accelerate as he wonders if the old man might try to say something to him, so he looks down at his feet and quickens his steps until he reaches the range where he feels it would be too uncomfortable for the old man to call after him. Then:

"Lovely day it's gunna be today, neighbor."

John is still walking, eyes inspecting his feet. "Mhm," he mumbles back.

"Hope you're spendin' it with good company."

"Yup, I am."

The old man chuckles. "That's mighty great to hear. Y'all enjoy yourselves, okay?"

"Mhm."

John turns right down the next street, still wondering what everyone is up to. He reaches the residence of Flint after a couple minutes of walking. Flint opens the door for John, then looks down at his phone. Both of them stand on the front steps.

"Heard there's gunna be a meteor shower tonight through my astronomy app. Might make for some pretty pictures. Nighttime pictures are trendy right now. We can meet in the park in the town center after sundown."

John stands in front of Flint, consulting his own phone. He wonders when exactly "sundown" is. He sees the bulletin for the astronomical phenomenon that Flint is talking about.

"That certainly sounds good," he replies. "But what if that's not enough?"

"What do you mean?"

John stops to think. "Well, what else do people like to do when hanging out?"

Flint pauses for a second to consider this. "Eat snacks?"

"That's true. The snacks we had at our last gathering were eaten rather quickly. I'll have some delivered later while we're all there. Do the usual people sound good? Anyone else you want to be there?"

John looks up for a moment, scanning the neighborhood. He has no qualms as far as who is invited, but he also feels like something is missing that he can't quite identify. He scratches the back of his neck.

"Is Stella invited? She's the only one I can think of."

"Yeah," Flint huffs, "she's on the usual list."

"Okay, good."

"Then great. I'll see you tonight."

"See you—"

John's farewell is unapologetically cut off when Flint steps back into the house and closes the door in front of John. He can hear the quiet sound of a lock turning from the inside.

John begins to amble home the long way from Flint's house. He passes by a few houses, but before he reaches the next street, he slows down as he passes by the house of Stella. Deep down, one of John's only real wants in life is for her to acknowledge him. He does his part in organizing all of the friends' social gatherings with the hope that she will praise him somehow, or show an urge to get to know him on a personal level. She always appears to be having the most fun, saying the most comedic things, and looking the most alluring. John has had a growing urge to reach out to her romantically for a few months now, after years of quiet observation, but has never thought highly enough of himself to think that such an action would be successful.

His curious amble past her house turns into a slowing, slight pause, which turns into a full out halt: today is different. Maybe it is the confidence from his parents' approval earlier, or maybe it is the solid plan about the gathering that he and Flint have come up with, or the conversation with the old man, but something is different about this moment for John. He decides that, at last, he will talk to Stella directly.

John, on the street still, is about twelve steps from the door of Stella's home, or her mudroom. The day's transition to evening makes John glad he wore a coat.

He takes one step towards her house, then two, three.

His mind begins to race as he thinks of things to say to her. He becomes self-conscious of the possibly invasive questions that she might ask him about either his life, or worse, his intentions for being at her door.

Four and five.

John wonders where Stella got the plants that line the walkway and wonders where she got the idea to get plants to line the walkway. The bright colors feel like they are grabbing John as they contrast with the dull walkway underneath him. John begins to aggressively squint and un-squint his eyes as he blinks. He begins to crack all the knuckles in all of his fingers.

Six. Seven and eight.

John begins to walk with a small amount of swagger in his step as he nears the door.

Nine, ten, eleven.

John makes gurgling noises as he clears his throat. *Better I do it now than when she opens the door,* he thinks. Phlegm lodged in some sort of nasal or sinus cavity finds its way into John's mouth. He can tell by its weight on his tongue that it is a sizable glob. He feels like it would be weird to spit it out onto Stella's property. He swallows it. He straightens up his back and brushes his hair aside. He cups his hand in front of his mouth and breathes warmly into it. His breath is acceptable, but it is too late to enhance it now.

As he takes step twelve, he wonders if he should knock on the door or ring the doorbell. Unable to finish the mental task by the time he is at the door, he knocks three times quickly, then rings the doorbell. John decides to take a step back so he's not in the way of the outward opening door, and waits for Stella to answer his percussive call.

He waits for what feels like an eternity.

Thirty-eight seconds later, there is a click as the door is unlocked and opened. There on the other side of the door is Stella. She stands in front of him glowing, wearing a dark blue dress with a floral design printed on it. John wonders whether her dress is made of satin, or some blend of polyester. She has her dirty blonde hair haphazardly pulled back into a hairstyle that John does not have enough experience with, other than to identify as "up." Her hazel eyes are the most grabbing feature of her face, but they are cast downwards at the stoop that holds their feet. Below her nose slumps something between a smile and a smirk, with small amounts of negative emotions curling around the corners of her lips. She is confused as to why John, of all people, is standing on her doorstep.

John feels compelled to greet her with a touch. Upon initiation of a movement between the two, she reaches out for a hug while he puts forward a hand. She catches herself just before she falls into him.

John, not used to being outside for such a long duration of time, feels a sneeze coming. He sneezes openly on her somewhat exposed chest, unprepared because his hand is still extended in front of him. The length, power, and amplitude of his sneeze (which is impressive), combined with where the content has landed, make the uncomfortableness of the situation unavoidable.

Both recoil a step and chuckle nervously at the unfolding situation. He wants to meet her gaze but knows that is too ambitious for him to attempt at the moment. John takes a deep breath. He rummages around his mind for something to say while she gets impatient waiting for him to say something.

John's level of flustered-ness grows from invisible and subconscious to visual and concerning as he begins to perspire at the brow and shake at the knees. His feet hurt from standing for such a long duration.

He opens his mouth. John mixes up a few possible things to say in normal conversation with his own private desires. Only a single word makes its way out his mouth.

"Intercourse!"

The small amount of negativity already curling around her mouth spreads down her cheeks and up to her eyes. The glow surrounding Stella disappears. Before he can begin to process the last minute and a half's events, she gently closes the door in front of him without ever looking at him in the eyes. He can hear the quiet sound of a lock turning from the inside.



By Olivia Mosher

Puzzle
By Thomas Cote

What if I were to tell you that
life is a jigsaw puzzle?
Would you call me crazy?
Or would you be willing to hear me out?

When solving a jigsaw puzzle,
always start with the outside.
It is the easiest,
kind of like how life starts out easy,
and becomes harder with every piece you place.

Once most of the hard work is done,
you only have a few pieces left.
Now you can relax
as if you just retired.

The point I want to make, however,
is you can't solve a puzzle without ALL of the pieces.
Life is the same way.
Appreciate everything you have.
Use every piece to advance your objectives.
Don't be afraid to ask for help,
and maybe when you're done,
a beautiful picture will be displayed.

Cold
By Cassandra Blaszczak

The countertop is cold
The water from the faucet is cold
Even the air is cold

Sneaking around the house can be tricky
A cold hardwood floor creaks with every step
Why must it be so cold?

The only warmth I can find is our living room rug
My feet bury themselves into the carpet
Toes clenching in and out

Embers in the fire are almost out
The only chance for survival is dependent on me
I will not freeze to death

Newspaper, kindlin, where are the matches?
Strike a flame and let nature do the rest
Set two logs inside and pray for warmth

There is hope after all
Unraveling from their frozen cocoons
There is life and light again, no more cold countertops

Sleeping Through Magic
By Janessa Corrigan

There is something truly special about nighttime outdoors.
As I walk, the cool March air hits my face and
penetrates the thin parts of my coat and hat.
It's chilling, and for a moment I think,
"Why on Earth am I outside right now?"
But soon, I remember. I look up and notice the
deep purple-black sky stretching for as far as I can see.
The silhouettes of pine trees skirt the bottom of the view,
while distant, iridescent stars fill the rest. This, coupled with
the near silence of the night, induces a certain sense of wonder.
I am reminded that while I lie down each night,
thinking of nothing but the warmth of my bed and
what the next day might bring,
there is a vast spectacle taking place right outside my window.
The day may feel over for me, but the mechanisms of the Earth never sleep.
Soon, the effect of the wind becomes even more piercing against my body
from standing still to admire the visible constellations and
their endless, beautiful home that is the sky,
so I resume walking to keep warm. As I do, I think fondly
on a Nietzsche quote I recall from my philosophy course:
"The world is deep. And deeper than day can comprehend."

Winter
By Malorie Martin

The brisk air, freezing my nose.
I should have worn a coat,
but the sun shining through my window
made me think it'd be warmer.
I can see the evergreens standing tall,
and it makes me think that winter
isn't so different from the other seasons.
The temperature is well below freezing,
but there isn't snow on the ground.
The sun shines through my window,
but the wind whips around.
Inside, the heat is on and I'm warm,
but walk out the door and you'll freeze.

Cold
By Malorie Martin

I can't feel the tips of my ears
as wind whips by them,
scattering my tangled hair
around my face.
My nose runs, constant and watery,
as my numb fingers wipe my eyes.
Tears from the wind and blinding sun.
The waves crash, drowning out
the sound of semi-trucks and angry parents.
And I feel so at peace,
squinting at the sun.
And its light blinds me,
reflected off the ocean.

Pain
By Marcos Argueta Guevara

Pain is universal but seldom seen.
We walk with a weight on our shoulders greater than what Atlas is condemned to hold,
yet we make it look effortless.
The scars on our bodies are visual representations of the pain once felt.
A scar is simple, its remedy a simple bandage or stitches.
But how do you heal a soul that feels shattered?
How do you help someone whose wounds run deeper than the ocean?
Take that smile with a grain of salt.
Behind those smiling eyes is a world of pain that is not explored.
We continue everyday as if we aren't being dragged down as we try to tread water.
The weight on our shoulders begins to wear on us.
Our treading becomes strained until the weight drags us down into the depths of our own pain,
an ironic paradox.
The pain that ran deeper than oceans is the same ocean we drown in.
But we are strong swimmers, and we begin to tread water once again,
hoping that the weight we carry on our shoulders can one day be relieved from our aching souls.

XXVI
By Marcos Argueta Guevara

I wish I could remember the day we first met in the park.
I would be able to tell you if it was love at first sight.
Now, I'm certain it was.
The universe aligned for us that night.
In that instant, everything fell into place like a jigsaw.
I loved you before I knew how to love myself.
Our lives became intertwined, allowing the colors of us to bleed into one another.
I will stand by you longer than the stars will shine.

Faker
By Jade Hichborn

How do you lose yourself so quickly?

I am fake so much more than I am ever real
that I've started to forget what it's like to be authentic.

People say they want realness, but in reality,
they want their anxieties soothed and conflict avoided.
And that completely rejects what my authenticity would entail.

I long to be a bouquet of bright, open flowers,
or a ray of sunshine bringing warmth to the Earth.
But I know I'll only ever be a discarded gift box or
a lackluster sense of accomplishment.

They say "it's better to be hated for what you are
than to be loved for what you are not."
But how does that work when you don't know who you are?
Emptiness may be a feeling, but it doesn't really define you.
Happiness may be fleeting, but at least it's something to strive for.

Safety Net
By Rachele Tatosky

Be your own safety net.
Build it with the strength of your healing bones
and not the fine lines of your bad choices.
Rely on yourself,
and not on someone else
to hold the net at your rock bottom,
or else you may be left with a landing
harder than the hardship you are
jumping asay from.
Let good choices soften your fall.
Do not place the fate of your well being
in someone else's hands.
Do not let them weave the source of your survival
with the feeble fear of losing you.
Weave it with faith in a better future,
a promise of safety that can only come
from the person who is falling…
you.



By Charlena Capozzi

What Ever Happened to Jamie Lennon?

By Daisy Apraku

There was nothing extraordinary about this fall day. Alice was on her way to Pops' for her afternoon shift when her mind drifted to her best friend's murder. Jamie Lennon had been slaughtered in his sleep exactly a year ago. The Sheriff's station had no leads on his murder, and when Alice got frustrated with their apparent insolence, she took it upon herself to investigate. She had had no leads on Jamie's death. That, mixed with the pressures of being valedictorian in her senior year, meant she was overwhelmed, to say the least.

As Alice neared Pops' Diner, a single golden leaf spun down in a spiral of breeze and danced through the air as it fell to the ground. It shook lightly, as if it could have been kidnapped at any moment by the clutch of the icy wind, but it levitated down the rotated course. It blasted past her face, landed faintly on the ground, and stood out amongst the darker leaves beneath it. The leaf was delicate; she yearned to reach downward and pick it up and hold it close to her chest and smooth out any creases. However, her chest became heavy as she remembered that this was something Jamie would do. He loved to admire the autumn leaves.

"Why do you always do that?" Alice stopped, looking at Jamie with amusement.

"Do what?"

"You don't even notice?"

"Notice what?"

"You always stop when we're walking and look around."

"Why don't you?"

"Because we've got somewhere to be. Time waits for no man."

"Exactly. And with the snap of your fingers, autumn and its beauty would vanish," he snapped his fingers for dramatic effect.

"Mmm…"

"The discarded leaves make the most splendid mosaic that is unique in all the world. "

"Wow… That was deep. Didn't think you had that in you."

"Me either. Guess I'm full of surprises," he said, avoiding eye contact with her.

"Okay, Mr. Mysterious, let's get going," she said as she grabbed his hand and pulled him along.

Pops' Diner was situated in the middle of the biggest buildings in the heart of the town. No one could get enough of the award-winning chocolate milkshakes, so people decided to build around it instead. Alice remembered that Jaime would bring her here every day after school. He would order the same thing each day: a large chocolate milkshake, a bacon cheeseburger, extra bacon, and large curly fries.

"Keep it up and you'll die of diabetes."

"That's the only way I want to go—mid chew," he joked.

"I can imagine the headlines now: 'LOCAL BOY DIES OF CONSUMING TOO MANY BACON CHEESEBURGERS!'"

"If there aren't any of these burgers at my funeral, then I don't want one. It's as simple as that." Alice had made sure Jamie got his wish. The whole town came for the Lennon's funeral, and they all had chocolate milkshakes and cheeseburgers from Pops'. Alice struggled to hold back a tear which had just escaped onto her cheek. The mere thought of Jamie made her overwhelmed with emotions. She wiped her cheek, took a deep breath, and opened the door to the diner.

"Alice, sweetheart!"

"Hey, Pops! How you doin' today?"

"Great! Heard there's heavy rain coming inabit."

"Really? That's so weird; it's lovely outside." Pops shrugged and continued to clean tables. Alice had always loved Pops. He was a giant black man with a loving heart. Everyone saw him as the town's grandpa, and he had always behaved as such. He was Alice's shoulder to cry on when Jamie died and now, with her parents gone, he was her only family left. He did not hesitate to offer her a job when she decided she was not going to college anymore.

The floor in the diner was a grid of large stone squares, which alternated black and white in a checkered pattern. There was an antique cash register, which wasn't used, and a low-hanging ceiling fan, which spun awkwardly. Pipes from the radiator ran along the walls. The booth tabletops were fairly small, which resulted in customers sitting close to each other at a close, intimate distance. Finding her way past the various booths situated all around the diner, she made it to the back of the restaurant and placed her duffle bag in one of the lockers. Alice took off her Converse and put on her non-slip server shoes. She searched the bottom of her bag for her name tag before eventually finding it in the pocket of her apron. *Typical,* she thought to herself. She was not supposed to work this shift today; it was the eve of Jamie's death and Pops had given her this day and the next off. But she refused — she did not want any special treatment. Plus, she needed something to keep her busy; otherwise, she would have just spent her day crying.

Shortly after her shift began, the clear blue skies had turned into a dark grey. The tiny diner huddled despondent among the huge town buildings. Washed out under the cloudy skies, it arched into itself, battling against the light shower. People rushed

by the diner outside on the crowded street. The dozen customers looked up as the doors swung open, signaled by the cold wind. Compared to the outside, the inside of the diner was warm and gay with bright and colorful walls. The customers returned to their chats as the door swung closed and the cold breeze was forgotten.

Alice looked up as well and was greeted by two men who had slid into a booth at the corner of the diner. They did not look like they were from Grandville because Alice was sure she would know them. There was something unnerving about their entrance into the diner; it was like a gasp of freezing cold air had unsettled the atmosphere. This unsettled Alice. The one who Alice could see looked unfamiliar; he had thick and lustrous disheveled dark brown hair. His face was strong and smooth with the exception of stubble on his chin. He had dark brows, which slid downwards in a serious assertion. He looked almost angry as he whispered in hushed tones. She could not get a good look at the other one. All she could see was an avalanche of dark chocolate hair that tumbled out of his baseball cap in a tousled mess. It reminded her of Jamie, but she dismissed that thought completely. Alice was not one to be this distracted; she was usually focused, but she couldn't shake this weird feeling.

"One chocolate milkshake, bacon cheeseburger, extra bacon, and curly cheese fries. And a root beer for table 8!" Pops called out to Alice. Alice stopped in a daze. That was Jamie's order minus the root beer. She had not heard that order being called out since his death. She shuddered. Table 8 was the table the two gentlemen had been seated at. With their food on a tray in her hands, she took shaky steps and made her way towards the booth in the corner.

The man Alice could make out looked at Alice through furrowed brows as if she looked familiar. Alice found it hard to avoid his piercing blue eyes, and it took some strength to remove her gaze from his. His upper body vibrated, and Alice figured it was because he kept shaking his leg because she assumed his buddy was pissing him off. As her eyes started to focus on her surroundings, she made out the small features of the man that had his back to her. Ivory skin. Rosewood hair.

"Jamie?" she whispered, unsure of what she saw. His gaze rose slowly when he heard Alice mention his name. He greeted her with the full force of his smoky, jade-green eyes.

Alice felt lightheaded instantly, which caused her to loosen her grip on the tray she held. This resulted in it crashing down. As soon as she lost her footing, the mysterious guy grabbed her by her shoulders and stabilized her. Immediately, Pops was at her side.

"Alice sweetie, you okay?"

"Pops, it's Jamie," she pointed at him.

"Alice… I know it's rough, but Jamie's not here."

"No! He's right here! You're looking at him!" She was almost hysterical.

"Sweetheart…" Pops shook his head. "I'm so sorry about this, sirs. I'll get you another meal. On the house!" Jamie and Alice had not broken eye contact yet. They both looked at each other with utter disbelief. Eyes widened. Mouths agape.

"No, don't worry about it. We have somewhere to be, anyway. Thank you." The man stood up and then Jamie did, too. In the blink of an eye, they rushed out through the doors of the diner.

"You're scaring off customers now?" Pops joked and crouched down to pick up the pieces of broken plate off the floor. Alice was still disoriented but crouched down to help.

"You didn't see him? He-he-he was right here…"

"Maybe you should take a break, sweetie," he said. Alice nodded, too weak to argue. She made her way to the ladies' room and fell down to the cold marble floor. She took a breath. And then another. And another. She tried to make sense of all of this. She saw Jamie. She knew it was him. He knew that she knew it was him. Why couldn't Pop see him? Was she hallucinating? Who was the guy Jamie was with? Why was his gaze so terrifyingly mesmerizing? All these questions made her head spin, and they drove her crazy. She needed to run and so she did... Into the rain.

The icy grey sky endlessly grumbled. Soon, the rain that overpowered the clouds, which struggled to withstand the weight of the rain, gave in. The rain poured down over the town with a loud cry. Icy rain pierced Alice's wet skin. She ran across the glassy path, her movement weakened by the weight of her rain-soaked clothes. The harsh rain annihilated the crystal reflection of the sky and turned it into a confused chaos. She ran with no destination in mind. Wherever her feet took her, she went. It was no surprise that when her feet could go no more, she was met with these writings carved in stone: "Here lies James Christopher Lennon, beloved son and friend. December 6, 1998 - February 17, 2017."

They were more than just tears; it was more like the kind of bleak weeping that would belong to a person drained of all hope. Alice sank to her knees at the grave with little care about the moist mud that dirtied her clothes. Her tears interweaved with the rain, and her puffing howls echoed around the graveyard. The pain that coursed through her was as detectable as the bitter fall wind. It did not hurt this much when he died, but the false hope broke her even more. When she noticed it was way too late to be outside, especially without a phone, she got up to her feet and was about to leave the graveyard when she saw two people in what seemed to be an argument.

She neared them quietly in an effort not to give away her position. Getting a better view of the individuals, she realized that it was "Jamie" and the other guy. Muscles were tensed, hands balled into fists, and eyes in a death lock.

"I told you coming back here was a mistake," the man said.

"My parents are buried here, Aiden." *His name is Aiden,* Alice thought to herself.

"We could have come straight here. That stop at the diner was unnecessary."

"If you had tried the burger, you wouldn't feel that way."

“You almost got caught!”

“Alice… Why could she see me? I was cloaked,” Jamie fidgeted. He bounced from one foot to the other. He could not be still when he was being confronted.

“She’s the reason you risked it all?!” he fumed.

“I had no idea she worked there, okay? I thought she would never work at Pops’. She hated going there with me.”

“Typical,” Aiden spat. “Can’t expect much from someone who used to be a human.”

“If you hate humans so much, why didn’t you leave me a year ago? Why did you take me away from my parents and everyone I love? Why did you turn me? Why did you save me from that thing? And don’t think I didn't notice how you looked at Alice. Do you want to explain all that to me?” Jamie demanded; his patience deteriorated. Aiden growled in response and Alice gasped. She had just given away her position, and in split seconds Aiden was in front of her.

“You’ve been a thorn in my flesh today… Alice,” Aiden took his time to say her name.

“Well, I’ve had a rough day. Finding out your best friend isn’t actually dead will do things to you,” she said, and this time she turned to look at the tall lanky boy who stood a few feet away from them. He approached them with cautious steps.

“Alice… Please don’t hit me,” he said. Alice studied his face. He was in front of her. Jamie wasn’t dead, and she wanted to scream. She was confused yet so happy, but she reacted differently. When Alice wasn’t sure of how to deal with her emotions, she resorted to petty violence.

“You son of a bitch!” Punch. “You made me believe you were dead!” Punch. “Where the hell were you?” Punch. Punch. “You have no idea what I’ve been through!” Punch. Slap. Punch.

“Ow! Ow! Ow! I thought I told you not to hit me!” he whined. Aiden tried to stifle his laughter.

“As much as this reunion is entertaining, we have to go, James.”

“He’s not going anywhere until he explains this messed up shit to me. And who the hell are you anyway? Jamie doesn’t have friends.”

“Ouch, Alice. That one stung—”

“I’m Aiden.”

“I know your name, idiot. I meant who are—”

“Oh? You’re stalking me now?”

“Wha— No! I could say the same thing as you. How do you know my name?”

“Jamie here told me, and I know he couldn’t have told you because, like you just said, you thought he was dead,” he said, mimicking her nickname for James.

Just as soon as Alice was about to reply, a menacing growl erupted from the shadows.

“What the heck was that?” Alice asked as she backed away from the darkness.

“Shit,” Jamie and Aiden said in unison and moved to block Alice’s view.

“Run, Alice…” Jamie whispered to her.

“It’s too late. She’s been seen. There’s nowhere for her to run.”

“What’re you guys talking abou—” she paused mid-sentence when she saw what was now closing in on them. The monster advanced on them, its physique hardly distinguishable in the shadowy twilight of the graveyard. It moved slowly as if it was studying its prey. Slime dripped, oozing out of its body, and dropped on the tombstones. It was sticky mucus, rancid and toxic to touch. The beast reeked of… acid. Alice could not figure out which acid, but she knew it had to be acid due to its foul smell. It growled again, frustrated by the fact that its prey backed away from it. Its one colossal eye rotated wildly, searching, its nighttime vision only used for discerning rapid motion. As a last resort, it began to release ticking noises, using its sonar powers to locate this tough prey.

“We don’t have much time,” Aiden warned. “Do you want to live, or do you want to die, Alice?” She looked at the monster that neared them, and then to Jamie, who stood frightened in front of her. There was no time to think, and with that she replied:

“I want to live.” As quickly as she said those words, they were gone. Gone from the graveyard. Gone from Grandville. Gone from the world. The next morning, the papers read: “ALICE GREEN FOUND SLAUGHTERED IN BED A YEAR AFTER JAMIE LENNON!”

Alice woke up in a dark room, and on what she noticed was the comfiest bed she had ever laid upon. She rubbed her eyes a bit because it seemed as though her eyes had been welded shut. She sat up into a sitting position.

“You’re up earlier than expected,” she heard from the far corner of the room.

“Jamie?” Alice asked.

“Think again.”

“Aiden?”

“DING DING DING! We have a winner!”

“Can you refrain from being so loud? My head hurts really bad right now.” Her head ached. The pain felt as though someone had taken a knife to her skull and would not stop stabbing. She leaned her head against the headboard. She squeezed her eyes shut and willed the pain to go away.

“Hey, take it easy there. Have something to drink,” Aiden said while he approached and handed her a glass of some

liquid. Since the room was so dark, Alice hadn't known what it was and as soon as she took a sip, she regretted it immediately.

"What the fuck is this?" she asked, shooting Aiden a death glare.

"It's a potion. Drink it. It helps with the headache."

"A what— OH MY GOODNESS! Yesterday—and the—MONSTER! WHERE THE HELL ARE WE?!"

"Relax, we're safe," he said as he sat down beside her, placing his arm awkwardly around her shoulder. Tingles emerged at the place their bodies touched, making Aiden get up abruptly. He knew what that meant, but Alice didn't, and he wasn't about to explain it to her just yet.

In an attempt to salvage the awkward moment, Alice asked again, "Where are we?"

"We are in another realm, Alice. The realm of the Immortal."

"I don't understand. Yesterday we—"

"Yesterday I asked you if you wanted to live. This is the price of answer. Your life on earth is over. You are immortal now. You're a shadow hunter now."

"A shadow hunter?"

"Your life is now not your own. Your fate is to hunt downworlders 'till the day you die."

"Downworlders as in vampires and werewolves and ogres? You must be joking. I'm a character of the Mortal Instruments now? Where are Clary and Jace? Do I get to meet them now?" she asked sarcastically.

"Clary and Jace Herondale? You'll be surprised that they are legends here. They saved us more than once and they're practically worshipped here."

"Huh? I thought I was joking."

"Well the Mortal Instruments is based on a real story, love."

"Um, okay then… Where's Jamie?"

"He'll be up shortly. He's being interrogated because of last night's events."

"I hope I didn't get him… you guys, in any trouble."

"Don't worry about it. We'll be fine," he reassured her.

"Do you mind if we open the blinds? It's dark in here."

"You sure? The light is blinding," he warned.

"I can handle a little light, Aiden," she said stubbornly. Aiden chuckled and drew the curtains opened.

"Oh, fucking hell!"

"I told you sooo," Aiden chuckled, which resulted in Alice throwing a pillow at him.



By Isaiah Marseille

Symbiotic Stress Reliever

By Nick Schlosser

Overfilled mugs of beer slid down the oak furnished bar top of the Black Spade Cantina. The crowd was composed of college students from the nearby town, local alumni, and 9-5ers that needed some alcohol in their system before they made their way back to their dry cycles they called lives. Maverfield is a college town, home to Albright University. Albright is a DII school that is the enrollment home to about 6,700 undergraduate students. Many live in Maverfield because of the low housing cost around the university. The bar had a dimly lit sign outside and was on the main drag of the street in town that hosted many different coffee shops, thrift stores, and fine eateries, but only one bar. The inside was designed with the bar stall wrapping around the entirety of the right hand side of the bar. The rest was reserved for tables and seating areas near the front with a billiards table assortment in the back of the bar. The bar's stained carpet was usually forgotten by the atmosphere, as the employees usually do a great job with their themed events.

That night there was no special event, only $2 bucket shots. In the back left corner of the bar, a group of graduate students in their mid 20's huddled around a pool table that had a fully racked set of balls ready for a game. At the other pool tables there was a young couple, local high school teachers, and football players from the Albright team. A few large overhead lights covered the billiards area, but the establishment was mainly lit by flickering lights that originated from the scattered brand signs and the glow from televisions displaying whatever professional hockey game that was on that night. Tera, Ashley, Neal, and Gerome were passing around pool sticks and chalk, preparing for the first round of the night. They all were physical therapy majors with only a year left of graduate school before they would be able to practice professionally. They were all freshman suite mates to start their collegiate careers. The four of them became close, as they were always in the same classes, dealing with the same perilous exams the program is known for. They would always find ways to entertain themselves and get away from the stress of the academic world. Specifically, besides science, they loved the art of taking.

After a warm-up round of pool, Tera bounded for the bar to begin the night's events. Tera, whose brown hair was falling over her shoulder, was wearing a pair of black pants and a white top that was covered with a conservative navy colored winter jacket. The bar counter was crowded, but she knew exactly where to position herself to get the moth attracted to the light. This was not her first time seducing. She usually was the one to take this role for the night, as she believed she was well versed in the process of male entrapment. She saw a sleaze ball of a guy leaning on the corner of the bar between the door to the bathroom and the counter. He had an empty shot glass in his hand, waving to the bartender for another.

"You think she is okay to get back to it tonight?" Neal asked.

"I don't know, but we have to believe that she is, so she isn't worried. We can't let this one go haywire; we almost fucked it up last time," Gerome pointed out.

"We've got to get her help when we can. It's getting bad, guys," Neal suggested. "But for now, let's just keep doing what we do. Only a few more credits to stress through."

At the bar, in her strategic location, Tera started ordering next to an early thirties looking man with a black leather coat and tight jeans. The man possessed a slicked back blonde pad of hair on his head. He looked freshly cut out of an *Outsiders* poster. He donned many different trinkets of gold and other precious metals that hugged his fingers, neck, and wrist. Tera noticed him looking at her for her entire walk up to the bar; Tera already had one in her trap.

"Hey, I'm Crane, and you are?" the wannabe pimp greaser asked as he slipped the comb in his left hand into his jacket pocket.

"Marlo, my name is Marlo. I'm drinking a peach passion in case you're curious," Tera said.

Crane pointed towards the illuminated liquor rack that bounced red and white light on his soft face and leaned in on the sticky oak bar.

"A peach passion for the pretty lady. I'll take a Bud Light, bottle," Crane said to the bartender, and then turned to Tera. "What are you up to tonight?"

"I'm just here with my friends. Had a crazy midterm today, so just unwinding," Tera replied, trying to look interested. "You a student?"

"No… College isn't for me. I prefer street smarts," Crane leaned in closer to Tera. "I am what you could call an entrepreneur, a businessman."

"Are you a day-trader, or something like that work-at-home kind of thing?" Tera asked.

"Ya, day trader is a good way to describe it," Crane replied as the bartender gave the two of them their drinks.

"Well, what are you trading?" Tera located the straw in her drink with her mouth while keeping eye contact with her new acquaintance.

"Commodities, sweetheart. That's enough about me; tell me something about you. Like, is one of those friends over there your boyfriend?" Crane pointed over to the corner where the group of young adults were chattering and sinking down pool balls in a warm-up game. Ashley was wearing a dark pink sweatshirt with the Albright logo on it, all black yoga pants, and wore a clear sign of exhaustion from the color that shaded her eyes. She was the student in the group that no one knew how she made it

this far academically. She was all book smarts and absolutely zero street smarts. Many around her, without knowing her, would classify her as an "airhead."

Neal had on a blue Nike pullover with a pair of khakis that matched well with his white shoes. He also had a grey strap back hat that was on backwards. Neal played lacrosse for Albright for his entire undergraduate career at the school. He was supposed to be the "cool" kid of the group. Gerome was dressed in a very nice white collared shirt with a passionate red tie that matched his red Albright Graduate OT Top 5 lapel pin. He wore an entire dress outfit for every exam in each of his courses. Gerome had a complex that he was better than everyone else, hence the suits, and he loved to be the alpha dog in any situation he was in. He was the "leader" of the group. Tera was the "entrancer."

"Ahh, no. They're just some people I study with. They do a good job of coercing me out to the bar sometimes. Not my scene," Tera commented.

"I bet you get stressed going through school," Crane said.

"Sometimes I just need to release that stress. That's why I come out here so I can hopefully meet someone to forget a night with," Tera said while she grasped Crane's arm that was supporting him on the bar. "Crane, you seem like a nice fellow."

Crane propped up and looked Tera in the eyes. "Baby girl, I'm one of the nicest you'll meet." He proceeded to reach down and bring Tera's hand to his lips and caressed it with a kiss.

"You can say that, but how do I know that?" Tera asked while pulling her hand away. "You could be some killer. Your leather outfit doesn't really comfort me," Tera was pointing at the chrome studs on the shoulder of his jacket and giggling.

"This old thing? I only wear this to attract those who are strong-willed enough to handle a man who rocks leather," Crane replied while taking off the leather jacket he just adamantly defended. "And you can trust me. What if I buy you another drink? Will you trust me more?"

"That's a good way to my heart!" Tera said in a high pitched voice.

Some time passed while the two flirted at the bar, laughing back and forth. Crane started getting fairly handsy in between jokes, but that is exactly what Tera wanted to see. After dealing with it for ten minutes, she looked over at her friends to signal them to start readying up.

"If you like peach passions from here, you should try the peach cocktail I can make back at my house bar." Crane pushed out the early invite with particularly low hope.

"If it is so good, then what are we still doing here?" Tera questioned.

"Good point. I have a place on Southside. I'll call us a ride," Crane responded quickly and then walked outside while taking his phone out of his pants pocket. Tera finished the rest of her drink and hustled over to the back corner of the bar through drunk busybodies to where her friends were and gave them a quick debrief.

"I'm heading to his place now. Y'all should get out to the car. His place is on Southside," Tera whispered.

"Let's go. How long do you think you'll need 'till we make our way into his place?" Gerome asked.

"Few minutes, tops. I was aiming for one that can go quick. Not really in the mood tonight," Tera replied.

"You can tell just by looking at someone how long they'll last?" Neal asked.

"Hell yeah I can, Galen Rupp," she said, staring up and down and smirking at Neal. She turned to the rest of the group, "Okay, I'm going to get back over there. Hurry up. Don't lose us, but don't follow too close."

"We know how it goes."

Tera exited the group and made her way toward the door to meet Crane. He had secured a driver to pick them up. The car pulled up to the curb, and before leaning into the car, she leaned for a quick peck upon Crane's cheek. As the couple made their way into the car down the street, the rest of the friend group walked out onto the street and made their way over to Neal's brown car in a side parking lot. As they got in the car, the two passengers had to battle with lacrosse sticks and trash reminisce of fast food. Neal started the car up and began tailing their target. After a lengthy twenty-minute caravan that made supply stops at a CVS and a liquor store, the cars made their final stop.

Crane's vehicle stopped at the front door of his very impressive condo residence. Neal stopped his car on the other side in a parking lot of some local retail store that was closed for the night. Crane and Tera had made their way inside while the rest of the operation waited outside in the car.

"Give her ten minutes," Ashley stated. "Let's get prepped."

"Word. I got the mask in my backpack. Snag me the gym bag for the tool," Neal said.

"Why did you just call it a tool? It's a fucking gun," Gerome questioned. "Like, technically it makes sense. It is a tool; it is meant to be used to finish tasks… I get it, but I don't like it."

"Whoa, not that deep, bro. I just heard it in the new Migos song I heard on the radio," Neal responded while covering his face with the black cotton ski mask that only had holes for eyes.

The rest of the crew followed by putting on their masks, sunglasses, and gloves as well. Neal took the pistol from the gym bag, clicked back the barrel, and put it in the front-hand pocket of his pullover sweatshirt like he had seen in all the hip-hop music videos he had been watching. The team waited a couple of more minutes in silence. After some time passed, they got out of the car and hustled across the street to the stairs leading up to the door of Crane's residence. There were large untrimmed bushes that gave ample cover for them. They hid at the bottom of the stairs on either side and waited. Moments later the door cracked open and Tera was standing in the doorway.

"C'mon in. You guys waited long enough. I was right; it was only about a minute and a half," Tera chuckled and waved them in.

They filed into the condo that was painted an eggshell white. Along the inner hallway following the door there was an all black sideboard that had a bowl of fake fruit on the top and some pictures of what seemed to be his parents. Ashley fell quickly to her knees and whipped open the doors of it and started sifting through items that cluttered the inside. The rest of the house walls were littered with pieces of art. The inner hallway gave way to a large, open-space living room with red couches placed around a huge flat-screen television on the middle wall. To the right was the breezeway to the kitchen with a set of stairs just to the left. The opposite side of the space gave way to more hallways, but also to a set of doors that appeared to lead to a study.

"What have you already hit, Tera?" Gerome asked.

"I got the master bedroom. Still gotta do the walk-in closet. Someone has to hit his office upstairs and help me with a broad scope search," Tera said while displaying a couple of watches, a wallet, and some other assorted jewelry that glowed bright in the LED lit room filled with self-portraits of the man they were robbing.

"Neal, go help her finish that," Gerome commanded. "I'll work on the study and get the rest of the downstairs with Ashley."

Tera and Neal rushed upstairs while Gerome stepped up in front of the white french-style study doors and opened them slowly. As the doors opened, the lights in the room kicked on, revealing shelves on each side of the room that carried rows upon rows of different books. At the end of the room was a desk with a bust of Crane. Gerome walked over to the desk and began snagging whatever looked of value on the top of the desk. He grabbed a signed baseball that was sitting next to a Hank Aaron photo. He took a laptop and a nice vintage bottle of bourbon. He then shifted to the drawers. He snagged golden pens, some diamond rings, and continued grabbing everything he could find that could be resold. After he had cleaned out the study, Gerome stepped out of the french doors, turned right, and continued the search through the remaining bottom floor rooms with Ashley, who had just finished rumbling through the kitchen.

Upstairs, Tera and Neal rummaged through all the walk-in sized closets and large extra rooms, finding more jewelry and some nice electronics. While going through the upstairs rooms, Tera made especially long stops in the bathrooms. Tera had had prior problems with prescription addiction, and these stops to search for more has left the group in very dicey situations before. Just as Tera was closing a medicine cabinet in one of the bathrooms, Neal popped his head in holding a sizable cash lock box, which he quickly handed Tera's way. Tera grabbed the box and walked out into the hallway with Neal.

"Let's break this bitch!" Tera exclaimed, leading Neal into a spare bedroom in the condo with the lock box in hand. "I saw a hammer in here somewhere." The room was fairly empty except for some paint buckets, a small step-up ladder, and a few hardware tools.

"I'm gonna pry it open with the back of the head," Tera said while going to work on the lock with a grin that could adorn any Hollywood villain. She rushed the process by setting it up in a prying position with the handle sticking out. She followed by stamping down on the handle with her foot. It quickly broke. The metal clacked and pieces flew into the air. The cracked box revealed cash from multiple different countries.

"Yen, Pounds, Lira, and even actual American cash," Tera said, holding multiple stacks of rubber banded bills. "Looks like we have a reason to do some traveling."

As the two began counting the money, Ashley and Gerome came upstairs to show their findings. Gerome bounced over Ashley's slight voice of success to boast about how much the baseball would get them and shared every other item he was able to get his hands on. Once they were done counting, the college students threw what they had into the gym bag Neal brought.

Gerome nodded to the group that it was time to wrap things up. They made their way into Crane's bedroom where he laid cuffed to the bed and with something pink gagging his mouth. His bed was a large king-sized, oval shaped bed with gold adornments upon the frame of the bedposts, with a mirror strategically placed adjacent to the bed. There was a door in the back of the room leading to a bathroom already looted by Tera. Gerome came to the head of the bed and addressed Crane.

"Mr. Crane, I'm sorry it had to come to this. Thank you for being a good businessman; it allowed for us to find some good stuff. See... we just have to do this from time to time. Like Marlo told you probably, we've been stressed, studying and all. This lets us get out any extra anxiety we might have, and lets us focus on our future. I guess you could call it a hobby," Gerome explained.

"It's super helpful to us. You're really doing us a service. We'll pay it back when we graduate and can professionally help people. But for now, we have to be a bit stingy, school tuition and all, right?" Ashley gushed, reaching into a coin jar on a bureau that was in the bedroom, picking for any quarters she could find.

Crane was squirming, retracting his cuffed arm over and over again with bleak hope. He kicked with muffled wails as Neal walked over to the side of the bed. Neal raised his arm.

"BLAP!"

Neal's gun rang, leaving a visible puff of smoke coming from Crane that vanished as the group began to walk out of the room. They casually made their way downstairs and out the front door. They walked across the street, put all their treasures and equipment in the trunk of the car, and piled into the vehicle.

"We can easily sell all of those things we found. That was a good take!" Neal exclaimed.

"The biggest one I think we've had yet. And our cleanest. We're getting better," Tera stated.

"I think we could break this new record easily. When is our next test?" Gerome asked.

The car laughed and Neal started the engine. Some mid 2000's T-Pain came on the radio and the group began to sing along to the song that probably dominated their middle school dances. They made their way back across town in the early peaks of morning to the parking lot of the Albright library they always studied at. Everyone except Neal got out of the car and before they went their separate ways, Neal yelled from the front seat cracked passenger window.

"Y'all trying to do some research tomorrow? We have that huge group report due in a couple days," Neal asked.

"Yes."

The Void Inside

By Destiny Powers

Looking back into the void that you were finally able to escape,
you think about the darkness,
even when you are now out.
But are you?
You stand at the edge, almost dancing around the vast pit.
No matter how good it gets, you never truly escape.
You still have it inside of you.
Looking back, you realize the pit isn't a place:
it's you.

Trying to balance the light and dark.
Becoming the person you are meant to be.
Understanding the balance.
Life is just a simple balancing act.
As a child, some may want to juggle.
Very few of us physically do,
yet all of us juggle.
We juggle not three things or four
but hundreds, thousands.

We all want to learn the correct way,
but is there a correct way?
Everyone is different.
When we embrace the difference,
we escape the void inside ourselves.
We find the light.
We become free.



By Janessa Corrigan

A Lesser Companion

By Julia Desrosiers

He saw me as a lesser companion.
His words weren't shy to say so.
And yet he raised me from damnation.

He was the one with the sword.

We were similar pieces on life's chessboard,
yet the king and queen favored him,
and gave him his vigor and confidence.

He was the one with the sword.

As age did what time brings,
he was told his place by a lover.
And she pitied him.

He was the one with the shield.

He cursed and hated me, the lesser companion.

And I learned beyond his knowledge.

I stood and took up my sticks and stones.

And I created my weapon.

I am the one with the sword.

Turn Awareness into Action
By Rachele Tatosky

I am tired of spreading awareness.
I am tired of telling people that the plastic bag
that they carry their factory-farmed meat products in
is detrimental to the environment.
I am tired of telling people that their plastic cup
filled with coffee and nonlocal milk products
will take a thousand years to decompose on this Earth
and will more than likely end up contaminating
the same ocean they happily swim in every summer.
I am tired of telling people that carbon emissions
need to decrease to 0 by 2050
in order to avoid the most harmful effects yet
of climate change.

I think it is time to turn awareness into action.

To turn gently cradled knowledge
into independent acts of change.
Sacrifice money for our Earth's cure,
lying on the bottom of a reusable bag
or on the ocean's surface, replacing the spot
that a plastic cup otherwise would have taken,
but is empty because your reusable cup
made that difference.
Walk, don't drive, to a green spot in the Earth
that sprouts promising change in reaction to your
sustainable choices.
Voice your knowledge
to people in power,
from your state officials to
your local grocery store owner.
Let cries of justice
spill off your tongue.
Bellow out of the same mouth
replacing meat with mercy
for those unable to
speak for their pain.

Hopefully, together, we can turn awareness into action.

Imagine This
By Rachele Tatosky

Imagine our world drowning in pollution,
weighted down by industrial waste,
cut by the ripped edges of Poland Spring bottles
or choked by a six-pack of plastic rings from
a fisherman's old beer supply.
Imagine our world extending an arm,
begging for our help with
the little bit of life she has left.
An arm that bears branches,
and leaves,
and oxygen to help us breathe,
yet instead we cut down growing hope,
let it sink to the bottom of nothingness
where it will die along with every other
piece of our Earth that sprouts for attention.

The relationship between us and the Earth
is dependent on a give-and-take system.
One of the biggest things that the Earth gives us
and expects in return is **life**.

So, instead, imagine this:
Imagine a parallel universe where
Instead of sucking the life out of the Earth,
we take her offerings, and then we return
the love.
Imagine the world being saved
by the strong hands of
revolutionaries,
of visionaries crashing
through waves of "what-ifs"
and "unrealistic" action
to help the drowning Earth
extend life without the fear of
humanity cutting it down.

Imagine a world where your life
is of equal value to that of our Earth.
Empathize with each breath you take,
knowing that each exhale
is not enough to give back to her.

You Are a Storyteller

By Kevin Praik

Everyone has a story to tell; whether it is you saying hi to a friend or the time your dad had cancer, everyone has a story to tell.

Out of the over 7.5 billion people on Earth, each story is something special; it may not seem like it, but it is.

Each day you make history, from what you eat, to what you do, to who you choose to spend your time with. It is history-making because you are doing something people hundreds of years ago could not even imagine. Each day you create a new story.

The great thing about these stories is the numerous ways to tell them.

Many people own a cell phone or a social media account. What if I told you that you have told the world a story using one or both of those things many times before? From what you say in a text message, to what you say on social media.

You can even make videos telling stories. It is easier than you might think. Think about your favorite YouTuber, Netflix series, or TV show. Do you have it in mind? Now, regardless of what it is, whatever or whomever you are thinking of tells a story. I know, mind-blowing, right?

Storytelling can be fun, too. You can act out scenes from your favorite movie or play with others from the comfort of your own home.

You can FaceTime, Skype, or video chat with people from all around the world and share different stories.

Each culture in the world is different and breeds different stories to tell.

Remember the over 7.5 billion people I mentioned earlier? Most likely there are people from different cultures than your own. What you eat on a daily basis is different from what they eat on a daily basis. This does not mean we are incapable of relating to one another. Each of us has a story. Everyone, and I mean everyone, has at least one thing in common: humanity. It is crazy to think you have something in common with a person in Indonesia whom you have never met, seen, or even heard of before.

Through this shared humanity, you can relate to one another. You paint figurative pictures for people using your words. The emotions which arise in someone when reading a story are something magical; they put the person in your shoes. They get to live through you for the duration of the story. Where do you get such a story, you might ask? Your experiences throughout your life are the answer.

Storytelling can be based on experiences. When you are telling a story about something you know, it is easier because you know how it goes. You are the best storyteller of your experiences because you know the small and intimate details that bring a story to life, whether it is the smell of the hot dogs roasting at the ballpark or the fresh air on a warm summer's day on the beach. It could also be something you experience with your other senses.

Everyone has a story to tell. It is easier to find than you might think. Stories can be anything, and they can change the world when they are told.



By Harley Brooker

Black Stream Falls

By Jade Hichborn

Summer mornings in Maine are warm but not too warm. Soon, however, the dark morning sky will be replaced by the powder blue sky of summer, and the dew drops on the grass will dry. The June sun will relentlessly beat down on the treetops and transfer heat to what lies below. A winding dirt road in Sangerville descends deep into the woods and all noise, other than the sound of tires crunching over gravel, drops off completely. The road is encroached by pines and hemlocks that have not been properly maintained, and branches precariously hang out over the road. When driving by, the branches will smack windshields and try to enter cabs of trucks. In the midst of summer, the only color one can see is green. Every shade of green imaginable colors trees, bushes, grass, and moss. Health and prosperity fill the air. As the end of the road grows near, there is a small bridge. As it is approached, the roaring sound of water slowly gains volume.

The farther down the road, the louder the sound of rushing water will become. There is a small path to the side of the bridge that leads down to the stream. The path begins with a steep descent that requires walkers to dig their heels into the dirt on the way down if they want to remain upright. The path is paved with rocks and roots of trees that didn't quite stay underground; it doesn't follow the most logical way to the stream, but rather, it takes the scenic route. The once wet moss on the rocks has been drying in the sun for several hours and now gives off a smell of earth and mud. Black and gray jagged rocks jut out of the stream and give room for spectators to stand or pass over the water. All different shapes and sizes of rocks comprise a makeshift bridge over the stream.

Even though it is still morning, the water is not cold; it is perfect toe-dipping temperature. At the top of the highest rocks to be seen, a waterfall is formed. Water runs rapidly down the rocks, going fast enough that it skips over the gaps in the rocks completely and instead creates small arcs. For a quick moment, the water comes over the falls and it becomes a multitude of colors. The clear liquid now contains the browns and yellows that only nature can create. At the bottom of the falls, the water froths and foams into bubbles that rise to the surface of the water and run down the rest of the stream. As the stream continues, the bubbles begin to die off and the water becomes smooth and consistent. Twigs and water striders are carried by the stream to an unknown ending. Water gathers into tiny inlets near the edge of the stream, and small creatures that cannot be detected by the eye dance underneath the surface. Snails and crayfish make homes on rocks and dragonflies float through the light summer air.



By Janessa Corrigan

More Than Meets the Eye

By Jade Hichborn

After a night of working my part-time job at TJ Maxx, all I want to do is go home and catch up on some long overdue sleep. As I walk down the sidewalk, I turn off onto the road that leads to the local university's garden. It's not the only way to get home to my apartment, but it's my favorite way. I'm eager to get home, but I know I should call my mom back. If I don't call her soon, she'll start to worry about me. I sit on the dirty white marble steps leading into the garden and dial her number.

"Penelope! You didn't answer my texts." She's mad before I can even say hello.

"Hey, Mum. Sorry I didn't text you back; I was at work," I apologize.

I half-heartedly listen as she fires questions at me about my car and how school is going. I change my phone over to speakerphone and put it in my lap so I can flip my head over and twirl my head of black curls into a topknot. It's starting to get windy out and my hair will only get in my way if I don't put it up now. Out of nowhere, a professional looking middle-aged man appears. He seems to be in a hurry to get somewhere, but slows his pace as he passes me, kicking rocks forward as he stops on his heels. His presence jumps me, and seeing someone in the usually empty garden is frightening.

I interrupt my mother's questioning to tell her of the disturbance.

"Hey, listen. So, I'm in the garden and this guy just showed up and I don't know what to do..."

I trail off, waiting for a response, wondering if he can hear me, too. I feel like I'm speaking quietly, but I know my voice shakes and rises as he fails to break eye contact. His dark green eyes make me feel empty inside.

"Mom?"

I look down and I'm met only with a black screen. My phone must've died, but it was working just fine before he got here.

My phone has always given me this fake sense of security. Without it or my mom, I'm at a loss for what to do. Taking a moment to look at the stranger, I can see that he is older than me, probably in his thirties. He has slicked back dark black hair and is dressed well in a navy-blue suit and matching tie. He seems out of place, but doesn't seem to pose a threat to my well-being. At least not yet. He doesn't face me straight on, which is odd, and only allows me to see his side profile. The only thing that seems to distinguish him from any other businessman is the large tattoo of a triangle on his right hand. Keeping my gaze, he flashes me a large grin, too large for my liking, and walks on.

I sigh and finally take in more air. I take breaths in four-counts and try to slow my heart rate. The night air is crisp and the wind is picking up. My arms and legs are cold to the touch, but I still feel warm. I gather up my faded purse off the steps and decide to make my way home and try and forget about the strange man. Although it is closing in on midnight, the sky is brilliantly lit with the light of the stars and the moon; this makes my walk seem a little less ominous. As I walk through the garden, I pass multiple flower beds of purple and pink perennials and my favorite section of daffodils. I would normally take the time to stop and admire the flowers, but I am anxious to build more distance between me and that man.

As I approach the midway point of my walk, the gravel switches to a red brick walkway and I feel my feet hit the ground harder. I stop to bend over and tie the laces to my Converse. My back tightens, and I feel like I'm being watched. My eye is drawn to the small pond to the right of the path. Next to it sits a much larger tree. The tree is a bit of an attraction in the park because of its red tint and huge branches that twist and turn into each other, building a jungle gym within it. As my eyes move back over to the dark, stagnant water, a man appears on the other side. Even though I'm standing thirty yards or more away from him, I recognize him instantly. It is the stranger from before. He has no reflection on the water.

The pond and distance between us don't calm me in the least. My mind races as I try to think of how he could've gotten there when I was walking on the only path in the garden and we had already passed each other going opposing directions. At 5'2", I know it's unlikely I can outrun the man. Even so, I throw what I can on the brick path and begin to run farther into the garden, hoping that I know the terrain better than him. The close clustering of trees and bushes works to my advantage as I run in the direction of home. My dark hair and clothes work in tandem as camouflage, but my bright white complexion doesn't do me any favors.

I get winded quickly and stop to lean against the back of a tiny shed. The shed is ornamental only and has no actual function. The university has purposefully made it appear dilapidated for aesthetic purposes. I slide my back against the shed and slip down until I'm sitting on the backs of my shoes and try to think of a way out. In the midst of my thoughts, I catch an aroma of apples and my stomach gurgles loudly from my lack of food. My position has been compromised. The man must be closing in on me.

As I stand and begin to flee again, I see a flash of white inside the tiny shed. The man smiles at me once more, this time from the door of the shed, knowing he will always be three steps ahead of me. Being the closest I have been to the man so far, I can finally see his face from all angles. The right side remains the same as before, but the unexposed left side contains a deep red port wine stain that gives the illusion of his cheek being slashed open from cheekbone to the jawline. Despite the terror and defeat I know must be in my eyes, he never seems to lessen his smile. I tightly shut my eyes as the man reaches forward and runs his ice-cold fingers over my scrunched up face. I wait for the unknown.

The next thing I know, my eyes dart open to the sound of my phone getting notifications. Looking around the room, I see my bedroom door is closed and all my stuff is where I left it. As I relive my night in an instant, I realize that I am safe in my room. My phone goes off again as I receive the fifth text from my mom this morning.

“Remember you have a dentist appoint at 8. Love you!”

“Text me after so I can come pick u up on time.”

“Penelope are u up?”

“If you don’t leave by 7:15 you will miss appt.”

“Hello???”

I throw my blankets to the side and rush to dress while also attempting to scarf down some microwavable waffles. I sit down in my car at 7:18 a.m and drive to my dentist’s office, beating most of the morning traffic on Main Street.

The woman at the check-in window is rude, but reasonably so, considering that I have arrived only three minutes before my appointment is scheduled. I sit in the crowded waiting area between an elderly man reading the paper and a woman with her little boy. Trying to hide how out of breath I am from all the running, I start to fill out the endless amount of paperwork stuffed on-to the clipboard I have been handed. I take my phone out to check the date for the paperwork, and my screen is black. I was just using my phone before I got in the car. Strange. Before I have time to think about my phone in any more depth, the dental technician calls my name from the open doorway. This morning isn’t going well, but I’m still thankful that I didn’t miss this appointment to get my wisdom teeth out. I have been on a waiting list for months.

The tech informs me that my regular dentist is out sick today, so I will be seeing Dr. Bale instead. This doesn’t bother me as long as the procedure is done right. I think back to the last time I had a stand-in dentist and he filled a cavity in the wrong tooth. The memory makes me slightly uneasy. The tech and I reach the cubicle-style room I will be in, and I sit down into the familiar, plastic covered chair. The tech exits, leaving me to wait alone for the doctor in silence other than the almost nonexistent country music coming from the small radio on the windowsill.

The doctor enters prepared for the surgery. His gown, gloves, bouffant, and face mask make it almost impossible to see what he looks like. After a quick introduction and some pleasantries, the doctor begins to get the anesthesia ready and sets all his tools into place on the tray near my head. I had decided to be put to sleep, even though I had seriously considered staying awake for the procedure. As the doctor prepares to put me under, he places the mask over my face, the mask that will administer the gas and take me to a different place. During my last conscious moments, I blink heavily and watch as the doctor removes his gloves revealing his clammy hands. The one on the right has something on it. The more I stare at it the more I’m sure that, yes, I think that that’s a triangle! Who do I know that has a triangle tattoo? The hands reach up to lower a mask that reveals a large, toothy grin and a port wine stain to boot.

Was it really just a dream? Or was he warning me of what was to come?

I lose consciousness.



By Malorie Martin

Two-Faced
By Janessa Corrigan

Various shades of blue stretch across the Earth
for miles, filling the spaces between disjointed bodies of land.
The ocean surrounds every nook and bend like an embrace,
welcoming native and traveler alike.
The sun glitters on its surface,
creating a light-show of wonder.
Its tide ebbs and flows and shows us it is alive
with each crashing wave.
The deep blue turns to white in an instant as the waves roll and disperse,
a spectacle of nature that inspires change, and growth, and rebirth.
Even the salty air provides visitors with solace.
And lucky for us, the sublime awe of the ocean can be found
in nearly every corner of the world.
But so can its terror.
The sea is vast, deep, and strong.
It is unforgiving and does not consider anything but itself.
The power of its mechanisms can swallow ships whole,
can erase cities in just a few strikes,
can tear and pull life apart with ease.
It is dark, and often cold, and home
to hundreds of mysterious lurking dangers.
Its water will suck the life from your body
if it gets the chance, and leave you with nothing.
The ocean is relentless;
it has stolen countless individuals from their lives,
even those innocently basking in its beautiful, inviting, shallow edges,
and it will continue to do so for as long as it exists.
The sea dances right on the fine line between wonder and fear, and yet, for me, this makes it still more beautiful.

Nature's Wonders
By Rachele Tatosky

One bird's call will be different from the other,
and the way we appreciate their melodic sounds
will vary from person to person,
just as the depth of ridges have the power
to either scare a person who is afraid of heights,
or enthrall one who embraces
its vast natural formations.
Nature gestures a single sound or sight,
but offers thousands of interpretations.

Will Trade Heart for Lilacs
By Rachele Tatosky

She forgot how to see things
in black or white
after holding the gray stem
hidden behind irregular beauty
that is a lilac.

Falsified images of beauty—
one round and tinted purple,
another as tall and skinny
as its five-inch stem
ridden of its green hue.

Consumed by the uncertainty
behind each budding lilac,
her mind replaced sense
with her heart's desire
to romanticize the unknown.

Among the Stars
By Kristen Polky

There are secrets hidden among the stars.
They whisper to me, calling out my name.
I lay on the grass and watch from afar,
trying to see the glittering white flames.
I yearn to understand what they tell me,
and so my heart aches as I watch the sky.
I know that their knowledge will set me free,
yet here I sit low while they hover high.
There is pain staying here, but I am stuck;
that is why I will contemplate below.
From a distance, their beauty leaves me struck.
I admire the way they burn and glow.
How much longer must I be here to wait?
Will the secrets of the stars come too late?

Rules
By Thomas Cote

Control your excitement; all that glitters aren't gold.
Don't get your knickers in a twist.
Don't count your eggs before they've hatched,
and don't cry over spilled milk.

You must be able to read between the lines,
and be able to kiss and make up.
Sometimes it's one for all or all for one.
Why aren't you talking? Cat got your tongue?

It's just a matter of time
before you're as old as the hills.
Time heals all wounds,
and what goes around comes around.

Laughter is the best medicine,
so stop being ugly as sin.
Opposites attract,
so find someone as brave as a lion.

When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.
Don't wake up on the wrong side of the bed.
Don't live as if you're without a care in the world.
The writing's on the wall.

Follow these rules,
and I won't be frightened to death about your future.

Love
By Julia Desrosiers

"Love is a lie," the saddened one said.
And yet she loved herself enough
to have others fall to their knees.
"Love is an illusion," the angered one said.
And yet she had been lying,
especially to those she held dear.
"It's a waste of time," the pitied one said.
And yet she spent time
caring for herself the most.
"But love brings life to all," the oracle said.
The three cursed its name,
calling it a user and a cheat.
And though it didn't want to,
it nodded and loved them the same.



By Seth Doherty

Acceptance & Antipsychotics

By Syrena Clark

Have you ever seen
butterflies in the middle of
a cold Maine winter?

I am a forest.
Depression is a man with a
knife at my open throat.
All I can do is ache
as everything lives on
inside of me.

The hum of a heart against
cold skin is mine.

Psychosis can be beautiful,
but mostly it's devastating.

A thief,
a monster,
a nonconsensual
hallucinatory drugging.

All the fluid in your brain
turns to honey, or pine sap,
depending on the day or
time of year.
Psychosis is fatigue
unreasonable.

Yet, once I became a forest,
but empty, aching, and vast.
Or at least,
I heard the forest
when it was not there.

Once I smelt apple pie and
then forgot what month it was.

Once my shower turned to saltwater
and made me into the ocean.

When I was too depressed
to get out of bed,
my brain painted birdsong
into the air,
but I never saw them.

That's not to say I've
never "seen" anything.

I remember the man who
tried to read my mind by
sticking his fingers in my brain.
Of course, he wasn't there,
not really.

I remember the time
invisible blood covered my
very visible hands.

That's not to say I never
"believed" any of it.

I went away six times to
try and get better.

Still there were
conspiracies, of which I
thought I was the center.

I had a radio once.
It only had words for me.

I emptied my bank
account during a manic
episode once. The money
is still missing.

And of course, the voices,
which are very seldom
kind, and rarely beautiful.
They started and still
haven't stopped.
It's been seven years.

I swear not even sleep
brings me silence.

Once there was a man who
said he'd take me to
Florida with him.
He said I was the most
beautiful thing he'd ever
seen.
He touched me and
wouldn't stop.
He wrapped himself around
me like I was the present
and he was the bow.
When he left the store that night,
he vanished,
as all hallucinations
eventually do.

But I've learned not to mix
apathy
with antipsychotics.
Acceptance is a safer bet.
I am a tiger,
and psychosis is a wall of
glass,
or a heavy blanket,
a black dog,
an unexpected snowstorm,
or a bad fuse.

But I am a tiger,
slowly coming back
from near extinction.

Twenty-Four

By Zachary DeFosse

Just a little boy,
three years old.
I've always done
what I've been told.

Can't turn on this stove
on my own.
Guess I'll have to
eat my soup cold.

I hear them yell.
Behind that door,
I hear her say
she can't take no more.

Sitting here, alone,
twenty-four.
To this day, I
eat my soup cold.

Winter's Strife

By Jade Hichborn

Inside a small, two-bedroom cabin in Bradford, Maine, Grace Evans watches the snow drift down and accumulate outside her bay window. She sits comfortably on the couch with her legs tucked under her and the TV on low. With March coming to a close, this should be the last snowfall of another long Maine winter, but it's predicted to be an unforgettable one. Grace partially listens to the WABI weather forecast in the background as she works on the maroon sweater that she has been knitting for what feels like months.

"In the Central Maine area, we are seeing a projected snowfall of 16-20 inches starting tonight and continuing into late Saturday," Chris Ewing reports.

"Man's full of shit. Don't even know how to read a fuckin' thermometer," her father Andy grumbles from the table.

He pauses from working on his crossword puzzle, but only long enough to finish his PBR. He didn't believe the weathermen were ever reliable, but he stocked up on beer just in case they ever were. Grace shakes her head and giggles at his ramblings. Although she had been hesitant at first to move back home, she was happy she did. If anyone was going to take care of Andy, she was glad it was her. Her sisters didn't have the patience for him that she did. He had calmed down immensely in his old age and was always good company. With her due date coming at the end of April, Grace was comforted to know her father would be around for the birth of her daughter. She had feared in the past that he would miss it.

Around 5 p.m., as Grace and Andy finish their microwaved supper, the lights and TV go out, leaving the house completely black. Living in Maine, the Evans', like all locals, are prepared for anything the weather can throw at them. Andy slips on his flannel jacket and covers his gray tufts of hair with an orange hunting cap before shuffling out into the night to turn on the generator and restore the power. While Andy messes around on the porch trying to remember which cords give power to which rooms in the house, Grace lights the kerosene lantern and sets up the cribbage board while waiting for him to return.

Six cribbage games and several pots of tea later, the snow is piling up faster than even the Evans had anticipated. Maybe Ewing *did* know what he was talking about after all. With 10 p.m. fast approaching, Grace contemplates going to sleep, assuming the power will not be returning any time soon. As she pushes herself off the couch and onto her feet she feels a popping near her abdomen and a trickle of water runs down her left leg.

"Dad! I think I'm having the baby!" Grace cries.

"What?" Andy asks. "It's gonna be alright."

Andy throws his jacket and boots back on and rushes outside to start up the truck. Looking down at her wet pants and then out the window at the covered pine trees, Grace tries to remain calm. She heads to her room to change her clothes and to grab the hospital bag out of her closet that she prepared in January. The small bag had taken her weeks to pack.

Minutes later, Andy comes through the door and the snow covering his shoulders and gloves falls and melts onto the living room floor.

"We're not getting out of the driveway right now. Too much snow. I'm gonna hafta plow real quick. Canya' wait?" Andy asks, stomping the snow off his boots and onto the carpet.

"I guess I don't have much of a choice, do I?" Grace says, snapping at him.

Andy mumbles something incoherent under his breath and disappears again into the night.

Grace hears the plow truck start up. Now alone in the dark house, she only has her thoughts to keep her company. What if she has to have the baby here? Dad doesn't know how to deliver a baby, for Christ's sake! She didn't even really want to have a baby, and now she was trapped in the woods with no way out.

An hour goes by; the longest hour of Grace's life. Her contractions are only coming every 22 minutes, and although they are painful, they are still bearable. Wondering what could be taking him so long, Graces pushes herself to her feet and piles on some jackets to go check on Andy. She had helped Andy plow in the past, and with her help maybe they could get it done faster. Anything would be better than sitting in that damn house waiting. As she opens the front door, Grace is hit with a wind so cold that it burns her face. She tucks her head into her right shoulder, squinting, and pushes forward. From the front porch, she can only see the beginning of the driveway. Another quarter mile of it remains between her and the main road. The old barn where Andy does his woodworking has almost disappeared underneath all the snow, and the top of Grace's car is level with the still-growing wall of snow. Looking out into the night, Grace can see the flashing light atop the plow truck. It appears to be stopped down by the first bend in the driveway.

Without thinking, Grace begins to climb down off the salted steps and starts to trudge through the snow to the truck. The first step onto the ground puts her up to her waist in snow. Pushing towards the far-off truck, Grace struggles to walk against the resistance of the built-up snow.

By the time she reaches the old Ford, Grace's jeans and leggings underneath are re-soaked from the snow she has waded through. She pulls open the passenger door to find that the cab of the truck is empty. Sliding over the vinyl seat into the driver's seat, she opens the door and climbs out the other side. She makes her way around to the front of the truck, and lying in the snow underneath the high beams is Andy. Next to him, his coffee is spilled in the snow.

"Daddy! What happened?" Grace says, dropping to the ground.

"My chest. I tried shoveling out the snow 'round my tires and I couldn't breathe so I hadta sit for a minute. But I'll be OK," Andy leans on his elbows, unable to catch his breath.

Grace instinctively reaches into Andy's coat pocket to retrieve the small bottle of Aspirin he keeps. They had been here before. She grabs Andy under the arms and, despite his fighting, drags him around to the side of the truck. Opening the passenger's side door, she helps Andy climb into the truck where he lies down. Grace takes off her outermost jacket and lies it over him before shutting the door. A pain hits Grace that is so intense that her hands instinctively curl into fists. She clenches so hard that her fingernails begin to cut into her palms.

She rolls back her mitten and looks at her watch; the contractions are down to 15 minutes apart.

Regaining her focus, Grace grabs the shovel that Andy had dropped and begins to dig out the tires. Every shovel load of snow puts her in deeper agony. Slumping over the piles of snow, her spine throbs and the weight of her belly continually threatens to pull her down. The wind blows with such force and speed that the snow stings her face as it whips by. Grace can barely see what she is doing. As she works, she sweats and the perspiration freezes, making her even colder. She pulls her beanie further down over her blonde braids and finishes shoveling.

Climbing into the driver's seat, Grace looks over at Andy and grabs his hands.

"It's going to be okay, Daddy. We're gonna make it, just hold on," Grace says.

Andy looks up at her and opens his heavy eyes long enough to meet her gaze. In between shallow breaths, he squeezes her hand.

Grace pulls the seat forward enough that her short legs can reach the pedals. She adjusts the rearview mirror despite the fact that there is nothing to see. With some difficulty, she jams the shifter into first gear and the truck lurches forward. The snow is coming down even faster now and Grace knows they must hurry and get out before the driveway gets any worse. Going slow, she navigates the first bend of the driveway successfully until they hit a patch of ice and slide off into the ditch.

With the truck still running, Grace hops down and assesses the damage. The truck has only gone off the road slightly with the tires hanging over the edge of the lip of the driveway where it drops off into the ditch. It just needs to be pushed back onto the carved ice path. She goes back into the cab, only to slip it into neutral, and returns to the front of the truck. Grace steps down into the ditch but treads lightly, hoping to not break through the hard top layer of snow. Her hands feel for the bottom of the grill and she lifts upward, pushing herself down into the ditch. Pushing with more strength than she can muster, she cries out in pain and her knees give out from beneath her. The back tires of the truck hit the driveway and the truck does the rest of the work.

Her contractions are down to 10 minutes apart.

As they approach the end of the driveway, Grace knows she must go fast enough to get over the hump of snow at the end of the unplowed driveway. She floors the gas pedal and clutches the steering wheel for dear life. The truck gains momentum at the straightest part of the driveway and skips across the top of the snowbank. Grace loses control of the truck once they are in the air. As the truck reconnects with the road, it begins to fishtail, and she is unable to slow down. They skid across the icy road and into their neighbor's dooryard.

The red Ford hits the Blaisdell's garage head on. At the point of impact, Grace is slingshotted forward as her chest and shoulder meet the resistance of her seatbelt, slamming her back towards her seat. Her head collides with the sliding glass window behind her. Her hands rush like those of a mother's to push Andy back as she anticipates the crash. The windshield shatters and Andy and Grace are showered with millions of small shards of glass. Andy is jolted from his lying position and thrown to the floor.

Her contractions are now 5 minutes apart.

Tim Blaisdell steps out into his yard when he hears the crash. By the light of the moon, he recognizes the truck as old man Evans'. He puts on his slippers and runs to the truck to see what has happened.

He finds Grace and Andy. Both are unconscious.

Grace opens her eyes and instantly wants to shut them. Her head pounds and her whole body aches and throbs from pain. She looks down and sees that her jackets and sweatpants have been replaced by a hospital johnny. Her stomach is much smaller. She looks around the room and sees no one. The corner of her private, wood-paneled room is filled with pink balloons and gift bags; she must have had the baby.

She swings her legs over the side of the bed and tries to stand and explore but she is stopped by the screeching of an alarm as soon as her feet touch the floor. A nurse rushes in and silences the alarm. She cautions Grace that she must remain in bed. She can't walk this soon after the C-section. The nurse introduces herself as Beth.

"Where's the baby?" Grace asks, settling back into her bed.

"She's in the nursery. We wanted to wait until you were up to bring her in," Beth covers Grace with extra blankets. Despite the happy news, her face seems dark and devoid of any joy.

"Wait, where's my dad? Is he here, too?" Grace asks.

She grabs Beth's arm. Beth does not pull away.

"The baby is doing just fine," Beth insists.

"But where's my dad?" Grace pushes.

"Grace, I'm so sorry. They did all they could for him, but he didn't make it. His body went into shock and his heart just gave out," Beth tells her.

The look of sympathy Beth gives to Grace only makes her feel worse. She doesn't cry immediately. She shakes and curses and screams, but she does not cry.

Beth leaves at Grace's request and returns later with the baby girl. She stands in the doorway and waits for permission to enter. Grace tells her she can come in. Beth places the infant in Grace's arms and leaves the room, shutting the door on her way out.

The baby is swaddled up tight, and her little face and dark brown eyes only remind Grace of Andy. Now, she lets herself cry. She holds her daughter until she's in too much pain to support her any longer. She calls for Beth and they put her down for a nap in her tiny bassinet.

Looking down at her new companion sleeping soundly, she smiles and feels a little less alone.

"What are you going to name her?" Beth asks.

"I think I'll call her Andy."



By Ani Inman

NESCom: Student Perspectives

"As I walked through the NESCom building doors, as a freshman, I was immediately welcomed into a new family. I never expected the warm greeting I got from everyone. All the students just wanted to see each other succeed. The teachers went from intimidating professors to friends of mine who share similar interests, and I've even spent quality time with them outside the classroom. Leaving my family and traveling 200 miles away was hard, but I found another family to help and support me in the Husson students and faculty." Kyle Tremblay

"The teachers at NESCom are understanding and kind-hearted individuals, and I'm happy that I've gotten to get to know them. They've made it very hard for me to leave; I want to continue knowing them! My advisor has helped me in ways that he might not understand just yet. My professors, as a whole, are energetic, funny, and inspiring. I'll be leaving NESCom a proud student for sure." Kevin Coehlo

"NESCom gave me a foundation in video production that I still use today. When I moved to California to pursue film, because of NESCom, I had the skills to succeed. In addition, faculty put me in touch with NESCom graduates, already working in California, and I am working with them, today. " David Cahill

"The video production program here at NESCom has given me more than I ever thought possible. Not only have I developed crucial skills for my dream career path, but I've made incredible friends and connections and found confidence in myself that I didn't think I would ever have. I love the path my life is on, and I owe this to the video program." Nick Pelletier

Get Lit(erature)
Husson University's English and Creative Writing Club



BlueBlack Evenings, Open Mic Event

Crosscut Artists, Writers, and Editors





National Day on Writing



Get Lit and Art Club join for day of art, Portland Art Museum



Service in our community: Ronald McDonald House Charities



Solstice Spiral, Holiday Event



Holiday Fellowship!

One Place I Love

By Autumn Holzworth

Turquoise waves slosh over my feet
as I walk by myself along this tranquil beach.
The sun is shining, vast, golden, and bright.
Its rays kiss my skin.
Not a fluffy cloud in sight.
A cold breeze blows, making me shiver.
Goosebumps rise on my arms and
remind me how much I don't like winter.
Each step that I take imprints in the sand
and waves sweep them away again and again.
Squawking seagulls fly overhead,
while some in the distance fight over bread.
Salty sea air tickles my nose,
the sand beneath my feet velvet like a rose.
Facing the ocean, I take a deep breath in.
The salt now laying across my lips,
licking them, I think: *tastes like salt and vinegar chips*!

