

Write RHODE ISLAND!

CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP BY SCHOOL ONE AND GOAT HILL

Write Rhode Island! is a short fiction competition for Rhode Island students in grades 8 through 12 sponsored by **School One** and **Goat Hill!**

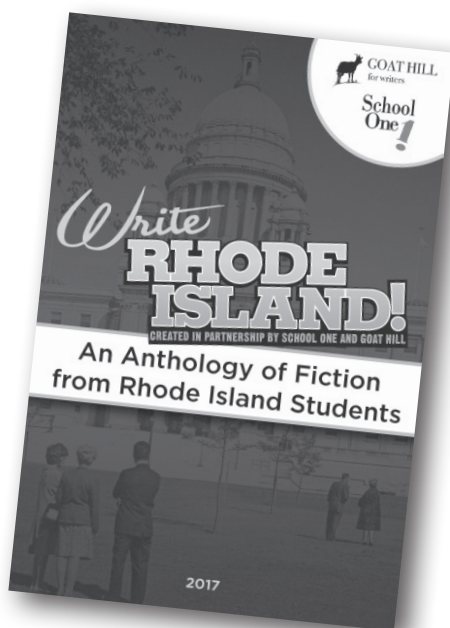
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Write Rhode Island!

Write Rhode Island! is a short fiction competition for Rhode Island students in grades 8-12. The goal of **Write Rhode Island!** is to promote and celebrate student writing by incorporating Rhode Island as a theme in a creative piece of prose.

Write Rhode Island! publishes the **Write Rhode Island! Anthology**, a juried, high quality publication, and the only statewide print magazine dedicated to the fiction writing of RI students. We offer creative writing workshops in which students meet with published writers for guidance and support.

**Write Rhode Island! is created in partnership
by School One and Goat Hill.**

School One

School One is an independent high school in Providence that provides an arts intensive, college preparatory education to diverse students from across Rhode Island and Massachusetts. A learning community that emphasizes a student-centered approach and a rigorous curriculum, School One is not a typical school. Our students come from a variety of backgrounds: they are racially, ethnically and economically diverse; they come from low-income city neighborhoods as well as suburban communities. Over 70% receive financial aid.



Founded in 1973, School One has held on to many of the core values of its founders, a group of parents who sought an alternative to the one-size-fits-all approach at most high schools. Our mission statement reads: “At School One, we teach students to think, write, analyze and create. As a community, we treat each other with care and respect. We appreciate each other’s differences as people and as learners.”

School One’s small classes are discussion-based, inviting all students to contribute in personal and meaningful ways. Our curriculum spurs love of learning and self expression. Our accepting community and our advising system provide support, guidance and inspiration. Our tuition is affordable relative to local private schools and we offer generous financial aid.

School One is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

Goat Hill

Goat Hill is the Providence meeting place of writers Ann Hood, Hester Kaplan and Taylor Polites. We invite you to join us at Goat Hill for workshops, seminars, literary events, and sociability.



GOAT HILL
for writers

Our events offer exciting opportunities to engage in conversations about writing and publishing, meet agents and editors, attend readings, and connect with other writers. We enjoy taking advantage of Rhode Island’s many beautiful and interesting sites for our events.

Write Rhode Island! Advisory Committee and Judges

Reverend Doctor David A. Ames

Cristin Cali

Tina Egnoski

Marie Esposito

Austen Farrell

Dr. Pat Feinstein

Diana Grady

Bill and Debbie Harley

Robin Kall Homonoff

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Dorothea and Russell Maynard

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Tony Pacitti

Willa Perlman

Maureen Reddy and Doug Best

Victoria Rose

Sissy Rosso

Elizabeth Rush

Nic Staab

Susan Tacent

Molly Malcolm Tinkerhess

Maryann Ullman

Ilene Weismehl

Marcy Wintrub

Robert Whitcomb

Write Rhode Island!

Head of School, School One: Jennifer Borman

Director of Literary Engagement: Diana Champa

Goat Hill: Ann Hood
Hester Kaplan
Taylor Polites

Design: Kim Luca

School One Intern: Paige Witbeck



Congratulations from School One

About a year ago, School One and Goat Hill Writers hatched the idea of **Write Rhode Island!**. Though School One has long been known for its strength in the arts, we noticed there were few opportunities for students to showcase their talents as creative writers. Hence, **Write Rhode Island!**: a short fiction contest open to any student in Rhode Island in grades 8-12.

We were excited to see how quickly students – and their teachers and librarians – took to this new opportunity. In its inaugural year, **Write Rhode Island!** received over 100 submissions from students attending public, private, and parochial schools from every corner of Rhode Island. To get their stories started, many students participated in one of the 30 free creative writing workshops we held this past autumn.

This anthology features the award-winning stories along with honorable mentions and notable reads. I don't envy the judges' task to select among them. The stories show a remarkable range and sophistication. While some students explored genres like historical fiction and dystopian futurism, others created nuanced portraits of complex relationships or fleeting moments in time. There are dark themes in many of the stories – racism, divorce, ruptured friendships – and moments of insight and resolve.

Throughout the stories, the writers all convey a powerful sense of place. Rhode Island's history, multiplicity, and beauty are present on every page. Our coastlines, our seasons, the bleak woods of Foster in December, our zoo, Providence's City Hall, Newport's clapboards, and the many moods of our ocean all emerge through these writers' imaginations. Though the stories show how diverse our student writers are, they also show the ways we all come together within our shared boundary. We are delighted to have played a part in bringing these stories to light.





GOAT HILL

for writers

Goat Hill was formed in 2015 by three Rhode Island writers to cultivate community and opportunity for writers in Rhode Island. We have enjoyed bringing writers, agents, and editors to Providence to talk about their work and share their special insights. We are especially proud to have partnered with School One to create this program that goes right to the grassroots of our writing community. Writing is a lifetime practice. We are thrilled to acknowledge the work and ambition of these young people—and to encourage them to keep writing. In its first year, ***Write Rhode Island!*** received over one hundred submissions from students in grades 8 through 12 from every corner of the state. We were moved by the response and the stories these young people told—from humor to horror, from struggle to transformation.

We hope that you find these stories as delightful and beautiful and poignant and sincere as we do. The display of talent in this first year's competition is a testament to the innate desire we all feel to tell our stories. We look forward to cultivating storytelling in the young people of our state, and we look forward to the stories they will tell now and in the future.

Ann Hood

Hester Kaplan

Taylor Polites



THANK YOU

We would like to extend a big thank you to all of our community sponsors who are supporting ***Write Rhode Island!***

A special thank you to Jennifer Borman, Nick Boke, Paula Cioe, Austen Farrell, Hester Kaplan, Taylor Polites and Alayne Todd for their red pens and eagle eyes.

Write Rhode Island! collaborates with many Rhode Island organizations to educate and publish RI students. We would like to acknowledge the support and help of these individuals and organizations.

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**RHODE
ISLAND!**

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**IS PROUD
TO PRESENT THE
WINNING
STORIES**

Nostalgia in Blue

.....
by Marissa Alfiero

Yowling the words along to the Tom Petty song as if she'd been considering joining a feline chorus, she raised the windows of the car and turned up the heat.

"Well her lips were as warm, as that wet southern night, her eyes were as black as the sky...."

"You know what?" she said to the boy beside her, whose hand was grasping the door handle. He glanced at her, a smile playing tentatively at his lips, promising some sort of secret or revelation he hadn't quite decided to disclose yet. His hair was the type of blond so pearly that the roots were nearly white, and he combed it back in a skittish sort of way. Without waiting for him to respond, nor expecting him to, the girl began speaking once more, lowering the volume of her CD so that Petty's croon was not so audible beneath her voice.

"I think... I think... never mind." She hastily added. "I suppose," she pursed her lips. "You look like Jimmy Stewart. Has anybody ever told you that?"

The boy told her that, no, nobody had, and his free hand wound itself over to curl atop hers.

It was not until days later, once he'd told her he could not do this anymore, that she could not provide him with the human connection he yearned for, that the thought of her made him feel hollow, that she frightened him and he worried for her safety, that she told him what she'd meant to say. It came in the form of a letter, addressed to him in her careless script that was every bit as scattered as each fragment of her being. She had not left a return address, nor

had she signed it, but it was unmistakably she who had sent it. The stamp looked up at him, its black-and-white gaze searing with charm, a limited edition portrait of Elvis.

“My Alabama,” she began. “What I meant to say is I am at a point in my life in which my apathy has drowned out so much I once cared for, but never think for one moment I don’t care about people. I care terribly about people. In fact, I think that the people I love are the only things tethering me to this earth, that without them all I’d

.....
Always, she could
feel their presence,
coating her tongue
like warm cream, but
just then her mouth
was barren.
.....

float away, a dandelion blowing off along the wind. God, I am so child-like, so intangible. You were the most solid thing in my life, and without your presence an anchor has been torn from me, and left me unmoored.

“I’m afraid I won’t last the winter. It’s November, and it’s so bitterly cold already. My hands shake and my fingers are laced with blue. I am disappearing into the baggy denim folds in which

I hide myself, shamefully, and I fear my identity has become foreign to me. I don’t think I’m strong enough to weather New England. I’ve decided I must leave for Italy. That is where I want to be most. I’ll stay at the farm with my aunt, and help her tend to the vegetables, and I’ll be happy there. I won’t tell you where I am now, but I simply need a stay in the countryside, a break, for I’ve grown so weary of it all.

“I could have loved you, Alabama. I really could have.”

Upon receiving the letter, he dropped it onto the kitchen table, hands clenching and unclenching its wooden grain. From upstairs, he heard his little brother and sister, scurrying around, playing cowboy with one another. Eyes shut, he imagined her saying how she wanted the moon, making believe she was Audrey Hepburn and insisting that her Humphrey Bogart impression was a marvel, but only when she was by herself, only when no one could see her. He thought of her dragging him to the water when it was just warm enough to still haunt the ocean

by moonlight, how she told him the tale of a ring she'd lost in the waves, only to soon find another washed up on the shore, how this was proof to her that she had become betrothed to the sea.

"My wife," she'd proclaimed. "How I love her so."

He recalled holding her under the darkness, rain dancing on the roof over him, whispering poems in her ear, and how he had heard such a sharp intake of breath, which she'd later explained was because his voice was so strikingly beautiful, as beautiful as the falling rain.

Yet, in all of this, in the times they spent eating gelato under the verdant treetops of Wilcox Park during late August, or meandering through downtown Wakefield, tossing handfuls of kettle corn into the Saugatucket River (he always with his camera, she never without a notebook), he knew she was, somehow, emotionally unavailable.

She had made herself detached, and had forgone reality, and become disconnected from everything that once mattered in her life. Her isolation, he saw, was her own doing, whether or not it was intentional. She distanced herself, refusing to let him pay for her coffee, or buy her a rose.

"I just want to mean a damn to something," she'd said, squeezing her eyes shut as she gripped the steering wheel, grinding to a halt to avoid hitting the owl that had descended into the middle of the road late one October evening.

He had not realized the ability he had to ruin her, far more than she'd hurt him. All at once, she existed, both wildly independent, but glaringly fragile from years of wear. As was his custom, he'd taken to walking the sun-dappled streets of his road, the smell of sand in the air, scarf tucked close under his chin, as his mind worked through queries and quarries and pitfalls.

Miles away, the girl laid her face in her hands, sitting in the front seat of her car, mumbling the lyrics of "Memory Motel" under her breath. She hadn't eaten all day, and her head felt light, her vision darkened when she turned too quickly, and she realized that maybe her last meal had been even longer ago than that.

"How did things become this way?" she wondered.

She thought back to the past year, to when she shaved her head and tossed the scraps of hair out for the birds to build nests out

of; that was the spring. Or there was the summer and the hospital and her arduous recovery, how she was relapsing and forgetting to put food into her body again, back to the car accident that had thrown her into such disquietude.

Sitting at the park-and-ride, wondering how far into Connecticut she could go before the cold snap of spruce and bucolic farmland swallowed her whole, the girl took sharp breaths and fished a notebook from her backpack (you know the kind, a journal whose tattered pages are nearly full, nipped and bruised from constantly being towed from bag to bag), beginning to write, beginning to work through her thoughts in the only way she could conceive.

“She hadn’t been able to see the moon for some time, and she missed her gentle reassurance. There was a disconnect growing, between her and the things that were once her reality. She craved the stars and their hot, milky breath, the solid feeling of them beneath her trembling, blistered fingers. The sound of rain could never be just that again, never just rain, but hushed whispers, fragments of words, delicate fingers skating over the skin of her back. She could not forget the tenderness....” she stopped. Her mind was fogged, and the words that once blossomed out from her were nowhere to be found. Always, she could feel their presence, coating her tongue like warm cream, but just then her mouth was barren.

Sighing, she bit the end of her pen. It was not enough. None of it was ever enough. She started her car. Things could have ended so differently, that last time she went hurtling towards a thicket of trees, and she had felt relief but also confusion at still being conscious, alive. The dreams of barreling down back roads, skidding along them so that there was the horrible clash of metal on wood all over again, had subsided, but still cropped up every now and again, interrupting her already restless fits of sleep. It was so easy for a machine to become a weapon, just as easy as it was for a person to do the same. She began the route to the place where she felt her nights always ended, whether alone or in company, down to shores of Blue Shutters beach.

It was there she had gone on countless occasions, through day and night, there that she had snuck out to on the eve of her seventeenth birthday, simply waiting and writing and feeling the

gravity of her solitude, softly listening to jazz as she hoped things might get better. Her mind set in the past, she propelled herself forward, needing to see the shore she loved one last time before leaving. It had been determined long ago that she could only thrive in constant motion, in perpetual exploration from one scene to another. Her need for independence confined by the boundaries of her youth, she'd made it a personal mission to seek out every hidden gem of

her state, one so unassuming in its size. She wanted every lush forest glen, every dimly lit café tucked away from sight, but where there were double-chocolate muffins to rival the sun, every vision of human experience revolving through that deceptively simple coast. Still, somehow, her mind would revert to its most primal setting, and she'd find herself in terrain so familiar her past all but made up a Baedeker guide to those sandy dunes. It was like second nature.

When she arrived, she felt it, that same prickle of tears behind her eyes that plagued her with such virulence. Shaking in her oversized t-shirt, low-hanging jeans, she ran out to the water, plunging her hands into it against all rational cautions in her mind, splashing the spray onto her face, her chest, her arms. Her mouth opened and closed as her skin shrieked in defiance against the icy waves, and she felt the taut slap of the night air distill her blood into something colder, into something that was alive, so her veins were veins and not threads of twine.

"It's like a baptism," she thought. "This is my new beginning. I am being born again." She began to try and convince herself, to make a conclusion take root with certainty, that this was the last time she would be seeing this side of the Atlantic for a while.

"Goodbye," she moaned, sobs flowing freely down her face, as freely as the tides, and the moon held it all in her grasp—all the canals

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.....

and tunnels trenched out by the salted rivulets. Looking up to face that orb, coming to terms with it all, her life and how it would unfold before her with such fluidity, the girl saw another figure standing a few yards away, peering into her.

“Cecelia!” he called to her. “Cecelia, please come home!” She gasped, the identity of this boy dawning on her as she saw the moonlight reflect off the pale sheen of his hair.

“Absalom, Absalom!” she cried in response, watching him as if in slow-motion as he came running over towards her. She felt herself falling as though she were an actress in a film, as if she were watching it all take place. He knelt above her, and carefully placed a hand on her shoulder. The wind whistled as if on cue, maybe as a warning, maybe as encouragement.

“My Alabama, my Absalom,” said the girl. Propping herself up on unsteady hands, she stumbled, and folded her body into him. “You don’t need to save me. Please don’t be wanting to save me. Only I can do that, you must understand. Me, and the ocean here, she will revive me. This is my fountain of youth, the wellspring from which I have been reborn. I am going to be okay. You must understand that.”

He pressed his lips to the top of her head, rocking her back and forth as though she were floating, on a raft, cast away at sea but in the least lonesome of ways.

“I know, I know. There are no white knights or towers, Cecelia. You are going to get better. I promise you that, that you will find strength of the sea in yourself. Please, just come home.”

She looked up at him, the moon bouncing off of her wide-open eyes, a thousand stories in them, as in any human gaze, her eyes as magic as Paris when it sizzles, and she smiled.

“Absalom, my Absalom, I know. They say that salt can rub wounds raw, but you and I both know that today, in this moment now and from here on out, it will be my salvation.”

The water in question flowed calmly, steadily, as consistently as ever it had, and in those glossy sheets there was a promise, not of a sepulcher but of a kingdom, and its motion seemed to say, *I am here. I will always be here. Lay my thumbs over your eyelids, and let me wash you clean.*



Sculpture Itri, 1975, **Salvatore Mancini**
From the collection of the Newport Art Museum

Just the Beginning

by Kiani Pope

I live in the smallest state. Some people think it's a part of New York. Some people call it Lil Rhody. Some people don't even know it exists; but I know. And it's real. And it's the biggest smallest state you'll ever go to.

I live in the capital, Providence. Around here we call it Prov. We break Prov up by sides: Eastside, Southside, Northside, Westend, and Lakeside. This how most people know who to mess with or not, by which side they're from. It makes it easier for us to know who's against us or not, who we got beef with, who's out to get us. If you don't rep one of these sides you're kind of irrelevant in our eyes.

Where I'm from you're fighting to survive. You're shooting to kill. When you got problems with people, it's as serious as not wanting to sleep 'cause you always gotta watch your back.

Where I'm from everybody's from the projects. Everybody reps a gang. Everybody's willing to die for their squad. Your family ain't blood, but you're closer to them than your actual family. You call them your brothas, sistas, buzzints, your fam.

Where I'm from, you don't have enough fingers to count how many brothers you lost to the streets.

Where I'm from, you don't have enough fingers to count how many people you know behind bars.

I'm from the Southside, but I go to Central High School. That's where everybody goes if you're from my side of town. There's never not a day where I don't have to watch my back. There's never not a time I don't wear a hoodie. I never know when it could be my last day to live. When you're with this gang life you never know who's out to get you. The truth is I don't know if this is the life for me. I don't know

if I want to have to watch my back every hour of the day. I don't know if I want to have to fear for my mother's life because my beef know where we live. I just don't know if I can do it. The truth is I want to be an artist.

Everything I said about Prov is true; but it's also true that this is the creative capital. This is the city where no matter what street you on, you see murals and artwork. You see things that people my age, going to the same public school I go to, make. You see the art of people who thought they had no choice, just like my fam thinks, just like I once thought. I don't want to be another statistic. I don't want to be another stereotype. I don't want to be another black boy from the projects that draws but doesn't do anything with their talent because they think they won't be enough, or they won't survive long enough to be anything.

I've been drawing and doing graffiti for as long as I can remember. A lot of times I'll be walking downtown with my bros and they'll see some of my stuff and say it's fye—some people would say fire. They never know I did it, though. Nobody knows I draw except my motha, and she doesn't even care. She says that it isn't gonna pay the bills. I know it can, though. There are programs out there for people like me.

I'm scared, though. What if Mama's right? What if I don't make it with this art stuff. I don't know what else I'd do. There's nothing I want more than this. I'm a junior and the only college I have in mind is RISD. If I don't find a way to get accepted into that school I don't want to go to college at all.

Every day on my way to school I pass this telephone pole that always has events and fliers on it. Today, I saw a new one: an opportunity to get a scholarship to RISD by painting a mural on the outside of an up and coming school on the Eastside. The problem is I have beef with the Eastside. They all know me around there; and they all want me dead. Like I said, with this gang stuff you never know who's out to get you. But luckily enough we know which side is out to get us. I know this would be putting my life in danger but I'm going to take this opportunity while I have it. It's probably the only way I'll get a guarantee acceptance into my dream school. The application is due

tomorrow. I feel as though it was a sign for me to see this, a sign that I have a future being an artist.

It's been a week since I've signed up and there's no turning back now. I'm in it. I'm risking my life for something that is totally worth it and I'm not the least bit scared. There are four contestants. We each got a separate day to paint our murals. Today is my day.

I've been drawing the design since I saw the flier and I honestly think this is gonna be the dopest piece I've ever done. Better yet, it's legal! I don't have to sneak and do it! I don't have to avoid getting caught. I'm free to do what I love and not have any consequences and maybe even get a reward. This is a new feeling for me.

I started at 5 o'clock and from the looks of it I'm finna—or some people would say, “going to”—be here for a while. I didn't realize how much detail is in this design, but I'm confident it's going to pay off. I can feel it in my bones I'm going to win. No beef is gonna stop me. I'm going to get this done even if I have to die for it and I know being on this side of town, that's a possibility for me. This is the most realistic piece I've ever done. Usually when I draw it's some crazy stuff, something that you'd see in a sci-fi movie or something, but nah, not this. This has to be special. This mural means a lot to me. It shows how we're all one, no matter who we mess with or what side we're from. It's a skyline of Providence with people holding hands all around it. It's probably hard to picture; but trust me, it's gonna be dope.

It's 1 am when I finish. I take a step back and look at my work. This is hot! Definitely the best thing I ever done! If only my mama was here to see this. Maybe she'd be proud this time. I start walking back to

.....
We call it Prov.

We break Prov
up by sides:
Eastside, Southside,
Northside,
Westend, and
Lakeside.

.....

my hood when I notice this black car following me. This is exactly what I didn't want to happen. Only one thing I can do right now: run. I never ran so fast in my life. Usually when stuff like this happens I'm with my squad, but this time it's just me and that car. The car is faster. They got me.

I wake up with mama in front of me, tears rolling down her face. She's yelling at me, telling me I almost died, that the bullet just

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Only one thing

I can do right

now: run.

.....

an article in *The Providence Journal* with a picture of my mural on the front. She's crying harder than ever now. She apologizing for all that she's said. I've made it.

My name is Derrick Ivory. I was born and raised in the Southside of Providence. I grew up with them killas, them thugs, and them drug dealers, but that didn't shape me. My story doesn't start there, either. It starts at this moment, this moment where I can say I've made it to where I want to be. My name is Derrick Ivory and this is the start of my story.

.....

Tiny Droplets of Change

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by Shana Wilson

The cold Misquamicut waves lapped at my toes as I danced gingerly amongst the sand. It wasn't the smartest choice to come here in the middle of March, but I had a craving for salt and sea. The distant smudge of Block Island was visible on the horizon. When summer rolls around, tourists will wave at the ferry-goers from the sand as though they are going to some far away land.

I pulled myself up on the boulders to make my way around the breachway. The waters were calm for March. Only the occasional fisherman floated around the rock walls. The neon yellow of a surfboard bobs in and out of view.

I had to get out for a while. I could not tolerate being in that house anymore. My parents were fighting, again. Now they were trying to decide who would get the dog. Mom thinks it should be her because she rescued it. Dad thinks it should be him since the dog likes him better. I couldn't care less, to be honest, because I'd see the dog at either house. But the divorce has my parents at each other's throats. So I ran out and found my safe spot.

Life seems to be so peaceful here. The only sound is the squawking of the seagulls and the sea sloshing against the slippery rocks. No tourists, no noisy kids, no delinquent teens. Just me and mother ocean.

The minutes tick by, and I sit alone. My hair is tangled in the sharp breeze. The echoes of my parents' biting words from that night bounce around in my head. It's ironic how cliché each argument was, talking of full plates and clinging to backs and repeated excuses.

"You know what? I'm done. I want a divorce."

I want a divorce.

Want a divorce.

A divorce.

Divorce.

Just like that, my whole world had broken apart like a chipped piece of a seashell on the shore. Dad was moving out so Mom and I could keep the beach house. The boxes and bags filled with his stuff haunted me every time I stepped outside my bedroom. I couldn't go anywhere in that house without seeing memories of my suntanned childhood being peeled away like dead skin on a sunburn. And all I could do was watch.

I saw my dad sit to my left in my peripheral. I knew it was only a matter of time before my parents noticed I was gone. Dad must have been voluntold to come get me. He sighed deeply, hands folded over his bent knees and crisp white work shirt rolled up to his elbows.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart," he finally said.

"For what?" I asked flatly.

"For a lot of things. I'm sorry I'm working all the time. I'm sorry I fight with your mom. Most of all, I'm sorry I wasn't

there for you." I turned to him and studied his face. Dad's eyes had deep bags underneath his blue-green irises. His hair had light greys streaking upwards from the roots. And the frown lines had deepened to prominent creases.

"Dad, I know you have a lot going on in your life with work and stuff," I began, "but I'm your kid. I should come first." He sighed again and wiped his eyes.

"I know. Dammit, I know. I just...grew apart from my home life. I should have been a better man and prevented that from happening. I know I can't fix my past mistakes, but I can make sure I don't repeat them." I turned away.

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.....

“This isn’t something you can fix with empty promises like always. You say over and over you’re going to change and it never happens. Why should I believe you now?”

He was silent for a moment, thinking carefully.

“Because of this place,” he finally said. “Because of Rhode Island. Remember all the times we went to the museums and the historical sites last summer?”

Dad and I loved history, so the two of us took a staycation

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When summer rolls
around, tourists
wave at the ferry-
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away land.
.....

around the state for a week to visit all the cool historical sites we could find. It was the highlight of my summer. Because he was always working through my decathalons and swim meets, I was skeptical when he told me to pack my bags and get in his car. But cruising around in his Jeep turned out to be just like old times, like our history was repeating itself, our history before his career became more important. It felt as though we were on a quest to soothe the thirst of knowledge we possessed.

We took the Providence Ghost Tour. We marched our way down the beach to climb

in Fort Mansfield in Watch Hill. We weaved in and out of mansion after mansion in Newport. Each new experience made us closer than ever before. Not only were we learning about the state, but we were learning about each other as well.

“Well in all the time we spent reading, and listening, and learning, one thing was most common: Rhode Island is about change. The ocean provides the change of scenery and it’s always magnificent. Roger Williams provided change for those sick of religious intolerance. Slater Mill provided change by jumpstarting the industrial revolution.

People who live and breathe in Rhode Island are inspired to change the way things are. Including me,” he added.

I thought about what he said for a moment.

“What if I give you the opportunity for change and it doesn’t happen?” I asked.

“That’s the funny thing about history. It has a way of repeating, so those who experience it have the chance to repair the damage of their mistakes. And I fully intend to repair the cracks I made in our relationship,” he replied as he gazed out at the horizon.

I watched the waves swirl at the base of the rocks below. Dad was right of course. If a tiny droplet in the ocean had the opportunity to change, why shouldn’t he? But I was scared. Mom and I had always been close since dad had left me disappointed so many time. What if when he moved out, he never came back?

My dad always said I had a heart as wide and deep as the ocean when it came to forgiveness though. Against my better judgement, I agreed.

“Okay Dad. I believe you.” He smiled and wrapped an arm around my shoulders.

“Things will get better, kiddo. You’ll see,” he said as he squeezed me in a hug.

The tide began to rush in with my new beginnings, the sea splashing gently on my jean-covered legs. Slowly the sun was setting on the horizon and turning the water to the color of sea glass. My previous chill of the beach had disappeared with my dad’s body heat comforting me. Surf time was over and the handful of people who had been wandering around disappeared.

I rested my head on his shoulder and smiled.

“I never realized how beautiful Rhode Island was until now.”



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**IS PROUD
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HONORABLE
MENTION
STORIES**

.....

Edwin

.....

.....

by Andrew Ackroyd

LADD School, 1955

“Exeter, Rhode Island, 1891, that is where our story starts,” said a small, brown-haired, pudgy man who had cowlicks sticking up everywhere in his dark hair. He had dark brown puppy-dog eyes and something about his aura demonstrated a dark, cynical understanding of the universe that was beyond his twenty years. The man reeked of sweat. Anxiety and stress had left him severely mentally disabled. His legs were twisted in such a way that he could not stand on his own. They were shrunk and his toe-nails were clawed. His audience consisted of two young boys, a nine-year-old and a slightly older one of thirteen years. The storyteller was in the LADD School for the criminally insane. “Mercy Brown, a girl of nineteen years, a convicted vampire of her home town,” the man, Edwin, continued. A crack of thunder suddenly ripped through the sky. Outside the asylum’s window, a bright white lightning bolt followed. It was a clear night, contradicting the sudden events, as if nature wanted to add a cinematic value to this young man’s horror story. But nature does not work like that.

Exeter, 1891

Mercy felt a sickening turn in her gut as her father’s palm smashed into her cheek, sending her to the ground. Tears welled up in the girl’s eyes as the father she had loved all her life hit her. She curled her body as if to brace herself from the incoming blows. “How could you curse your family with consumption, you witch?” George screamed as he repeatedly kicked her sickly fetal body. She let out a tiny whimper and looked up at him, her dark-brown eyes searching for the father she used to know underneath the white shirt riddled with blood and phlegm.

He hit her again before falling into a coughing fit, doubling over in agony. His raucous coughs echoed through the halls of the giant mansion. The coughs were filled with a thick, gooey, white liquid that he spat onto the floor along with the blood that was rank with the smell of sickness. She recoiled from it as a big puddle of illness splashed down on the floor in front of her. Mercy quickly fled from the area up to her room. Her older sister and mother, both named Mary, had died a few years ago from consumption and her father blamed her for it. Her brother was still alive and doing better than her father, but the grasps of the demonic curse were already consuming his blood and bones. There were rumors around the town that someone in their house was committing witchcraft and other dark arts.

She wept from both the pain and betrayal she had felt at her father's hand. Mercy examined her body for any marks, finding dark blue contusions covering her skin on the impact zones. She prodded one of the bruises on her arm and winced in pain as an aching feeling covered her entire arm.

Several hours later, there was a knock on the door of the large house where Mercy, and her remaining family now lived. "Get the door, Mercy!" The strict, manly voice of George called to her and was followed by a fit of wet, vehement coughs. That had been the normal sound of the Brown family for the past few years. In addition to falling in and out of sickness, almost the entire family had been plagued with dreams of both pious angels or nightmares of soul-sucking monsters. Mercy, her sister, mother, and father experienced the nightmares, whereas her brother had solely the perfect dreams.

Mercy hobbled down the stairs, very aware of the pain from her father's punishment. Going to the door, the small girl pulled it open slowly, trying carefully not to hurt her arm. A man in white garments stood before her. The holy cross on his tunic was repeated on an iron chain around his neck. He had a Bible in one hand, and a wooden stake in the other. It was of simple oak and sharply pointed. She backed away from the holy man.

"Mercy Brown, hello. I am here for a quick visit, nothing more. I would like to speak to your father," he said firmly. "That is," he continued in a whisper, "if you have not killed him." His stale breath

reeked of garlic as it reached Mercy's face. The small sickly girl nodded, tightened her mouth and led him to the library. That was where George spent his time recently, plunging through religious scriptures and arcane texts, finding a way to either meet his late wife in this life through resurrection or in the next through the Almighty. Mercy directed the man through the doorway, where George was sitting on his plush couch at the corner of two canyons of books he had received from ancestors, found at flea markets, and discovered during the sinful escapades of his youth.

The priest nodded to George before turning to Mercy. "Please, give us silence and secrecy. Leave," he said this in the general direction of Mercy, not able to look at the abhorrent creature of the night that she was fabled to be. Mercy complied, though she could not tell for sure why. She was strictly a Baptist, as was the priest, though he was not from her own church on Chestnut Hill.

She decided to go upstairs to the bird's nest she had discovered at the top of her family's manor. Mercy had adopted the nest of a wren; the mother had died with Mercy watching, leaving the chicks alone. She reached the top of the stairs and checked the nest to see if the downy, brown chicks were still there.

The two baby birds were there. One of the baby birds careened its neck to look at Mercy, or at least that's what she thought it was doing. She smiled for the first time that day and fed it pale yellow seeds from her dress pocket.

Mercy felt a dryness in her chest and coughed, a deep guttural cough that echoed throughout the forest surrounding her family's house. The two baby birds were startled, unable to process what happened in their feeble minds. One of them chirped shrilly, the other

.....

I would like to speak to your father," he said firmly. "That is," he continued in a whisper, "if you have not killed him."

.....

one shifted slightly on its little feet. Mercy immediately felt a sinking feeling in her stomach, as if she had just cast herself off a tower. Her breathing quickened rapidly before a rational thought came to her. It is nothing... Just a cough. She forced herself to smile and calm down a little. The feeling in the pit of her stomach stayed. She coughed again.

She stayed with the birds until she saw the priest exit the house. Once he had disappeared over the hill that the house stood on, she began her descent back downstairs. Cautiously, pausing on every step to listen for a stirring other than coughing in the house, Mercy heard nothing but silence, not even the raucous coughs of her father. She shrugged this off, and went further down the creaking stairs. Mercy then entered the hallway on the top floor and scurried to the third door on the left and pushed it in slowly. The door creaked open and she saw her sleeping brother on his bed, a tiny pile of skin and bones on a straw mattress with pieces of the dried straw poking out. It was evident from the way his legs looked underneath the simple, white wool sheet that they had been tangled since birth.

A wooden chair sat in the corner on two unsteady wheels. A window was at the back of the room, letting sunlight stream in. He stirred in his sleep and green-tinted blood oozed out of his nose, slipping down his face, staining the pillow and covering his thick puffy lips. He was still breathing, which was what she was looking for, so Mercy slowly pulled the door closed as she exited the room.

.....
The father she knew
had been consumed
a long time ago by
the wretched disease.
.....

She descended another set of wooden steps that moaned with her every movement. She reached the bottom and crept over to the library to see if her father was still there.

A body was bent over the desk, its figure heaving with every quiet whining sob it emitted. Mercy realized that it was not the father she had loved

but was only the barest husk of what he had once been. The father she knew had been consumed a long time ago by the wretched disease.

The small girl eased closer to the body, walking on her heels, careful not to make a sound. She slowly reached out her hand once she was in reach and put it on his back. The back of his white shirt wasn't covered with the fluids of sickness, though dried sweat made it cling to his body.

The remains of her father looked up at her, dark eyes staring into her soul. She felt exposed as if he could see every single inch of her, inside and out. Mercy shivered under his bloodshot and baggy eyes. His forehead was bruised, as were his cheeks and chin. He moved his gaze down to her stomach; she slowly followed his sight.

A flash of beige appeared in the space between her father and her body. A dark, terrible pain soon followed. Her stomach ruptured, sliced open by a stake that was held in the withered hands of her father. He pulled it out quickly and blood gushed from her body. He turned the stake so it was facing down and plunged it into her heart. Blood burst from her chest as she fell to the floor. Her knees felt the pressure from the wooden floor and she crumpled down onto her back, breathing heavily. The stake turned red around her and splintered, leaving a chunk of the top lodged in her heart. She felt her soul pull wickedly from her eyes, ripping her in two, and then, there was only red and the shrieking laughter of insanity.

Exeter, March 1892

A wooden door flew open as the cold air rushed into the marble tomb of the Chestnut Hill graveyard. It was a freezing morning and frost was still thick on the grass. The older brother of Mercy was accompanied by a priest and a town council member, all shivering in the cold. They held him up as his legs were only getting worse. The council member had a steel knife in his right hand. A twitching body lay in the dark corner of the building and all three of them entered. The priest, cleanly-shaven and fat, had a chalice of holy water clutched close to his covered chest. The man in the middle was wearing a dark gray, buttoned shirt with long, loose pants that covered his monstrous legs.

The smell of decay filled the nostrils of all three men and brought the rusty taste of blood into their mouths, though there

was no evidence of it being there. Both senses suffocated them and filled their eyes with water. The priest coughed loudly and put a handkerchief from his pocket to his mouth. The brother wheezed a ragged gasp as they edged closer to the body of his dead sister. The two men set him down as they came upon Mercy's body. Trading his body for the girl, they dragged her out of the tomb leaving the boy behind, locked inside.

When the priest and the council member both set her down on a granite rock, they flipped her over, so she was lying on her stomach. She had blood stained on her dress and the gashes in her skin were terrifyingly deep. The priest felt his stomach turn and bile rose up in his throat which he hastily swallowed, choking on the taste.

In the blink of an eye, her black heart was sliced out, splintered wood and all. The knife was stained red. There was still blood in her heart, and after three months, she should have started to decompose. She had not. The priest sprinkled holy water on her and scurried off to the outskirts of the graveyard where the councilman was holding the corrupted black heart. The two started a fire and threw the heart in. When the heart had turned to ashes, the priest gathered them and mixed them into the chalice of holy water. The liquid turned into a dreary gray color and burnt the priest's frail hand to the touch.

The door to the tomb slowly creaked open. Edwin pushed himself back with his hands, cowering away from the door. When the two figures appeared in the gap, he calmed down.

"This will heal you of that girl's curse," they said, putting the chalice of gray liquid to his mouth. He drank it slowly, as it burned his mouth and throat, but he continued to drink the remnants of his vampiric sister's heart. The ashes escaped his esophagus and oozed into his bloodstream. He screamed ghoulishly and launched himself at his companions. They didn't scream; the only sound in the silent graveyard was the chortling of two wrens.

LADD School, 1955

"And that is the story of Mercy Brown, the last found Rhode Island vampire," Edwin said with a foxlike grin on his face.

The little faces of his two audience members were enough to do that to him. They were wide-mouthed and had their eyes stretched to a comical height.

“Edwin? You made that up right?” the younger boy said, shifting on the cold wooden floor.

“Not a bit of it,” Edwin said as seriously as he could, suppressing a laugh. He watched the faces morph from fear to utter terror, laughing internally. “Here, I will protect you. Let me give you a hug,” Edwin said to the little boy, who scurried up and squeezed his arms around the crippled boy’s neck. Edwin squeezed back and when the boy seemed to calm down, he bit down on the delectable pale throat. The boy screamed in utter terror as the teeth entered. Blood and skin ripped away into Edwin’s mouth as he dropped the boy and moved onto the older one.

Edwin simply tackled him to the floor and scratched the boy’s face, hot blood oozing onto his long sharp nails. He killed the boy quickly, tearing his neck out, savoring the sweet blood like a coffee cabinet the cafeteria made.

When Edwin finished, he rolled the bodies next to each other and broke the window in the room. Glass shards went everywhere. He shifted his form quickly, before someone who may have heard the screams could get the authorities. Thank you, sister, he thought to himself. He gradually pulled his legs up into his tiny body. His bat form maliciously pressed its little lips into a mock smile and flew out into the cold dark night, free once again. Edwin is still out there to this very day, roaming.

.....
She felt her soul pull
wickedly from her
eyes, ripping her in
two, and then, there
was only red and the
shrieking laughter
of insanity.
.....

.....

Faith's Declaration

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.....

by Haley Kaye

It was hot. Incredibly, swelteringly hot. Even Hancock sported a loose cravat, a paper fan waving like a metronome stick in his hand. The requests to prop open a window even the smallest bit went unheeded—people could be listening, Hancock strictly reminded them, and at this moment, with the Declaration lying like a wilted flower on his desk, now was not the time. How many weeks had it been? Three, surely, nearly four. With Adams, Franklin, Jefferson, Sherman, all of them working their way through the heat, even when the sweat dripped off their brow and onto the ink below. Men who had braved the heat, only to gain the entire refusal of the Southern delegates to sign what they had created, to sign their masterpiece, the result of their tireless, endless work. The slavery clause must go, they had said. There would be no consideration of signing until Jefferson removed the slavery clause. Their black slaves were not equal, they believed, and they said they never would be. They would not sign until the sentence was gone.

Now, the sentence was gone. Scribbled, crossed, written out of existence, just as it had been so easily written in, it was gone. The South was waiting patiently. A unanimous vote had been taken. Slowly, the names were called.

Thomas Jefferson, of Virginia.

The fire-haired, lean man slowly stood and eased his way to the heat-stricken Declaration, gently dipping the quill in a provided inkwell, and added his elegant signature.

Caesar Rodney, of Delaware.

The older man stood slowly, like Jefferson, but with no ease and grace as the younger man had exhibited. He wobbled

and limped in his own small, dignified manner to the Declaration, clambering up the single step upon which Hancock's desk sat raised above the rest of the Congress, thrust the quill into the well and signed.

And soon enough, his name was called. Stephen Hopkins, the name rang out, of Rhode Island. The man had to be Franklin's

.....

There would be
no consideration
of signing until
Jefferson removed
the slavery clause.

.....

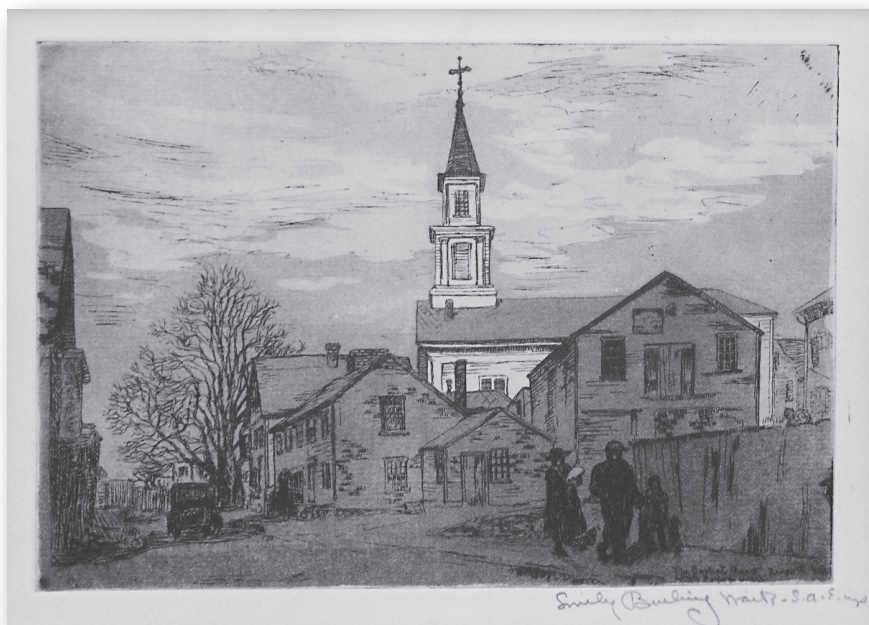
age, at most. With wiry grey hair, a long, pointed nose and almost sunken eyes, he was no wonder to behold, but he was a man to be respected, in his own rights. Whether at the tavern or in the Congress. He held one hand over the knuckles of the other as he stood, taking slow, lumbering steps towards the large paper sitting quietly, waiting for his arrival. Cursed palsy. It had only worsened with the greying of his hair. But he would sign, of course.

For himself. For America. For Rhode Island.

John Hancock's eyes were on him as he made his way to the Declaration of Independence, he knew. The gaze was scrutinizing this time; it was rather watchful, appreciative. But weary. He dipped the quill gently into the ink, his jaw clenching as the tip clattered against the rim. He slowly guided it to the paper, taking his time on the *s*, then the *t*, the *e*, the slopes of the *p* and *h*, another *e*, and finally, an *n*. He started again on another *h*.

Hancock watched him still as he set the quill down again, slowly lifted his old eyes to meet John's. He nodded slowly before looking down to his hands quaking lightly against the table.

"My hands tremble," he said softly, in a voice like the spring breeze the Congress so desperately wanted to let in, "but my heart does not."



The Baptist Church, Newport, 1930, Emily Burling Waite
From the collection of the Newport Art Museum



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From Here to Eternity

by Kateri Bajer

The world doesn't end with a big bang like everyone thought it would, a meteor ricocheting through the earth's atmosphere or a deadly apocalypse of undead dismantling any fragile hope humanity had left at survival. There are no monsters rising out of the depths of the oceans, no alien invasion, no nuclear war, no robots overthrowing the human race.

Instead, it's a gradual undefined decline over decades with the sea waters rising and cities collapsing and babies being born cold more often than not. There's disease in the air, but it's not the deadly kind in the sense that you're struck dead within moments, months upon contacting it. It prevents life from continuing, though, and at first there's a terrible, unpeaceful panic as leaders from the world yell at doctors and scientists to come up with solutions to the issue. There are riots in the street, people repeating nonsense that sounds good to their ears and tantrums being thrown left and right.

But a solution never comes, and there are less and less of those able to make a difference. Some flee to spaces off of earth, saying goodbye as waters lap on their doorstep, buying tickets with millions of green paper. Ironically enough, it's many of the leaders that leave first, abandoning such flimsy promises as "first and last on the battlefield." Swarms follow them, and soon, there's next to nothing left.

It's pleasant that way.

By all senses of logic, Rhode Island shouldn't exist. It was an "Ocean State," and with other states being all but eaten up by hungry waters, it should be gone as well. And in a sense, it is - most of the tiny state has been consumed, truly making it the 'island' that it never managed to be until now. There's some sort of irony in the idea of something not living up to its name until long after people populate its

land, and that irony is certainly not lost on the current residents.

There are bits and pieces of land sticking up from the waters defiantly here and there, some perhaps several hundred yards across, while others stretch several miles either way. The water in between such strips of land is incredibly shallow, a couple feet till the bottom at the absolute deepest.

It's here that people have made their hesitant recovery, houses built on stone stilts above the waves, and boats made out of the scavenged remains of automobiles long useless. Shops are made, gas stations refurbished, and life has a scary sense of normalcy returned to it.

A boy sits on the hood of a rusted semi-trailer, fishing pole in hand as he watches the clouds dance. The heels of his feet clang against the bumper, the hollow sound ricocheting around the empty sea expanse in front of him.

He hums unpleasantly, his throat harsh and clashing with the rhythm of his feet and the lapping of the waves against the truck. But it's a tune nonetheless, the kind filled with nostalgia that you can't quite place and grows quite annoying after a while.

"Ugh, can you *shut up!*"

The boy's eyes unfocus from the clouds to the lace-dressed girl sitting on the trailer above him and, momentarily, he stops his humming. "Is there an issue?"

"The issue is you." The girl spits on the boy and he scowls. "The whole feet thing was kind of pleasant, actually, but then you had to remind me to whom the feet actually belonged and it completely ruined the whole image. Way to screw up a girl's day!"

"A girl? Where? All I see is you, Quin." The boy sits up, attentive.

That earns him a kick to the back of his head. "Oh ha, *ha*. I'm sure you'll put food on the table by being a comedian, Donnie." Quin jumps down next to the boy, bare feet creating a satisfying and resounding sound on the hood of the truck as she straightens up. "It's my birthday, so I came to see what sort of surprise you were going to get me."

There's a long, painful pause as Donnie freezes up.

"You forgot, didn't you?"

"No! Of course not!" He begins reeling the fishing rod in rapidly.
"I...I would never--"

"You definitely forgot."

"--how dare you." Donnie sighs as an empty hook comes out of the water.

"Yeah." The girl snorts and hits him on the back rather harshly, causing him to stumble ungracefully. "Don't worry," she hums. "I figured. So instead I've decided that I'll just pick out a gift from your belongings again."

Donnie raises an eyebrow. "Oh? And have you decided what you want?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact!" The girl claps her hands. "Your ukulele."

The pause this time is even longer as Quin waits for a reaction, but all the boy does after a minute or two is sigh resignedly, wedge the pole into a crack so it stands up straight, and begin climbing up from the hood and back over the trailer.

"Are you gonna say anything?"

"What do you want me to say?" Donnie balances from the top of the trailer, hands out on either side of him. "Sure, I'd have preferred you'd pick something else, but if I say anything you're gonna guilt trip me and make me feel bad for protesting in the first place so I decided to skip the whole ordeal."

"Oh. Well, a fair enough point!" The girl huffs and climbs up after him. "You don't have to be so unnecessarily *rude* about how you phrase that, though!"

Donnie plops down on the sand on the other side, lifting his hands high above his head as he stretches. "Noted. Anyway, do you wanna go pick up that ukulele?" Quin nods, pouting slightly, and he pulls up his bike. "Well, come on, then. Your birthday only lasts a day."

Quin hops on the back of the bike, precariously balanced, and after a squeaky and shaky start, they're off.

The ride doesn't last long, hovering across a stony and dusted road next to the water's edge as they make their way to a house already in sight. Honestly, it's more of a simple, unnecessary enjoyment than anything else. God knows that any sort of automobile that only covers the ground is more than useless now.

“Look over there!”

Donnie glances over and, sure enough, there are several dolphins in the far off distance, their sleek bodies catching the midday light before landing with a splash in the water. Donnie laughs at the sight, and Quin herself lets out a delighted giggle.

“How beautiful...” She pauses. “Do you think that they’re sad that so many people have left?”

“I don’t think they care,” Donnie admits. “I wouldn’t either.”

“Oh. Fair enough.”

With that, he comes to a halt at the edge of the house. “After the birthday girl herself,” he says, and Quin scowls as she scales the ladder that serves as an entrance. “Mom’s not home but she probably will be soon, so please don’t make a mess, alright? I was supposed to catch something today but, very obviously, I didn’t.”

“What a loser.” Quin sticks out her tongue, feet settling on the handmade welcoming carpet that reads “Ocean State Sweet Ocean State.” She wiggles her toes uselessly in the fabric before stepping onto the wooden floor, spinning around as she glances up at the open roof.

“It must suck when it rains.”

“It’s not like it does very much anymore in the first place,” Donnie points out, already making his way into the other room. He opens up a cabinet, taking down a pair of mugs and placing them down on a table with a shining surface. “Do you want some coffee?”

“I’d prefer some tea, actually.”

Donnie sighs, pulling down a tin with a worn label. “Alright, it’s your special day. Take a seat, would you? This shouldn’t take very long.”

Quin does, watching as the boy takes out a kettle and turns on the faucet. It sputters at first but, after a moment, there’s a steady stream of water pouring into said kettle. Setting it aside to let it fill up, Donnie sparks a tentative match to turn on the stove. He sets the kettle onto the stove and, after a minute or two, it begins to heat up, and Donnie drops some leaves into it and puts the top back on.

“What kind of tea was that?”

“A surprise blend.” Donnie rolls his eyes. “I’ll get the ukulele, so wait here and watch the kettle, alright?”

Quin nods, and Donnie steps out of the room. The moment he does, she stands up and begins making her way across the room, opening the window over the sink and letting out a relieved sigh as the fresh air hits her face.

“Is that a thief I see?”

Looking down, Quin notices the older man sitting on a small motorboat below. “Oh, hello Mr. Winston!”

“Hello, dear.” Mr. Winston smiles and waves. “Happy birthday. Is it alright if I enter my own house?”

“Why, thank you!” She giggles. “And of course! Donnie’s making some tea, so you can have some too, if you’d like!”

“I most certainly would!”

Stepping away from the window, Quin pulls out yet another slightly-chipped mug. Tentatively, she washes it under the sink just to make sure that it’s clean enough for the old man before dubbing it Mr. Winston worthy. She returns to her seat just as Mr. Winston enters the house, letting out a tired groan and cracking his knuckles.

“Thank you for preparing the tea, dear.” He hums pleasantly, sitting himself down on a creaking chair as the sea below lets out a particularly violent splash. “Or, perhaps I should be thanking Donnie, but you’re here and he’s not, so I think it’s alright if I thank you instead, don’t you agree?”

“I’m right here, actually, Grandpa.” Donnie chooses that precise moment to enter the room with a scowl, ukulele in hand. “Good afternoon. And, happy birthday to you, alright?” He tosses the ukulele towards Quin, who gasps and catches it with an awkward fumble.

“Oh, thank you,” she gasps.

“Don’t mention it,” Donnie says dryly. “And I really mean, *don’t mention it*. I don’t think I’ll be able to live on with these mental scars.” He places a hand dramatically to his forehead and sighs.

“I think it’s a lovely present,” Mr. Winston comments, and Quin flashes a small smile towards the old man as she traces her hand over the carvings on the side of the instrument, several curly cued waves surrounding the words “Rhode Island.”

“Do you know how old this is...?”

Donnie shrugged. “Hell if I know. It’s been around for

generations—since before this place was just called the ‘Ocean State’ and was known as ‘Rhode Island.’ You know, hence the name there.” He pokes a finger at said carvings. “Or at least, that’s what I think. It’s not like anyone from back then is actually alive to tell us what’s the deal with this thing.”

“True enough.” Quin sighs wistfully. “It’s kind of sad though, don’t you think? Not knowing much about that time.”

The kettle begins to whistle, and Mr. Winston stands up promptly.

“That may be so, but nonetheless, it’s almost pleasant, isn’t it?” He hums, beginning to pour out tea into the mugs. “It may be frustrating at times, but it’s kind of nice to not know warring times. We only have to be nostalgic about peaceful days. Some people might prefer that we were fighting all the time, if only to have a ‘reason’ to live, but, honestly...I wouldn’t be able to stand such days. A world without fighting isn’t necessarily one without reason, after all.” He hands a mug to Quin and Donnie respectively before taking a sip from his own mug, licking his lips and letting out a satisfied sigh. “There’s something sad enough about time passing by on its own, and you don’t need wars and fighting to make it even sadder. Living a nostalgic, simple life on your own and enjoying the little pleasures as they come, without being burdened by destructive thoughts...that’s more of a blessing than anything you could ask for.”

There’s a silence as the trio drinks their tea silently, the air filled with a gentle awkwardness before Mr. Winston puts his empty mug down with satisfying smack.

“Sorry for bringing the mood down like that. Those were just the meaningless musings of an old man.” He laughs tiredly. “Quin, now that you’ve successfully stolen Donnie’s ukulele, why don’t you play something on it?”

Quin starts in surprise, obviously not in the present, before hurriedly nodding and beginning to strum some simple chords. “This is way better than your crappy voice,” she notes, glaring at Donnie who simply snorts in response.

The sound travels around the small house, painting it with a sort of invisible color as it dances out the window and sings with the gentle lapping of the waves.

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Trick or Treat

by Gabrielle Bianco

The sound of leaves crunching was almost indiscernible from that of candy bar wrappers rustling in my pocket. The wind ripped at my ears and I wished that I had worn a coat under my costume. I also wished that I had cut larger eye holes as I rubbed my eyes for the hundredth time, trying to rid myself of the irritation of cheap cloth cut with even cheaper scissors. The kids around me multiplied like rabbits. Their costumes sparkled and lit up and gushed blood at the hands of small remote controls. I realized how absolutely ordinary I must have looked dressed as a bedsheet ghost. The children ran up and down driveways, zigzagging through the neighborhood turning it into a pinball machine on a sugar high. I watched a group of dads camped out in the middle of a cul-de-sac sip on bottles of Narragansett from a cooler hidden inside a little red wagon as they waited for their trick- or- treaters. I thought of my own dad on Halloween and how he would pull me in a wagon to the opposite side of the neighborhood to collect from the house that handed out giant-sized pixie sticks.

The sidewalks looked smaller than I remembered, as did the roads on which I drove away twenty years ago and never looked back. The house numbers that Jeremy Collins spray painted on the side of the curbs for his eagle scout project were faded but legible. I walked slowly, dragging my foot along the side of the curb until I reached the last house on the street. The shutters weren't blue anymore and the hydrangeas were gone. There was no welcome sign hanging over the front door and the porch swing was missing. I waited for a couple of minutes on the side of the garage in the

driveway, watching my breath turn to fog and dance away, unsure of whether I should go up to the front door or not. I remembered standing in this very spot decades ago, worrying about whether or not my date with Melanie James would go well or if I would make the baseball team or if I would get bullied over my new shoes. Some things never change. In the time I spent reminiscing, three groups of jedi's and firefighters and characters from *Frozen* had come and gone and I saw a soccer mom look at me suspiciously. I guess I had been standing there for a little too long. With the threat of having to explain myself looming, I walked up to the front door.

The doorbell made the same sound it always did and I wondered if it still could not be heard in the master bedroom. It only took about a minute for the door to open. A young woman greeted me, holding a bowl of candy over a protruding, pregnant belly.

“Trick or Treat.”

From my position on the front steps, I could see pictures lining the wall of the stair case. Gone were the school photos of me and Benny and Laura and mom and dad’s wedding portraits. I could see into the living room where there were no longer jars full of shells collected at Narragansett beach. I could almost smell the hot leather of my dad’s Camaro that we would pile into for a Saturday at the beach. It always seemed that whenever we went, the whole state was there. I could still remember the way my mom would lay out an old comforter and weigh down the corners with rocks so that it wouldn’t blow away. I remember the way the sand around our blanket would look, peppered with colorful sprinkles from our Allie’s donuts. I can see through to the kitchen and the sliding glass doors that looked out onto the deck where Benny had tried to sneak out one night to meet his friends at Rocky Point. I remember Laura taking prom pictures in the foyer with Ronnie Gallagher who broke her heart and our window once. The window was an accident, her heart was not.

Most of all I remember wanting to leave. Wanting more than anything to get out of this tiny state and see the world and

meet people and live and learn and grow up. If only I knew then all the growing up I had truly done within these four walls. Now I had seen Paris and Rome. I now had a house and a mortgage and made my own money and I was finally a man, but none of it seemed as glamorous as I thought it would be. There are some lessons that can't be learned later in life. You can't wait until you're thirty to learn how to give your perfect cup of Del's lemonade to your brother who dropped his, and you have to find out when you're young that if you wait for the water at the beach to get warmer before you jump in, you'll be waiting forever.

I don't even remember what type of candy she gave me. Between the door opening and closing only a minute passed, but so had an entire lifetime. Lost in a flurry of my own thoughts, I wasn't paying attention to where I was walking. My feet hit a piece of cold, hard metal. I looked down to see what I had come in contact with. It was a sign. "For Sale."



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My Beautiful, Bright Red Hijab

by Starlyn Diaz

JOURNAL ENTRY 1:

Dear diary,

I am Fatima Kantari. I am 19 years old and I am now an American citizen. I have lived in Morocco my whole life, but it's time to find something new. As excited as I am to be on a plane for the first time, this flight is less than pleasant. The turbulence made my stomach do back flips. With the amount of moving my head did, you'd think I was a bobblehead. America has always been talked about as the golden country, everyone is equal and free. President Trump seems to be talked about a lot from the Americans. Some people even worship him. Others wish he had never even run for president. He has only been president for 2 months but he seems to have left every American with an opinion. Well, it's time for the plane to land! Guess I'll write to you later, diary!

JOURNAL ENTRY 2:

I wish that I could say that my transport from the airport to my new apartment went smoothly. It absolutely did not. Everywhere I looked there was someone giving me a strange look. I know that I'm foreign, but these people looked like they literally wanted to dissect me and see if I was human! My apartment isn't the best, but it's all I can afford right now. I start my new job first thing tomorrow morning. I want to be excited, but so far my time here has been anything but exciting. I'm hopeful that tomorrow will be a better day. I just need to give it some time. I guess I should head to bed now. **موندلا لبق تارك ذم!** (or as you say in English, Goodnight, diary!)

JOURNAL ENTRY 3:

Today started off as any day would. I got dressed and packed

my lunch. I knew that I would have to adapt to the American culture so I tried to dress as any young American girl would. I had on blue jeans that hugged my body very well and a loose sweater that was very warm. I never thought I would need to wear a sweater at the end of August, it doesn't really get too cold in Morocco, but here in Rhode Island it's different. Even though I am now an American, my home is still Morocco. My beautiful bright red hijab reminds me of home. I don't have a car or a bike or anything to transport myself to work, but luckily I now live in the smallest state in all of America. Walking to work can't be that bad. Off to work I go! أقحال تقو يف مكيل! ثدحتأ (Talk to you later!)

JOURNAL ENTRY 4:

Today could not have been any worse. Walking to work seemed like a good idea at first, that was until I realized that I now live in the state capital. Providence. Every street seemed busy, there were cars rushing by at every corner. It felt like I was playing some kind of game. Running across every street hoping that I wouldn't be hit by any kind of vehicle. The cold air felt like it was sucking every bit of moisture from my face, my eyes burned as if I had just been swimming in a pool full of chlorine, but I finally made it. "Candy's Corner Store." I've never been so happy to see such a graffitied little brick building. I walked in thinking that the most difficult part of the day was over. I could not have been more wrong. Everything was going okay until that one customer came in. That's when the day seemed to turn completely gray. She was a small woman with short red hair and a face that looked like someone sprinkled freckles on her with a paint brush. I was standing behind the register when she made the comment that made me realize I might have made a mistake. Moving may have been a mistake. America might not be the place for me.

"Excuse me young lady, but don't you find it disrespectful to be wearing that towel on your head when you have the lord hanging around your neck?"

"Excuse me?" I said.

"Well, I couldn't help but notice that you have the beautiful necklace with a cross on, and I feel it's a disgrace for you to have that on while you wear that Muslim head towel! As a devoted Christian woman,

I will not stand for this!” Her eyes were heavy with anger.

“I’m sorry if you feel offended, but I am a Christian woman too and this is not a ‘head towel,’ this is a hijab. You don’t have to be a Muslim to wear one.”

“Well, maybe you should just go back to the Middle East where you came from instead of polluting this great country with this terrorist culture,” she said with fierceness.

I didn’t even know what to say. Should I have been stunned? Luckily, my boss had overheard and came over. He told me to just go on my lunch break. He pointed to a little room that looked like a mop closet.

“The break room is right in there. Why don’t you relax and eat lunch. I can deal with this.”

I just shook my head and walked into the break room. All I managed to say to him was, “I’m not even from the Middle East.” I wonder if he even heard me. Hopefully lunch will be better.

JOURNAL ENTRY 5:

This was my first and last day at work. I don’t think I will ever be able to work in a place where people judge me for simply being me. As if my day behind the register wasn’t bad enough, the rest of my day had been awful as well. While sitting in the lunchroom, I figured that I had plenty of time to think about what had happened and time to cool off. That was until Mr. Clark walked in. Hunter Clark. He was a co-worker that I had the pleasure of not knowing at the time. He was a short man, probably around 5’5”, and even though he was young, he had very noticeable bags under his piercing, pale blue eyes. I guess the stress of always having to judge people really gets to you. I was just trying to eat my lunch in peace when he came up to me.

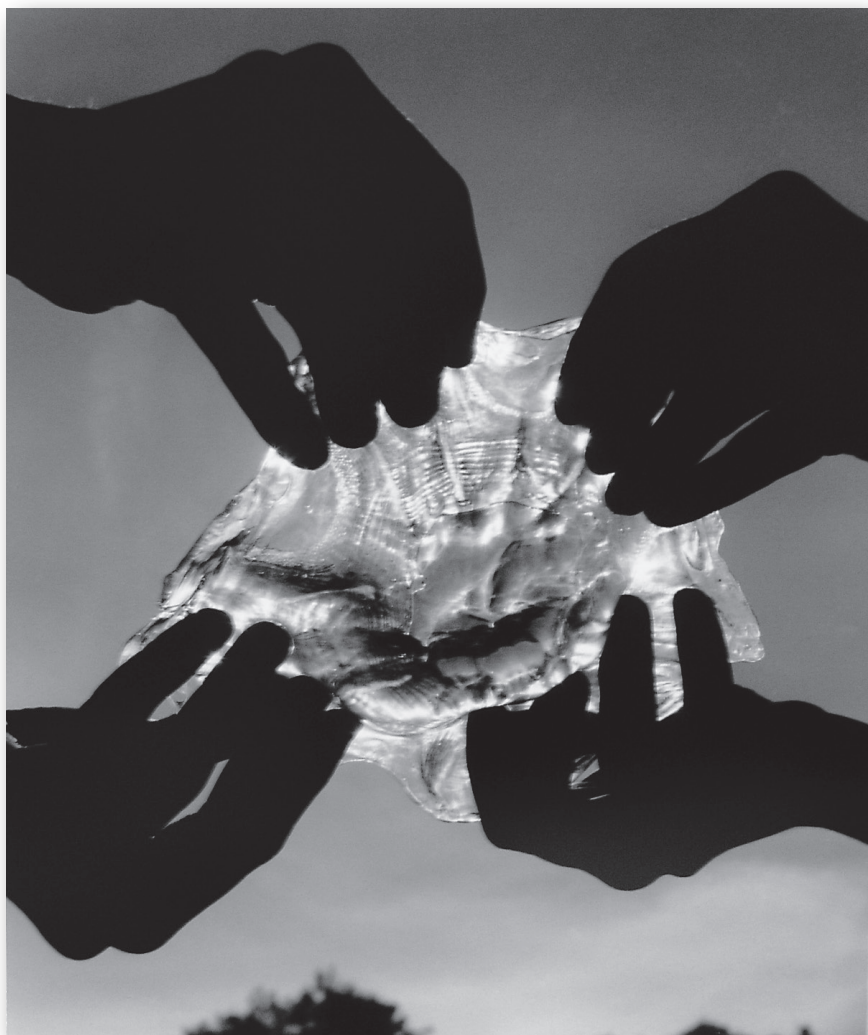
“You must be that new girl,” he said.

“Yes, I’m Fatima.”

“Well, hi there. You’re too pretty to be hiding under that head scarf. You know that you would avoid a lot of trouble if you didn’t wear it.” He laughed.

“I know that. I wear this for my faith,” I muttered.

Here we go again. Am I going to be able to make it here in the “Land of the Free”?



Jellyfish, 1998, **Salvatore Mancini**

From the collection of the Newport Art Museum

Created Through Divine Providence

by Benjamin Esposito

They say everything's bigger in Texas; their gratuitous portions of steak, their gas-guzzling cars, and most certainly their egos, too. However, once you look away from the monstrous human creations that find their way to Texas, it's quite small there. I once visited a friend in Austin who had recently moved there from Bozeman to work in the state government. His name was Andrew, though everyone called him "A-Man" for reasons never made clear. His flight from Big Sky Country to an "A-list" city in a state that can't stop reminding others of how big it is seemed natural. He was a braggadocious guy, and, like a magnet, the Lone Star State draws those types of egos and swagger.

Reflecting upon Andrew's experience, it was bizarre to me when I learned that I had been accepted into an American politics fellowship program halfway across the country. I then also had to come to grips with the fact that I would spend the next few years of my life in a state whose greatest significance out West is the astonishment people experience when they are first told that Rhode Island is not in fact an island. Even Hawaii does not call itself an island, and it actually is one!

I couldn't process the image of someone like me, the son of a cattle rancher, born and bred to take pride in my height, packing up my bags and transplanting myself into a state smaller than the average brush fire. Would I become cramped in the small space Rhode Island had to offer? I had no choice but to accept my predicament, however. Our cattle farm had long ceased to be a true ranch. Today, Ma and Pop prostitute out the once-prosperous ranch to Northeastern vacationers who wish to "rough it" for a week and think that they have seen how

life was in the “Wild West.” I had always refused to take part in the abominable amusement park; it increased my sympathy towards the Native Americans protests at the state house to get their land back.

In the end, my opposition did not change my life direction. I, too, am now prostituting myself out to the East Coast in pursuing a Ph.D in Political Economics, a field which only has relevance north of Richmond and east of Pittsburg. The horizon is approaching the Kleiner mann family ranching tradition, robbed as it is of a century-long heritage as the price of beef continues to fall towards nothing, and becomes even less valued by the mouth of the consumer.

On my last night in Montana on the ranch a few dozen miles outside of Bozeman, I excused myself from dinner and stepped outdoors and walked towards the stable, where we kept our horses. In spite of the bitter cold outside, the inside of the stable was warm with the heavy breathing of the horses. I walked over to Champ’s stall and poked my head through an opening. Champ stood majestically, as horses do when they sleep, as his body slowly flexed in and out with every breath. I was going to miss Champ most of all; not just the animal himself, but the vast world we discovered together while I was on his back. We had torn through plains where no life could be seen for miles on end, and where a quiet barrenness stretched itself out into the distance. I would halt Champ sometimes in the middle of a field, and pause to let our panting be the only sounds to disrupt the silent horizon. There, alone and filling my eyes with the outstretched sky, I felt the awe the settlers must have had when they came upon Montana from the East. Amazement expanded within my chest, loosening my jaw muscles for me each time I found an especially beautiful expanse before me. The calm picture, rolling out past the limit of what all could see, made me understand why settlers a hundred and fifty years ago thought that they were discovering untouched land, even if Natives had arrived first.

Watching Champ, I felt that the boundaries of the stable had begun to close in on me. The stable was intent on pressing me into a pancake. I fled the stable, in the process startling awake a few horses

into a whinny and ran to the cattle pen. The pen was for amusement today, showing the cattle off as props made us a larger profit than to grow and slaughter them. A high, white fence surrounded the sleeping herd. I spotted one awake, trotting around the outside of the fence, its head low to the ground and its tail swinging, even though flies aren't out at night. The moon shone a white glow onto the entire scene, illuminating the quiet herd and the restless cow. Before heading inside, I sucked one last of cool Montana night air, crisp but not too painful to swallow, a reminder that nature is harsh, but always extends a hand to make survival possible. I only hoped that the Ocean State would not squeeze the air of me.

I saw blue as the plane landed at T.F. Green. Big swaths of blue that rolled past where the eye could see. I had never once glimpsed the ocean and wondered if it held as many wonders as the Montana grasslands. The plane got closer to the ground, and neighborhood upon neighborhood replaced the ocean to fill the horizon. Roads spidered though through the greenery of lawns, cutting like small cracks that put each box of green and the white house centered inside into its own plot. The tightly packed houses already made me nervous. Was open space so hard to find in Rhode Island that everyone needed to live right next to each other, even outside of the city? The houses in the suburbs of Bozeman or Austin had plenty of space to throw a football around, host a barbeque, and have a pool at once.

After some time at the gate, the pilot cheerfully announced "Welcome to Rhode Island" before informing us that we were free to take our bags and exit the plane. I had sat in an aisle seat and popped out of it immediately to get my suitcase out of the overhead compartment. I wrangled the suitcase out of the bin and was startled to hear a small shriek as I lowered my bag. I glanced down and saw that I had nearly placed my bag on a woman who now glared at me. Odd, I thought to myself, I had not seen her at all when I had stood up and here she was--at least before she had stormed off down the aisle. I hunched over to grab my book on Rhode Island's involvement in King Philip's War and hurried out of the plane, eager to finally step on Rhode Island soil.

Francis Quattromani was standing with a sign saying “Gregory Kleineremann.” Frank, as he insisted I call him, was a friendly, stocky Italian who spoke almost the entire ride from T.F. Green to Providence.

“How was Montana? How did a guy like you land in Providence? You must be like seven feet tall!” He peppered me with questions and noted on my height to apologize for driving his small Camry to pick me up. “If I had expected you to be this tall, I would have borrowed my neighbor’s pickup truck!”

I told him I was used to being a bit squished in cars, even though in Montana everyone drives a pickup truck, and smiled before scrunching my face up upon seeing a monstrosity on the side of the highway.

“What is that?!” I exclaimed as I pointed to a sculpture of a blue insect gazing over the interstate.

“Well it’s the Big Blue Bug of course! World famous landmark!” Frank yelled, waving his arms. I was beginning to think that yelling was his normal speaking volume.

“We only have real wildlife in Montana” I replied, looking out the passenger window onto the Narragansett Bay, whose shores were bordered by scrap metal and construction.

“Well, why didn’t you stay in Montana then? It’s quite beautiful out there, I’ve seen pictures.”

Well, that was exactly it, I said to myself: there’s only beauty in the West, no cities, no crowds, even the Fourth of July parade attracted only a couple of thousand residents in all of Bozeman. But yet, something still made me nervous about my decision to uproot myself and transplant myself in the East. I had traded Champ and the rolling, infinite horizon for a packed Toyota Camry and Frank’s favorite Federal Hill restaurants.

“Camille’s! You simply can’t beat it! When I go, and I go only on my birthday mind you, I get the lobster ravioli with pink vodka sauce. I don’t know how they do it! It’s terrific!”

As we reached College Hill, I looked around at the surrounding streets, all bordered by two rows of tall brick buildings, reminding me of the fir trees that lined the wooded dirt horseback riding trail. At home.

We reached the building on George Street that would be my new home for the next part of my life. I entered and took my one of my suitcases up to the second floor. I unlocked the door and placed my suitcase onto the ground, almost flinging it out of utter exhaustion. The room, similar in size to a dorm room, was cramped and simple. A bed, a desk, and a small bathroom were the main accessories, but I couldn't complain. This was something I was going to have to get used to.

"Is everything alright?" Frank asked from the doorway, noticing the confused expression on my face, the sort of look that rainbow trout express in their eyes when they've bit on a fly that turned out to be a hook. "I don't know. I suppose I need to walk for a bit to shake off the jet lag. Just to walk around and get comfortable would be nice."

"I suppose a walk down on the Blackstone Boulevard would be good for you. Do you know where that is?"

"No, I've never been to Providence before."

"Perhaps you should not be doing the navigating then. What are you looking for?"

"Open space. You don't have much of that in Providence, do you?"

"Not of the kind you're thinking of. It's a city remember!"

"Yes, does Rhode Island have anything big?"

He looked at me quizzically, not understanding at first what I was looking for before a smile began to grow across his lips. "We do have one large attraction we are famous for. Let me write a few things down for you. I think that you especially will like what I have in mind."

Several hours and a short nap later, I stepped off of the Number 14 West Bay bus onto sandy pavement. A large sign before me read "Narragansett Town Beach Parking Next Right." I took a picture of it to send back home and began walking across the parking lot. The sun was setting late in the day; most of the beachgoers had left for the day, leaving the beach desolate, just as Frank had said I would best enjoy it. The wind whipping my face reminded me of the winds that swept the grasslands at home. The sky, though not as large as at home, was blending into a pastel of reds and purples as the sun set and white seagulls squawked and flew in circles above me. I turned around, but

the bus was long gone. I was not sure when the next one would arrive, or if I wanted one to come any time soon.

I reached the main building of Narragansett Beach and swung my legs over the small chain gate with a sign that read “CLOSED,” looking around to be completely sure that no one was still around to catch me.

It was then that I saw the blue again. This time it reflected the setting glowing orb and I had found the immense, barren wilderness whose absence from my life had caused me to fling down my suitcase and desperately search around the room for something, anything large. Only the ocean could equal the plains I would not see soon. Additionally, it offered movement. Waves moved mesmerizingly up and down farther than I could ever see. A lone sailboat drifted along the horizon, offering a sign of life in the midst of such an awesome sight. I leaned against a lifeguard chair to fully appreciate the sight, my shadow stretching out behind me.

“Excuse me,” said a woman walking her dog who slid by me to reach the “CLOSED” chain gate. Startled, I clumsily stumbled out of the way and looked across the beach to see if any more people would come my way. Several small families had lit fires for the night and were busily roasting sausages, the fire pits forming a line that stretched down the beach like lanterns. I climbed up the rungs of the lifeguard chair, took my shoes off, and laid back, looking over the entire beach.

“Yes, I could get used to this. Very much so,” I said to myself before closing my eyes to hear only the crashing of the waves and feel the wind. Little Rhody, perhaps you aren’t so little.

Henry

by Frost Infante

Henry Davidson had writer's block. And when he had writer's block, characters tended to die. This was not born of a hatred for his characters or a love of violence. Rather, it was out of a desire to do *something* to move the plot along. Unfortunately, the prompt in front of him did not allow him to forward the plot in this manner. He sighed, and glanced again at it.

"Halloween is just around the corner! To celebrate, you will be required to write a scary story.

- It must be 1,500 words or less.
- Please refrain from gratuitous violence.
- Excessive gore will not be tolerated.

Happy writing and happy Halloween!!!

Ms. Oakman.

(Also, please note: this assignment is worth 1/4 of your grade.)"

Henry sighed again. There was absolutely nowhere a story could go. How am I supposed to write a scary story without violence?! Honestly, he thought, there's just no pleasing Ms. Oakman sometimes. One of his better stories, *Katherine and the Swarm*, had only gotten a B-. His second attempt, *Bella Meets the Mutant Bees*, hadn't been well received either. Mrs. Oakman had written that she saw a distinct, and somewhat disturbing, theme in these stories. What about *Nicholas's Unfortunate Chainsaw Mishap*? That got a C-, and it didn't have a single bee!

"Henry! Guess what?"

"What?!" His little sister Marina was standing in his doorway

with a smile that made him want to throw a shoe at her.

“Mom’s taking us to Allie’s Donuts!”

“Because she knows you’re going to lose and she feels bad for you?” Henry asked.

“I am not going to lose! Do you want to know why?”

“Not really-”

“I know every single word of Rhode Island, It’s For Me by heart. I know that the approximate number of eggs a Rhode Island Red lays is 312 per year. I know that the state mineral is Bowenite. I’m very much in tune with my constituents, and I am guaranteed to win.”

Henry rolled his eyes as his sister ran downstairs. She had entered in a writing contest to become Rhode Island’s governor for one day. This seemed like a particularly bad idea to Henry, who wouldn’t trust his sister with his computer for one day, let alone a whole state. But she seemed convinced that she would win over the Governor with her mind-numbing attention to detail. He returned to his own blank page.

The completely and utterly perfect girl decided, with the help of her parents, that now was the time to start driving, despite the fact that she was only eight years old. She put the keys into the ignition, and revved the engine. She was on the road within seconds, but she didn’t see the giant tree coming before she-

“Henry! We’re leaving in five minutes!”

“I’ll be right there, Mom!”

He raced downstairs, ready for a donut. “You’re welcome, by the way,” his sister whispered.

Henry savored his jelly donut, sitting in the back of his mom’s car as the rain pattered against the window. Mom and Marina were talking about pensions for the elderly and how she was going to implement the subject in her essay.

“How about you, Henry?” Mom asked, turning around to face him. “How’s your Halloween story coming along?”

It was due in two days, and the most Henry had achieved was staring at a blank page until he thought his eyeballs were going to fall

out of their sockets. "Um... It's coming along... pretty decent."

"Good!"

"Let me give you some advice," Marina said. "Whenever I feel like a work of mine, like my essay, is going in a bad direction..."

Henry gazed out at the parking lot. A couple of seagulls were fighting over the scraps of a strawberry donut as red and yellow leaves scattered across the parking lot.

"...since writing what you know is..."

Henry wondered why they would even want a strawberry donut. To Henry, jelly was far better. Besides, in the light rain, the frosting would just get washed away.

"And simpler is often better for..."

The girl assumed that on a cliff, she would be perfectly safe. This assumption was wrong, as a man in the shadows snuck up behind her and shoved her off the edge. As she tumbled down into the river, she discovered, to her surprise, that it was filled with sharks-

"Henry! Are you listening?"

"Yeah. It was... very inspirational. Thanks, Marina!" he said.

"Glad I could be of assistance," she said, patting her face with a napkin.

The next day was Sunday. Henry stared at the screen of his computer, still feeling a little queasy from the johnnycakes his mom had made for breakfast at Marina's insistence. *It's all hopeless*, he thought.

"Henry!"

"Marina, can I *please* have half a minute to myself?!"

"Okay, fine! I just thought you would want to look over *my* second draft."

"You thought wrong. I have better things to do with my time than look over your silly little essay." Noticing Marina's offended glance, he said, "I'm not sorry."

"You should be," she replied. "When I become Governor for a Day, I'll have so much power over you!" She ran back downstairs.

A field full of cows turned out to be a very dangerous place for a little girl. She failed to realize just how much aliens loved abducting

cows, and thus, was very surprised when a UFO flew over and captured her and all of the cows. On the ship, she was mistaken for a mutant cow, which the aliens thought would make a particularly delicious steak-

“Henry! Have you been abusing your sister?” Henry’s mother called.

“Sorry, Mom!” he said, somewhat lost in thought.

Smirking, Henry got to work.

Two days later, Marina sat at her desk, doing her math homework. She despised math, and it was her worst grade. *I have a 96%! she thought. If I do badly on this, I might get an A- on my report card!*

“Marina!”

“What do you want, Henry?”

“Guess who got an A on *The Girl Who Just Would Not Die*?”

“Can you leave, please?”

“I’m just saying...”

“Mom!”

“Okay, okay, I’ll just go frame my perfect story.”

The desperate young man hoped that the Governor’s mansion would be a perfect place to hide from the sharply dressed assassin. He did not, however, count on his stalker being the Governor herself. Knowing every inch of the property from her extensive research on Wikipedia, she quickly tracked down the sniveling child. Revolver in hand, she stealthily advanced-

Marina shook her head. With a self-satisfied smile, she slowly returned to her studies.

Telephone

by Rachel Kovach-Fuentes

My life was exceedingly ordinary for a full eight years, when it suddenly and unexpectedly took a turn for the worse.

It happened like this: I was being my eight-year-old self out in the little mud patch that was our garden. My sisters squealed and dashed madly away from me while I toddled after them, my face and hands smeared with mud. I laughed hysterically as I chased them round and round and round again, occasionally catching hold of their skirts for a moment, but never catching up with them completely. It was undeniable fun, and we were laughing and playing our little game, when--

"Nate!"

My mother. I knew even then what her call meant: It meant we had to stop. But I didn't want to stop, so I kept running, even after my sisters had both stumbled to a halt to listen.

"Isabelle! Susan!" she called again. "You have to come in now!"

I finally stopped running, accepting that Izzy and Susie weren't going to play anymore. Together, the two of them began to move dejectedly towards the house, where my mother watched them through the screen door. Bugs hummed in the air around us, and the sun reflected off the pools of water on the ground and the grass blades outside the garden which we had churned beyond recognition. We were in the hottest, most humid part of a Rhode Island summer -- so hot and humid that it felt like Florida.

I scrunched my face up and folded my arms, but Izzy and Susie kept going and my mother kept watching. Finally, I gave up and headed towards the house.

Squish. Squish. Squish. The mud rose up between my toes, cool and refreshing in the summer heat.

I should have been shuffling the other way, of course. I should have been running the other way, but I didn't know that yet.

With a few more steps, I had disappeared inside the house, and sealed my fate.



I objected and pleaded and sobbed and threw a fit, but eventually the mud came off and my cheeks and fingers were red with scrubbing. Izzy and Susie separately emerged from our bedroom, each wearing new clothes, the old ones hurled carelessly into a laundry basket. Of course, Susie had put her dress on backwards and Izzy's shorts needed adjusting, so my mother abandoned me immediately after I was clean and fixed what needed to be fixed.

"Mama," Susie whined and squirmed in my mother's grip, "Why can't we stay outside?"

"We have to leave immediately, Susie. You three are going to go stay with Uncle Greg and Auntie Tessa for a day or so. I'll help you pack your things, and as soon as you're ready I'll take you there."

Izzy, being the oldest, frowned with understanding. "Why can't we stay here with you, Mama?"

Our mother turned away from us and folded her arms over her chest decisively. "I need to go to a funeral, and somebody has to look after you while I'm gone."

"What's a funeral?" I wondered aloud.

Izzy was smarter, and asked a more appropriate question. "Who died, Mama?" She suddenly seemed solemn, and her bubbly girlishness was replaced by a respectful quiet.

"No one you know," she said shortly. After an awkward pause, she hurried to find another task to occupy us. "Come on, we need to get ready!"

"I don't want to stay with Auntie Tessa!" Susie whined as she was dragged off. "She smells weird and doesn't let us play in the yard!"

"I don't want to stay with Uncle Greg!" I butted in. "He doesn't let us--"

"That's *ENOUGH!*" With unexpected venom, my mother whirled around and glared at us all, her hair dangling like spider legs around her face. "You *WILL* go to Uncle Greg's house, and you will *NOT* complain! *AT ALL!* Is that clear?"

I went quiet, as did Izzy. Susie's lower lip began to wobble dangerously, but she was yanked out of the room before tears could pool in her eyes.



The car ride was hostile and silent. I think of it now, and it's agonizing to remember all the signs of what was to come. All those signs that I never saw.

Izzy had the common sense to be quiet, so I followed her example, as did Susie. You could feel the awkwardness in the air. Everything about it was wrong-- the way my mother gripped the wheel so hard her knuckles turned white, the way she muttered under her breath, the way she would occasionally cast a hard glance at us in the rearview mirror.

My mother was not the ideal parent by anyone's standards, but she was usually fairly patient with us, even after a hard day at work. The only time she would get seriously angry was whenever we would mention dad, but seeing as we hadn't done that yet I didn't understand what was wrong. But I didn't have the boldness to ask about what was bothering her, so that hour and a half went without anything being learned on my part.

Then we were all jostled as the car's tires crunched on gravel, and my heart sank. We had arrived.

Without a word my mother ushered us out of the car, popped open the trunk, retrieved our bags and hurried us to the door. With a cool hand on my shoulder, she stabbed a finger at the doorbell, and there was an ugly buzzing noise from within the depths of the house.

By my side, Susie shifted uncomfortably, and I could see the gears turning in her mind. *Should she bolt? Or should she remain here, the victim of what was to come next?*

Before she could decide, my mother's other hand shot out and clamped down on her shoulder, crushing any possibility of escape.

Then the door swung open and doom itself stood before us, in the form of my Auntie Tessa.

"Auntie" tends to be used as a term of endearment, a cute little ending that softens the word "aunt". In Tessa's case, it only served to prove how hard she was, and that no cute word in the world would ever change that. My Auntie Tessa was exceptionally tall and thin, and she had closely cropped hair that had been dyed a red that looked great on the model but not so much on Tessa. She must have been wearing a full pound of makeup. She was dressed fashionably, but the clothes looked unnatural on her, especially the tight shirt. Tessa also had hard grey eyes, and never smiled.

Auntie Tessa looked us over as if we were museum specimens, gave a curt nod to my mother, and ushered the three of us inside. I stumbled over the little step as I entered, and instinctively put out my hand for someone to help me to my feet.

No one took my hand or offered to help me up. Instead, Tessa urged me to keep going. She didn't ask if I was hurt or not.

Once all three of us had come inside, Tessa extended her hand to my mother. They shook awkwardly, looking more like businesspeople than blood relations.

Taking hold of our bags, Tessa exchanged a few words with my mother.

"My condolences, Grace. I'll be sure to take good care of your children while you're away. I hope you won't be going too far from here."

Tessa's words held no feeling whatsoever, but my mother still pressed her lips together in a semblance of control and nodded.

"Thank you," she replied. She then turned to us, and I caught a glimpse of her broken smile.

"You'll be fine for a few days," was all she said. Then Tessa closed the door, and my mother was gone.

Tessa turned to face us like we were a couple of mice the cat had dragged in. "Your Uncle Gregory is working. Please don't disturb him while he's busy, because his work requires a lot of concentration and you could be distracting."

I nodded dumbly, as did Susie. Izzy did nothing.

"I'll show you to your rooms. You girls can share a room, and Nathan will go into the other spare room that we have. Follow me."



Auntie Tessa was remarkably efficient. My LEGOs were confiscated immediately because the pieces might get spread about the house. Susie's doll, Annie, was also removed because Tessa was convinced that it harbored germs, and Izzy's deck of cards (she had shown a great aptitude for the game, even at her age) were hidden away for reasons unclear. Just about anything with any potential for entertainment was taken away. Tessa even found my pack of gummy bears, hidden away in the most remote depths of my backpack.

We weren't even allowed outside because we might get lost, or worse, get dirty. I thought this was extremely unlikely because the backyard was fenced in on all sides, and there was no mud to be seen. There wasn't even a hopeful patch of dirt. The yard was just perfectly trimmed grass. But when I raised the point Tessa ignored my every argument, complaint and threat and we were all locked away in our rooms.

So far there had been no sign of Uncle Greg, which wasn't particularly promising. As far as I knew, Uncle Greg was some sort of Rhode Island state official, with hair greying at the temples and a square, boxlike face. Uncle Greg wasn't very exciting by any standards, but he would probably let us have a pencil and paper to draw with, at the very least. He was also a card player, which meant that Izzy could have someone to play with. If he were around, that is.

Just about the only thing we were allowed to do was visit one another. I immediately took advantage of this, sitting in my sisters'

room in hope of finding some kind of entertainment. For awhile we just sat and complained to one another, but eventually we decided that we weren't going to be trapped in here forever. Encouraged by Izzy and Susie, I was sent out to scout the territory ahead, armed with the excuse of getting lost on my way to the bathroom.

Uncle Greg and Auntie Tessa lived in a pretty big house. It seemed positively massive to me, but that was only because our house was tiny. As a blissfully ignorant eight-year-old kid, however, I didn't acknowledge this point, so I only felt the wonder and none of the shame.

I found a bathroom, a living room, a locked door which I presumed led to the place where Uncle Greg was working, and a few other rooms which weren't very interesting. Bored, I turned to go back, when I saw something which piqued my curiosity.

An open door. I hadn't noticed it before, painted white and without a blemish in the paint. Slightly ajar, with a brass knob, a door that beckoned to me and begged me to enter and explore.

Had I been older or smarter, I might have realized that this door was not like the others. The other doors were all made of simple wood. But it wasn't too hard to tell that this particular door had been backed with plates of metal, and there was a deadbolt plainly visible on the outside. But I didn't notice. Instead, I entered the room with eager curiosity.

There were no windows in this room, but the light switch was easy to find after feeling at the wall for a few seconds. Flipping the switch up, there was an explosion of light and I snapped my eyes closed. After a moment, I opened them again cautiously... and then frowned.

It was by far the weirdest chamber that I'd ever seen. It was rectangular and about the size of my kitchen at home. Unlike my kitchen at home, I could plainly see plates of metal lining the walls of the room, including the ceiling and floor. Each plate was bolted securely, and I didn't bother trying to rattle it; I could tell already that it wouldn't be loose. My socks slipped on the surface beneath my feet as I stepped further inside.

Either side of me, arranged like an honor guard, were two highly organized rows of pedestals, each just black painted wood

blocks. But what was most bizarre was what was on those pedestals.

Some of the things I didn't recognize, but I frowned when I saw a few that I knew perfectly well.

Telephones. All sorts of shapes and sizes of telephones, at least two dozen of them. Some of them were clearly old, while others were just normal phones that regular people would use in their houses. Looking back, I know what the unrecognizable ones were; they were all telephones, but they must be anywhere from thirty to a hundred years old. Some were attached to the back wall, and there was even a bright red booth in the far back, complete with the label TELEPHONE.

It was like a scene from a movie, the climax-- the place that the hero had come so far to find. Except I had no idea what any of it meant.

Eagerly I grabbed the nearest telephone from off its pedestal and pressed it to my ear, giggling. Strangely, it had a cord, but it didn't appear to be attached to anything.

A robotic woman's voice came out of the speaker. "Welcome, user. You are now being connected with the year 1987, in Baltimore, Maryland. Now transferring to Agent 26 . . ."

I stopped dead. Someone, a man with a guttural voice, was now speaking out of the device.

"Hello? Who is this?"

I hardly dared breathe.

"What year are you calling from? What Agent number are you?"

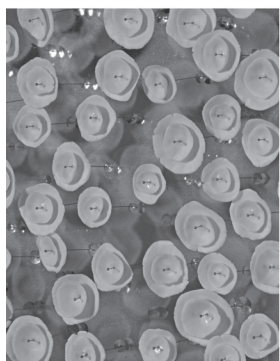
No reply.

"REVEAL YOURSELF!" the voice shouted. "OR THERE WILL BE GREAT CONSEQUENCES!"

In my terror, the phone dropped from my grip and smashed on the floor. The plastic casing burst open, and I watched as what looked like glowing ooze seeped out into a puddle around the wreckage. There were no wires or mechanical pieces to be seen.

Then I was shoved into the nearest wall, crying out in pain. Uncle Greg leveled his face with mine, looking well beyond furious.

"What have you done?!"



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Of Quiet Places

by James Lavoie

I think when most people hear of Rhode Island, the first thing they think of is the oceanside, and the towns and cities that are around there, like Newport is. I don't really blame them for it, it's what Rhode Island is known for. We don't call it the Ocean State for its forested, quiet and somber areas of which no one ever thinks.

Of course, they don't.

In Foster, we aren't known for our beaches, mansions, or pretty oceans with crashing shores of salty water. We're known for our schools that always shut down whenever there's rumor of snow. It's a phrase here, an inside joke: "No School Foster-Glocester." That is, as much as an inside joke as can be, as we are separated by uncut forests and woods, of which many trees tower and cover.

Trees. It's funny to think someone living here would hate them so much.

Melissa was a good friend of mine. She was loud and talkative, and really an excitable personality. With her blond hair and slim structure, she was "good enough" to hang around a more popular crowd, but she always hung around on the bottom-most part of the school food chain. Maybe because she'd be heard there, and she was. It was hard not to hear her.

Once, or maybe twice, she had told me something. Melissa sat next to me on the bus, first day of high school. She had asked for me to switch spots on the bus seat, so she could have the window next to her. I quietly accepted, and we awkwardly moved around, and she leaned her head on the pane. Hands folded, I sat sitting up, eyes forward.

And she said it.

"I don't know why I asked to switch seats, I hate the view."

Before I could ask if she wanted to switch seats again, she had said something else.

"I hate trees."

I looked at her, perplexed and confused. "What do you mean?"

"They're just... ugly. They have this ugly, hard, wrinkly skin and in the fall, they shed their leaves all over the place to rot. Not to mention the rodents that live in them. It's just so...like, weird. And ugly."

I couldn't say anything to this. "Oh," I muttered instead.

We were friends after that.

She filled my silence with many of her own words. She had a lot of things to talk about, sports, her family, her brother who played on the high school football team. And so many words spilled out of her mouth. But her eyes, they were always unfocused, always glazed over, like she was reciting something she had said a hundred times before.

One time, I asked her how she was.

"Same old same old. My brother won the game last night with a 40 yard pass."

"Oh." I mumbled.

I persisted a bit. "But how are you?"

She stalled. "He had Gatorade splashed on him. His uniform was smelled so bad."

I tried again. "Yeah, so what's up with you?"

Two full seconds of silence from her. "My mom is baking a cake for him tonight."

That's where I gave up. "That's nice."

But a year after, I heard she was moving. To Newport. Melissa wouldn't stop talking about it. In fact, the day she found out, that was all she went on about at lunch.

"My mother got a new job there, one that pays, like, a bunch more."

"Cool," I sighed.

"I can't wait! Newport looks so cool! Like, it's not like a city-city, but it's better than, like, a half-mile between neighbors. And the ocean is, like, so beautiful!"

"Huh." I sipped the small bottle of water on my right, before picking up a fork and munching on the salad on my left.

"Andrew. I figured, like, we should still stay in touch and stuff. We're friends, right?"

I nodded.

"And you have me on Google Hangouts, right?"

I nodded again.

"Yeah, so, like, video chat me with it."

I nodded a third time.

And her last day was like any other; she talked and talked and talked and then left on the bus. A few kids I knew felt a bit sad in her absence, but I didn't, really. I still had the means to talk to her. But I didn't call her right away.

I was watching the trees, and how their colors changed from vibrant green to fire red, yellow and orange, and when they fell to the floor of the woods, it had caught alight. I saw how the bark of trees formed such an odd pattern and how curious it felt if you touched it. And sometimes, a squirrel or chipmunk would scuttle up it, so wonderfully fast and rushing.

She called me first.

To see her again did not surprise me, to be frank. When I saw her face on the computer screen, I could see the same face I had for years.

"Heya Andrew!" She called out in a sing-song voice.

"Hello," I replied. "How are you?"

"Newport is cool," she said, ignoring my question. "There's, like, still trees, but like, a lot less trees. The food is so good, too. There's a lot of fresh seafood. I have a bunch of new friends here, too. There's Sandra, who draws a lot, there's Aubrey..."

She continued about her friends and family. She told me about how good of a drawer Sandra is, how nice Aubrey is to her brother, and how her brother is supposedly single-handedly saving the school's supposedly atrocious football team. She told me about how much happier her mother is.

"What about you?"

"I've been okay. I got a date for the upcoming dance."

"There's no dance coming up- oh, wait, never mind! I was thinking about my school! Gosh, I'm so dumb. So, so dumb."

"Oh," I murmured, under my breath.

We went on talking until nine at night.

"I'll see you tomorrow, right?"

"Mhmm."

She hung up.

At the time, I understood why Melissa liked Newport more than Foster. A lot more people and a lot more events happen there, unlike this quiet place.

I am fine with Foster; I am okay with staying here for as long as I can.

"Because, quiet people will stay in quiet places.

"And, loud people will stay in loud places.

"That's where they are going to be happiest."

That is what I told myself many times whenever I thought of Melissa and me.

And even though my thoughts haven't changed on those principles, my thoughts on Melissa did.

Melissa called me one day. It was only two weeks into moving and settling in Newport, and she told me something.

"I hate the ocean."

I looked at her face on the screen, staring off somewhere else. "What? You hate the ocean? What?"

She nodded. "It's never calm, it's always splashing and foaming up, and it smells bad, too. And the boats, there are, like, too many of them. They're always clogging it up."

I sighed. "Melissa?"

"Yes?"

I paused, took a breath. "You've seen both sides of where someone could live. In a quiet place, Foster, in a loud place, Newport."

"Uh-huh...Well, what about it?"

"And even if you liked Newport a bit longer than Foster, you still can't stand either?"

"Yeah."

"Melissa, do you know what you want out of life?"

She paused. "I don't know."

I paused, longer than her. I looked away from the computer's screen.

"Melissa, if you can't live in a quiet place, nor a loud place, where can you live? Where are you going to live where you are going to feel, you know, okay about yourself?"

"Are you okay with yourself? Do you like yourself?"

Melissa hung up.

The Essence of Humanity

by Adrian Cardenas

The boy looked down at his hands. His fingers and palms were coated with dark grey dust. His fingernails were caked with grime, and numerous scars even further marred his skin. He doubted that the dirt would ever go away in his life, no matter how much scrubbing he did. He was in a perpetual state of filth, still not fully accustomed to it. His three-piece suit had been reduced to almost rags.

But it wasn't the dirt that bothered him. It was the fact that some of his memories had been stolen. He couldn't remember his name, his age, and certain past experiences, small yet significant parts of his life. There were times when the fuzzy outline of a lost memory came into sharp relief and became clearer. But every time he got close to finding what he was searching for, the memory would float away tantalizingly, just out of his grasp.

The boy looked up from his hands and stared out into the desolate wasteland before him.

Despite its state of decay, he recognized that he was standing in downtown Providence. The buildings no longer stood proud and strong, but instead had been reduced to giant slabs of stone and glass. The pavement sidewalk and street were both only small shards of concrete. He looked up apprehensively, afraid at what he would see. And the boy's fears were confirmed. The Superman Building, once a tall and beautiful building, looked as though it had been pelted with asteroids. Large chunks were missing, and nearly every window was broken. The beacon, one of the building's most distinguished features, had fallen off. The boy fixed his eyes upon a spot a few yards away from where he was. There he saw it, cracked

and dirty but still emitting a faint glow, illuminating the cold dusk air around it.

He found it interesting, how seeing the destruction of one's home evoked so many emotions. However, they were emotions that he couldn't describe, nor could he remember feeling them. It seemed as though his capacity to feel complex human feelings had been taken from him after the destruction, just another memory that had been stolen from him and needed to be reclaimed.

But he still knew one feeling: simple, psychotic rage. The thing that tore people apart, the thing that brought out people's inner demons, the thing that had caused the birth of this post-apocalyptic nightmare.

And of course, he knew what it felt like to be the only thing that breathed for miles.

Lost in his thoughts, the boy wasn't initially aware of the fact that he had kicked something. Something living. He heard a sharp squeal then a hiss at his feet and looked down.

Standing out against the perpetual state of greyness in which the city was a small milk-white cat, its staring, vibrant green eyes full of apprehension. The boy stuck his hand out and the cat immediately rushed forward to sniff his hand, but backed away in what appeared to be revulsion.

The boy sighed. Lonely. So alone.

Dark grey clouds of dust swirled before his eyes. That dust was leaving, restarting, finding a new place to go. The boy wished he could do that. But a few minutes later, as he silently walked along the fragmented sidewalk, he supposed that this destruction had been a new beginning, a new beginning for better or worse.

Once again, the boy lost track of time and direction and ended up in another familiar place, a place in which he had found refuge countless times in his past. It was a place of order, a place of knowledge, a place of sanity.

The Providence Public Library stood in front of him, its immense stone steps familiar but alien at the same time: he knew this place, had been here many times. But its dilapidated state was completely unfamiliar to him.

He slowly trudged up the crumbling steps and pushed open the battered double doors. The boy noticed a fire burning inside of an oil drum beside the doorway. Mounted on the wall was a flag that he recognized as the flag of Rhode Island: an anchor in the middle of thirteen stars on a white background.

But under the anchor was a short word, a word he didn't recognize. He knew why he didn't know it. It was another one of his memories that had escaped his mind. But why and how the memories were gone, he didn't know.

He was sick of it. Sick of having those blank moments in which he couldn't understand something that he knew he should have understood. The very thought of it, the thought of his amnesia, filled him with a newfound fit of blind rage. He saw nothing. All he knew was that he must destroy everything in his path, destroy anything that had ever defied him.

When the blindness subsided, his knuckles were bruised and bloody. The door through which he had walked contained small dents. The boy was breathing rather heavily. He peered out the doorway into the ruins of Providence, only to find a pure white feline surveying him from the steps, his tail elegantly curled around his body as he watched. If cats had expressions, this one definitely had a pompous look of disgust on its face. The cat stood up and yawned, then slowly stalked into the library entrance. It walked past the boy into the hallway, then looked back at the boy and waited. It seemed to be waiting for him. So the boy followed the feline down the hall, into a row of bookshelves. A row of crates was stacked against the wall. The boy opened one. Inside were first aid supplies. The boy wrapped gauze around his bleeding hands. He then realized that the cat had led him here, though he didn't know how the cat knew this was here, or that he even needed medical attention.

The boy was eternally grateful for a cat, which was something he never thought would happen. The boy stuck his hand out to the cat, but this time it didn't recoil in fear. It brushed its head against his hand and purred. Suddenly the boy felt something different inside of him. Suddenly the world didn't look so bleak. Suddenly he had a

revelation. A feeling that had been completely lost to him was coming back. He felt as though he had made a friend. He knew what it was like to have a companion.

Unexpectedly, memories started to return: hanging out with friends after school, talking with his mother. He remembered what it was like to feel companionship. However, to his dismay, the other memories were lost to him.

A creaking noise pulled the boy out of his lethargic rumination. He heard voices, footsteps. Panicked, the boy opened a crate marked WEAPONS and pulled out a large knife. The cat's ears perked up and his eyes widened.

About five people walked over to the row of book shelves where the boy and the cat were. Their bodies were dirty, their faces were scratched, their apparel was little more than pieces of cloth attached to their bodies. All of them had knives at their belts.

"Where did you all come from?" The boy asked. Or at least, he tried to ask them that. Instead only a strained grunt issued from his mouth. It had been so long since he had talked, he could barely utter a single word. He cleared his throat and asked the question again.

The person in the front, a middle aged woman, answered the question. "We live here." Her long hair was black with streaks of grey, tangled and matted. Her dark brown eyes were filled with intensity.

"Can you help me? Ever since the destruction, I've forgotten certain things. Why?"

"Wait. First, what's your name?" asked the woman.

"I don't even know."

The woman surveyed him from head to toe. "Hmm, let's call you... We'll call you Johnny. My name's Ripper." She saw the look on the boys face, then replied, "yeah, you heard right. Ripper. So how do you like your new name?"

"Johnny. My name's Johnny." The boy tested out the name. Johnny then got up, the cat at his side. "Can you name my cat too?"

Ripper looked at Johnny's companion. "That cat? We've already named him. That's Ghost."

Ripper's tone suddenly turned businesslike. "So you said you need help remembering things? Well I have no clue as to how you lost your memories, but I do know someone who might be able to help you. Their headquarters are a few miles away. We can leave as soon as we eat."

Johnny enjoyed a dinner of steak with mashed potatoes. At first, realizing that it was freeze-dried food, he had been reluctant to try it. But all of his doubts vanished as soon as he put the food in his mouth. Soon after, Johnny, Ghost, and Ripper set out into the wasteland.

They slowly walked. Their footsteps were the only sound audible in the world. But somehow, Johnny had a feeling that they weren't alone.

Finally Johnny broke the silence. "So who are all those people living with you?"

"People I found," replied Ripper.

Johnny didn't know if she was being intentionally vague or if she was just a woman of few words.

He tried again. "How long have you been there?"

"Not long."

Discouraged by Ripper's unhelpful replies, Johnny gave up and continued on in silence. However, later on, he asked her, "why are you helping me?"

She took a while to answer. Until, "Because you seem okay."

Dawn was breaking. The orange sun rose over the ruins, shining its soft beautiful light on a once beautiful place. Johnny was beginning to feel sleepy.

Ripper seemed to have read his mind. "We can set up camp here and rest." She set up the tents, one for each of them, and crawled inside one.

Johnny and Ghost went inside the other tent. He wanted to stay up and learn more about Ghost, but his desire to sleep prevailed, as it always does. He let his body the darkness of his closed eyelids and soon was snoring loudly, dead to the world.

When he awoke, the light of the sun was all but gone. The few streetlights that worked flickered dimly, bathing the street in fluorescent light.

Ripper stopped, after about an hour of walking. She stopped in front of what he recognized as the Providence City Hall, only a shadow of its former self.

Johnny stared at her. "Go in."

This building didn't even have any doors. He walked through it and heard voices. Ripper followed. Johnny looked up and saw men in dark suits, talking in hushed voices that reverberated around the cavernous structure nonetheless. They seemed to have heard him walk in, as they turned around and looked down at him from the balcony.

One of them, a bald man with a long black beard, yelled down, "We've been expecting you! Come up, we have much to discuss."

Johnny looked back at Ripper for guidance, unsure of what to do. She pushed him towards the stairs. Together they walked up them.

The man shook Johnny's hand vigorously. "Nice to meet you, sir. What is your name?" Johnny told him. "Great name, just call me Mr. Rex." He also was introduced to Ripper. "Interesting name, interesting indeed. Now, both of you must be starving. Come!"

Johnny could not help liking Mr. Rex. He automatically followed him through a doorway. Ripper however, stayed where she was, wearing a cautious expression.

"What are you waiting for?" Called Johnny. "Come on!"

"But..." Ripper seemed to be having an internal struggle. Finally, she grunted, "fine," and followed them.

Johnny had never eaten so well in his life, and he had lived a pretty luxurious life. He was enjoying himself so much, he'd forgotten what he was here for. But then he remembered. The rage took control. He flipped the polished oak table, spilling food and smashing the elegant china.

"Whats going on?" he called out, "What happened to my memory? Why did you destroy this place?"

Mr. Rex held up his hands defensively. "Don't act rashly, Johnny. I just wanted to talk."

But Johnny wasn't listening. "Ripper. Get them."

She didn't hesitate. She quickly incapacitated the other two men,

who didn't seem to be very competent fighters. Mr. Rex got up and quickly grabbed Ripper. He dragged her to the balcony and threw her over as easily as one would throw a doll. Johnny screamed in rage. He drew his knife.

"Look," said Mr. Rex, "we took your memories and destroyed Providence for science. It would benefit all of us, give us more knowledge. We were experimenting. We didn't do this out of corporate greed. Can't you at least respect that?"

Johnny was fond of science. But he didn't care. He was blind to pain, blind to anything stopping him.

Finally he could see again.

The boy looked down at his hands. His fingers and palms were coated with dark red blood.

But it wasn't the blood that bothered him. He doubted that the memory of the murder would ever go away, no matter how much forgetting he did. What bothered him was that, after all that, he still didn't have his memory. He smashed another plate in frustration. He looked to the wall, on which the Rhode Island flag was pinned.

Things looked bleak. Nothing ever went right for Johnny, no matter what.

But he couldn't think of that. He had to think about the future. Think not about his current situation, but what his situation could be in the future. Things could get better. He could have... he could have....

But he didn't know the word. It was just out of his grasp. He turned his head back toward the Rhode Island flag. He looked under the anchor, where the word was. Slowly but surely, he began to make sense of the word, what it truly was.

And then it hit him.

He could have hope.



Thames Street, #3, 1974, **Aaron Siskind**

From the collection of the Newport Art Museum

Worlds

by Eden Suthowski

Her eyes, bright and full of inquisitive shine, peer out of the car window. It is as if she's a child again, barely tall enough to gaze upon the passing sights. Adrien's mother doesn't notice. She's busy humming absently along to the radio as she steers her way through the snow that's starting to drift across the windshield. She never would, even if she wasn't driving. Off in her own world, as is typical. She'd never notice this wholly special moment, this rare time where her daughter's eyes are something aside from hollow, from wary and scared.

The orange of the streetlights makes the snow seem infinitely more magical. Adrien has seen snow in her lifetime. Lots of snow. Snow in droves, snow in thick downy blankets, snow wet and heavy and entirely obliterating. But in this town it seems like fantasy, a blessing rather than a burden. It swirls down onto empty sidewalks, onto the occasional figure that hurries past, landing on the bare branches of the bird-foot trees scratching the dim sky with their gnarled fingers. The car moves slowly and dreamily along the freshly salted road, and Adrien stares into the windows of the buildings as they pass, some lit, some cold and dark like the sockets in ancient skulls. It's constant, the wondering, thoughts of what each building means and has meant to others before her, and it's only enhanced by the pristine nostalgia the snowfall brings to her. *Was love found there? Was there death? Birth? Horror or joy?* She rests her elbow on the armrest on the car door, rests her chin in her gloved hand, movements ginger and delicate. As if she's afraid of breaking herself, or perhaps upsetting some otherworldly balance unseen. There are so many intricacies her brain can weave around the centuries-old

architecture in Rhode Island, so many dark corridors in each building that her imagination creates. The wondering was there before she moved, but this state is so old she finds her stream of consciousness constantly leaping to the past.

“Ahh, it’s so cold,” her mother muses from the front seat, turning the heat on. Adrien doesn’t respond. The tone her mother carried implied that she was merely talking to herself. Maybe she thinks that she was talking to Adrien, but Adrien knows that it’s not so. Her mother turns on the heat, the *whoosh* of the fan coming to life and the flood of warm air driving Adrien further into thought. Those are comforting things, conducive to daydreaming. Quietly, she moves her hand from her face to the frigid glass, long, pale fingers half-emerged seeming to be some actor on a stage with a backdrop of an aloof winter scene. “We’ll be home soon, sweetie.” The words float over her as she melts into the discovery of a new mindscape, its arrival brought forth by a quiet church that they pass. *When was that one built? How many masses, funerals, baptisms, confessions, communions?* She can hear the priest droning low, or shouting with fervor, or talking in a smoothly conversational tone. The congregation silent, murmuring, crying. Her eyes close to absorb the moment, the dusty light drifting through the stained glass, perhaps carrying incense smoke or the scent of candles. The car passes over a bump in the road and it simply fades into the nothingness that exists outside of her bubble of creation.

But soon enough, they arrive at their house, and Adrien is wrenched back into the present as the red of the brake lights vaguely illuminates the ground in her view. The cautious look returns. The two of them get out of the vehicle, get the groceries from the back. The wind touches Adrien’s face lightly, a few spots of white gathering in the dark curtain-folds of her hair.

“What’re you thinking about, you silly girl?” her mother inquires distantly.

“Oh, nothing much,” Adrien replies, equally removed.

They go up the stairs to their apartment, floating in their own universes, billions of light years away from one another.

How We Fall

by Audrey Buffi

My February Vacation

It has been a really long and cold winter. There was a lot of snow and Mom says I'm not big enough to help shovel yet so I had to spend a lot of time inside. It's so boring. During my vacation, Nana and Grandpa told Mom that they wanted to take me to Newport for a winter festival. At first I thought it would be very boring. They said the streets were old and the buildings were old and there was a lot of history. I guess they don't know that history is my least favorite class.

They brought me to Newport on Wednesday. The ride took forever, but we drove on a huge bridge and it was cool. When we got there it was so cold that I had to wear my heavy coat and a superhero scarf I got last year because even though I don't like that hero anymore, it's the warmest scarf I have.

One of the first places we went was a chocolate shop where I got to make a marshmallow snowman. There is a bunch of different stores there for different stuff. One store is for dessert, and another is for clothes, and there are different ones for paintings. It's weird not being able to buy everything in one place, but Nana and Grandpa kept saying things like, "That's how all the stores were when I was your age."

After that we went ice-skating at an ice rink close to the ocean. I asked Nana how the water was frozen at the ice rink, but not be frozen in the ocean. "The trick is that the ocean doesn't stop moving," she told me.

When we were done at the ice rink, Grandpa asked me if it would be okay if we went on a quick walk before heading home. I said it was okay. We kept walking until we were in an older part of the city. The roads were narrow and we had to be very careful where we walked because there was ice and snow on the sidewalks. We

got to one street that was the oldest and crooked out of all of them. Grandpa told me how he and Nana met in that spot when they were in college.

“It was the middle of a long winter when we met,” he told me. “Cold and snowy, just like this one. I was actually showing off in front of all my friends when I slipped and fell on ice, and she was walking past and helped me pick up my papers. We went out for hot cocoa, and you know the rest.” He winked at me. Even though old places aren’t usually exciting, I think Newport is nice. It’s cool that Nana and Grandpa met here.

Then we got in the car and went home, and I told my mom all about it.

1. One new word I learned over the vacation is “cobblestone”. It means small stones that were used to make roads. I learned it because a lot of the streets in Newport have cobblestone on them because they are old.

2. One new fact I learned is that the first ever circus was held in Newport in 1774.

Grandpa told me because he’s very smart and knows a lot of things. I think that that’s really cool because even though I think history is boring, I like the circus, and Mom took me there once.

3. My favorite thing about the break was getting to spend time with Nana and Grandpa and going cool places with them. Even though I was really board bored this vacation, they showed me that there’s a lot of fun stuff to do, even during a really long and cold winter.

Pt. II - Sadie

A new spring blossoms around me.

The bright petunias and the deep violets mock me with their sickeningly sweet colors. Rain barrages my umbrella; my steps fall in time with the raindrops hitting the brick walkway. Tears run from my eyes in tiny streams, flowing over my cheekbones and dripping off my chin and eventually mixing into the dirty puddles at my feet. The wheels of my suitcase clatter noisily.

I feel the anchor burning into the skin on my shoulder. It was the tattoo that finally put him over the edge.

“Are you kidding me?!” His face darkened to the same purple as the flowers beside me now. “You’ve gotta be kidding me!” It shames me to think how I shriveled up against the wall. “Please, I’m sorry, I just don’t see the harm in it. It’s small, plus it’s–”

His hand slamming against the coffee table made me jump. “You don’t see the problem? That’s the problem, Sadie! I’ve done nothing but support you – financially, emotionally – and wait for you to get a job, for the ‘right gig’ to come up, and how do you repay me? By going out and getting a tattoo and potentially ruining the chance that an employer would hire you?”

Everything seemed to unfold in slow motion.

“I can’t do this anymore – not when you don’t appreciate it.”

I remember how I sobbed like a child as I pleaded with him:

“B-but I d-do appreciate it. I need you.”

In reply, he looked me in the eyes and shook his head. The walls melted around me and the floor cracked beneath me and I knew it was over.

I walk past the State House and its pristine lawn bejeweled with raindrops. The Independent Man scowls at me from atop the building; he scorns my submissiveness and despises the way my shoulders slouch with defeat. The gleaming blue windows lining the regal facade cause a memory to surface.

Four years ago, the day of my first college writing class, most of the seats were taken when I arrived. A sea of cynical eyes and plastic smiles turned towards me as I walked through the door. But the corner of the room, I noticed a girl with bright blue hair and a septum piercing, furiously doodling in her notebook. (I wonder how my now-ex-boyfriend would have reacted if I walked into his apartment with a metal ring through my nose.) The scrutinizing looks of the other students made my hair stand on end. I swallowed my nerves and strolled over to her corner of the room. After I settled down next to her and pulled out my notebook, she nodded approvingly. Her words still echo in my ears:

“See? Different isn’t so scary.”

Ba-bump, ba-bump, ba-bump. My suitcase continues to thump along the brick. A glance at my watch reveals that my scheduled

interview doesn't start for at least another twenty minutes, and it's only about fifteen minutes down the road. I lower my umbrella for just a few moments and let the rain rinse the salt off my face.

The Independent Man atop the building smiles at me knowingly. A new spring blossoms around me.

Pt. III - Ellie

It's going to be a gorgeous summer, according to all the forecasts.

I peer out the window eagerly to take in the sight of Rhode Island for the first time. Coming from a family with deep roots in the Midwest, I never imagined I would move to a town in coastal New England. Forests filled with green giants tower over our car on this narrow, winding road. The longer we drive, the more the air becomes tinged with salt.

Gentle fingers brush my own. I see Dylan's hand resting on mine and can't help but admire how nicely our polished rings look side by side. He smiles at me, causing his turquoise eyes to illuminate.

"We're almost there. Are you ready?"

I nod, pressing my lips together. It requires all my strength to hold back the tidal wave of tears threatening to break free.

"Now close your eyes."

I do. And I let him drive toward the horizon.

When I step out of the vehicle, my eyes remain closed. Dylan's strong hands wrap around my shoulders.

The first noticeable difference is the strong sea breeze. Albeit astringent, it feels like clarity and serenity and freedom. I let the air glide across my cheeks and allow it to carry away the bad thoughts: thoughts of my thin hair that still hasn't fully grown back; thoughts of how my shirt puckers too much in the front in the space where it should be filled; thoughts of scars all over. I surrender these thoughts to the wind.

Instead, I think about Dylan, and I think about my new life. He wraps his arms around me, supporting me the way that not everyone did.

The worst of times are behind me now. "Open your eyes, Ellie."

Forty-one. The number echoes in my head.

Forty-one years have gone by, but it somehow seems okay,

because they all led to this one moment. I stand here, with my love by my side, and I take in the ocean and all its glorious vastness for the first time.

Waves crash over my toes, leaving foam in their wake as they recede into the ocean. But that doesn't stop them from colliding with the shore time and time again.

The sunset on the horizon sets the sky ablaze. Scarlet, fuchsia, and gold converge in an explosion of vibrancy. Each gilded crest reflects these deep, luxurious colors.

What strikes me the most about the ocean is how unlimited it seems. It has no boundaries, no constraints – it's infinite. I cannot see its edge, nor the extent of its depth. Ships bob along its surface, sailing away towards freedom. It must be splendid to wander freely while always having a home.

"Ellie, are you all right?" With his large, strong hands, Dylan gently wipes the tears off of my face.

"I'm wonderful, it's just—" I stifle a sob. "I never thought I would live to see the ocean.

It's going to be a gorgeous summer – and I embrace it with open arms.

Pt. IV - Isaiah

It's been a treacherous fall. A series of terrible thunderstorms tore apart the trees and the whole town lost power multiple times. After a month of vehement rainfall, the chaos ended, and a beautifully clear weekend moved in.

The crisp scent of apples from the nearby orchard fills me with the cozy feeling of autumn. Cornstalks rustle on either side of me, whispering to each other, probably laughing at us. I clutch onto the straps of Grayson's backpack as he takes a winding path through the corn maze.

We've already spent half an hour wandering about aimlessly, but Grayson refuses to turn back before finding all of the hole punchers for our card to prove that we conquered the labyrinth.

"Should we turn left or right here?" Grayson sighs.

"Left," Kelly calls out from behind me. "Why?"

“Because we’ve already been here, and last time we were here we went right.” “What?! No way. We should definitely take a right,” he insists, eliciting an exasperated groan from Kelly. Without meaning to, I laugh.

A hand ruffles my tangled locks.

“What’s so funny, weirdo?” Kelly teases.

I turn my face skyward to bask in the warmth of the sunshine. That sun hanging in the sky like the planet’s largest chandelier is the same sun that was in the sky above me three years ago. Even though I’ve changed so much since then, I suppose some things stay the same. Leaves fall and people fall apart but there’s always a light that burns on.

“Isaiah?”

It takes me a minute to realize that Kelly is still waiting for a response. “You two.” Honesty is the best policy. “I bet you’re going to get married.”

They both erupt in cackles around me, and I laugh with them until my eyes water. Before long, we make another right turn.

I sigh. “Wrong way, Grayson.”

“How would you know? You’re blind.”

“I don’t have to be able to see to know that we’re going in circles.” And that’s the truth. After adjusting for three years without my sense of vision, it’s not hard to tell that Grayson has us all hopelessly lost. “Try a left.”

I cling to his backpack for several more minutes as he leads me and Kelly through the maze.

“Yes! Freedom!” His bag tears free of my grip as he runs out of the corn.

Part of me aches to see him run, to see his dark hair flying in the wind. I want to see Kelly’s brilliant green eyes one more time. I’d give anything to see another Rhode Island autumn where the forests appear to be on fire. You don’t notice these things until you can’t notice them anymore.

But for now, I notice the crisp scent of apples, and the whispers of the cornstalks, and Grayson’s elated cheering mixed with Kelly’s hysterical laughter.

It’s been a treacherous fall. But I am who I am because of it.

The Jamestown Anomaly

by Kevin Tierney

To Howard Enoch, the joy in life came from it's many mysteries. Howard spent many a late night researching obscure books and websites for eclectic information regarding an absurd subject. He constantly plunged himself into a world of theory and thought, reading the works of Lovecraft and studying the thoughts of Aleister Crowley.

Howard was intrigued by anything arcane or occult, but his main interest was what he considered the greatest mystery of all: the paranormal. Living in Rhode Island all his life, he thought he had known even the most untouched back roads and local points of interest, but only recently has something unknown to him emerged from the murky depths of obscurity: Fort Wetherill, Jamestown. It was a place Howard had heard of for it's recreational opportunities, but never anything beyond that. According to an online forum for ghost enthusiasts, Fort Wetherill was a place notorious for being haunted.

A skeptic at heart, he was eager to experience something capable of stretching his already vast imagination. Joseph Teller was a member of Howard's social group; they were seniors at the local high school and talked with a diverse group of people but were ultimately drawn to each other because of a similar attitude and set of interests. They talked for hours about conspiracy theories and paranormal events they had each read about, sharing information and constantly learning new things in the process. Despite having fun in a group, they seemed to alienate their friends, who did not quite share their enthusiastic tendencies or odd interests.

When Howard and Joseph first talked about Fort Wetherill in lunch, the other friends in their social group showed something of a vague interest. The idea of actually visiting a place that could provide a thrill or exciting experience was very desirable to a typical

apathetic high school senior. James, a quiet member of the small group, spoke up.

“I know about Fort Wetherill,” he announced, with an almost displeased expression contorting his face.

The rest turned to face him, most of them simply curious, but Howard was filled with a euphoric mania, jittering at the mention of something he was passionate about.

James continued, “My uncle lives in a home for people who aren’t really able to live by themselves; people who have mental issues and what not, you know?”

The group nodded simultaneously.

“Well, my mom let me visit him a few times and I remember him talking on and on about stuff that wasn’t even coherent, like one second he’d talk about how loud the wind is and then the next about how the moon and the sun are enemies or something really weird like that.”

Joseph looked at Howard, concerned by what their friend had told them.

Howard spoke up “So, how exactly does this relate to the Fort?” James looked straight at him, unblinking and determined. “I visited him during the summer, and I think that’s the last time I’ll be seeing him for a while, and a long while at that.”

The group was now silent, giving full attention to James as he continued.

“You see, my uncle wasn’t always the type of guy you’d imagine being in a mental facility, he used to have a wife and was a marine engineer and everything. He was a successful and happy guy.”

James continued after shaking himself out of his reverie. “He was really passionate about hiking and one afternoon he went out with his dog to Fort Wetherill. He had even been there before but I guess he didn’t tell his wife about where he was going or stayed out too long or something because the police got called and he was filed as a missing person.”

James sighed, as if exhausted by reliving the events. “You see, the thing you’ve got to know about the Fort is there’s tunnels, and there are a good amount of them. The police looked through

these Godforsaken tunnels and found my uncle, huddled in the fetal position and sobbing hysterically, whispering and mumbling things they couldn't understand. They never found his dog, but apparently when people in my family have talked to him and mentioned the dog, Murphy, he cries and starts talking about things that took him. That's one thing he stays coherent about: the things. He goes on loopy tangents about whatever it is he imagined took Murphy."

The friends sat in silence for what felt like minutes. It was Joseph who broke the silence, "So, does that mean you aren't interested in coming with Howard and I?" he inquired.

James let out a partial chuckle at the absurdity of the question. "You couldn't pay me all the world's riches to step foot in those tunnels, I know it's not logical but I've heard too much about what supposedly lives down there. You see, uncle George talked about these tunnels a lot. I guess he talked a lot in general but that's beside the point. He said that there were things that looked like people down there, things with faces like they were made out of strips of magazines and babies that walked around on disproportionately long, bird legs."

In total, there were six teenagers sitting at that table, and every one of them looked stunned and confused. James stood up from the table, dropped his lunch tray in the garbage, and turned back with one final remark, "I don't know what my uncle saw, and I thoroughly doubt it was real, but I never want to experience anything like what his delusions." He said walking out of the lunchroom.

Joseph and Howard looked at one another, wide eyed in disbelief. They worked out the optimal time to set out on their excursion and spent the rest of lunch listening to what the other members of their social circle had to contribute about the seemingly mythical place. They heard tales of New England's infamous 'Black Dog' an anomalous canine that brought bad luck and subsequent death to any travelers and hikers who encountered it. They heard stories of ghosts, and even one tale regarding Mercy Brown, a young colonial Rhode Islander famous for being depicted as a vampire. The conversation thrilled all involved, but especially Howard and Joseph, who seemed to show little care that their friend had made such a dramatic exit.

The day after that conversation was Friday, and it was decided that the two would go explore the depths of Fort Wetherill and describe the experience on Monday to the group. Both teens were skeptics, and only saw James's story as a coincidence, but a small iota of doubt lurked in their psyches, conjuring fear and anticipation regarding what they would see. Their Friday classes seemed to go slow, and they could barely contain the excitement they felt for the trip. The end of school came, and as many prepared for a night out to the movies or dates or parties, Joe and Howard were ready to explore the destination.

The car glided quietly through the October evening, the headlights piercing the fog but only managing to illuminate about ten feet in front of the vehicle. Despite all of their excitement, they grew silent as they approached the fort. People walked their dogs, meandering around in the dense mist as Howard and Joe pulled up. The people seemed indifferent of the two students, paying them no mind nor acknowledging them with a friendly gesture. Howard found this strange for a public area; especially somewhere as pleasant and socially interesting as Rhode Island.

They walked briskly side by side, taking nothing but their phones and a single flashlight. It was casual how they entered the subterranean tunnels, but they both felt fear and intrigue as they progressed. Graffiti stretched over the cavernous halls of the area, slang and rudimentary depictions of various celebrities littered the sides of the dingy, cylindrical pathways. It was exceedingly dark in the tunnels, more than they had expected it ever to be. The natural light of the sun did very little to penetrate the seemingly endless abyss of darkness covering the grey walls and illegal art. Howard flicked on the flashlight, the yellow electric buzz dug through the abyss of darkness with the efficacy of a toothpick through molasses. The darkness was seemingly thick, almost palpable. They felt almost as if they defiantly trudged through the organic matter of some impossibly large being. The duo walked timidly through the underbelly of the fort, every footstep seeming to echo endlessly. The vast halls seemed to shrink and stretch, what was only a few feet in diameter seemed to become claustrophobic very quickly.

"I have a headache, maybe we should turn back and get some medicine," Joseph suggested. Howard didn't answer. He was fixated on something and waved his hand sporadically to silence his friend.

"Did you hear that?" Howard muttered.

"Hear what? You know other people are most likely down here." retorted, he was annoyed by Howard's antics and by the growing pain in his head. Howard looked back at his companion, his eyes wide and his body trembling. Joe could see the light of the flashlight move subtly due to Howard's shaking hands.

Then, in an instant, Howard sprinted away from Joe into the darkness of the tunnel. Joe screamed for him to come back but there was no response. Only the sound of rapid footsteps echoed through the underground. Joe ran after him, fear jolted him awake and pumped adrenaline through his system. He ran and tried to follow the glimpses of light that cascaded down further into the darkness. Joe soon lost any sight of Howard and was left alone in the dark. Joe yelped for Howard to come back, suddenly terrified of the thick darkness and unable to find a path back to where they had entered. He wandered, terrified and alone, for what seemed like hours. Time seemed to distort as if being in the tunnels kept him from being aware of the circadian rhythm.

Meanwhile, Howard stumbled through the tunnel, he could hear what he was running from. He wondered how long Joe would go without encountering what he heard. What prompted him to run was what sounded like a legion of crying infants mixed with the reptilian hiss of a crocodile. He heard whispers and grunts, as if the occupants of an insane asylum wandered around the tunnels accompanied by a snarling pack of hyenas. He shined his flashlight every which way, hoping to get a glimpse of where the noises emanated from. After what seemed like an eternity of trudging through the bowels of the fort, he stopped at a dead end. Someone had left a graffiti mural of the Roman Emperor Caligula, enshrined in crude words and drawings, right in the center of this ending.

Howard trembled as he slowly turned to make an exit. As he did so, his light seemed to falter and dim. He spun around to face behind where he stood, and his eyes adjusted to the immeasurably dark underground to see a pale figure. The shape was not large or

imposing, but stood just outside of his range of sight, seeming to fade in and out of Howard's perception. He was paralyzed by fear, but realized the noises and mumbles had completely stopped. Blocking his exit stood a very pale and malnourished pregnant woman, with long brown hair and wounds covering her face, where a look of strange countenance was displayed. Her eyes were pale and the flesh around them seemed to corrode and degrade, as if the presence of that cold gaze was enough to make her skin retreat from her body. Her inflated stomach bulged with veins and her thin legs trembled under the weight of it, the thin frame of her form barely able to uphold her offspring. Her hands twitched and trembled as she took a small step toward Howard, seemingly paining herself to do so.

Howard stood in shock, the color vanishing from his face instantaneously. He couldn't even manage a scream, or any hint of desperation. The woman's eyes widened and the endless layers of wrinkles fell down even more on the frame of her face. Her lips curled back into a hideous grin, revealing broken and yellow teeth. Her stomach pulsated and bulged even more, grumbling and groaning seemed to come forth from it. She shook and trembled as her stomach rumbled and growled; the whispering and howls of a seemingly immeasurable amount of people and animals echoed through the endless corridors of Fort Wetherill as Howard faded from consciousness, unable to cope with the reality he faced.

Joe and Howard woke up the next morning a few feet from the tunnel's entrance, a small gathering of people stood uneasily near them. They seemed to wake up simultaneously, looking at the bright sun above them and the group of civilians standing adjacent to them. Relief and confusion washed over them in a curious way as they both realized what had happened. They sat upright and studied their surroundings, confused by the situation completely.

Later, they came to the conclusion that Fort Wetherill was not something to be understood or conquered by the petty interests of mankind. It lay in the abyss of imagination, over the precipice of human understanding. After the events transpired, they told their group they had never made it to the site, as they didn't want to talk about it and be labeled insane. For years after, their curiosities were satiated.

Whenever They Asked

by Avis Zane

Whenever they asked about Holly, I always repeated exactly what you wrote down: “she was a friend”. I’d recite, though it wasn’t true. “She was a nice girl” lie twisted something awful on my tongue, acrid and false. I repeated the statements to everyone: my parents, the reporters, the police, school officials. When news vans swarmed the beaches and the high school parking lot, I said those words until I couldn’t understand words any longer. *She was a friend, a friend, a friend, a nice girl, a friend, a friend . . .* There was that picture of her that was printed, the picture you took once when we watched an awful movie in your basement, *The Hills Have Eyes*, or something, that didn’t capture Holly at all. She was lounging cross-legged on the couch with a blanket on her lap, staring eagerly at the screen. Her mouth slightly open, eyes wide. She looked pathetic. She looked innocent. It was featured in every paper, every trashy magazine that hailed her as a saint and an angel or whatever. All those magazines that made you laugh when you looked at them, bending the covers (with her face! That picture, all wrong, all wrong) until creases tainted her milky skin.

Sometimes I think about what I could have said. If you hadn’t fed me words, what would I have told them all? I wanted to tell them about the picture. About how it was a slanderous portrayal, how it didn’t capture Holly, not a bit. She wasn’t so young, so sweet in person. Not the way I saw her. I would have described how her nails were long and rubbery. How her thick hair glinted with gold when she drew her fingers down from the roots, tossed across her shoulders in a wave severed by split ends. She had uneven teeth yellowed by cigarettes and coffee; speckled skin and a crooked nose. Eyes glazed by ice. They rolled and narrowed and pulled creases of skin across her brow. She was always rolling her eyes. Never laughed at my jokes, not even the dirty ones.

It was your jokes that she liked, the cutting insults that you doled without a second thought. She thought you were hilarious. She thought you were everything.

What else would I have told them? About the way she collapsed in the front seat of my car, tossing an affectionate glance at you (sprawled out, drunk, in the back)? How she drawled her vowels, syrupy, as if she wasn't an Ocean State native but instead from somewhere warm and Southern? She'd hiss, "change the station; I hate this song," no matter what was playing, and I would fiddle with the knobs until she'd swat my hand away and do it herself. Being close to her, I was forced to inhale with my mouth. Her breath was always rancid. It had a fishy quality to it. Sour and dead. No matter how many slabs of minty gum she chewed, it continued to reek. How could you stand that sour tongue rolling in your mouth? She was a dirty person. Not an innocent girl, no, not a nice girl. When I remember Holly, I imagine the photograph that should have captured her: gnawing on a wad of gum, legs crossed knee to ankle, brazen hair atop her head, wailing along to the radio . . . Or, maybe a snapshot of that one time, when she chain-smoked Malboros out the sky roof of my car, laughing into the darkened streets. That should have been the photograph: her arms stretching upwards, wind sweeping the cigarette away. Tangled hair shivering across her brow. A hysterical cackle streamed from her lips. We passed the beach, ocean furious and glowing blue-green, and the waves threatened to swallow up her voice. But she only laughed louder. Light from the full moon pooled in the indents of her clavicle.

She was gone but the chewed gum remained. Green chunks decorated the interior of my car. It became hardened sediment. Stuck on the dashboard, smeared across the door handle. Speckling the upholstery. Time after time again, I would beg her not to litter the slimy green wads in my car, but she'd ignore me. Remember that? "Calm down, Stacy," she'd snort, her voice mocking, as it always was when she said my name. "'S just gum." But it wasn't just gum. It was her, and she was everywhere. The ash of her cigarettes, murky footprints against the glass. There were glimmering strands of her hair coating the floor. I'd find them, tangled on the seat, or wrapped around the straps of my bag. You told me to erase the residue of her. You said we had to pretend she

wasn't there. So I tried: I scraped off the gum. Wasted hours vacuuming up the hair, the ash, the sour cream and onion chip crumbs, the wrappers. I installed an air-freshener ("Morning Mist"). But she was still there. Somewhere above my head, taunting me. Maybe half-way out of the sunroof. Leaning on her elbows. Head thrown back. Laughing, smoking.

The car wouldn't drive without her. I'd sit in the seat, flicking my keys around the ring. Paralyzed, squeezing a Rhode Island keychain until my knuckles turned white. She wouldn't let me go. She was holding down the brakes. She was pressing her weight against me. The morning after, when I hadn't even showered and the night before was splattered on my clothes—vomit, dirt and gravel churned with sweat, and something red and hot caked on my skin, the hardest thing to wash off—I knew I'd never escape her. She was everywhere—on my body, in the air, flaking apart on the seats of my car. Everywhere. She was forcing herself up from my stomach to my throat, she was ringing in my head: you did this . . . you did this . . . I'd twist the key, and the rumble of ignition would remind me of her voice. When my fingers gravitated towards the radio dials, I'd expect her hand to shoot out and stop me. But she didn't. She didn't, she wasn't, you weren't, I couldn't be. So I had to stop driving.

One night, when the upholstered seats were damp with rain and it smelled of you—herbal cigarettes, musk, cedar—she talked to me. We never talked. You'd get gas, or buy an ounce off Jimmy at the park, and in the wake of your absence the car would fill with dense silence. I knew Holly didn't like me. She was suspicious of us. Of those small moments we shared sometimes, when you'd say a joke and I'd understand immediately, adding onto it, our brains wired together. She didn't like it when we looked at each other. When our gazes didn't even flit to her. So when you weren't there, Holly and I wouldn't even glance at each other, side by side in the passenger seat.

Except that night. That night, when she leaned forward and brushed my shoulder. Whiskey on her tongue not potent enough to mask the sour scent. A crazed glint in her eyes. "Stace," she said, half-laughing, and I winced in shock. She never called me that. Collar of her shirt had rolled off her shoulder, and I could see a small constellation of moles across the skin. She spread out her hand on my arm as she unbuckled her seatbelt and shifted in the seat to face me. "Stace, you won't believe this

...” and I couldn’t. Her eyelashes were stuck together. Tiny raindrops of freckles across the bridge of her nose. She leaned forward, even closer. Her breath was toxic; my eyes filled up with tears, but I couldn’t stop looking at her. All these nights in my car, all the early mornings, cranky with no coffee; all the bad highs and crying fights and potholes and stoplights ignored, I had always been watching Holly. Stolen glances after each snarky comment, every Marlboro tossed out the sunroof, every moonlight-soaked night we raced onto the beaches and sprayed white sand up our ankles. I’d been waiting for this, I realized, as she came closer.

“It starts like this,” she began, after a quaking inhale. And so it began. Unraveling in a drunken brilliance—the telemachiad of sex and drugs and awful step-siblings. Pregnancy scares. Mystery bruises she couldn’t explain. A sick cat. How she loved to swallow his medication and savor the nausea. How desperately she believed in God. How miserable he made her. Words streamed from her chapped lips, not hindered by any sort of punctuation, no commas or periods. “It’s love with him I think,” she confessed, and for the first time I was reminded of you, of you and her. “Except sometimes...sometimes when I look down at the wrong moment and forget it.”

I traced my gaze over each bump of her sunburned skin that bled from her hairline. Rough texture of her pink complexion, it teased down her chin and brow. My chest was on fire. Why did she tell me her secrets? She said she couldn’t talk to you. I loved the way she said it, like she and I functioned on a plane far above what you could comprehend. Like you didn’t even exist. Like when she quirked her brows and said the last line, “it’s not like it matters now,” all light and humorous, like I didn’t already know what would happen to her. I couldn’t stop staring. Freckles cast in uneven patches. Stars and a moon. Liquid crescent of a birthmark right below her lips. She kept laughing—an uncontrollable wheezing sound. Her eyelashes were stuck together. Tears, I realized too late. She was crying. As if the next few months were mapped out in her eyes too. As if she knew that one day I would end up in the driver’s seat with a shirt mottled with vomit and blood. With a car that refused to start without her, and a memory that contained only her fingers and hair and lips and scent and skin. She laughed as she cried, and that’s what I wish I could have told them—that she’d known all along.

The Smuggler

by Jasper White

“Koon tam sah-senaad alai ti awmerigaa?” I turned to Bramote and thought about his question for a moment.

“In America? I’m a Buddhist.”

A look of shock rolled over his face. “Jing, mai?” he asks.

“Yes, really,” I respond. Only a few things make it this far across the world, and I am a smuggler. A smuggler of knowledge, of information, of America. I pinpoint a time in my childhood and try to think like I did then. I try to think about what I would have done if I had known that in only seven years I would be sent to Thailand by the U.S. Government as a representative of the United States of America.

I would not have thought much of it, honestly. I was too distracted by the music over the loud speaker, the zebras, the “wilder beasts,” and finally, right before the one thousand foot high “Jambo Junction” sign, the aoudads. Wild aoudads reside high in the mountains of Northern Africa for protection against less agile predators. Their synthetic hill at the Roger Williams Park Zoo hardly compares, but the extensive stone river cascading down its center provides the same serenity I imagine would be found on the Tunisian cliff faces. I longed to be inside, conversing with my caprid companions, basking in the sun on the shimmering summit. It bothered me that I wasn’t allowed to jump the wooden barracks and scale the picturesque mountain encased in their enclosure almost as much as my family’s disrespect for these beautiful creatures. There they stood, spouting every pun in the book, “Ow, dad! Why did you pinch me?” “Ooh, dad! Look at the aoudad!” As if the African sheep hadn’t heard them all before. I may have only been nine, but I felt bad for them. People constantly laughed at their exhibit because aoudad (Oo-Dad) is apparently the strangest word to pronounce in the English language. I imagined that I was an aoudad,

plagued by the incessant mispronunciation of my species' name, like listening to a motivational speaker who says "uman" for your entire life.

I haven't experienced this caliber of aggravation in years. That is, until my host sister, Oil, told me, "That your Thai name," as her children clasped my legs yelling, "P'Namo!" "P' means older sibling," she informed me. My mind muddled as to why my American name wouldn't work. I realized why at school the next day, however, greeted by twenty-seven girls screaming "JahBEU!" Jannis, the German exchange student I met at the orientation just two days earlier, didn't recognize me. My long hair gone, and Vinzenz, the English teacher from Germany, wondered what kind of guy would have his haircut by a half-blind, old Thai man who asks hairstyle preference by pointing to a Spanish *fútbol* poster after your host sister tells him you're a boy. Vinzenz could relate, deprived of his dreadlocks upon arrival. Emmanuel was happy just to have another American at school. We grew to form a sarcastic "Germerican" brotherhood, based on our shared English skills heard nowhere else in rural Phra Puttabat, which I taught Vinzenz when he wasn't teaching Thai students. It was amazing how quickly we grew accustomed to one another. I couldn't believe that only two months later, Emmanuel was returning to Chicago. I wouldn't hear another "Yo mamma" joke or "Phineas and Ferb" reference until I returned as well.

P'Oil drove me over to the hotel in which Jannis lived. The striking mountain behind it fascinated me. Finlayson's squirrels bounced off the treeline, Painted Jezebel butterflies flew by his balcony. "I need to climb that mountain," I informed him. We made our way through the strange, spiny, six foot tall plants growing behind the hotel, green but too heavy for their own strength, to the dusty dirt path where Jannis ran every morning. It stretched on for nearly a mile, but we disregarded it with more ambitious aspirations. The mountain substrate is soft. Small plants sprout from the sometimes jagged ground. Grasping branches as we climb, kicking dirt and pebbles down the ever-steeper incline. The trees are strangely sharp; the thorns are thick and long, randomly protruding from precisely wrinkled bases. Snails litter the leafy boulders below. I'm amazed by the white slabs of rock revealing themselves from beneath thin growth, the beautiful view, the serene, untouched landscape. It's all so wonderful.

“Keu kwok beeah, mai?” Jannis asks, practicing his Thai.

“Kwok?” I question.

“Is that a beer can?”

“Oh... yeah.”

We reach a leafy plateau with patches of luscious green stalks, eight feet tall. Wild bamboo, where it's meant to be, where it evolved. An eternity could be spent here. Settled between the spires that pierce the sky, it's just the right altitude. I consider the possibility of living here. The un-raked elliptical leaves perfectly forming a blissful bed. How much would my family really care if I never returned? Alas, we push on, but I'm sidetracked at the next level, perplexed as to how to properly transport this cactus from this far up to the ground below. Jannis disappears further onto the peak. His disembodied voice echoes from beyond the tree-line. “Namo, are you coming?” He prefers my Thai name. I try to follow his footsteps up the vertical rock face. “I'll just stay down here!” I call up to him, staring at a strange white figure atop the pale spire opposite us. It makes me consider the age of this land and how generations before us scaled these peaks to place religious symbols. I'll just take a piece of the cactus down with me. I stash a chunk of the prickly plant in the pocket by the knee of my cargo pants and sit down until Jannis returns. We make our way back down the mountain, through the lush bamboo forest caught in the threads of time, trotting as the path steepens into the thorny passage. Made worse by the dark green cactus in my pocket, the blood procured from my wrist indiscernible from dark brown thorns, scraping deeper every time my hand brushes by my leg. I rip the wretched portion of plant from my pocket, tossing it down the hill in my approximate trajectory. Throwing it further every time I get to it. I had to get it home, I already managed transportation of the one I bought in Nan. Succulents are surprisingly easy to get over borders. We reach the bottom before I know it, the cactus chunk left long ago, half-way down the hillside, battered, bruised and broken.

“Paw, Maeh, Sawaat dii, krap.” I greet my parents.

“Ah, Namo, waatdii. P'oil ha khun.” A finger in the direction of my sister, I make my way towards her.

“You were looking for me?” I inquire.

“Namo! I bai wit friends to Chiang Mai, you like to come wit rao

mai?” She likes speaking “Tinglish.”

“Yes, I would like to bai gap you.” I feel stupid when I do it.

A week later we’re boarding a plane. The recycled air and din of engines provide comforting familiarity. This is the sixth one in six months. Buddy Holly’s “Everyday” plays softly through my earbuds as we prepare for the six hour flight ahead. Sadly there’s not much outside besides the tops of clouds, fluffy and white, as usual. My eyes grow weary from the unadulterated sunlight. I’m awakened by the jazzy percussion of “Stand by Me.” Sliding the window shade up reveals lush mountains that I can only describe as fluffy. Greeting Sam with a hug after the plane lands, I describe the difference between mountains in Chiang Mai and Saraburi; it’s one of the only things we can discuss with both of our host sisters there, but it’s so glorious to speak and hear American English in person. We are sadly split, however, as neither of our sisters understand our ‘complex American get-together.’ It didn’t communicate well that Sam was supposed to see the temples of Chiang Mai with us. Instead her sister wanted to go to the mall for forty-five minutes to see a friend.

Looking forlornly back at Sam, I reluctantly step foot into a van, much smaller on the outside than on the inside. The dashboard is littered with religious relics, the ceiling above the rear-view painted with white spots and peeling gold leaf in a strange triangle. The man knows where he’s headed and drives expertly through town, passing a thin river from which a scaly, spotted, seven foot Asian water monitor, a close relative of Indonesia’s Komodo dragon, emerges. We stop at a small intersection; a tiny pagoda points directly to a golden tower atop a lush, green mountain. It must be a temple. When the monks built it, no streets, no roads rose to the top, no modern houses, no air conditioning units. Everyone knew where to worship, but they needed commitment to get there. We turn right, stopping again next to a sign with a deer bearing a slightly terrifying grin. It reminds me of my dad and his long Rhode Island winter hunting stories. “From here to that tree away, and I took the shot! Got its left flank, but too far back. I must’ve followed it three miles through the woods until the sun went down. The snow melted and the blood disappeared; I couldn’t find it. I’ll look around tomorrow morning. You don’t want ‘em to suffer, y’know?” Weaving our way through the rural streets at the edge of the city, we arrive at a small temple that ends a

narrow street half way up a mountain. Every car approaching nearly runs us off the road and down the hillside. The ceramic figures inside this place of worship aren't quite worth the risk. The roads grow with importance of the temple that ends them, but only by a hair's breadth. We arrive at another temple. Petals strung into necklaces, placed on plates, piled high before the god of flowers. We pray, and depart.

We pull into a rotary walled by bricks and merchants, selling to tourists migrating up the mountain on motorbike. This is the temple seen from below. Exotic birds invisibly sing from every tree. Giant jackfruits grow from every other. Ducking slightly, we enter through a cement passage, revealing an inner courtyard with a glowing golden centerpiece thirty feet high, religious shrines on every side. Paying my respect to the laying figure who represents people born on Tuesday, P'Oil prompts me to enter the room. I kneel with the others before elephant tusks symmetrically encasing the idols surrounded by coins and candles. A monk flicks water over us with a stiff brush. P'Oil positions me for a picture with the central golden stupa. One standing, one kneeling. "*Sawng roy baht.*" The man printing the pictures requests payment. We exit through what I thought was the same door, now faced with two golden Naga snake statues, six feet apart, bodies stretched as a guard rail down three hundred and nine steps before us. We stop into a store to our right, I purchase some small meditation cymbals, and a little bag, perfectly suited for my temperament of floral thievery. It's not until we reach the airport and I'm looking at the pictures P'Oil bought for me at the temple that she tells me why it is we went.

"That Wat Pra Tat Doi Suthep. Every Thai person bai there. It has, uh..." She turns to P'Wad and mumbles something in Thai.

P'Wad looks up at me and says, "Buddha bones, light?"

P'Oil confirms, "Yes, Buddha bones in temple." Hit so nonchalantly by this gem of information, my mind spun from the impact until we reached home that night. I just prayed to all of these shrines built around the legendary tabernacle that holds the glowing shoulder bone of the Guatama Buddha. However, I did nothing in recognition of the stupa itself besides pay a peddler six dollars for a picture beside it.

The significance of this journey to Chiang Mai was unknown to me, as was the history of the white figure atop the mountain behind

Jannis's hotel. I return home from "the land of smiles" to the land of "Yo Mamma" jokes and "Phineas and Ferb" references, taking nothing tangible but some contraband succulents and tiny cymbals in a bag bought on a northern Thai mountain. My first stop in America will be the Roger Williams Park Zoo, where I had worked before my exchange, in "The Farmyard" and "Australasia." I return to work to find that they have reassigned my position to the upper African Plains region of the zoo, with red river hogs, African crowned cranes, and aoudads.

We train Persephone, the red river hog, for ultrasounds, and I watch as the cranes dance merrily around Amanda, the zookeeper with whom I work. Finally, just before the Jambo Junction sign, no longer one thousand feet high, we enter a gate, camouflaged in the wooden wall's hand-painted African folk art. We step into a small grassy patch behind a concrete building, undecorated in its sequestered region of the zoo. Amanda pulls out a carabiner of innumerable keys, and seamlessly unlocks the blank gray door. Inside is nothing new to her, but it's a fascinating world to me. Shovels and rakes hung in perfect order on the right wall, a "Happy Birthday" mug on the shelf. Feeding charts on the wall explain the finicky nature of aoudad's taste buds. One only takes diatomaceous earth with real molasses, another is content with the molasses-infused pellets. Amanda hands me a shovel and a rake for collection of caprid excrement, and we head out. The grass is lush and green. A thin gravel path runs behind the mountain. I look up occasionally, admiring the inspirational structure. In awe of its construction, a foundation of boulders that has withstood the decades. As we come around the front of the beatific peak, I'm brought once again to a moment in my childhood; eagerly longing to ascend the synthetic promontory. It's no longer an objective, it's immediate. I'm just waiting for Amanda to say the words. I take the first steps towards my childhood wishes, half expecting the earth below me to disappear into smoke, to fall through the clouds of my daydreams, but it's stable. I climb higher and higher. Looting droppings from the secluded scene, there are no shrines or stupas. This stool is my succulent. Up the large rocks, parallel to the clear, imaginably refreshing water that flows peacefully down from the pinnacle.



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