



GOAT HILL
for writers

School
One!

Write
RHODE ISLAND
A CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM FOR TEENS

An Anthology of Fiction
from Rhode Island Students

2024

School One!

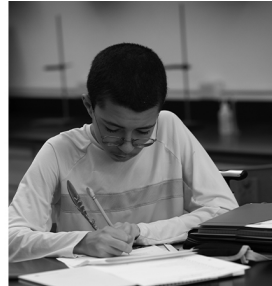
School One is an independent, college preparatory high school on Providence's East Side. Founded in 1973, it has long been known for its innovative curriculum, strong sense of community, and diverse student body.

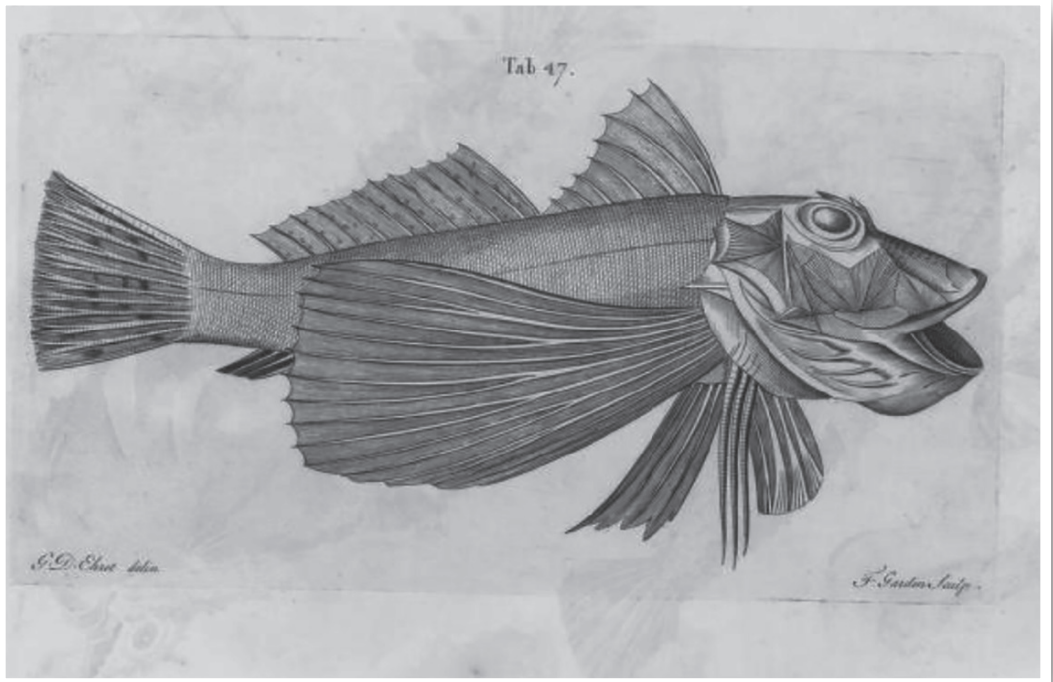
Our hallmarks include:

- Small classes
- Support for learning differences
- A vibrant arts program
- Generous financial aid
- Graduates who are prepared for college-level work

After-school and on weekends, School One's Literary Center offers a wealth of creative writing opportunities for School One students and teens in Rhode Island and beyond.

220 University Ave., Providence, RI 02906
www.school-one.org (401)331-2497





Fish

DATE: 1756, PLACE: London, MATERIAL: Ink on paper
Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University



Write RHODE ISLAND

A CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM FOR TEENS

A short fiction writing competition for RI students in grades 7-12. 2024-2025

The Rules: Compose a short story. Eligible entries should be a short work of fiction incorporating Rhode Island as a theme. Your entry must be under 2500 words. Check out past winners and read our tips before submitting your entry, www.school-one.org.

The Winners: The winning entry will be the top four stories that deliver a powerful and engaging story as determined by judges. Our judges look for a story that demonstrates creativity, technical skill, originality, personal voice and use of Rhode Island as a theme.

Prizes: \$100 is awarded to the Top Winners. Our sixteen Notable Mentions also receive awards and are published in our anthology. Winners are invited to read their story and attend events throughout the year as ambassadors of Write Rhode Island

Judges: All submissions are read by volunteer judges. Once a story submission has made it to the final round, Write Rhode Island special guest judges read and select the work for our publication.

Entry Fee: NONE. Write Rhode Island is free to enter. (only one entry per student).

Deadline: Story submissions must be submitted by 12/10/24.

Submission Guidelines: All entries should be submitted using our Submittable Page on the Write Rhode Island page of the website (www.school-one.org). The title of your document should be the same as the title of your story.

All submissions are read blind. Do not include your name, the name of your school or the name of your teacher on the pages on your story. Entries with personally identifiable information will be disqualified.

Winners will be notified individually via email and then an official announcement on our website and social media platforms. You will be notified by email if your story has been rejected.



Dear Readers,

It is truly encouraging to see the abundance of talent and creativity showcased in this year's *Write Rhode Island* anthology. The diversity and depth of this year's stories are a testament to the perspectives of their authors as well as the coming together of the teachers, parents, volunteers, editors and supporters who encourage them.

Each anthology is an example of fantastic collaboration: from the teachers who encourage students to submit to the images curated for us by Taylor Polites and the John Carter Brown Library to the 50 volunteer judges who read more than 185 submissions. And let's not forget the work of editing this finished book: Barbara Ruttenberg, Julia Emlen, Emily Robbins and Paula Cioe.

Appreciation should also be extended to individuals like Taylor Polites, Dr. Michael Polites and Hester Kaplan, whose support plays a critical role in nurturing the talent of Rhode Island's young writers and sustaining programs like this one. Their investment contributes to the development of the future literary community in Rhode Island.

Again, I extend sincere thanks to all the volunteers and teachers, past and present, whose contributions have shaped this anthology and thriving program. I'm truly grateful to all of those who believe in teens and their creativity.

Sincerely,
Diana Champa

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THANK YOU

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 organizations.

Barrington High School

Blackstone Valley Charter School

Chariho Regional High School

Classical High School

Cranston Public Library

Cumberland Public Library

ENRICHri

Greenville Public Library

Hamilton House

International Women Writers Guild

Jacqueline M. Walsh School for
the Performing and Visual Arts

Jamestown Public Library

John Hay Library

LitArts RI

Meeting Street School

The Met East Bay School

Pawtucket Public Library

Ponaganset High School

Providence Public Library

Quest Montessori

Rhode Island Center for the Book

Rhode Island Department
of Education

R. I. Writers Project

Rochambeau Library

St. Patrick Academy

Warwick Public Library

What Cheer Writers Club

Wickford Middle School

Wilbur & McMahon School

West Warwick High School

West Warwick Public Library

Write Rhode Island would like to thank our Advisory Committee and Judges. We are grateful for their willingness to give time, energy, and talent.

Alice Adler	Aliza Holstein	Maureen Reddy
David A. Ames	Robert Isenberg	Sherry Rhodes
Gerri Bain	Nancy Kerrigan	Robert Ricci
Jack Becker	Tom Kerrigan	Emily Robbins
Cristin Searles Bilodeau	Kathryn Kulpa	Barbara Ruttenberg
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Jo-Anne Hart	David Parr	

A message from Hester Kaplan and Taylor Polites, co-creators of Write Rhode Island

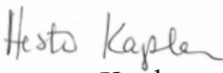
For eight years, we have been proud to work with School One to grow *Write Rhode Island*

Each spring, we look forward to visiting schools and communities across our state to honor the young writers who have demonstrated so much creativity, emotion, and skill in storytelling. Telling stories is not simply entertainment, it is a process of analysis, critical thinking, and transformation. It is one of the unique capacities of human beings.

Inviting young people across the state to create stories, to depict our common world or the worlds of their imaginations, cultivates skills of expression and interpretation. We believe this work is foundational, creating not only literary culture but capacities of understanding and thought that will serve these young people throughout their lives.

For eight years, we have seen that talent grow and flourish in Rhode Island. This year, we had more submissions than ever before. The stories reflect the rich and diverse experiences of the youth of our state. They show us the fears and hopes of our community as well as our potential.

In an uncertain and ever-changing world, we are deeply gratified to be a part of this effort to inquire, examine, and tell. We are grateful to our partner in this venture School One and all the volunteers, teachers, librarians, parents, sponsors, donors and the young people who make *Write Rhode Island* happen.


Hester Kaplan


Taylor Polites

Our Judges

Each year, Hester Kaplan and Taylor Polites lead the judging process for *Write Rhode Island*. All stories are judged as blind submissions—none of our judges know the names or schools of the submitters.



Hester Kaplan is the author of novels and short story collections, including, *The Edge of Marriage*, winner of the Flannery O'Connor Prize for Short Fiction. She is a 2020 recipient of a Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, and most recently, a Mark Twain Fellowship. Her fiction and nonfiction has appeared in numerous publications and anthologies. She offers one-on-one writing mentorship and coaching, manuscript development, and creative writing workshops, and is on the faculty of Lesley University's MFA program in Creative Writing. She is a co-founder of Goat Hill.

Taylor M. Polites is a Rhode Island-based writer, educator, and researcher. His first novel, *The Rebel Wife*, was published by Simon & Schuster and his work has appeared in anthologies as well as arts and news publications. He was a Community Practitioner in Residence at the Swearer Center at Brown University and is the recipient of the 2018 award for Public Humanities Scholarship from the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities. He teaches at the Rhode Island School of Design and the Maslow Family Creative Writing MFA program at Wilkes University.



Guest Judges

Write Rhode Island relies on the dedication of a talented group of volunteer judges. We're grateful! We also asked members of our storytelling community to serve as final-round judges. This year's guest judge for the 7-9th grade submissions was Alex Graudins. Rebekah Bergman was the guest judge for the 10-12th grade submissions.

Alex Graudins (she/they) is a Rhode Island-based cartoonist. She illustrated *Science Comics: The Brain and History Comics: The Great Chicago Fire for First Second*, and is both author and artist of the graphic memoir *Improve: How I Discovered Improv and Conquered Social Anxiety*. She specializes in autobiography and narratives following mental health and friendship. When she's not drawing, she's usually at the library or thinking a little too much about D&D.



Rebekah Bergman's novel *The Museum of Human History* (Tin House, 2023) was nominated for the Philip K. Dick Award and named a best debut of the year by Kirkus and Booklist. Her short stories have been published in *Joyland*, *The Masters Review*, and other journals. She holds a BA in literary arts from Brown University and an MFA in fiction from The New School. Rebekah calls Rhode Island her home.

THANK YOU

RI *Writing* Project

Offering a two-week summer camp for K-12 student writers

and

year-round professional development for educator-writers including programs such as:

- Summer Institute
- New Teacher Camp
- W.A.M (Writing. Art. Movement.)
- Hacking Your High Quality Curriculum
- Open Air Institute
- Book Clubs



Find out more on our website:

www.ric.edu/academics/ri-writing-project



*Congratulations,
Write Rhode Island
winners!*

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GOAT HILL
for writers

School
One!

write

RHODE ISLAND

A CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM FOR TEENS

**IS PROUD TO
PRESENT THE 2024
WINNING
STORIES BY
RHODE ISLAND
STUDENTS**

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Unlocked

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by Eliza Gobin

September in New England brings the crunch of fire colors to the sidewalk beneath my Converse sneakers. Maples march along the road I travel with her pudgy little hand in mine. Sparrows sing, sun greets the sky, and sweet Rosie hops over cracks in the concrete on her way to kindergarten. She still has the energy. Her smile makes me smile, too, and I love our walks to school.

The Monday morning is perfect until I leave her at her elementary school. She runs to join her friends, showing off her new skirt. As they follow their new teacher inside, I long for childhood. It was all so much simpler then.

My memory replays shouting, slamming, crying. Dad's anger, Mom's exhaustion, and the pressure of the bed frame on my back as I hid beneath it.

Maybe it wasn't simpler then. I keep walking, kicking leaves into the air and crushing others noisily.

When I get to school, I don't go inside. I know I should, and I know I need to if I want an A on the first algebra quiz of the year. But something about sitting silently at a squeaky desk under buzzing fluorescent lights and judging eyes doesn't appeal to me.

I walk slowly at first, hands so deep in my pockets that I feel lint under my chewed up nails. Then, I see my Spanish teacher getting out of her car, and I give up subtly. I run.

The untamable auburn mane, my dad used to fight me on, flies out behind me. It's the same color as the foliage at my feet. For some reason, I imagine the leaves I stir up collecting at the end of my locks. In my mind's eye, they add length, and my hair is as long as Rapunzel's, Rosie's favorite princess.

This vision keeps me moving. I pump my legs until they're burning, and my backpack is thumping against my thin frame, and all I hear is

She may have the prettier namesake, a flower instead of an absent father, but here, we are both embodied by bright, beautiful things.

Inside, I leave my Converse sneakers at the door and head for the cluttered kitchen. I fill up on my favorites: syrupy sweet coffee milk, neon Cheetos, and an entire bag of powdered Donettes.

The house is eerily quiet when my crunching and slurping is over. I've never been here alone. It's just Nana, Mom, and Rosie, but there's always a record on and a pot boiling, and I usually end up playing with Rosie while Nana cooks and tries to get Mom to relax.

When I was Rosie's age, I begged Nana to take me into the eves of the attic, but we haven't been up in years since her arthritis worsened. Today, I can do whatever I want, so I pad across the carpet to the door. Locked-away memories bubble up inside me as I reach for the knob. My fingers shake and my hand drops. I almost leave.

Almost. The stairs extend up to a window, and sunshine pours down on a single cobweb blowing from the top step. I scamper up before I lose my nerve.

The window overlooks the backyard I know better than my own. Nana's tomato plants climb up the house, and Rosie's rainbow hula hoop lies in the grass. It's too far away to see, but I know that on the second highest branch of the oak tree, my parents' initials are carved into the wood. Jagged and fading, the letters are a reminder of a young love that didn't last through adulthood and two babies.

Even though Dad left when Rosie was born, a chasm of guilt opens inside me when I think of my father. No one would ever leave because of my angel baby sister, but me? I'm the son he always wanted but never really had, who cried at roadkill (still does) and couldn't catch a ball (still can't).

.....

Somewhere between the catchy chorus of "Can't Buy Me Love" and the cryptic chords of "Norwegian Wood," I forget what I'm walking away from and that I don't know where I'm going. I forget even my name.

.....

It's a question that never climbs up my throat and out my lips. Am I the weight that broke my parents' branch? Although it's never been uttered aloud, it's one I know the answer to.

After a collecting breath, I turn away. The right wing is full of old furniture, boxes with labels in Nana's curling script, vintage lamps and vases. I even spot a crystal chandelier like the one in the dining room and a set of ceramic mixing bowls.

.....

But now I know that
no amount of listening
or trying or changing
would make me the son
Dad wanted, because a
baseball player, a son, a
boy, is not what I am.

.....

I'll be in enough trouble for skipping school, I figure, and I don't want something broken on my conscience too. I turn into the smaller, darker left wing, where I use my phone flashlight to find the pull chain. Soon a single flickering bulb fills the 6 foot space, but it's a warm one.

In one corner is the brick chimney, in the other, a plush purple armchair. Along one wall is a weathered wooden chest. I cross

the room to it and attempt to lift the handle. It doesn't budge.

Despite the thick layer of dust, whatever is inside calls to me, but I can't quite recall why. Last time I stood here, I was so much smaller. Wait. I crouch down, folding long legs underneath me, and see a small gold button below the handle. I press into it and lift, and yes. The hinges squeak as the chest unlocks and I squeak along with them.

Inside, a yellowing gauzy veil is draped over everything else. Nana's low voice rises to the surface of my mind.

"A bride fills a hope chest with everything she'll need for her life after marriage," Nana told me. "When your grandfather and I moved here and I unpacked it, I filled it with everything I wanted to remember from my wedding day."

Sure enough, underneath the veil I see it all: dainty white heels, pressed lavender, an angel cake recipe in the same writing as the boxes.

I'm examining the goofy bride and groom cake topper when I see the best item: a gown fit for a queen, even at the bottom of this musty chest.

I gasp, inhaling dust and spluttering as I remember more. Little me held this dress up to myself and spun until Nana told me not to drag the sparkling hem on the floor. I marveled at it in the cracked mirror hung high on the wall - still there.

Almost involuntarily, I pick up the dress and slowly unfold it. With shaking hands, I pull off my t-shirt, closing my eyes so I don't have to see the scrawny body I've come to hate. And then, before I can change my mind, I pull the dress over my head and open my eyes.

Some small animal noise escapes me when I see myself. It's loose at my chest and short at my ankles, but it's on. The once-white silk has faded to a creamy color that compliments my hair, especially when I pull the elastic out and it falls around my shoulders.

The flowing silk skirt hides my angular hips and swirls around me. Tugging off my jeans, I realize it's the softest clothing I've ever worn.

It's so beautiful. Too beautiful. My eyes sting as I remember I'm not beautiful and I shouldn't want to be.

I pull a thick book off the shelf to my right to distract myself. Too late, I realize it's a photo album, showing Mom's highschool years all the way through her 20s. There's senior prom on Dad's arm, and I immediately notice how wide their smiles are. Then I see my dad's unruly curls, and his young face that looks so much like mine. Nausea rises like a tide.

I turn pages, and there's Mom, pregnant. Dad's not in this one, but Mom's smile has dimmed, and there are circles under her eyes. Already, I'm causing problems.

The album ends with a photo of my dad kneeling behind 5-year-old me. He's wearing a catcher's glove and smiling for the camera, his head close enough to mine that he probably just gave me a stern talking-to about not ducking away from the ball.

And yet I'm looking off, at something beyond the camera. Little me couldn't care less, and my hair is already longer than his.

Something clicks into place, and tears stream down my face in earnest.

If I had listened to him-

If I had tried harder-

If I had been more-

But now I know that no amount of listening or trying or changing would make me the son Dad wanted, because a baseball player, a son, a

boy, is not what I am. I break all over again, and I have to swallow the bile creeping up my throat as I sob.

That's when I hear the door swing open and panicked footsteps on the stairs.

Mom is suddenly in front of me, Nana at her heels. Nana lets out a string of curses, and Mom doesn't even shoot her a look before she's holding me on the ground.

"Oh, baby," she murmurs into my hair. "Oh, baby."

Her tears mix with mine and her clean, meadowy perfume fills my nostrils.

Nana wraps her arms around us and asks calmly, "What's going on?"

She says my father's name, the name I'm supposed to carry and live up to. I cry harder.

"Why does that make you cry?" Mom asks. "Talk to us, baby. You've been so quiet, and I should've—" Her voice breaks, but she continues. "I should've asked you about it. I should've done something before you skipped school and gave us the scare of our lives."

All I can do is whisper how sorry I am.

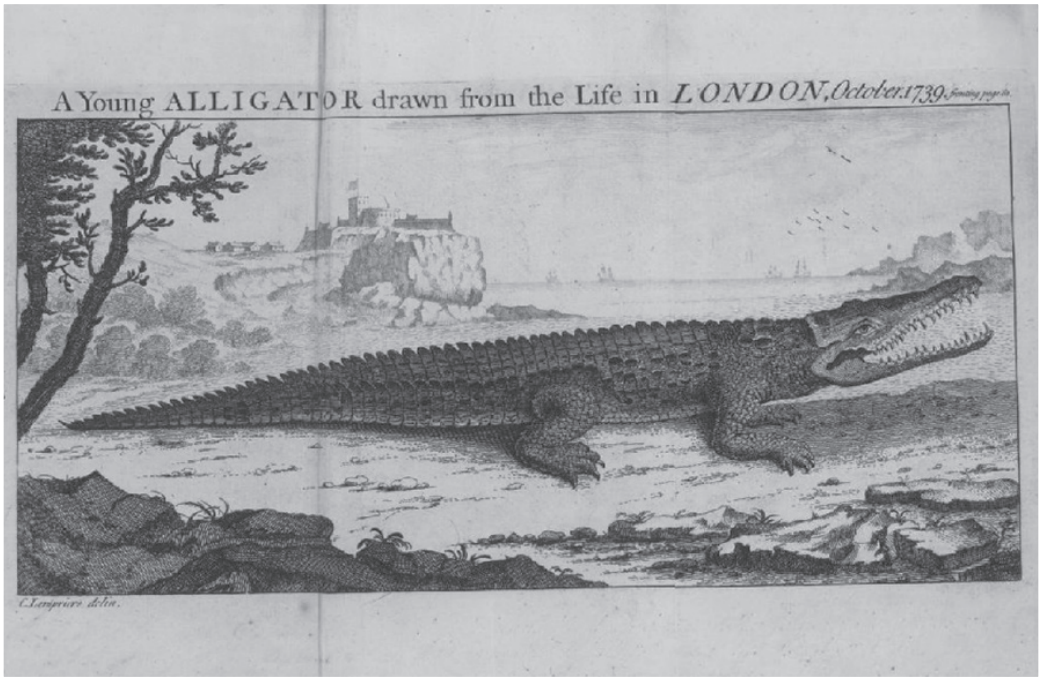
"No, baby. I'm sorry. I'm so—"

She's cut off by the *bzzt* of her phone. When I see the caller ID, I'm confused, because I'm not calling her. Then I realize who it is.

"You've got to be—" Nana says. Mom silences both her and the call by saying, "He's three weeks overdue on child support. Now is really not the time."

The sets of arms holding me are both so strong. For the first time, it occurs to me that my father may have left, but these women never have. Never echoed his criticisms. Never let him back in. Never told me to keep my eye on the ball. Never tried to change me. And they never would.

I don't know how long we cry in a heap on the floor. Eventually, when my tears slow, Mom plants a kiss on my head with a questioning look in her eyes. I smooth the silk of the dress and start to talk.



A Young Alligator drawn from the Life in London, October. 1739

DATE: 1726, PLACE: London, MATERIAL: Ink on paper

Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

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The Journey

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by Karuna Lohmann

January 14th, 2200

Dear MTS Committee,

I don't know whether I'll regret writing this letter in years to come, but I've made up my mind.

Let me take you back to yesterday, 2:30 pm.

The school bell rang. My best friend Salima and I joined the throng of students jostling toward the ladders that led down to the parking pier where our boats were moored. Salima lingered by one of the stilts on which our schoolhouse was mounted. She wanted to chat, but I left in a hurry so I'd have time to collect our water ration and be home before nightfall so my grandfather wouldn't worry. Seven years ago, when I was nine, my dad and mom, Dadu and Dida's only daughter, were shot while protesting for stricter climate legislation. Ever since, Dadu had become terrified of losing me and Hasina too.

The sky blushed with the last hours of daylight. Waves sloshed against my boat's hull as I rowed to Terminal 315, where the poorest Rhode Islanders received their government-mandated water rations.

I docked and took my place at the end of the river of people winding towards the water terminal. Dadu said it had been different when he first immigrated. People could buy bottled water whenever they wanted - as much as they wanted.

At last I reached the front of the line. The water officer checked my iris for identification although he saw me every day, and then filled my half-gallon jug. He never smiled or greeted me, but I always thanked him. My grandparents insisted it was our culture to be polite, even if others were rude.



On the way back to the boat anchorage, I passed a little girl struggling to carry her water jug. Her large eyes and skinny frame reminded me of my twelve-year old sister Hasina.

“Can I help you with that?” I said.

She didn’t look up.

I raised my voice and asked again.

She flinched. Her eyes darted up at me. Was she scared I was a thief? Or was she an immigrant who didn’t understand English? Bad as things were in America, Dadu said it was much worse in some other countries. So people still came here, hoping for a better life.

“I just want to help,” I said softly.

After a few moments, the girl handed me her jug. She led me away from the terminal. By the time we reached the tent city where she lived,

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The memory of the little girl haunted me as I rowed back home under a sky spangled with stars that glittered like sequins.

.....

the sky had darkened to a deep satin blue.

“Home!” she lifted a tattered tent flap.

An elderly man stepped out, leaning shakily on a cane. I set their jug down and he bowed his head in gratitude. The girl hugged me tightly around my waist. My chest clenched.

The memory of the little girl haunted me as I rowed back home under a sky spangled with stars that glittered like sequins. Dadu was going to be so angry at me. Oh well. I sighed, tying the mooring line of the rowboat around the cold metal cleat by the door to our houseboat.

I pushed hard against the front door. The bottom of the door scraped across the rough floorboards, swollen from last week’s torrential rain.

The instant the door groaned open, my little sister ran over, her face concerned.

“Naila! Are you okay? It’s so late!”

“Sorry, Hasina.”

“I’m so glad you’re home. Dadu went to get our food rations an hour ago but he still hasn’t come back,” Hasina said.

“He’ll be fine,” I said to ease Hasina’s worry. “I’ll make dinner. How’s Dida?”

Hasina shrugged and retreated into a corner to study. My grandmother sat on her bunk bed talking to herself in Bangla.

Dadu was never late. My breath hitched and my heart pulsed double-time. But sitting around being scared wouldn’t help anyone. I opened the cupboard above the stove and pulled out a leftover package of crickets from yesterday’s ration. I turned the stove on and emptied the crickets into the frying pan, my insides roiling as a wing came off. I hated the pitiful look in their eyes, as if they were begging me to stop. I roasted them quickly.

After the wildfires had spiraled out of control, and the earth had heated up faster than anyone had imagined, farmers had either been getting downpours or drought. Crops had failed. People starved in so many countries. I ought to be glad we had anything to eat at all.

“Dinner’s ready,” I called.

Dida shuffled over.

“Salaam,” she said formally.

I echoed her greeting.

We sat at the rickety table. My leg bounced up and down nervously under the table. Where was Dadu? I bit into a cricket, trying not to gag as its smoked flavor filled my mouth.

Dida hadn’t touched her plate.

I sighed. “Please eat, Dida.”

She didn’t react.

I squinted out the window at the water, searching for a rowboat. Yes! At last! A vessel bobbed closer and closer on the silver-crested waves.

“Dadu!” I dashed to the door. Hasina ran out after me. We stood together on the deck of our houseboat. I squeezed Hasina’s hand as Dadu docked. I helped him out of his rowboat. The weight of stress fell off me as he ducked through the doorway.

Dadu hugged me and Hasina and then handed me a bag. I peered into it. Seaweed! I put some on Dida’s plate.

She met my eyes. “Thank you, Taslima.”

I looked at Dadu. “Who’s Taslima?” I whispered.

Dadu averted his gaze. He had never ignored my questions before. It felt as if he was somewhere else entirely, in a world of his own. It scared me.

The first time Dida hadn’t recognized me, I thought she was



trying to be funny. Later, I'd cried. Now, I accepted that she was slowly losing her memory. But she usually called me by my mother's name, Nazreen. Not Taslima.

I cleared the dishes with Hasina and she climbed into her bunk to sleep. Dadu was still sitting silently at the table. His eyes were red as if he had been crying.

"Dadu," I repeated. "Who's Taslima?"

He stared out the window but finally answered, "You know I had to leave my beloved country, Bangladesh, because it was swallowed by rising sea levels. Mangrove forests where I had played as a child drowned. A flood destroyed my village. All that remained were skeletons of houses floating on the water."

"I spent my savings on tickets to America for your Dida and I. But I never told you - she didn't want to come with me because she had a little sister called Taslima, whom she didn't want to leave behind."

"I persuaded her to come. I promised we would go back and rescue Taslima."

"When I had finally saved up enough money to bring Taslima to America, another storm ravaged Bangladesh. We tried to find Taslima, but - " Dadu's face crumpled and his shoulders, which to me looked strong enough to carry the world, sagged.

I put my arm around him.

"I'm sorry to share this sad story the night before your big day, Naila. I was too ashamed to speak of it - but maybe it's good I did." He smiled sadly. "Sleep well and don't worry about me."

"Good night, Dadu."

I got into my bunk. The one above mine creaked as my sister rolled over.

"Naila?" she asked tentatively.

I could vaguely make out her face peering down at me. "Yeah?"

"I'll be praying really hard that you win tomorrow," my sister said.

I smiled into the darkness. "Thank you, Hasina. That means a lot to me."

I slept fitfully, disturbed by a nightmare. Hasina's deep brown eyes were looking up at me. As she reached out to lace her trusting fingers through mine, we were pulled apart. Her figure became smaller and smaller, until it was a solitary speck, lonely as the first star in a night sky. In my dream,

I was leaving her behind, like Dadu had left Taslima.

I rose early the next morning and picked out the silk headscarf with the smoky-red martian hue for good luck. After saying goodbye to Dida and Dadu, Hasina left for her school and I rowed to mine.

Salima met me at the boat dock and we found Ms. Wilson, to thank her before the announcements began.

“We know students from the houseboat sector have never won before, but we also know you’re the best teacher,” I said.

“She stole the words out of my mouth!” Salima said.

Ms. Wilson teared up. “You both deserve it so much, not only for the quality of your entries but for the people you are. If the judging was fair, you would get it. I keep hoping they won’t be biased. And regardless of what happens, I want you both to know that I am so proud of you.”

The school assembly began.

The cavernous room hummed with chatter until the principal walked to the podium. “Good morning. Today, as you all know, the winners of the Mars Ticket Scholarship will be announced.”

.....
The cavernous room
hummed with chatter
until the principal
walked to the podium.
.....

She turned on the old radio and we listened to the crackle of static through the even older loudspeakers as we waited to hear the winner’s name. I could feel the pressure in the room mount. The air felt like glass threatening to shatter from the tension. This ticket was our only hope for a better future. We all dreamed of a better life on Mars.

My palms grew sweaty with apprehension. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest like a caged bird frantically trying to break free.

The announcer’s voice came over the loudspeakers. “Congratulations to the 2200 runner up... Salima Jackson.”

It felt as if the tightrope of hope I’d been walking had torn and I was falling into an abyss below. If she was runner up, there was no way I could be the winner. Two people from the houseboat sector? That was impossible.

As runner up, Salima wouldn’t go to Mars. But she would get some money.

For a moment, I couldn't help but think, why wasn't it me? But as soon as the thought crossed my mind, I looked down, ashamed. Salima deserved this more than me. She never would have thought such a thing if I had won.

In ninth grade, when we got our Finals back, Salima had asked, "How did you do?" She was new to our school, so I didn't know her well yet.

"Alright, thanks!" I replied.

She raised her eyebrows and snatched my paper out of my hands. "WOW!" She smiled at my scores. "You beat me as usual! I knew it! You're too modest. If I were you, I'd be telling everyone how well I did." She laughed. "Well, I guess I'll have to do that for you."

At school the next day, a bunch of Salima's friends congratulated me, so I knew she'd been as good as her word. Ever since, we had been best friends.

I was glad for Salima.

People began clapping. I whistled and gave her a little push.

"Congratulations, Salima."

She looked at me, speechless, shaking her head.

Through the soles of my sneakers, I felt the floor vibrate, sending tremors up and down my legs, as the announcer's voice came through the loudspeakers again. "Congratulations to the 2200 winner of the Mars Ticket Scholarship... Naila Khan."

I froze. Only my eyes moved, flickering around the room. I was one of thousands. And I was from the houseboat sector, too! Was I dreaming? Had the committee really picked the winner and runner up from our sector? But the announcer was describing the very letter I had submitted, about how my grandparents bravely left Bangladesh to begin a new life in Rhode Island and how, if I was awarded the scholarship to Mars, I'd make them proud by following their example of leaving behind the only home they'd known to begin life elsewhere.

"Go, Naila!" a voice shouted above the cheering and applause - Salima's, of course. "All you, girl."

The smile in Salima's voice woke me from my disbelief. I could feel Salima's pride and happiness radiating out of her like sunbeams, filling me with warmth. And then I felt her hugging me tight.

"We'd better go up to the podium," Salima said.

I felt thousands of eyes on me as we made our way to the front. The staccato clicking of my heels echoed as I walked up the wooden steps.

The announcer handed me a golden certificate imprinted with Mars Ticket Scholarship Winner, 2200 and my name below it in an embossed cursive script. She said they'd send me my ticket as soon as I wrote an acceptance letter to the committee.

Then Salima and I posed for photos, our arms slung around each other as we held up our certificates, which gleamed in the flash of the principal's camera.

I felt so light, as if I was walking on the moon. As if I was spreading wings of hope and taking flight.

Buoyed by my excitement, my row home felt shorter than usual. Soon, I could make out the outline of our house and was close enough to see it rocking back and forth on the waves. As I approached, I could make out a small figure standing on the deck, eagerly waving at me.

I knew it was Hasina. But instead of Hasina, I felt I was seeing the young girl I had helped yesterday, whose only family was her grandfather. Instead of the sound of the waves, I heard Dadu's voice from yesterday, choking up as he told me about Taslima.

So much happened in that one moment. So much changed.

When Hasina asked me how it went, I lied to her.

"I have great news," I said. "Salima won!"

And I knew I could make this true. Because I could decline the scholarship.

That's why I'm writing now. I'm turning down the ticket. I will not go to Mars and leave Hasina to care for Dadu and Dida without me. I cannot risk something happening to her while I'm gone. I couldn't bear parting with her, knowing I could have chosen to stay.

According to the rules, the ticket will be given to the runner-up instead. Maybe someday, Salima will find a way to bring us to Mars too. But even if she doesn't, I will be content because I will be with Hasina, and Salima will have a better future in our Martian colony.

Thank you again for the honor of bestowing the Mars Ticket Scholarship on me. I hope you will understand why I am declining it.

Sincerely,

Naila Khan



.....

Culicidae

.....

.....

by Annabel Rarick

For my thirteenth birthday, I got a new pair of AirPods and a little sister. The AirPods, I asked for. The sister, not so much.

Bridgette didn't arrive in my life the way most children do; she was no wrinkled red bundle, delivered by stork onto my doorstep, nor was she an infant at all, capable of being wrangled into a fluffy headband for pictures or stuffed into a bassinet to greet me with pudgy legs and dimples. There was no fanfare, really, to Bridgette. No balloons. She entered my life like a Jehovah's Witness. One day I opened my door and she was just there.

With her came a middle-aged man named Andrew, who had endeared himself to my mother with big brown eyes, a mildly impressive physique, and a voice that rarely rose above a whisper. He was a nice foil to my own father, whose arrogant timbre was capable of bulldozing most conversations.

Andy dropped his seven-year-old daughter off on a Saturday, and that was that. Bridgette and I went from being vaguely acquainted to siblings in just one month, but neither of us minded. It was like we'd crossed some unspoken threshold when I zippered her flower girl dress at the wedding. We were sisters. We acted accordingly.

In the four years since, not much about Bridgette has changed. I mean, she's gotten taller. She's nearly outpaced me in pencil marks on the dining room doorway. Someone else might call her lanky, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. There's nothing remotely ungraceful about Bridgette, with her heart-shaped face and thick blonde hair that transcend even the disadvantages of a gap-toothed smile and braces. Sometimes, selfishly, I worry that she'll grow up to be prettier than I am.

"What are you staring at?" Bridgette asks irritably from across the kitchen table, scrunching up her face so her lips kiss the bottom of her nose.

"Relax," I say, then flick a piece of penne pasta at her, but it bounces harmlessly off her cheek and falls limply to the placemat below. Shame. "I was just thinking about how you should be a shampoo model or something. Right, Mom?"



"You're both beautiful girls," my mom says, without looking up from her phone.

Bridgette rubs a glistening smear of butter off of her cheek and glares at me. "CJ is being sarcastic," she says.

"No, seriously," I say, shoveling a forkful of pasta into my mouth. "Go get yourself an agent or something. Shit, I'll find one for you."

"Language," my mom interjects helpfully, then goes back to her article. Sometimes I wonder what the dinner table would be like without

Bridgette. With Andy working nights again, I think we'd all just sit in silence.

My phone buzzes with a message. Without looking, I know who it is. "Hey Mom, can I run out to pick something up?" I ask, tucking it away in my pocket. "It won't take long."

Across the table, Bridgette's gaze darts to me. I have a feeling she knows that it's Matt texting, but she doesn't say anything. Like most eleven-year-olds I know, she treats secrets like currency. I'm convinced she's just waiting for the right moment to cash in.

My mom sighs. "Just be quick. And make sure you have gas left over in the morning. I don't need a frantic call tomorrow when you

get stranded in the beach parking lot."

"Got it," I say, already pushing in my chair. "I'll be back soon."

"Don't hit any mailboxes," Bridgette calls out to me as I leave, giggling like it's the funniest thing in the world.

The drive to Wakefield only takes me ten minutes, but somehow it feels like crossing state lines. I watch as the small saltbox houses of our neighborhood in Narragansett rush past the window, soon replaced by beautiful green lawns and two story houses that boast fresh coats of paint. Matt's bedroom window is already propped open when I get there. The sticky June air is warm enough to accommodate mosquitoes, so by the time I climb the lattice into his second-floor bedroom, I'm covered in bites. My family jokes that I must have bad genetics or even worse karma. Something about me attracts them.

.....
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.....

"You're lucky I love you," I tease, as Matt helps me off the ledge into a dimly lit room, curtains drawn at every other window. Scattered across my arms and bare legs, the insect bites are already beginning to swell. At this time of year, it's hard not to feel like carrion.

"Very lucky," Matt agrees, his dimples reappearing at the sides of his mouth.

I've known Matthew Hayes since we were sophomores, but something about him is still exciting. He's one of those special people who feels foreign from every new angle, a kaleidoscope of personalities. When I first met him standing in the concession line at the Prout-Narragansett football game, I thought he was an athlete, with his broad shoulders and biceps. Seven months later, I see him as more of an artist, with his gentle hands and pianist's fingers.

Mostly, though, he's just Matthew Hayes, and that's good enough for me.

"I've got snacks and everything," he says proudly, fumbling around between crumpled bedsheets for the remote. Sure enough, his nightstand is piled high with bags of popcorn and Sour Patch Kids. "Help yourself."

Grinning, I pop a few kernels in my mouth as the opening notes of the *Jaws* theme start to trickle through his TV. I know it's one of Matt's favorite movies, but I've never been a big fan. Something about it has bothered me ever since I watched it for the first time at twelve years old and saw the smooth slope of Chrissy's bare breasts disappear below red waters. It's like the filmmakers were trying to twist her suffering into something seductive. I don't know. Sometimes Matt says I overreact.

I make myself comfortable at the foot of his bed, tugging my legs up onto the covers. He sinks down beside me, resting a hand on my thigh. It's endearing for about twenty minutes, before I get a cramp in my leg.

"Hey, Matt?" I ask, shifting slightly, but his hand doesn't leave my thigh. I weigh my options. I could make an excuse and get up from the bed, but he might take it personally. I could move his hand, but I think I'd miss the feeling of his skin against mine. The cramp isn't so bad, anyway.

"Never mind," I say, and Matt smiles, squeezing my thigh a little too hard.

We only make it halfway through the movie before my phone buzzes with a text from my mother, telling me I need to come home. "We can

In the reflection, Bridgette's eyes widen. It takes me a second to realize what she must be thinking.

"No, not like that," I backtrack quickly. "He was shutting his pickup door last week and didn't see me getting out. It was an accident, I promise."

"How do you not see someone getting out of your car?" Bridgette mutters under her breath, swiping one of my eyeliners to doodle on her arm. A wobbly smiley face comes to life in black charcoal. "Your boyfriend must be a real idiot, Ceej."

My stomach flips. "It was an accident," I repeat, more firmly this time, and snatch my eyeliner out of her hand. Bridgette takes a step back.

"I was just wondering," she says, her voice very small. Two thick braids snake down her back in a style reminiscent of the Wendy's logo, though I don't think she would ever forgive me if I made that comparison out loud. Standing across from her in the bathroom, it strikes me then how painfully young she is.

"Sorry," I say, flushed with sudden guilt. "I didn't mean to snap at you. Thanks for tying my bathing suit."

Before she can respond, my mother sticks her head in the doorway.

"Sorry to bother you guys," she says, in a tone that tells me she's bracing to deliver bad news. "CJ, I need you to take Bridgette with you to the beach tonight. She can't stay home by herself."

I open my mouth to argue, then shut it again.

The smell of saltwater follows us to a table on the pavilion, where we divvy up the cold doughboys Jazz picked up from Iggy's. Water drips from the ends of my hair onto my bare skin. With pruny hands, I wring out the excess.

"Bridge, don't you want to go for a swim?" I suggest gently, gesturing out at the seawall. "It's so nice out."

Bridgette's glance darts between me and Matt, side by side on the picnic bench. "No, I think I'll stay," she says, shifting in her seat.

.....
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.....

Jazz, oblivious, wraps an arm around Bridgette's shoulders and squeezes. "Here, you can have some of mine," she offers, pushing what's left of her doughboy toward my sister.

Matt clears his throat. "Then maybe CJ and I will head back down to the water," he says, with a meaningful look in my direction. "You'll keep an eye on the kid, right, Jazz?" Bridgette frowns at him.

Jazz shrugs, still licking powdered sugar off her fingertips. "I guess," she says, as I climb reluctantly off the bench, dusting sand off my thighs. "Wait a second, Ceej."

I stop in my tracks. "What's wrong?" I ask with surprise. "What, do I have something on my face?"

"No," Jazzy says, and leans over the table, brushing her thumb very lightly over my leg, where marks have formed in the shape of Matt's fingerprints.

"You've got a killer bruise here. You didn't know that?"

Matt goes very still. I feel my cheeks flush red with embarrassment. "Oh, it's nothing," I

say awkwardly. "He was just—"

Matt slaps me.

A sudden hush falls over the picnic table. I look down at my arm like it belongs to someone else. A handprint lingers there, splotchy and pink. Jazz blinks a few times but doesn't say anything, like she can't quite process what just happened. The beach suddenly exists in a vacuum. It's so quiet you'd think he backhanded me across the mouth.

"What?" Matt says, breaking the silence. His voice is reedy, like he's barely suppressing a laugh. This is funny to him, I realize. "There was a mosquito. Don't worry, I got it."

I sink back down to the bench, landing gracelessly on its rough wooden surface. My arm stings with the memory of Matt's knuckles. I don't remember what we were talking about before he slapped me. Maybe that's exactly why he did it.

Bridgette's eyes are wide and nervous. "I want to go home," she says

.....
The beach suddenly
exists in a vacuum.
It's so quiet you'd
think he backhanded
me across
the mouth.
.....

suddenly, untangling herself from Jazz's embrace. "CJ, can we leave?"

Blood rushes past my ears like static. "Sure," I say, avoiding Matt's gaze as I start gathering my things; keys, towel, backpack, what's left of my confidence. "Sorry guys. I'm gonna drive Bridgette home."

I plant a light kiss on Matt's cheek, but he tolerates my affection like an inconvenience. Jazz starts stacking our paper plates, mumbling something about needing to clean up. I ask Matt if he wants me to drop him off at home, but he says he'd rather stay for the sunset. "You guys go," he says, smiling like nothing's wrong. In this fading light, his eyes remind me of melting honey.

"It really is mosquito season, you know," I tell Bridgette as we walk toward the car. She hugs her folded sweatshirt to her chest like a pillow. "And I wasn't wearing bug spray."

I move to open the passenger door, but Bridget nudges it shut with her elbow. "Here," she says, holding out her hand. "Matt must have missed."

In her palm lies the bloodless corpse of a mosquito, one broken wing fluttering in the breeze.

Brilliant Light

by Gabrielle Taillon

Suspended from the head of the doorway, clusters of puka beads are strung into twine curtains, cool on the wind-chilled skin of my face as I step through. Cluttered magazines stained by various pigments decorate my sister Chelsea's mid century modern styled desk. Nail polish fumes intoxicate the air so that when I breathe in, I feel salt hit my throat. Posters of garage bands sharply contrast 10 year old baby pink walls, and small porcelain jars of succulents litter the hardwood floor. It is December, 2014. I am eleven years old, and in four days, my older sister will leave our Rhode Island duplex to ice skate with a friend. Throwing my stolen yellow scarf around her neck, she will walk out our front door for the very last time. It will be the first winter of many without her, the first Christmas Chelsea is dead. The last thing I say to her is that I hate her. Regret will never stab me so mercilessly.

My name is Carissa Moretti, but you already know that. I am staring at an unfinished plywood wall, soon to be demolished. It is December, 2024 and I have a face, though it's a blurry one. Identity is difficult when you realize you are made of all of the women in your life, even those who have passed. That number has stacked over the past couple of years, though I must admit I didn't realize the strength of my resemblance to relatives in West Virginia, women only I see for funerals and weddings, until I began contemplating my own features obsessively, hungrily searching for myself, terrified when I dreamt of looking in a mirror and not conjuring up a reflection.

Janis was an aunt on my cousin's side. All I really knew of her were her big square teeth and the flask she'd sneak out of her jacket around the holidays, when I was much younger, even before the water took Chelsea. She died about a month ago and was buried here, in Cranston, despite having spent most of her adult life in Winchester. Something about wanting to be with her parents again. At the wake, the women swarmed through the parlor,

heaves of them with loud voices somehow simultaneously melodious and ear-bleeding. Most with brown eyes and big hair, not a floorboard let be by the rambunctious crowd. If you had been there, I would've joked about the

.....
If I were not so
focused in my mind
and were to look into a
mirror rather than the
plywood, I would find
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inside of myself.
.....

confirmation- *just because we can't cook doesn't mean we're not Italian.* Had you had been there, you would've looked at these women and smiled that upside down smile, telling me not to joke at a time like this, lip quirking so that the single dimple on your left cheek disagreed with your choice of words, like a dent in the moon oblivious to man's disturbance.

If I were not so focused in my mind and were to look into a mirror rather than the plywood, I would find each of the women inside of myself. I might mention my grandmother and her nephew's sister. The cousin I grew up with, the woman who worked at the deli when we were

kids and had married into the family. Even deprived of blood relation and a solid family tree, I feel they are all part of me. My sister, of course, who I still talk to at night, on Christmas, and whenever I wear a scarf or anything yellow. I think of my face and I think of a crowd. A conjoined, somewhat disjointed art piece in which each color bears resemblance to a woman I have known.

I think about death too much, that is for sure. Almost as much as I think about women and what it means to be who we are. I wish I were intelligent enough to spew feminist wisdom, but I'd rather keep my mouth shut and admire those more articulate than make a mockery of something so sacred.

A dent is present opposite to where I stand in this room- Andrew and his mercurial temper. He's a man, of course, but sometimes I think he gets us girls in a way the others don't. Maybe it's because I've known him so well for all of my life as he has known me.

Maybe I just find myself to be like him. After all, we share our father's anger and appreciation for 70's music. We share our eyes like almonds and our fists wound tight. I cannot blame him for the wall when I know I've done

the same. We'll take a hammer to it eventually. Why not punch it a little first? I cannot tell if it's cruel or smart. I'm unsure if I'm more like you or my father.

Andrew is at the drugstore buying candy and cigarettes. Maybe if I'm lucky he'll snatch me a Snickers. If I were to so much as glance at the lighter he would smack my shoulder, because he's my older brother, and a brother's vices are his own- he must protect his sister from them, or something like that.

I am trying to be less-hyper aware of the sentiment behind this building. I am attempting to view this wall as a wall, to see this wreck as it is, rather than what it has been for me.

I keep my mind blurry like my face. That is how it has been these last few days. Andrew smokes, I pace around the corridor. I trip and he laughs at me, I do not tell him how much I love him, but he knows it anyway, so I am not bothered. I brush my teeth at the hotel in the morning and shower this place off of myself at night. I box the photographs like they are blocks of cardboard and answer the landline like a proper receptionist. I tell myself to drink more water and forget. I go through your jewelry box and try not to cry. I pass Chelsea's room and resent myself for wiping the personality from it. Almost ten years you'd kept it exactly the same, the door locked and the windows shut. I scrub glitter from the heater and destroy the last living piece of my sister. Andrew tells me not to feel so guilty, so I tell him I do not feel anything, and it is true, half of the time. I wrap the puka bead curtains in a sturdy box from the Job Lot in Johnston and place it in the front seat of my car, certain it will board the plane with me.

When Chelsea died, I threw up so many times for such a tired extent of time that the doctor had you convinced I was bulimic. I cried in your arms and soaked your favorite sweater with snot, spit in your face as you'd reason with me and fell asleep, a dead weight in your arms. Every night I would die beside you, every morning over my cereal. Only once did you cry, when I broke down at the laundromat and told you I blamed myself. You left the basket right there as if none of it mattered, drove us to the cinema and bought the most expensive, overpriced Del's frozen lemonade being offered. All of these times I would fall apart so publicly, and you stood by me, a gentle palm on my shoulder, a kiss to the forehead, an *I love you, goodnight*. I was eleven when my sister died, and I was so caught up in the terror of it all that I failed to acknowledge that the girl who had fallen through the ice was your daughter. And you loved her as you loved Andrew and I. And you saw yourself in her face. And you were so strong for me even as your heart shredded.

When I received the call from Dad, it was the first day of November- a date I only know because it had been Halloween, so late in the night it was morning. I was in Sacramento with Jillian, drunk and laughing on her kitchen floor. She was kissing my face and mocking politicians. We were out of our minds by the time his name lit up the screen of my phone.

I don't consider myself to be a religious person but something universal touched my soul in the moment. Impossibly sobered even just for a second, I knew before picking up. When he confirmed my suspicion, so malignant and heartlessly cruel that I could barely align it to any version of you, I threw up just as I had with Chelsea.

The first night, Jillian held my hair back as I leant over the toilet, disposing of our mistakes and apparently my grief all at once. On the second day, I did not speak. I watched reruns of *Friends* and let my eyes gloss over California news stations, picking dried mascara from my eyes and blending the black crust between my fingers, watching it stain my skin to charcoal. By the fourth day, Jillian was calling me heartless. By the fifth I had booked a plane ticket back home.

Rhode Island. T.F Green airport and that hotdog place I hate. Two flights from Sacramento, a hold over in D.C., I was absolutely exhausted by the time I dialed Andrew. I don't recall feeling any differently than I had for the past five days- feelings so fatigued that they camouflaged dread.

My brother is a good man. An accountant in Providence, a beautiful wife and a baby on the way. The boy I'd wrestle in the kitchen during our primary school days has remained just as close to me as he'd been throughout our childhood, only in a different way.

We have this rule where we call every Sunday. It is a rule often broken. Still, I find his contact to be the one I most commonly message, and my phone is flooded with pictures of his bull terrier and screenshots of texts that left me snorting with laughter.

Beside Gate 7, we did not hug and he did not leave the car. Two suitcases, I had with me. My good clothes and my laptop and other scattered essentials. After all, my life is in Sacramento; this trip back was supposed to be just that- a departure with a destination, a week-long getaway I felt obligated towards.

It has been nearly two months since the airport. A week blends into three and suddenly, the holidays are back again. Christmas in Rhode Island makes me sick, significantly more sick than anywhere else.

The wake was already organized by the time Andrew left the hotel. The funeral took a bit longer, just because he wanted to make sure you'd be buried somewhere beautiful. Andrew is good like that, always has been. Responsible, calm where I am fleeting, cautious where I am often calamitous. He is quieter than most, though a solid personality, and agreeable enough I can rarely stay angry with him for more than a few hours.

It's December now, a decade since it started. I know saying that is not fair to anyone, not even myself. It is rude to mark the last month with Chelsea as the beginning of a painful segment of time, considering she is gone and I am here. The old cat by the farm no longer greets me as I walk down the street when I choke on dust cleaning the old house, and need an excuse to leave. Even paint on the walls peels around the corners. I am here and you are not. It feels insensitive to complain.

So we take the higher route, or so we tell ourselves. Andrew and I, we clean the house and call the contractors. We pull you from the building and we let you go. We mourn of course, he does often, in explosive tendencies and disruptive meltdowns from stubbing his toe in which he slides down walls and punches himself, blaming inanimate objects for a death inevitable.

I am just about to call him in request of the candy bar when he walks through the doorway, deprived of its hinges.

"Let's go," he states, face even.

I make that face I make because I never learned how to raise an eyebrow, but desire the same effect. I laugh- once, short, humorously. My breath, a cloud in front of me.

"Out of here. Now."

He says it like it is easy. And I stop for a moment because maybe it is.

Losing you, of course, is tragic. So impossibly human it feels inhumane. But walking out these doors, now that is very much possible. And so, for no apparent reason at all, and every reason unsaid, I shrug my shoulders and follow him.

.....
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.....

We wind up by the church in Greenville. It is not the closest to the old house, nor is it a church we'd ever attended, other than the mass ten years after our Grandfather died, when I was nine and more concerned with the rice krispie treats I'd brought for the gathering at our grandmother's afterwards.

Andrew parks the car by a restaurant I haven't been to in years, and blows into his hands, disposing them into the pockets of his windbreaker. We walk across the street and by the fire-station, not exchanging any words. It isn't too late, but the sun's been setting by five lately.

The town is decorated for Christmas, lights strung out and down planks aligning the walls of local businesses. The church bell rings as the hour closes, and a gathering of girl scouts are distracted from their task, instead engaging in a snowball fight using slush as ammunition.

.....
Emotion builds up
in a way it hasn't
since that morning,
November 1st,
and I think I may
cry, but I end up
smiling in a way I'm
unable to stop.
.....

I pull out a ten and purchase two boxes of S'mores. The girl who hands me the cookies has a red nose and big green eyes. Her auburn hair braided in two is wet from the snowball fight. She tells me she loves my scarf, yellow and handwoven. I wrap a cold hand around it, and thank her. Emotion builds up in a way it hasn't since that morning, November 1st, and I think I may cry, but I end up smiling in a way I'm unable to stop.

"Have a nice Christmas," I tell her.

Andrew gives me this look after the interaction, once we are walking again.

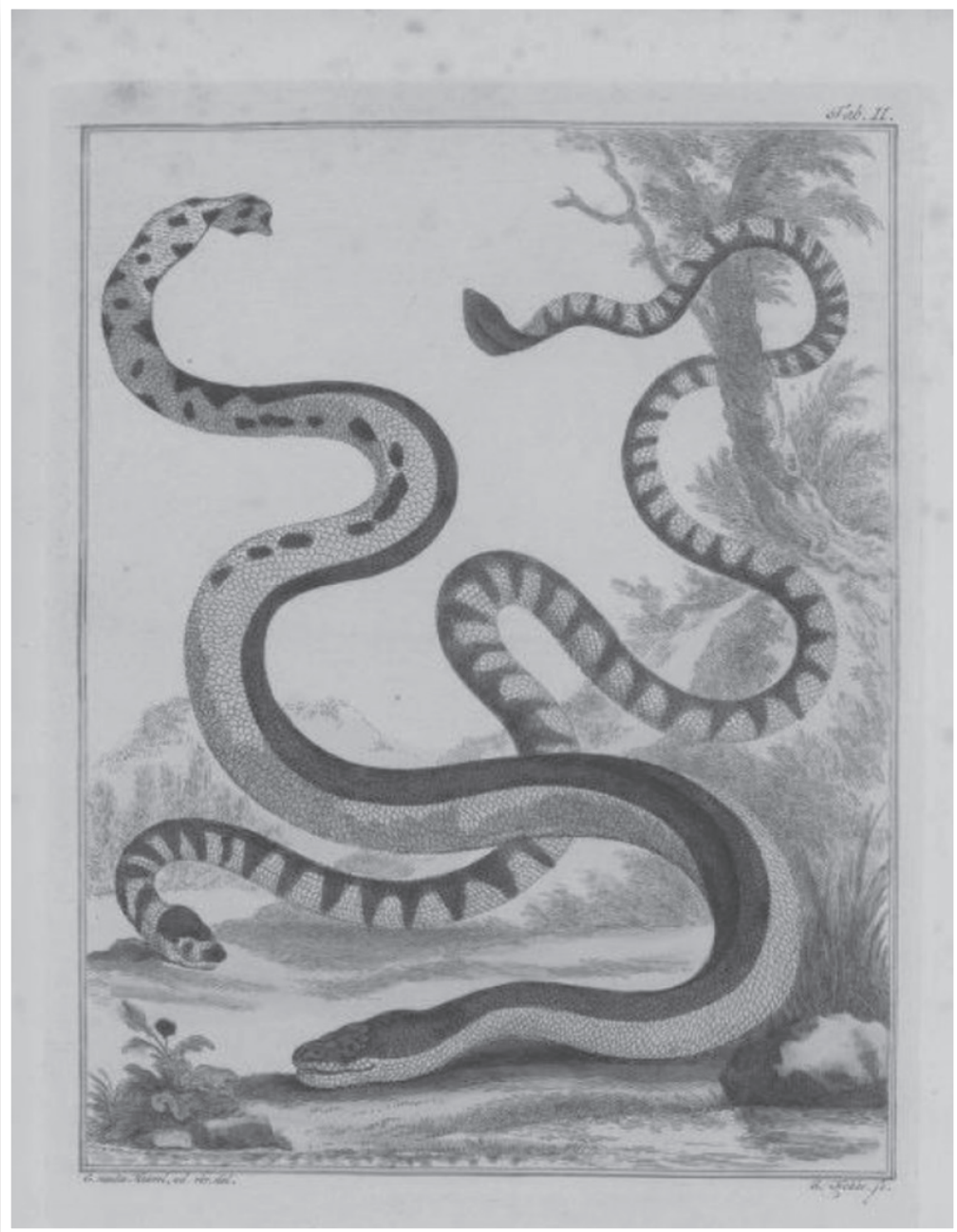
"You're alright, you know."

I laugh wetly and wipe my eyes, reminded of the declaration you'd so often make.

.....
Music is playing, though I don't know where from. The heavy blanket of night cannot defeat this bustling community. *It will not suffocate me*, I think. It is beautiful here, so beautiful.

I know this is not something I can tell myself I will get over. You cannot forget the woman who gave you your life. I can shower thousands of times and when I die, my bones will still wash up in Rhode Island.

To feel so deeply, I think I am grateful for.



Sea snakes or sea kraits

DATE: 1774, PLACE: Amsterdam, MATERIAL: Ink on paper
Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University



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**NOTABLE
STORIES**

**WRITTEN BY
RHODE ISLAND
STUDENTS**

The Laughing Death

by Audrey Adams

Tonight was it. The end. Their last night of life.

They knew it, all of them did; four strangers watching as the clock ticked down to midnight.

The streets were empty. Everyone else had fled the city, seeking refuge in the neighboring towns. Or else they were huddled in their homes clinging tearfully to their loved ones.

These four strangers had no one to run home to. They had no will or energy to run anywhere at all.

So instead they were here, spending their final hours in the artificial lights of a New York style diner.

The Providence Journal had chronicled the attacks from their inception in 1942. At first it had been the most obvious targets—Washington DC, New York City, Chicago—and now, months later, the data pointed to Providence as the next target.

No one knew who was behind the attacks. Oh, there were theories: the Russians, terrorists, aliens from outer space.

The exact details of the occurrences were muddy as well. The papers had nicknamed them “The Laughing Death.” Eyewitnesses from neighboring cities repeatedly reported a joyous, merry laughter on the night of each incident, like the sounds of a party, only to wake up the next morning to find the untouched city littered with bodies.

The bodies within the diner were alive...for now. Behind the counter stood the soda jerk, a young man in his twenties, his face bright and open, not yet hardened with the pain of life. His attempts at conversation were half-hearted but persistent as he mixed a drink for the first of the customers.

This man reminded the soda jerk of his father, a businessman of some sort, with the sort of hawk-like nose that excelled at smelling money but

nothing much else. His eyes were shadowed by the brim of his grey fedora and a cigarette balanced lazily between his fingertips.

Beside the man sat a woman: sunset red dress, copper hair, makeup so thick and garish it could only belong to a woman of the stage. Or perhaps just a woman with secrets. She stared off somewhere in the distance, her expression unreadable.

The final customer was the strangest of them all, for the very reason that he was the most ordinary. He was the kind of man you'd see walking down the street on the way to the office, or perhaps on the way home to his wife and children. Yet here he was, alone. Shoulders hunched. Eyes half closed. Slowly breathing out hope and choking up despair.

The silence was thick and suffocating, and the four played it like a little game: who could withstand the torture, who'd be the first to give in? The soda jerk, young and weak, soon buckled under the weight and spoke. "Do you think it will hurt?"

The others let the question hang in the air, its broken notes echoing off the diner's walls. Then after a pause just long enough to be uncomfortable, but not too long as to break the delicate rules of etiquette, one of the customers answered with a question of his own.

"Are you scared?" It was the man sitting alone, his voice deeper and softer than expected.

"No—no, I'm not scared," said the young man behind the counter. He would have fooled most people, but the lone man had been a politician once, and the woman an actress, and the other man a gambler, and they all could hear the tremor in his voice, see his pupils dilate in fear.

"What's your name, son?" asked the man sitting alone.

"Peter," answered the boy, "Peter Hill."

"Otto Lloyd," said the lone man, nodding his head in introduction.

"Peter, dear, why aren't you at home with your family?" asked the woman in the red dress. "Surely you have someplace better to be than here with us old failures."

"This is my shift and I had to show up—" the realization hit him like a blow to the stomach, knocking the breath out of him. "But of course," he choked on air, "that doesn't really matter anymore, does it?"

The adults shook their heads, eyes pools of pity.

"And I don't have anyone to run to," Peter continued, stronger now. "I

don't need them. I live my own life and make my own money." He said it like a mantra he'd repeated to himself many times.

"Ha!" said the man with the cigarette, causing them all to jump at the sudden forcefulness. "Ha! Oh, young man, you are still a child. Horace Grime, pleasure to meet you," he pumped the boy's hand enthusiastically. "But ha! My dear boy, can't you see that's the reason we're all here tonight? We all made the same mistake, told ourselves the same lie: 'make your own money,' 'don't need anyone else.' I had the same dream: power and riches. And I did it—climbed up the ranks, taking out the competition one swindle at a time. But now what've I got? A heart full of cash and a bank vault full of guilt. Ms. Jaeger would understand." He turned to the woman beside him, sat back in his chair, and took a long draw from his cigarette.

"Jaeger as in Rosalee Jaeger, the opera star?" Peter Hill asked, his face agape in childlike awe.

"The very same." Her speaking voice was weary and hollow, ironic in light of her profession. "Horace is right. My mother told me I loved to sing as a child. I'll have to take her word for it, because later it was never about the singing—" she removed a hundred dollar bill from her purse and tossed it to the countertop: — "and it was never about what I loved." She gently slid the cigarette from Horace Grime's fingers, placed the lit end against the bill, and blew.

The room was impossibly still, as though it were a painting, as the edges of the paper curled in, green turned to grey, and smoke rose from the bill like a ghost from a corpse.

"But there must have been something," Peter pleaded, "there must have been something more to your lives. At least you all did something. Ms. Jaeger—your performances, they must have made people happy. And even if you truly did nothing, at least you all had the chance. The chance to live. I...I'm—" he blinked hard and swiped angrily at an invisible tear.

"You're the luckiest of us all is what you are," said the lone man, Otto Lloyd. "Tell me, did you think life was all dancing and drinking and marching into battle? You did, didn't you? Oh, poor boy, of course you did. I did too, when I was your age. Well, let me tell you something: it's all a lie. They tell you to make dreams when you're young only to crush them when you're old. The moment you lose those rose-tinted glasses, life hits you from behind and you never stop stumbling. There's no peace to be preached, no paradise

to be reached, and true love is truly a myth. Let me tell you, son, you didn't miss a thing."

"He's wrong, Peter." Rosalee Jaeger's voice was steadier now, fuller. "You're right. There was something, a time I remember. For a while I convinced myself it was a dream, but maybe... It was the night after one of my performances, when I would often go outside to cool down from the sweat and the stage lights. I was sitting at the bus station, staring at the full moon, humming a lullaby. There was an old woman sitting beside me, and she smiled, and told me my voice reminded her of her daughter's. We talked a little and then just sat there together, gazing up at the moon. It just felt so...real, like she actually saw me as a person. And the emotion I felt—if it wasn't happy, then I'd call it...peaceful."

"I have something too," Horace Grime said after a respectful moment, "but first, son, let us have a drink. I don't think your boss will mind if it's on the house!" He chuckled softly to himself, clearly amused at his own pathetic wittiness.

The bottle was opened, shots were poured, and Horace Grime began: "I'd always wanted a son, a boy of my own. I'd tell him stories and take him fishing and to the movies. I never ended up having one. But one day I was walking in the park and I saw some kids playing baseball. I must've stood there watching them play for a good while before one of the kids came over and asked if I could play. Some strange power must've come over me, because I told him yes, and I did. By the end my suit was covered in dust and I must've pulled about ten muscles, but I was grinning. I was happy—strangely but utterly happy."

Now memories were pouring forth as fast and strong as the alcohol.

"I dreamed—"

"I danced—"

"I laughed—"

"I cried—"

"I loved—"

"I lied—"

"I lived."

Even Otto Lloyd cracked a small, rusty smile.

Only Peter Hill's face remained sullen.

Horace Grime was the first to notice: "What's wrong, son?"



"I just—" His voice hitched—a loose pebble—and the whole dam came crashing down. "I had so many plans and now I'll never get to do them." He was sobbing now, shaking. "I'll never get to travel the world; I'll never get to fall in love; I'll never get to be a father; I'll never—" he choked. "I'll never get to do anything with a real purpose, like all of you, and I never did. My life...my life was wasted."

"Peter, Peter, stop." Rosalee Jaeger placed her hand on his shoulder until his trembling stopped. "Peter, look at all of us. Look at our faces, look at our smiles. You did this, Peter. It was you."

Horace Grime smiled at the boy and raised his glass. "To Peter!"

"To Peter!"

"To Peter!"

"Thank you," Peter said, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. "Thank you, Rosalee, all of you."

"You know, my real name isn't Rosalee. That's my stage name. My real name...it's, well, it's Gretchen."

"Well then, Gretchen Jaeger, sing us a song!"

She hesitated for merely a breath before filling the room with a melody. And the four people, no longer strangers, grinned and drank and sang along.

And laughed, and laughed.

And laughed.



MOOSE DEER.

Moose Deer

DATE: 1784, PLACE: London, MATERIAL: Ink on paper
Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

A Warm Winter

by Emily Church

The sky was thick with clouds like lamb's wool, the early morning light dashing through the windows pale and chilling. The prematurely erected tree huddled in the corner of the living room as if it were grasping for warmth, while underneath, stacked presents, already grimy when touched, brushed the dry lower branches. The house was silent, but for the distant rhythm of the sea and for the rustling of Mrs. Moore's overcoat being pulled slowly over her thin shoulders.

Her quiet, tremulous voice hummed a carol she had sung for school once long ago, pausing every few notes to recall what it was that had touched her soul so truly some faraway Christmas. As she remembered, the song hung impatiently in the air, willing to be completed, and Mrs. Moore pulled her soft red gloves over her hands, delaying for a moment to feel the gentle fabric between thumb and forefinger. She whisked a scarf around her neck, wrapping it once, twice, thrice while she picked up the carol once more; to anyone Mrs. Moore's was apparently a mother's lilt, and hers a temper so serene it could lull two hyperactive little boys to bed each night.

But no little boys rushed throughout the house now, no begging to open presents early or fighting over who gets to lick the leftover cookie batter first. Peace rang through every room, and as Mrs. Moore finally left, she didn't feel the need to lock the door.

She was met by the thin, gray dusting of sand that blanketed her front porch, the dunes rolling onwards towards the ocean, the sand so packed where the tide hit it that it looked like pure stone. Narragansett Beach was a friendly one – it seemed to grow nearer and nearer towards Mrs.

Moore's seaside abode with each passing day. Along the rim of the beach, spontaneous spouts of bold green plants forced themselves indifferently through the cold shore, and for every pathway, dozens of beach roses shuddered bravely. Mrs. Moore inhaled that sweet, sticky smell of the ocean, and found that in years of living upon sea, the smell never wavered, never seemed fainter.

Mrs. Moore shuffled along her porch, and in vain flipped the collar of her overcoat up to provide extra warmth and found it made no difference. In the summers, she would sit on her deck in the small black chairs and peel a clementine on the matching table, but now she only reached down to sweep a picnic blanket from one of the chairs. She unfurled it and hunched under it as if it were a shawl, hobbling down the short set of stairs onto the beach carefully. Above, seagulls screamed mournfully, following the faithful ocean down to where the water was always warm. Mrs. Moore was no migratory bird, and had decided long ago that her home was her home, and since there was no better place on Earth, why travel?

The sand was difficult to navigate in her flat, low-rising shoes, and grains of it hastily clogged them up. She had only gone a little way when she spread the blanket on the fine ground. The whole world is inside, she thought. The ocean and I will go on without them. She lowered herself onto the blanket, stretching her feet in front of her, hurriedly taking her shoes off and dumping the sand that had intruded out back where it belonged, yanking down the cuffs of her pants, curling in upon herself. More than Mrs. Moore loathed being cold, she appreciated the soundlessness of November's foreign dawn, and figured that a few frozen limbs could not outweigh the valiant, wintery ocean.

"I wanna go in the ocean!"

"Look, look, beach roses!"

"No- you *can't* go in the ocean-Elijah-it's November--"

"Go get your swimming trunks! Ethan, go get your swimming trunks, we're going swimming!"

At once the silence was broken; some interminable, bulging bubble of quiet had been popped effortlessly. The juvenile voices rang out across the open waters and filled every bit of space they could, their mother calling after them in a tone exasperated but dulcet. Mrs. Moore thought of her empty house, the guest bedrooms dusted meticulously every day in

anticipation of when her sons would return home for the holiday season next month. That was alien, as distant as Europe across the ocean, but these children were here with their mother now, and Mrs. Moore felt a cold wave of pure, unalterable sadness wash over her.

She leaned over steadily and stuck one bony finger into the damp, freezing sand, etching shallow spirals into the earth just to look busy to the newcomers who were frolicking the shore with reckless ambition. Their mother was rushing after them, her simple skirts flowing behind her, a superhero's cape, her hair already being whisked out of its bun by the breeze. One of the boys, the slightly smaller one, kicked off his shoes, digging his toes into the wet, packed sand near the water and squealing as if he had never done so before. The bigger kid clutched a handful of his mother's long skirt, pleading with her.

Mrs. Moore continued to draw spirals, turning away from the trio. A curious kind of embarrassment hit her and she felt her face grow hot and the familiar waves of heat go through her body the way they always did when she was nervous. Who was she, alone and old, to sit on the beach and fill a space that such a lovely family could occupy? To enjoy soft sand underneath her that those boys could very well marvel at the way they were marveling now at the wet darkness of the sand further down the shore? The vulnerability of it all startled her, and she wanted to discreetly go back to her cottage. Maybe she could redecorate the guest rooms again in preparation.

"Hi, ma'am." The sand had muffled the footsteps as the littler boy had approached. Now Mrs. Moore turned towards him quickly, chuckling anxiously. She said, "Hi, there. Now, I heard you and your brother and your mother down there, if you'll pardon my eavesdropping. Do you happen to be Elijah, or Ethan?"

"I'm Ethan, ma'am." He stood at the edge of the blanket, pressing his heels into the lumpy sand and pivoting back and forth absently. He fiddled with a button on his plain blue shirt and stared at her.

"That's what I thought. You really thinking about going swimming, in this frigidness?"

This seemed to fluster Ethan – he looked at the ground resolutely. "That's mainly my brother, see. He likes the ocean. He was born in January, so he doesn't mind the cold much. So he likes to swim all year round. But our mom says that it's not good for him. I like the sand more than I like the

water, though. My brother won't want to do anything on the shore, and... well, I don't like to say it, but I'm bored of playing with my mom. So what I'm getting at is, I wonder if you'd like to build a sandcastle with me." His eyes widened and he pointed down at the darker sand. "I have a bucket, down there. Oh! And, what's your name?"

Mrs. Moore smiled wide, patting the sand next to her approvingly. "There's your manners! I knew you wouldn't forget them. My name's Gwen Moore, dear. Just Mrs. Moore is fine, or Gwen if you prefer."

Ethan blushed sheepishly. "Nice to meet you, Mrs. Moore."

The two made quick work of the sandcastle. Ethan rushed to collect the bucket and was in charge of scooping up all the dark, clumpy sand and plopping it upside down onto the ground again. Mrs. Moore shaped it and perfected it, and showed him how to make a moat with his fingertip and poke holes in the sand towers to make windows. Blissfully, Mrs. Moore rounded the edges of a particular spire of the castle, and wondered when was the last time she'd made a sandcastle on the beach. Not so far away, Elijah roared happily in the ocean, leaping over every wave that came towards him in his soaked jeans and tee shirt. The mother sat by the beach roses and watched her sons contentedly, evidently having given up on trying to restrain them from getting hypothermia.

Ethan impaled the sand again with his plastic bucket, dumping it next to Mrs. Moore with all the other mountains he'd made. Mrs. Moore cupped the edges with her hands. "Are you excited for Christmas? It will be here before you know it," she assured him.

"My family doesn't do Christmas. We celebrate Hanukkah." He didn't look up from his meticulous work.

"Oh, lovely! Are you excited for Hanukkah, then?"

"Yeah. But I'm more excited for my brother's birthday. That's in January. I've already got gifts for him, all picked out."

Mrs. Moore nodded, and felt a bit relieved. If this young boy could have gifts picked out two months in advance for his brother, then surely she could have gifts picked out for her two boys a month in advance. Another part of her felt a predictable twang of nostalgia. She felt her mind wander, and without realizing it she was thinking: *I wonder if my boys have each others' birthdays marked in their calendars.* In the real world, on the beach, she said brightly, "Good! When's *your* birthday?"



"It's in April. I'm gonna ask my parents if we can go see a Celtics game for my birthday."

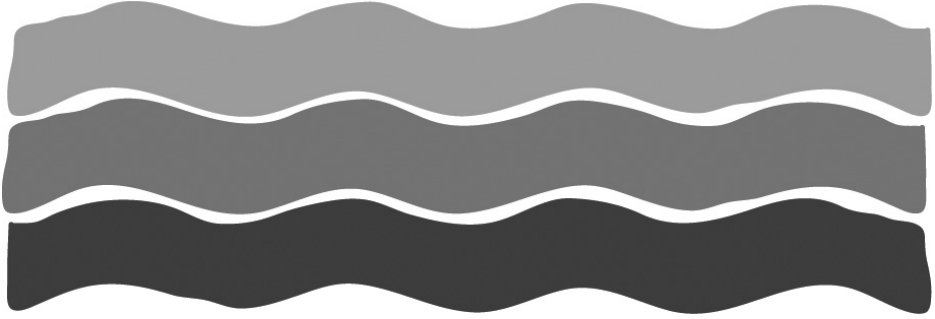
Boys and their sports. Mrs. Moore pulled her hands away from the sand steeple she was working on, leaning backwards to admire her work. Ethan clapped his hands once, sitting on his knees and looking at the completed castle. "Good job." He said.

"Thank you, Ethan, and same to you. It's getting cold to me." She stood up, brushing the bits of sand off her pants, shoes, and coat. Ethan stood, too. Elijah had come out of the ocean and was sitting next to his and Ethan's mother, shivering. Ethan stuck out his hand, which Mrs. Moore shook firmly.

"I'm going to go home now. I live right up there, you see,—" she pointed,—"it's not a far walk at all. It was a pleasure to meet you and your family. Have a warm Hanukkah, Ethan, and I hope to see more of you." "We could make latkes together. For Hanukkah." Ethan smiled slightly. "That would be nice. Run along now, I think your brother has decided it's too cold to stay any longer."

They went their separate ways. Mrs. Moore didn't know where the boys and their mother lived, if they were very far away or just across the block. Mrs. Moore stomped out all the sand in her shoes onto the front porch, and was thankful for the warm air that greeted her inside her house. She unraveled her scarf, unzipped her coat, unbuttoned her sweater, kicked off her shoes, and realized that maybe it wouldn't be so long until her sons would visit. In the meantime, maybe she would learn how to make latkes. She wandered into the living room and opened her laptop that she'd received as a present last year, looking up "best latke recipes." She decided not to redecorate the guest rooms again. They were already perfect as they were.

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The Reefs

by Vika Dwyer

The muggy air trapped Eabha like a hopeless swimmer in rough ocean waters. Now that Eabha was old enough to work she spent every day of summer digging away in her neighbor's garden feeling jealous of the flowers she tended whose only worry was getting enough sun.

She wiped her face with her glove. Whether she dried it of tears or sweat she wasn't sure. The heat made Eabha's body weak and her thoughts fuzzy. She had not been to school in a while and one day bled into the next without an end in sight. But she was not alone in her labor. Her friend, Saoirse, was by her side, relaxing on a lawn chair, dozing, waking to read the local newspaper aloud for her friend, pausing to sip on iced lemonade.

Saoirse knew that Eabha wasn't paying attention but she read anyway. She had nothing better to do. Her parents were always busy and she had no siblings, no duties, and no flower beds to tend to. "Did you hear that the Bells are being torn down?" she asked Eabha.

"No. What bells?" Eabha replied, then picked up a shovel and began digging shallow pits to place clusters of flowers in.

Saoirse sighed, "not actual bells. THE Bells. It's a name. It's what they call the old horse stables at Brenton Point."

Eabha threw the shovel down again and walked off to search the shed. She heard Saoirse talking as she stumbled and stepped over shovels, rakes, and items older than she stored in the wooden shed since time immemorial. She nearly avoided a nail poking out of the floorboards and felt her stomach twist at the thought of what could have been.

"The Bells were originally named the Reefs, owned by a successful lawyer named Theodore M. Davis. He made his fortune practicing in New York before spending much of his later years overseeing excavations in the Valley of the Kings where he hoped to uncover the tomb of Tutankhamun."

The shed had no light source except for a glimpse of the sun that shone through the door when it hung ajar. Eabha started to regret taking off her shoes earlier. Then, as if the universe had planned the moment as a cruel joke, Eabha yelped as she felt a nail pierce through her sole, sending her to her knees to inspect the bleeding wound.

Saoirse kept reading, "in 1905 Davis was the most successful tomb-opener of anyone in the world..Wait, tomb-opener? That's really what they're called? That's silly. Anyway...he discovered eighteen tombs, and paid for the clearing of twelve others..."

Eabha rested her back against something, turned, and found that it was the soil she'd been looking for. She grinned in accomplishment and carried the soil outside, forgetting about the pain in her foot.

"..He would often bring artifacts from his missions back to the Reefs to put on display.."

Eabha started to fill the holes she dug with the new soil. When she finished she took a moment to relax and collapsed onto the cool grass by her friend's chair.

"..Some say Davis just had bad luck, some say that the artifacts were cursed, that he had disturbed a site protected by dark forces. Davis fell ill, as did many of his associates, and anyone who visited him. Many of his friends died in freak accidents while others were said to have gone mad."

"What?" Eabha gasped, tuning back into what her friend had been going on about. "That's total nonsense!"

Saoirse laughed. "After Davis died, the Reefs were bought by the Budlong family and renamed the Bells."

"Can I have some of your lemonade?" Eabha asked.

"Excuse me? I'm in the middle of a story! No, you can't have any!" Saoirse said sarcastically while handing Eabha the glass with a sly smile.

"Thank you. Continue!" Eabha smiled.

"Those who knew the Budlongs well said that the house destroyed them. The Budlongs argued constantly until they divorced a few years after buying the Reefs. They left it unattended until it was confiscated and occupied by the US Army during World War Two to defend the US coast against a possible land invasion. While soldiers set up camp in the forest around the Reefs and began building fortifications nearby a sickness broke out amongst them requiring the unit to be quarantined. Rumors circulated

that the land was cursed, that the soldiers had found one of Davis' artifacts while building defenses and had awoken the curse."

"Wait, what was the artifact?" Eabha asked.

"According to some sources it was a small sculpture of Sekhmet," said Saoirse.

"Who's that?" Eabha questioned.

"A bloodthirsty Egyptian goddess." Saoirse explained, "disturbing her could result in war, plague, even death, but she was also said to have healing powers, could see the past and future, and was the keeper of memories."

"The Bells burned down under mysterious circumstances in 1960, and everything was torn down except the stables. It's been abandoned and crumbling ever since and was just declared unsafe a few months ago. The city plans to tear it down soon." Saoirse finished with a smile on her face.

"We should go check it out," Eabha said, twirling some tall grass between her fingers.

Saoirse jumped up excitedly. "Yes! Let's go now!"

Eabha shook her head. "I have to finish my job, and it won't be easy to get to during the day if the city has it blocked off. We'll go when the sun sets."

When Eabha was finally done with her work for the day they rode their bikes towards the woods across town. Eabha tried to be quiet and not draw any attention to them but reckless Saoirse hummed gleefully as she hopped along the trail to the stables and stomped on every rock she saw. The farther they walked the thinner the trail became, weeds overgrowing the path. They finally reached the stables held up by brick walls black with ash and wood charred like toasted bread.

Saoirse frowned. "Seeing it in person is not as cool as I thought it would be. We probably shouldn't be here- doesn't look safe."

"You didn't think that when you read all about it earlier?" Eabha snorted. "You're still coming with me, right?"

Saoirse nodded silently. Eabha lifted a piece of yellow police tape for Saoirse to duck under then followed her into the stable. Shadows walked beside the two girls, following them, sometimes formless, at moments taking on unusual shapes not their own. Saoirse and Eabha felt the shadows creeping behind them, reaching for them, stealing the warmth from their

bodies. Goosebumps crawled along Eabha's skin and Saoirse's stomach twisted in knots, but they continued despite their growing unease, exploring the stable, walking beside crumbling walls and avoiding piles of smashed bricks on the floor.

"Come here!" Saoirse beckoned to her friend, "there's a carving in the wood here!"

Etched into a splintered board there was a female figure with the head of a lioness, crowned by a large disk and serpent. The figure wore a long robe and held a staff in one hand and a sign in the other.

"Who is this?" Eabha asked her friend.

"That's Sekhmet...maybe." Saoirse grinned. "The goddess I read a bit about earlier, remember?"

"Strange," Eabha remarked.

The sun began to set, sending golden pillars of light pouring down through holes in the stable's high ceilings. Saoirse pretended they were deadly lasers, moving through them gracefully, avoiding the beams until Eabha tripped her jokingly.

"Get up, Saoirse!" Eabha laughed, reaching out her hand. The structure above them moaned, something broke off, and a slab of concrete was sent tumbling above them. Saoirse screamed as the slab crashed onto the floor nearby.

The two girls stared at it in horror. If Eabha hadn't taken her friend's hand and pulled her up fast enough Saoirse would've been crushed under the rubble.

"Are you okay?" Eabha asked her in a panic. Saoirse nodded and stared at the ground trying to calm her racing heart while Eabha paced back and forth nervously. She noticed a small clay sculpture among the broken bits of ceiling, picked it up, and held it out for Saoirse to see.

"Look at this!"

Saoirse recognizes it as the same artifact she saw earlier in the paper. She smacked it out of Eabha's hand. "What's wrong?" Eabha said with shock in her voice.

"That's the sculpture that put a curse on Davis!" Saoirse shouted.

"You don't believe that, do you?" Eabha asked. "I think this place has gotten to your head."

"Just like it did to the Budlongs! We're done for!" Saoirse despaired.



Eabha tried to comfort her friend and hold back her judgment. She reassured Saoirse that it was just a coincidence and that they'd be okay. "I'll get rid of the thing, and it'll be fine. It's just a story, none of it is real."

Saoirse shook her head, advising her friend to just leave it there. "Don't! It's bad enough you already touched it!" she yelled.

"Then what will happen when this place is knocked down and dug up? Will the curse be spread to everyone in the city?" Eabha argued. "I'll destroy it now!"

Saoirse sighed knowing her warnings were useless against her friend. Eabha placed the sculpture the size of her palm onto the ground and smashed it with a piece of the fallen ceiling. The sculpture shattered. "Done."

The forest outside went silent, a cry sounded from outside the stable, deep and guttural, more animal-like than human. Behind them appeared the faint figure of a woman with a glowing orb above her head. The light grew brighter and brighter until the girls could not see- then blackness. Everywhere around them and within them. They screamed for each other in the darkness. When Eabha tried to reach out with her hand she discovered her body missing, detached, formless. She was nothing but molecules suspended in time, hopelessly floating within this abyss that was once perceptible to her. She wanted to close her eyes but she had none. There was no sound or being. How many years had it been?

Eabha fell and scratched her knee on a rock. She sucked air through her teeth in pain, then looked around at the sunny blue sky. Her friend Saoirse was beside her and the stables in front of them. The walls were white and the brick was intact, moss and vines growing along the sides of the building.

"What was *that*? What just happened?" Saoirse asked, stunned.

Eabha furrowed her brow.

"How is the stable fixed? What do we-?" Saoirse got cut off by another scream, this one even louder than the last. The two girls made their way to the structure, searching for the source of the noise, Saoirse looking in each horse stall while Eabha looked around a larger room. The stable was empty but alive and began to glow- a fire had broken out in the stall beside Saoirse.

Before Saoirse had time to move, the flames swallowed the floor in front of her and the stalls to one side. "Eabha! Help! I'm trapped!" She screamed.

"Where are you? I'm coming!"

"I'm stuck! I can't move!" Saoirse shouted.

Eabha made her way to the hall and examined the area, trying to make a plan. Each stall had a door and was separated from the rest by walls that only reached halfway up the ceiling. The walls had pegs that had once been used to hang equipment. Eabha stayed in the open room before the hall and shouted to her friend, "you need to go into the stall on your right, pull yourself up with the pegs, and jump over the wall into the next stall."

Saoirse gritted her teeth, held her breath and crawled into the next stall. Eabha couldn't see her from where she stood paralyzed and unable to help her friend. The fire grew larger and Eabha had to take a few steps back from the heat. "Where are you, Saoirse?" Eabha yelled over the crackling of the fire. The flames started to spread closer and closer. "You need to hurry up!" Eabha panicked.

The door of the stall caught fire and Eabha stumbled back. The more she yelled the less coherent her sentences became. She had inhaled too much smoke. She kept screaming, though her voice was giving out and her lungs burned. Fire engulfed the entire stall Saoirse had been in.

She tried to get closer to the fire and get her friend out of it but the flames only grew higher and pushed Eabha farther away. She started coughing and sputtering out smoke like an old car. She fell back and thought about saving herself just as Saoirse tumbled out from the stall gasping for air. Eabha was already weak but she pulled Saoirse to her feet and supported her as they walked out of the crumbling building together.

They collapsed onto the grass outside at the same time the ceiling collapsed into the structure, destroying the second floor and burying the flames below. Eabha closed her eyes as she caught her breath, when she opened them again the sun was shining directly in her eyes. She was tired of working in her neighbor's garden. Summers had been a real pain since she turned old enough to work. She wiped the sweat off her forehead and collapsed onto the ground next to her friend Saoirse, who had been reading the local paper aloud.

Eabha looked down at the blades of grass between her fingers and held onto that memory while it lasted but the moment was fleeting and slipped from her grasp. The summer was nearly over and Eabha felt as though some ethereal magic was pulling at the threads of her being, but what it was she could not say, and she was unsure if it had already occurred, had yet to be or if it had always been.

Fall

by Melanie Eusebio

“**Y**ou came.”

“Of course I did.”

Katrina was getting ahead of herself. The idea of the interaction ran through her head so many times a day, she was beginning to doubt it would ever happen.

She had missed this weather. Autumn had crept around the corner so quickly, like a sneak attack, as if summer had never existed. It always looked like it was about to rain, but Katrina never minded it. The leaves, all shades of orange and scarlet and a warm lemon yellow, scattered across the entirety of Neutaconkanut Hill, almost covering any trace of the paths that have ever existed. *They look like her hair.* Katrina instinctively made the connection as she stared down at it but let the memory blow by her with the wind that blew her own tar-black hair out of place. It wasn't long enough to tie up, so she just let it be. And anyway, it was no use reminiscing, was it? Not when today, Jay's autumn colored hair would become a reality. Today was the day they'd see each other again.

Traveling had always felt useless to Katrina. She had never seen the appeal of packing up your things in search of other things. Not when everything she had ever needed or wanted was always in front of her. Katrina's entire life, she had watched parents, sisters, and *Jay* slowly leave Providence. Not for any specific reason really; just in search of something missing. She still didn't understand. Maybe it was easier to be content for Katrina. Content with the cold, snowstorm weather, when she had spent so many nights falling asleep next to the fireplace, then the chilly mornings when her roommate had woken her up, screaming about leaving it on all night. And then the slightly too warm summer mornings when she'd spend all day with the freezer open because although she liked any kind of weather, it simply became too much for her, and that same roommate, Poppy, made her pay extra for the electricity bill.

Poppy, her overexcited, pushy roommate, was the one who had convinced Katrina to get out of their small, two-bedroom apartment in the first place. She had been ready to lie in bed all day and ignore the three calculus assignments her professor had assigned a week ago, when she got that text. *I'm around if you're around.* The shriek she let out earned a bang on the wall from the neighbors, but she barely heard it over her own shock, feeling her stomach drop and all of the heat in her body rush to her face. Poppy had jumped out of the shower, her frizzy blonde hair appearing brown from how soaked it was. Katrina couldn't even speak—looking back on it now—she simply showed her freckled-face roommate the message, who shrieked just as loudly. The neighbors were ready to move out by this point.

“You...should meet her,” Poppy had said to her after slight hesitation, reaching for her phone with the hand that wasn't holding up her towel, but Katrina yanked it away, shaking her head furiously. “Well, she can't come here. *Clearly.*” Poppy gestured around the room, dirty Radiohead t-shirts and baggy jeans filled her floors. It was impossible to even see the floors with the fruit snacks wrappers that surrounded her bed, Poppy stepping on a couple as they talked. “And the living room's a mess too. I told you Gio's coming to help me finish—” Katrina silenced her with a look. Not particularly mean; just sad. Sad enough for Poppy to stop talking and move on the next thing, adjusting her towel a bit. “Go, okay? There should be clean clothes in the laundry basket.”

Katrina didn't like the color pink, but that's the only thing her roommate's closet consisted of, so there she stood, in a pastel pink dress and a matching pink sweater, because not even her hoodies were washed. At least she could wear her Doc Martens: good for crushing leaves with every step, walking towards the bench she always found herself at. It was right beside the parking lot, facing the kiddie playground, which was always empty this time of day. Katrina imagined the children taking their after-lunch nap on those little mats they put out in school.

She remembered when she first met her. Katrina had first moved to Providence from Seattle at the age of five, and she never regretted it for a second. Anthony Carnevale Elementary was easier, and a lot better than her preschool back in Seattle. The teachers always had smiles on their faces. They were never a problem. The only issue was her classmates, who'd make funny faces at the lunchboxes of Fish *amok* her mother would lovingly pack her. It



Ranchers and the black-haired girl arriving after school to put them back.

And it was a cycle. A rather endless one. Katrina was only surprised a teacher hadn't caught them yet. But by the end of seventh grade, Jay gave it up; the whole phase, as her mother put it. That's when the tutoring began. "I hate this."

Katrina would just smile and nod, pretending not to hear her as she hummed along to Deftones in her Beat headphones, writing down math problems for Jay to practice with.

And when Jay would throw airplanes at Katrina's head, or draw phallic images on her papers, or cut a good chunk of Katrina's hair (so big she had to cut all of her waist length hair into a tolerable bob), somehow, she loved her anyway. Katrina couldn't help loving Jay.

The wind was slowly getting colder, like needles wisping by her face, to the point where she suddenly wished she had brought a scarf. Katrina didn't realize how long she had been sitting there. Her pale hands had turned red despite flexing them back and forth to keep warm (but also from the anxiety). Why wasn't she here yet? She had been there so long that the families had started to pour in from their minivans with kids under eight and their matching siblings. She used to be like that, she remembers clearly. After the youngest, Alissa, had been picked up from the YMCA, Katrina's parents would take all four girls, including the middle sister, Meredith, and Jay to this park right here, where the dry soil had begun to dust up Katrina's boots. They'd run around for hours, Alissa constantly tripping and scraping her knees, but she swore she was a big girl, and she could handle it. Meredith always tried to include herself in Katrina and Jay's games of tag, and hide and seek, but despite only being two years younger than them, she could never keep up. The park became something that only belonged to the two of them, Jay and Kat. Her little sisters were shadows out of frame when Jay was around. And every day Jay accompanied them to that park, the more they faded.

Looking back, Katrina could feel the pain weigh on her, especially with her two younger sisters now off at college, as far away as possible from Providence. Maybe if she had let Mer catch up. Maybe if she had helped Ali get to her feet. But in the moment, all that ever mattered was Jay, whose flowing autumn hair appeared in her memory in every waking thought, and whose giggles, like beautiful insects, fluttered around her head if she dwelled on it for too long.



She didn't like the way people began to stare, wondering why she had suddenly crumbled into tears from the simple act of staring into space. So, she wandered. Katrina didn't care where; just away from everyone else. Up the small hill, past the fences, towards the end of the parking lot, leading to the hiking trail.

When Katrina was sixteen, she worked up all her courage to ask Jay to hang out. It took several pep talks from Meredith to work up to it, but she did. Of course, Jay said yes, why wouldn't she? They had been best friends for years. It would've seemed more normal if Katrina had just dragged her there. But this trip was supposed to be special: or at least different from their usual weekly races down the trail. A picnic awaited them at the top of the hill, overlooking the entire park, and practically the city, Providence suddenly looking a whole lot bigger despite the stormy looking clouds. Katrina wasn't worried though—she made sure to check the weather plenty of times. The trees were bare, so no leaves to bother them. She didn't forget to check the grass, morning dew-less and perfect for resting a blanket on without freaking out during laundry the next day. It'd be perfect. It would only be them.

Jay's smile was crooked, like she meant it but for the wrong reason. "All this for me?" She said in that silky, calm voice, and all Katrina could do was nod her head. "Kat...you're too nice."

They ate almost in silence though, Jay cracking jokes here and there about the trouble she must have gone through, or about their AP Euro project due in two days. She stared at Jay the whole time, despite her timidity. The wind coming from the cloud that threatened rain blew her long, autumn colored hair. It was probably a lot shorter now. And in the end when the ants were drawn to the cookie crumbs and bits of ham that fell out of their sandwiches; when the sun had begun to set and the first star peaked its head out into the sky, Katrina kissed her. It was almost perfect. Almost. "I'm sorry."

Katrina still never understood what she meant by that, I'm sorry. For the simple act of pushing her away? Or, she supposed, not kissing her back? Jay never led her on, so it couldn't be for that. But in the moment though, and for a long time, Katrina took it as, I'm sorry for ever meeting you.

The leaves were endless, covering up the spot where Katrina felt she could've—should've died that day, looking over the city. The turkeys had run far off at the sound of her footsteps, which was good, because she was

terrified of turkeys. Her memories of screaming as she ran away from them while Jay tripped over herself laughing, were all clouded by that picnic.

But the leaves covered it now. It was easier remembering the picnic like that. Covered in leaves. Better than her happy memories clouded by the former. Katrina jumped, though, after a rustling came from the path she had just come up. It felt and sounded fast, the clatter of footsteps on the rock stairs and then the crunch of the leaves approaching closer, and closer, and Katrina was hoping it was just a family of happy campers and maybe a German Shepard, but her face dropped, and her stomach felt empty suddenly. Like there was nothing left inside of her.

“You’re...still here.”

Katrina’s heart dropped to the bottom of her stomach, and she felt almost a burning sensation in her chest. “Well—of course I am. You told me I had to come!”

Her furrowed eyebrows glared at Poppy, who could only stare back at her solemnly, practically with tears in her eyes. “I know. I’m sorry. I didn’t think you’d still be here. You, uh, left your phone.”

The message from Jay was sent two hours ago. *I’m sorry*. Katrina would’ve laughed if it weren’t for the tears streaming down her face. The guilt was written all over Poppy’s face.

“I’m sorry, Kat. I didn’t—”

“I want to be alone.” The furthest thing from the truth, but it was all she could say, facing away from Poppy after forcing out her cracked words.

Poppy didn’t say anything else, heading back towards her car, where her boyfriend, Gio, waited for her, all her belongings in the back or tied to the top of the small, silver Honda, ready for their move out of state.

And she fell to her knees, the pain filling her up with nothing but the thought of, *I’m sorry for ever meeting you*.

How Else Could I Be?

by Bridget Flynn

It was a cruel, sultry midsummer. Morning light filtered through the blinds, washing the walls in isolated hues of white and gold. Amidst a room cluttered with canvases and paint, Liam lay on his bed, his head pushed against the bed frame where his feet should have been, and his feet resting on the pillows. A worn paint-splattered shirt draped from his frame, clinging to him like a second skin.

He last moved an hour before to shift himself out of the light, dodging the attacks of the sun. From this position, through a small window above his bed, he could see the waves nipping at the shore. Clouds shifted overhead while sailboats drifted below the horizon.

Pinned into the corner of the window frame was a remembrance card, the kind given at funeral services or memorials, featuring a photo of his smiling father. The date atop the card, which was similarly branded into his memory, read *December 8th*—only seven months earlier.

Drawing a deep breath, he turned away from the window. Laying there, he squeezed his eyes shut and watched the backs of his eyelids, a dusky orange.

He would have liked to remain like that all day, perhaps all summer. If he could, he would have retreated into himself and left his mangled sheets as the only evidence of his disappearance.

If only he could disappear. The thought bit at his temporary solace, like becoming half-conscious in a dream.

From somewhere outside his room, he heard tiny, scampering feet (likely his younger cousins) and his mother's voice calling his name. They all faded into the white noise of his mind as he tried to retreat into his dream.

...

Liam's family had been coming to Newport every summer since before he was born. It was a long-standing tradition—arrive in June, leave in late August. Each of his father's siblings and their families had a home in Newport, and this year, they were joined by his second cousins, whom he barely knew. There were three of them, all a bit older than he, and all in college. He was told by his mother to befriend them that summer; she wanted them to feel welcome.

During his first days in Newport, he observed his second cousins. He learned quickly that they were told to be cautious around him. They knew of his father's death only months prior, and in Liam's brief absences, they would fraternize in hushed tones, presumably talking about how he was handling his grief. They spoke to him as if he were fragile, destined to break. This only managed to frustrate him.

He was closest in age to his second cousin, Andrew, who was a freshman in college. He felt, at the very least, that Andrew was less interested in his malaise than the others, or perhaps, less interested in most things. He seemed passive by nature, exuding a sort of charming detachment. Admittedly, this passivity could be endearing, sometimes disarming. Once, while at a nearby beach, Liam asked Andrew how he was doing.

"Fine," he had said, in that disinterested way Liam thought customary of him.

Their beach chairs were positioned close to one another, both facing the water. Andrew returned to his book. Liam noted that it had been half an hour since he had turned a page.

Liam interrupted, "Truly?" The crashing of the ocean punctuated the silence.

"Yes," he said, letting the word linger. "How else could I be?"

Liam did not bother to answer, though the answer bit at him incessantly: *Not fine*.

The rest of the day—while he was reading, while he swam, while he cursed himself for his insomnia at night—he repeated the sentence to himself, whispered it under his breath like a prayer: *How else could I be?*

The sentiment followed him, like a wave following a child darting to shore. It caught him by the legs, pulling him out to sea.

...

Something heavy and dreadful bloomed in the pit of his stomach, like a flood materializing. Water filled his lungs. He watched himself struggle to breathe, feeling like an onlooker to himself.

When his paintbrush dropped, a streak of blue appeared across his painting's face, a gash running from the eyebrow to the cheek of his self-portrait.

The blue appeared like a teardrop, or a scar, on the portrait's face. At the same time, he felt one stream down his own. A flood opened within him, and he could not control himself. His teacher ran over to him. A frenzy of people swarmed him.

He did not remember much after that, except that he wished his father could see his painting.

...

Liam's summer passed idly. He spent more time with his cousins as the weeks wore on. Despite this, people increasingly came to check on him, supposedly to see how he was faring in his fragile state. *Fine*, he said to all of them, *perfectly fine*.

When he was alone, he read. They were the same books, the same scenes, over and over. One scene still circled in his mind, even while he read others: his conversation at the beach with Andrew.

The same sentiment still followed him. He repeated it whenever he felt himself dipping below fine: *How else could he be?*

He had spent more time with Andrew in recent weeks. They went on walks along the coastline, he gave him tours of the town, and they spent more time at the beach. He was agreeable, but rarely witty, and remarkably fine all of the time. For the first few weeks, Liam thought his personality was dry but tolerable. Secretly, he spent more time with him in hopes that Andrew's demeanor might rub off on him—a faded indifference toward life.

...

Liam lingered on the fringes of his own backyard, a glass of juice in hand. His mother was throwing a dinner party, so people were littered throughout the property. Under normal circumstances, someone would have broken away to engage Liam in conversation, but tonight, everyone was consumed





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Undertow

by Marjorie Leary

To love is to lose. It is to split your heart open and pray that what grows in the cracks are flowers. It is to loosen your soul from its anchor to watch it slip through your desperate fingers. It is to cherish the pulse of another body, warm and delicate, only to feel it fade.

Maeve has loved before, and so has lost before. She has shared breaths with someone in the womb of night, fingers intertwined, and secrets whispered reverently. She has felt the tenderness of her heart sing and swell in harmony with someone else's. She has cradled another's face, tracing dimples and cheeks with laughter and teasing, and has watched that face disappear, lowered beneath the ground as she watched with a tired, empty soul.

...

Shifting her grip on the wheel, Maeve turns into the gravel lane, pebbles popping under her tires. Amber leaves, dark and sodden from the rain earlier that day, gather in clumps on the ground, while others spiral wildly from their branches. Pulling into a small lot, she parks, quieting the hum of the truck. Wrapping her jacket closer to her body, she steps out, curling her stiff fingers deep within the fleecy sleeves. Stones crunch beneath her boots, each purposeful step met with grating discord. Trees chatter high above her, flinging water droplets to the ground with every gust of wind. The November air is brutally crisp, leaving her cheeks red and prickling, but she pulls her hat further over her ears and walks on. The gravel turns to dirt and the dirt turns to grass, and stones begin to emerge through the damp sod. Some are large and extravagant, with flourishing penmanship carved on white, weathered marble. Others are gray and worn, chipped and faded from years of erosion.

One is new. It sits towards the back of the graveyard, near the hissing trees and dense foliage. It's simple and white, with a smooth finish

and a humble size - not much taller than Maeve's kneecap. Crouching down before it, she reads the letters scripted on the stone, letting her fingertips rest gently on the damp surface.

Hudson Myers

Brother and Son

Fiercely Loved and Deeply Mourned

2004-2022

Tears pool in Maeve's eyes, familiar but never any less painful. She brings her hand to her lips, presses a kiss to her palm, and lowers it to the tombstone. After several moments, she rises, picking her way back through the mismatched stones and slumbering skeletons, thoughts of Hudson mingling in her memories.

His laugh, warm and deep, as he pulled her close to him. His fingers intertwined with hers. His head on her shoulder, a small smile playing on his lips.

They had been close growing up. They went from grinning babies, chubby hands grasping one another's, to riding their bikes to school each day, trying to pedal faster than the other because Hudson couldn't stand to lose to a girl and Maeve couldn't stand to lose to a boy. Let alone *that* boy.

She was, in simple terms, in love. She thinks she always was, even when they were just toddlers, sloppy smiles shared between the two of them masking mischievous secrets. It wasn't until their first year of high school together that Hudson asked her to homecoming, and she realized he too, all along, had felt just the same. He, too, stole glances at her when he thought she wasn't looking. He, too, blushed softly when she laughed at his jokes. He, too, yearned to hold her hand but could only achieve an awkward embrace.

Then, they started dating. Hudson was her best friend, her biggest comfort, and her strongest ally. He was her home, stable and warm and *hers*. They would drive around together in Little Compton, the small town in Rhode Island where both of them grew up, soaking up the acres of lush farmland and salty ocean air. She taught him how to surf, holding him stable as waves whisked them towards the shoreline. He would visit her in the evenings, chores forgotten, and homework abandoned, and they would bake burnt cookies and watch trashy shows when no one was home.

But twelve months ago, Hudson started having trouble breathing.

Twelve months ago, Maeve was the one who visited him in the evenings, bringing burnt cookies in Tupperware containers to his hospital bed.



Twelve months ago, she massaged his hands when the cloud of drugs and exhaustion disconnected his mind from his body.

And only two months after that, she held those hands until they grew cold, cancer turning his boundless future into a nine-week crucible.

A month later, she sat at his funeral, numb to the speeches and sniffles but acutely in touch with the grief that threatened to drag her down under with Hudson.

Sometimes, she wishes she was there with him.

Maeve's phone buzzes softly in her pocket, once, twice, dragging her away from her thoughts. The sweet, earthy scent of autumnal decay cloys her pores, heavy along the path. She continues walking, swiping at the screen to see the new messages, her mind as sludgy and dark as the muddy road.

we still on for tmrw evening? :)

surf should be sick!

Maeve slips her phone back into her pocket. Getting back into her truck, the remnants of heat blissful compared to the brutal conditions outside, she starts the engine, rubbing her stiff fingers together. Noah's timing is just a bad coincidence, and she knows it, but his texts send her back into the spiral, panic bubbling up in her chest.

Noah.

He's her friend, the one she turns to when in need and studies with at university and shares indecent gossip with over late-night calls. He's supportive and gentle and everything she could hope for, but deep in her heart, beneath layers of grief and heartache and pain, she fears that she's falling for him. The thought coats her tongue with the thick taste of shame. Shame, raw and poignant, mixed with the fear and guilt that she's betraying Hudson. Betraying her *one*. After all, it had only been a year. A *year* since Hudson died. She's only known Noah for ten months—she has no right to do this to Hudson.

No right.

Tears ooze from Maeve's eyes, sour and bitterly familiar. Her entire body shakes with the panic attack that's building deep in her body. It crests, before crashing over her mind and heart with physical intensity. Gripping her arms tight to her body, she tries to breathe through the thoughts violently spiraling. Her mind isn't receptive, leaving her trapped. Trapped between sorrow and shame,

trapped between her desire to be happy and her fear of betrayal, trapped between the love she feels for the living and the loss she bears for the dead.

Minutes pass, frantic and endless. Slowly, painfully, her thoughts eased, the panic a dull hum in the back of her mind. She releases a shuddering breath, her cheeks damp, and her hands white and taut from where they grip each other in a desperate embrace. Maeve forces herself to detangle them and places her right palm on her heart. She feels the beats gradually slow, pulsing against her quivering hand. After her breathing levels out and the shaking is manageable, she grips the wheel and pulls out of the drive, trying to pretend as though nothing has changed.

Everything has changed.

Her entire body feels torn. Torn between two men, one within the earth and one above it, both deeply rooted in her heart.

How cliché, she thinks bitterly as she turns her headlights on, swiftly dissipating the shadowy dusk. She drives home, lost in her thoughts, her phone burning a hole in her pocket.

...

Maeve's fingers linger on the car door as she closes it. Noah grins at her from inside, his hair damp and softly curled from the salty water. She watches him drive away; his glistening surfboard strapped to the roof of his car and smiles softly to herself.

She almost hadn't come. Almost stayed home, ignored his text, let herself sink deeper into whatever grave she was digging for herself. And yet, she didn't. A small part of her, one she hadn't known still existed, tugged inside her.

Something new. She's glad it did.

Maeve turns towards the water, tired and cold and *happy*. Along the horizon line, she sees the collision of sea and sky, the seamless sisterhood of water and air. Both blue and vast and vital, yawning with deceiving emptiness. Pearly clouds punctuate the boundless expanse above, and gulls shriek in the distance, squabbling over the fish who's just become their next meal. The water glitters sharply under the evening sun, winking with each undulating wave. The wind plays gently with her hair, tossing the damp strands about her head, and she closes her eyes, listening to the whispers of the ocean—the water lapping

CAPVT LXXIII.

De animali quodam piloso.

INuenitur in agro terzocano animal pilosum valde, vocatum *stalcogot*, duas longum spithamas, vnguis melis aut

quahpecoti similibus, & cruribus breuibus, & nigro vestitis pilo, breuissimâ caudâ corpore toto & albo in fuluum vergente, sed dorso ac supernâ parte capitis & colli nigris, lineâque distinctis cadenti. Caput est paruum, rostrum tenue & longiusculum, exerti canini, ac vita viciusque eadem quæ quahpecoti.

S. V.



CAPVT LXXIV.

De su animali.

CAPVT LXXV.

De glire Chiappa.

Unknown

DATE: 1635, PLACE: Antwerp, MATERIAL: Ink on paper
 Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

Run

by Freyja Lombard

Prudence Island, Rhode Island, December 30, 2049

“Run!” The word tears from my throat like my feet tearing against the ground. I push Allen towards the moonlight, and he stumbles in the shallow water. “Get to the boat,” I yell. I don’t need to look back to know there’s only time for one of us to escape.

“But Ezra what about you?” Allen is standing knee deep in the water, his face a collage of terror.

“I’m sorry I can’t go with you-” shouts eclipse my words and I glance over my shoulder, just barely able to make out dark shapes running towards us. “Just get to the mainland, tell anyone who will listen what you heard. Find someone who will help you get to Canada. Do you understand?”

Allen doesn’t move.

“Do you understand?” I scream at him again.

...

Thump. Thump. I pull my camouflage jacket closer around me and glance at the clock. 11:32 PM. There shouldn’t be anybody here, our last run came through over an hour ago. Whoever it is will just have to wait till morning. I turn back to the arrivals log and continue filling out the day’s runs. Thump. Thump. The door rattles on its hinges.

“We’re closed,” I push too hard on the pencil and the lead snaps. Thump. Thump. I groan and slam the log shut, making my way around the desk and to the door. I yank it open and a gust of cold air swirls in. Of course, the one time someone needs something it’s below thirty degrees. Alex stands just outside the door, fist poised mid knock and bowler hat askew.

“What,” I snap. He probably doesn’t even have a reason to be here. It would be just like him.

“Up for a late-night tour?” he grins at me, lowering his fist.

“No.” I’m about to close the door in his face but he stops it with his hand.

“Oh come on Ezra, please.” Alex is a few inches taller than me, though I attribute that to his habit of wearing more than one pair of socks at a time.

“No.”

“I’ll put a good word in with the captain.”

“I don’t need your help.” I make another fruitless attempt at closing the door.

“You’ve been moping here for two months, if you want your job back then you’re going to have to do something other than sit around scribbling in the log book.” Alex has a good point though I’ll never admit it.

“We’re closed.” It’s a feeble excuse and we both know it. He rolls his eyes and pushes his way past me. I was never getting out of this. A kid around six or seven follows him in, his dark skin gleaming in the moonlight. The whole room shakes when I slam the door closed. I stomp over to the dilapidated desk and offer the kid the bowl of pronoun pins. He rummages through it, finally retrieving a He/Him pin. I replace the lopsided ceramic on the desk and shoot Alex a glare. If he isn’t the most annoying person I’ve ever met then my name isn’t Ezra.

“Welcome to the bureau of LGBTQ+ and BIPOC peoples. What’s your name?” I turn my glare to the younger boy

“Allen,” he fingers his pin, turning it over and over. “What’s this?”

“It’s a pronoun pin,” Alex kneels to help him attach it to his shirt. “Most runners wear them, so we don’t have to say our pronouns every time we meet someone new.”

“What are runners?” Allen straightens his pin.

“We help LGBTQ+ and BIPOC peoples get onto Prudence Island so they can live their lives without being persecuted.” I walk back around the desk. I don’t expect the children to know everything that’s happening. But this one seems more oblivious than most.

“Are you a runner?” Allen looks up at me, his messy hair flopping into his big brown eyes. I look away, hoping he won’t make me answer.

Alex chuckles “Ezra here got kicked off his...”

“Their,” I correct, tapping my pin.



following the curve of the room. Creak. I look back just in time to see the door close, standing seamlessly against the wall.

“What is this place?” Allen spins in circles, his mouth gaping open. A page falls out of my heart. This is the next generation? These kids don't even know what a book is, and we're relying on them to fix the mess we've made?

“It's a library, people used to come and borrow books for a certain period of time. I didn't think Prudence Island ever had one,” I cross to the coffee table and glance at the books spread across it. I frown at them. “These are all banned.”

“Aren't all books banned?” Allen picks one up and flips through it. I nod grudgingly. There are so few legal books that most people don't bother learning to read.

“Why is this one banned?” His small voice echoes through the room. He hands it to me. I skim through the picture book. Honestly I don't see anything wrong with it either. It's just a picture book about a family with two loving dads. I hand it back to him.

“Come on, we should go.”

“Nuhu, I wanna see more,” he grins, replacing the book and scampering towards a doorway at the far side of the room.

“This isn't part of the tour,” I call after him. He ignores me and disappears through the exit, giving me no choice but to follow him. The next room is empty except for a few paintings. The walls, floor and ceiling are painted a bright white, like a hospital room. Allen's red t-shirt is the only spot of color. Allen has his ear to a closed door on the left side of the room.

“What are you doing?” I whisper to him. We are clearly not supposed to be here and I'm already in enough trouble for one lifetime.

“They're talking about something and I don't think it's good,” Allen frowns at me through a mouthful of donut. I waver for a minute torn between pulling him away from the door and joining him. As always, curiosity gets the better of me and I lean up against the wood.

“I've told you J we need to get out of Texas, the underground down there is already getting antsy.” Charles' gravely voice is muffled by the door but I can make out the words clearly. I'm surprised he managed to make it down here with his heart issues. His forty plus years of smoking certainly haven't helped. I bat at a path of smoke trailing from the crack in the door.



Finally the door opens just enough for Allen to slip through, then me. I pull the door shut, letting out a sigh of relief in unison with the walls.

“What on earth were you thinking?” I spin, my shoulders tensing.

“Alex,” Allen runs to him. Alex doesn't take his eyes off me, disappointment and fear in their green-blue irises.

“Do you know what they're doing, what we're doing?” I ask him.

He's silent for a count of ten. “Some of it.”

“And you kept working for them?”

“I didn't have a choice!” Alex shouts. “Just this morning you were dying to get back to running.”

“That was before,” I hold his gaze.

“What could I do about it anyway?” He looks away. I never understood Alex's ability to ignore what's going on around us. He simply looks away and moves on. It's a skill I never learned. For better or worse. It's one reason I wanted to be a runner. I thought I could make a difference. The door creaks behind us.

“Go!” Alex commands. I scramble toward the exit, glancing back to take in the crappy office I've spent two months of my life in. Allen pulls the door open and we run out into the night. If we can get to Potter's Cove there should be a boat we can use to get away. I look behind me expecting to see Alex but there are only shadows. He must have stayed behind to delay them. I thank him silently as we cross Neck Farm Road. My legs ache but I know Alex can not hold them off for long. Allen races ahead of me, though I can see him slowing. Maybe if I can get him to safety it will make up for my part in this plot. Finally we reach the beach.

“Run!” The word tears from my throat like my feet tearing against the sand. I push Allen towards the moonlight and he stumbles in the shallow water.

“Get to the boat,” I yell. I don't need to look back to know there's only time for one of us to escape.

“But Ezra what about you?” Allen is standing knee deep in the water, his face a collage of terror.

“I'm sorry I can't go with you-” shouts eclipse my words and I glance over my shoulder, just barely able to make out dark shapes running towards us. “Just get to the mainland, tell anyone who will listen what you heard. Find someone who will help you get to Canada. Do you understand?” Allen doesn't move. “Do you understand?” I scream at him again. I can hear their pounding

feet now. As much as I hate to send him back into the world alone, I have to stay behind to give Allen time to get away. Finally he dives into Narragansett Bay and splashes towards the rickety boat. I turn to face our pursuers, praying that he'll never look back.



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A Moment in Time

by Brenna Malloy

If you live in Southern Rhode Island you have most definitely come in contact with a military brat. The recycling of school aged children is an annual occurrence thanks to the war college in Newport. When I was little I tended to be very wary of them due to the fact that they were new and I was shy. But as I got older I continued to treat them with the type of kindness you may see between acquaintances who don't really like each other. What I mean to say is I always kept a figurative "meter stick" in between us. They always left and I had never relished the idea of creating a friendship that had a set expiration date. But you can't control these things can you? And as I grew older I found it was impossible to completely avoid these people, well, at least one certain person. Would you like to hear about it?

She was a year older than me and was new at school and immediately upon her arrival she became a celebrity within the student body. She was on the tip of everyone's tongue and I couldn't go a week without someone giving some unsolicited opinion of her. Was she stuck up, too relaxed, a whore, a prude? I was mesmerized by her reputation before I had even seen her. Then as I made my way through my week I found out that we shared a few classes. After a while I began to idolize her, I was the person talking about her to anyone and everyone, I thought her to be the epitome of grace and elegance. Well, as graceful and elegant as anyone can manage to be at seventeen.

One day I sat on a bench impatiently waiting for my mom to pick me up. I was listening to music and had my signature "don't bother me" face on. So, naturally, she came up to me then. She made her merry way up to my bench and started to talk. Of course, when she first talked to me I responded eloquently and in a way which may be perceived as "cool."

"Can I sit here?"

"What?"

“Sit? Here?”

“Uh, sure.”

If you couldn't tell I was being sarcastic when I said I responded eloquently. However, when I sat down, she stared at me and then looked straight ahead. Eyes unwavering. I swear to God she would not turn her head! She sat so still it must've been deliberate, some sort of prank for her own amusement. Then, much to my dismay, a car pulled in the lot and she left. Before she got in the car, she looked back and smiled at me. I was left there, starstruck.

The weeks following we had minimal contact, I didn't think I would ever talk to her again. Then out of nowhere she texts me.

“How do I look?”

It was a photo of her falling flat on her face over a finish line. I don't know how she got my number and I don't particularly want to know. Lord knows she had her ways.

“Absolutely stunning of course. When was this lol??”

We started texting daily. Long drawn out conversations about books, childhoods, and classes. And I found out something that boosted my ego exponentially, she was so similar to me. We had read the same books and had the same early childhood troubles. We would commiserate with each other about annoying classes and teachers and shared the same complaints. I felt like I had found my match, my twin flame, my soul mate if you will. I was so unbelievably happy, texting her was like taking the purest form of ecstasy. There were days when she would find me at my locker and others where she would walk me to all my classes. There were others when she would text me places to meet up during free periods where we could just talk. However, in between my spurts of elation I was confused. What were we? Were we just friends and I was making all of the extra bits up in my head. I mean, I was a girl, she was a girl, was she simply just trying to be my friend? I was confused, but I shoved these thoughts down. I didn't want to mess this up, I promised myself I wouldn't mess this up.

It turned out we had a mutual friend and she was going to have a birthday party. She had suggested that we go together. I was over the moon. I spent hours scrutinizing my face, hair, and outfit in the mirror. I was shaking as I walked to her car. I perceived this to be a sort of date, even if it wasn't explicitly said by her. But as I look back at it I think she thought so too.

said goodbye and blamed a headache for my early departure. I looked at her one last time and walked out the door. It's silly really that a relationship that meant so much to me, that shaped how I see relationships and love today, happened when I was 15 and ended at a birthday party.

Everything went on as normal afterwards. I studied, I hung out with friends, I laughed, I cried. The day after she texted me and I texted her back. She would continue to text me like that. Like nothing had happened. But that day was the last time I would see her face and she had kept a distance ever since. My melodramatic teenage self started asking rhetorical questions. Was that the only way I could be appreciated? At a distance? Away from everyone else? Was everyone in my life going to leave? The answers to the first three questions are no, obviously. I knew that at the time but I was in my emo era as I would have said. And the last one, yes, I mean we all die right? And it's not like people I had cared about hadn't left before. My grandfather had died the year before, I had been friends with military kids who had moved, but this hurt particularly bad. I guess it was my first heartbreak. But what really drove me crazy was the conversations we had afterwards.

See, we were still texting, she would ask me about my day and various activities she knew I did. I would ask her about all of her various competitions and drama going on with friends. We were friends still, but something had changed in me. I was at once pulled to and away from her. She repulsed me and was the single thing I desired the most. She infuriated me but she had also brought me the most joy I have ever known. I was in love with her and I hated her for what she had done to me. Everything about her confused me and that was why I think I couldn't stop thinking about her. She was everything, all the good and the bad and the horrible and the wonderful. To me, but I don't think I was ever that to her.

Late June came and went and I never got a goodbye. What I did get was a detailed text describing everything that was about to happen. She was going to leave, they were going to go to Florida, then California, then abroad. She didn't know where yet but she suspected that her parents did.

I walked by her house one July morning, we lived fairly close to each other. I walked down this dirt road and stared at this house I had never seen before. I just looked at it. I felt my eyes well up. It was a beautiful July morning. Rhode Island sure knew how to deliver a beautiful summer day. I wondered what it would be like in Florida at that moment. Stuffy and humid

and far too hot I'm sure. I looked at her house. I watched the grass rustle with the wind and listened to the birds chirping. Then I made my way to the docks.

I walked back down her dirt road and smelled the sharp salt air. I smiled as the wind hit my face. I looked around at the rocky shore below me, California certainly couldn't produce such a picturesque view. I thought to myself that they could take their sandy beaches and shove them right up their- well you get the point. Surely only Rhode Island could make beaches like this, whose jagged rocks were home to sprawled barnacles and seaweed, where the sand was wet and cold beneath your feet, where the water was cold and gray and perfect. No where else could I feel so perfectly content, no where else could I ever call home.

I look back at that year now many years later and I cannot bring myself to anger. She was just as scared as I was. She, who had moved from place to place since she was born, and she who had grabbed my hand while pushing me away. I don't live in Rhode Island anymore. I don't think about her all that much anymore. But when I come home and sit on the docks, I remember her and I remember me. I sit and breathe in the air of the place I got to call my home for all these years and I am overwhelmed with gratitude for this place. As I sit and think I find myself most grateful for all the people which Rhode Island has brought me, even if they were only with me for a moment in time.



Dipus Americanus, American Jerboa

DATE: 1799, PLACE: Philadelphia, MATERIAL: Ink on paper
Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

Asesinato

by Lillian Maloney

Exterminating was a tedious task. It wasn't necessarily complicated, simple enough for Ted Staedtler, I.Q. 89, to understand. The action and the resolution were just always the same, the tracking, the trapping, the ending, everything muscle memory infused into Ted's calloused hands. X-Bug Incorporated's business model remained as steadfast as stone, and while Ted didn't necessarily mind the monotony - as he didn't crave much mental stimulation - he was still a man with dreams, who sometimes ached to do something more interesting.

But, pest control paid well. In suburban Arizona, a hellhole disguised as habitable, families were always willing to drop hundreds, even thousands, in order to rid their homes of nature's children. And Ted dealt with anything, which helped. A burly twenty-something, he'd wrangled western coyotes out of Jacuzzis and black widows out of Airstreams. For someone so academically daft, Ted Staedtler's tact when it came to the removal of creatures was unmatched. He'd gained a sort of notoriety, and so he was often requested by name, which earned him hefty bonuses and three square meals a day. There was, at least, one benefit to the drudgery: a consistent source of fiscal comfort. And at least he'd proven his mama wrong. He could get himself a job.

So, when Ted pulled his company van into the driveway of 1473 Montclair Avenue, Asesinato, Arizona, he had no reason to be uncertain. It was a typical rattlesnake scare. He'd brought the tongs and the antivenom, slung across his slate-gray polo, ready as always. Yet, there was a certain hum in the infernal air, and despite the smothering heat and the pre-paid receipt in his pocket, Ted felt an almost imperceptible chill arc through his spine.

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He'd confirmed the appointment earlier that morning, as he ate his typical breakfast, clad only in plaid boxers and tattered ankle socks. The trailer he owned had previously been up-kept by a hippie, so his kitchen window was homemade stained glass, shaky flowers embossed on shards of green. Despite some initial reservations, Ted grew to enjoy it, beer-bottle browns warmed ocher by the sky. He liked how it morphed the unrelenting sun, stretching and dyeing its interstellar rays like candy. The sweet glow stormed across his omelet and his shag carpet and onto his paper, where he scribbled down the address and her name. He gazed into the light as the woman on the call explained her situation yet again.

"I know it *is* a bit unorthodox. I just really, you know, really don't want to upset my husband," she pandered, and Ted was bright enough to pick up on her embarrassment.

"No, no," he reassured, slathering butter across his white toast. "Get weirder stuff all the time. Don't 'cha worry 'bout it. I'll be there at... eleven. Did 'cha pay through the online portal?"

"Yes, yes, I did, thank you, Mr..."

"Ted," he answered. "Bye now. Thank *you* for choosing X-Bug. See you soon."

She bid adieu, and hung up, and Ted thought about her. Ted was used to placating customers for various reasons; it was one of the more challenging aspects of his job. However, it was odd that his client was so reluctant to tell her husband about him. But she'd explained thoroughly the week before: they were Yankees who'd been thrust out of their element by her husband's job, and the woman - Alma - hadn't wanted to ruffle his feathers anymore than she needed to. "He doesn't need to know there's a rattler in the basement! You know, he picked this house out himself, paid a good amount of money for it too. I just don't think I *need* to tell him. Is that okay? Yes, yes, okay, just come on Tuesday, he's on a work trip. I'll pay whatever, Mr. Staedtler. I'm told you're the best. *God*, I don't like that snake."

And after he swung down his Clozapine, he was off. He would catch that snake, and leave, and then buy himself some honey ham for supper. Maybe he'd even buy some clam chowder. Well, he reasoned, it might not be too tasty here. It might be too warm for anything.

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Alma adjusted her sweater and waltzed back into the living room, handing Ted a dewy glass. "Thanks," he muttered, as she splayed herself on the loveseat. He took a sip (lukewarm) and placed the glass carefully upon her wooden coffee-table.

"NO! No!" Alma sprang to life, like a spring unleashed, and snatched the glass, grabbing a coaster from the center of the table, wiping the residue with the hem of her knit. Ted stilled, sinking into the couch with bewilderment. Who was this woman? Where was the snake? The light from above seared into his neck.

"I'm sorry," she laughed, embarrassed. "My husband just *hates* when the tables get stained. He'd put up a bit of a fuss." Her eyes glazed over, and she cracked her knuckles twice. She looked at the door, and back to Ted. His breath came in lumpy waves. It was hot. The water didn't help.

"S'okay, ma'am," he spluttered, wiping his brow. "Now let's get focused here." Yes, he had to re-center the purpose of his visit. It was always the same. "Where's this rattlesnake I been hearin' about?"

She blinked, and then a shy smile inched across her rodent face. "Yes! Yes, the snake. Thank you for coming, by the way, to help with this snake problem. The snake... Well, there isn't really one."

Ted frowned, his unease melting into confusion. Well then, why the hell was he here?

He asked her the above, in kinder terms, as Alma took a lengthy drink. She glanced at the grandfather clock, and then at the door, and at the torn stitches on the armrests of her furniture, and then finally, into Ted's eyes, her gaze haunted by something unspeakable.

"I want you to exterminate my husband."

The room felt like a vacuum. Even the natural light from the windowpanes ceased to enter the space, and the grandfather clock itself knew when to shut up and behave. Ted couldn't bear to move, as Alma took another measured sip, fingers shaking. He couldn't even think, even ask why. Why him? Why now? What on earth was he doing here?

Alma seemed to read his mind. "I'm sorry, Ted. I know you've just met me, and I'm asking you to *kill* for me!" She tried to laugh, but it came out strangled, like the call of a hunted bird. "But I'm desperate. I'm so desperate. I can't seem to do anything without being beaten, Ted. And according to those reviews, you're the best in the county at your job, Ted. Is it so different?"



It is so different to get rid of somebody in the same way that you get rid of a roach, Ted? I mean, I'm no advocate for murder, but it's self-defense, Ted. I can't do it, Ted. I can't call the police because he's so damn good at lying, Ted. I can't protect myself anymore. I need someone--"

Ted stood, sudden, crashing into the table, both glasses shattering against the hardwood as water spilled and trickled everywhere. So much for coasters. The clock came back full force, thunking and ticking in every inch of his mind as he tried to breathe. With sickening resignation, he managed to ask, "Is there even a snake?"

Alma put her face in her hands, and looked at him pitifully. "Have you ever heard of a metaphor, Ted?"

She's started speaking in *tongues*, he thought, and he knew he had to leave. Damn it, but he wanted to help the rat woman, her eyes beaded with needy tears as she shook before him. "Please, Ted," she wailed, outstretching her hand.

"I'll get 'cha some refunds. I'm sorry, I gotta leave. Give you a refund," he muttered, jumping away from her touch, rushing to the door, scrambling to unlatch the lock and escape. It was too much. The receipt fluttered out of his pocket and landed on the front stoop as he put the van in gear and drove as fast as he could, Alma's final cry echoing in his stunted mind.

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Ted held the cigar between his fingers, his leaf-wad vermilion with dying fire. It almost seemed to breathe, seizing with tendrils of gossamer decay in the fluorescent porchlight. He watched the silver coils unfurl, and felt a pang, as if his heart were tied to the house in *Asesinato*, the woman desperately yanking at the other end of an invisible string. A cricket chirped in the ether. Cacti blocked out the moon.

Ted looked into the purple night and wondered if he had done the right thing. He could almost taste the metallic terror in Alma's mouth, inky blood drawn from months of bitten tongues. Unwillingly, images smeared across his mind's eye, her pleas, her sallow cheeks, the rotting yellow-green blots on her arm. He watched a stray ember jump from the cigar and land on his boot. It crusted and writhed, searing through the sienna fabric like memory through time, and he allowed himself to wallow in not only the

panic he had felt in Asesinato, but the heart-wrenching familiarity that had crept through his body and stuck to him like glue.

He thought about Mama for the first time in years.

She was what his school resource counselor had described as “untreated borderline.” All that meant to him was that she was a sick witch. His childhood had been fire and ice, all the time, in every way, and never did Ted sleep comprehending why Mama did what she did. Whenever Mama lied to his teachers about his bruises, Ted would nod his aching head, as if Mama were the be-all end-all, the final say of the universe, and anyone who thought otherwise was wicked and wrong.

Mama would come home and slam open his bedroom door. She never knocked. He’d tell her he failed the test. The math test, the science test, the reading test, he’d failed it, and he’d failed her. “I can’t *WIN!*” she would yowl, as she raked her clawed acrylics across his face. “I can’t do *one* Goddamn thing right, can I? You should be *grateful*. I spent *so* much money on that tutor and for what? YOU’RE the loser. *You’re* the loser. Not me. *Not* me. Not *me.*”

Not me.

The recollections rushed in, a flash-back flash-flood, tumbling and lapsing, drenching a valley of sorrow that had dried long ago. Ted let out a strangled breath, half-laugh and half-sob, caked in decades of suppression. A tremor shot through his hands. He dropped the cigar on the deck. It hissed and spat, visceral, and he felt like murder, as a single tear raced down his bristled cheek and sunk into the floor.

He had never been able to face Mama. He’d only been able to run from her, and run he had done well. But somewhere in his gullet, a voice told him that Alma couldn’t run. He imagined Alma bashed by a Swiffer, shaking in the bathroom as she tried to wash her hair. He touched his head, to the scar across his scalp, and the sudden child-like sorrow that had swallowed him melted into something darker.

She had gotten there too, that dank place of embitterment, where in desperation she’d made that call to him. And Ted hadn’t really replied. He was the best exterminator west of Phoenix, and he rarely pondered the value of animal life. But human lives were far more fragile. The action would be the same, but the resolution would differ in immense and irreversible ways. Yet, now, such considerations mattered less and less. Alma’s husband was clearly

the scum of the Earth. Ted had to go somehow. He wasn't stupid enough to forget about prison time, but his gut told him he'd just have to find a way. Alma had called upon him, and he'd have to answer. Ted tossed his cigar over the edge of the deck, final tendrils of smoke urging him to go. He hustled to his Ford Escort, slamming the car in gear as he made his way back to Asesinato.

...

The house looked crueler at night, bathed in headlight glow. Ted parked a little farther away and turned off the ignition, the rumble of the engine replaced by the sounds of locusts in the dark. It was possible that he'd been too rash, forgetting to call Alma before arriving. But her husband was on that work trip. He had to get back to her now or never. Was he prepared to exterminate a person? Not yet, but he'd left her vulnerable. He'd left her without any comfort. And he knew what it felt like to be left without comfort. Ted locked the car door and walked down Montclair Avenue, until Alma's house came into view. The stucco was the same, embalmed in midnight blue, mailbox unemptied, one car in the driveway. It was safe to approach. An owl cooed somewhere, calling him closer.

Ted tiptoed towards Alma's lawn, warmed only by a scant garage-light. He steered clear of it, slinking through the shadows towards the front door, making progress towards saving Alma until he stopped, as he gazed at the Crossover, illuminated by the flickering bulb above. It was not orange. It was blue.

Ted's heart sank into his shoes. He flicked his gaze to the license plate, from the Ocean State, but with a verdant wave of green. It couldn't be. Was her husband the only one home right now? Did his trip end early? Damn it, he thought. I just have to call her tomorrow. We'll sort this out. The goose pimples on his spine reignited with fear, and he turned back to the street. As if on cue, the door to the house flew open with a loud click, silencing the insects of the early morning and the specters of the beyond.

A man stepped outside, and Ted did not have to think twice to know who it was. He knelt down in the blackness and watched. His inner streams of regret widened into rivers of uncertainty as he saw that the man dragged a full garbage bag behind him, with casual haste, as if what lay inside the bag meant nothing. The husband's head, turning with violent

surges, was the only indication that he was terrified. The rest of his body moved with the utmost control, like a soldier, as he walked to the crossover. With a heaving grunt, he pushed open the hatch and threw the garbage bag inside, turning his head left and right, and left again, checking that nobody saw. But Ted saw, and began to realize what exactly he could be witnessing. He thought about Alma on the loveseat, frantic, like a hamster chained to its wheel, victim to the circle, and he wanted to drown and scream and raze the husband down right there. But he froze, and the crossover vanished, a receipt caked in blood soaring out the rear window and onto the Earth.

Ted raced to his car and snatched his phone, calling 911 faster than he could breathe. And then he collapsed on the curb, and threw up in his hands. He could have saved her, but he was too afraid to do so. And now she was gone, and now he could never save her again. Ted wished, in that moment, more than ever, that the action and the resolution would always be the same.

That he had never trusted himself to handle everything, that he wasn't incapable of helping others escape their own mamas, escape the diamondbacks, escape themselves. It seemed that all he could do was kill rodents and fail tests, and X-Bug's very own Ted Staedlter began to cry, shoulders shaking with the weight of his choices and the entire world.

Pelts

by Sadie McCann

Gray shadows slipped through the ocean, looping and slicing through the water. Women in pelts were free from the pressures of land and men, almost weightless in the ocean's water. Swimming was in their souls, from the tips of their flippers to the ends of their noses.

For eons, the gray fur had wrapped around the women, both as humans and seals. The pelts held the key to their happiness, their souls, the key to the freedom of the water and the opportunity of the land.

For these women, it was life.

Esther pivoted on her foot just as she reached the front wall of the warehouse and started to walk, once again, to the back. Her heels made an echoing click with each step she took, highlighting the void of black that filled the corners of the building, where the light from the lantern couldn't reach. Her fidgeting fingers found the edge of her coat, her pelt, and dragged themselves up and down it.

Ruth lounged against the wall next to the pool, taking long drags of her cigarette and blowing it out in slow exhales. "You tryin' to put a hole in the floor? Calm down, doll."

Esther pivoted once more on her heel and continued. "I'll stop when you put down that gasper."

Ruth just snorted and took an even longer inhale.

"Shut your mouth, there's no way I'm stopping. It's 1924, doctors are advocating for them now, saying they're good for ya. I'm gonna live till 95."

Even as Esther shook her head, a small smile crept onto her face. Ruth would live as long as she wanted. And then when the Reaper finally caught up, she'd claim he was running late.

Esther spared another glance at the pool of dark water. Florence and Mildred had gone out this morning to meet up with the rum runners who sailed out in international waters with alcohol to smuggle into the

States. Esther knew the bums that bootleg alcohol could be difficult to work with, and it was usual for the girls who went out on runs to be late, but that never seemed to calm her nerves. She liked it better when she was out on the runs herself, flowing through the water, completely in control.

Roughly half an hour later, after Esther had gotten tired of walking and Ruth's cigarette had been reduced to ash on the ground, a gray orb poked out of the water, followed by deep black eyes and whiskers. Ruth coolly stood up and dusted off the edges of her coat.

"What took ya so long?"

The seal seemed to roll her eyes as she swam to the edge of the water entryway. As soon as she reached the edge, the gray seal morphed into a bright red-headed woman with freckles like stars and a temper just as hot. She wore an elegant gray coat, not unlike Esther's and Ruth's, and had a rope tied to her waist leading to the water.

Florence stuck her hands on her hips and raised an eyebrow at Ruth's griping comment, a look she had perfected over their teenage years. "I'm sorry, did you just swim to international waters and back lugging gallons of alcohol for a bunch a' party goers and drunks? I think not, so shut up."

Florence turned to Esther and gestured to the rope tied to her waist. "Help me with this, will you?"

The women braced their feet and heaved the rope up, pulling a net full of bottles of alcohol into the warehouse. The women began packing the bottles into inconspicuous suitcases, a trick they used to avoid cops who were too loyal or stupid to already be on their payroll.

"Where's Mildred?"

"Millie got caught up tryin' to catch a striped bass, and you know how persistent she gets when she's hungry."

Esther nodded, and Ruth snorted. "Do I ever?"

Just as soon as the women finished the first net of bottles, Mildred swam into the warehouse, wiping a smudge of blood from her lip.

Florence latched up the last suitcase and turned to her smuggling partner. "Finally caught up to a fish with a brain that's probably the size of your pinkie tip?"

Mildred heaved up her net and ignored her partner's teasing. Esther was always amazed at the heavy weights she threw around with the ease of a weightlifter holding a feather. After the bottles were all successfully

hidden in suitcases, the women lugged the suitcases out to the car in a nearby alleyway, hidden under a tarp to protect it from shine-seeking fairies. On the way to the car, Esther was approached by a pack of werewolves looking to cause trouble. The alpha of the pack crept up to Esther, licking his lips. "What do we have here?"

A breath caught in Esther's throat at the idea of the dirt caked hands with cracked fingernails coming anywhere near her or her coat.

Another wolf raked his slimy looking eyes over Esther like a piece of meat he couldn't wait to sink his teeth into. "Why, it looks like a flock of pretty little chicks who flew too far from the nest."

Just as a wandering hand started to get too close to Esther and her coat for comfort, Mildred stepped in front of her, letting the broadness of her shoulders and width of her biceps sink in.

"Come on guys, look at the coats," the scrawny runt in the back muttered. "Them's that women gang, the Pelts. They're selkies, they control the waterfront."

"Yeah, y'all need to listen to rat-face in the back there and run on home to mama." Ruth wasted no time putting down her case of booze, and casually shifting her hand to the pistol in her belt. The alpha's eyes darted between Mildred's towering frame and Ruth's pistol, and decided whatever he had been planning wasn't worth the trouble. He signaled his pack back into the shadows, but didn't pass up the chance to bare his teeth at Esther. Florence gently put her hand on Esther's shoulder and guided her a block to the car.

Twenty minutes later, the car pulled up behind a grand hotel in downtown Providence. Esther had finally calmed down and was able to help carry the suitcases into the service entrance in the back of the hotel. The kitchens were bustling as a group of witches casually passed ingredients and dishes in colorful bursts of magic.

Esther weaved through the chaos of the kitchen and down a few staircases to the basement, where the alcohol was kept. Ruth tugged the bags from her hands and, compared with the work that went into getting it, unceremoniously dumped them on the ground. "Come on Esther, we'll leave these two to put the bottles away. You and I deserve a night of fun."

Florence gave Ruth another pointed look, but there was a mischievous glint. "And what have you done to deserve this night of fun, huh? Stood in a warehouse, waiting for us?"

Esther looked back at Florence, who gave her a small smile. "Go on. Have fun," she mouthed. Esther reluctantly let herself be pulled along. "They'll be fine; those two could use the alone time. Now stop dawdling, I wanna get to the club before the band runs out of the good songs."

The pair walked up to a door guarded by another selkie. Anna looked up from her book to confirm their gray coats, and waved them through without hassle. Inside the hotel's old ballroom, a raging party lit up the room. A bar went the length of the back wall, and Esther knew from the nights she spent bartending that there was a trapdoor to the cellar, where Florence and Mildred were more likely than not goofing off.

The center of the room was filled with a dance floor full of circles of fae. Ruth's favorite band, The Sirens, enchanted the crowd. Groups of vampires preferred sticking to the back corners of the room, snickering and giving the side-eye at the laughing fae in the center. A group of leprechauns were holed up in the right corner, completely engrossed in their game of cards. Esther did a double take when she saw a glint from the center of the table.

"Are they betting with actual gold?"

"Nah, it's just chocolate. There's no way you could get a leprechaun to risk their gold." Ruth continued to guide Esther through the party, pointing out who was sleeping with who, and who cursed who into what.

"And John over there was the unlucky sap who was stuck as a chicken for a month after he cheated on Eliza Hutchinson, one of the descendants of Anne Hutchinson, before he realized she's the head of one of the oldest witch families in the state."

By this point, Ruth had led Esther to the bar, and managed to get a cigarette from somewhere. "Have a drink, doll. I'm gonna meet up with a friend."

Mary, who was working the counter that night, took pity on Esther, and handed her a glass of apple cider. "I see Ruth's dragged you here, hun." Esther sipped her drink. "Yeah."

"I heard you were on pick-up duty; I'd expect you to be out swimming by now."

"You know Ruth. I'll slip out later, and go down to Conimicut Point."

Mary smiled, with wrinkles shining around her eyes. "I was just like you when I was young. I loved-love the water."



Before Esther could continue the conversation, Mary was called down to a group of women who wanted a round of shots. After five minutes of nursing her drink, Esther was assured Ruth had gotten distracted enough with her friends that she wouldn't notice if Esther slipped out. Just as she stood up, a crash exploded behind her. One of the vampires, who had gotten a little too tipsy, barreled into the leprechaun's game. A fight quickly ensued between the groups, all of whom were heavily armed.

The room fell into silence, besides the cocking of hammers. The room was a powder keg over an open flame, a toddler seconds from being told no, a glass teetering on the edge of a table. Esther froze in place and waited for the silence to break. In the end, it was a woman at the end of the bar who passed out with a crash that sent a hellfire of bullets ripping across the room.

Esther scrambled to get behind the counter, but before she could get to safety, a vivid flower of blood bloomed on her side. That small bullet had ripped through her flesh without struggle, yet the damage it wrought was irreparable.

It sliced without mercy as it destroyed this irreplaceable part of herself, damaging her link to the ocean, her link to freedom.

Esther didn't know whether it was from the pain in her chest or the pain in her heart, but the anguish was overwhelming, and the world faded into black.

Esther lay in bed, staring at her ceiling. Even after months of staring, the water stains on the ceiling refused to take any shape. There were no flowers, no dogs, just brown stains marring her view. But the brown stains were better than the alternative, which was turning her head just a few degrees and seeing her listless pelt on her chair.

Every time she saw the pelt, a stab went through her side, right where she had been shot. The physical pain had long faded, but it still left scars. After that night, Mary washed her pelt, returning what was left to its deep gray, but the pelt was not left unharmed. A hole, which in any other coat wouldn't be an issue, had bored its way into her mind and heart. It was gnawing at her constantly. Her pelt, her soul, had been irreparably damaged. Mary had reassured her that the hole wouldn't change her ability to shift. She had said that as if it fixed everything.

But it didn't.

Because a piece of her was gone.

For the past months, Esther had barely left her room. She couldn't bring herself to stray far from her pelt and she couldn't bring herself to put it on or even touch it. So she remained tethered to her bed, in a way that she had once been tethered to the ocean. The pelt still sat on her desk where Mary had returned it weeks ago, because Esther couldn't bring herself to put it away.

Without warning, her door opened with a bang. Ruth appeared above her, blocking the plain brown stains, and ripped off her blanket. "Get up."

Esther groaned and turned over as Ruth went through her closet, and threw pieces of clothes at her. "What if I say no?"

"Not an option, doll. It's been long enough."

With much hassle, Ruth dragged Esther out of bed and into her car. When Ruth offered her pelt and Esther just stared at it, Ruth put it in a bag.

They drove out of the city and down the state, until they arrived at Esther's favorite swimming spot, Conimicut Point. Without thought, Esther wandered, in a trance to the edge of the water, where the waves almost lapped at her feet, but couldn't quite reach.

Ruth, for once, was just quiet at her side. The pair were alone on the beach, the crowds had been dissuaded from coming by the heavy, oppressive clouds blanketing the sky.

After a minute, Ruth's unusually tentative voice broke the silence.

"You know, I brought you down here to swim. I thought... I thought it would make you feel better, make you better. I thought seeing the water would fix the hole. I thought something would just click. You'd feel the salt, the sand, and you'd realize everything was the same, hole or not."

Esther just stared out at the sea, before she forced her eyes to her pelt. Ruth had carried it out for her after Esther had left it on the back seat. Before she knew it, her eyes grew watery and the floodgates blew open.

Esther sobbed into Ruth's shoulder at the ache of the injury and her soul and at the fact that no matter what she did, the pain wouldn't stop rearing its ugly head.

"But I-I'm not. There's a part of me that's just gone."

"I know doll, I know."

Esther took a shaky inhale. "And even if I get over this-this hump, I just..."

"You're not the same." Esther's head snapped up, a sudden sinkhole drilling through her stomach. Her eyes raked Ruth's face for any hint of maliciousness or snark. There was none.

"No."

"And you're not gonna be the same."

"No."

"And you're beautiful. We're gonna figure it out. But you know what I do know?"

Esther shook her head. Ruth squeezed her tighter.

"You're gonna make it through. And I'm with you, all the way."



Description d'un Monstre né d'une brebis

DATE: 1660-1732, PLACE: Paris, MATERIAL: Ink on paper
Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

The Library

by Emma Mitnik

A chill stings Daisy's face as she briskly walks through her small town square. Wind blows her short brown hair and nips at her freckled cheeks. She looks down, hiding her watering green eyes, trying so hard not to think of that ghostly word that wouldn't stop following her. *Divorce*. It was because of that word that she stormed out of her house, screaming "I hate you!" to her parents. It's because of that word that she knows her life will never be the same. And it's because of that word that her legs are taking her to a place she hasn't gone to in years, but one she remembers vividly.

Muscle memory takes Daisy to her safe haven without her even having to think about it. A giant stone library towers over her, windows open but boarded. She remembers grabbing a Del's or an Awful Awful and making herself at home within the library's protective walls. She used to walk here whenever her parents fought, until it closed four years ago. She leans her hand on the doors, feeling a sense of loss.

Much to her surprise, the doors open.

The sudden scent of dust tickles Daisy's nose, causing her to sneeze. Her eyes adjust to the darkness as she closes the door behind her. The library was already run-down and ancient when it was open, but now it just feels... empty. She runs her hand along the spine of a book, only to realize it has no title. In fact, none of them have any titles. She picks the book up and finds the cover completely bare, except for a silver engraving of a dragonfly. She dejectedly throws it onto the floor, and it lands open on page one.

Suddenly, swarms of dragonflies fly out of the pages, causing Daisy to shriek. The book spits out what must be thousands before finally stopping. The dragonflies gather together, forming a human figure, before dispersing out the semi-boarded windows.

In their place stands a man with long, blond hair that falls in curls over his silver-clad shoulders. His blue eyes and armor sparkle in an

unnatural way. The two stare at each other in shock, before the man makes the first move.

"You... you opened my book," he says. Daisy only nods in disbelief, her voice caught in her throat. "No one's opened my book in years." He gestures around the library. "No one's opened any of these books in years." The man steps toward Daisy, and she shrinks back. "Do not be frightened, my lady," he reassures her.

"Who are you?" Daisy asks, finally finding her voice.

"I am just a knight, my lady." The knight gets down on one knee, right arm diagonally crossing his chest. "I have been waiting for a kind soul to open my book and hear my story. Please, allow me to regale you with my tale."

Daisy almost laughs at the absurdity of the situation. How is any of this happening? "You know what?" she asks sardonically. "Sure. Why not? I can take another curveball the universe throws at me today!" As she sits down on a ragged leather couch, she notices the library fading away. She finds herself still sitting on the couch, but now in a medieval kingdom.

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful kingdom. The kingdom used to be the center of trade, prosperity, and fortune. Until one day, a dragon moved into a nearby cave and terrorized any and all visitors. The queen knew she must act fast, so she appointed an up-and-coming knight to prove his worth and slay the dragon. The knight took his quest with honor.

When he arrived, he grasped his sword and charged in with valor. The cave was dark and wet, but the knight pushed forward, determined to prove himself to his kingdom. However, when he finally reached the dragon, he froze. The dragon had purple scales the color of poison, and piercing yellow eyes that stared into his soul. It was all too much for the knight. So, in a moment of weakness, he ran.

The queen was rather disappointed to hear of the knight's cowardice, but she was a reasonable ruler, so she gave him three more chances. The next two attempts had the same outcome: he rode to the cave, he ventured inside, and when he finally faced the towering dragon, he ran.

His last chance started like the others. However, this time, the dragon blocked the exit. The knight had nowhere to run. He could no longer avoid his fate. He knew the only way to ensure his survival and the future of his kingdom was to face his fears. It was a long and tiring battle, but late that night, the knight returned to his kingdom with the dragon's heart pierced on his sword.

The queen named him the fairest, most courageous knight in the land, and they all lived happily ever after.

As the kingdom fades back into the library, the knight turns to Daisy. "Well? Tell me, my lady, what did you think?"

"I'm not sure I understand. If you were supposed to be the kingdom's only hope, why did you run away? And why did the queen give you more chances? And what was the point of all this?"

"Have you never run away from something you thought you couldn't face?" Daisy opens her mouth to retort back, but closes it again. After all, the only reason why she's here, the only reason why she ever came here, was to run away. Still, she won't admit that to the knight. He senses her hesitation. "Well, it's never too late to face your fears."

"Wait, but what do I do now?"

"The same thing you do whenever you finish a book: close it, put it away, and pick up another one."

As Daisy picks up the book, the dragonflies fly in again, swarming around the knight. This time, when they disperse, he disappears. As soon as the last one dives into the pages, she closes the book and places it back on the shelf. *Pick up another one.* She strolls around the library and chooses a random book in what used to be the horror section. However, this book has a butterfly engraved on it. Daisy opens the book and quickly tosses it onto the ground before anything can fly out. It doesn't prevent her from getting hit in the face by a few butterflies. She stumbles back with her eyes closed, and when she finally opens them again, a tall, red-haired woman stands in front of her.

The pale woman has a modest red gown and dazzling jewelry on. She wears copious amounts of makeup, but they don't hide the sorrow in her gray eyes. "And who are you supposed to be?" Daisy asks, inspecting her.

"Oh, just a housewife," she responds, her voice no louder than a whisper. "My husband won't be back for a while, and I would love some company."

"You want to tell me your story?" The housewife nods slightly in response. Daisy sits back down as the library transforms into a seaside village.

In a small town by the bay, there lived a married couple: the mayor and his housewife. The mayor was a respected man, and one of high honor among the townspeople. People far and wide came to him in times of need, whether it be a loan, or a drinking buddy, or just a shoulder to lean on.

The housewife was a quiet woman, who barely left the house and barely spoke a word. She spent her days tending to the house and caring for her husband. However, while everyone else saw the mayor as a kind, honest, and genuine man, she knew the truth. Behind closed doors, he shouted at her and berated her, expecting her to spend every waking moment devoted to cooking and cleaning and maintaining his image. Day after day, he sculpted her into the perfect little housewife, until all of her was scrubbed away.

One day, on her way to get groceries, she bumped into the town fisherman. She apologized profusely, bracing for an onslaught of insults and obscenities, before he placed a hand on her shoulder to calm her down. She looked into the fisherman's concerned eyes and saw what she hadn't seen in years: genuine care for her.

Seeing the fisherman gave her the confidence to speak up to the mayor about a divorce. He merely laughed in her face, before realizing she was serious. The mayor was enraged. He called her worthless and idiotic, unleashing all of his verbal fury on the poor housewife. "What would the townspeople think?" he shouted. "It would ruin me if everyone found out my wife was planning a divorce! And where would you be? Begging for food on the streets, because you're a good-for-nothing housewife, and that's all you'll ever be!"

That night, the housewife didn't cry. For she knew what she had to do. When she was sure her husband was sound asleep, she snuck out of bed and crept to the kitchen. She grabbed the sharpest knife she could find. Her finger glided along the side of the blade, and she imagined what it would be like to use this knife to gut the fish the fisherman would catch. When she snuck back into the bedroom and approached the mayor's bedside, all she could see was the fish.

"What was that?" Daisy shouts as the library fades back into view. "You killed him? What kind of story was that?"

"People interpret stories in many ways," the housewife says with a bit more confidence than before. "I happen to see it as a cautionary tale."

"Caution about what? Not murdering people?"

The housewife chuckles, in better humor now that her husband is gone. "Oh, not directed to me," she corrects Daisy. "The caution is directed to the others. There are many lessons I wish the mayor and the townspeople could've learned. Maybe there are lessons I should've learned, too, but there's one thing I know for certain. Divorce was such a forbidden topic. Because of that, I was trapped in a relationship based on abuse and control."

“But divorce isn’t a good thing.”

“It isn’t a bad thing, either. Sometimes it can be the only way to get out.”

The housewife’s words anger Daisy. In a fit of rage, she grabs the book and starts to close it. She watches the butterflies swarm the housewife, her gray eyes staring right at her. Those eyes are the last parts of her to be covered before the butterflies disperse back into the book, and the housewife vanishes.

She shoves the book back on the shelf, fighting the urge to kick the bookshelf. What does the housewife know? Besides, she never had to consider how it could affect a child. Daisy’s family was being ripped apart, and the housewife had the nerve to suggest it isn’t as bad as she’s picturing it?

Then again, her father isn’t abusive to her mother, so the housewife definitely had it worse, without a doubt. But is Daisy’s mother as unhappy as she was? Her father must feel the same way if they both agree on a divorce. The housewife had to resort to more gruesome methods. What methods would her parents resort to if they didn’t have the option? Daisy doubts either of them are capable of murder, but cheating or running away aren’t preferable options, either. Maybe divorce is the best outcome.

No, Daisy pushes that notion away. She can’t be thinking such things. Instead, she focuses her attention on finding a new book. After a few minutes of searching, she finds one that seems to be calling to her. This time, it’s a book with a moth on the cover. When she opens it, the moths reveal a tall, tan-skinned teenager with black hair and brown eyes. The boy looks around excitedly.

“Oh man, I’ve been chosen! My book has been opened!” He turns to Daisy. “You must be the reader!”

“I take it you’re an athlete?” Daisy asks, noting the jersey he’s wearing.

“I mostly play basketball, but yeah!”

“If you don’t mind, I’m not in the mood for all this energy, so can you please start the story?” The athlete looks a little disappointed at Daisy’s request, but he nods anyway. “Quite the mood change from the murderer,” Daisy mutters to herself as the library changes to a basketball court.

It was the start of the season for the basketball team, and the gym was bursting with excitement. One athlete in particular was the most excited of them all. After years of practicing and training hard, he finally made it into his high school’s varsity team.

At first, the athlete was eager to become part of the team and prove himself with his skills. But as the season progressed, he started doubting himself. With every game, he started noticing the mistakes he made more and more. He wanted to connect with the other players, but he found it hard to insert himself in an already tight-knit group.

However, it all fell apart near the end of the season. The team was competing for a spot in the championship game. In the locker room, as the athlete listened to the team captain hype up the team, he suddenly gained a boost of confidence. This time, he knew he was going to prove himself and win the game.

When he ran out onto the court, the roars of the audience flooding his ears, he could barely contain his excitement. As soon as the ball was tossed into the air, he let his adrenaline take over. He was flying on autopilot, soaring through the air without even thinking about it. His mind was in the future, thinking about the praise he would receive, how proud he would make the others feel.

Soon, the buzzer went off for the final time, and the athlete looked up at the scoreboard. His face fell. He expected their score to be at least a little higher than the other team's, but it wasn't even close. They lost, and their season was now over. The athlete was crushed, and he trudged back into the locker room, sure he had messed it up somehow. He didn't remember what he did, but it had to have been him. He'd been messing up all season.

He apologized to the other teammates, angry at himself for letting the team break up now. But the captain just looked at him confused. "You were fine. Sure, you messed up a few times, but we all have. We're not perfect."

As the rest of the team voiced their agreement, the athlete knew he couldn't wait until next season.

"So what does that mean?" Daisy asks. She really doesn't understand sports, and these stories aren't her style.

"Oh... I don't know!" the athlete states after thinking about it. "I'm not good with finding hidden meanings."

Daisy huffs. "You have to be the worst storyteller ever."

But the athlete isn't paying attention. Instead, he's focusing on a moth that has landed on his finger. "I've always felt a deep connection to moths."

"Why? Aren't they just pests?"

"Well, some of them can be, but not all of them. You probably know moths for eating clothes. Well, most moths don't even do that. And still,

everyone blames them. I wonder if they blame themselves, too, even if they know they didn't do anything wrong."

Growing impatient with the athlete's distraction, Daisy picks up the book. "Look," she says, "I don't know what any of this has to do with my parents' divorce. Aren't libraries supposed to inform and help you? Well, all I've learned about is a cowardly knight, a deranged housewife, and a stupid athlete! All I wanted to do was return to my safe space, and now I feel even worse than before!"

The athlete looks at her, dumbfounded. "O-Oh jeez," he manages to stammer out. "I'm sorry, I- I didn't know! Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Yeah, you can take your moths and leave me alone!" Daisy shouts before starting to close the book. The moths quickly swarm around the athlete, ready to make him disappear. The last thing Daisy hears before they disperse back into the pages is a faint, "It's not your fault."

Daisy freezes, the book now closed. *It's not your fault.* It plays over and over again in her head, until tears spill from her eyes. Was that what was bothering her? All this time, did she really think it was her fault? Looking back, Daisy feels so stupid. Maybe that's what the athlete was trying to tell her. Maybe she's like a moth, blaming herself for something she isn't even guilty of. She strokes the spine of the book, finally understanding the meanings of the stories. None of this is because of her. Divorce really is the best option for her parents. She can't run away from that anymore.

Wiping her eyes and gently placing the book back on the shelf, Daisy looks outside. The sun is beginning to set, and her parents must be very worried. As she steps out the door and away from the library, she whispers a goodbye to the place that has saved her once again. And as she runs home, she swears she can see a dragonfly, a butterfly, and a moth out of the corner of her eye. They follow beside her, assuring her that everything will be alright.



Description d'un Monstre né d'une brebis

DATE: 1660-1732, PLACE: Paris, MATERIAL: Ink on paper
Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

Boat of Hope

by Maggie Reed

When the sun's gone down, the multitude of the visitors on Mackerel Cove slowly return home to rest. The beach is in complete solitude except for one boy. His name is Liam. He sits on the ground wearing his sand-covered boxer shorts and Fourth-of-July t-shirt from Old Navy. He sips his water in rhythm to the crashing waves. Crash, sip, crash, sip, crash, sip. Until there is no water left. He stocks his bottle in the ground and looks longingly at the bay.

How he loves the ocean, to swim in it, to surf in it but most important, he wants to sail out there. Whenever he thinks of being on a boat, any onlooker can tell when he is daydreaming. His eyes light up brighter than the sun and he smiles, and not just a freakish giant smile. A sincere smile of true euphoria and if you saw it, you would smile too.

As the sun's light slips away, he watches the water turn orange to red to pink and then finally the sun leaves and the bay turns a deep blue like he has seen everyday that summer.

Today, however, he has an idea. He is going try to buy a boat. He is about to run home to check his piggy bank when reality hits. He doesn't have enough money for a boat; it's like a million dollars or something. There has to be a way though, right? Liam lies on the ground which gets sand in his new haircut, but he doesn't care; he has more important worries. He thinks long and hard; he even tries dunking himself in the cold night water. There has to be a way, but what? He decides to use a trick his mom taught him when he feels stuck. Breathe in; breathe out. Synchronizing with the waves, he can feel the cool air reach his lungs. He does this until finally he has an idea. How could it have taken him ten minutes to realize. He can make a boat. Yes, his boat will be majestic, spectacular, but there is one problem though. How is he going to make a boat? There has to be some way to find out how.

"The library," he says out loud. He can't go to the library today; it is way after the library has closed. He picks up his water bottle and cleans off all of the sand on his outfit. He slips on his favorite pair of sandals and heads to his bike. He bikes all the way home to find his parents already sound asleep. He puts his bottle down on the cluttered coffee table and tiptoes to his room, not to wake his parents up.

When he gets to sleep, he dreams about boats, pirates, and the sea. This is usual but instead of Black Beard or another pirate it is him. He is on a boat called Dream; everything is smooth sailing (no pun intended) until he can see an ominous wave coming for him.

Liam awakes in a startle. He looks at the clock; it is 8 a.m. and the library opens in an hour. Just enough time to get ready to go. He brushes his teeth and hastily puts on his clothes and when he is done an hour has passed and Liam is all ready to go; he is sporting his favorite boat socks and a beaming smile. He runs out the door barely saying goodbye to his mom and hops on his bike. As he speeds down the streets he thinks about the boat in his dream; the Dream is the perfect name. He fantasizes about the memories he will make with this boat, but it is interrupted by the gravel road shaking his bike. He is here.

Inside the library, it is almost a maze, each shelf filled with countless books with brightly colored spines beckoning him closer. He would have stayed there for hours reading if he weren't on a mission. He navigates through the many other sections until, before him is the boats section. It isn't a large section, but it is definitely more books than he can count. He takes his time checking the spines of each book until he finds *GO BUILD YOUR OWN BOAT* by Evan Harold. He picks up the book and flips through the pages. Everything in the book is so carefully described with diagrams and footnotes. Everything starts to become clear, but another problem; where will he get the materials to make the boat? He knows a place that sells wood, but let's just say the owner isn't very fond of him. He knows though that he will have to go there since there are no other places close by that do that.

He walks to the librarian's desk. "Hello, Liam," she says with a smile. "Is that the only book you will be getting?"

"Yes," Liam replies. "I'm gonna make a boat!"

"That's AMAZING," she whispers. "I hope it goes well, but where are you getting your material? Chuck?" I nod my head; she looks at me in awe.



"I know I'll find something out," Liam said mildly determined.

The librarian starts fidgeting with a pen and asks, "Um, I actually would like to ask you... would you like me to-..."

"Yes, yes," Liam interrupts. "You can come to the end of summer party at my house, everyone is invited!" Liam leaves the library, oblivious to the offer she was going to make.

Liam bikes to a gift store to get a knick-knack as a sort of apology gift. Liam buys him a wooden sculpture of a duck that is about the size of his head. He is worried this may not be enough to ease his anger, but to his surprise, Chuck isn't angry anymore.

"I need some wood, tools and rope, " Liam states.

"All right, don't mind me asking, what do you need it for?" Chuck asks.

"I know it may sound impossible, but I'm building a boat!" Liam answers.

Chuck stares at him in disbelief. "*You*, make a boat? That'll be the day." He hands Liam a worn-down leather bag, a bundle of rope, and tells him to go pick what he wants from the back yard. He is free of charge since this is a 'family' discount. They aren't actually family, but they are very close.

Liam finds that he can't just bring all the wood on his bike so he calls his mom to help pick him up. Once his mom pulls up in her truck they load everything he needs in the back. His mom thanks Chuck and they drive off.

Once Liam gets home he sets up his work space. He feels the grass between his toes and starts to read the book. He finds out that one of the most important things to get is the hull/base. He kind of expected that, but it is fun to know. After taking three hours straight to read the entire book, he makes a plan.

The plan is: First, make the hull out of wood and a tarp he has found in the garage while looking for the glue. Second, use ropes and a mast and a bedsheet to make the sail. Third, make oars (in case it is not windy). Fourth, put it all together. Fifth, paint it and make any special details. This process will happen over five days.

On the first day he gets a little help from Chuck to find out the angles and dimensions of all of the pieces, which helps a lot. Chuck really believes in Liam, but he comes because Liam is less than capable with a saw. Liam has only used a saw once in his life, so it is hard to work it at first. Eventually he gets the hang of it. When the sun goes down to rest it is the first time this summer he hasn't seen the sunset on the beach. At the end of the first day the hull is the size of a queen bed.

The next day is spent tangling with ropes to get the perfect mechanism for the sail. By sunset that day the sail is in perfect working condition.

The third day is very peaceful when carving the paddles and Liam spends the rest of the day listening to the wind rustle the trees. The oars aren't exactly even in the end but they are working.

The fourth day is the longest of them all. It is windy outside making it take way too much time just to make the mast stand straight up, let alone *keep* it standing. Many times he wants to quit and he almost does but when he feels overwhelmed he takes a deep breath and tries to think of the beach. His want for the beach drives him back into motion every time. When he has finished, the boat is astonishing. It isn't the prettiest sight but that would change very soon.

The fifth day has arrived, and Liam is pumped. It could be his adrenaline; it could be he snuck a sip of his mom's coffee that morning; we will never know. Nevertheless, he is ready. He hastily rides in his mom's car to the paint shop to find the paints he wants. While his mom gets preoccupied with the catalogs of house decor, Liam picks out his paints. Do I want pure white or ivory white? They look all the same to him! He eventually picks the colors white, navy and yellow. His mom pays for the paint and they leave to go paint the boat. Both Liam and his mom paint the boat since he doesn't have enough time to do it on its own. At sundown his mom asks if he wants to see the sunset at the beach. Of course Liam accepts and they stay up late watching the crashing waves and chatting.

He awakes the next morning and checks on the paint. They will have to wait another day for the paint to dry, then it will be perfect. The days go by fast visiting the beach and hanging out with friends. Then the sealant paint is dry. Liam is about to take it out on the water. The boat looks exactly like his dream, stunning, radiant, majestic. He almost cries. His mom tells him they can sail his boat tomorrow.

That night he almost can't sleep but, when he fell asleep that night he has the same dream he had the first night doing this project except the wave is closer. Almost on top of him. It is huge. A second later it crashes down on him engulfing him with water. He awakes in a fright. It is just a dream though, right?

The day has come and he decides to do the first test of the boat in a lake by his house. His mom has invited the librarian, because when she had returned Liam's book she was curious about his progress. His mom and the



librarian carry the boat into the water. The boat bobs up and down steadying itself. After it is relatively still, Liam carefully climbs in. He is smiling brighter than the sun; he is filled with euphoria until he grabs the oar and he feels like he is going down. He looks and sees water coming in as the hull slowly falls apart. He treads water and watches as the boat slowly sinks with all of his dreams. When he gets to shore his mom hugs him, tears streaming down Liam's face.

Someone then starts to pat his shoulder. He looks over and the librarian says, "Hey, I know how you feel, but can I give you an offer?" Liam nods. "I have a boat that I've had since I was a kid, and I was going to sail it to meet you. Do you want to sail with me sometime?" Liam is stunned but nods in agreement.

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As Liam pulls on the main sheet and the boat starts to heel, he looks back at the librarian on the tiller with a big smile. He realizes it was all worth it.

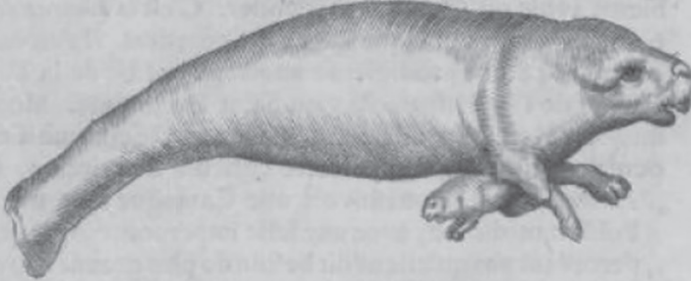
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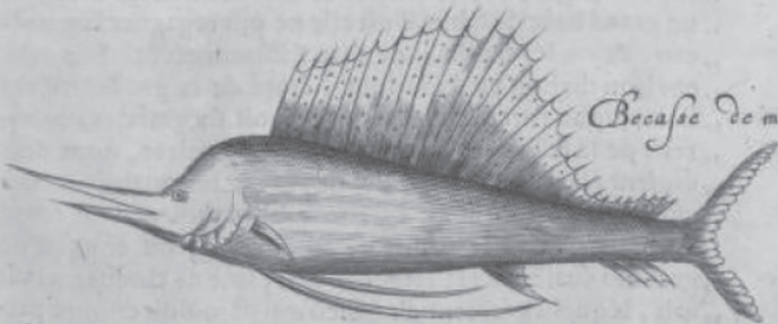
Requiem



Lamaatin



Becasse de mer



Sea creatures

DATE: [1658]; 1651-1700, PLACE: Rotterdam, MATERIAL: Ink on paper
Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

Gilded Thieves

by Antonina Suellentrop

America never had royalty. The closest thing to palaces are in Newport, Rhode Island. These buildings lord over the ocean, their polished golden beauty a sharp contrast to the harsh, unbridled mass of the sea. They are great, imposing structures, filled with lavish grandeur as far as the eye can see. Tall, marble pillars, ornate carvings, lushly upholstered furniture and soaring painted ceilings grace these mammoths of wealth. The greatest of all these glorious palaces is the Breakers, named for the fierce Atlantic Ocean waves that roar beyond its tranquil lawns and gardens.

A woman strides through these gardens now, a clipboard clasped tightly in her hands. She bursts through the doors into the mansion and continues briskly walking forward.

“You!” She stops and points at another woman setting up a strand of lights.

“Raise it higher.” The woman nods and does so. She sighs and turns to a man jogging along behind her to keep up with her fast steps, each one sounding like a gunshot as it hits the cold marble. She frowns and says quietly, “I cannot have this ruined.”

“Of course, Ms. LeBlanc,” the man says and scribbles something in a notepad.

She casts her gaze around the ballroom. “Horace,” Ms. LeBlanc states pointedly. “Did I not tell you *yellow* ribbons, not pink?”

“Oh. Yes, right away,” Horace hastily replies.

She pinches the bridge of her nose to ward off a headache. “It’s opening night, and I cannot make a hash of it. It’s my first assignment as the director of special events, as you might recall.”

Horace nods, but internally he rolls his eyes. Director this, special events that. Here at the Breakers, a tourist attraction that saw hundreds

of thousands of visitors last year, he has seen too many *directors of special events* to count. The allure of the rich and their wealth, even through time, is magnetic. In any case, it seems like every year to him that they hire and fire a new one. Ms. LeBlanc really should get off her high horse. She is not *unique* for heaven's sake. While he was thinking, his boss strides off, yelling more instructions, and he hurries after her.

...

Ms. LeBlanc stands, admiring her work. The ballroom has lights perfectly placed to accentuate the jewels strung from posts over it, the pastel yellow ribbons adorning every one. It's perfect, she thinks with pride. The Vanderbilt Necklace is being displayed for the first time in 100 years, and she is in charge, so of course, it has to be perfect. The necklace is a testament to the long-gone glory days of the house, when it hosted grand soirées, filled with lavish items far beyond the grasp of the ordinary man. Today, wide-eyed tourists shuffle through its halls, cameras flashing as the scintillating wealth waltzes around them. Ms. LeBlanc can almost picture the necklace on a woman's elegant neck as she swirls in a ballroom dance not performed here for many years.

The pedestal where the million dollar necklace would rest, ready to be admired by the crowds sure to swarm to the display of such a controversial and precious piece of jewelry, is a simple stand to accentuate the beauty of the rubies.

The necklace was lost over a century ago, mysteriously vanishing without a trace. The investigation caused several staff members to be fired back in the Gilded Age when it went missing. Suspicion was cast on everyone within a 10 mile radius of the house, and beyond. It was a cold-case that had been a famous puzzle for ages, remaining in the minds of the people even after the Gilded Age waned. Until, about 6 months ago, during a renovation, it was found under the floorboards. Such an auspicious and long-awaited event. And she, Ms. Henrietta LeBlanc, is to account for all of its splendor. With a contented smile, she turns and leaves.

...



day is ending and she hasn't come to work. Ms. LeBlanc never missed a day before. A young man walks up to Horace. His hat is in his hands and his face is distraught.

"I'm afraid I have some terrible news," he begins. The sun dips below the horizon, staining the clouds the same bloody-red as the missing necklace.

...

The rubies sat on her neck upright, showing proper posture. A lesser woman might have been overpowered by the weight of the precious stones, but Ms. Gertrude Vanderbilt was not a lesser woman. She was striding through the early years of the 1900s as only the privileged child of a robber baron could.

Beside her mirror was her sketchbook, where she kept all her drawings and watercolors. She coveted her art dearly, for Gertrude had adored color and light since a very young age. The light dancing on the jewels fascinated her now. Perhaps later she would try to capture their intricacies, shown on her own neck.

But for now she must rest. Her younger siblings had already been swept off to slumber in their beds, and she must too. Tomorrow was a party at her family's summer cottage, the Breakers, where she was going to show off the gorgeous necklace Mother and Father had given her. It was as much a chance to have fun as a way to display the monument to wealth her father had constructed. In Newport, among the rich socialites, there was no such thing as a mere gathering, conversation, or glance. Every sentence was polished and every word hand-picked, its true meaning covered in lace and glitter, but sharp enough to be never misconstrued. With a half smile, she took the necklace off, placed it on her dressing table, and went calmly to bed.

...

Gloria was up before dawn, when the stars still shone and the moon smiled a white, wide-toothed grin. The butler had made it clear that the house must be sparkling by the time the *soirée* rolled around. Most of



the day was to be taken up with decorations, setting up the ballroom, and the grand feast the chef would prepare, though most of it was sure to be thrown into the garbage. The menial tidying up was to take place in the wee hours of the day. She was kneeling on the floor, scrubbing at the marble until it sparkled.

She needed this job. At times like this, when her back and knees ached and her palms were raw, she tried to remember her little brother. Gloria smiled, remembering how excited he was to go to school on the first day. She needed to put him through his education. She would not let him live the life of servitude she was living now. All that “honest work” stuff was hogwash. It was honest, sure, but it was also back-breaking. But it was this or the factory, and Gloria would rather have a bit of pain rather than get her hand sliced off. All the children working in those factories made her sick, their faces covered in dust, sweat, and tears. Those very factories made the people who owned these massive, magnificently palatial mansions obscenely rich.

But it wasn't just the aches that made her hate working this early. The house seemed strange when no one was awake but her in it. Its nauseating glamour seemed more pointed, the shadows contorting the statues' faces like gargoyles. She could swear she had seen them move out of the corner of her eye. The wallpaper flowers seemed to rot and wilt and the painted-sky ceilings loomed ominously overhead. A prickle ran up her spine. She turned around, swearing she felt eyes on her, but no one was there.

...

Gertrude awoke, better rested than she had been in a long time. Her bleary eyes flitted around the room till they came to rest on her dresser. The necklace. Where was the necklace? In a fit of panic, Gertrude got out of bed and searched for it frantically. This must be some cruel joke on her by her brothers and sisters. She called wildly for her maid.

Nothing else in the room had been touched. There wasn't a footprint in the plush rug. Nothing. Gertrude sat, shivering, even though it wasn't cold. The police were questioning a maid in the station. She did not remember her face from before, but the look in the woman's eyes

would haunt her. She had deep-purple bags under her lower-lashes, she protested her innocence. Gertrude could hear the desperation beginning to rot into resignation in her voice. The necklace was still missing. Mother, Father, the staff, the police, even Gertrude herself had torn the house apart trying to find it. It was nowhere to be found.

Mother and Father fired the maid the next morning. Her items were cleared out of her upstairs bedroom. The only thing she had that was personal was a photo of the younger maid with a couple of other people.

...

Gloria sat in the police station, the photo of her family in her hands. A younger officer, in a bout of sympathy, had let her keep it. Gloria was younger, her arms curving around her younger brother, a small smile over his face. Although Gloria wasn't smiling, it was obvious she was happy from the light in her eyes that shone through in the photograph. The light in her eyes has long since gone out. She didn't notice a tear sliding down her face until she tasted the salt on her lips. Her mother had run off in the middle of the night, during the coldest New York winter in its denizens' memory. Her father had died that winter. Her grandma said it was from a broken heart. Gloria knew better. No matter how bad the depression gets, the sorrow won't kill you, but a bullet to the head will. Her grandma was too old to work, and on the edge of being senile anyway. It would be hard to find a new, reputable job to pay the rent. People like her and her brother were headed for the gutter anyway. She'd been fooling herself. This world of the filthy rich and the dirt poor was stacked against anyone not born into power. Maybe her father wasn't so crazy to end it all.

...

Now in its third century, The Breakers still stands, as lavish and grand, a relic of a past Gilded Age of the nation. The painted ceilings are still soaring, the pillars still regal. Today, a construction crew is there for some minor renovations. A man stands, giving directions calmly through all the hustle and bustle. Two workers are tearing up the floor planks, when one of them shouts. The man hurries over, the worker excitedly pointing

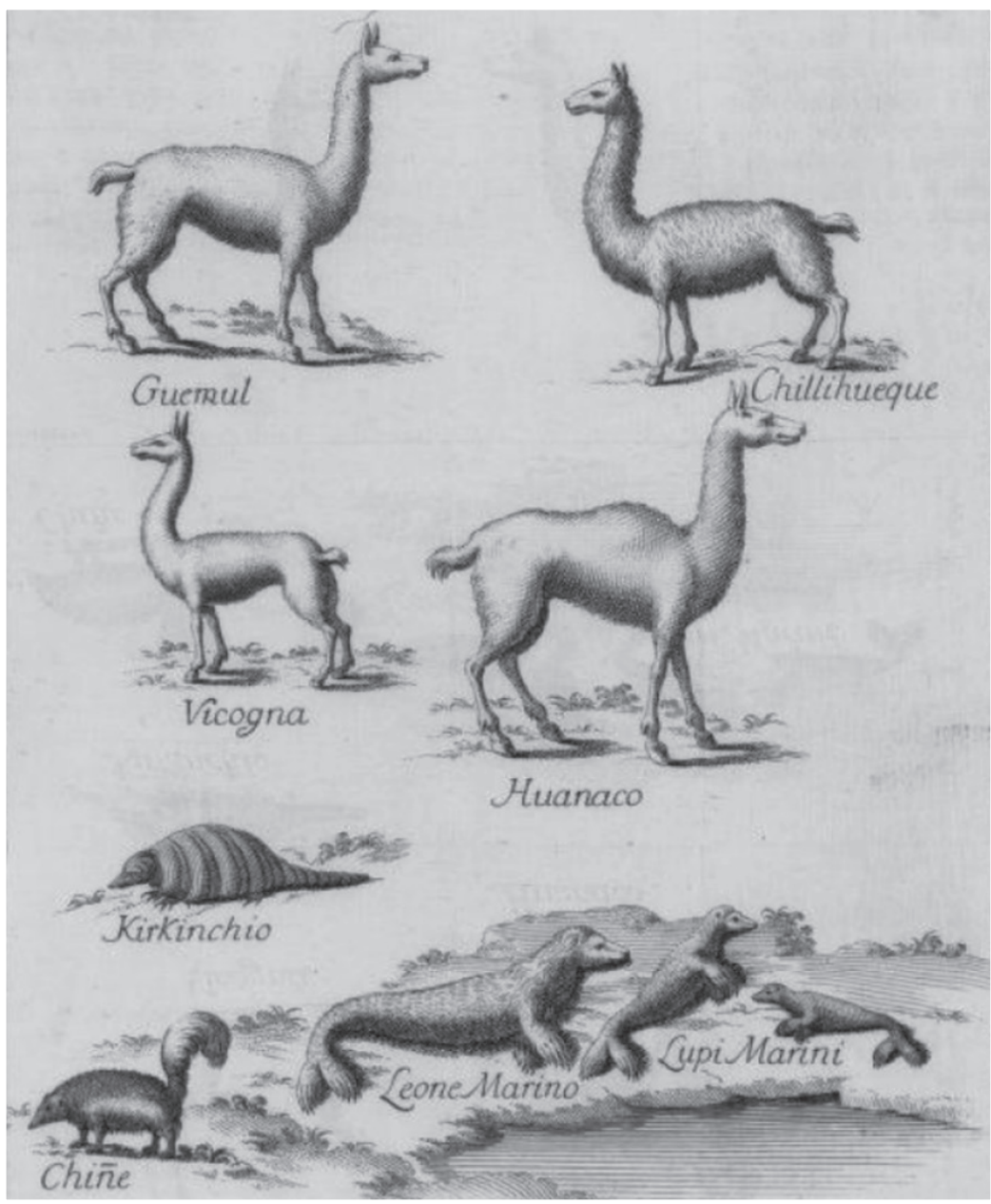


at a glimmer of red amidst the dust. The man reaches in and pulls out a beautiful, ruby red necklace. The light dances through it, casting red beams on the ground.

The director is sure no one has ever touched these floorboards before, at least since the last renovation in the log book, back in the 21st century. The necklace should be dull and dusty by now. The silver chain should have rusted. Instead, it is pristine. It looks oddly untouched.

The necklace sits in a case, cold rubies against black velvet. The man stares at it, and the jewels sparkle like otherworldly red eyes in return.

“Where did you come from?” he murmurs. The rubies glow like opulent, luminescent blood. He steps closer and places a hand on the glass, captivated. A chill slides down the back of his neck, as he feels eyes on him. He turns around, but nobody is there, save for the hungry wealth of the mansion around him. The sky is darkening, and the moon is beginning to show its teeth.



Animals of Chile

DATE: 1776; 1751-1800, PLACE: Bolonga, MATERIAL: Ink on paper
Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

Night Owls

by Amelia Taylor

The night is thick and dark and sludgy. Crickets hum and buzz and the night only ripples in response. A mating call: the crickets rub their tiny wings together. Pebbles scrape, slap, skid across the ground as a girl kicks them. No sidewalk hugs the road, but wide dirt stretches melt into sugar maples and balsam fir that follow it closely. The girl stumbles along. Pine needles and dirt cling to her sweat-spackled feet, her shoes click together in her hand, and the night sings the sounds back to her. She wishes it would leave her alone. The night, the noises, the clicking, chirping, scraping. The night is too heavy to breathe in or move through, yet the road soars into trees ahead, disappearing around a bend.

Coughing metal rattles down the road and flattens buttercups and ostrich ferns. The girl casts glassy eyes back at the truck approaching. Despite the obnoxious color and the familiar boy behind the wheel, she doesn't bother to pick up her pace.

The truck catches up to her. Through chipping blue paint, sparse street lights bounce off its metal. She cringes at the sight.

"Hey, come on, would you please just stop for a second?" A boy grips the wheel, leaning over the passenger seat. The truck rattles slowly along beside her.

"What do you want, Danny?" she bites, but her words only nibble the viscous air.

"Just get in. It's not safe." She thinks that's funny, but she doesn't say it. She doesn't even smile.

"I'm not coming with you." The words are heavy in her throat.

"Come on, please?" Big eyes the color of his truck plead with her. "I'm not letting you walk home like this."

"I'm not going home." It might be a lie, but her feet are still moving along the dirt curb.

"Oh, sure. You can wander around aimlessly. That's so much better. Look, if you get murdered, we'd all feel guilty for letting you leave the house. Are you happy?" The wheel of the truck catches a black-eyed Susan and pulls it from the ground.

"Yeah, ecstatic."

"You know Laurie didn't mean it." The flower rolls along the wheel, yellow petals smashed and splattered.

The girl stomps along. "Oh, yeah, she didn't mean it at all. I know you've all been thinking it, Laurie was just the only one with the guts to say it out loud." A thorned stem kisses her skin as she walks, leaving love marks. The black-eyed Susan lies dead in the road.

"No one thinks that, trust me."

The girl finally stops. Socked feet plant themselves in the dirt, she turns to face the rattling truck. "That's why everyone went silent and stared at each other, huh? Like it's some big conspiracy I'm not in on. Trust me, I know better than all of you what's gonna happen when you all leave."

The truck stops beside her. "Nothing is going to happen."

"Says you. I'll be lucky if I get a yearly postcard from you."

"That's not how it works." Smoke drips from the exhaust.

"I know how it works, Danny."

"We'll be back for summer and breaks. You'll be busy with work, anyway."

"At a convenience store. God, you don't even realize, do you? You'll be drowning in *intellectuals* and reading some stupidly complicated novel at Brown, sitting under a statue of a colonial douchebag. And maybe if I'm *lucky* you'll think about me, your poor little hick friend, and then eventually you'll think about the convenience store, and then you'll remember how grateful you are for all your new friends and your hip city." The forest echoes the hum of the idling truck. A frown roots itself into the girl's sticky cheeks. "And your truck stinks, Danny."

Shiny metal braces span the length of his smile. Moonlight alights on his blonde hair, a halo perching gently. He reaches across the truck and opens the door. Above the hum of the engine and the roar of the crickets, the sound of the door creaking open pierces the night. She breathes it in, the blue truck bright against the deep forest. Light bounces off rusty metal, shiny cheeks, wet eyes, and braces, as she climbs into the truck. Dirt clings to her socks and tracks on the black mats inside, mingling with leaves.



Pinheads of blood seep from thorn pricks along her legs, mapping veins and divots.

“Hey, you’re bleeding.”

Danny’s face is sincere, he hides nothing. His smile has faded. It’s warmer in the truck. No thorns pull at her skin. Her socked feet rest on the mat and her eyes glance from the shiny blood to his own. “Your truck is leaking,” she counters. She sets her shoes down for a moment.

Danny shows his teeth again. He was supposed to get his braces off weeks ago. She wonders if he ever will. Through the smudged windshield behind him, smoke seeps into the night. “Don’t pretend you don’t love it.” Danny says as he runs his hand along the dusty dashboard.

“How does this thing still run?”

A laugh echoes. Inside the bright blue truck, the engine is quieter. She can hear his laugh, breathe it in clearly. The crickets chime, but they’re farther away. She wonders how many cricket bodies have stuck to its tires like the black-eyed Susan.

Danny shifts into second gear. As the truck pulls away from the dirt curb, the engine roars and splutters. Raccoon eyes glow bright in the headlights as they wind down the road.

“Is this my last truck ride?”

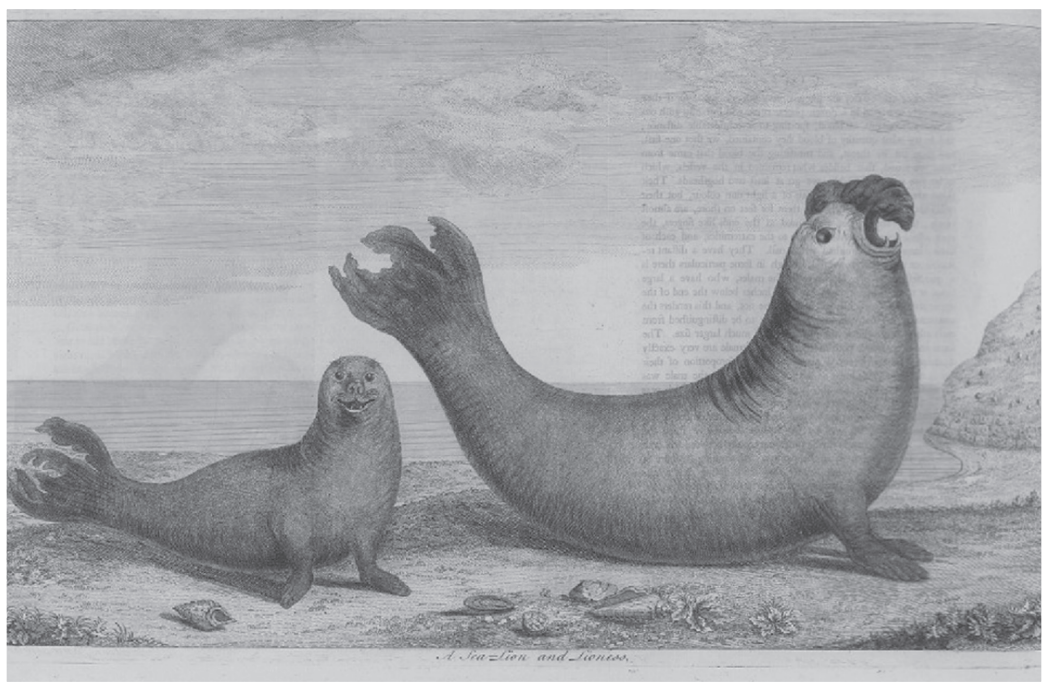
Danny grins his mechanical grin. “Let me take you somewhere fun. Anywhere. You wanna go to the city?”

She glances out the window, then back to the boy beside her, all blue eyes and golden hair. “Sure.”

“Alright, good. I just got gas. Just for you. I’ll give you something fun to remember me by, since you’ll never see me again, not during summer break, and *definitely* not at Christmas.”

She smiles softly, lips pulled tight. She’s made a mess in his passenger seat, blood and dirt and leaves. It’s warm in Danny’s truck, his seats are soft. She knows when her feet hit the dirt road again at the end of the night, it’ll be cold and hard and rocky.

“Okay, yeah. Let’s go.”



A Sea Lion and Lioness

DATE: [1748]; 1701-1750, PLACE: London, MATERIAL: Ink on paper
Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

The Adventures of Sir Harry

by Wesley Van Leer

“**T**ruly, a strange land,” I mutter to myself as I dig my heels into the sides of my loyal steed, Bucephalus. We are cantering down a dirt path in some strange woods, the oak trees lining the walkway clearly ancient and storied. The summer sun is cooler here, under the shade. Still, though, I can feel myself slowly being cooked within my plate armor. I do believe this is how a chicken must feel in the pot.

Suddenly, Bucephalus and I happen upon two travelers on their own journey through the woods. Neither of them seems much equipped for a trek, the only pieces of survival gear between them being a small flask and a jacket somehow endowed with patterns of branch and leaf. Judging by their carefree demeanor, they seem not to understand the severe dangers that lurk within the woods.

“What ho, travelers?” I call out to their backs. “Dost thee require aid in thy journey?”

They both spin, shock written across their features. “What?” the man on the right says. He has no deceit hidden within his voice; I do believe he must have missed my words.

“I asked, ‘Dost thee require aid in thy journey?’”

He laughs, and his companion laughs as well. They are raucous, their arms clutched to their torsos in hilarious agony. The one on the left strides toward me and Bucephalus. I worry not that he will startle; I have trained him since birth. “Nice costume, Lancelot!”

“Lancelot? Nay, I am styled Sir Harry of Larken, accompanied by my loyal steed, Bucephalus, second of his name. And this,” I gesture to my arms and armor, “is no fool’s ensemble. It is the purest steel, forged in the forges of the greatest castle known to man!”

They double over again. I can nearly see the stitches appearing in their sides. Face reddening, I spur Bucephalus forth. As we trot onward, one of his

hooves nearly crushes the foot of one of the travelers. "Hey, watch it, buddy! You almost killed me!" he shouts, his demeanor abruptly turning hostile.

"For those who have not the knowledge of the knights of the kingdom, Bucephalus shall trounce you as the dragons of old!" I dig my heels in, beginning a canter that quickly rolls into a gallop. I shall leave these mocking voices behind me and find the lord of this land, hopefully to receive a true royal welcome.

Without warning, the tree line breaks and I am under the clear sky, Bucephalus's hooves pounding on black stone rather than dusty dirt. The stone extends out about fifty feet to a much longer road, also paved with that black stone. All around me sit painted, covered, metal wagons, each one having glass windows inset into them. Whatever this kingdom may be, it must be quite rich to have glass in each carriage. A small family stares widemouthed at me, the two children clutching some sort of food item, judging from the white discoloration of their tongues and the matching treat in their hands.

"Greetings, children. Milord. Milady." I bow my head to each family member in turn. "Is your intention to venture into the woods, perchance?" I shall warn them of the dangers that lurk, if they affirm my suspicions.

"Wha—" The father is cut off by a bout of his own laughter. Truly, a strange land. He doubles over, sparking the same laughter within his wife and his children. Only my chivalrous code prevents me from challenging him to a duel right in front of his own offspring.

"Perhaps there may be a misunderstanding. I am as serious as an executioner at the block." I attempt to steel my expression, but the heat is getting to me. My armor will, perhaps, spell my defeat.

"Hey, are you all right?" the father asks. He steps forward, a concerned expression on his face. "There's an ice cream place just up the road," he pivots and points down the black stone road. "It must be getting hot in there, huh?"

"I thank thee for thy chivalrous understanding of my predicament." I nod at him gratefully. Judging by the content of the phrase, this 'ice cream' must be freezing. It would be the perfect cure for such fiendish temperatures. "It seems that true knightly honor is present here after all." I begin to canter away, sure that my compliment will make this man's day.

"Well," he laughs again. "Well, I try my hardest. See you later, Lancelot!" The whole family waves, still speechless save for the father.



I stop Bucephalus dead in his tracks, wheeling him around to face the family once more. "Is there perhaps an eminent knight in your kingdom named Lancelot? I cannot help but notice, I have been mistitled two times in as many minutes."

"Yeah, nice one. Go get your ice cream," he waves me away, clearly more concerned for my safety than my honor. He is less of a knight than I initially had thought.

"Nay, sir, I am deadly serious. By the titles granted to me by my just and rightful king, I am now and forever more entitled Sir Harry of Larken, and it would be best for you not to forget it."

One of the children bursts into the conversation, evidently waiting until she can learn my name before addressing me. A child, and a woman, no less! With more knightly courtesy than her father! "Sir Harry, can I touch your horsie?"

"Of course, my child. He is styled Bucephalus, second of his name." I know he will never harm a child, though I still keep a tight grip on the reins as the young girl toddles toward us.

"Lucy, come here!" the mother calls to her daughter's back. She sounds fearful? For what reason? I turn my head as quickly as I can, but there is no unwashed bandit or large wolf behind me. As the child turns and shakily walks back to her parents, the father steps forth once more.

His voice is tough and grim, a sharp departure from his previously humorous demeanor. "I think you should go get that ice cream, buddy." I realize that his eyes are locked dead onto the scabbard hanging at my side.

"I take offense to your insinuation that I am any sort of danger to your child! Honestly, dost thee truly believe a royal knight, appointed by..."

He cuts me off. A lowly peasant, interrupting me? Preposterous! Still, he continues. "Get out of here! Go!"

Despite my honor, I can see the benefits of listening to him. His children are in the midst of being hustled away by their mother, quickly going to what I assume is their carriage and getting inside. "Very well, peasant!" I cry, spurring Bucephalus toward the longer road. "I shall take my leave."

And with that, I'm off, galloping down the road in the direction the man indicated. Buildings are densely packed here, each two stories and colored in strange ways. They must be houses, judging by the various glimpses of families and couples I catch looking through the windows.

Carriages are parked on the streets and next to the houses, some of them twice as tall as a man. The wind streams through Bucephalus's mane, while my own leonine hair stands strong against the encroaching forces of the gales. A small building stands off to the right, about a hundred wagon-lengths away and closing quickly. Atop it is a huge model, twice the height of a man, depicting that same treat the children were snacking on. This must be my destination, that land of ice and cream the peasant had spoken to me about. I begin to pull up on the reins, slowing down and eventually stopping right in front of the doors. A small walkway runs around the outside, so I bring Bucephalus just short of it and dismount. My armor makes it somewhat tricky without help from my squires, but I manage to do so without falling and making a fool of myself.

I notice two signs suspended on the awning above two separate windows, nearly three Bucephali apart. One says "Order" while the other says "Pick-up." They are written in blocky black text, far neater than any I have seen from the scribes at court. I sidle up to the window underneath the first sign and am immediately blasted by cool air. Somehow, the inside is far colder than the outside temperature, and if I were to be entirely honest, I am not complaining a whit. Brother John always tells me that I must count my blessings, though this much of an incongruence puts me in mind of witchcraft. Now, I am no longer being cooked like a chicken; rather, I have the distinct feeling of having my face dunked in a pool of ice water.

A teenaged girl wearing some sort of black uniform with the name "Alexa" emblazoned on it suddenly steps in front of the window. She looks me up and down. "How..." she snorts, cutting herself off. I must have been making a strange expression, one that I feel entitled to considering my current frozen relief. "How may I help you, sir?"

Finally, a person with some respect and recognition for my station! "Give me one ice cream!" I declare authoritatively. "The infernal flames of the sun shall trouble me no longer!"

"W-what flavor, sir?" Alexa is poorly hiding a smile.

"Flavors?" By Jove, this kingdom is magical! A foodstuff that a peasant can eat, having multiple types? I do wonder what spices they have to flavor such an item at such a cheap price that the commonfolk could obtain it.

"Yeah, like..." she leans out the window to point at a previously unseen list posted right next to me. "One of those. I recommend the



strawberry, but all of them are really good!" She retracts her body back into the building, allowing the cold air to flow out once again.

The list, printed in that same perfectly straight text, could easily be imagined as a foreign language. The only thing preventing that prognosis from a learned man is the constant occurrences of familiar words. Items such as "Rum Raisin," "Moose Tracks," and "Blue Moon" are mixed in with completely foreign words like "Pecan" and "Vanilla."

"What is, ah, a chocolate?"

"Choc... ohhh... I see! Because it's from America and you're a British knight! Great attention to detail!"

"What?"

She laughs. "Yeah, fair enough. You figured out what you want yet?"

I spot something on the list that I have only had once, at a grand feast celebrating the birth of my king's firstborn son and heir. "I shall have the cinnamon, though any true knight would be concerned for the financial state of this establishment, if you can price it the same as all the rest."

"All right, I'll get that for ya." Alexa disappears back into the building, presumably to prepare my food. She shouts something after a few seconds, with surprise tinging her tone. "Janine! There's a horse outside!" Perhaps she had not realized I had ridden in on Bucephalus.

I stick my head through the window, both to get more cold air on my body and to clarify my relationship to my steed. It is all metal and white tile inside, with tubs and tubs containing different colored substances that must be ice cream. "That is my loyal stallion, Bucephalus, second of his name!" I hear laughter, then a bell jingling. I withdraw my head until I can look to my left and see an older woman coming out the front door. She wears the same outfit as the other girl, but this one says "Janine" on it.

Janine approaches Bucephalus, hand outstretched and cooing delightedly. "Hey there, boy! How are you," she murmurs, getting closer and closer.

"Halt! Stay back! Thou art unaware of the danger..." Bucephalus snaps at her fingers, jaws coming together with a bony clack. He whinnies, sending Janine reeling backward, clutching her arm, face composed into a mask of terror. I see no blood; thusly, I must conclude that she is uninjured. "I attempted to warn you, milady!"

"Train your damn horse!" she screams at me.

"Here's your ice cream, sir..." Alexa trails off as she witnesses what's currently happening. Before the situation can escalate any further, I snatch the ice cream from her grip, nearly crushing the shockingly brittle cone.

"Thank you, miss. I do believe I shall be taking my leave." Janine storms back inside, door slamming shut behind her. I slap two coins down on the counter, probably more than it is worth, and bite down on the ice cream.

"I...don't think this is legal tender."

Freezing pain radiates outward from my mouth, ripping through my skull as rats scurry under the floorboards of a cheap inn. Before I know it, I'm reeling, then kneeling on the ground, gauntleted hands pressed to my temples in agony. I feel nothing but cold, working its way up my head and slowly dripping out the top.

"Sir? Sir? Are you okay?" Alexa is leaning out the window concernedly.

"Thou..." I level a shaking finger at her. "You witch!" I push myself through the freeze and sling myself onto Bucephalus as quick as I can. "I know not what foul enchantment thee placed onto me, but I shall come back with an army and burn this coven till it is ash! Then, I shall sow the ashes with salt, so you can trouble no knight, nor peasant, any longer!"

I spur Bucephalus away from the building, just as I hear the door open behind me. I brace myself for any witchy spells to be unleashed after me, but it appears I have scared them into submission. More houses pass by, along with the carriages and various pedestrians. Loud music emanates from a nearby yard, and I see many people in various states of dampness. gathered around what appears to be a large body of water.

Without any hint of prior warning, I catch sight of something gigantic sitting atop a building. I see just a blue flash through the tops of the buildings, then it comes into full view. A wide, flat-topped, painted metal building sits a distance away from any surrounding building, and atop it is a gargantuan cobalt insect. It stands menacingly unmoving, but there is no doubt in my mind that this monster is a threat to the kingdom. This is my dragon, the end of my quest, my reason to exist. I shall slay this terrible creature and ensure the smallfolk are free from terror forevermore.

A huge white carriage sits next to the building, with an even larger box attached to the back of it. It is open, goods and crates in the midst of being unloaded from it. I spur Bucephalus over, ignoring the shocked gasps and stares of workers. They shall get a good show; I will ensure it. "Hah!" I



shout, bringing Bucephalus up just next to the carriage. Before anybody can say anything, I plant my feet on top of the saddle, bunch my legs up under me, and leap the few feet to the top of the carriage. "Goodbye, Bucephalus," I whisper, looking down upon his stolid figure. I may not return from this battle.

One of the onlookers finally works up the nerve to speak. "Wha...get down from there!" I respond with silence.

It is a quick hop to the roof of the building, only a few feet away from the wings of the monster. It seems not to have noticed me, as any movement has been unnoticeable. Unsheathing my sword from my scabbard, I can hear the yells from below reach a fever pitch. Their words are hardly comprehensible to me, but I hear distress, anguish, and fear. "Worry not, peasants!" I bring my sword arm down on one of the wings. The translucent appendage snaps off, skittering across the roof and falling off onto the stone below. Still, no movement from the monster. I slash again, at the torso this time. A chunk of flesh falls off, revealing dry, white innards. It stands, still and motionless. I let out a wordless scream of rage.

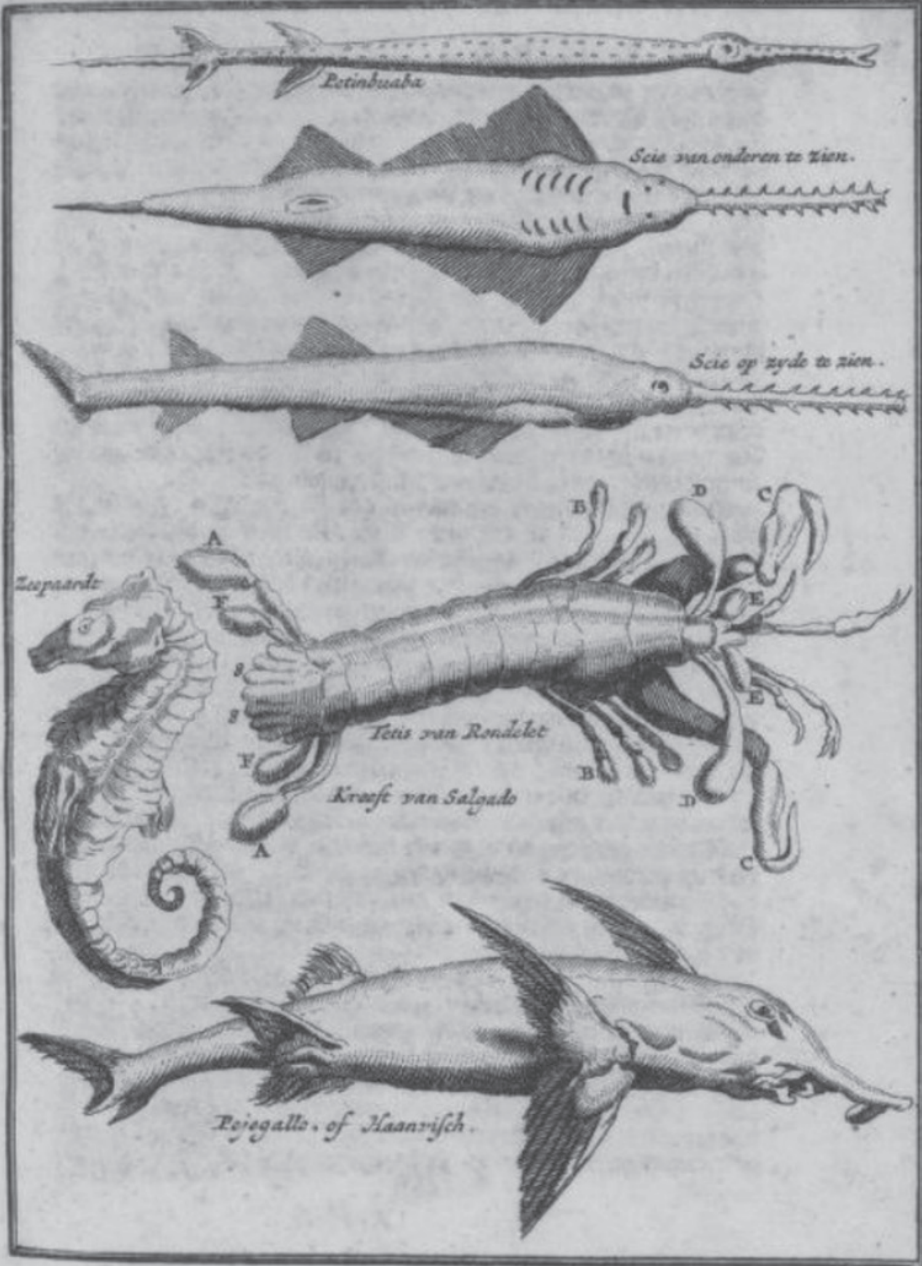
There is a clanging of metal behind me. I spin to see a man, dressed all in stiff black clothing, clambering onto the roof from a previously unseen ladder. He stands up, brushing himself off. He looks at me. "Hey, dude. What's up?" His tone is soft and calming. Suspiciously so, given the circumstances.

"Stay back! Can you not see the danger?"

His voice shifts down, becoming more solid. "There's no danger, sir. Please step away from the statue." His hand brushes down to his belt. I see no scabbard, but there are large pockets where he could be keeping ingredients for spells or potions. "I'm Officer Martinez."

I bring the tip of my sword up until it is pointed directly at his heart. This man is either insane or under the control of the monster. Either way, though regrettable, I must end his involvement in this situation. "They call me Sir Harry of Larken, villain." I take a step forward, planting my feet in a combat position. "But to you, I am your end!"

I charge. His hand swings up, some sort of yellow item in it. He presses down on it, two strings come shooting out, quicker than any arrow I have seen, and my world becomes lightning and thunder.



Fish and sea animals

DATE: [1718]; 1701-1750, PLACE: Amsterdam, MATERIAL: Ink on paper
Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University



How to Survive Rhode Island: A Step-by-Step Guide

by Jasmine Vega

SEPTEMBER: Take your last beach trips, wear all your shorts (with hoodies), always have a hair tie on your wrist, get excited for school (know deep down that it's going to suck), and start signing up for your fall sports.

It's September. I stepped out into the end of summer air, but it wasn't warm. It felt like October. I suddenly re-think my outfit, *maybe shorts and a tank top wasn't a good idea*. I walk back inside and pull a crew neck over my head. "PROVIDENCE RI" it said in big white letters. *Good at least I'll be showing some spirit. I look down at my watch and realize it's 7:30. I'm about to miss my bus.*

It's the first day of school and my bus is late. It's supposed to arrive at 7:30; it's 7:45 and it's still not here. I begin to wonder if I missed it, but suddenly a loud screeching sound comes around the corner. Eventually, the bus stops in front of me, and I notice it says "Property of the state of Rhode Island" in big black letters on the side.

It's hotter inside the bus than it's ever been outside. It smells of sweat and gas, *perfect, on my first day of school I'll be showing up smelling like other people's B.O.* The bus ride is long and bumpy, and it feels like our bus driver is going two miles per hour. We arrive at school just before the bell rings. We all rush to our separate pods. I arrived at my homeroom three minutes late. The teacher gives me a look but doesn't say anything.

OCTOBER: Start thinking about your Halloween costume, watch the Providence WaterFire, bring out all your sweatpants (keep your shorts out, you never know), cry in your room about being behind in all of your classes, lose all motivation, and start your fall sports.

Today's the first indoor soccer practice, so no one can hang out today. It's okay, that gives me more time to contemplate my costume. I'm considering going as the purge, so I can just use it for the football game,

and I won't have to buy a new one next year. That's basic though, so maybe I'll find a matching costume for me and my friends. Last year, we all went as something beach related, I don't know why, it was kind of lame.

After a while, I get bored and decide to start plucking my sweatpants out of the back of my closet. *Wow, I have a lot more than I thought I did.*

How did I ever fit all of these into my dresser? I stop trying to make it neat and just start shoving them wherever they fit. My mom comes into my room to drop off all my winter coats and boots. *Great, that's exactly what I need right now, more stuff.* The cold makes me feel messy, so I just shove everything into my closet and decide I'll organize it later.

NOVEMBER: Start getting excited for Christmas (don't let any idiots who tell you it's too early to celebrate affect you), feast on all of your Halloween candy, try to find the motivation to keep going to school, nap from 3-5, wake up and be shocked that it's pitch-black outside, stay up all night, and regret it in the morning.

It's November, but it's warmer out than ever. I've been wearing more shorts than I did over the summer. It's finally spirit week, and no one feels like doing it. Monday is twin day, Tuesday is dress like a teacher, Wednesday is State Spirit Day, Thursday is character day, and Friday is blue and white day.

It's Thanksgiving break. It's so ridiculous that we had to go to school for two days, *they should have just given us the whole week off*, no one wanted to be there. After Thanksgiving, we're allowed to celebrate Christmas without some lowlifes telling us that Thanksgiving hasn't even passed yet. It started to get dark out at around four, *which is really interrupting my schedule.* When I went to New York it was freezing cold, so coming back to Rhode Island and finding out that it's been seventy degrees all week was quite a shock.

DECEMBER: It's basically Christmas, but don't bring out your snow boots yet (it probably won't be snowing for a while), get ready for winter break (even though it's only ten days), wish the break was longer, hope you get everything on your Christmas list, try and go to school every day after thanksgiving break and before winter break, and the ice skating rink is open.

It's December and it's finally started getting cold outside. Though it hasn't been nearly as cold as it was last year. Rhode Island's weather has been so strange this year. I've started making my Christmas list, but it's weird

because it's half the size that it was last year. The only things I can think of adding are Uggs, a new phone case, and some clothes. I've been asking my friends what they've been putting on their list, and unsurprisingly, they're pretty much like mine.

The ice-skating rink finally opened, and I've been going every weekend. I thought that I had forgotten how to ice skate, but apparently, it's like riding a bike. I'm probably going to spend every weekend there until it closes again. I'm also considering asking for my own ice skates for Christmas, just so I don't have to rent a pair every time. Surprisingly, it snowed this week, even though it had been warm for December. It all melted away the next day—it made for a pretty picture though.

JANUARY: It's the new year, 2020 was officially four years ago, but everyone agrees that it feels like it was yesterday, try and stick to your new year's resolutions (we all know I won't), try and find room for all your Christmas presents, and go insane hoping for a snow day.

It's January. My new year's resolution is to go to school at least twice a week. I'm burning out. There's nothing to do in Rhode Island right now, and the ice-skating rink is getting boring. School work is getting harder, and I can't keep up with it. I might just stop trying, but that's not like me. I'm trying to go to school, so my friends don't worry about me, but it's hard. It's the hardest thing I've ever had to do.

We haven't had a snow day all month. It hasn't snowed all month. I hate January. I hate winter. I hate school. I hate everything. *I wish everyone would leave me alone, I'm fine.* It feels like 2020 again, I don't want to go to school. I don't want to talk to anyone. I just want to go home.

FEBRUARY: What's good about February? Nothing. I hate February.

It's February, I don't know what to do anymore. February has always been a relatively boring month, but this year it felt different. I just want it to be over. *When does school end again? Not until June.* I can't do this anymore. I need to feel the warm summer air against my skin. I need to be at the beach sitting on the sand. I need to be running around town with my friends without a care in the world.

My teachers have started to notice—my grades have dropped from A's and B's to C's and D's. *I'm trying, I'm really trying, I promise. It's just not*

enough. I can't wait for summer. I just bought a new Rhode Island crewneck, it was like all of my other ones, but it reminds me of summer, so it's okay.

MARCH: What can I even say about March? It's just March.

It's March. It's been a normal month and my grades have stayed the same. I'm not getting any of my work done, but it's okay. My friends have started to notice, and obviously they're worried, but I can't remind myself to care. Rhode Island must have decided to get colder this year because I feel worse than ever.

I get like this every year—it's nothing new. I've always tried to fight it, and some years I did, but this year, this year I suddenly don't care anymore. It's like a switch in my brain was switched off, the switch that turned on all my emotions. It was really nice out today, and the sun was shining brighter than it ever had. I had a "self-care day" yesterday, but it didn't help, I still feel the same as I always have. Maybe it won't go away this time.

APRIL: April showers bring May flowers.

It's April, and it's been raining all month. I feel a little better. Usually, I've snapped out of this by now, but it doesn't seem to be going away. Maybe it's just Rhode Island. Usually, I go out of state much more than I did this year, but I just didn't feel like it. I haven't felt like doing anything.

It's been so ugly outside recently; I don't even remember what the sun looks like. I hate Rhode Island. It's good for nothing.

MAY: It's getting warmer.

It's May. I see the sun. I've been wearing shorts to school now. It doesn't feel like a chore anymore. I've been running around town with my friends again. I don't know how I never realized Rhode Island is so pretty. Sun rises are gorgeous, I don't know why I haven't been waking up to watch them.

My grades are still low. I'm probably going to have to go to summer school, but it's okay. At least it will be summer. I love summer. I wish it could be summer all the time. I still feel low sometimes, but it's getting better. Maybe it will go away. It always goes away; I can't remember why I doubted it.

JUNE: School's out. It's summer and everything's fine again. The beach is open, and I changed the name of my Spotify playlist.



It's June. It's summer. The air is warmer. The beaches are open. I can wear shorts again. I'm happy again. My friends have noticed too—how my face lights up when I'm happy. I have a pep in my step. I'm almost never seen without a smile on my face. I love summer. In the daytime I wear shorts, tank tops, and usually bathing suits. At nighttime I wear shorts and Rhode Island crewnecks.

I still have those feelings when I'm in summer school, but I ignore them this time. I've learned a lot this year—no matter how hard your life gets, summer will always start in June. I don't think I've ever been this happy. I don't think I ever will be this happy again. I used to say that I hated Rhode Island, but I can't remember why. Rhode Island saved my life. With its weather, its smells, its people, its places, and its presence. I love Rhode Island, almost as much as I love summer.



Grampus Mostro Marino II. Vitello Marino III. Goulù Mostro de Mari d'America.

DATE: 1796; 1751-1800, PLACE: Florence, MATERIALS: Ink on paper
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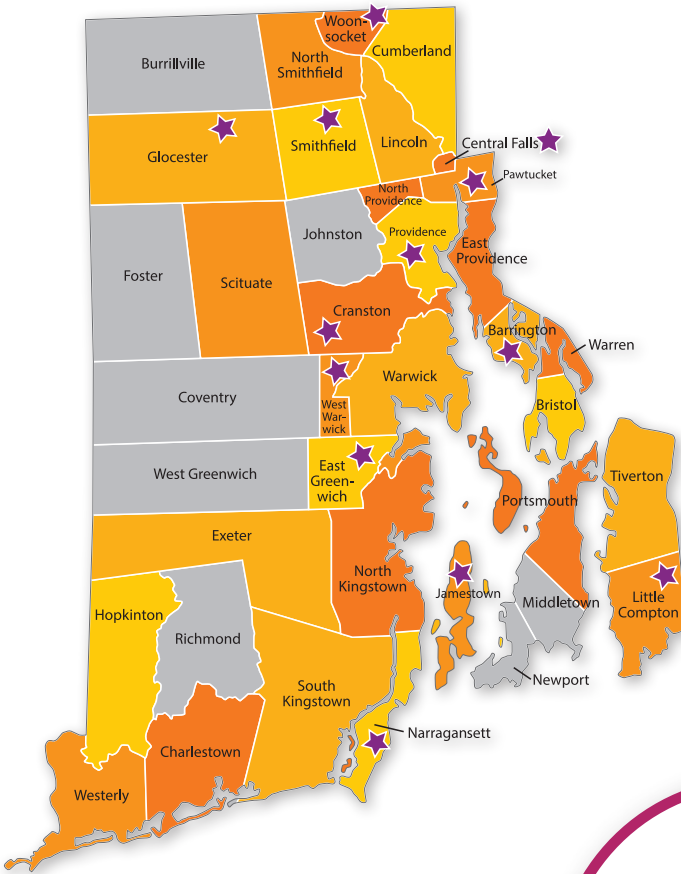
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