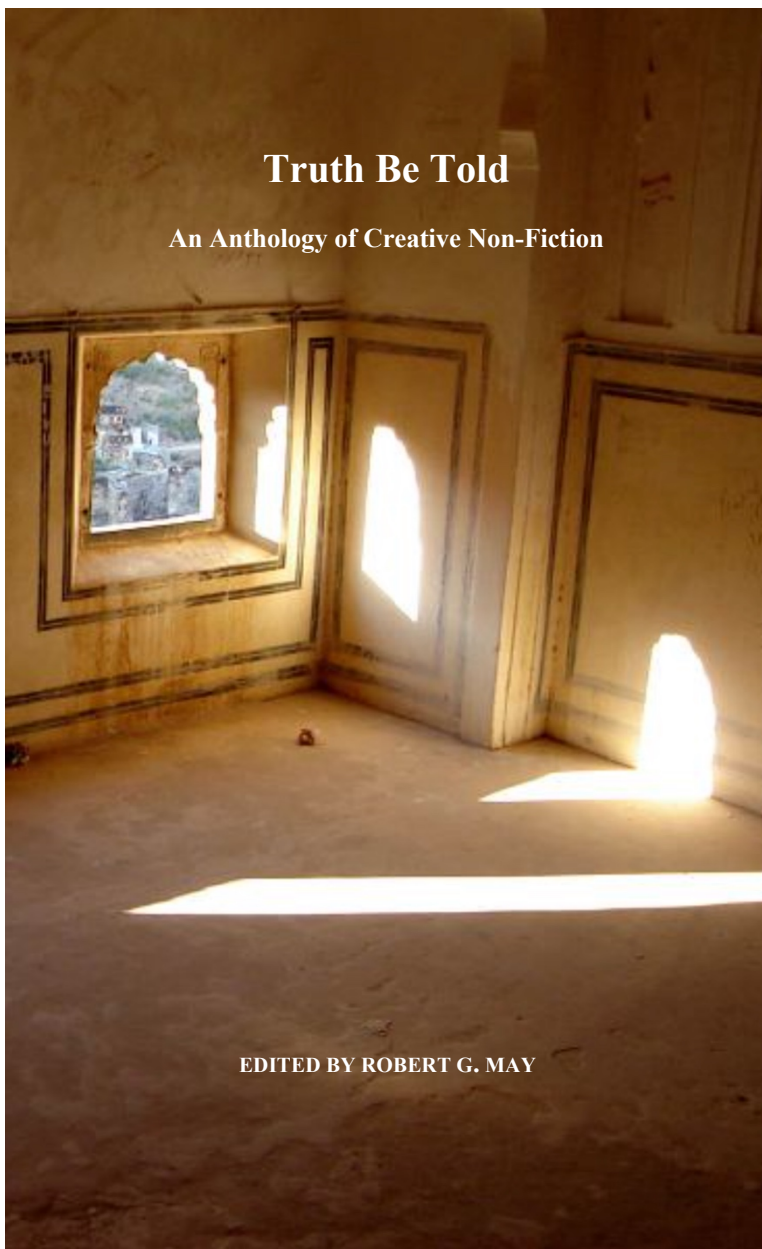


Truth Be Told

An Anthology of Creative Non-Fiction

EDITED BY ROBERT G. MAY



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Preface

ROBERT G. MAY

TRUTH BE Told is the fifth anthology of creative non-fiction produced by the students of Writing Creative Non-Fiction (WRIT 290), an online Arts and Science course at Queen's University.

WRIT 290 has been on hiatus for a couple of years while I updated and redesigned the course. I decided to organize the new WRIT 290 around two great resources: Lee Gutkind's *You Can't Make This Stuff Up* (2012), and Luanne Armstrong and Zoë Landale's *Slice Me Some Truth* (2011). Gutkind is a renowned author and editor of creative non-fiction, and *You Can't Make This Stuff Up* is one of the most popular guides to writing creative non-fiction. Armstrong and Landale teach creative writing at the University of British Columbia and Kwantlen Polytechnic University respectively, and *Slice Me Some Truth* is an excellent anthology of recent creative non-fiction by Canadian authors.

I especially like the titles of both books, which emphasize the essential *truthfulness* of creative non-fiction. Unlike, say, a short story, which can be wholly fictional—made up completely in the imagination of the author—a creative non-fiction work must emerge from the real-life experiences of the author. “You can’t,” as Gutkind puts it, just “make this stuff up.” And yet creative non-fiction need not be wholly *objective*, like a newspaper article or a lab report. Truth can be personal, subjective, moulded by the author from something purely factual and prosaic into writing that’s compelling, alive, and organically connected to the author’s boundless imagination. One of the objects of WRIT 290 is to

help students walk this fine line between the “creative” and the “non-fiction” of creative non-fiction.

One of the reasons I chose *Truth Be Told* as the title of this year’s anthology (based on a suggestion by student Bryan Miguel da Silva) was to emphasize this hybrid nature of creative non-fiction. “Truth” must be at the forefront of all creative non-fiction, yet truth can “be told” in myriad ways, as evidenced by the sheer diversity of style and subject matter contained in this anthology. I think this title goes well with the cover photograph (contributed by student Nathalie Trudel) of the sun shining through the open window of a building. Because of its essential truthfulness, creative non-fiction can function as a window into the author’s life and mind, offering insight and illumination to the reader.

The final assignment for WRIT 290 is for students to compose an original work of creative non-fiction on a subject of their choice. First, students write a proposal and conduct some preliminary research. Then, they develop their proposal into a rough draft. Finally, they revise their rough draft into a polished, publication-ready final version. At every step of this writing process, students receive advice and feedback from myself or their teaching assistant. Students’ final works are then published here with minimal further editing. I have made some minor corrections to spelling, formatting, and the like, but generally speaking I have published students’ final drafts as they submitted them at the end of the course. Students who wished to opt out of having their work published here had the opportunity to do so if they wished, but I am pleased to say that most students participated enthusiastically in the project. The works of creative non-fiction in this anthology thus represent the product of several months’ work by a group of dedicated students of writing. It’s a work they can be immensely proud of.

Interested readers may also download the first four WRIT 290 anthologies of creative non-fiction, *Through the Eyes of Ourselves* (2014), *The Scene and the Unseen* (2015), *Unearthed Treasure* (2016), and *Spirited Words* (2017), at:

<http://post.queensu.ca/~mayr/anthologies.html>

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Thanks to the diligent students of WRIT 290 who contributed their original works of creative non-fiction to this anthology.

Thanks as well to the conscientious teaching assistants for WRIT 290, Ellie Barton, Meghan Burry, and Roger Martin, who helped guide students' creative non-fiction works through each stage of the writing process, from proposal, to rough draft, to final version.

And thanks to the many WRIT 290 students who contributed ideas for the cover design and the title for this year's anthology. The title *Truth Be Told* is based on a suggestion by Bryan Miguel da Silva. The cover photograph was taken by Nathalie Trudel and is entitled "A Small Glimpse of Life."

The end of this year's WRIT 290 course was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and resulted in unavoidable, last-minute changes to the Course Syllabus, deadlines, and assignments. Despite this upheaval and the disorganization it occasioned, students and teaching assistants remained steadfast and engaged in the course to the end. Many thanks to them for their dedication in the face of an unprecedented disruption.

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The Unexplainable Fears of Travelling Alone

NATASHA ALLEN

I SAT at my gate, shaking uncontrollably as my body filled with anxiety. I'm minutes away from boarding my flight, and the only thing on my mind is the thought that I am about to leave the country, and nobody knows. "Flight number U6078 to Houston, Texas is now boarding" was called over the intercom, and reality finally set in. I was going to travel thousands of miles to meet my boyfriend, Mike, for the first time, and I was doing it without telling my family or friends. This was quite possibly the most reckless thing I could do; it was scary knowing I was embarking on this journey completely alone. My hands began to shake as I handed the lady my passport and boarding pass, and I proceeded to walk down the long hallway to board the plane. A thousand thoughts ran through my mind, adding to the overwhelming anxiety that was taking over my body. "What if my parents find out?", "What if my flight gets cancelled and I am stuck in another country with no way home?" All of these doubts crossed my mind, but then I remembered a blog post I read before planning my trip. Florence, an author of *Reporter on the Road*, wrote an article called "My First Experience Travelling Alone." and within this post, she went into detail explaining the anxiety and fear she felt travelling alone, yet the memories and independence she gained from the experience made it worthwhile. I remembered a specific quote Florence wrote in her blog: she said, "The idea of traveling alone made me feel anxious, I was not very confident in myself and I almost deflated a few weeks before departure." My lack of confidence is the reason I am going on this adventure. I want to prove to myself that I am independent and can overcome my inner fears of

doing things alone. Mike has allowed me to open up emotionally, which is something I have struggled with my whole life, yet meeting him in person will allow me to open up in newer and more intimate ways than I am used to, and that scares me. The last thing Florence said was, “This trip gave me immense joy and the doubts and fears that I had had before the departure had all of a sudden disappeared.” The reassurance that my anxiety over travelling alone was normal and would disappear made it easier for me to relax and catch my breath. I shouldn’t be lying to my family, but there was no way they would allow me to visit my boyfriend alone and go to a new environment by myself.

As the plane took off down the runway my fears were overtaken with excitement. I was ready, ready to develop newfound independence that I have been craving for so long, and I was more than ready to do it knowing my boyfriend would be waiting for me at the airport. As I sat on the plane I stared out of the window, taking in all of the emotions I was feeling. The sky was blue, it lacked the cluster of clouds that I was used to seeing back at home. The colour was so opaque it reminded me of the type of blue used in art history paintings: lapis lazuli. This blue was strong, vibrant, and filled me with joy as I knew I was getting closer to my destination.

I soon felt that joy rip out of me when a notification from my sister popped up on my phone. “Where the hell are you Natasha?” My body froze in fear. “How did she find out?” I thought. There was no way she knew where I was or what I was doing. I was careful. I turned my location services off and disabled my location on my social media accounts. There was no way.

My sister and I shared the same phone plan. She was the account holder and would receive e-mails when either she or myself would roam outside of the country. Due to my complete and utter stupidity, I scrambled to think of an excuse as to why I would be travelling outside of Canada. “Kaylie and I decided to go to Watertown to do some shopping. I’m sorry, it was last minute, and I didn’t think it would be that big of a deal,” I managed to type into my phone and reply to her. Within seconds she replied, “I don’t believe you. Send me your location right now, Natasha, or I’m going to tell Mum and Dad. I know exactly what you’re doing, you’re visiting your boyfriend.” I couldn’t think. How did she know? What do I say? I was so scared of my family finding out, but I was almost in Texas and too far into this lie that I had to keep it up.

The plane landed, and as I rushed to grab my suitcase from the overhead compartment, I was filled with so many mixed emotions. I was nervous to meet my boyfriend, scared that my sister wouldn't believe my lies, and also excited to be experiencing what it is like to travel alone. I remembered a time when my friend Kaylie travelled alone for the first time. She told me, "My fears were soon replaced with excitement as I realized what an amazing experience this would be and all of the amazing memories I would be able to make." She was my anchor, and the person I confided in the most at times of trouble. Her words gave me hope that this experience would be amazing, and I allowed myself to relax.

I walked through the airport to the exit doors, and there he was. My boyfriend. I ran up to him and embraced him so tightly I thought my chest would explode. That's when the anxiety left my body and in its place was love and joy, and I knew this experience would be worth it. But then I remembered, my sister was expecting my location.

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How I Discovered My Pride

KATRINA BELCASTRO

BEFORE MY life fell into a downward spiral there was snow. The cold air sliced through my parka, causing my ears and cheeks to pulsate. I can feel each snowflake falling on my exposed hands—wishing I hadn’t forgotten my gloves in the morning rush. The walk to the bus stop isn’t too bad. I take my usual shortcuts and try to follow the huge footprints left from the person before me. I’ve been extra tired lately, probably because of school, but the fresh snowfall always brightens my mood.

I hopped on the bus, walking through the slush-paved aisles, and headed straight to the back seats. My ma always told me to sit closest to the driver because she doesn’t trust the neighbourhood. But it was early in the morning and everyone was half asleep heading to work, so I decided to take my chances.

I attend St John Paul II. It’s a Catholic high school that is situated in something called Toronto’s Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. Basically, this means that we live in a part of Scarborough that is considered a low socioeconomic neighbourhood and needs a little extra love from the city (Hernandez 31). My school didn’t have the nicest reputation because we had a lot of issues with drug use and violence. As I opened the doors to the main entrance the smell of beef patties and weed wafted throughout the halls. The faded blue lockers contrasted against the grungy yellow walls and the lights flickered because they needed to be replaced. As I walked through the halls, officer Jackie was inspecting someone’s locker along with Principal Morris. Most of the students skipped classes so our hallways were always crowded. We weren’t well known for our academic success.

The bell rang three times indicating that it was time to get to homeroom. I pushed through the crowded hallway which was difficult for me considering I was only five foot two. I turned the corner and hit a hard chest—it was my boyfriend, Alden. He put his hand on my waist and went in for a kiss but I turned my head so his lips caught my cheek instead.

“Hey, you didn’t respond to any of my texts last night. Are you okay?” Alden asked.

“Yeah, sorry, I fell asleep early last night,” I replied, avoiding eye contact with him.

I lied. I got his texts, I just didn’t feel like responding. I didn’t know how to tell him I’m bisexual. I haven’t told anyone yet and I’ve been losing sleep over it. I don’t think a strict Catholic mother and straight boyfriend will take the news very well.

As soon as we got to homeroom we sat at our desks and before Alden could ask me any more questions, the announcements blared out, “Please stand for the singing of *O Canada*.” I could tell he was concerned, but I didn’t want to talk about it.

“Our home and native la— Did you check?” Miriam, the girl who sits beside me, whispers.

“Still pending,” I replied.

“I got my acceptance this morning,” Miriam said with a smirk.

I sat down right away after announcements to check my application: still no change. Miriam and I both applied to the social work program at Ryerson University. Miriam did a lot of volunteer work and extracurricular activities to put on her application, so I’m not surprised that she got her acceptance so fast. My extracurriculars, on the other hand, consisted of picking up the twins from school and working at Abuelo’s flower shop on the weekends. It wasn’t a real job but I helped here and there with the orders. I knew Ryerson was the perfect school for me. They had the representation that I so badly needed. They had clubs that talked about sexuality and mental health more fluidly and made me feel a sense of belonging.

Mr Eddy clapped his hands. “Listen up, class! I know this is a difficult time of the year for everyone, especially for you seniors who are waiting on acceptance letters or job offers. Mental health is a serious matter, especially for your age group. You guys are ten to twenty percent more likely to be affected by mental health. This percentage is doubled for minority and queer youth (Giwa 156). I want to let everyone know that my door is always open if you ever need someone to talk to.”

I liked Mr Eddy. He is one of the few teachers at school who cares about his students. He puts a lot of effort into his lessons and you can tell he really loves what he does.

After the lesson, I went straight to my locker. Something seemed a bit off to me, almost as though everyone was moving in slow motion. I turned and Alden was at my locker, his lips were moving and but nothing was coming out.

I suddenly woke in my bedroom very confused. Ma was standing at the foot of my bed with her arms crossed.

“What’s going on, mijah?”

Ma looked disappointed. I guess I hadn’t eaten in a while but hadn’t noticed. I must’ve fainted from all the stress.

“Is this why you’ve been sleeping so much?” ma said in her heavy Spanish accent. My mom’s a first-generation Canadian; we migrated here with my grandparents when I was twelve. She has been through a lot raising three kids on her own.

“I know, ma. I’m sorry for scaring you, I got it under control,” I said. Still a bit groggy, I dozed back off.

The cherry blossoms were in bloom. I stood in front of the mirror trying on my bright yellow dress that I planned to wear at the Pride Parade in June. I had just come out as bisexual to my friends and family last week. Alden and I are still dating; he took the news surprisingly well. This is the happiest I’ve felt in a long time. There was a knock on the door.

“Come in,” I said.

“Did you take your vitamins, mijah?” ma asked. That is what she called my antidepressants. After my incident in January, I was diagnosed with major depressive disorder. I learned that it is not uncommon, and almost twelve percent of female youth experience a depressive episode (MHCC 12).

“Also, this letter came for you,” ma said with a smile.

“Congratulations, Ms Carmina Gonzalez. On behalf of Ryerson University, we have accepted you into our Social Work program and would like to offer you \$2000 on account of your academic success.”

My eyes welled with tears.

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A Dark, Sunny Day

HALEY BENTHAM

IT IS a beautiful day; the sun is shining over the nearby fields and it is quiet, save for the sounds of feet along gravel and the wind in the trees. The weather feels incongruous, almost insulting, considering what is about to unfold. I enter the church with my family, and the minister approaches us.

“Are you the grandchildren?” he said.

“I’m her granddaughter, and this is Josh, her grandson,” I said.

“Follow me to the stage. I’ll show you where you will be speaking and you can leave your scripture on the podium.”

My brother and I follow him towards the stage, and I catch sight of the casket. The casket stands directly in front of the pews, open to display my grandmother’s body. At sixteen, I had never seen a dead body. The sight triggers an almost visceral reaction: my pulse quickens, my hands begin to shake, and my eyes immediately well up. I hesitate to say “my grandmother,” as the body in the casket looks so small and foreign. Her skin is waxy and grey—despite the makeup applied by the mortician—she looks entirely unnatural. I tell myself, “That is not your grandmother, that is just a shell.” I steel myself as I walk onto the stage. I force my hands to settle, digging my nails into my palm to keep my tears from spilling over. I peer over the crowd of mostly strangers. The church itself is old, smelling of dust and wood, yet elegant in an assuming manner. My grandma would have liked the church, I think, as she always found beauty in the most mundane of things, having been an artist. I smile to myself at these thoughts, feeling a sense of calm wash over me. Although my father cannot create artwork as I can, he is a craftsman, able to build precise piece of woodwork. Perhaps we both owe our ability to create to

my grandmother. Even in her passing, it is heartening to consider the how she still connects my father and me.

We retake our seats, and the funeral begins; much of it passes while I sit in a daze. My father leans towards me in the pew: “I’m sorry you had to see grandma like that. It wasn’t supposed to be open casket, or I would have warned you,” he whispers.

“I’m okay,” I say, smiling back at him. I can see the trails tears have left down his face, and I will my own not to fall. I swallow quickly, recalling the day I learned she had passed:

We passed the Starbucks beside the Port Credit lighthouse, as a piercing ring played throughout the car. From the back seat I watched as my mom accepted the call. My father’s voice came on speaker, and I zoned out as they exchanged pleasantries, engaged in people-watching through the car window.

“Grandma’s in the hospital, I’m waiting to find out more. We’ll talk more when you guys get home,” dad said. I had snapped back into focus, finding a pit was slowly opening up within me. When we arrived home, the pit grew as I crossed the threshold. My feet began to move, seemingly of their own accord, silently towards the kitchen. I waited, concealed by the hallway wall, straining to hear my parents.

“They said it had probably been three days before they found her. She’s dead, my mom is dead. I have no family left,” dad said. I was frozen in place, as tears began to wet my cheeks. Images of my grandmother on the ground in her small apartment, alone—her body must have looked so small then—flooded my mind. I entered the kitchen, walking quickly towards my parents, and joined their embrace.

“We’re here,” I said.

I snapped from my reverie, watching my father watch my aunt speaking. I always thought grief was something you experienced individually, but I realize it is quite the opposite. In the midst of his own mother’s funeral, my father is worried for me. I am sitting in the pew, battling my tears for him. It seems to me that grief is a balancing act; everyone cannot fall apart at once or we cease to have any control, one of must always be bearing the weight for another. In a moment of clarity, I realized the funeral is never about the dead, it is about those suffering most.

The minister ends with a final scripture reading: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of

God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The verse is from Romans; I know because it’s one of my dad’s favourites. I nudge my dad’s arm and smile at him, and he returns it with a smile of his own.

“I picked that one,” he says. I start to laugh, and remembering where I am, stifle it quickly with a cough. My theatrics cause my dad to laugh, which leads my mom to shoot us both a warning look. Suddenly, my dad and I are both covering our mouths with our hands—my mom’s disapproval having made it all the more comedic. Thankfully, the funeral wraps up and the minister leaves the stage. The guests begin to file downstairs, where the reception will take place. My dad takes my hand in his as we walk towards the stairs—I usually hate holding hands, but for some reason, I don’t mind it now.

The Pursuit of Passion

NOAH BLAFF

IT'S THE height of exam season. Libraries are packed like pigpens of students amid a cyclone of test papers, textbooks, and lecture notes. For a moment, I mistake the library for a chapel. With the lack of chatter, carrels have become pews of faithful devotees. The tension is palpable as stone, and the atmosphere silent as space. The outside air is a frosty knife in the throat of all who breathe it, constantly jabbing at students' lungs. Outside, thickly layered snow lines the same roads that students used, only months earlier, to galivant down to the pier.

Yet for all scholastic responsibilities that most students have, a small cohort make the pilgrimage to a secluded room in Ellis Hall. The room is unusual. Hidden enigmatically amid a labyrinth of hallways and staircases, I open the door to a vibrant mashing of buttons and joysticks as students escape the cold and receive the warmth of a welcoming community.

They are playing *Super Smash Bros.*, a fighting game published by Nintendo. The raucous crowd contains all the usual suspects: the recluse, the trash-talker, the veteran gamer ... and so forth. It feels like I have suddenly entered an underground casino where the atmospheric ecstasy is concealed from the outside world. The door is C.S. Lewis's wardrobe, and once you enter, you have stepped into an entirely different world.

Inside, a crowd of unfamiliar faces piques my interest. I shuffle around each corner of the room, gauging which matches attract the biggest crowds. I keep drifting towards one screen where a lanky student is zoned in, equipped fully with noise-cancelling headphones and eyes stretched taught. I ask around to dig for the name of this player who's been running the screen for hours; someone turns and whispers into my ear, "Adam Brooks."

I end up sitting down with him between matches to ask some questions. Brooks, who goes by the gamertag *DKbill*, was introduced to the game in first grade after playing at a friend's house. Since then, Smash has been a big part of his life. He is a Queen's student who started playing competitively in high school while frequenting a "dingy gamer basement" in Toronto.

"When I got to Queen's, the first thing I did was look for the Smash scene, because I knew all universities had one," Brooks says with a grin.

"But why commit so much to this game? What makes it so special?" I ask, awaiting a lengthy response.

"I love Smash because everybody plays it. There isn't a single other sport where you will see a thirty-year-old seriously grinding against a six-year-old, only to respectfully bump fists at the end," Brooks replies, leaning back in his chair.

He believes that Smash, with dozens of silly characters, creates a very wholesome and friendly environment. Having a community at Queen's allows casual couch players to plug in against a vast range of opponents with drastically different skill levels and play styles. In the Queen's community, he is hailed as a veteran, someone who can cinch spots in final after final at tournaments.

These accomplishments, however, are not nearly enough. Brooks' goal is to be the greatest player in the world. He has a YouTube channel with over a million views and even self-published a book on Amazon titled, *The 3 Ws of Life: Women, Wisdom, and Winning at Super Smash Bros*. This burning fervour is what makes the community special. While some people let hobbies drift in their transition to university and adult life, these individuals persist.

"Most people just go to class, struggle through work they don't find interesting, and relieve themselves with social activities at night," Brooks laments.

"People tend not to have meaningful, rewarding hobbies and passions, ones that they commit time and effort to. For me, Smash isn't just a great game that I love, it's a challenge, my very own Everest."

This passion is the impetus that drove Sammy Moss, another Queen's student, to organize tournaments. I keep hearing his name thrown around and finally build up enough nerve to chat with him about Smash. For a self-proclaimed "nerdy gamer," I still found it an intimidating ask. Moss recalls wistfully that when he started studies at Queen's, the gaming scene was non-existent. The popularity of the most

recent game, *Smash Bros. Ultimate*, however, has contributed to the nascence of this local gaming clique.

The development was so rapid, Moss reflects, that they introduced a second weekly tournament, and even launched a monthly series that attracts talent from Ottawa, Toronto, and everywhere in between. The organization of these events is a significant commitment for Moss, who is also balancing scholastic and social responsibilities. His enthusiasm for this game, and the community which houses it, however, is so great that it seems an insignificant price to pay.

A few days pass, and I find myself half-buried within a tattered couch in the student ghetto, watching friends play the game. I look around at the table, furnished with grease-stained fast-food containers, empty liquor bottles, and a bong. It makes me think back to what Brooks said, that maybe students lack passion these days; maybe they compensate with hedonistic vices, which at university, there seems to be an abundance of.

Conversation between us consists mainly of surface-level topics like who's hooking up with whom and when certain parties are being thrown. The energy seems so dull, so artificial, that I could project its inevitable expiry date: graduation. A time when four years of incessant drinking, partying, and late nights become relics of times past and real-life kicks into gear. Where passions are traded for practicality and mundanity ensues.

While Queen's—and other large institutions like it—nurture some unique culture that all students share, it is nothing compared to what this handful of gamers have perfected. A communal appreciation for and commitment to passions drive a sense of belonging and to some extent, purpose.

Life after graduation will be much different, and small desires that drive us may be washed to the wayside in lieu of jobs, relationships, and other commitments. Whether it is playing video games, writing poetry, or any other seemingly insignificant pastime, lest we forget the wisdom this community has provided. Little things in life can make a world of a difference. Keep hold of those beautiful niceties and never let go, for if we do, we surely lose parts of ourselves in the process.

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Upon Reflection

HENRY BOWEN

“FWEEEEET!”

Three seconds left on the clock, down by one point, the stage was set for a movie-like ending. This last possession was not only going to determine the fate of the game, but the ways in which we would remember our high school sports careers. We were in the finals, and this would be the last game of competitive sports for many us. The task at hand was to inbound the ball cleanly, get it into our star player’s hands, and then with every ounce of hope we had, watch him put up the final shot. This all had to happen in the span of three seconds, the success a season that was built on countless hours of practice, eighteen games, and a four-month-long commitment, would be decided in just three seconds. The feeling was comparable to that of the three hours of crunch time before an exam, or the nervous waiting before a make-or-break deal that took years of planning.

The referee hands Jacob the ball and he quickly inbounds it to Truman. Truman lunges forwards and cleanly catches the ball at the top of the three-point line. At this point the crowd was on their feet, a nervous tension filled the crowded gym, and they watched on in silence as the clock began to tick down. I stood at the three-point line in the corner and could only watch as Sofer forgot to set his screen. My stomach dropped. Sofer’s back screen was the most significant part of the play our coach had drawn up. If you had to boil down the success of that play to one thing, it would no doubt be that back screen.

“Sofer! What are you doing!”, screamed our coach from the bench in a panic. I could already see my teammates sitting on the bench with their heads in their hands. The ball got to Ian, our best player, with little over a second remaining on the clock as he frantically put up a shot ...

wide to the left. The opposing team and their fans let out cheers, you could see the look of relief on their faces. That was it, season over, and we didn't even get to give ourselves a chance after messing up the play. We retreated to our locker room in silence. After taking our seats everything started to sink in. Chatter started to break the silence as we waited for our coach to give us our final debrief.

"Hey, great fuckin' job, guys," murmured Noah. He spent the whole game watching from the bench.

"Yeah, I'm pissed, but that was fun," said someone else.

It was remarks like these that I remember so vividly when thinking back on my time as a high school athlete. Teammates became best friends, lifelong friends, that played a part in such a crucial stage of my development. Some of these guys who hardly played a minute all season, were just as proud to be a member of the team as the starting five were. Upon reflection, the camaraderie that we grew over the course of the season was one of many lifelong lessons that youth organized sports taught me. The beauty behind many of these lessons lies behind their relevance off the court. They are intangible, yet extremely noticeable.

One skill that I've noticed coincide with the growth of a team's camaraderie, is accountability.

"What the hell was that pass!" could be heard in practice. "Why are you standing over there instead of over here? You know the play, c'mon!"

What can tend to sound like hostile jabs towards one another to people in the stands, are often teammates looking to bring the best out in one another. Similar to the environment of a busy restaurant's kitchen, or even that of the House of Commons, everyone involved has done their best to prepare for this one moment, and in turn expects the best from everybody else. This didn't only apply to teammates, but to the coaches that dedicated their precious time and effort, as well as our parents who gave us the opportunity.

Later in life, a person's accountability can gain them trust and respect. It's something that doesn't just become irrelevant once you're not being relied upon to make that smart defensive play or show up to an early-morning practice with the right attitude. It is a trait that remains relevant in all walks of life.

In the same genre as accountability, falls one's ability to communicate. Communication is a part of accountability, and also a part of being a good teammate. In her final year of high school, my sister Audrey has already been able to notice her improved communication

skills. This became apparent when I, after my own reflection, decided to ask her what (if anything at all) she brought out of her time as a student athlete. I was met with an unsurprising response.

“These are skills that I’ve already found myself using in other aspects of life. Whether its advocating for myself to teachers or asking a friend how they’re feeling.”

On that same note, I decided to pursue further research on this topic. What are some of the tangible benefits? Can these benefits be measured?

According to four-time Olympian Bo Hanson, “females who participate in high school sports are 92% less likely to use drugs, 80% less likely to get pregnant, and 3 times more likely to graduate than non-athletes.” This just shows how valuable youth sports can be for a child, apart from just in a social capacity.

But what else about youth sports is so captivating? Why should others bother in facilitating these events, beyond simply for the benefit of its participants? It gives parents an opportunity to watch their children grow and participate in this important phase of their life through volunteer positions or coaching. It also gives coaches an opportunity to teach younger generations not only critical life skills, but to play a role in turning these young boys and girls into men and women. I’ve been lucky enough to take pleasure in coaching some youth sports and can assure you that there is nothing more rewarding than seeing the kids you essentially “taught,” succeed.

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The Impact of Music

NATALIE BRODIGAN

IT IS March 2018; my granny is extremely ill and doesn't have much longer to live. My mother notifies many of my family members of what is likely to happen in the upcoming days. She advises them to prepare their travel.

As I sat in the creepy old age home, I stared at my granny who laid restful in a small single bed. There was soft music playing in the background. Music was something that would always be playing in my granny's room. It gave her a sense of comfort, especially in times when she would be in her room alone.

"That is no way to live," I said to my mother, while a gentle tear rolled off my face. My granny was a woman who was once so independent. To watch her slowly lose her independence was one of the hardest things I ever had to go through. I could barely even recognize her at that moment.

Her illness had all begun when she was diagnosed with dementia. My mother was the first person to tell me the news. At the time, I hadn't known much about the disease, and so I did some research on it. I learned that dementia affects fifty million individuals around the world and there is no treatment currently available (WHO).

Over the next few years, my granny's dementia began to take over her life. It started with forgetfulness and needing help with personal care. The latter stage involved total dependence and physical inactivity. I helped my mom take her to countless doctor appointments. My granny was not comfortable going to the doctor's anymore. She couldn't comprehend what was happening to her body. Social settings became harder and harder. "Who are they?" my granny would ask again and again. The people she'd be asking about were her own children.

The process was particularly hard for my mother, as well. She had been extremely close with my granny and found it difficult to adapt to who my granny had now become. I could understand the emotional toll it had on my mother. She had to watch her mother fall ill. My mom would say, “be patient, patience is key.” I took this advice and couldn’t fault my granny for what had been happening to her. It truly was the disease taking over her body.

It was my granny’s last birthday. My family decided to have a party for her at her senior residence building. We had rented out the party room on the main floor of the building. It was decorated beautifully with white roses that filled the tables and gold balloons that floated around the room. My granny had been in a very poor state at the time and her dementia was at its worst. She had been incoherent for most of the day and wasn’t very vocal. We had hired a bagpipe musician to play for her. She had been raised in Scotland, where the bagpipes were a common musical instrument. A man who was in his mid-forties had taken a deep breath and began to play the bagpipes perfectly. My granny had broken down hysterically, tears streamed down her face with excitement. It had been the first time in a very long time that she was truly happy. I didn’t understand how this musical instrument had brought so much emotion out of her.

A study done by neurological researchers explains the link between music and memory. One researcher, Concetta M. Tomaino, demonstrates “how music can facilitate the return of some brain functions a person has lost.” Researchers further explain how some patients with Alzheimer’s “can sing along with song lyrics but can’t recognize a formerly familiar face” (DeLauro). This explains how the sound of the bagpipes were so memorable for my granny.

A couple of months later, she started refusing to eat. The nurses explained this was a dying patient’s last action of independence. The last couple of days she was alive she laid in her bed with little movement listening to her music. I had sat with her, the only things she had left of her own were a couple of paintings and a brown dresser. For five long days, I had held her hand and spoke to her. Even though she couldn’t respond, I had never stopped talking. Whenever I would leave I would make sure her music was playing so she didn’t feel alone. She eventually passed away. She passed surrounded by a room filled of my family members and myself.

It was the day of my granny’s funeral and the grandchildren all had a special task in the ceremony. The boys were required to walk in the

casket and the girls followed behind, carrying roses. I stood in the front of the church holding a long-stemmed white rose in my hands. My hands ached as the thorns on the stem pricked my fingers as I had clenched the rose tightly. I was nervous. I wasn't ready to say goodbye. I looked to my mother who stood across the church and struggled to hold her tears back. She mouthed "I love you." I gave a small smile to let her know I loved her back.

The priest had motioned us to walk down the aisle. It was at that moment I heard the bagpipes began to play. The same man who had played at my granny's birthday party was playing at her funeral. The sound of his bagpipes reminded me of the joy they once brought my granny. My eyes filled up with tears. They hadn't been tears of sadness, but rather tears of joy. The church had been completely full. All the people who had been a part of my granny's life at some point or another. As I sat down on the wooden brown church bench looking at the large portrait of my granny at the front of the room, I was grateful. Grateful to have known such an amazing woman.

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Migraines

CYAN CARUSO-COMAS

THEY ALMOST always start in the morning, never in the middle of the day or at night. Maybe they start in my sleep or maybe they only kick in as my brain is booting up for the day. It doesn't really matter. All I know is the familiar burning pain above my right eye. It's going to be a bad day.

During a migraine, my brain struggles to keep up with what's going on around me. I have trouble finding words (a problem considering I work as a writer). I'm clumsier than usual. I'm easily annoyed and blow up at those I love most. I can't stop eating, because somewhere deep down I think that maybe if I'm eating, I can't be in pain.

"Did you drink any water?"

"Washing a Tylenol down with some Gatorade always works for me. Have you tried that?"

"How much water have you had?"

"Was it something you ate?"

"It's just a headache. You'll be fine."

Well-meaning loved ones are quick to offer words of support, but they don't know just how trite and annoying their advice is. I've been dealing with this condition for most of my adult life. I've missed work, cancelled plans more often than I care to think about, and had holidays and vacations ruined. If a glass of water and a Tylenol would help, I would have figured that out by now.

I do know what helps—sometimes. If I catch it early enough, I can pop one of the migraine pills my doctor prescribed, take a couple of Advil and wash it all down with a large double espresso. Sometimes it's enough to wipe the migraine right out. It's a revelation when that happens. Like the clouds have opened up and the Philadelphia Cream

Cheese angel is smiling down at me. Most of the time I'm not that lucky. The pain may subside slightly, but the rest of the symptoms are still there in full force. Without the headache part of the headache, I feel off balance and maybe worse than before. Without the pain to anchor me, the remaining effects of the migraine are disconcerting.

If none of this makes sense to you, it's because it doesn't make sense to anybody. The Mayo Clinic says that while genetic and environmental factors may have something to do with it, the causes of migraines are still not understood. There are new studies coming out all the time—"New Evidence Links Migraines to a Hyper-Excitable Visual Brain"—but nothing concrete, and nothing that can help people like me.

I'm one of the lucky ones, I know. Some people are unable to work because they have constant migraines. Mine are less frequent and I can often tell when they may hit. Any time the weather changes. At a specific point in my menstrual cycle. If I've done something stupid at the wrong time. I have to be careful about things others don't think of. When I want to have a glass of wine with my friends, I have to look at the weather app on my phone first. If it looks like there's going to be a pressure change, better not.

Sometimes I wonder if these migraines are doing something to my brain even when I'm not having one. I get tired easily, I feel like I'm thinking more slowly than I should be, I don't get all the jokes. Sometimes I can tell myself that I'm a working mom who studies every evening. I've earned my fatigue. It's okay not to have time to keep up with pop culture.

But on a day like today, when I'm feeling healthy and strong even as the world is crumbling thanks to a global pandemic, I wonder. Am I doing enough to stop the migraines? Should I do more? *Could* I do more? Do I exercise enough? Do I exercise too much? Maybe I should try harder. Drink more water. Eliminate everything that isn't a vegetable from my diet to see if I get better. Stop drinking....

I don't drink that often. I grew up in an AA home, so I know first-hand what excessive drinking can do. I don't worry about being addicted. I know that drinking isn't a problem for me (shopping and eating on the other hand, maybe), but dammit, sometimes I want to be able to have a glass of wine without thinking about it.

On the rare occasion that we get together with friends without the gaggle of kids that usually surround us, I'm always on edge, because I don't know how it will end. The scene is almost always the same: the guys are drinking scotch, the women wine or cocktails. We've all been

friends for at least a decade, so it's easy company. At the beginning of the night, I'm there. Catching up, making jokes, comparing parenting notes. If I woke up feeling well that day, the sky's clear and it's the right time of the month, I can actually enjoy the evening without pain. Too often though, it strikes after one drink, and I spend the rest of the night on the couch waiting to go home.

Sometimes I want to have two drinks at a party and not worry about waking up and wanting to die. Lots of people pay for a night of partying the next morning but most don't get headaches and other hangover symptoms at ten o'clock at night while everyone around them is still having a good time, safe in the knowledge that their kids are at home with a sitter. I do. Often.

I've thought about just not drinking, ever. I don't drink much. But I enjoy the taste of a cold sour beer on a hot day, a perfectly bitter gin and tonic at a party, a good glass of red wine while chatting with friends. I enjoy the feeling of letting go, which I don't do very often, especially knowing what's waiting for me on the other side.

But I won't do it. I won't be controlled by the migraines that so want to take over my life. I will be there for my kids, even if it means listening to them sing the same song over and over again while my head throbs and pounds to the beat. I will socialize on the few occasions that I can. It's my only release.

I will, however, continue to use my migraines as an excuse to get out of things I don't want to do, as I always suspected my mother did.

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Going Fishing

REBECCA CHAMPAGNE

IT'S A peculiar thing to enter the dating world as an adult. Like many others finding themselves single in their thirties, I turned to online dating to find my mate. My social circle just didn't include any intriguing single men. After conferring with my all-knowing girlfriends, Plenty of Fish was the site I elected to go with. Match.com cost money and Tinder was yet to be born back in 2012. I carefully crafted my profile, telling my potential admirers just enough about myself to catch their interest yet leaving some things to talk about later. I was honest and direct while, I hoped, conveying my wit and charm. I attached a few recent pictures, the requisite closeup headshot, the full length in a dazzling outfit, action shots on the golf course and walking the dogs. Thoroughly showing off my well-rounded self. After some edits and final approvals from my ladies, I went live. Then I went to bed.

After a night dreaming of my prospective knights in shining armour, I hurried my kids off to school and myself off to work. I couldn't get through my day fast enough. I was dying to get home and check my laptop to see if I had any replies. Apparently, I didn't need to worry. It's as if a new profile flashes with neon letters, "FRESH MEAT!" I must have had fifty replies. I called my girlfriend.

"Is this normal?"

"Yup."

I could hear the smile in her voice. "Have you opened any of the replies yet?"

"No."

"Hang up the phone and go to it. Call me later."

I left it until the kids went to bed and dove in. I had no idea of the adventure that awaited me. At least half the replies were quite direct,

asking, “Wanna fuck?” or other such charming vulgarities. Delete. Eye-opening to say the least. I read through them and selected a few to respond to. After a couple days of chatting, plans were made. I went on a tremendous number of first dates. There were mini-putt dates and ice-cream dates. I learned how to throw clay pots on a wheel with James, drive a Vespa with Keith, and pretend I wasn’t bored to death with a quite a few “gentlemen.” I quickly overcame my initial naïveté and operated my dating life like a high-efficiency production line. I figured out what kind of guy floated my boat and what kind of guy sunk my ship. I obtained a greater self-awareness and an astounding new insight on men. I developed rules. I did ultimately find my fish, but not before I spent three years throwing them back!

As had quickly become my habit, I arrived early, taking a seat at one of the high-top tables in the bar area with a view of the door. I patiently awaited my date’s arrival. Another online match-up, from the infamous Plenty of Fish. Jamie, forty years old. Construction foreman. I sipped my drink while I glanced about the room, assessing the other Wednesday-night diners, a table of ladies laughing over half-price martinis, a few couples enjoying a late meal and another lady on her own. We exchanged knowing smiles. A new arrival caught my attention. He saw me and crossed the restaurant towards the bar area. Definitely Jamie. Definitely not forty. He had clearly used very old photos on his profile. My mind was reeling. How should I play this? The guy lied to me!

I stood to meet him, offering my brightest smile. “Hello, Jamie, I’m Rebecca.”

“Wow, you’re as beautiful as your photos.”

I couldn’t believe his opening line. “Kind of you to say. You look quite different from yours.”

Jamie looked sheepish. “Should I go?”

“No, you can buy me the drink you promised.”

I decided that I could take the high road and spend a half hour in Jamie’s company despite his dishonesty. He wasn’t terrible, he was just so old! No way was I interested in a man at the very least ten years my senior. I let him know that most women did not take kindly to false advertising and he should really use current photos on his profile. On to the next!

The next being Jack, so promising in our chats, who asked me for drinks on the Keg’s patio. (I never said yes to a guy who asked me to Tim Hortons for a coffee.) I basked in the sun and enjoyed the beautiful floral hanging baskets while I waited for him. From my vantage point I

watched a white Cadillac Escalade roll into the parking lot. Gold-spoked rims. LOUD rap music. I hoped it wasn't him. The man hopped down from the vehicle. Oh my. It was him. All five foot six of him. Not the advertised five foot ten. Oh, well, another hour, then home. I would absolutely be ordering a Keg-sized drink.

Jack joined me at the table, offering me a charming grin and a fuchsia gerbera daisy. Okay, so maybe not a complete waste of time. We began with the customary pleasantries while we waited for the waitress to take our orders. Once our drinks arrived, the conversation went south quickly. Jack was obviously hung up on his ex-fiancée and clearly intent on impressing me with how much money he had and spent on her. Her four-carat engagement ring, the BMW, the ritzy condo. He was not perceptive enough to notice my eyes glazing over. My every attempt to change the subject thwarted. I drained my drink and signalled the waitress. I was done. When she arrived at our table, before I could ask for my bill, he ordered another round. I opened my mouth to object, but she was gone. I should have walked out then, but manners prevented me from doing so. The second round came, and Jack continued to spiral into his dismal story, pausing only to reply to the constant influx of text messages to his cell. I finally couldn't take any more.

"Oh, look at the time. I should be getting home. I only booked the sitter for a couple of hours."

He patted his pants. "Yah, so this is kinda embarrassing. I forgot my wallet. Do you mind getting the bill?"

No way was I paying for this joker's drinks. I produced a twenty from my purse.

"That's all I have. It will just cover mine. Sorry."

I got up and went to find the waitress before Jack tried something. Epic fail, POF. You suck!

The Isle of Dogs

BROGAN CHAPUT

BEN JONSON watched as his manuscript curled up in the flames. Blinking through the smoke and heat, he could still make out the title, scrawled in his own hand, before the sheet charred black. In a moment it would be gone, as if it never existed. It would never be read or performed again. All that time he'd spent writing and reworking the play until it was perfect, and this is what it had come to, a bundle of papers up in flames. *The Isle of Dogs*, gone forever.

There was a banging at the door. They'd come for him.

The year was 1597. It was a time when no one could be trusted. Anyone could be a Catholic plotter, or they could just as easily be one of Burghley's spies. It was a time when you had to choose your words carefully, unless you wanted your head on a spike on London Bridge. What a time to be a writer.

And yet London had entered a new age of literature and art—the Renaissance. The theatre, in particular, was booming. Only a few years earlier Christopher Marlowe had popularized blank verse, which had since been adopted by nearly every playwright in London, including a promising newcomer from the Midlands by the name of William Shakespeare. It was a time of opportunity, and Jonson was poised to take it.

Jonson was an actor, but not a very good one (Donaldson 106). He was not attractive or charming, but he was clever. He was literate and articulate and had a talent for verse. As a child, he had excelled at a grammar school in west London. He could have gone to Cambridge, had he not been forced to join his stepfather in the bricklaying business. Jonson was a passionate man, both for good and bad. By the end of his

career, there would be hardly a man in London whom he hadn't had a spat with. And why not? He was good and he knew it. He was only waiting for everyone else to realize.

That's when he met Thomas Nashe.

By 1597 Nashe was already a controversial figure, unafraid of shocking the public with his lewd and scandalous pamphlets. Jonson had some respect for the veteran writer, later saying he possessed a "spirit, quick as powder, sharp as steel" (qtd. in Donaldson 111). With only a few plays under his belt, the opportunity to collaborate with a more accomplished writer must have appealed to Jonson. Together they set about to write the satirical play that would become *The Isle of Dogs*.

Several months later, Nashe was on a carriage headed for Norfolk as guards in London tore through his lodgings, looking for the papers Jonson had burnt. Nashe would never return to London, and he would never write another play.

But Jonson did not leave. Instead, he found himself sitting in a cell in Marshalsea, waiting for a meeting with Richard Topcliffe.

Richard Topcliffe was, to use the words of his contemporaries, "a veteran in evil" (Rankin). By profession, he was a torturer—the Queen's personally appointed torturer. It was his job to get information, by any means necessary. His method of choice was the rack, a wooden frame designed to slowly stretch a prisoner until their limbs were ripped out of their sockets. It was horrible and gruesome, and Topcliffe loved it.

We'll never know what happened between Jonson and Topcliffe in the dark recesses of Marshalsea prison. But we do know that it was unsuccessful. Jonson, as it turns out, was made of tougher stuff. Later he would brag of his stoicism against great odds, saying they could get nothing from him but "ay" and "no" (qtd. in Donaldson 114).

Without a confession and with no proof of sedition, Jonson was brought before the Privy Council and dismissed. He was released back into the world, only to find it much changed during his absence.

In the three months Jonson had been imprisoned, the theatrical world had been completely shaken by this episode. The Privy Council had decided that the theatre posed too great a risk to ignore and an indefinite ban had been put in place. The playhouses were closed, the playing companies had stopped performing, and the Swan Theatre, where *The Isle of Dogs* had been shown, had lost its licence (Knox). But despite the wishes of the Privy Council, the theatres would not remain abandoned for long.

Only a few days after Jonson was released from Marshalsea, performances began again at the Rose Theatre. The ban was still in effect, but no one seemed to care. Soon all the playing companies were back to performing. Had the ban succeeded there would have been no *Hamlet*, no *Othello*, no *Twelfth Night*. The English Renaissance would have ended decades early.

The Swan Theatre never recovered from the incident; neither did Thomas Nashe, who spent his remaining years in a self-imposed exile (Nicholl). Jonson, on the other hand, went on to become one of the best-known English playwrights, with a career spanning three monarchies, rivalled in popularity only by Shakespeare himself. Somehow, he had escaped the controversy with his reputation intact.

The Isle of Dogs is now a lost play. No copy has ever been found. No mention of its contents was ever made, besides the claims that it was seditious. It has been speculated that the play satirized the Privy Council, or perhaps the Queen herself (Donaldson 116). But we'll never know. In all likelihood, every copy was destroyed. The play will remain lost forever.

The only people who will ever know what it was about were those few who decided to make the trek across the Thames to spend a sunny, summer day at the theatre. As they stood in the clammy, crowded pit watching the players up on the Swan stage, they were unaware that they were witnessing a brief moment in time that would never be repeated. All they knew was that the play was giving them permission to laugh at the powerful. So they did.

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How Simon Became a Billionaire

TIAN YU (AMIRA) CHEN

I'M SURE most people have given some thought to what makes some people wealthier than others. There's the nature and nurture debate; are people born with it, or are they taught to make it? I think, after meeting Simon, I understand the reason for success a little bit better.

Every Sunday afternoon I visit Simon at a place he rents. It is not a place you would expect a former billionaire to have. The house is in the suburbs, a quiet middle-class neighbourhood with young children playing in the streets, nothing extravagant like Beverly Hills. To get to Simon's room, I walk along the side of the house towards a back entrance that leads straight down into the basement. Simon keeps the door to his room unlocked when I visit, so I let myself in. It's a small room with the bed taking up half the space, but there's always a little leg room for me to sit in-between the desk and cabinets. I am greeted with the familiar 60s music I came to love after spending so much time here. The computer that played "Southern Nights" by Glen Campbell also played a slide show containing Simon's memories and desires: mansions, beautiful scenery, and representations of freedom and peace. Simon smiles when he sees me, but also grimaces because of old military injuries. I remember him telling me about some of his injuries, and the one that stood out to me was the radiation poisoning during one of his military operations. (That's a story for another day, though.) Simon's hair never fully grew back, and his eyebrows became sparse. His old photos showed him with thick and bushy eyebrows, but the one thing that never changed was how sharp and observant his eyes are. I always feel like he is able to read my mind and stare into my soul because of the way he predicts what I say and do. I guess that's why he was a treasured member of the secret services. Most of the time he lays in bed now, though his lively spirit and

engaging storytelling makes it seem like he's still in his 20s, when he worked with the four biggest banks in Singapore's 70s, and as a secret bodyguard for Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew.

For some time while Lee Kwan Yew was still in power, Simon fled Singapore for Canada. Simon apparently pulled some strings with the Canadian military, and they let him into the country after some complications because he had saved some Canadian soldiers in a mission he was sent to. Simon wouldn't give me the details to any of his military missions though, for "safety" reasons. I tried asking many times. Simon changed his name and went into hiding, working as a bartender so he could simply live and not draw attention to himself. (Simon's name, by the way, is not actually Simon.) Simon knew too much about Singapore's operations, and he had too much control over the banks and therefore the country's cash flow. The prime minister wanted him gone. Although Simon kept these events under the wraps, he happily told me about his business ventures.

"So how did you start becoming rich in Canada, when you lost everything in Singapore?" I asked. The story was getting interesting, and I leaned closer to him because he spoke in a soft voice, sometimes coughing and stopping to breathe.

"Being a bartender was bloody boring. Eventually I had to get into something bigger," Simon replied.

Simon went on describing how he started a fishing company for lobsters in Canada's east coast during the 80s, before everyone discovered the marine treasures in the 90s and collapsed the industry by overfishing. He also got into making small cake decorations later, selling them for a few cents to a few dollars per pack. There were small figurines, fun shaped candles, and a lot of what you can imagine in cakes today.

"You wouldn't think that would make any money," Simon answered my unspoken question. "But those things sold for millions across North America."

There were other business projects that Simon considered "fun," but you get the idea. Simon somehow managed to become wealthy and successful even though he started with nothing but his past experience in Canada. Similarly, Simon was almost on his own when it came to how he became successful in Singapore. He wasn't always rich. Although his extended family might have been wealthy, complicated family politics left him penniless in the jungle to fend for himself.

Simon once told me, “the first seven years of your life influences the rest of your life. My life came at a price, a very violent price.”

He told me he was born into a world of jealousy, a world where “dog eats dog.” He was constantly beaten by his mother and other family members of the maternal side, being an unwanted bastard child. It did not help that he was a “smart aleck,” either. According to Simon, he was able to complete middle-school-level homework when he was just four years old. His cousins were not too happy about that, and engaged in the same violent tendencies their parents passed down to them and extended the brutality to Simon. After experiencing multiple near-death experiences during his violent childhood, Simon, younger than age twelve, resorted to escaping the family and living within the jungles of Singapore where he learned to hunt, grow food, and fish.

When I asked Simon what he wanted to do as a child, he gave me one word: “survive.” He dropped out of school as a teenager and did anything he could to be independent and self-sufficient. He still relied on the jungle’s resources, but discovered there was other work that could be done. During his teenage years, he gave eco-tours in Malaysia, and worked as the guy who kept “creepers” away from the models in an agency he termed the “Asian Playboy.” In a week, Simon would make more money than the average man’s salary in a month. All of this was just so he could survive and escape his abusive family. He was not happy.

But there was something passionately burning inside Simon, a desire that had been sparked during his childhood by his grandfather, George Lien. At age four, Simon’s mother would sometimes take him to see his biological father, who worked as a millionaire banker. At the bank, Simon met his grandfather, who presented him with a piggy bank and fifty cents. (Later, Simon would work with George’s bank, the Overseas Union Bank, but that’s also a story for another time.) George showed little Simon that if he put the money inside the piggy bank, George would return the money with an interest. “Investing,” George called it.

Little Simon, who was quite intelligent, got the concept off the bat. “I like investing.”

Present-day Simon, whom I sat with, smiled and said to me, “and that’s how he got me.” That little spark of passion stayed with Simon through his tough times, and allowed him to keep pursuing his love of entrepreneurship despite any odds life gave him. He kept learning, moving forward, and not letting the past make him bitter. I think it’s a little bit of nature and nurture when it comes to Simon’s life and success,

but Simon's passion is definitely what kept him going. Even though Simon lays on his bed from an illness that caught up with him from decades before, his spirit is strong. I know he'll be up at any opportunity that comes. It's quite infectious, that spirit. I often leave his room with a sense of hope and well-being.

Life Lessons on the Island

JODIE COMPEAU

THE CAR door opens and the expected Island greeting brushes her cheek and whips her hair: wind. With the slam of the door she turns and takes the familiar comforting path. The sticks on the ground bend and snap underfoot, the wind pulls and pushes, and she bats little bugs coming from all directions. The smell of the water crescendos as each step takes her closer and the sun comes through the oak and poplar canopy, casting mosaic sunlight on her skin. It always feels right being at the cottage.

Life on *the* Island is dictated by the wind: where it's out of, where it's into, where it was out of yesterday.... The unique Wolfe Island wind of early summer still carries cold around, like a harmless little grudge, with the smallest remnant of the winter's ice, picked up from skimming the ice floats just a few short months earlier. The girl who loves the Island loves the wind and misses it while she winters away. The Island wind never wants her to completely forget the work it does each spring to push said ice down the river so that she can arrive after the work is done and enjoy the beauty of the shore. A deep inhalation of appreciation and exhalation of the stress of "town" will put her back in the wind's good graces. When the wind boldly mixes the largest of the Thousand Islands' (Johnson iv) special potion of river and Great-Lake water and smashes it against the smooth, slick, flat rocks. She imagines it shouts to her, "Do you see what I did for you? The ice is out, come and enjoy the water. Are you an islander or a 'summer person'? Welcome back. Here: smell the wild phlox that Gram transplanted on her naturalistic, enduring, and forward-thinking shoreline (Mann 84) in the 80s. I'll mix the fragrance with the damp darkness of the moss between the rocks. I could quiet down for a while too if you like?"

The girl is especially fond of the quiet mornings on the water when the wind is gentle. She loves to go to the rocks when the morning dampness still demands a sweater over pyjamas, to put her feet in the freezing, still water. She laps up the peacefulness because she knows that as the wind swirls up through the day, so will the busy-ness of this particular cottage. Her grandfather's island upbringing instilled a work ethic that isn't easily dismissed in this family: "You worked 'til it was dark at night for a dollar a day" (McRae 29). There is to be much fussing over nothing, making of food, pointlessly moving of chairs out of the wind again and again. These rituals are what make the cottage the place that it is and are as reliable and faithful as the presence of the wind. Gram's words often ring in her ears, "Always remember where you came from; can I get you a muffin? There is no such word as *can't*; let's move the picnic table out of the wind. If at first you don't succeed try, try again; can I get you a cookie? You can be anything you want to be" (McRae).

The cottage lessons taught the girl strength to get back up after roughhousing with cousins, to hold her chin high when teased for being a redhead, to show gratitude and appreciation when family came together to make a meal or celebrate a special occasion, and to be a strong, proud woman who knows how to laugh at herself. She thanks wind and the cottage for such a valuable life lesson, "Thank you for teaching me to know who I am and to be that person, fully."

Her Gram was the driving force behind the building of the family cottage. The girl's Gram told her, "I fell in love with the sunset from the flat rocks on the north shore where the cottage stands today. I made up my mind that I would buy the lot so I approached owner that day and told him I would like to purchase that lot!" (McRae). And she did. The girl's grandfather, ever the fisherman, had later agreed to the purchase because there was a sensible spot for a boat and dock.

The dock crib used to seem like an unmoveable foundation of strength that would last forever. The dock crib's rocky, gnarly "hands" held up the pressure-treated planks and horizontal telephone poles with what seemed like ease for so long. The girl's family would come in with the family boat over the years and be met by the faces of family who had watched them come the distance from Treasure Island to Chubb Shoal point. The dock would hold and fuss with the lines and hold the boat steady in the strong wind. The dock would tease its occupants with its slight tipsiness from time to time. With time the surface boards gradually withered from the elements, like an old man's face, and needed

occasional replacement boards to smooth out its surface again but the foundation had seemed rock solid, until it wasn't.

She misses the dock, sorry that it couldn't hold out in the rising water of 2017. It was so strong for so many years. It saw comings and goings; it knew its job and did it very well. It enjoyed a beer or two with family members and knew how to accept people of all shapes and sizes. She wishes she could have supported it more in anticipation of the rough winter that was coming. However, in 2019 with even higher water levels, it may have been lost all over again (Caldwell 41). "They" say this will be the new normal, as the dock likely knew long before others recognized it. Thankfully the dock left behind a partner, the cottage, still loved. The small but mighty structure is safely "high and back" (Mann 84), now a suggestion for waterfront properties everywhere in these days of climate change.

The girl who loves the Island misses the dock; she misses landing on shore, the view from the water, making her way in the family boat from "town" across the way. Sometimes she imagines the cottage and dock are dancing, swaying back and forth together in a magic moment, to the rhythm of the river. "Thank you dock and cottage for life lesson two: nothing lasts forever so enjoy it while it lasts."

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Deteriorating

HAILEY COMPSON

“GO GRAB some paper towel!”, my father yelled in a panicked voice as I scrambled to the kitchen.

My grandpa’s finger was gushing blood as the tip of his finger dangled from the rest of his hand. My dad was holding his shirt around it, trying to prevent more blood from spilling onto the white carpet, even though it was already stained with red. My grandpa stood there staring at his finger with a blank look on his face, as if he didn’t know what was going on. But that was exactly it, he didn’t know what was going on.

It took me awhile to figure out that the distant look in his eyes when he was staring at his finger wasn’t because he was shocked, but rather because his mind couldn’t comprehend how severe his injury was.

Once we got to the hospital, my grandpa was admitted and we sat in the waiting room for a long time. My mom couldn’t stop crying and my aunt kept leaving to talk with the doctor. Everyone around me was whispering and I didn’t understand why, but I knew that something must have really been wrong. It wasn’t just a cut finger, there was much more to it, and in a few months things got even worse.

His decline happened in slow motion. He used to walk to the mailbox every day, until one day it became too much of a challenge. He would get lost on his way there and couldn’t remember how to get home, even though it was just down the street. One of the first signs of dementia is difficulty with visual and spatial abilities, such as getting lost while driving (Mayo Clinic); my grandpa was showing clear signs.

All these little signs started adding up to one big picture. He wasn’t able to hold conversations, remember who people were, and eventually he couldn’t take care of himself. The man who I once knew wasn’t there

anymore, and I think what hurt me the most was that he never got to see me grow up.

His health became a sensitive topic quickly. My parents didn't like talking about why grandpa didn't know my name, or why grandma sometimes would start crying in the middle of the day. But I figured it out pretty quickly that the dementia was taking over his body and mind.

"Is there anything that can be done to cure him?" I asked my parents without knowing how cruel the world can be sometimes.

"No, nothing can be done. There's no cure," my dad said. He closed his eyes and turned his head away from me. I could tell he was upset about it, that he wanted to cry, but he felt as though he couldn't because he was supposed to be the one keeping the family together—showing he was strong enough to handle anything thrown his way. But the thing is, he wasn't, nobody ever is. My dad grew up across the road from my grandpa, listening to him make curfews for my mom when she was a kid, telling her what she could and couldn't do, setting rules, controlling the house, and now he was watching him fade away.

"It's like watching someone who used to control everything, now unable to control anything. Not even his body or mind. He's not even there anymore," my dad explained to me.

As the months went by it really took a toll on my family, and my grandpa was put in a hospital. We couldn't take care of him anymore. He was slowly fading away and there was nothing anyone could do. He lost a lot of weight, and eventually you could see his sternum poking through his hospital gown as he lost all the fat on his body. I couldn't fathom that there were 608 beds in this hospital, and my grandpa lay deteriorating in one—one of the unlucky sick patients.

We went to visit here and there, but it was tough. There wasn't much to do or say while in the room with him, so I usually wrote in my journal.

"November 15th, 2014—We're at the hospital again. I don't think he knows why we're here, or even who we are. I know it isn't his fault. He's sick and the world's sick for making my family go through this. I can't tell if he's in pain or not, but if he is, I hope he feels better soon." I wrote knowing it was better to express my thoughts somewhere only I could see, rather than say anything to my parents.

A couple days later my mom decided to stay in Brampton at my aunt's house while the rest of us went home to Kingston. It was too much for all of us to be there, staring at him and hoping he would get better, even though it wasn't possible.

I didn't know how to deal with my emotions as I couldn't really talk about it with anyone. Only 7.1% of those over sixty-five have the chance of getting dementia, meaning the chances aren't incredibly high, and yet my grandpa still got it (Cunningham et al.).

"December 3rd, 2014—Mom is still in Brampton. The house is silent and filled with worry. Every time the phone rings everyone holds their breath, knowing that that could be a phone call saying he's gone"

And as the days went on, my mom stayed in Brampton, and everything was different. My family was holding on to the last final days with him, knowing the end would be coming soon, while I sat there knowing it was time. They didn't want to let go of him, thinking that maybe somehow he would get better. My aunt kept asking the doctors about what could be done to help him get better, and my mom kept holding on to the idea of a miracle. But he was in pain, he wasn't the same person anymore, we were holding onto something that wasn't there. He needed to be let go, he needed to be free.

The next time the phone rang, I picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Dad home?" my mom asked. I could tell something wasn't right by the slight rasp in her voice, I could tell she was exhausted and had been crying.

"He hasn't made it home yet. Everything okay?"

"He's gone, Hails," my mom said quietly. I could tell that this was the first time she said it out loud. It sounded as if something was ripped away from her at that moment. Almost as if she had a sense of relief, drowning in sadness. Knowing she would never see him again, but also knowing he was in a better place.

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Untitled

BRANDI COOK

IT WAS a warm Wednesday afternoon in May when my daughter Kennedy was born. She was beautiful. Now, I know all mothers say that, but a nurse confirmed, “that is one cute baby.” Kennedy had an older sister who was six at the time of her arrival, so my husband Mitch and I knew what to expect. But enough time had passed that we had forgotten a thing or two about newborns.

“Does this seem normal?” Mitch would ask.

“I think you should Google it” was my usual answer.

Kennedi was born curious; she would stay awake and gaze at her surroundings. Always trying to make sense of this new world and her family. As she grew, we envisioned what our girls would be doing in twenty years. Would they be good friends, scientists, athletes? Would they always stay close to us? We knew one thing for sure: we’re going to work hard to ensure their opportunities were limitless.

When Kennedy was six months old, I decided to join baby yoga with my friend Phuong, who had had a baby two weeks after me.

“Alright, mommies, let’s gaze into those beautiful eyes!”, the yoga instructor cheerfully announced from the front of the class.

As all the mommies gazed into their little ones’ eyes, I noticed that my baby was not too interested in this task. In fact, she was not interested in looking at me at all. I tossed it off as curiosity and wished all the other moms would notice how well she was rolling for her age.

“Kennedi doesn’t seem too interested in playing with any kids,” our daycare provider, Mary-Lou, seemed hesitant to tell me.

“Do you think that something is wrong?” I rebutted alarmingly, causing her to immediately recant.

“No, no, I am sure she’s just too young. I wouldn’t worry about it; it’s just something I noticed.” The words stuck with me. Mary-Lou knew kids, she was around them all day.

When Kennedy turned three, we moved across the country from Trenton, Ontario to Langley, British Columbia. I had started going back to university to finish my degree, and Mitch had started a career in gas fitting. There was one problem, though—Kennedy was not talking.

“I am positive Ava was talking a lot by this age,” I told Mitch. I decided it was time to take Kennedy to the doctor. I wanted to make sure she was okay and request a referral for speech therapy. The doctor visit was brief, we received our referral, and we were added to a six-month waiting list for autism testing.

“Precautionary measure, nothing to be too concerned about,” the doctor said nonchalantly.

After a regretful phone call with my mother-in-law she insisted that “Kennedy doesn’t talk a lot because you and Mitch don’t speak to her enough.” She was always quick to point out parenting flaws as the reasoning behind adverse behaviours.

The speech therapist came for a home visit, and I thought things appeared to be going well. She stopped and looked up at me, “has Kennedy been tested for autism?”

“We are on the waiting list, but our doctor didn’t seem to be concerned,” I retorted, already knowing where the conversation was going.

“Listen, if you can afford it, get a private assessment done, because I am quite certain she is autistic.”

Those words flooded my mind like a tidal wave. I held it together just long enough to thank her for her time.

I turned to studying everything I could on autism. I also called my parents, and in between sobs, I revealed our new normal. Mitch remained undecided. He was choosing to wait until we had a psychologist see her before making a decision about Kennedy. I already knew, I finally had my wakeup call. We made the decision to pay for a private assessment. A private assessment gives you the luxury of an immediate diagnosis, with a cost of approximately four thousand dollars.

The appointment lasted an hour. The psychologist played games, asked questions, and attempted reciprocal play with Kennedy. It was difficult to watch. Kennedy fumbled on many of the assigned tasks. It was very clear that she was behind in speech, but she struggled socially as well.

“Kennedi most definitely has autism, and is behind for her age,” the psychologist told us. “I don’t believe there are any other underlying issues, however.”

I had rehearsed this scenario a hundred times in my mind, expecting the diagnosis. I was able to remain calm, soaking in everything he was telling us about her strengths and weaknesses. I looked towards Mitch and realised he had completely zoned out. Staring out the window almost unable to listen further; he was fighting tears. I chose to be strong for the both of us. The doctor and I continued talking, as if Mitch were not even in the room anymore.

When we received an autism diagnosis for Kennedi, the grief was crippling. It felt as if we had lost a child, didn’t we? We had envisioned a life for Kennedi that was full of independence. Mitch and I would often daydream of our retirement and travelling the world. How can we travel the world if Kennedi is unable to live alone? We struggled with the realization that Kennedi may never gain meaningful employment, graduate, or have friends. She is now very likely to be bullied throughout school and suffer overwhelming adversities. These uncertainties tortured my thoughts. I allowed myself to go down a path of depression for a short time. I was, after all, mourning the loss of a child. The child I thought I was going to have, she no longer existed.

Acceptance inevitably pierced my depression and I began to fight for my daughter. I researched every therapy I could: play therapy, music therapy, behavioural intervention therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. Kennedi needed speech therapy, behavioural intervention, and a behavioural consultant. We were fortunate to live in British Columbia: the province mandates twenty thousand dollars a year to put towards autism therapy.

I felt alone in the process, none of my family and friends had gone through this. I had also quit school at this point; Kennedi’s new routine was gruelling. Her well-being was so much more important than my own dreams. It was and still is all about her. Years later we are still in the fight of our life, but she has made improvements I could have never imagined. Hope is our new normal, and our ability to remain thankful under any circumstance is our biggest accomplishment.

A Vessel of Memories

JADE COTIE

ON MOVING day, when I was twenty years old, about a year after my father's death, I found a sealed envelope hiding under the left corner of my bed. The envelope sat there patiently, waiting for me to expose what was inside. My first instinct was to grab the envelope. My conscience forced me to consider if I was meant to open it. My room was empty except for the bed and a few brown boxes neatly organized in the corner. The hideous orange U-Haul waited patiently in the driveway. The loud footsteps of the movers made me realize that I had to make a decision about this envelope. My knees cracked as I bent down to grab this hidden treasure. My heart skipped a beat as my fingers grazed across the envelope. My mother casually strode into the room as I ripped the envelope open. I'm afraid to look. I peer with one eye open. Photos.

I open both of my eyes. The first photo in the envelope is a picture of my dad and me, the day I learned to swim. When I was six years old, my dad insisted that I learn to swim. He wanted me to learn where he had learned, at his parents' house on the St Lawrence river. My dad moved to the river when he was nine years old. He had an attachment to the house, like a mother with her first-born child. It was a glorious Saturday afternoon, the clouds rolled in the sky, and the thermometer in the boathouse rose. The water stood still, sensing my impending arrival. I walked out of my grandparents' house and down ten steps to meet my dad on the dock. "You've got quite the outfit on," my dad observed. I was wearing a light pink swimsuit with gold polka-dots and white ruffles. I sported a cartoon animal swim mask that covered half of my face. "Are you ready for this, kiddo?" my dad asked, as he shuffled his body down the ladder into the water.

"I guess," I hesitantly responded.

“Let’s do this, climb in.”

I dipped my toe in the water. Chills shivered up my spine. My dad reached up from the water and grabbed me. I tried to touch my toes to the bottom of the river. Four hours later, I had mastered the doggy paddle. During that warm July afternoon, I felt untouchable next to my dad. He was my rock.

“You were so cute,” my mom said.

“Were?” I replied raising my eyebrows.

She laughed. My mom passed me a photo from the envelope hidden under my bed. My dad and I are smiling up at the camera, each doing a thumbs up. My bright yellow floaties sit at the edge of the dock. I flipped the photo. “July 2004, Jade learns to swim. So proud of her.” It was my dad’s handwriting. All of a sudden, I had this feeling in my stomach. It travelled up into my throat. Tears pricked behind my eyes. I tried to push the feeling back down. Big raindrops spilled down my cheeks. Grief is funny. One minute you are lost in joyful memories. The next, you question how you can live on this earth without them. I feel my mom’s warm body behind as she wraps her arms around me.

“Jade, look at this, your tenth birthday party. You were dying to wear that blue Care Bears robe.”

In 2008, I had my tenth birthday party at my grandparents’ house on the river. My mom must have told me a million times that this was my family party. My kid party would be next Saturday. The balcony was decorated with blue balloons, my favourite colour. The sun started to set. The sky was blue and pink. There was a feeling of undeniable happiness in the air, urging me to hold on to this moment. As the colours in the sky bled into one another, my family erupted into “Happy Birthday.”

My dad winked at me. “Make a wish, Jadey,” he said. I stared at him, completely distracted by the colours that painted the sky. I shut my eyes tightly and wished for the moment to last forever.

As the days turned into months and then years, everything began to slowly change. My grandparents passed away within a year of each other, leaving my family the house on the river. The house became my connection to my family, past and present. The river was the one constant unwavering aspect of my life. It was always moving past but always there, like our memories of people that we’ve lost.

Ten years later, my father died of cancer. It was an intense battle against a disease that seized his entire identity. The person I’d known for my whole life transformed into a different, depressed, and defeated person. One out of four people are expected to die from cancer

("Cancer"). My mother gave me the news about my dad. She was sleeping with him every night at the hospital, while my brother and I drove up daily to visit him. The minute she unexpectedly came home, I already knew what she was going to say. When she told me, it felt like I had been run over by a bus. The lasagne casseroles started to roll in after word got out about his passing. I promised myself I would never eat lasagne again.

"Are you ready?" my mom asked.

I snap back to reality. I put the envelope in a box. I leave one photo out. A photo of my dad and I when we moved to the river after my grandparents passed away. We both are wearing matching red and black checkered flannel shirts. I pull the photo close to my beating heart. I close my eyes, imagining my dad's arms around me and focus in on his voice urging me to move forward.

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Building a Relationship Is Like Building a Fire

SARAH CURRIE

“**O**KAY, KIDS, how do you build a fire?” the counsellor asks to her campers.

“With wood and matches?” one camper replies.

“It is a little more complicated than that, but today I am going to teach you so that you all become experts! The most important rule to building a fire—is never build it by yourself. Fire is a very hot, dangerous and harmful element. If it is not handled in the proper way, it will spiral out of control. So kids, let’s all split up into pairs and find an open fire building station, sit down and let’s get started!”

Fire needs different elements in order to produce heat and grow bigger. On earth, there are four different elements that are essential in order to live. They are earth, air, fire, and oxygen.

While we need these to survive, these elements also make up fire. The first thing you will need are your materials, from the element earth. There are many different items you can use, but the most effective one is wood. Find a variety of different wood—for example, sticks, twigs, logs—but it must be dry. Since wood is the foundation of fire, wood that is wet will not burn. Depending on where you build your fire, there are different materials that help a fire grow. When in the woods or outdoors, grass and leaves are helpful dry materials that allow fire to build off of, and when indoors, paper can replace those outside materials.

“With your partner, place your wood in the formation of a pyramid or a log cabin, just like this,” the counsellor tells her campers.

Once one has the wood to build a fire, they must pile the wood on top of each other to create a pyramid. When wood is placed in a pyramid-

like shape where each piece is holding each other up, it also for the second most important element to reach the fire. The second element is oxygen. Oxygen is the air that fills our earth; all living things need oxygen in order to reproduce and survive. Fire needs to breathe oxygen to grow and produce heat the same way humans and animals breathe to survive. When oxygen enters a fire, it allows for it to grow bigger and produce heat. The more oxygen that is given to a fire, the greater the fire will be. Although, in order to build a fire you need more than oxygen and wood. Friction must be created to produce heat, that will turn into a spark to light the fire. Friction is created when two objects rub against each other. Before matches and lighters were announced to the world, friction was generated by rubbing together sticks or even rocks. Eventually, these items will produce a spark that can generate a large fire. Nowadays, building a fire is very easy when you have wood and other dry materials. Matches are commonly used to construct fires, as matches are small pieces of wood that, when quickly swiped against the sandpaper surface, create friction that turns into a flame.

“One partner, grab two sticks and rub them together to create friction. When moving fast enough, you are creating heat between the two sticks that will create a spark, and soon a fire. Take turns between you and your partner to try creating friction. When you hear or see a spark, do not stop! Keep going, as you are getting super close to starting that fire! Whichever partner is not doing anything at that time, gather some small materials like leaves and grass, so that when your partner has created the fire, the two of you can work together to allow that flame to continuously grow (in a controlled manner).”

When that friction is produced, sparks will fly off, symbolizing that a fire is on its way. When the spark catches oxygen, it will either allow the fire to grow out or simply burn out. As these sticks work to generate heat, the more heat they give off, the more sparks are created—increasing your chances of constructing a fire.

“Today, kids, while learning how to build a fire, you also learned how to build a relationship.”

The counsellor proceeded to tell her campers about the basis of friendship, and how building a fire and allowing it to grow is the same stability you need in your relationships.

Everyone in this world has a relationship with someone. Whether it be mom to daughter, father to son, sister to brother, best friend to best friend, girlfriend to boyfriend, et cetera. All of these relationships that people contain in their lives have a foundation and a purpose.

Friendships do not appear, you slowly build them. First, you meet them, then you get to know them and eventually you earn each other's trust and you grow together. In everyday relationships, communication is the only way they can actually work. Communicating with one another is the key to allowing that relationship to build stronger. If one person is not talking, how can the other understand how they feel? You simply cannot. When a pair is communicating their emotions, that is how you have a successful relationship. Without communication you cannot build trust or love, it is the foundation to a relationship; like wood to fire. When the element of a relationship or friendship are working together, that is when it has the strongest flame.

Building a relationship is like building a fire, you need all the right elements in order to grow.

VIP

BRYAN MIGUEL DA SILVA

I WALK beside the Humvee. The heat is killing me, The Kevlar weighs me down. The rifle has become an extension of my body. We are going through another typical Afghan town. I always hate this part. Walking through the tension. Feeling observed by shifting curtains and suspicious eyes. Like a target. On my right, we're about to pass another group of soldiers. I hear English, which catches my interest. As a Canadian in a foreign army, I am not used to hearing my native tongue.

I feel the splatter before I hear the buzz. Like an angry bee. "Contact!" someone screams. So much blood. Confusion reigns. For a second, I don't know what's going on. We're being attacked.

"Where did it come from?" No one knows. Noises everywhere. "Eleven. Heads up." My squad retaliates. Am I hit? No, I'm fine. To my right. A body collapses. A soldier. He's just outside my reach. I pull him by the vest, and the Humvee becomes our shelter.

"I got you. You're gonna be okay," I say. He's scared, in shock. "No, I won't leave you. I'm right here." The bullet hit his shoulder. "It doesn't look serious. You'll be fine."

His name was Fair-something. I noticed his name tag. For a long time after that day, I thought about him, about what I remembered of him. His British accent and his stubble. I had stubble too; it had been two weeks since I had last shaved. I felt a certain connection to him.

That morning, my first sergeant briefed my squad about our mission. It was just after six a.m. and already the back of my T-shirt was glued to my back. He told us that our mission was to transport a local VIP to some location thirty kilometres away.

I had joined the Portuguese Army a year earlier, in 2012. I was eager to make a difference. I thought I could be useful. I thought I could inspire

people and fight for freedom. I wanted to do my part, not just say I did. I breezed through basic training and grunted through combat training and there I was, swimming in sweat, doing what I was trained for.

I never found out what happened to Fair-something. I asked, but no one knew. Now I know he was probably there with the International Security Assistance Force along with thousands of other soldiers, including forty thousand Canadians (Azzi). We were all there “to help rebuild and stabilize the country”—so we were told (United Kingdom).

After my tour, back in Portugal, Corporal Moraes and I are sitting on the long wooden benches of the mess hall having one of our many hushed discussions.

“Why do you think the West cares about the Middle East?” He looks around to make sure no officers are around. “They have interests there. They aren’t liberating anyone. We’re telling them how to live and calling it freedom.”

“Yeah, but what about ISIS? We’re freeing them from extremists,” I say, thinking we must be doing something right.

“What about them? We went there to avenge 9/11. Haven’t we? Haven’t we done enough to them? Why do you think ISIS exists?” We continue our conversation over a coffee or a beer or in the barracks.

Months later, I knock on the door that reads Company Officer and inform my superiors of my wish to leave the army.

In 2014, I meet Giuseppe, an asylum seeker who doesn’t like to use his Syrian name. Giuseppe is the only one in his original group of ten Kurdish Syrians to reach his objective, which now means a precarious shelter in Rome and some state-sponsored English lessons with me.

“What do you miss the most from Syria?” I ask him in one of our first lessons.

“Everything,” he replies. “More the smell of jasmines from my backyard. They don’t smell like that in Europe.”

Giuseppe left his home and family in search of a better place, in search of a new home. He lived through the dryness of the desert and conquered the vast, intimidating monster—the Mediterranean Sea. Giuseppe was one in thousands of asylum seekers that year.

Giuseppe tells me his story. His first contact with Europe.

He was swept into a dimly lit room—a lamp, a chair, and a table keep him company, nothing else. No one else. He was relieved that it was finally warm and happy with his new clothes. Hours later, an old man banged on the table. Giuseppe woke up and wiped the drool from his face.

“English?” the old man asked. He sat on a folding chair he had brought with him.

“A little.” Giuseppe wasn’t sure if the man wanted to help or send him back.

“Your age?” The old man tipped the chair back to get a good look at Giuseppe’s body.

“I sixteen.”

“Do you think the war is good?” The old man leaned in and looked Giuseppe in the eyes.

“No, not good. Daesh accept people because they lose father, mother, brother. War is not good.” Giuseppe didn’t feel rage against the foreign soldiers in his country, just doubt that their presence was any good.

“Hmm.... Why did you leave your country?”

“Because is not safe. Daesh is bad, politics is bad, flying robots is bad. I lose friends.” Giuseppe loves his country, but he wants to live more than he wants to be in Syria.

VIP. That’s the word we used. Very Important Person. Who dictates these things? Why is a businessman or local politician more *important* than anyone else? How can one put numbers on people’s lives? We did. We do. Nearly one million people died as a result of the war (Crawford), and for what? For liberty? Did we improve lives? Are they free now? The people we fight are people. What if I were born marching the other way? They see their country invaded and their people killed, and we call them all terrorists for defending themselves. For not submitting to capitalism. Thousands of soldiers were deployed to the Middle East. Did humanity win?

Giuseppe is no one; he is everyone. Your father, your sister, your son, your neighbour, your friend, your barber, your professor, your student. Giuseppe is not alone. Thousands—perhaps millions—of stories like his are silenced and dismissed, too inconvenient to be voiced. What is liberty? Choosing who deserves to live? Invading peoples’ countries with vague promises of a better life? I don’t think so.

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Don't You Think About It?

HOLLY DEAN

SAGE AND I walk away from the bus after Evelyn, our supervisor, showed us on a dinky creased map where we will find the cache. The cache is a designated area somewhere off a logging road or ATV trail that is composed of a variety of plastic bins filled with hundreds of saplings. It's almost nine a.m. and probably about seven degrees outside. The sun is beaming, and I think that I'm in love with Sage. Not in a romantic way, but in a friendly way. On the days that it's pouring rain, hailing, windy, swampy, muddy, or bloody hot, Sage grounds me more than the herb itself. Her cheeks are rosy, and her curly hair sticks out from under her construction helmet like the Play-Doh Crazy Cuts toy when I pressed on its head as a kid. Because it's still a little chilly, the bugs haven't come out yet. So, our eight hundred metre walk to the cache will be peaceful.

With a cheerful voice I ask her, "You ready for a good day? I think we're going to PB." PB is tree planters' slang for "personal best"—planting more trees than you've ever planted before.

"Yeah man. I'm going to bag up six hundred to start."

My face arranges itself into a smile, but I start to panic. Six hundred saplings, depending on the species of tree, can be forty to sixty pounds and I'm not sure if I can start my day that heavy. I don't use my shoulder straps, which means I bear all the weight from my tree planting bags on my hips. I feel panicked because I want to PB, but I don't think that I can begin my day carrying so much weight. However, if I want to PB with Sage, I'll rise to the occasion and get out of my comfort zone.

We walked in silence the last five minutes to the cache because it was uphill the entire way. We were huffing and puffing carrying our six litres of water, lunches, and planting bags.

We arrive at the cache and unveil the tarp covering a mere six boxes of trees. This is nothing in comparison to the usual ten to fifteen boxes that are typically at a cache. One box has around eight hundred saplings. Which means that if Sage and I were to plant all of them, splitting all of the saplings at the cache, we would plant just over two thousand trees each. Considering that our PB's are just over two thousand it means one of two things. One is we have a small piece of land to fill and Evelyn will relocate us in a few hours. Or, two, she thinks we're awfully slow planters and don't have it in us to PB today. Sage falls to her knees and begins gently placing Saran-Wrapped bundles of jack pine and black spruce into the bottom of her bags, each bundle containing twenty to twenty-five saplings. I am moving a little slower today. I take off my rain jacket and purple vest, leaving myself in just my plaid long-sleeved shirt, gloves, torn pants, and duct-tape-covered construction boots.

Sage lays out my tree bundles for me. "Here you go, buddy. Six hundred for you. Six hundred for me." It was her kind, gentle, loving way of saying "let's get going, Holly." She's so sweet.

We start planting and Sage is moving faster than I can, but I do everything in my power to keep up, talking nonstop. "Sage, don't you think it's a little bizarre that MLB players get paid millions of dollars a season to swing a bat while we're out here breaking our backs to make minimum wage?"

"We can make more than minimum wage if we can do better than we did yesterday," Sage said.

"That's not what I mean, though." I talk too much when I'm anxious. We're literally planting the trees that will be dug up to help build stadiums, baseball bats, and benches, but we get paid less than ten cents per tree on a day like this."

Sage laughs nervously. "Honestly, I try not to think about it. I'm only here to make as much money as possible since I'm actually broke."

I'm trying so hard to keep up with her that I'm planting J roots, digging holes that are too shallow and jamming the saplings in. A J-root is when the hole you dig with your shovel is too shallow for the sapling to be planted in straight and comfortably and ends up getting jammed in and makes the shape of a J. "It just blows my mind that society puts billions of dollars into the sporting industries while the world is literally dying. We need to be funding tree planters. Like, why are we living in shitty tents and eating dirt for months to save the world while a big muscular guy becomes a millionaire because he can hit a ball really far? I just don't get it ... and I'm a sports person!"

Sage lets out a big sigh. “I don’t have a clue, dude.”

We plant in silence again because I’m now in my head, thinking hard the fairness of my work. The sun is still shining. Our boots are filled with swamp water and our hands are wet with mud, but we feel good because nothing is purer than this Thunder Bay air.

Cassie

KESTREL DEMARCO

IT'S NO secret in my family that I'm the "annoying" sister. I know, usually that's the role of the younger sibling. That's how it is in your family, right? At least most of the time I know where to draw the line. But I didn't always. Once, when I was younger, my mom pulled me aside after a particularly bad fight and said, "you know, if you were a bit nicer to Cassie, you'd be her biggest role model." I couldn't believe it. Of *course* it was my fault. Is that how it is in every family, the older sibling takes the blame while the younger one gets off scot free? Fuming at the injustice of the situation, I stormed up to my room. My mom was wrong ... wasn't she? Lying in bed that night, her words played over and over in my head. I guess I could be a *bit* nicer to Cassie. Maybe even a lot nicer. Maybe. The more I thought about it, the more I knew my mom was right.

My family loves to travel. When I was thirteen, we went to Australia for six weeks. Up until then, my relationship with Cassie had been rocky. When we got along, we were inseparable, but we also spent a lot of time *not* getting along. What would start as harmless bickering would escalate into fights and tears. Years later, my mom confided in Cassie that before that trip to Australia she'd been worried that our relationship would never improve. To this day, my whole family recognizes it as a turning point; somehow, in those six weeks Cassie and I grew a lot closer. Maybe it was that I was finally learning where to draw the line, or maybe it was just that we *had* to get along, with no one else to talk to besides our parents. Whatever it was, it set us on a new path.

Growing up, one of the only things Cassie and I had in common was our shared obsession with Harry Potter. We would spend hours talking about it. If I had to guess, we've probably each read the series at least

fifteen times. There was an unwritten rule in my family that we couldn't bring the whole series with us on our trips, but that didn't stop us from trying. The situation played out the same way every time. Cassie and I would decide how to spread out the weight of the books between our two suitcases. My parents would go over what we had packed and make us leave the heavier ones behind. "There won't be as much time for reading on this trip," my dad would say. "You won't get through all these." Inevitably, we *would* get through them all, and we'd end up buying whichever books we'd left behind in whatever country we landed in. As a result, we now have at least three copies of each book, and in some cases four or five. Eventually, my parents gave up. From then on, we packed the whole series.

As Cassie and I got older, we stopped sharing a hotel room with our parents when we travelled. One of the first times this happened was in a cockroach-infested lodge in Peru. After spending about thirty minutes waging a war on the cockroaches, we got into bed, exhausted. We were dreading waking up at five the next morning for a day-long bird-watching excursion. Even though we knew we'd pay for it, we stayed up late into the night anyway, talking. It's the first time I can clearly remember us talking, somewhat awkwardly, about what was going on in our lives. I guess being thousands of kilometres away from home gave us the freedom to open up about everything we couldn't talk about back in Toronto.

I was sitting in my room in residence, weeks away from finishing my first year at Queen's, when Cassie called to tell me that she'd gotten into Pearson College, a two-year, "pre-university" school. She'd spent the last few months in an intensive application process, and I knew how badly she wanted to go. There was only one problem: Pearson is on Vancouver Island. Cassie would be living on the other side of the country for the next two years.

After we hung up, I cried. I tried to remind myself that this was what Cassie wanted, that this was about *her* life, but I just couldn't accept that for the next two years I would only see her at Christmas and over the summer. It wasn't like we'd seen each other all that much since I'd been living in Kingston, but at least every time I went home, she was there. What would happen to our relationship? Would we grow apart?

As it turned out, distance brought us even closer. That summer, at my aunt's cottage in Honey Harbour, Cassie and I swam out to the water trampoline. I scrambled up the ladder first and Cassie passed me the snacks before climbing up after me. We spent the whole afternoon out

there, catching each other up on what we'd missed while living on opposite ends of the country, enjoying the warm sun and each other's company. I don't know when it happened, but Cassie had become one of my favourite people to talk to. "I'm so happy you girls can talk for so long," my mom said after we got back. I was, too.

It's a bit ironic, isn't it, that distance played such a crucial role in bringing us together. Growing up, travelling helped us find the relationship we didn't have at home. Today, living apart has brought us closer than ever before. My mom was really onto something, all those years ago. But I don't think even she knew how much I stood to gain from cutting Cassie a bit of slack. At some point between then and now, *Cassie* became *my* biggest role model.

Breaking the Sequence

SABRINA FIELDING

WHEN I got to the party, it was silent. I hadn't quite caught on to the notion of being fashionably late, so I arrived at exactly ten on the nose. I was greeted by the sight of Sarah,¹ the other cashier from the pool, clumsily setting up a tent.

"Hey, Sabrina!" she chirped, struggling to drag the tent fabric across the pole. "Are you sleeping here as well?" I opened my mouth. "Oh, uh ... I hadn't planned on it."

She looked puzzled. "Isn't that your van back there?" She motioned to the 2001 Honda Odyssey parked at the end of the driveway.

"Yeah, that's mine."

Her eyes widened, and I suddenly caught on to what she was implying. "Oh! No, no. Don't worry. I—I'm not drinking." I waved my trusty Kleen Kanteen filled with water.

She shrugged, swatting at a mosquito. "Oh, okay." I knew the *why* was there at the tip of her teeth, but she held her tongue.

I clung to the bottle harder, my palms beginning to sweat. It felt like I was wearing a sign that screamed my innocence in brilliant lights. "Where's everyone else?"

"Bailey and Erica are setting up beer pong in the shed. The Bradleys'll be here pretty soon. Jill always takes forty years to get ready."

The Bradley siblings were something of a natural phenomenon around these parts. There were five of them in total, three of whom worked as lifeguards at the pool: Mike was the oldest, appointed head lifeguard for the past few years. At a staggering six foot eight, he felt no need to bother with pleasantries. It wasn't that he was explicitly unfriendly, but rather knew his presence was acknowledged without

having to say a word. (Unlike me, who often felt I could have stood in the middle of a room and screamed and no one would have bat an eyelash.) Then there was Jill, his sister around my age, whose galaxies of freckles and mop of red curls were as striking as a rare bird. Travis, who fell in the one year between Jill and Mike, was the enigma of the five. There was something about him that just seemed ... different. Tall, but not quite as dizzyingly so. Blond, instead of auburn. Blue, husky-like eyes instead of the dark green of his siblings. I'd only been working at the pool a few weeks as a cashier, and I had heard more about him than from him. The one thing I was sure of, however, something I knew all five had in common: they could party harder than anyone.

"You came!" Erica's voice came from around the corner, chipper as ever. She appraised my orange tank top, my sad attempt at neon. "Ooh, very *glow-y*! I like it!"

I blushed. "Thanks." As assistant head lifeguard, she herself donned fishnet stockings, a miniskirt, and a tube top.

"Do you want a drink? We have beer, cider, some harder stuff if you want ... oh! I think I still have some Smirnoff Ices in the cooler if you want, I—"

I stopped her. "I should be good for now. I have my water, so, y'know, I'm set." I laughed a little, trying to temper the awkwardness.

"Sure! No worries! Let me know if you need more water." She put a comforting hand on my arm, and I wanted to drown in my own mundanity.

The Bradleys arrived a little while later in their suitably provocative attire. Jill was already drunk, stumbling out of the truck. "Sabrina!" My name sailed loosely from her mouth. "How *are* you? Ready to get blackout tonight?" She didn't wait for an answer, running over to Sarah and assaulting her cheek with a sloppy kiss. Mike gave me his usual solemn greeting and headed towards the fire pit.

Travis hung behind a little, not saying a word. I noticed the water bottle in his hand, the label shredded into a million pieces.

He glanced at the bottle in my own hands, smiling a little. "Whatcha drinking?"

I glanced down at my hands, unsure if I should lie. "Just water."

"Not drinking?"

I shot him a wry smile. "Not tonight." Or any night, but I left that part out. "Big fan of drinking your vodka from Costco water bottles?"

He laughed. Something jumped in the pit of my stomach. “Only way I drink it.” As if to prove it, he took a swig. “Nah, it’s just water too. I have to get up at four tomorrow for work.”

I felt something in me relax, perhaps from the momentary bond of sobriety. “Last time I checked, the pool does not open at such an ungodly hour.”

“Ha. It’s for my other job, actually. Construction. Well, technically an internship, but basically I’m just the resident janitor.”

I grinned. “Sounds like a plum gig. Hope you’re getting paid, at least.”

He shrugged. “Pretty sure my boss is taking a cut of my pay, but whatever. It’s not a real internship unless some shifty shit is going down, right?”

“Just think of how much character you’re building.”

“Exactly.” When he looked at me again, he didn’t look away. The me I knew would have, would have found the current that ran between us too much, too strong, too intense. But I just held his gaze.

I couldn’t explain what I felt right then. For a girl whose previous dating life extended solely to a chaste forehead kiss and sweaty hand-holding (and awkwardly friend-zoning all others who dared ask), I was suddenly impatient. My typical level-headed self seemed far away in that moment, the girl who valued sequence, who was bound by tiresome attempts at rationality among the chaos of teenage emotion. I suddenly felt that girl cracking open, the chaos leaking in, the high of darkness and beer breath and this boy standing two feet away drawing me closer with his eyes.

“Hey, do you think ... do you think you might want to hang out sometime?” he asked, his stormy eyes searching mine for any signs of overstepping.

Old me would have found some excuse, a neat diversion of topic.

Let it in.

I took a step closer. “I might want that.”

NOTES

¹All names have been changed.

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Untitled

JEANINE FRAZER

“ARE WE there yet?” I said to my father impatiently as I kicked my little legs up and back against the backseat.

“Almost,” he replied.

“But you said the same thing hours ago,” I said. I threw my head back and sighed.

My mom turned back and said, “Are you excited to meet Mickey and Minnie Mouse?”

I lifted my head back up, smiled, and said “Yes”. I looked out the window and watched the moon passing by the car wondering how it always seemed to catch right back up the car.

“We’re here!” my dad exclaimed and I opened my eyes to see my mom beaming at me and shaking my legs. Finally, after driving for two straight days from Toronto we have arrived at Disney World.

“Are we going to meet Cinderella now?” I asked.

“No, hunny, it’s late. She’s sleeping and we have to sleep too. We can meet her tomorrow,” my mom replied. When we got to the hotel I went to bed immediately so that I could wake up and finally meet all of my favourite people.

“What does it say? What does it say?” I asked my dad as we drove past a bright yellow sign.

“Walt Disney World. Where dreams come true”

We’re finally here!

My mom, dad, brother, aunt, and uncle walk down a path that leads to a long line up. I looked up at my mom and asked, “Where are we going?”

“We’re going on a boat ride.”

My little body can barely contain all my excitement as I jump up and down. “Like grandma and grandpa’s?”

“I think so, we’ll have to wait and see!”

“I want to sit beside both mommy and daddy,” I say before my brother can as I jump into the boat and grab both of my parent’s hands. I look over at my brother and stick my tongue out. My brother shrugs and sits on the other side of my dad. My aunt and uncle also get in the boat and sit right behind us. There are strangers on the boat, too. I don’t like strangers so I sidle up really close to my mom.

“All right, ladies and gentlemen,” the skipper said. I bounced in my seat waiting for the boat to start moving. Eventually, the skipper yelled out, “Are you ready to go?”

My mom started clapping her hands next to me and I clapped my hands together too as the boat starting moving. The skipper directs our attention to the pretty houses and other boats along the shore. I stopped listening to what he was saying and just watched the water as we rode across it.

All of a sudden I feel the boat jerk as it drives into a very dark room. I don’t like the dark. “Why are we here, dad? I don’t want to be here. Can we go?”

My dad puts his arm around me and says, “It’s okay, Jeanine.”

After a few seconds, in the pitch dark, all I see are sharp teeth emerging from the water as if trying to attack the boat. I scream—loud—and cover my eyes. Other people in the boat are screaming, as well. I start crying and my dad tells me, “it’s okay, Jeanine. It’s not real.” *What is he talking about, it’s not real?* I don’t understand. Something is in the water!

We leave the dark area and I’m still very scared. I want to get out of the boat. Why aren’t we getting out of the boat? The captain continues to drive and I start crying even louder. All of a sudden the huge teeth emerge from the water once again but in the daylight, I can see that it is a shark! A splash of water hits my face as the shark slams its body back into the water. It is gone again, for now.

At this point, I am crushed between my two parents who are hiding me from seeing anything else. I burrow my face in my father’s chest and I don’t want to see the shark ever again. No one else on the boat, including my brother who is only two years older than me, isn’t scared or crying like me. *Why isn’t everyone else scared?* After a few moments that feel like an eternity we pull up to a dock and I get to get off of the boat.

As I walk through Disney Land afterwards everything else seems really scary. I'm holding my dad's hand and I see Goofy. My brother loves Goofy. He starts waving at Goofy and asks him if he can take a picture with him. He walks over and he's really big. I grab my dad's leg as he comes over and bury my fear in his knees.

"It's okay, Jeanine," my dad says as he bends down to my level. A cling to my dad's shirt as we take the picture with Goofy and watch him walk away.

I don't want to go on any more rides so I stay with my Aunt Barb who doesn't like to go on the rides either. As everyone else leaves us to go on a ride I stand holding her hand in the middle of the park. "Do you want to go see Mickey Mouse?" I hesitate but eventually nod my head. This was what I was looking forward to the most.

There we are, in Mickey Mouse's house waiting for him and Minnie Mouse to come through the door. I sit next to my aunt and wait patiently. I'm holding her hand and I'm already nervous. All of sudden Mickey and Minnie come running through a door—and I immediately start bawling.

They are really big and they came out of nowhere—just like the shark from the boat ride. After two days of travelling to get here, all of the excitement that I felt on the drive is gone. All of a sudden Disney World was not magical anymore, but absolutely terrifying.

An Irish Awakening

KAREN HANES

IT WAS our last day in Ireland and we were walking along the banks of the River Liffey. A cold wind blew directly into our faces. It was September 2018, and in the nine days my two friends and I had been in Ireland we'd been spoiled by unseasonably warm and sunny days. However, that day the weather had changed, and it was dark and bitterly cold. I didn't mind the cold too much because it gave me an opportunity to wear my new Irish wool hat, which I purchased a couple of days earlier in the town of Dingle. We paused and took some pictures on the Ha'penny Bridge and then decided it was a good day to warm up with some creamy Irish coffees in a cozy pub before continuing our walk.

"We've been talking about going on a trip for our birthdays," Mairead had said to Eva and me several months earlier. We'd all been best friends since grade nine, and Mairead and Eva went even further back to grade five. We were all born the same year and always marked a new decade of life together.

"Okay, where shall we go this time?" Eva asked.

"We've always talked about going to Ireland," Mairead replied.

I had been to Ireland with Mairead when we were in high school and had visited again with my husband just a year earlier. I had fallen in love with the beauty of the country and with its people; so welcoming and friendly, treating everyone like a long-lost cousin. I envisioned us sharing lots of laughs the way we always do, going to the pubs, sightseeing and exploring the cities and towns.

"Let's do it. We'll have so much fun. It will be a blast!" I said. We settled on a date and itinerary for our trip, and our excitement grew. I had no idea at the time that this trip would change my perception of who I am and where I had come from.

Once in Ireland, my friends and I became immersed in the culture. We drank Guinness in the pubs with the locals, and listened and clapped along to their music. We did a walking tour of Dublin and went on a pub crawl with a tour guide who was an impossibly perfect Irishman named James. We travelled to some smaller towns, taking in the local culture. We ate in wonderful local pubs and restaurants, and stayed in a quaint Irish cottage on the Wild Atlantic Way with a view of Tralee Bay.

With a family surname like Murphy, I had always known I had Irish ancestry. According to the Web site *Irish Genealogy Toolkit*, Murphy is the most popular surname in Ireland. My father had been researching our family history for several years, and I thought it would be interesting to follow up on some of the details he had uncovered. He had researched as far back as four generations and we knew that some of our ancestors had left Ireland for Liverpool, England, during the years of the Great Famine of 1840 to 1849. In her book *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-1849*, Cecil Woodham-Smith reports that the famine killed over a million Irish people and forced many more to migrate, to Britain, as mine did, or to North America.

With encouragement and help from my travel-mates, we spent an entire day following the leads that my father had provided, searching for evidence of my ancestors. I was able to find the town of Tuam, County Galway, where according to my father's research, one set of his maternal great-grandparents were born. In the church records office I saw documents confirming my great-great-grandparents' existence, then I visited the church where they were baptized and married. I walked the very streets where they had walked. It was truly an immersive and emotional experience. Something about being in their town and seeing their names in writing moved me from simply knowing I had Irish roots to having a deeper connection to those roots.

I phoned my parents that night from our hotel in the town of Galway.

"I found William Connell and Mary McHale," I said. I went on to tell them the story of how we found the records of my great-great-grandparents and about the town and church we visited.

Back in Dublin on that cool day, our last before flying home, we continued to take in the culture of the city. But this time it was different—it was as though I was looking through new Irish eyes.

As we continued to walk on the banks of the Liffey we could see the outline of human-like figures of the Famine Memorial coming into focus, and our mood turned sombre. As we approached, the bronze images took shape. Life-sized in height, the bodies are stooped and emaciated. The

faces are expressionless, drawn and haggard, like corpses that had come to a horrible death. Dressed in rags, some are carrying little bundles of possessions. One male figure carries another person over his shoulders, and a skin-and-bones dog follows the group. This heartbreaking memorial recreates the walk of the migrants, making their way to the ships that were to carry them from certain starvation and death. Sadly, many of those migrants died during their horrendous journeys to new lands. But many survived and so began the Irish diaspora—the millions of people of Irish heritage who live all over the world today.

As I looked into the faces of the Famine Memorial, I realized that these figures represent my ancestors. There and then, the events of the past few days culminated in a new awaking. I thought of what William Connell, Mary McHale, and others endured—and survived—so that I could be who I am, and where I am today. In that moment, in addition to knowing that I am of Irish heritage, I actually felt resilient Irish blood pumping through my veins,

George Bernard Shaw, the famous Irish writer, said, “Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.” During that trip to Ireland, I believe I did both.

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Shooting for the Stars

JOANNE HAWLEY

IT HAD been a year since the family had been together. Finally, here we all are, reminiscing about the past and sharing a few good laughs. The conversation shifted onto my nephew Chris's hockey career. His father, Mike sat forward and suddenly became more engaged in the discussion. "You know it is a lifestyle that a lot of kids only dream of, growing up. I always knew you had the talent to play in the Ontario Hockey League (OHL). But did you know that fewer than five percent move on to the National Hockey League (NHL)?" Mike reports. "I did know this," Chris replies with a smile. I love how his confidence will shine through when he talks about hockey. Next to his wife, hockey is clearly the love of his life.

Chris recalled that his draft to the OHL was really the highlight of his career. He eagerly states, "I had the opportunity to be coached by Don Cherry. Well, who wouldn't like that? Don was a great guy and a patient coach. I'm glad I had the chance to work with him." He smiles broadly as he reflects on this experience.

"It was pretty tough for you though, wasn't it?" I asked. "I mean you didn't get much time to be a teenager. If you could go back and do it again, would you?"

"Absolutely," Chris said. "It would have been nice to hang out with my friends more, but the hard work was worth it. I had some really great experiences and made some good friends along the way." Chris's wife, Sara, sits quietly beside her husband, her legs crossed and sipping on a glass of wine. She is an outgoing, educated woman who is well-spoken and outgoing. You could easily see why they made such a great couple. They complemented each other well. Chris would sometimes remark that his biggest regret was not accepting an offer to play in the NHL by the

New York Islanders. It is at these moments that Sara would speak up and state, “Well then, you would never have met me!” With a smile, Chris eagerly agrees, “That’s right, hon.”

There is so much work that goes into playing hockey at the professional level: personal trainers, tournaments, fitness testing, curfews, boxing lessons, school, tutors, volunteer work, and more. Chris laughs while informing us of the early morning hockey practices where the whole team had been out drinking the night before. “The coaches would push us that much harder to teach us a lesson. We were throwing up everywhere!” He chuckles.

Somehow, the story shifts to the OHL fans. Chris turns to his wife and says, “We used to have these girls that followed us around. We called them puck bunnies. Anyways, this one girl had a crush on me and she worked for Rogers Cable as a camera operator.”

Mike cuts in, “Yeah, and she would hold the camera on Chris while the game play was at the other end of the rink. The announcer would be calling the game and realize that the footage was still on Chris even though he wasn’t in the play.” We all laughed out loud.

I never realized until this particular day that Chris did volunteer work at the Hospital for Sick Kids. I was impressed, as it can be very difficult to have such intimate interactions with children who are gravely ill. I asked Chris about this and he replied, “I didn’t find it difficult at all. It was great to be able to make them smile and to have the power to bring about some happiness.” You could tell that his sentiments were genuine.

Of course, when you talk about hockey, the conversation inevitably turns to fighting. At six foot four and 210 pounds, Chris was a tough defenceman. It was his job to move the puck forward and to clear the net. It was this talent that drew Don Cherry to him as a second-round pick for the Mississauga Ice Dogs. I knew that Chris had many injuries playing hockey, but it was his comment about concussions surprised me. He said, “I only had one diagnosed concussion but I know that there were more than this.”

Mike added, “There were games where I knew that he had his bell rung. But this is hockey and you do what you have to. Sometimes this meant playing injured.”

Chris gets up to grab another beer while I continue to sip slowly on my glass of wine. “You know,” Chris says, “I saw a lot of hockey fights in my career. But what always made me shake my head were the parents in the stands. It didn’t matter if it was little league or at the OHL level,

there were always fighting parents. They seem to lose all control when it comes to their children.”

“Everyone thinks their kid is the best,” I replied. “It’s only natural.”

Mike sits with his arms folded across his chest. Chris laughs and says, “You know Dad, when I looked up into the stands, all I saw was you shaking your head at me with your arms folded as they are now.”

“Really? I never meant anything by it. I always sit like this.”

“I didn’t know that back then,” Chris said.

“I have always been proud of you,” Mike said. I’m especially proud of you now. You had your hockey career and earned your scholarship for school. Now you have a great income working as a prison guard. But most importantly, you’re happy. That’s all I have ever wanted for you.” Chris smiles. You can tell he needed to hear that.

Goodbye

ADELLE HENRIQUES

“YOU SURE you want to do this?”

I hesitated; my body freezes still and my breathing heavies.

I breathed in slowly and as I exhaled I screamed, “I HAVE TO!”

The scream was almost a cry for help to be saved from the pain.

I took my first step into the chilling viewing room filled with unfamiliar faces, but simultaneously it came with a refreshing mountain of colourful flowers that immersed me with a graceful aroma. Within the mountain I see my floral arrangement I had given to a local flower shop to make for her, and it made me crack a small smirk. It was a 20” by 20” circular arrangement with intertwining royal blue and crisp white daisies that created a peace sign—which was Jenna’s sign for our friendship—and had a white sash laid across, and written within in it in black lettering was a small phrase that delivered my message to her with four simple words: “I love you, Jenna.”

As my stare gazed past the blissful flowers, I see the grim reaper standing on top of her with his black scythe and all of his hellish glory. I did not want to admit it to myself that he came for her, and all I wanted to do was to run to her, wrap my arms around her, and wake her out from her deep sleep. It felt as though my feet were cemented to the floor, my vocal cords clipped so I couldn’t call for her, and my eyes taped open to watch her lay there lifeless as he took her away, permanently.

I try to call to her. “Wake up! Please! I can’t be here without you!”

I screamed with everything I have but it was no use, she wasn’t coming back.

The room gave me a shiver and I slowly raised my head. I somehow was standing right in front of her bed where she would forever lay completely pale, lifeless, and motionless. I look to my left for a warm

body to get rid of the cold, and I am relieved to find my parents grasping my hands at each side to me. The warmth coming from their hands was their way of telling me that they are never leaving my side, and all three of us stood in front of Jenna and had a moment of silence. The room was bustling with people paying their respects to her family, but in that moment the room went silent and all I could do was try to hold my tears from rolling off of my face. The more I held my tears, the more my throat felt like it was closing, and I knew if I were to cry the pain would not stop.

From that moment forward, everything went in slow motion. The first thing I noticed was her feet: she had white stockings on with black flats, and she was wearing her white satin dress with black polka dots. She was wearing a black, long-sleeved jacket as though she was going to get cold in her endless slumber, which gave me a second of hope that she would return to me. I looked at her body, but it took every ounce of muscle and will power to look at her face because I knew it wouldn't have her blissful smile. The most distinct things I noticed was that her hair was brushed back nicely behind her ears and was held back by her infamous hair band with a white bow. It was the colour of her skin that was a grey yellow, her shrivelled lips and stature, and her noticeable makeup to cover her lifeless face that had caused a wave of terror to overcome my body. The swelling in my eyes that I had been holding back began to creep in with an the biggest urge to explode. I only looked at her for a few seconds but this last image of her engraved itself into my brain so intensely.

I held back my waterfall of tears and devastation in my voice while I grasped my letter and picture to give to her so she could read in her final resting place.

This whole idea of her being really gone I just can't accept!

How is it that only two days ago we were at our grade seven dance together, laughing?

How is it that she fought so hard but he still took her away?

All of these questions are rushing through my head at the speed of sound but the one that sticks to me the most is, why her?

She will never graduate high school, get married, or have any kids. It just seemed crazy to me that my best friend who had fought for her whole life through cancer was gone in an instant.

The two minutes I was up at her coffin felt like an eternity, and I felt my dad leading me away from Jenna to say our condolences to her family. I wanted to put my photo and letter into the coffin, but I couldn't

bring myself to raise my arms to place them beside her hands because it was the terrifying thought of her grabbing me raced through my mind. My dad squeezes my hand, and we are in front of her family as my mother trails behind and see Jenna's two older brothers Justin and Jordan, followed by her father Paul, her mother Rina, and her grandparents on her mother's side all hugging people as they go down the condolence line in the front row of the chairs lined up for people to sit and mourn. I hugged her brothers, who I had known for five years, but the embrace made them feel like strangers without Jenna standing next to them. Then I approached Paul who had the coldest presence in the room, but I tried to not let it bother me and so I hugged him without hesitation.

As I hugged the most important people in Jenna's life I had managed to keep my tears back, but when I locked eyes with Rina the strength in my body depleted and I embraced her in the longest and tightest hug where my waterfall began and the worst pain I had ever experienced flowed in. At that moment of embrace it almost felt as though no one in the room, even my own parents, did not exist. Rina's arms squeezed harder around my small body and she whispered into my ear, "She loved you so much." Those loving words made my eyes widen and felt as though an arrow pierced my heart.

My mother held my hand as my embrace with Rina began to slowly release.

My mother softly asked Rina, "Would it be possible to put Adelle's letter and picture with Jenna?"

Rina smiled and said, "Of course! I know she would love that. Would you like to come with me and give it to her?"

I wanted to say yes but just couldn't bring myself to say it. Rina looked at me with a sorrow on her face and took my letter and photo, squeezed my shoulder with reassurance, and walked towards Jenna. I turned around and saw Rina caress Jenna's cheek and whisper that I had given her a letter. Rina leaned it against Jenna's left hand lying softly on the white cloth of the coffin, and I felt a little relieved to know that Rina knew the love I had for Jenna.

Once I started crying I couldn't stop.

I had held it for so long that I thought my tsunami would never dry.

As Rina walked away from her only daughter, and I began to walk away from my best friend, it was still incomprehensible but completely and inevitably unavoidable, and was all the proof that I will ever need to understand that she is gone but I was surrounded by so much love.

Bye, Dad

I'll Love You Forever and Always

MADISON HOCKING

I STOOD next to the entrance wearing my black lace dress, with my hair in a loose ponytail and makeup on to cover my grief. It was January 12th, 2018, the day of my father's memorial service. My brother, Davis, wrapped his arm around my shoulder, which felt comparable to the comfort of a security blanket, and my mum, Lynne, tightly gripped my hand. Sorrow and dread were blatantly written across our faces as we stood side by side, in solidarity, as if we were about to go into battle. As I waited for the room to fill up with people that I didn't really want to attempt to make small talk with, I kept thinking about the first day that led to this—June 8th, 2017.

Exactly eight months and one day before he passed away, my mum had called me as I was driving home from school. "Dad's in the hospital. Can you get to Trillium? It's a hospital in Mississauga, not too far away from your school."

A million questions raced through my mind, but the urgency and panic in my mum's voice indicated that this wasn't something that she wanted to discuss over the phone. "Of course, I'll be right there." As we stood looking at dad, sitting in a hospital bed instead of his usual leather chair, the doctor pulled us aside and uttered the six-letter word I had only experienced vicariously through sad movies—cancer. I stood there in shock and confusion like I had never heard the term before.

"I'm sorry to inform you that he has stage-four lung cancer, which has metastasized into his brain and bones," the doctor said. "He has fifteen tumours in his brain, each affecting his body differently. There is one on his left cerebellar hemisphere that is 3 x 3 x 2 cm, and to regain his motor movements, we must remove it." Three days later, at four p.m.,

my dad went into surgery with fifteen tumours and came out with one less.

“I’m so sorry for your loss,” was repeated to me as if I were hearing a broken record playing in the background. People fluttered into the dimly lit room that displayed pictures of my dad, Bob, as the majority of the guests called him. People I didn’t even know came up to me and told me stories, highlighting his amazing personality, attempting to make my heart feel less broken. Finally, a neighbour that I recognized approached and reminded me of how my dad had lifted everyone around him with his sense of humour.

This story took me back to his first day of chemotherapy. They didn’t allow us to see the prepping processes, but once he was settled, we came in to sit beside him. He was sitting in a great big lounge chair, eating a cookie, with a tube running from the top of his head to a machine. As we chatted, we noticed an old man with balding white hair and thick glasses, reading a book, sitting by himself the next chair over, so we invited him to join our conversation. My dad was very proud of the scar on his head, so he showed the old man and launched into an elaborate story as to how a shark had attacked him. While the old man could clearly see through my dad’s story, he chuckled along.

I heard “Madison” as I was embraced by a full bear hug that could be pictured in the Oxford Dictionary under the word *comfort*. It was Denise, her husband Robert, along with her two children, Joe and Maggy. They were family friends who had helped out a lot during my dad’s sickness. “How are you, sweetie?” she asked, nothing but pure sorrow in her eyes. Over the past six months, they had brought us homemade food, visited my dad at the hospital, picked up groceries, and taken the dog for a walk, but my mum was most grateful for their help the night my dad fell. After the ten sessions of radiation therapy and the four sessions of chemotherapy, my dad was weak. The cancer had become more pronounced everywhere, including his bones, and he struggled to stay upright. On the night he fell, my brother and I were away. With my mum in pure panic and my dad extremely embarrassed, they settled their argument by calling the Oricos rather than calling 911. In a matter of minutes, Denise and Robert were at the door, helping him back onto his feet.

The next person to approach me was Fiji, my dad’s personal support worker (PSW), who had basically lived at our house for the past six months. “He was such a great man; he always kept his spirits up and never let anyone tear them down,” she said, practically sobbing. As I

hugged her, all I remembered were the dozens of PSWs, nurses, and doctors who came in and out of our house, waking up in the morning, and walking downstairs to another stranger sitting beside my dad's hospital bed that had taken over our living room. On the night when no PSWs were scheduled, my mum slept on the loveseat next to his hospital bed. I remembered the multiple nurses and doctors delivering more and more bad news—"liver stopped working properly," "chemo isn't working anymore," "his death is soon." I felt terrible for Fiji, but I also couldn't look at her without all those memories swarming my mind like bees to their hive.

Finally, the memorial was done, and close family and friends were the only ones left. I walked over to the marbled blue jar holding his ashes; it was placed at the back of the room on a big table covered with pictures alongside several yellow and blue flower arrangements—his favourite colours. The tears accumulating in my eyes made everything look slightly blurred. *What was the last thing he said to me? When was the last time he held my hand?* As I tried to remember the things that mattered most, I was taken back to the last day I was with him. On the morning of January 8th, he already appeared gone. His eyes were like glazed donuts, he wasn't responding to anything I was saying to him, and he was practically unable to move. I was just praying that this wasn't the end.

We took him to the hospice, which was his short-lived new home. We sat there for hours as he slept until we realized there wasn't enough space for all three of us to camp out, so we went home. The next thing I remembered, which will forever be the hardest thing to put into words, was the heart-wrenching sobs from my mum that woke me up at 4.50 a.m. on January 9th, 2018. As we walked into his room at the hospice, I looked at his peaceful body—eyes closed, with a slight smirk, but no movement from his chest. I went up to his bedside, reluctant to come any closer due to the blue tint that had taken over his body. I reached for his hand and was startled by the lack of heat, knowing that I could no longer ask for his warm hugs when the Canadian winters chilled my body.

As I stared at the jar filled with his ashes, I whispered the same thing I said to him that brisk Tuesday morning when I saw him for the last time and kissed his forehead. "Bye, dad, I'll love you forever and always."

The Countdown

JODI HUENEMOEDER

“FUCK,” I whisper to myself as I apply pressure to my hand to stop the bleeding. My eyes squeeze tightly in a feeble attempt to push back the tears. There is no point, the tears flow down my flushed cheeks. I am in shock, my heart racing, and my mind running.

Drip, drip, drip. The thick red blood meanders down my arm to my shaking fingers, soaking the stone in my engagement ring before leaving a vibrant red pool in the white porcelain sink. I turn the water on high, and watch my blood and tears mix with the sink water and go down the drain. I gingerly put my hand under the flowing water, the sting is immediate. The burn is strong enough to take my mind off what just happened, but only for a split second before a wave of remembrance flashes over me. I try to slow my mind enough to go over the timeline of events.

1. I asked if he had been drinking.
2. He screamed at me.
3. I tried to walk away ... holding *our* baby.
4. He told me to stop or I'd regret it.
5. I didn't.

“Is this my fault?” For a split second I worry, then the actuality of the situation washes over me. I am disgusted at myself for the mere thought of this being a self-induced situation. “I am better than this.” I repeat this three times while staring into the mirror. My foundation shows the tears streaking my cheeks. The white of my eyes so red it makes their colour mesmerizing, like black holes beneath an ocean of blue. I blink several times to attempt to snap myself into reality. I need to pull it together, mom-duty calls. He needs me, he deserves me. I wrap my hand in a garish orange-and-fuchsia floral hand-towel. “I hate this

fucking towel,” I say, as I attempt to pull some strength from within to leave the bathroom.

I cautiously open the door. It creaks loudly. I feel my neck tense, even though I know he has left. I heard him leave, I heard his stupid truck, and I heard him curse me as he slammed the front door shut. He shouldn’t be driving, I know this, I should call the cops. A responsible citizen would, a responsible mother would, but I can’t. He would kill me. His family would kill me if I sent him to jail. I try to push past the what-ifs and focus on the right-nows. As I walk into the nursery, I immediately feel calmness engulf my body as my eyes meet his. He coos at me, making my heartache evaporate for a brief moment. How can I love someone so much, someone who is half him? I pick him up from the antique wood crib, a family heirloom. I sit in the rocker cradling his small body, feeling his heart against mine. I pull out my breast and begin to persuade him to latch onto my nipple. I need to feel useful. I need to feel that I am doing something right. He finally latches and I feel the pull of him sucking from me. My thoughts wander back to the timeline of events. I try to process and analyse what the breaking point was.

6. He grabs me by the hair.

7. I scream.

8. I beg him to let me put the baby in the crib.

9. He tells me I need to shut up, as he motions to the nursery.

10. I walk slowly and place the baby in the crib. He smiles at me.

“Ouch! Don’t bite.” I rip my nipple from the two teeth that try to pluck it off. He smiles at me. I smile back and gently put him back on my breast to latch. I pull the blue fleece blanket tighter around him, letting his little body peacefully sink deeper into mine. I let my mind drift off....

11. I walk back to him, knowing that’s my only option.

12. He just stares at me, his anger illuminating his eyes like flames in hell.

13. I walk into the kitchen, he follows.

14. I start unloading the dishwasher in an attempt to not look at him. He likes when I clean.

15. He catches on and tells me to look at him.

I hear my phone ringing from the other room and debate getting up and ruining this quiet moment. But what would be the point of it? I know who it is. It’s him. It’s always him. I decide against moving from the paradise of baby cuddles and instead use my unwrapped hand to gently caress his flawless face. I wipe a single strand of his dirty blond hair; he

looks up at me while latched on my breast, his hazel eyes sparkle as they meet mine. I study his face to attempt to determine what genetics are mine and what genetics are his father's. The phone finally stops ringing. I exhale and realize I had been holding my breath the entire time. I am relieved that, even for a brief minute, I didn't have to listen to another half-assed apology.

I make a fist with my wrapped hand and decide it's time to look at the damage ... the external damage. The internal cuts are far greater than the physical ones, they always are. As I unwrap my hand, I notice the bleeding has finally subsided, leaving the blood-soaked hideous towel looking like a prop from a horror film. I notice he has fallen asleep on my breast, his rosy cheek rested on my swollen breast. I can feel each tiny breath escape his body and settle on my chest. I feel my shoulders relax, allowing the pain and tension start to melt away. I begin to drift back to how the events unfolded over the past hour. In a pathetic attempt to try to understand how I ended up sitting in a chair embracing a baby I love with my entire soul while still hating myself and his father equally.

16. I grab a wine glass from the dishwasher and turn to him.

17. He grabs the glass and throws it at me.

18. I lift my hand to block it.

19. It shatters against my hand into a million pieces.

20. He looks at me, shocked at his own actions.

I begin to silently cry, realizing I have no other option. I need out. The time is now. I take a deep breath and give myself five more minutes of baby bliss before the panic of escaping will take place. Five more minutes of perfection and calmness. I take another look at his perfect face and slowly stare at the clock.

5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

A Palestinian Flower

AMEER IDREIS

THIS PLACE was nostalgic joy to the senses.

The sky was a clear canvas stretched out over us—the unchanging crisp and vivid blue of my childhood summers when I would return to Palestine on a visit to my homeland. The breezes too were just as I remembered, dreamlike, lifting up the warm aromas of the baker’s at the base of the hill and playing amongst the leaves of my grandparents’ trees—olive, plum, and apricot. I could so easily get lost in admiration for this place—a Mediterranean slice of heaven on earth—but then a harsher reality would creep in like the unexpected summer storm and replace all bliss from my mind.

My grandmother sat next to me on the bench by her garden. Her flowers—yellow daisies, scarlet poppies, chamomiles, and blue irises—smiled up at us. “They are all as Palestinian as the soil that sustains them and the water that quenches their thirst,” she told me in Arabic. The words sang gently in the local dialect. “All as Palestinian as you or me.”

She said all this as she played with my hair. After four years away, I had come back with a full head of curls that I was unashamedly proud of and that my mother was pleading to have cut. “I like the longer hair,” my grandmother said, turning to face my mother on the bench opposite us. As grateful as I was for the validation, internally I was squirming under her touch and feeling guilty for my resistance.

Until now, we had always visited Palestine for a month or two, usually every other year. But the period between visits had grown unintentionally long, leaving more time for people to change. Impulsive weddings and unexpected births and sudden deaths had continued without us. And in these past four years, I had come to know more of myself, as all young adults do, but me especially so.

And yet here I was feeling uncomfortable as she twirled my curls, and then feeling uncomfortable at my own discomfort because this in no way fit with my understanding of family. Where was the warmth and the true, unguarded connection?

Maybe she sensed this because she pulled back and sent her gaze over the horizon and over the valleys and peaks of Hebron, dotted with limestone houses. We stayed like this for a while, letting the descending sun warm us, letting the lush air fill our lungs. I had the strange feeling of being like one of her flowers, nourished by the land and sky.

With a swift hop to her feet, my grandmother rushed into the kitchen and returned with three mint teas and two plates of ka'ak ma'amoul.

I straightened my back in a jolt of excitement as I set my eyes on the rings of pastry.

"This one is date filled and this one is walnut," she explained. "I wanted to practise before Ramadan."

My mother inhaled a hearty laugh and we all knew why. My grandmother had long perfected the sweetness of the date, the crunch of walnut, the crumble and stitch-like patterning of the semolina shortbread, and the light touch of powdered sugar on top. Deep down, I knew she had done this for our arrival—for me.

She filled me a plate, handed me my tea, did the same for her daughter, then turned back to look at me. Her eyes were heavy and wet with love, shimmering in the golden light and accentuated by the deep green of her hijab. "Enjoy, ya habibi!" she hummed.

The sugared pastries must have acted quickly on us, as it powered my mother and grandmother into an elaborate rumour-dense story about my uncle's in-laws. I, always one for gossip, listened intently to the local rumours, attempted to contain a few hysterical laughs, and instantly felt as though I knew this city once again. But the stories only lasted so long before conversation and eyes turned to me.

"So, Ameer," my grandmother began.

I beamed toothily at how she trilled the *r* and how my name sounded rolling off an Arab's tongue.

"Are there any girls you have your eye on?"

There it was. That sleeping beast growling lowly in my gut that had kept my back straight and my senses heightened had awoken so suddenly and just as I had let comfort steal me away. My toothy beam became a strained smile of composure—a mask to hide the whirring of my mind.

"No ..." I let out a feigned chuckle.

My grandmother's eyes squinted as she smiled. "It's okay," she tried to assure me, glancing to my mother for support. "You're eighteen. Of course, you're interested in someone."

Naturally, this did nothing to soothe my fears that she had known all along or that she had found out somehow. Had I left a trail of breadcrumbs online, despite the separate social media accounts, isolated with clinical precision? Had the outrageous reality been passed from cousin to cousin like a viral truth, only to find her ear?

Here, being gay isn't just unacceptable, it's unthinkable—as in not thought within the realm of possibility. Even in the more metropolitan city of Ramallah, no farther than an hour north (a half hour more for the occupation's checkpoints and road closures), these things only emerge under the dim basement light of some discreet bar.

There was no way she had guessed, I reassured myself, and yet here I was in panic. My attention turned to my mother, likely sitting in as much terror as I. The fallout from my coming out to her had meant months spent living at a friend's, and yet here I was back in my homeland, having my hair twirled, fed the desserts of my upbringing, and likened to a Palestinian flower.

I can't say with any certainty what happened next. The moment felt suspended in the amber of the setting sun. Maybe I had frozen or feigned another giggle, using shyness or respect for my elders as if to say, "Of course, you're right, grandma. But I can't possibly say her name out loud before you now."

Regardless, the gossip of the hills and valleys of the city had returned, as yarns were spun and exchanged between them with joyous familiar laughter. Although for the remainder of the evening, I could see something changed in my mother's eyes—an anxious prayer that, for now, the truth would remain unknown.

Leaving Hymns Behind

ALBERT JANSEN

THE CONGREGATION fell silent, waiting for my musical cue. I shifted nervously and the wooden piano bench creaked. My eyes darted from the pastor to the congregation, checking that they were both ready. I glanced at the sheet music and the position of my hands on the black and white keys of the baby grand piano, making sure I was ready. I started playing. The rich sound of a slightly out-of-tune piano filled the high ceiling of the wooden sanctuary. Drills and lessons ran through my head. I curved my fingers and sat up straight; I read ahead and kept the tempo. Everything else melted away as the congregation started singing. I focused solely on keeping a steady rhythm. I wasn't playing *with* the congregation, my notes were *leading* them, falling a quarter beat before they sang, dragging them along. Keeping that lead was crucial. Though their timing lagged, they had musical momentum. If you fell behind, the congregation ran over you like a steam train. Lose the tempo, and their musical inertia pushed them along the rails of the simple tune until you were left behind. Then, it became nearly impossible to regain synchronicity.

The congregation stopped singing. I concluded the hymn with a simple cadence, keeping my foot on the bronze pedal and letting the notes resonate until the pastor was back at his pulpit. Everyone stayed standing, waiting until he raised both hands, then slowly lowered them. "You may be seated." They sat down simultaneously and began rifling through their purses and wallets for the weekly collection. It was during this brief interlude in the service, as the deacons walked up and down the rows of pews, that I had the most musical freedom. One Sunday I played sonatinas and preludes to fill the silence, but was quickly and firmly advised that the congregation preferred hymns. Further, not any hymn

would do. For it “to be appropriate for congregational use, a hymn must be based on an experience or an idea common to the entire congregation” (Reynolds 131). This narrowed my freedom to only hymns that were familiar and that spoke to a collectively shared experience.

That Sunday I chose “When Peace Like a River.” After the first few bars some people began to hum the melody. The text of the hymn ran through my head, the distinct call of the sopranos and response of the bass. *It is well. (It is well). With my soul. (With my soul).* We all experienced that moment and knew the tune. We all had the same religion and background. It was my job, through my musical selection as church pianist, to maintain this comfortable status quo through music. I could not deviate from the musical and religious doctrine. Which hymn could I select that would convey an experience the congregation had never seen? How could I freely express myself to a church community exclusively through hymns?

I stopped playing hymns when I officially left the church. My tenure as their pianist ended when I entered university. That first year away from home I became publicly irreligious, although I had left religion behind privately long before that. When I left, my life irreversibly changed. The piano bench was replaced by a cheap folding chair. The church sanctuary disappeared and shrank to a stifling one-room apartment in downtown Toronto. The glossy black piano transformed into a weighted electric keyboard. I am not the only one who has made this transition away from active religiosity. The number of Americans who identify as Christian dropped by twelve percent in twelve years, from 2007 to 2019 (Emba). The Christian Reformed Church, the particularly conservative denomination that I was raised in, reported a membership decline of twenty-five percent in the past twenty-six years (Stripp). People are leaving.

Despite this massive shared demographic, I was lonely. When I abandoned religion, the church and my family abandoned me in return. I had broken free from the restriction of a familiar, appropriate, collective experience, and it left me in despair. Music was not a community activity anymore. The form of the hymns themselves didn’t make sense without the congregation. The doctrinal tome of the Christian Reformed Church declares that “a hymn functions ... only when the gathered congregation joins voices in singing the text” (*Psalter* 15). Without that community, that music had no meaning or purpose. For a long while, I also had no

meaning or purpose. I had destroyed the link to my religious and cultural heritage.

I practised piano on that small keyboard in the stifling apartment with headphones on. Only I could hear the music. Instead of playing music for the approval of others, slowly, over many years, I turned inwards. I found satisfaction from within myself. I now have all the music throughout history to connect with. I am free from the burdensome expectations and restrictions that religious life placed upon me.

That weighted keyboard is one of the few consistent things in my life since I left my religion, culture, and community behind. I press the power button at the top right, and the small orange LED lights up. A quiet electric popping noise in the headphones lets me know that the instrument is ready to play. I scroll through the different keyboard sounds, finding one with a sonority and timbre that suits my mood. I flip through my sheet music, finding a sonatina that I have been practising for several weeks, and fold the pages back to make sure the thick binding stays open and flat. Satisfied, I glance from the sheet music to the position of my hands. Shoulders back, fingers curved, I relax, and smile. I am free, and ready to play music only I can hear.

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Vrindavan, the Mystical Village

YASH KHAJURIA

“A AARRRRRNN,” SQUEALED Padfoot. The tire easily slid out of his burrow and the car zoomed off onto the rugged concrete path. My mouth dried with dire dread. His mother’s heart-shattering howl shredded my very soul. Isn’t it incredible how often tragedies push us towards self-reflection? That unless the tragic wake-up siren of reality doesn’t blare, we don’t snap out of the dreamy haze of our *apparent* heavens? My reality alarm definitely trumpeted during the Indian summer heat of July 2017, in the mystical village-turning-city called Vrindavan. But let’s rewind.

Hi, my name is Yash and I am (or was) exactly like most of you—well—almost exactly. I hail from the awkward species known as human adolescence and wear a tanned skin around my body with messy jet-black hair to cover the top. Remember adolescence? Popping zits, spraying on copious amounts of Old Spice, and being confused as heck *all the time*—Biology or Physics? Football or Debate Club? Monika or Priya? (I’m joking.) Who am I? And if you grew up around *faith*—am I spiritual? So, there I was, whizzing through these thoughts while fidgeting in my tiny Air India seat. I heard the deep rumble of the turbines rev up and waves of my last fight with Rose violently pummelled my heart.

“You can’t change the plan just because your parents said no!” she yelled as I dodged the pan; she just flung at me. “You coward!”

“For the hundredth time—I need their blessing—before a freaking court marriage!” I bellowed, between catching and dodging different kitchen articles she kept chucking my way.

“And what about ‘*I am my own man. I’ll rip the world apart for you, babe!*’ We are so done!” After pitching what felt like the entire contents of her studio flat at me, she tossed me out as well.

“UUUURRRNNNNNT,” my reality alarm roared and there I was, homeless on the cold streets of Queens before an intense phone conversation with my parents put me on this Air India flight. They were still mad about my move-in with Rose—I guess telling them after three months, that “By the way, I found the love of my life while sightseeing in New York, and now stay with her,” would drive any sane parent insane. But these weren’t just any parents, they were *my* parents.

The flight steadied into the dark-blue canvas of the sky, and papa’s words rung clearly in my ears: “I just sent the ticket to your e-mail. You will board your flight to Delhi. You will stay with Radhey for the summer, and you will chant sixteen rounds every day to remind yourself of your culture, you ****.” Okay he might not have sworn, but every word he hissed had the same effect.

I adopted more Western culture than digestible for papa, and so here I was, being sent to the heart of our spiritual culture—Vrindavan, Krishna’s home, where mystical saints walked its velvety paths, absorbed in meditation. Since I grew up there before we moved to Vancouver, I could still remember the lush groves that encased its dusty tracks and the chirping green parrots that soared above the low-bowing crooked trees. Sorting through the fading images of Vrindavan in my head, I nodded off, resting my head against the cool windowpane—even then, the mere thought of Vrindavan calmed my anguished heart. I had no idea at the time of the horror that awaited me there.

I stood outside on the sizzling marble floors of Radhey’s small courtyard, looking at a Vrindavan I no longer recognized. In 2015, Vrindavan’s large collective group of saints sent a detailed petition to Prime Minister Narendra Modi “to control the town’s modernization,” which was a disaster!

“Where are the rest of the trees and parrots?” I shrieked, turning to Radhey, who just slid out in his shorts singing “Smooth Criminal”—the marble was notably slippery. That’s when Radhey showed me the petition that described how “thousand-year-old trees and forest areas [had] been cleared to build concrete buildings for profit reasons.” Profit reasons! How dare they dump a bunch of concrete on our holy land for *money*!

“Only three of the 137 groves remain, while the rest have been lost to rapid urbanization,” read Radhey, from journalist Soma Basu’s exposé

online. We both sat on the chairs flustered, as I chanted on my prayer beads and Radhey scrolled through articles on his Samsung—the bloke took away my phone—parents’ orders. I was to chant sixteen rounds daily and I had fifteen left. Here is how mantra meditation works: I chant sixteen of Krishna’s holy names—Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare—and listen to the spiritual sound, allowing it to clean the dirt of lust, greed, envy, and hate from my heart. Then I turn to the next bead and chant again on a total of 108 beads, and that was one round.

“Look who have come to say hi,” said Radhey’s father, who walked out with his prayer beads in his hands as he gestured towards the house gate with a nod of his head. There they were. The most beautiful dogs I had ever seen. There was a slim mother dog loving her two pups with her tongue. “Aweee, what are their names?” I squeaked excitedly.

“Sridevi’s the mom, and the two pups—wait for it—Padfoot and Prongs!” Radhey waited for a high five, but I was too busy cuddling the dogs—they were the first things that gave me some peace since Rose.

“These greedy builders covered Vrindavan with cruddy concrete muck, and ever since, cars gush through like Christmas shoppers. The Mathura builders got a huge cut from transport companies and saved some loot by buying lousy materials.” Radhey Shyam’s father worked in the property business and was clearly well informed.

“Two cars ran over three of her pups,” said Radhey, as he squatted down beside me scratching Prong’s stomach. I was busy loving the fluffy ball of energy that Padfoot was, whose positive optimism mirrored a younger me. Poor Sridevi had lost pups of hers because of this darned modernization and I could still see the deep sorrow of loss welling up within her droopy eyes.

I spent the most of my next few days either chanting on the chair or hanging out with Sridevi and her pups. Reflecting. Meditating. Healing. And watching Padfoot energetically dig into the soft mud on the side of the bumpy road with the unshakeable focus of an interior designer. He eagerly dug with his tiny paws until he made a little burrow and collapsed into it. I peered in to watch him nap—he was in heaven—enjoying the cooling embrace of Vrindavan’s holy dust. I laughed and sat back on my chair, envying the simplicity of his enjoyment—his dream seemed to be his reality, unlike mine—which had shattered into a million pieces with the blaring reality-alarm. How utterly wrong I was.

“EEEEERRRRNTTT,” a car drifted until it was perfectly lined up with the road ahead. The car revved harshly, scattering some birds in the

branches of a low-bending tree on the side of the road. Its wheels shook violently forwards between the heady power of the engine and the harsh grit of the rocky pavement, and my heart sank as it bolted across Radhey's gate. "No!" I screamed, as I rushed forwards, slipped, and fell to the floor. I heard the wheel of the car sink into Padfoot's burrow.

"AAARRRRRNN," Padfoot yelped. My heart sank. I raced Sridevi to his burrow. She shoved her muzzle into it and dragged him out. His little arms and legs flapped for dear life until ... they stopped. Srivedi let out the most eerie screech before frantically licking Padfoot as if she could lick life back into him. But ... Padfoot was gone.

The dark days ahead brought several reflections to my heart. I found myself pouring my heart into Krishna's names. I realized that we are all a little like Padfoot—determined to dig a marvellous hole in this *material* world, hoping to enjoy the fruits of our efforts, ultimately discovering suffering—the sources of our selfish pleasures end up being sources of suffering. If I was spiritually in touch, maybe I wouldn't have moved in with Rose to enjoy her, saving our heartache and my parent's psychological torment. Maybe if the builders didn't give in to their greed for money, they would have preserved the lives of the innocent trees and puppies of Vrindavan.

Padfoot taught us—you and me—that there is more to life than selfish aspiration. That a spiritual life could teach a life of giving. I was at a point in life where I was trying to understand myself and realized I need spirituality—maybe we all do. Just like Vrindavan was once filled with life, love, and spirit until the greed of dead asphalt snuffed it out—our pure spirits are urbanized by our greed and lust. What we don't realize, in our greed, in our lust, is that we might be digging our own graves, just like Padfoot.

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Please Let Me Out ...

HYUNNY KIM

The Reason Behind Everything

MY NAME is Jang Ja Yeon. Many of you may know me as the celebrity who died of depression, but I have been murdered. I had once hoped to be a famous actress. One that could inspire and make people laugh, but I never got close. It all started with Mr Kim, our entertainment agency CEO, who was full of evil schemes and desires. One day I got a phone call from Mr Kim. I picked up and he said, “Ja Yeon! I made arrangements for a meeting with producers and marketing CEOs. Come out and look nice.” I thought this would be my first step to becoming a rising star, so I replied, “Yes! See you soon!” I arrived at the club. I passed the wine bar and entered the room. I saw three men in suits, each sitting with one or two girls by their side. Some girls were new actresses. I didn’t recognize anyone famous. Mr Kim told me to sit down by a man named Mr Bang. He was the CEO of the Korean newspaper company, Joseon News. I knew at that time that something wasn’t right. I imagined a formal meeting in an office space, but it was a private night club with alcohol and loud music. But I needed to make a good impression for my career, so I stayed. Mr Kim said, “Ja Yeon, why don’t you pour Mr Bang a glass of soju, show him a good time.” I poured Mr Bang every time he had an empty glass, I stopped keeping track of how many cups I had poured for him. I looked around and all the girls there had been doing the same. The men got touchy, things started to get intimate. I was scared to cry out “Stop!” All the other girls were still, motionless, as though they were drugged. I froze, sweating, like a weak, frail nobody. That was first encounter at the club. Then I received more calls from Mr Kim. And then, it had become my life.

The entertainment industry was far more dystopic than I had imagined. It was nothing like the movies or TV shows. It was nothing glamorous. Mr Kim said if I listened to him, I could become famous and live in my own penthouse. I spent long years of giving up my body for pleasure, serving alcohol, being vulnerable to people of power. I lost my purpose: I became a living tomb (Arnold 72). I decided to remember, never forget, what Mr Kim brought me into. I loathed Mr Kim and every single person at every sponsorship meeting. Little did I know that my troubles only began to steep when I met Mr Yoo, a rising producer, and Ms Lee, who was a rising star. People loved to see her. Mr Yoo and Ms Lee themselves have had troubles with Mr Kim. They knew the kind of situation I was in. I was told to write a testimonial letter against Mr Kim and record *everything* of what he had done to me. The physical abuse, verbal abuse, alcohol abuse, and his manipulative behaviour.

I thought I met people who would take my side and want to hear my story. But they were all the same. Mr Yoo and Ms Lee used my story as a threat to get what they wanted. Ms Yoo made me sign the testimony I had written against Mr Kim, stamp my fingerprint, and even write my social security number. My misery began here. Mr Kim had found out about that damn letter. I don't know how, but he's a powerful guy, so I wasn't surprised, but I was afraid to death. I had to live under his way of the game. Then I turned Lee, a dear friend of mine.

March 2nd, 2009, 9.08 p.m.—Five Days Before My Suicide
(SBS *Uncovering the Truth*)

Jang: Listen, I didn't do anything wrong to the company. I'm doing whatever the company is telling me to do, don't you see? I didn't move in any way. I don't have backup or connections. I have nothing.

Lee: Noona, you're going to have to find a way to solve this either way.

Jang: How? With what power? How! I can't solve this with pills anymore. No more sleeping pills. If they want to kill me, tell them to. I have no foolishness....

Lee: ...

Jang: There is something you don't know.

Lee: I'm sorry?

Jang: Mr Kim did something to me recently. He's already spread extremely harsh rumours and played pranks....

Jang: There is a man, he has a lot of connections and knows many people. He is a very powerful man. Even Mr Kim can't say a word, but only do what he's told.

Lee: Okay....

Jang: Mr Kim spread rumours that I met some old man, hm? That I did this and that. He's saying all kinds of crap about me. They contacted me and said that they would kill me.

I didn't get much out of my conversation with Lee. But at least someone knows. I mentioned a man, so powerful, so discreet. This man is so powerful he makes his own law and his own rules. It was a man who overruled all of Mr Kim, Mr Yoo, and Ms Lee. I was only an ant who could disappear unnoticed, unless I make a move worthy enough on the news. Now, the man I've been talking about, no one knows who he is up until now. At least people knew Harvey Weinstein, he didn't go unnoticed. But even so, he was not served justice. Why? Why can't you see? When we explicitly tell you what we've been through? I struggled five long years from people of power telling me what to do, what not to do, listening and following orders from above. I struggled five long years from the most sinister kinds of people. *They were so powerful.*

I guess I thought it would be better to die by my own hands than to die in someone else's. There is no one who would protect me anyways. So, I took a rope and hung it to the ceiling. I got up on a chair and wrapped the rope around my neck and jumped. It was all over on March 7th, 2009. Everything was black, dark, I felt no pain anymore, well, except for the part where I couldn't breathe. Then, ten years later, I was re-known, remained on the top search list as the girl who committed suicide ten years ago. The letter had been the sole piece of evidence that just might reveal the truth. The letter that was planned to be used against me, eventually became the letter that testified for me. But no, nothing changed. Mr Kim, Mr Bang, Mr Yoo, and Ms Lee did not face their punishment. Even the sole witness, Yoon Ji Oh, never intended to speak for me.

My Last Words

Ten years after my death, I am writing my story to say nothing's changed. Everything is the same, you are all the same. How disappointing to see where people focus their attention. You were all

curious about who the people of power were, how I was harassed. None of you thought to yourselves the mentality I had to deal with.

My name is Jang Ja Yeon and I am a rookie actor. I wish to escape from this hell.

Someone please let me out....

Jang Ja Yeon

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Gwen

EMMA GWEN KIMMETT

MY GRANDMOTHER was born on March 8th, 1931. She was the fifth child in an Irish Catholic family of ten. My grandmother experienced childhood during the Great Depression, came of age when the world feared a freedomless tomorrow, and raised a family of her own in a time where tomorrow was not sure to come. My grandmother has lived alone in my father's childhood home since her husband passed four days shy of the millennium. She is eighty-nine years old and goes to church once a day, plays bridge once a week, goes to a dance once a month, and believes slowing down to be the death of you. As children, adults are omniscient and omnipotent. There is no problem they cannot solve, nor a pain they cannot ease. They are our heroes. And my grandmother was mine.

When I was eight, I climbed a tree in her backyard with my cousin. "I bet you can't reach that branch," she had jeered.

I was hardly an athlete, a well-established fact by the time I was eight, but each step I took was pure vindication, and the elation I felt on my cloud of branches could not have prepared me for my return to the ground. For when I did, it was to find my brand new white-and-purple Sketchers stained and sticky with tree sap.

I appealed to my grandmother, hat, or rather shoes, in hand. She didn't miss a beat. As she worked away at my shoes with warm water and a toothbrush, she told me a story.

"When I was a girl," she started, "do you want to know the worst thing I did?"

I nodded.

“When I was about your age, the Queen came to Kingston.” She paused for my awe. “And my mother and father and the four oldest children all got to go see them, but there was no more room in the car for me; besides someone had to stay home and take care of the younger kids.” The sap was starting to lift from my shoes. “I was so angry that I went to the cellar and got a jar of mother’s candied pears. I ate the whole thing by myself, rinsed out the jar, and hid it behind the stairs!” She laughed to herself, and I laughed too. “And I never got caught.”

She handed back my shoes, now clean as a well-behaved child’s, and I knew in that moment my grandma would always be on my side.

When I was eleven, I had to complete an assignment on someone I looked up to. I chose my grandmother. I pulled out a pen and paper and pulled the stool up to the landline. I asked her about her life, her education, her family, and her job. She told me how she finished grades seven and eight in one year, so she started high school when she was twelve. When she was seventeen, her father arranged for her to stay with the nuns at Hotel Dieu where she would receive room and board in exchange for doing chores.

“That was a big deal for a girl my age at the time!” she said, “But an older cousin of mine was staying there also and made me her pet, so I had people looking out for me.”

She raised a family of six, and opened a Benjamin Moore paint shop in her basement before going back to teaching when her youngest was old enough.

I listened in awe at the ease in which my grandmother spoke. I couldn’t fathom doing all she had done. I felt such pride in my grandma and finished my project in a fever, anxious to share with my class the hero who I knew.

When I was sixteen, I was sitting in my grandmother’s living room, in our usual formation. She in her gold chair, myself on her pink floral couch. She told me that after my dad was born, after all the kids had been put to bed, she would go out on the porch and smoke one single cigarette.

“I never felt like I needed a cigarette, and I never had more than one. I had my own pack that I kept in the freezer.”

She didn’t sound remorseful, or melancholy, or even enlightened by the memory. It wasn’t even really a story. It was simply a fact; something that she had done. But despite its simplicity, I understood the nuance of what she was telling me.

As we come into adulthood ourselves, we begin to realize how little we know, how little the adults in our life, our heroes, must have known. We watch as they hang up their capes and unveil to us their secret identities. I realized then that all the things I thought she'd done with ease were in fact quite stressful. That despite her busy energy and many accomplishments, she too needed to slow down and indulge.

Life wasn't always easy for my grandmother. Perhaps that was what made her stronger, or maybe harder is just harder, and strength is a mere matter of perception. Perhaps perseverance doesn't make you an unstoppable hero, it just keeps you alive along with your vice of choice. Just as Clarke Kent needed glasses, perhaps my grandmother needed fifteen minutes of unadulterated silence and a cigarette a day. Perhaps she never slowed down because she was never allowed to, and she didn't know how. Perhaps this doesn't make her the hero I once thought she was, but rather a person doing her best, whom I cherish, and who despite her many complexities, is still a hero to me.

A New Friend

JINSUNG KO

IT'S FRIDAY and that means I have to go there again, the painting class. I tried making friends there, but they have terrible social skills despite how much older they were compared to me. I was 23 years old whereas the majority were in their 30s. I didn't want to go because I knew how I'll be treated there. I'm like an aberration, a monster because I'm different from the rest of them. All they like to paint is dark and brooding abstract images to reflect on society, but I'm more hopeful than that. I like to paint pictures that are colourful, vibrant, and full of life to reach into my audience's soul.

Ostracized. Lonely. Unwanted. So, what's the point of going? Well the Good Book did say, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" according to Jeremiah 29:11.

Reading that verse encourages me to get back on my feet, but unfortunately, I've keep failing to impress people with my artistic works. I never get an ounce of praise or endorsement from people, only harsh criticisms for my drawings. At times, I ask myself, "Is this really my destiny?" I suck at this, but I enjoy it. Does my heart have what it takes? Will God help me?

All my life, I believed my destiny was to draw paintings for the Lord. At age 8, I knew what I wanted to do because I was inspired by such beautiful images on a school trip to a museum. Then again, I have never shown any of my paintings to other Christians because they never asked what I do. I always expressed my artistry with people who shared the same passion.

I didn't want to go to the class today, but I did. All because I want to be a great artist, someone who can illustrate the majesty of God's

creation of the world. I want to show people how the world is beautiful through God's eyes, not mine. So, the natural world is what I always draw in my pictures with big mountains, beautiful skies, and trees in the golden hour period. Acrylic paint is the best because it dries faster and works well with a fan brush. I can easily dry brush and blend in my drawings and colours seamlessly; orange and yellow are my preferred choices to represent God's intimacy. Lastly, I always add a big white lion crowned with thorns fading in the background to represent Him the best since God is known as the Lion of Judah.

This is what I enjoy and like to make a career out of it, but I could just be fooling myself because it's almost an unattainable dream. Fame and fortune have nothing to do with it because I need to paint pictures to live, just like how a human needs a brain to think and lungs to breathe.

What do you know? No one bothered to speak to me. It seemed as though, no one was interested in me. If painting is such a joy in my life, why does it bring me so much pain when I'm here? Gosh, it tortures me.

Just once, I want to talk with somebody, be friends with someone, someone to help me. I don't want to paint alone anymore. I was stroking my brushes, trying to create a bluish sky and a snowy landscape for my new world on the blank canvas. Once again, I was the creator of a new world, but I was bored. I wanted to get lost into my imagination as if I was on an acid trip, but I was stuck in reality.

"Hi, do you need any help?" a voice said.

I looked up and saw a tall man with long hair and a goatee, wearing a red shirt and jeans. He looked friendly although his height was intimidating. He was a new face I haven't seen before. Must be a new guy altogether, so I said, "Just braindead is all I can say. My name is Roger and yours?"

The young man smiled at me, "I'm Marcus, I was sitting behind you for the past three weeks and noticed you weren't painting well today."

I was puzzled by his remark because I wasn't sure if it was genuine, so I had to ask, "You watch me paint?"

"Well I mean, it's hard not to watch when I'm sitting behind you. I think your paintings are great though."

"Thanks for the kind words, but no one here really thinks that way of my paintings," I said.

Marcus frowned and said, "Really? Your paintings are so unique unlike most people's work around here."

I couldn't ignore him if I wanted to because he was friendly and the encounter was unexpected too. Maybe my prayers were answered because I couldn't believe that I was enjoying this moment with someone.

I smiled and asked him, "Thank you, what kind of paintings have you drawn?"

Marcus started to unpack some of his drawings from his bag and began to display them for me, "Well, I'm a fan of science fiction and fantasy, so these paintings are some images that I drew for my creative writings." My eyes opened widely and asked, "You like fantasy and writing stories?"

"Yes, this drawing right here is a man travelling through an alien-like world; he's looking for a new place to build his own robot utopian civilization to keep away from humanity. To be like God."

His paintings were astonishing; I was immersed with the worlds and characters he has drawn because they were so expressive with the gentle strokes and shadings he has done with them. I noticed that he liked to use the same colour palettes of teal, red, and orange with each painting. It was like the colours were used as his trademark and right then, I knew the kind of person he was. He was a warm person like the colours he uses, so I confidently asked, "Marcus, would you like to have coffee with me some time and talk about our paintings together?" He smiled at me and said, "Sure. I'm game."

What do you know? I guess, God does answer prayers. I hope my conversation with Marcus will bring upon a fruitful collaboration, where we support each other and promote our works. If there's someone who unexpectedly reaches out to you, don't shut them out. You never know the kinds of people God puts in your life. The greatest friends you'll meet can be the ones you come across unexpectedly. Friends can be the true path to success, not just talent.

Too Tired to Jump Through Hoops

CALVIN LACHANCE

PLEASE TELL us the story of the main symptoms that bring you to the Environmental Health Clinic.

Sitting with my occupational therapist, I read over the question once again. I hesitate. “My hands are too tired to write,” I say to her. She grabs a nearby pen. “Dictate it to me and I’ll write it for you,” she says. Before she begins writing, she looks at me again. “Do I have your permission to do so?” she asks, and I nod. The waitlist for the environmental health clinic is seventeen months. I’ve put this off far too long.

“Well,” I begin, “it was the summer before university that I noticed the first non-stop wave of fatigue. I’d had bouts of depression, especially in the summer, but this was ... different. All of a sudden, I wasn’t tired because I was sad, I was sad because I was tired. Does that make sense?”

She nods. “Could you list the drugs and treatment plans you have already tried?”

“Sure. So, back in 2015, before the fatigue became a huge problem, I was put on fluoxetine, and I took trazadone to help me sleep. Then I was on bupropion for a few years; it’s an SSNRI. This was all in 2017 and 2018. I did physiotherapy for a while, but it was a dead end. Everyone told me to take vitamin D. I took *so much* vitamin D. It took a long time to get treated for the fatigue. They really made me jump through hoops. I kept getting pushed from one doctor to the next, that sort of thing. When I was finally being treated, I was started on amphetamine, twenty milligrams a day. It did something, definitely, but not enough. I still failed classes because I couldn’t show up to any of them. I’ve seen about six different doctors. I’m on methylphenidate now, same dose since November, I think.”

“O-kay,” she says slowly, scribbling down the last sentence. “Can you give me a bit more information about your symptoms?”

“So, there’s fatigue, obviously. For the last few years, it has felt like someone was messing with my gravity settings, and they’re turned up too high. Like I’m carrying a hundred pounds of dead weight everywhere I go. I feel like I must be running marathons in my sleep, because I wake up exhausted every day. Medication helps, but only a little. When I stand up, my head feels woozy, and if I stretch too hard, I’ll pass out. I think that’s related to my blood pressure. I can’t walk for more than fifteen minutes a day, thirty on a good day. My body aches everywhere, and sometimes it just gives out. I’ve had a million blood tests, and I was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome last year. My brain is foggy all the time. Worse than foggy, even. I’d probably call it sludgy, cause sometimes I can barely string words together. Sometimes I can’t write. Like, I’ll think I’m writing a sentence, and I’ll look down, and it’s all gibberish. My memory is wonky, and I’ve got a bad heart. It beats too fast, palpitates too easily; I think I had some arrhythmias at one point.”

She nodded. The page was now full, and she was writing outside the margins. She handed me the paper for me to review it. She got all the details written down. At the top of the page, there was a small space for you to write the date when you last felt consistently well. At the risk of sounding dramatic, I truly had no clue when that date was. I wrote 2015.

If anyone ever asks me about my chronic illness, I’ve got all the information memorized. I’ll usually start with the basics. Systemic Exertion Intolerance Disorder (SEID), otherwise known as Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME), otherwise known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), can be described as many things: puzzling, controversial, and debilitating, to name a few. There is vast debate in scientific and medical literature regarding how to best conceptualize this illness, with even more debate on how to approach treating it. Ultimately, the gold standard treatment is dialectical behaviour therapy, which has a success rate below fourteen percent (Herane-Vives, et al.). Most other treatments are speculative, using trial and error to find an optimal solution. We are really only just beginning to understand ME/CFS. Some cases are caused by autoimmune etiology, some are environmental, and most are simply unexplained. As a result, the process of acquiring help remains gruelling and tiresome for most patients, myself included. Health anxiety, distinguished by the perpetual uncertainty of living with a chronic illness, is common in ME/CFS patients (Daniels 502). This is likely due to the high rate of negative experiences of patients within the

healthcare system. I often joke that CFS patients are just too tired to jump through the many hoops of the healthcare world. A study in 2016 found that it is common for patients with ME/CFS to be subjected to doubt and disbelief from doctors (Blease, et al. 550). Hell, I get subjected to doubt and disbelief all the time. Even my own siblings forget that I live with a disability, often assuming I use fatigue as an excuse to be lazy. Studies such as these offer scientific understandings to the well-known frustration of “doctors just won’t listen to me.” It doesn’t make it any easier, but at least I know I’m not alone.

I have sat in this office ten times since 2019. Each time I see my occupational therapist, she asks me if I have sensed any improvement in my condition, to which I always reply that I cannot say for sure. “I can’t thank you enough for helping me,” I always say. “That’s my job,” she replies. These papers sat on my desk for weeks on end, and I just couldn’t get around to filling them out. See, fatigue operates like a budgeting system on your day. You wake up, and you don’t know exactly how much energy you have, but you know you have to allocate it wisely. When I have to choose between feeding myself and filling out papers for a clinic referral, the papers unfortunately have low priority. Luckily, we were able to finish the papers and fax them to the clinic. I likely won’t hear back from them for over a year. Who knows where I’ll be by then?

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Why We Won't Go Back to Our Countries

JASMINE LOVE

EVERY CHILD has a family story, whether it's your grandparents' love story or your parent's "hardships" as children. We've all heard the story about how they had to walk miles to get to school ... or it may even be about how your great uncle Jack fell off his truck doing donuts in a field. Point is—everyone has a story. My family in particular has a story that not many people know about. But, I've come to the conclusion that as stubborn as we are about sharing, we Torreses have a tale that defines the courage and spirit of being an immigrant.

It was 1995, and I was just five years old when my family was accepted into Canada as Canadian citizens. I didn't know then, but it was a monumental moment in our lives. I remember standing there, next to two Mounties donned in brilliant red jackets and huge silly-looking ranger hats. I thought it was odd that an old man (the judge) with a funny-looking black bath-robe was handing us a piece of paper, and my mother was crying about it. A reporter was standing a few feet away, telling us to smile while we held up this paper. My mother waved proudly as the flash went off, and as we stood crammed into this small room with the Canadian flag standing tall behind us, I realized I needed to go to the bathroom. To this day, my mother still has the news article; we made headlines that day, and we often look back on it fondly. But it isn't just that moment that makes me proud, rather it's *how* my family eventually made their way to Canada.

My father fled from the civil war when he was young, deciding to leave behind his family to go to Mexico, where he met my mother. Mirna Carranza, an author who wrote an article based on El Salvadorian immigration and the cultural impact it has on daughters, answers the derogatory question that immigrants are plagued with relentlessly: *Why*

don't they go back to their own country? Her educational and thoughtful response is engraved in my memory, imploring that in order “to fully understand the experiences of Salvadorian immigrants and refugees, it is essential to understand the circumstances that gave rise to their flight” (390). Most immigrants don’t come with the clothes on their back to “take your jobs,” “raise your housing prices,” or annoy you from a call centre. Most of us are here because something has driven our families to flee our homes and leave our possessions and friends behind. My father was lucky enough to find refuge in Mexico, while most of his friends and family were not. But, even in Mexico, things were not safe, and soon afterwards my mother gave birth to my sisters and was expecting me on the way. It was at that moment that my parents knew it was time to leave Mexico and find somewhere safer to live. It was a choice most people did not brave, but my parents, much like many other Hispanic individuals, had no other choice.

Believe it or not, that wasn’t all my parents had to endure. At one point, my mother, with two young daughters, had to cross the *Rio Bravo* in a tire. Yes, I said a tire. She said it was the scariest thing she has ever done. She said she remembers the tire swaying back and forth in the water while she held on tight to two little girls, hoping and praying they would make it across alive. A loving mother would not risk her life and that of her children to impede on Canadians because she wanted a “green card.”

I’d like to say we were graciously accepted by all Canadians, who are known for their politeness, their kindness, and their openness. But the municipality of South Huron County left a bitter taste in my mouth. This small little area of farmland is where my parents finally decided to settle in, I was about twelve when we moved here. If you were to look at the 2018 community profile of South Huron, the Latin community makes up a grand total of thirty-five people. That’s fourteen percent of their population (“Community”). I went to school here in 2002, and I was the only non-Caucasian student in my class. With this came an onslaught of racism that followed me until my departure in high school. I was often told how ugly and hairy I was (which if you’re not blessed with blonde hair, you know what I mean). I was often called a Mexican, a Latino, or something that was never my actual name. In fact, usually, if you’re a foreigner, your race becomes your identity. I can’t say that it was all terrible because I had a group of friends that never made me feel “less than.” I am so grateful that I was blessed with accepting friends because I know that’s not always the case for some. However, it is sad that I feel

“blessed” to have had friends who treated me equally. This feeling is not something that should be optional, but unfortunately, sometimes it is.

I have a hairdresser named Mohammad who, ironically, also grew up in South Huron. I had hoped that a small community like that wasn’t always plagued by bigotry, sexism, and homophobia, but I wasn’t surprised to be told it was. Mohammad is forty-three and still recalls his childhood in South Huron. I remember the second day I met with him, he started asking me about myself like most hairdressers do. After the initial introductions, he asked me where I was from. His face scrunched up in disgust when my reply left my lips. “That place is just—it’s a nightmare! I’m from Iran, and they would call me Paki. They were just—they were so ignorant. I got in so many fights in school.” He shook his head at me as if in a distant memory where he’s a teenage boy, again. I told him I knew what he was feeling and felt his words fuelling my own anger. He continued on bitterly, recalling that he “can’t even remember a day I wasn’t dealing with people’s racist crap. My brother was younger than me and nicer than me, so he didn’t want to react. But the things they would say, it’s like they had never seen another human being before. Or at least someone who wasn’t white.” Even though my hair was in danger of being mutilated, we exchanged stories, his much more abusive than mine, because he would get into fistfights. Stories like Mohammad’s don’t surprise me, though, and in the smaller countries, this phenomenon isn’t anything new. Racism has become a sense of normalcy in Huron County. So much so that just a quick glance at their official Web site illustrates their ignorance: “The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as “peoples who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (“Community”).

So, this leaves me to answer the ignorant question: *Why don’t you go back to your country?* Why are we still, as a community, compartmentalizing each other like we’re different? Why do I have to justify my struggles or my parents’ struggles? Why do you have to defend yours?

Maybe it’s not a matter of who has had it worse, who’s privileged, who’s not. I guess the moral of the story isn’t to make you feel worse or better for me. I think it’s to contemplate. Perhaps that’s what we’ve all been doing wrong. We’re not coming from a place of understanding, but rather a place of accusations. Life isn’t easy for anyone, and maybe if we spent more time listening to one another and sharing our stories, we’d realize that we’re not so different after all.

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My Experience as a Solo Female Traveller

MEHRISA MALIK

I REMEMBER being highly anxious before my first time travelling alone. After spending a week in the UK to visit family, I had decided to take a three-day stop in Barcelona before returning to university in Canada for the beginning of the fall semester.

I was only twenty at the time and my nervousness stemmed from the horror stories I had heard of young females travelling alone. Some of these fears were warranted, such as the danger of not keeping a close eye on your purse and belongings, and some were unwarranted, such as being kidnapped in a plot reminiscent of the movie *Taken* with Liam Neeson. But nevertheless, I booked my flight and a stay at a hostel that touted its catering towards solo travellers, and off I went.

After an uneventful taxi ride from the airport, it only took a few minutes to check in at the hostel, simply providing them with a credit card and my passport. The hostel I had chosen, Casa Gracia, was centrally located and only a ten-minute taxi away from places I wanted to visit, such as the famed La Rambla street, which winds its way past several vibrant marketplaces and cultural sites before ending right at the beach.

My first stop was the hostel lounge, where on my way to my room I had seen a dozen people socializing. I had recognized a few English accents among the chatter, in addition to a smattering of German and Italian, and felt like this would be a good starting place to see if I could meet any travel companions.

I had always been a bit shy but decided to take the leap and sat down on a chair next to a couple of girls who were chatting amongst themselves, one of which I recognized had an English accent. I nervously interjected and asked the one closest to me if she was from England, to

which she smiled and responded yes, stating that her name was Sarah. We spent the next hour talking about where we were from and what we were doing in Barcelona. It turned out that she and her friend, whose name was Ann, were my age and were backpacking around Europe during their break from university.

Sarah suddenly looked at the clock and turned to Ann, exclaiming that they had to get going if they wanted to accomplish their plan today. Sarah then asked me if I would like to tag along with them, as they were about to embark on a day of sightseeing. I was still a bit tired from my flight but eagerly responded yes, as I didn't want to miss the opportunity to make some new friends and travel companions.

Our first stop was the Barcelona Cathedral, which was a twenty-minute walk from Casa Gracia. As we approached the stairs leading up to the church, I was almost overwhelmed by the breath-taking Gothic architecture and sheer size of the cathedral.

We quickly paid our seven-euro entrance fee and spent the next hour touring the building. As we walked inside, my eyes immediately shifted to the soaring ceilings and vibrant stained-glass windows. We walked up to the massive organ at the head of the church and took a couple pictures before making our way to the rooftop. Next up was an elevator ride to the roof, which had stunning 360-degree angle views of all of Barcelona as well as a half dozen gargoyles, some representing real animals and some mythical. I almost couldn't believe that such a building had been created over five hundred years ago.

Our next stop was the Sagrada Familia, a temple which had begun construction over 135 years ago under legendary architect Antoni Gaudi and was only scheduled for completion in 2026! While this temple drew from Gothic influences, one can easily see the distinct influences of the architects who took over after Gaudi's death in other spires and features of the building. These other styles range from African mud architecture to Expressionist. We spent almost the entire time ogling the three spectacular façades on the outside of the structure, with each dedicated to a moment of Jesus' life.

The first was the façade of birth, which was covered in incredibly detailed sculptures of animals, humans, and plants. We overheard a tour guide explaining that the façade was meant to represent the constant change of nature, an allegory beautifully depicted through the dozens of sculptures. The next façade, the Passion, was meant to represent the death and resurrection of Jesus. I could sense a darker feel to this one as the edges were jagged and the sculptures were skeletal. The final façade,

the Bliss, is the only one not finished yet, so did not have anywhere near the level of detail of the first two. An interesting fact we learned, though, was that Gaudi believed that humans should never try to outdo God, so the height of the tallest tower in this area was slated to be a few metres shorter than the tallest hill in Barcelona.

After finishing at the Sagrada Familia, we spent the rest of the afternoon walking down the renowned La Rambla street, dividing into side alleys to explore the vibrant markets that line the central corridor. I bought a couple trinkets to bring home to my friends and family, and we stopped by La Boqueria, the most famous marketplace in Barcelona, for dinner. I had heard horror stories about pickpockets on La Rambla, so I was ever aware of my pursuit, but I never once felt threatened or in danger.

We returned home by eight p.m. and I suddenly felt exhausted from the travel combined with walking around the city all day. Sarah and Ann had planned to go out that night to the beach bars but I regretfully told them that I was a bit too tired. I took down their contact information, though, and we agreed to meet up the next morning to head to the beach.

Despite my initial hesitation about travelling alone, I found it fairly easy to make some new friends, and never once felt like I was about to be kidnapped. While over the next couple days we did exercise common-sense caution, such as not walking alone down side streets at night, none of us had any issues with theft or harassment throughout the trip. To those who were nervous, as I was, to travel alone, I would certainly encourage you to step out of your comfort zone and prepare for a fulfilling and unique experience!

Marilyn

CHRISTINE MCCALLUM

Surrounded by her loved ones at Kingston General Hospital on Sunday, October 21, 2018. Marilyn Kellar of Seeley's Bay, in her 65th year. Loving daughter of Ruth (Silver) and Ernest Kellar of Sydenham. Beloved wife of Cameron McCallum. Cherished mother of Laura McCallum-Henry (Angus) of Kingston, Jennifer McCallum (Steve Kellar) of Seeley's Bay, and Christine McCallum of Kingston.

Kingston Whig-Standard

WRITING THE obituary for my mom was a strained family effort. How were we to summarize her life? My older sister Laura struggled the most, especially when I suggested writing, "she passed peacefully, with her family by her side." She did not see peace with my mom's death. Roger, the funeral director, did well to navigate the sensitive nature of our meeting. Too numb to contribute anything poetic, we settled for the standard format of black-and-white details. Following the obituary writing came the task of selecting a casket and vault. Making these selections without her felt unnatural, too personal. Anxiety filled the room. Would she want dark wood, or light? What type of vault would she want? What colour of lining should the casket be? Despite it feeling too personal, I knew the answers to all of the questions. I was fortunate to have a deeply rooted bond with my mom, and it made the funeral decisions easier, as I could predict what she would have wanted. This bond, however, came at price. It caused many lifelong disputes between Laura and me, and my mom and Laura. Those disputes led to tense family relationships, and the friction with Laura was present on the

funeral preparations day. My other sister Jen retaliated on each negative comment made by Laura. She lacked patience and was “tired of Laura making life harder than it needed to be.” My sombre dad, dressed in his favourite blue plaid shirt my mom bought him months earlier, selected the casket and vault I suggested.

“It costs a lot to die,” he whispered to me, as he signed the funeral contract.

Watching him hand over the finalized contract weakened my hazel defence, unleashing more burning tears. Finalizing the funeral details was another step in acknowledging my mom’s death. The first step was when I received a call from the Trillium Gift of Life Network, three hours following her final breath. They were looking for permission to take my mom’s eyes. Her eyes, once so filled with life and love, were beautiful hazel masterpieces that could ease my troubles with just a glance. Her eyes were the only part of her body that metastatic breast cancer had not invaded. It was the only part of her they wanted, yet one of the only parts I needed to soothe my aching heart.

Her eyes also housed a spark for adventure. Following the diagnosis of terminal cancer in November 2012 came her immediate need to invest more time in living her life to the fullest. Living it with a purpose of experiencing as much as possible. It spurred me into making a personal vow to enhance her life as best as I could, for as long as I could. Despite me drowning in student debt, we set off multiple times a year to destinations on her “Live It Before I Kick It” list. We took multiple trips to Vegas to see performers like David Copperfield, Elton John, and the remaining Righteous Brother. We explored Virginia and watched wild horses canter across the Assateague Island seashore. We explored Quebec City, stayed in fancy boutique hotels, and splurged on culinary delights. Most memorably, we went to the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. We were picked up from the Fiddler’s Inn in a golf cart and taken through busy intersections to the front doors of the Opry. I sat in the back and watched my mom’s long silver hair, not yet lost to treatment, ripple through the muggy August air. Her right arm danced through the movements of the wind, and the rear-view mirror shared glimpses of her infectious smile. When we arrived at the Opry, I went to the ticket booth and discovered they were sold out. This trip was spontaneous, and I never thought to pre-book our tickets. We were devastated, but my Mom, with her admirable positivity, wasn’t going to let it ruin her trip.

“Let’s go to one of those country bars instead,” she said, with encouraging eyes.

Although that sounded fun, I didn't want to give up her chance to experience the Opry. I asked the clerk again and explained the need to fulfil this dream for my Mom. With luck, two additional seats were found. We sang along with country greats, held hands, and let the dark clouds of reality pass by. I watched my mom, with blurred eyes and a satisfying fullness, tap her feet to the rhythm and close her eyes to sway with the crowd. She embraced life, despite having to trudge through the depths of hell. She grieved while living. She lived while dying. The Opry and her adventurous soul prepared me for *my* fight.

My fight isn't because of a terminal diagnosis, although grief does seem to have a never-ending power for blocking out light in my life. However, I keep searching in my toolbox to find my next defence against grief's piercing hooks because I promised I would keep going. In the final weeks of her life, as mom started to drift, she made me promise to not hide from the darkness. She made me promise to "always keep fighting" and to "keep talking to Linda."

"I'm tired of fighting. I can't grieve. I feel hollow. I feel like life has been sucked out of me. I'm dying," my child self screamed.

"Not dying, your heart is just breaking. You need to let it break," replied Dr Linda Beckett, a Kingston family doctor specialist in mental health.

Linda was trying her best to fuel my fight for life. She poked and prodded me to share, and held my hand each time I was flooded with emotions, each time I got stuck at the bottom of the rabbit hole. Linda has been there from the beginning. Before losing my mom, she helped me manage the grief that comes with a looming death. I went through a phase of preparatory grief, a term I learned from the book *On Death and Dying* by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. And as much as this phase has made grief less unbearable, the intensity of it is only a memory, a visit home, or a motherless trip away from its drowning waves. When it hits, it feels like being trapped ninety feet underwater with a near-empty scuba tank, taking only small breaths to keep conscious. It reminds me of her last three breaths. Three Mississippis.

In three Mississippis, three breaths, life can be altered forever. Losing a mom at twenty-nine is uniquely painful, as life is just getting started, with so many significant life celebrations on the way that would have been shared. Loss as a millennial is isolating, as many within my friendship tribe are not versed yet in this life-altering experience. I was forced into a club of "Motherless Daughters" (Edelman), a membership I never wanted. However, I am learning that with pain comes beauty.

Although I can't always see it, especially when the reminders of my loss unexpectedly visit, I do see the lessons. Grief has reminded me that life is heartbreakingly short. Grief has forced me to grow up, to stand on my own two feet, to believe in myself, and know that I am also a fighter. The mother-daughter bond, our love, will never die. Even though there are days I feel I could die in the rabbit hole, days I struggle through the darkness, teetering on the edge of sanity, I am always saved by the melodies of the Opry, the memory of my mom's sweet smile, and the strength and guidance from *our* hazel eye.

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Fire on the Horizon

ZOE MCCORMACK

IT WAS 5.30 in the morning on August 6th, 2018. Having trouble sleeping, my father got out of bed carefully to avoid waking up my mother. He walked barefoot across the cool stone floor to the front of the cave house and opened the door a crack. The sky outside was still pitch black; the sun had not yet started to rise. My father's heart leapt at the realization that morning would come shortly. I had always dreamed of watching a sunrise because I had experienced many sunsets at summer camp, which beautiful as they were, had become ordinary. I was eager to see what the sky looked like in the mornings and to experience a unique opportunity in life. My father would go to any length to make his children happy. Unknown to me, he had always hoped one morning would present itself as the perfect time for us to share a sunrise. He thought to himself, *there is no time in the world more perfect than here and now*.

"Zoe." He shook my shoulder gently. "Zoe," he whispered again.

I squinted into the darkness and recognized the shape of my father standing over me.

"What?" I managed to croak out.

"It's six a.m. You don't have to wake up, but I thought if you want, we can go watch the sunrise." There was evident enthusiasm in his voice.

I closed my eyes again and felt sleep pulling me back down. Had my pillow always been this fluffy? My sheets had definitely never felt so soft. I was in the middle of a good dream....

"Zoe?"

I opened one eye. "Okay. Yes, I want to go." Tired as I was, the realization that I was finally accomplishing my dream of watching a sunrise, and doing so with my father, woke me up.

I got myself out of bed, went to the bathroom, and then met my father out on the terrace. It was much brighter outside than indoors; the sky was full of pastel blues and oranges, yet the sun still hid behind the hilly landscape of the island. I was immediately struck by how lucky I was to be witnessing this view with my own eyes.

The terrace of our rented white cave house held a small wooden table with two chairs next to a pool carved out of the mountain rock. I positioned my phone securely on the edge of the terrace wall and began recording a time lapse to capture the sunrise. I had never used the time-lapse feature before, but my instinct told me I would regret not eternalizing this moment. I sat down on the wooden chair opposite my father and looked out at our breath-taking view of the Santorini village, Oia.

“Are you happy?” my father asked me, with sheer joy in his eyes. I nodded. “Beyond. Thank you.”

At home, I rarely had time to strengthen my relationships with my parents and have meaningful alone time together. I went from school to choir practice to doing homework while they spent most of the day at work. This moment was not simply precious because of what we were about to view, but because my father and I were finally awarded a peaceful hour together in the jungle of our chaotic lives.

My family was on a three-week summer vacation to Greece and Croatia, and this was our fourth day in Santorini. The multiple paintings, photographs, and videos I had seen of the island before coming had not done Santorini justice. The crescent-shaped island created from a volcanic explosion is a true miracle on earth (Black 22-24). We stayed in Oia, a village at the north point of the island, famous for its sunsets. The tourists that flocked the narrow streets in the evening were oblivious to the alternate experience Oia offered in the early hours of the day. I felt part of an exclusive club of people willing to sacrifice sleep to witness the wakening of the world.

The architecture that establishes Oia’s unique look on postcards covered the top of the hills as far out as my eye could see. Amid the white buildings, bright pink bougainvillea flowers grew along rocky paths carved out of the mountainside. The Greek flag sat atop a building in the distance, flapping in the breeze. Sailboats decorated the vast Aegean Sea below us, soaking up their moments alone before massive cruise ships arrived and interrupted their serenity. We were truly in the best possible location to view the sunrise, every breath-taking detail of Santorini at our disposal.

Panagia Platsani, a cathedral in the main square, stood out amongst the other white buildings thanks to its blue-domed roof. The previous morning, I walked by the cathedral on the way to get breakfast from a local bakery and saw a photographer doing a shoot with a bride and groom. Without seeing the results, I knew the photos would turn out beautifully. At this moment, the pastel palette of the sky only emphasized the wondrous structure of the cathedral.

As minutes passed, a fiery yellow ball emerged out of a U-shaped dip in the island, as if the mountain had been carved especially for this. I had never paused to appreciate the sun, mainly because it would hurt my eyes to do so; however, at this moment, the sun itself was of equal beauty to the island below it.

I had never seen colours more powerful. The sun commanded the pale blue sky around it, like a fire on the horizon. It cast a red glare over the white buildings as it rose, which was replaced by a soft natural light once it was higher in the sky. As it settled into place, the secrets of the sunrise vanished, a sight seen by only my father and me.

I ended the time lapse on my phone but did not immediately watch the video. Instead, I reflected on the experience I was incredibly fortunate to have just witnessed. I had chosen to experience the sunrise without any distractions; my phone was on the ledge and my novel in a beach bag. In a generation dependent on technology, I was eternally grateful and appreciative of the moment I was living in.

A silent observer of the sunrise, my father was equally stunned by the canvas in the sky. The time lapse is something we go back to regularly, reminiscing on that perfect summer morning. He shared with me that whenever he reflects on our father-daughter moment, it brings him deep happiness and pride. There are not many opportunities in life to share something like this with a parent, especially in the business of everyday life. It was a special moment for both of us that we will cherish forever. My instinct to record a time lapse made him feel proud as well, both as a former producer watching me in action and as a father understanding my passion for filmmaking (McCormack).

If you ever find yourself in Santorini, set your alarm, go outside, and witness the beauty of the sunrise. Put away any distractions to allow yourself to experience the moment in its entirety. I will never regret it; I would do it again in a heartbeat. An extra hour of sleep cannot compare to a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

My mother had woken up and was standing in the doorway of the house. “What are you guys doing outside?”

My father and I exchanged a look as if to say, *where do we start?*

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Of Marc and Mini

NICOLE MINIALOFF

LOVE AND relationships have fascinated humanity throughout history. Marriage itself has taken on varying purposes and practices, but the act of loving and falling in love with another person has been held in high regard within Western society. Researchers at Grand State University found that, although humans are consistently attracted to those who have desirable physical attributes, “mature individuals are aware of the fact that simply being attractive is not sufficient to sustain a satisfactory relationship” (Braxton-Davis 9). Informing my younger self of this fact likely would not have deterred me from countless questionable relationships. But then again, the study does specify “mature” individuals.

Suggesting that I had become mature when Marc and I met would be a stretch. However, I had experienced enough troubling individuals in my life to know when I had stumbled upon a person of strength, integrity, and a true sense of values.

We started off as simple co-workers who had not said more than two words together in years of working in the same establishment. It just so happened that one day we were in a vehicle travelling to the transit terminal together and a first opportunity to get to know one another appeared. I posed a simple question about relationships. His answer provided a glimpse into the wondrous extent of his values, and I dared to ask him if he was married. Nope. Not married. No children. Free as can be.

“Dedicated.” All these years later, that is the first word he chooses to describe me. “Well, you’re a very dedicated hard worker. That was my first impression. I like that. You always want to do the right thing and tell people what to do” (Potvin). He had blushed then as I informed

him that this was a love story I was concocting; an examination of our past and present and how in the world we made it from a note in his mailbox to a house, baby, dog, cat, and photo albums full of adventures.

If we travel back to the beginning and then skip forward a chapter or two, we will find ourselves in the tiniest of towns, west of Sudbury, called Nairn Centre. It's true that it could be described as a "sleepy little town" and that you could sneeze and miss it whilst passing on the highway. The town found its inception in 1876 but we found our way there in 2016. I had first purchased the home at 26 Minto Street on my own, in a fury of impulsive decisions following a relationship that could be described as abusive and everything else under the "do-not-do" category. It was in 1890 that the lure of gold had enticed John Hall to travel to what would later become Nairn Centre and the lure of solitude and a hide-out space that carried me to the humble abode ("Nairn").

We had a small "shack," as we liked to call it, in the backyard. We would make fires out there in the woodstove he installed and play board games in our underwear as the temperatures inside reached the thirties and the temperatures outside teetered on minus forty. Then came my job as a child welfare worker to the surrounding First Nations. How we survived that together remains a mystery. With fourteen-hour days on the highway, I would return to a household full of warmth; the icicles dripping from the rooftop and reflecting our ever-growing heat bill as the hundred-year-old house was in dire need of a new roof. I'd walk into the porch and see him standing over the stove, preparing something lovely for my eight p.m. homecoming. I would sit across from him and shake my head from the excursions of the day, and he would place his hand over mine and let me stir in silence with him while my worries slowly drifted for the evening.

It was no mystery that I was struggling as a new worker in the field of child welfare. Any time I would tell a friend or family member of my newly acquired job they would acknowledge the assumed difficulties in such a challenging line of work. Studies conducted on the toll on social workers have found that new workers often used the word *overwhelmed* to describe their experience within their new role. This term "was used to describe excessive competing demands, guilt, and emotional strain" (Shah 172). In the two years since I departed my career at Greater Sudbury Transit, these were essentially the core facets of my new existence as a social worker. I would walk in the door, greeted by my own small family. I would draw a bath, soak, and filter away the dozens of worries and overdue items that the following day would surely bring.

There would be Marc, perched on the floor beside me, ready to chat or sit idle while I stared above at the ceiling. He never faltered.

When I look back on the self-described *crazy* that he endured, I often reach out to ask him, “Why did you stay?” He laughs and states, “not even you could withstand that lifestyle much longer. It was not sustainable. I knew things would change” (Potvin). It had taken me years of failed relationships and attempts at love and connection to discover the one thing that truly sweeps a woman off her feet. It turns out it was none of the romantic gestures and long walks on the beach that I had anticipated, but rather, the staying power of a man who loves you enough to see through the tough times and ugly moments.

It was on February 20th that we sat at the kitchen table discussing our upcoming trip to Dominican Republic. Marc had looked across at me and asked if I had bought a new bra. I laughed and asked when I might have had the time to do so. He stated I looked “bigger” and had a laugh as we both knew that was the last word we would use to describe my breasts. Just then, as if in the scene of a cartoon, I imagined a small lightbulb being flicked on above my head.

“We should do a pregnancy test,” I suggested. “I know we’ve only tried a few times, but you never know.” And then we were there, pacing, walking the length of the tiny living room and waiting for the result of the test to appear. I went back into the bathroom and witnessed the pink stripes appearing, I shrieked and ran out to Marc who sat nonchalantly on the couch and gazed up at me. “I am ... we are ... pregnant!” I yelled and jumped on his lap. We simultaneously cried tears of excitement, joy, and terror.

A scene passes through my mind as I reflect on all that happened between now and then. The moment when my words became a reality and we packed our bags for the hospital. We are now over three years into our love story, living in a new home with less heat loss and a lot more memories behind us. He is there. Holding onto my leg and looking down at me, I open my eyes only for a moment to narrow in on his gaze. “It’s working, Nic. I can see the head,” he reassures me with tears in his eyes. I push again. Again. Two and a half hours of ten-second countdowns. Then I feel the pressure build as the baby makes her appearance into the world and Marc states, “it’s a girl?” with the shock and awe of nine months of false predictions. She is placed on my chest. She cries out. She latches on. I sob and state the most truthful thing I may have ever experienced: “I love her.” And he places his hand on my chest and leans down to kiss my forehead. Our life begins.

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Wrestling in Whirlpools

Struggle, Futility, and Meaning on the Local Campaign Trail

ETHAN MITCHELL

I WAS seated in the hall, one among a crowd of people, watching the local organization of the New Democratic Party officially nominate our candidate for the 2019 federal election. I'd been involved with them for a little over a year and had been serving on the executive for about half of that time. They'd offered me a job helping to organize the election campaign, but I declined. It wasn't like I had anything else in mind, but the race didn't seem winnable.

Up front, Dr Winston Brooks, dressed in a suit with an orange tie, strode up to the podium to accept the unanimous decision of the party to ask him to run for member of parliament. Everyone had wanted him to run for years, and this time he finally felt inspired or self-destructive enough to say yes. It would be a tough fight. He would be running as a black candidate, under a Sikh leader, in a riding that was mostly white. It also didn't help that the riding happened to be a stronghold of the Liberal Party.

I was thinking about all of this when Winston started speaking. By the time he was done, I was on my feet, clapping, and I knew exactly where I wanted to be this summer. He had an almost impossible contest ahead of him, but hearing him lay out his vision, I knew it was one I had to be a part of. I sent an e-mail to his campaign manager, Connor McGuire, and joined the team.

The next day, we were knocking on doors.

Winston was awkward at first, and most people hadn't had the chance to think about the election, still six months away. Knocking on doors and trying to persuade strangers to vote for you is hardly natural. Over the few hours, however, Winston became more comfortable. He

cut an impressive figure, appearing simultaneously as an everyman and a reformist leader. I couldn't help but feel optimistic. We had a mission, and the beginnings of what looked like a scrappy operation.

A few months later, we were in the dead of summer. Time was spent organizing canvassing, events, and other activities from our campaign office. Most people still weren't thinking about the election, and the number of volunteers remained low. Through long, hot days, we ground away at the map of the city, trying to reach as many voters as possible.

Early one evening, I stepped back into this office with one of our volunteers, Jason. The two of us were drenched in sweat, and I remember shivering in the cold indoor air. Jason slumped into a chair and I walked to the fridge to get him a bottle of water. On the way, I passed Winston and Emily chatting at a desk.

Emily had started out as a volunteer with us, until we eventually hired her as staff to replace Samantha, who had walked out angrily a month before. Emily had been doing well so far, but I started to hear rumours that she was publicly airing her dissatisfaction with my decision-making. I was finding it harder to shake the feeling that she, and Samantha before, were right.

I passed Jason his water bottle and went over to Emily and Winston. "Did you guys finish your route?"

"No," Emily said. "We couldn't."

"You couldn't?"

"Emily was *this* close to having heat stroke," Winston said, pinching his fingers together. "You don't know what you're doing to people, you and Connor."

"Right." I went back over to Jason, and soon he was on his way back home. The moment he left, the two of them were yelling at me.

The next day Winston called me at home. "You know, Ethan, you say that people don't have to finish their routes. It's like when the boss calls you in for an optional meeting. It's never really optional. Let me tell you something. You're dangerously close to being manipulative."

"How am I being manipulative?"

"I didn't say that. Don't twist my words around. I said *dangerously close*."

In a few more months, the leaves started to turn, and things were looking a lot more alive. We had a steady stream of volunteers and we were hitting more of our targets. The office had transformed since that hot summer day. People were moving through constantly, chatting and

working. Emily had fallen away. Winston's absences were becoming more frequent.

One evening, the canvassing groups all came back to the office. I collected the clipboards and Connor ordered pizza. We sat around talking about everything from history to funny conversations at the doors. I found myself talking more and more with Ayesha, whom we had fortunately been able to hire. We started going out for drinks most nights.

It became clearer from the polling that we weren't going to win the riding. Yet, somehow, the team seemed undeterred and I was only getting more and more excited to show up for work every day.

Finally, election day came. It was sixteen hours of pure chaos. Ayesha and I were shut in a house, sitting at a table covered in maps and papers, constantly on the phone as volunteers filtered in and out. We were coordinating a city-wide effort to pull every single person we identified as a supporter (numbering in the thousands) out to their local polling stations and overseeing a team of about a hundred volunteers. By the time the polls closed, we were all exhausted. The volunteers all went to a pub for the celebration, but Ayesha and I took our time.

When we got there, it was exactly what we thought it would be. The results came in, putting us in second place, but it was the strongest result the party had ever gotten in the riding. Hangers-on were strutting around and shaking hands. Winston gave a triumphant speech to a room full of volunteers who he had thus far never made the effort to speak to. People got drunk and enjoyed the spectacle of politics.

While they did, Ayesha, Connor, some other volunteers, and I left the pub and headed back to the campaign office. We opened a case of beers that Connor had previously hidden there and sat together from night until the next morning. And finally, in that room full of people who I'd only met because of a long-shot local campaign, I understood why I was so glad to have taken the job. Next to what we built, losing an election didn't seem so bad.

Pursuit of Happiness

NICHOLAS MURMANN

Introduction

MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER was steadily becoming more unhealthy as she got older. Whenever I would meet her she would make sure not to talk about her declining health, but rather the enjoyment she experienced in the last year. She was always super positive, always looked forward; she believed that to achieve happiness one had to be content in every situation. To do this, she made sure to always plan ahead, whether this was to meet with her family or to travel across the world. Unfortunately, she knew what reality had in store for her: maybe ten or a few more years. With this at the back of her mind, she had to continue forward, to make the most of her last years here.

My great-grandmother was born in Germany in the early '20s; in her lifetime she experienced many terrible things, but through the good and bad she always managed to stay content. Unfortunately, she passed away a few years back, but she left one key message behind: no matter what is holding you back there is always a way to achieve the things you want. In this story, I will be bringing you along on her journey in the pursuit of happiness.

Happiness

My great-grandmother left many memories behind with everyone she knew. One that stood out from everything else was that she was constantly on the move; she would always have activities planned. This could be anything from having tea with her daughter all the way to plans for a trip to an African safari adventure. The way she would stay content

was by looking forward to something in the distant future. For a large portion of her late life, she spent her time travelling around the world; she wanted to continue to see new places and experience new foreign cultures. By looking forward to something, she was able to forget about all the bad things and focus on what was around the corner, focus on what is good. Planning new trips made her content. The anticipation made her very happy and allowed her to look forward to something, this in part made her enjoy travelling so much; the anticipation for the trip created as much happiness as the trip itself. This enjoyment factor made her want to keep on travelling; I remember talking with her and asking how she found the places to go. She would respond with, “sometimes I like watching TV, and when I see the beautiful safari, I want to go, so I look to see if I can go and so I plan the trip and every day closer to take-off makes me more and more excited.” She spent the majority of her life in Germany, so her English was not perfect. However, she was always able to keep the story in line. Whilst I was young, I saw her every summer; back then I could speak very little German, but understood almost everything. And yet, to make me bond with her, she told her stories with limited English. One of the biggest trips that she had planned was for her to travel to Canada.

Canada

She was always very fond of Canada and the vast landscape it held; thus she made the big decision that she wanted to travel there. She spent the majority of her life in Germany and wanted to experience something new. At the time, my father, who was also her grandson, was living in Austria with his uncle. He was enjoying his time there, but was offered the trip of a lifetime: to go with his grandmother to Canada. At first, it would be just to visit Canada in the summer, and then he could go home to school.

The trip was on. Bags were loaded into the car, and they left. It was the summer of 1982. My father and his grandmother were on a trip to the other side of the world. He was going into unmarked territory with an open mind, and she knew what she was in for. They flew into Vancouver airport. They rented a car to drive up to the ranch, which was leased. It was about a four-and-a-half-hour drive. They first took the Sea-to-Sky Highway, one of the most beautiful highways in the world, driving on the side of a mountain with a steep drop-off on the left to Howe Sound, a big body of water connecting the Pacific Ocean to the interior of British

Columbia. The surrounding mountains were covered in bushy evergreens. Ferries are bringing residents to the islands of the water. The scenery is remarkable and was the driving force behind this trip. Upon arrival, they were greeted by a ranch-like estate with a big farm for cattle. It was similar to what they were used to in Austria, except for that they were in a whole new country.

My great-grandmother fell in love with how relaxed people were. Everything was calm. You couldn't hear cars. It was just her, her grandson, and nature. After a few weeks, she decided to buy the ranch. She wanted to live there part time; she viewed the purchase as both an investment and a gift to herself. Summer was over now, and she flew back to Austria with her grandson to deliver some news; he, just like her, fell in love with the place and the people, the relaxedness of the public, and the opportunity that Canada had for him. So he decided to move in with his grandmother to B.C., Canada. He would drop everything, move and enrol in the local high school. Both of them were so fond of the culture change which pushed them to do this big move. This was a trend I could see with all her travel decisions. When I was younger, I viewed her trips to be for the purpose of having fun, but now that I am older it is clear that she was immersing herself in new cultures on every trip she went on. This change in reality through a change in culture allowed her to have a change in perspective on the way to live life. She loved this immersive culture change so much that it drove her to live for over twenty years in Canada.

Finale

The hardest part to wrap my head around is that whilst she was doing all this she was around sixty-five years old, and as she got older she still was on this pursuit of happiness. She found what made her feel content and chased that to the best of her ability. By the time she left Canada she was in her eighties, her health declining rapidly, and so she moved back to Germany so that her family could take care of her. This shows that age is more of a mindset, rather than a limitation to life, and people can continue doing what they love. To be happy is to be content in every moment. Many people have negative thoughts in life; they may be holding you back. However, this story shows that it is possible to achieve something no matter what preconceived social normalities exist. Your own will and mindset will triumph over most things that will try and hold you back. By remembering her stories, we can clearly see that the way

in which she pursued life: always looking towards happiness allowed her to achieve true happiness in the darkness of times.

From her life I have learned that there are always ups and downs, to make sure the downs don't triumph over your life, you have to focus on the good. The good things will keep you wanting to go onward with life and justify the hard work you put in. She always kept a positive attitude which essentially kept her going, and I adopted this into my life. I try and focus on the all the good things that have happened to me so that when bad things do come up, it will not overthrow my overall happiness.

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A Visit to Yellowknife

ARVIND NALADIGA VENKAT

THE SECRET to a good marriage is to listen to your wife when you're wrong. The secret to a great marriage is to listen to your wife even when she's wrong. I was anxious about the upcoming trip to Yellowknife and reminisced about the dreaded moment when I agreed with Kanchan, my wife, and booked our tickets for the misadventure. That was three months back.

"How about Yellowknife to watch the Northern Lights?" Kanchan suggested.

"Yeah! Right!" I sniggered.

"Yellowknife has 240 potential aurora viewing days per year," she read aloud from some Web site, "the highest probability for viewing aurora in Canada."

She was serious.

"Really? Yellowknife in February?"

Now, we celebrate our marriage anniversary by travelling someplace, and 2017 was no different. The only obstacle was that our permanent residence was being processed and traveling outside Canada wasn't an option.

"C'mon, we've experienced enough cold," she explained. "We'll be fine."

All I could feel was being underprepared for the upcoming rendezvous with the cold. *We'll be frozen!*

Near the baggage carousel stood a statue of a polar bear on a snow slab, with its hind legs up in the air—intimating how insanelly north we'd reached. We quickly discovered that the airport had no Wi-Fi, and our

phones had no signal. Apparently, our phone network operator, Rogers, didn't operate in NWT. While we watched others leave in cabs, we couldn't understand how to book one. *We were stranded.*

We finally discovered an old-fashioned payphone in a desolate corner with the "City Taxicab" phone number scribbled on the wall behind it. "*Whew!*" Normally, I would curse someone writing on walls, but this time I blessed the conscientious stranger. I called the number and reached our accommodation at around ten p.m.

Our host Paul, his two dogs, and five cats welcomed us. Paul answered a million questions we had regarding auroras.

"When is the best time is to watch the spectacle?" I asked.

"Forecasting auroras is like the forecasting weather," he said, "Connect to the Wi-Fi and download an aurora tracking app that displays the KP index."

I scratched my head. "What's the KP index?"

He leaned forward as if revealing a secret. "The global planetary KP index is a scale between zero and nine," he whispered. "The higher the value, the better the chances of visibility of an aurora."

We nodded and quickly downloaded the app.

"You know," he said before retiring to bed, "our last guest saw the lights from outside the house."

Our jaws dropped. *Awesome!* So, upon the app's recommendation, we woke up early at five a.m. the next morning. It was minus thirty-five degrees Celsius, but we dared to venture out, only to spot clouds and snow. Disappointed, we returned and slept.

Later, during the day, we waited for almost an hour to get the bus to the Telus showroom. For a tiny city of twenty thousand people, buses felt like a horrible way to travel. So, after buying an exorbitantly priced SIM card, we felt relieved that we could book cabs. *Surprise! Surprise!* Our mobile phones were out of juice. Our phones couldn't withstand the cold, and happily died on us at the critical time of booking a cab. Eventually, we waddled like penguins through almost knee-high snow.

The scarce daylight brought no respite to the bone-chilling cold. One day, halfway through our walk, icicles formed on our eyelashes. Still, we kept hiking. We hiked to have the mouth-watering arctic char at the Bullock Bistro. We hiked to the NWT Diamond Centre to learn about the thriving local diamond-mining business.

Nights were different. We waited for the nights and its promise of the Northern Lights. On our second night in Yellowknife, we went on an

aurora hunting tour. Our bus frequently stopped at random locations. Our tour guide explained, “The aurora is formed when solar particles interfere with Earth’s magnetosphere and are guided along the Earth’s magnetic field towards the polar regions. When they hit Earth’s atmosphere, they collide with the atoms of oxygen and nitrogen, which causes them to emit light of a certain frequency of colour.” It amazed me how no one, for centuries, could perceive its association with the sun.

“Tonight, we will be hunting for auroras.” The guide appeared optimistic. We stared at the sky for hours. *Is it appearing from that side? What’s that dim light? Am I imagining it?* Around midnight, we headed back to our accommodation. Two nights and zero success.

“Maybe if we stay at one location, we have a better chance to see the aurora,” Kanchan suggested. So, the next night, we went to the famous “Aurora Village.” There were three enormous conical tepees. To the west stretched a vast expanse of nothingness, with chairs scattered and expectant tourists fiddling with their cameras. However, after two hours, we had lost hope. We were enjoying hot coffee and were warming up by the lit charcoal heater in our allotted tepee. Suddenly, we heard murmurs about the aurora. My heart raced in anticipation. We rushed outside, and there it was—a faint glow gradually exploding into a rich green aurora. It remained there for a minute before fading into obscurity. *Brief and splendid!* We realized that, unlike the pictures, actual Northern lights were much fainter. Also, most auroras were green in colour, quite unlike the scientific name “Aurora Borealis,” which means something like “the red dawn of the North” in Latin (Brekke 84). Anyways, our exposure settings were messed up, and our first aurora pictures were neither red nor green, but black.

The next night, we went with “Arctic Tours” to a remote location outside the town where the dreamy Yellowknife sky unfurled its green ribbon curtains to the heavens for us. But this inexplicable bliss was short-lived. As we were returning, our bus stopped midway and wouldn’t start. After ten minutes, I gripped Kanchan’s hands. *“This is how we die.”* At minus forty-five degrees, without a heater running, we’d freeze to death within hours. Fortunately, another bus was passing by and took us all in, and we sped back to safety. *Phew!*

Our time in Yellowknife was a crazy misadventure, with atrocious cold and bittersweet experiences. It was worth it, but I swear, I’d never go anywhere this cold again.

“I’m never allowing you to plan trips again,” I told Kanchan later.

“Fine,” she replied. “Then you have to plan the trip to Antarctica.”

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Falling in Love with Paris

CARLY NOONAN

I ALWAYS dreamed of travelling to Paris. There was something about Paris that beckoned me, and I knew I was destined to travel there one day. On June 13, 2008, my mother and I boarded a plane to Paris for a week-long trip. My mother raised me as a single parent, and going to Paris with her added much more meaning to the adventure. With her, I shared new experiences, embraced a different way of life, and enjoyed Parisian history.

We rented a little apartment on Rue Saint-Honoré. From the balcony we could see the top of the Eiffel Tower and the exterior of the Louvre. While adjusting to the time difference was a priority, we were eager to explore Paris. After a few short hours of rest, we decided to walk to the Tower. Some of the streets we wandered were narrower than others, but my mother took notice to the colourful buildings, saying, “I feel like we are walking in a painting” (Noonan). We also admired the architecture on many of the bridges connecting the banks along the Seine. Pont Alexandre III was my favourite bridge, with the golden statues and the way they sparkled in the sunset. As we walked, I knew we had truly fallen in love with Paris.

As we approached the Eiffel Tower, I could feel my dream coming true. To be at the famous monument “defined by artists in the 1920s as the symbol of modernity,” was breath-taking (“Tour”). Later that evening after returning to the apartment, my mother saw it first, suddenly calling, “Carly, come quick!” The Eiffel Tower was brought to life by 20,000 bulbs creating a champagne effect (“Tour”). I truly had no words for the scene, but I knew how grateful I was to be in Paris with her as we watched the Tower shimmer.

On our first official day in Paris we woke up to beautiful sunny skies. During breakfast my mother asked, "Where should we visit first?" I responded, "Let's spend the day at the Louvre." When the Louvre was originally constructed in 1190, it was built to be a fortress (Szalay); to date, it is still "one of the largest palaces" in the world (Elrich). I could tell it was huge from our balcony, but walking through it put the size in perspective. I remember being in awe as we explored the corridors of the museum, seeing the historic paintings and statues. However, the crowd of people trying to get close to the *Mona Lisa* was quite the scene. Imagine being at a red-carpet premiere trying to glimpse the stars; this was very similar, except the star was on a small canvas encased in plexiglass. It certainly is no wonder that the painting is "flanked by guards" to prevent the painting from going missing, as it did in 1911 (Szalay).

The next day, we explored Champs-Élysées. The avenue is well known for its cafés, gardens, and the Arc de Triomphe. Our brief visit to the Arc de Triomphe included watching the cars driving masterfully around it and pausing to recognize unknown soldiers who fell fighting for France during the World Wars. The weather was warm and sunny as we wandered down the avenue, so we decided to stop for a French-style luncheon on a patio with the most scrumptious chicken we had ever tasted, paired with white wine, embracing the Parisian lifestyle.

On the day we went to Le Musée d'Orsay, I noticed right away how much brighter and open it was compared to the Louvre. The museum was built in 1900 to serve as a railway station for the Paris Exposition (Dorling). Today, the museum is home to a large group of Impressionist paintings, which my mother was most excited about (Noonan). As a retired dancer, I was most excited to see the works of Edgar Degas who is famous for his ballerina paintings. I could imagine the sound of a piano, as if the dancers were dancing on canvas by the way he painted their movements.

On our visit to Notre Dame, walking through the cathedral and hearing the harmonious sound of the choir singing hymns brought a sense of calmness. The beautiful architecture humbled me. Picture the wooden beams, high ceilings, and detailed stained glass, all centuries old. Notre Dame has stood tall on Île de la Cité since the start of its construction, dated back to 1163. How fortunate we were to see it in its original glory, since much of it was destroyed in 2019 by a fire (Elrich).

Returning to the Eiffel Tower, we took the lifts up to the top, enjoying the 360-degree view of the city below with hundreds of other

travellers. Interestingly, the lifts' "annual journeys combined are equal to two and a half times around the world" ("Tour"). As I stood 1,063 feet from the ground watching the city move below, I pondered why, at twenty-one, I was not travelling more of the world.

The following day we visited Sacré-Cœur. Montmartre was so lively, with talented buskers and narrow streets with shops leading up to the church courtyard. We saw people dancing to a busker who was playing music on his accordion, which made it feel like we were in a French film (Noonan). I was told that the view of Paris was even more spectacular from the turrets of Sacré-Cœur, so I said, "Let's figure out how to go up." I was determined to figure out how to get up there (Noonan). We climbed nearly three hundred stone steps up spiral staircases to reach the turrets. The view from Sacré-Cœur was very different from the Eiffel Tower, and again I felt a sense of calm as I overlooked the beautiful scenery. For a brief few moments, we had the whole view to ourselves, leaving us to fully relax and take in the scene before descending the stairs, grazing my hand along the cold ancient stone column of the spiral staircase.

When I reflect back on the trip, I not only got to experience Paris in my twenties, but I got to experience it with my mother who is also my best friend. I fell in love not only with Paris, but with travelling. Being in your twenties is the best time to travel. This is the time to start figuring out who you are, and travelling is the best way to do this. While my more recent travels have included parts of Canada, Las Vegas, and New York City, I look forward to boarding the plane on my next adventure.

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Danger in Daylight

A Journey Towards Healing

AMANDA NORRIS

CITY HALL is not a place where anybody should feel unsafe. But after that brisk Thursday morning in September, I was left feeling as though safety was not a right that had been granted to society.

At the time, I was working as a customer-service representative at Waterfront Gifts and Apparel. I was also a creature of habit. Every day before work, I would sit down in the amphitheatre of Springer Market Square and drink an iced Americano and enjoy the calm before the storm. But September 6th was different.

Out of the corner of my eyes, as I sat down in the amphitheatre on the cold cement bench-style seating, drinking my iced Americano, I could see a man walking down the stairs to my left. People walk down these steps all the time, usually to go to the washrooms that are located below City Hall. But this man didn't go to the washroom. Instead, he walked towards me and sat down three feet to my right. The man quickly introduced himself as Pierre. Now, it isn't uncommon for strangers to approach me in public, but something was different about this situation.

"You're a very pretty young lady. I saw you walking downtown and followed you here," Pierre stated with hollowness in his voice. It sounded like his voice was going to shatter into a million pieces, just as my life was about to.

"Followed you here" played back in my mind. "How long had he been following me?" I thought to myself, but all I could muster out as a response was, "thank you."

The details of what follows are graphic, but once I was finally able to leave the amphitheatre, my life was forever changed, and I became known to the Kingston Police as Case ID #19587.

As a kid, I remember my mom always telling me never to walk alone at night because it wasn't safe for girls. What she didn't tell me, though, was that there was also danger in the daylight.

Being sexually assaulted by a stranger in a public space during the daytime was never a concern that had been on my radar. Up until that point, I had faith in humanity and was ignorant to the uncertainty of life. But after that day, I knew that I would never be able to go into a public space the same way again. I knew that no matter where I was, I wasn't safe.

I knew that I needed to protect myself. I needed a sense of security in my life again. Therapy is something that I had tried in the past and it had never been successful, so I knew immediately that that method of healing would not be adequate. Therapy also wouldn't be able to protect me in the real world. No matter what kinds of coping strategies I learned, I would always be vulnerable to strangers believing that my body was their property.

I needed something that could protect me at all hours of the day. I needed a companion. I needed a dog. Something that would love me unconditionally and be able to stay by my side 24/7.

I had always had a passion for animals. I grew up with cats and had a cat of my own at my student house. But a cat couldn't leave the house with me. A cat couldn't protect me, but a dog could.

My research started with a quick Google search: "lovable dog breeds." The first article that I came across was titled "15 Affectionate Dog Breeds Always Ready to Snuggle." Number nine on the list featured the English Bulldog, with the description stating that "they are calm with an easy-going temperament. They are great with children and over-the-top affectionate." One look at their wrinkly, smooshed faces and I was sold.

The more research that I did on the breed, the more in love I fell. Everything about the breed was exactly what I had been looking for. The only problem was that they were quite uncommon and extremely difficult to come across.

I spent countless weeks and sleepless nights searching for a suitable breeder. Every time that I thought I had found one, it would turn out to be a scam. Weeks went by where I felt hopeless in finding a Bulldog, until October 6th, 2018, exactly one month after the assault, when I came across a breeder by the name Vidics Bullies. To my luck, they had recently had a litter and still had unclaimed puppies.

Straight away, filled with an unexplainable combination of joy and relief, I sent the breeders an e-mail. The only issue was that I lived in Kingston and the breeders lived 390 kilometres away, in Palmerston, Ontario.

The next day when I checked my e-mail, there was a message in my inbox from Vidics Bullies. I had been approved to purchase one of their puppies, and they were willing to make the five-hour drive, for an additional cost, to deliver the dog. Since dogs should not be separated from their mothers before eight weeks of age, we decided on a delivery date of October 16th 2018, and the \$3,500 cost of adoption was sent to the breeders.

With my bank account close to empty after spending the majority of my student grants on the hefty adoption fee, I finally started to feel like it would be safe to leave my house again.

The night of October 15th, I could hardly sleep because of the excitement that would unravel the following day. I was adopting a dog that I had never met before, so I was certainly filled with my fair share of anxiety, as well. All of my fears and worries went away on the cloudy, dull morning of October 16th when I saw my puppy getting out of my breeders' car for the first time.

"Ava!" I yelled from across the park, and a little eight-week-old, potato-looking dog came wobbling towards me. She didn't know her name at the time but walked towards me nonetheless as if she knew that I was her new mom.

We have been inseparable ever since.

Although it cost an arm and a leg to adopt Ava, being her mom has been priceless. She has allowed me to feel safe within the world and shows me every day that the world, and the people in it, are not out to harm me—and that is something that money truly could not buy.

Boxed Moments

ANA VIDA NORRIS

THE LAMP cast enough light in the basement, but it got too warm on my forehead. My glasses were dusted with soil and green foliage powder; it added a patina to my vision. Earlier, I sat on the front steps of the porch while the neighbourhood kids rode their bikes as they enjoyed the freedom of summer afternoon. I had an old strawberry jam jar, the label faded from the dishwasher, and a small tarnished silver spoon that was bought for a dime from a thrift shop. Once the jar was practically full, I moved my operations inside. With a small tea sifter and patience, every scoop of clumped dirt turned into a fine powder. It was a lot of effort, but it would make everything perfect.

When I was younger, one of my favourite toys was the Polly Pocket. They had tiny furniture, arranged in a hard blue-green plastic clamshell, details of tiny flowers barely perceptible. With this clamshell, I can set up houses anywhere: in the garden, at our grandparent's house, even in my dad's study, tucked in a corner as he kept on working. I was fascinated with the size of it all.

My dad, an engineer who works closely with architects, would often indulge my fascination with tiny houses by showing me the model house dioramas his colleagues would make. These were precise replicas of actual houses to be built in a subdivision, with perfect manicured lawns, tiled bathrooms, and balconies overlooking the street.

The sifted, fine soil landed on the glue mixture, matte Modpodge with some tap water to thin it out, and it looked horrid and milky.

"Glue dries white," I reminded myself. "Don't adjust the colour, let this layer dry first!"

I had to do something else to stop picking and prodding at the drying glue, it always ends badly and needs to be redone. The focal figurine for

this piece was a small plastic bear from the Japanese Mobile Suit Gundam series. Normally, this one would be shiny and red, but a rubdown with fine grit sandpaper and a dusting of red and brown hued soft pastels with a hard bristle brush dulled the colour and suggested severe damage and rust.

My fascination with miniatures increased as I grew older. My family enjoyed watching crime shows, especially *CSI* (including both *Miami* and *New York* spinoffs). A seventh season episode featured Natalie Davis, the “Miniature Killer.” She would create elaborate dioramas of her crime scenes, providing the detectives with clues to her identity. The whole concept was based on Frances Glessner Lee’s *Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, which “explores the surprising intersection between craft and forensic science” (“Murder”).

“You should try making dioramas,” my dad said during a commercial break.

“It looks hard,” I said, as I played with the tassels on our living room pillows, “I’m not that creative.”

“I think you’re creative and crafty,” he said.

I never saw it that way. Frances Glessner Lee was creative and crafty. Her dioramas are intricately detailed, labels on tiny sacks of flour and cans of tomato soup, tiny stockings that were hand knit to fit the scene. Her dioramas depicted murders with no apparent causation, and it takes a trained eye to see all the clues laid out, so much so that law enforcement uses the dioramas as training tools. Frances Glessner Lee was creative and crafty, and I am not.

In my current project, the glue had finally dried to tacky consistency. The colour produced by mixing fresh soil and artificial green moss foliage mimicked the fertile earth with some grass seedlings peeking. I placed the bear in the middle of the scene, then to the corner left, a little to the right, a little lower. Its head was bowed low and one arm sat at an angle that suggested severed wiring and disuse. Frances Glessner Lee made dioramas out of murder scenes; I made mine of broken things.

Although I liked looking at dioramas, I never considered making them myself. They were time consuming, can be expensive, and the finished product takes up too much space. I moved to Canada and left my family and the life I knew behind. Barely a year into it, barely getting over the homesickness and the fear of whatever the future held, my dad suddenly died. I wanted to do something, I wanted to keep my busy hands busy, and I desperately needed a distraction.

“How about making dioramas?” my husband suggested, a couple of weeks after.

That afternoon, we bought a diorama kit, one of those used by middle- to high-school students for science projects and the like, and a more complicated Mobile Suit set, the type where you have to follow the instructions carefully lest a foot turns out the wrong way and the piece is thrown off completely. That diorama looked unpolished, hot glue peeking from underneath the plastic model, and the fake pebbles that were supposed to mimic nature looked too posed and almost ritualistic. That diorama has since been dismantled and reused in others, freeing up the issue of much needed space.

I have never considered myself creative, no matter what my dad used to say. “Creative” meant being good at crafting something from nothing. I am more comfortable calling myself “crafty with instruction.” I can make paper cranes or mend clothes or embroider tiny flowers on sweaters, as long as I have the instructions laid out before me. There is certain strictness to what my dad considered craftiness. In these boxed scenes, there is order in the chaos and a moment of reprieve from sorrow. With dioramas, I can make something from something else, fashion something into a scene that would find its permanence with a bit of super glue, pastels, and paint.

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High-Stakes Nuptials

KENDRA PIERROZ

SEEING THE place where my parents originally celebrated their wedding reception was terribly disappointing. But, as I walked into a disease-ridden hospital and was consumed with paralytic fear of catching COVID-19, the crumbling church seemed like a royal castle. I was about to officiate the wedding of a dying man named Carl, to his life partner Joanne of more than twenty years. The personal risk of catching the COVID-19 virus was consuming my thoughts, but my mission to help this couple make their relationship legal was my mission. The bride was a woman of my mother's age, and I thought back again to the crumbling church and my parent's wedding. I often love looking at my parents' wedding photos, taken before my mother's face was changed by disease, and while my father still considered fluffy tuxedo ruffles appropriate party attire.

Carl, the sick, hospitalized groom, could not safely stand in the chapel. I conducted a romantic, tear-filled ceremony in a portion his room, behind plexiglass. For just a moment, amid the quiet "I do's," I realized that this was the only wedding I had conducted where the bride and groom could not share a kiss.

After I got engaged, I excitedly interrogated my parents about the highlights of their nuptials. I often tell my parents about the weddings I work at, but seldom have asked of theirs, and recall it with pure and honest delight.

"We had our pictures done outside the church," my mother began, eager to describe a wedding moment she had clearly previously selected to intentionally share with me. My dad interjected and stole the show, as usual.

“And the exciting thing that happened there was that grandpa went ... ‘Pechuuuuuu.’” Dad gleefully mimed falling over with his right arm, making explosion motions with his fingers.

“He had a heart attack,” my mother finished. I couldn’t tell if she was more disappointed about the stolen story or the medical drama on her wedding day. As a wedding officiant and photographer, I often relish in observing the parental behaviour at weddings, medical emergencies ... included.

I immediately recall the summer of 2019 at a swanky Toronto wedding. The groom’s mother was visibly nervous to take the podium to speak, and heavily compensated with alcohol prior to her address. The entire reception watched as she immediately barfed post-toast behind what she presumed was a wall ... into a large palm-tree pot on the veranda. I later watched as she was tucked quietly into a hotel-bound car, openly weeping. In the spring of 2018, at a less polished Hamilton wedding, the father of the groom was asked to refrain from the constant cocaine consumption in the bathroom, and was later asked to leave the premises after a shoeless fistfight with another guest.

I have witnessed name-calling, the pulling of hair, shot-glass smashing at the weddings of many, many young Canadians. Carl and Joanne’s hospital wedding was much less celebratory. They wanted to get married so their last names matched on their tombstones.

In 2017, while swing dancing and drinking wine at a cousin’s wedding, my parents did not complete their youthful dance moves with grace. An ambulance took my parents to the hospital to set my mother’s obviously broken arm before the main course of dinner was served. I hope my own reception goes off with only small disasters, like that of the heart attack during my parent’s photos. While interrogating my parents about their wedding, I wanted to know if the reception was impacted or if the celebration changed because of the heart attack and missing guests (including two of my Mom’s grandparents).

“I think that everyone partied harder because it was like you just witnessed that someone could have died. We thought, let’s celebrate the good and pray that everything else works out.” The room held a beat after my mother’s reply.

“Oh yes. And it was the first wedding at Mohawk College. We had a live band, too. And the bartender was the bartender from the Army (the on-campus pub), and he was one of my classmates.”

“Where was the reception held at the college?” dad says in a tone that suggests I should have guessed.

“It was in the cafeteria.” Although I have attended weddings on top of towers, in small boats, and in many Starbucks across the GTA, I have never witnessed a cafeteria wedding. At least after my parent’s “college cafeteria” wedding, the budget-friendly pizza and champagne party I was currently planning didn’t seem so pale in comparison.

Always looking to sip the tea, and stewing with the information about an open bar, I saw my opening to get more info from my now-chatty parents.

“Did anyone hook up at your wedding?” I asked while my mother’s eyes winked knowingly.

“Just us.”

My grandmother hand-sewed my mom’s wedding dress, and my mother’s bridesmaids (there were three) all sewed their own matching dresses. Most of my girlfriends wouldn’t be able to identify a sewing machine, thread a needle, or draw a pattern, myself included. This art seems lost to the common “basic” modern woman in the modern world. A good thing, too. During the NYE wedding I worked this 2019, I saw bridesmaid’s nipples way too frequently for me to still get paid to be in attendance. I did not tell the maid of honour, Sarah, that she was not quite as proficient with the sewing machine as she had advertised.

I asked my parents how long they have been married for.

Mom cautiously recalls.

“About forty-four?”

Dad interrupted with calculated confidence.

“We are about to celebrate forty-five years.”

For me, it was the friendly congratulatory pranks that my dad’s classmates from college (all computer programmers and engineers) played on the newlyweds that was *absolutely* hilarious. The group of peers snuck off from the reception (probably after enjoying the bar), took the computer punch-card waste (the present-day equivalent of three-hole-punch circles), and dumped the entire contents of the operating room into the vents of the honeymoon car.

“It blasted out like confetti!” mom remembers, explaining the discovery as they rolled over the engine to drive away from the wedding to prepare for the romantic trip the next day. The airport adventures continued, and my father tells the tale of getting his luggage checked upon landing. He didn’t know until inspection that his pre-packed luggage had also been tampered with by his supportive college mates. The boys had emptied boxes of colourful children’s cereal into my parent’s luggage. Every nook, cranny, and shoe was crammed with this

delicious morning snack—which, of course, they had not appropriately declared to customs. The cereal chosen for my parents was my favourite, Froot Loops. I don't know what disasters will bless my reception, but if I can sit across from my children with my husband, and tell them about it in forty years, I just know that it will have been the best wedding ever.

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A Bridesmaid's Betrayal

MAEGAN PRICE

I STOOD at the front of the room clutching my bouquet and fidgeting with the ring. I was a nervous wreck, not for myself, but for the bride. Would she trip down the aisle? Would she stumble on her words during her vows like she did in rehearsal? Would she lose her nerve and run? My mind was racing through solutions to potential problems that could make my best friend's wedding a disaster. I wanted this to be the best day of her life, but only because I had finished grieving and accepted our new friendship. If these problems had arisen months earlier, I would have simply let them happen. I may have been the worst maid of honour ever.

Fourteen months before the wedding, Chae and I sat on the patio of our favourite Irish pub, watching tourists head towards Niagara Falls. It was peaceful, sipping sangria on a warm July afternoon until three fateful words were spoken.

"So, John proposed." Chae set her wine glass down. I was stunned. Chae and John had been together for two years, but this was unexpected.

"When?" I asked, trying to look excited.

"Yesterday. With a ring-shaped pancake...."

She continued her story, but I was processing this information. Although I did not know it then, this was when I began grieving the loss of our friendship. Grief has five common stages, in no particular order: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Holland). My first stage was anger. How could my best friend betray me like this? Marriage was never her plan; it was always mine, and she knew that (Marouf). I was hurt, and to top it off by stealing my life goals, she was also replacing me with something I couldn't compete with. I felt discarded like trash; apparently, our twelve-year friendship meant nothing.

“... and I said yes. So, you’re my maid of honour,” she finished. It wasn’t a question.

Denial set in eleven months before the wedding. Sitting in the uncomfortably stiff David’s Bridal chairs, we waited for Chae to reveal her first dress option. It felt strange sitting in that unfamiliar white world, like we were on a prank show. Surely, she would pop out of the dressing room yelling “Gotcha!” We couldn’t possibly be waiting for her to pick a wedding dress so she could actually wear it.

It’s typical during the denial stage to react to grief “by pretending the loss or change isn’t happening” (Holland). My feelings being normal did not help me feel better about the fact that my brain was trying to treat this moment like a challenge to pick the ugliest dress.

I was struggling. Half of me wanted to sabotage Chae’s plans to get her to call off the wedding, and the other half knew this wedding was inevitable. I needed to be strong for my friend. She was already stressed out from her mother’s lack of interest and her future mother-in-law’s overstepping, the last thing she needed was for me to be the Brutus to her Julius Caesar, so I fought to keep myself in line.

When the bridal shower arrived two months before the wedding, my anger and denial had subsided; I was onto the bargaining stage now. I was trying to “regain control” in hopes that I could “affect the outcome of the event,” as experts say (Holland).

By now, Chae’s mother was completely absent in the planning, so the shower fell on myself and John’s mother, Mary. My thoughts were focused on helping because that was my bargaining chip. I thought if I made this the best shower possible, Chae would consider me valuable and not abandon me after marriage.

I told Mary to cover the decorations with the florist, and I would handle the rest, including invitations, entertainment, food, prizes, favours, photos, and hosting. I cannot claim I did this all single-handed; I had help from others, but ultimately, I shouldered all responsibility. It was my last shred of hope our friendship would survive.

My bargaining stage affected the bachelorette party too, since I splurged for a hotel room that cost more than a rent payment. However, when that day came around one month before the wedding, my depression phase had begun.

Chae and I were staying in the room the night before, just us, because I selfishly wanted her all to myself one last time. We had just

gotten out of the jacuzzi and Chae made her way downstairs to the chair by the window overlooking Niagara Falls to peruse the room-service menu. Over the railing from the top floor, I watched my best friend sitting below. She had everything I ever wanted. A wonderful relationship, two beautiful children, a home of her own, a job she was incredible at, and now a wedding. I felt defeated, like I would never get to have what she had.

The phrase “always a bridesmaid, never a bride” is a cliché for a reason; many people feel like I did that night. One *Brides* article suggests dealing with this comment by remembering “My time will come” (Glantz), meaning our friendship would balance out again when I married. It didn’t feel like that. It felt as if the morning wasn’t bringing a wedding celebration, but rather a friendship funeral.

The night before the wedding, Chae and I stayed at the hotel she was getting married in. I was sprawled across the couch and she sat cross-legged on the floor, her laptop and a bottle of wine on the table between us. She was having trouble writing her speech.

“I can’t do this. What do I say?”

“Just say thank you and then talk to John as if no one else was there” I encouraged.

“Can you help?”

“Sure.”

She jotted some notes down and I typed them into a coherent speech.

“Change anything you need to,” I offered.

She nodded. “Thank you. I don’t know if I could have gotten through this without you. I know this hasn’t been easy for you.” She had been aware of my turmoil all along.

“I wouldn’t have done it if I couldn’t,” I said. In that moment I knew our friendship had changed and I was ready to accept that. People evolve, so do their relationships, and mourning something you will miss is acceptable. Our friendship wasn’t disappearing; it was simply evolving.

In the end, she never tripped down the aisle or stumbled on her words. She was elegant, beautiful, and joyous, and I could not have been happier for her.

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Just Another Day in Mexico

KATHRYN PURSE

IT WAS a blistering 42°C day in Mexico, so when we stopped at the corral to feed the horses I opted to stay in the blissfully cool truck. I leaned back in my seat and watched my partner, Mauricio, bring out the alfalfa. As all of our horses lined up to eat, I noticed Capricho, our large dapple-grey stallion, was agitated and stamping his back feet. Something was wrong. Mauricio tried to calm him, but then he also began stamping his feet. Suddenly they both turned and ran. With such a clear display of the flight response from two alpha males, all twenty horses then leapt away and began stampeding madly around.

As Mauricio ran towards me, his hat flew off and he started clawing at his face. A few seconds later he threw himself into the truck, and I was instantly transfixed—he was covered in bees. Hundreds of them clung to his body and wafted around him in a cloud, their incessant buzzing reached my ears only moments before their stingers did. In a split second I was out and running. My plan formed the instant I blundered out of the truck into an even larger cloud of bees: I would run home. I had been a sprinter in school, and it was an easy four-hundred-metre dash to my house. I could be there in a minute.

African bees were introduced to South America in 1956, with the intention of breeding a more productive strain of honeybee (Nicholls). Unfortunately, they escaped and bred with the local bee population, creating a new hybrid bee. These new Africanized bees arrived in Mexico by 1985, and quickly earned the nickname “killer bees” for their aggressive colony response when protecting their hive (Nicholls). The bees kept time with me as I ran, and each time they stung the back of my neck and shoulders it was as if they were prodding me to run a little faster. My house came into view, and I plunged my hand down into my

pocket as I sprinted up the cobblestone driveway, only to discover that I didn't have my keys. I couldn't get inside! So, I doubled back, shielding my eyes with my hand as I cut straight through the buzzing black cloud that followed me. The only thing I could think of was finding sanctuary. As I ran, I remembered our massive water cistern; with 500,000 litres of water nestled safely underground at the corral, it was like a deep, dark, subterranean lake. I could open the rusty old trap door and jump down into the cistern, and the safety of the water below ground, in a matter of seconds.

As I fled back to the corral, though, the memory of something splashing and chirping from the dark depths of the cistern came into my mind. I had grown used to that sound over the years, but now I felt alarmed by it. What lived down there? The cistern was part of an ancient water system on a hundred-acre farm, and crumbling old pipes connected it to at least three wells. I wondered if a snake could be living down there. A giant snake? Visions of the Basilisk from *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets* passed through my mind, and I began to cry. I had nowhere left to go; there was no sanctuary. I ran into Mauricio as I skidded around the corner of the corral, and he pulled off one of my shoes and chivalrously began beating the stinging bees off of me. Africanized bees are smaller than other bees and carry less venom. A person needs to receive approximately a thousand stings for a lethal dose (Nicholls). That is, of course, only if one is not allergic. Some five hundred people had died from bee stings in Mexico over a recent twenty-year period (Becerril et al.).

Through the chaos, there was the sound of a truck skidding to a halt and a voice hollering "Get in!" We turned to look through swollen eyes, and miraculously our neighbour, Moy, was there in his old pickup truck with the passenger door thrown open wide. He clung white knuckled to the steering wheel and shouted "*Run!*" We ran. Mauricio shoved me down the bench seat as he crammed in beside me and slammed the door. Then, without anyone speaking a word, we began slapping each other unapologetically until nothing was left buzzing in the truck. We sat in rigid silence for a moment, breathing heavily, and then began to thank Moy for saving our lives. As my eyes took in the sight of him, however, I was flooded with shock all over again. Moy's face was swollen up like a boiled tomato.

Forgoing any thanks, Mauricio shouted, "Are you allergic to bees?" "No, I don't think so," Moy said. "Why?"

“Your face...” I said, and gestured for him to look in the rear-view mirror.

He took one look at himself and gaped. “Dios Mio!” he said finally.

We sat in silence again, exhausted, scared, and not knowing what to do—then we heard the blessed sound of sirens.

The fire department had arrived, and we drove towards them through the melee. All around us the air was thick with bees; there were cars in the ditch, a woman was crawling on her hands and knees up the road, and firemen in white bee-keeper suits seemed to float past us in slow motion. Our truck inched by the bizarre apocalyptic scene; we could have been on the moon for all we knew. As we cleared the swarm we came upon an ambulance, and Moy almost rear-ended it as he slammed on the breaks and pulled up behind. The attendant talked non-stop as he examined each of us in turn.

“Someone disturbed a hive hidden in the wheel well of an old truck.”

He gave Moy an injection.

“When it swarmed it disrupted three more hives!”

He put the stethoscope to my chest.

“Then it turned into a bee war, I’ve never seen anything like it.”

He paused and listened closer before sitting back abruptly and staring at me.

“Have you ever been stung before?” he asked.

I had a hard time catching my breath to reply, “no.”

“We have to get you to the hospital. You’re having a heart attack!”

Then the doors of the ambulance slammed closed and the siren wailed as we sped off, and I thought to myself that it felt like we had fallen into a thriller novel, but it was just another day in Mexico.

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The End of the Season

AUSTEN REMME

WHEN I was little, I remember stealing lunch trays from the cafeteria and sneaking up the ski hill after dark. We would use them as toboggans, sitting on them as we raced down the snowy sections between the ski hills. I remember after the year-end banquet we would sneak out as quickly as possible to slide down the chute near the old lift. I mentioned the thought to my brother. I asked, “remember sliding down there?” I pointed past the deck into the trees,

“Of course I do!” He replied with a smile. “You almost flipped over the fence at the bottom.”

“That’s not what a dad likes to hear,” my father chimed in. He was sitting quietly looking out towards the ski hills. You could still make out the last skiers on the hill.

“I don’t think anyone will be sliding down there this season,” I said. My brother shot me a puzzled look. “The banquet was last night; I don’t think anyone would slide down there without snow.” The shale-covered chute did not look nearly as inviting.

“I don’t think we’ve had snow there for the last couple seasons. Kids will just have to get their sledding done during the winter.” The spring is usually the best time of the year at the ski club. The weather is a bit warmer, and March break has all of the kids out of school for a week, but with the changes in the weather, I’ve been seeing fewer families make the journey up from the city.

The sun was low in the sky and almost everyone was off the hill by now. I was sitting on the patio with my dad and my brother; the sun’s rays scattered as they collided with the glass railings. The deck was built to have the most amount of sunlight on spring afternoons, so the towering glass-faced structure behind us wouldn’t cast shade over the festivities.

We were sitting in the far corner where I could see the crowds bustling out the door, trying to get a piece of sunshine. From where I was sitting, I could see down to the creek that runs up between the two sections of the ski resort. The water was rushing quickly, and the large rocks that lined the shore glistened from the freshly melted snow. The melt continued up from the creek to the surrounding trees like a brown band staining the pristine snow-covered hills. Between the ski runs, dirt and old leaves replaced the beautiful untouched snow that had been there for months.

“We used to play up in that area.” My brother pointed to a brown spot that was just off the gravel path from the parking lot. “I don’t ever remember playing on dirt,” I replied. During the season, mounds of snow would be piled up there from the ploughs in the lot; we would dig out tunnels through the snowbanks. There would be crowds of kids fighting to stay on top, tumbling down the small snowy mountain. Now, there was a puddle that sunk into the muddy grass below. There should still be snow, given the time of year, but an early spring seems to be the new norm. The brand new chalet was massive so you would always be able to find a seat. The bar was always packed, and on a day like today the deck was full, as well. Every table outside was filled with jubilant members and guests who had shed their winter coats for a sunny March afternoon on the patio.

“I don’t think we could even fit this many people in the old chalet!” my dad thought out loud.

“Yeah. What a huge improvement,” my brother replied. I don’t remember the old chalet that way; I was younger, and it always seemed so big to me. The cozy fireplaces were always lit, and each room was usually crowded with families eating lunch or looking for an escape from the cold. The private ski club seemed like just that: private. The old chalet was traditional; it had a large clock tower, and the high ceilings were filled with old metal chandeliers. The walls were covered in old pictures of founding members or black-and-white photos of the ski club as it was years ago. Even then you could see the changes occurring through the years: new ski lifts, larger maintenance facilities, portable space for members’ lockers, and yet now the club feels like a new place. The modern lodge has the feel of an international ski resort. The maintenance area has grown with new technologies and more employees, as they try to fight off the ever-warmer temperatures. Most of my memories of the old lodge were from when I was young; the ski-up wooden deck would be filled at this time of year, but the new muddy

trail that you must walk on has dissuaded most of its usual patrons. Why walk through the mud when there is a beautiful patio down at the new lodge?

The three of us were gazing out at perfectly cut tree lines and the sculpted white slopes between them. “What will it look like years from now?” my dad asked. He had a serious look in his eye. Even with all the drinking and revelry going on around us, our table sat in silence for a moment. I thought about all the memories I’ve made here. I thought about the many seasons spent skiing and training until late March, and I look up and see the last skier of the day come down the hill in the late afternoon slush.

My brother replied, “Well, it’s not going to get any better.” I immediately felt uneasy. The place I loved most growing up is in danger. Every year, the spring and fall are seemingly encroaching on our winter season. Climate change is an ever-increasing problem and we are just beginning to see the repercussions. There may be a point where we cannot return. Eventually, our cutting-edge snowmaking systems will not be enough. In thirty years, we may see a shorter ski season. In fifty years, the season might be cut in half. Without a change of course, we are headed for the conclusion of winter skiing in eastern Canada.

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New Year's Eve in Brickell

LIV ROBB

AS I climbed on the back of the scooter, a wave of anxiety hit me. We shouldn't be doing this. We told our parents we were going for a quick walk to the Seven-Eleven one block over. That was a lie. Carlos held loosely on to the handles. I grasped his hands tightly. I put my other foot up on the scooter and carefully balanced. He pushed the ground with his right foot, and off we went on our electric scooter adventure through Brickell Avenue.

"I said hold my shoulders," Carlos exclaimed.

"I feel safer this way," I said as I squeezed his hands even tighter. He sighed and shook his head. Luckily, he didn't mention that I was giving him the death grip. We sped past noisy bars and the crowds that moved from bar to bar. It was New Year's Eve and I, a humble Nova Scotian, was speeding down the ever-so-fancy Brickell Avenue in Downtown Miami.

"How do you like Florida, Canadian?" Carlos piped up and asked.

"It's ..." My parents and I moved mid-November; however, our time so far was spent getting driver's licences, bank accounts, and furniture for the new house. It was exhausting. Therefore, this was my first time truly being out and about in this new place. I stared at the women clutching their Gucci handbags and men in fine suits that lined the street as we zoomed on forward. My gaze diverted to the skyline. It was littered with skyscrapers and neon lights radiating from them. "It's a lot different." I paused and closed my eyes for only a heartbeat, a quick heartbeat since my anxious heart raced faster than our scooter. "There's so many people here!" I said loudly. I swear people stared at me and that made me blush.

"Yeah, there's no one where you're from."

“Be nice! There’s plenty of people in Canada,” I shot back. “Okay, well maybe California has, like, more people than all of Canada,” I joked. He didn’t reply and we just kept speeding on down the avenue. We left behind the crowds and bars for more skyscrapers. It truly was a concrete jungle.

Carlos explained to me that they were mostly office buildings. “Master Card is one of these. That’s where my brother works.”

I let out a loud “wow” in response.

“It’s not that important,” Carlos shot back. But for me it was. Where were all of the big, important offices in Nova Scotia? Were there even any?

“Whatever,” I replied.

When I gazed to my right there was the ocean not too far off. I could make out the outline of a docked cruise ship. I knew the mini tropical paradise that was Key Biscayne wasn’t too far off from the marina. I knew where Key Biscayne was since I spent a lot of time trying to memorize the map of South Florida before moving. I was happy to still be living by a coast line. Maybe the vastness of the ocean is scary when you live away from it. However, the endless sea of blue nothingness has always felt homey for me. It is a sea of possibilities, metaphorically and literally.

“How much time do you spend in Brickell?” I asked, trying to make small talk.

“Whenever my brother gets the day off, I come to his apartment. It’s fun.” We continued zooming forward. We almost hit a lamppost and he steered dramatically to the right. The wide swing caused us to almost hit a couple who were walking past.

“Aye, permiso por favor. Lo siento!” Carlos shouted at them. I must have let out a “huh” because Carlos piped up, “It’s Miami, Canadian. Everyone speaks Spanish.”

“Oh, okay.... Wait! Stop calling me Canadian. You know my name.”

“Your name is Canadian. Sorry,” Carlos laughed loudly. I couldn’t help but to smile.

“Lo siento!” Carlos shouted again as we zoomed past a woman on a bench with her small dog. The dog barked angrily. I made a “I’m so sorry” face at her. I reflected back on what Carlos said about Miami. Everyone here did seem to know Spanish. I was overwhelmed since I couldn’t speak Spanish yet. But I was also excited. I grew up in Nova Scotia, raised by a Venezuelan mother. As far as we knew, she seemed

to be the only one in the province that spoke Spanish. But now here I was; I moved to the Spanish-speaking capital of the US with my family. I suddenly wondered how our parents were doing in the apartment.

"We should go back soon. It's getting late. We told them we were going to Seven-Eleven!" I shouted.

"Callate, Canadian. It's New Year's Eve—no rules until next year!" He sped up the scooter. Carlos, only thirteen, was probably having the time of his life. I was eighteen, a university freshman, and tired. I loudly repeated that we needed to go back right *now*. I tried to tempt him by saying that there was dinner in the apartment.

"Wait, wait, wait. I have to show you the *best* part of Brickell!" With that being said, he took a hard left turn. He glanced over his shoulder, saw that there were no cars coming and the scooter crossed the street in a rush.

"Carlos!" I yelled, getting angry. We jaywalked, or jay-scootered.

"It's New Year's Eve. There are no rules until midnight," he repeated. I huffed and sighed anxiously. I questioned where we were as we went down a parallel street.

"It's faster to the mall this way." I quizzed him about the "mall." Carlos laughed, "Yeah, didn't I tell you?"

"Oh, so that's where we are going. I guess it must be faster this way," I responded.

"It's not. I just wanted to bother you, Canadian." He took the next right. Then the next left. Back we were, zooming down Brickell Avenue. I noticed a large building in the distance. It was probably the mall, but I still commanded him to turn back around. He whined and did not listen to me.

The building turned out to be the mall. It was lit up by a sign that marked it "Brickell City Centre." We came to a screeching halt and I stumbled off. I looked up. It was pretty tall. I looked down. There were no doors. This was a mall? Carlos remarked that it was a community centre and it was open air. He parked the scooter and pulled out his phone. "Gotta reserve it so no hijo de puta takes it," Carlos said. I turned around and just stared at him. I firmly told him not to swear as I recognized his Spanish phrase. Carlos came up and put his hands on my shoulders. He was almost my height.

"I told you, Canadian. There are no rules until midnight!" He grappled my hand and pulled me forward and into the city centre. The first floor was lined with Coach, Prada, and Fendi. All shops were closed

down by the front window displays were still lit up. “The best stores are on the next floors. You like Chanel?” he asked.

“I can’t afford any of this,” I whispered. He must have not heard me, so I just nodded my head regardless of what my wallet told me to say. Carlos grabbed my hand and led me to the escalator. I shook him off and hesitated. He laughed loudly and bounded up the escalator. He yelled as he ran up, “No rules until 2020!”

Caregiver Kindness

SOPHIA RUTLEDGE

1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... breathe ... 1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... breathe. This was the calming mantra her counsellor had given her to try to quell the swirling in her gut when she felt panicked. She could admit that it did clear her mind a minute amount, but how could she possibly waste her time counting and breathing when she had three classes and two assignments today. Sophie, who was a first-year university student, had lived her life up to this point teetering between nervous and anxious. She could not remember a time when she had felt entirely at ease in her surroundings.

“Oh, she’s just shy,” her mom would say, glaring at Sophie and nudging her forwards to speak to her distant relatives.

“She’s really talkative at home,” her dad would joke to his friends. Which was right: she was loud and frivolous in the comfort of her home. But four-year-old Sophie didn’t understand why she couldn’t work up the courage to speak to these people. She couldn’t shake the funny feelings erupting in her tummy when she was forced to interact with anyone she didn’t live with. Even her grandparents made her nervous.

As time went on, it just got worse. Being driven to tears at school for having to write a pop quiz, not because Sophie didn’t know the answers, but because she didn’t like the change of routine. She also had developed the habit of throwing up whenever she was “nervous” or “feeling shy,” which had finally concerned her parents. The first time her parents took her to the counsellor, the girl was twelve years old. Throughout her high-school career, she saw the counsellor five times, which was more than what most of the “regular” students needed. Sophie thought that ending high school and moving on to post-secondary would help bring her out of her shell. What she didn’t know was that in the first

year of university, students are the most likely to drop out or even end their lives due to the stress and loneliness they endure from being away from home (Shackle).

Sophie was dutifully sitting in her psychology lecture one November morning, on the side and far enough back that there was no way the professor could even make eye contact with her. She was always conscious of that. Eye contact means getting noticed, getting noticed means she could be asked a question. Her thoughts questioned, *What if I don't know the answer?* What if she guessed wrong? Then everyone would know that she was stupid and unworthy of being in this school. This is how her brain worked every second of every day. Catastrophizing. That's what her counsellor called it. But Sophie just calls it the truth; her mind had been working against her for so long, she sometimes had trouble reasoning with herself that these cognitive distortions weren't real. They had become a reality.

"Okay, let's get started, everyone," the professor called out to the class just as the last few stragglers trickled into the lecture hall. "So, you probably saw from the syllabus that this week we will be focusing on mental illness and personality disorders," he finished. Unfortunately for Sophie, she was a bit behind on reading the syllabus and had not prepared herself for the triggering nature of this topic.

Oh, god, I hope they don't talk about.... The professor can't bring up ... what I feel, Sophie thought to herself. This was her worst nightmare; she could feel a steady torrent of discomfort move through her stomach. *What if everyone finds out?* Sophie had kept up appearances for most of her life; she suspected that only those closest to her could tell she was mentally ill. This topic was filling her with panic, and she knew that the upsurge of chaotic energy could potentially lead to a visible anxiety attack. An anxiety attack can come in many forms: some people have a flood of negative, panicked thoughts that peaks in ten minutes; others have physical sensations like shortness of breath and hot flashes. The list goes on almost infinitely, or so it seemed to Sophie. She was always searching the Web for the solution to her problems, usually exacerbating them in the process.

When the professor had finally come to anxiety and its symptoms and treatments, it became too much for Sophie. It started with a niggling thought, wondering if anyone was looking at her. Her eyes darted around, scanning the lecture hall, looking for any sign that a classmate had seen her panicked expression. A hot flush covered her face, and her breath became shallow. The thing is, in reality, no one was looking at

Sophie, because why would they? She was just a face in a sea of students.

“That’s it for today, everyone. Don’t forget to finish your modules online this week! See you all next class,” the professor called out to his students. Sophie felt a mixture of relief and fear as she realized she could finally leave without being noticed. Outside the building, she felt her head spin. Where could she go now? Her parents always told her never to be alone when her thoughts were jumbled. She thought for a beat and came to a quick solution. Michael, her older brother. Despite being four years her senior, they had always been exceptionally close growing up. Even during Michael’s awkward and angsty teenage years, he still took the time to hang out with his sister.

Sophie all but ran to her brother’s house, which was fifteen minutes from campus. Knocking on the old, beaten up, front door of the student house, Sophie felt queasy. What if he was too busy for her? What if he doesn’t want her around anymore? These were irrational thoughts again, though, because when he answered the door and saw the expression on her face, he gave her a smile that she could sense pity in and ushered her into the house and over to his bedroom. Caring for a loved one who deals with mental illness can be stressful but also make a person feel closer than ever to said loved one (Adelman 1053).

“Sit on my bed, Soph. I’ll make you some tea. I was playing some games so why don’t you sit and watch for a while, then you can talk when you’ve calmed down a bit?” To others, it would seem like her brother was brushing her off, but this is what he did whenever his sister was overwhelmed. She was always cheered up by his running commentary on the video games he played. He even set up his games in her room when their grandmother died. To Sophie, this was the best medicine for her bad mental-health days. This was a good fix until she was prescribed antidepressants. The love from a caregiver during times of duress for an individual with mental illness is a piece in the puzzle to creating a barrier to block negative thoughts and reactions to situations out of their control.

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Sometimes the Seemingly Impossible

AISLING SAMPSON

I KNOCKED again. Through the tall window across the stairwell, I could see treetops rimmed with gold in the early evening sunlight. Everything fit Katrin's descriptions exactly. The white stairs. The scrubbed white walls. The white roll of receipt paper suspended from a nail by a length of rough twine. The bright blue pencil hung beside it. Last summer, Katrin told me this method of leaving written notes is common to many flats in East Berlin, where working phones were scarce. Or tapped. We met almost exactly one year ago when Berlin was still split in two, and I had no idea I'd return so soon. I knocked again, wondering if I would find Katrin here.

When I met Katrin by chance during my day trip to East Berlin in the summer of 1989, we had a meeting of minds. We talked and laughed our way through the city as if we had always known each other. My world was full of promise. Like so many other grads, I celebrated completing my studies with a backpack and Eurorail pass. That summer, no one anticipated the changing global landscape, the upcoming East German protests, or the end of Honecker's iron-fisted reign as the leader of East Germany. Then, we couldn't have imagined that Katrin would ever be permitted to leave the Eastern bloc.

"Westerners think the Holocaust isn't taught in Soviet countries," I said, surprised to find a Holocaust memorial in East Berlin. We stood by the Große Hamburger Straße ghetto and Holocaust memorial, a haunting statue of small, slightly abstracted bronze figures arranged on a square grey stone pedestal. Their humanity was mesmerizing.

"We do learn a little about Hitler, but not in any detail," Katrin said. "The evil of fascism is the bigger focus." We continued walking. "There

are so many restrictions to what we're taught. You know, I'm lucky. My mum hid caches of books from her university days, so I've read a lot of banned books. Sadly, during the crackdown,¹ the Stasi found one of her book caches. We all pay for that still. None of us have a phone. The toilet in my mum's flat is broken for seven years now." Katrin stopped momentarily. "Even though I had the marks, I wasn't allowed to write my university entrance exam, the abitur, after my technical abitur. So!" She snapped her fingers. "No university for me."

Propelled forwards by the inequity, Katrin quickened her pace. "Worse thing is, they found that cache before I could read the books. The Bible was in there. I've never read it." Her frustration was palpable. "There are so many stories that I don't know. I see a painting, *Rachel at the Well*, but I have no idea of the story. Who is Rachel? Why is she at the well? Authors use her as a metaphor, but what do they mean? I've missed so much; it feels as if I'm blind."

Until that moment, I thought I understood all the benefits that the happy accident of being born a Canadian granted me. Katrin and I were so similar in our age, attitude, and outlook. But her life choices were constricted in ways that I couldn't begin to know.

The glass prism made the flames dance gold on pale marble walls. They faded before they touched the ceiling, making it seem impossibly out of reach. "This monument is my favourite," Katrin said. "The broken eternal flame, Neue Wache. The memorial to victims of fascism and militarism." In 1989, Honecker's East Germany—the jewel of the Soviet Empire—was the most militarized country on earth (Thompson).

We walked to the Unter de Linden, zig-zagging our way towards Friedrichstraße Station, where foreigners on foot accessed the U-bahn to cross between East and West. We talked about politics and Honecker. "His approval of the Tiananmen Square massacre horrified us all," she said. "Honecker will never give up power. He has complete disdain for Gorbachev and his promises of *glasnost*.² We're worried more restrictions are coming. Hungary will be closed to us in the new year because Honecker thinks, 'Hungary has gone West.'" Katrin made a face, then brightened. "Would you believe I got travel papers for Hungary? I'm going in November, while it's still open. I'll send you a post card." As we approached the station, Katrin nudged my arm, "That way." We slipped around a corner. "It's a good idea to be out of sight from the guards to exchange addresses." Even without our modern

technologies, Stasi surveillance had a broad and terrifying reach (Bailey).

It's been thirty years since I was last in Berlin and watched the borders dividing the city dissolve. I look at my teenage boys planning for university and seeking their place in the world, and I wonder about the future they face. In a few years, they will be the age I was when I met Katrin, and the iron curtain fell. Then I didn't think that we'd replace the old East and West divisions with growing gaps between the haves and have-nots and polarized politics. Governments manipulate information, spreading propaganda with fake social-media accounts (Borger). Bots spew anti-Muslim messaging and deny climate change (Townsend). Yet, civil unrest against authoritarianism and youth-led civil rights protests swept the globe in 2019 (Hribernik and Haynes), reminding me of the anti-Apartheid and pro-democracy protests of the 1980s. Small things have changed; tweets and texts replaced pencilled notes slipped under the door, but the passion of youth remains. Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg embody the younger generations' spirit, galvanizing us to succeed where we once failed and build an equitable future. When nay-sayers belittle their generation's youthful aspirations for a better world, I remind my boys: the seemingly impossible became a reality in 1989. Since that has happened once, it could happen again.

"Last try," I said, knocking again.

"Are you looking for Katrin?" A young blonde woman leaned over the stair railing.

"Yes," I nodded. "We met last year."

"Ah! You're the Canadian! I'm sorry, she's gone—she was one of the first to leave. Before the wall fell—she left everything behind."

"Should I ... ?" I gestured to the message paper roll.

She shook her head. "Katrin vowed never to set foot in the East again. I don't know how to reach her."

I thanked her and descended the stairs.

Stepping into gold sunlight, I smiled.

NOTES

¹Refers to the 1976 Crackdown. See Lentz.

²Gorbachev's program of increased transparency, open dialogue, and decentralization.

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Pretty

Yael Schechter

I ROSE from the floor, lightheaded, and wiped my face. I didn't want to throw up in G's studio, so I used the café down the block. It was a coffee and a croissant I couldn't keep.

I would throw up anywhere, that was routine, but I felt that the studio was off limits for that. It wasn't as if G didn't know I was throwing up. I was a model after all. We all had some form of eating disorders, even those who ate. G was a photographer and I clung to him during my time in the city. Maybe I thought that the studio represented a place of "perfect images" and so a place where I should be perfectly healthy too.

I was a brand new model, freshly signed at a reputable modelling agency. Only months before I had walked into the mirrored and marbled lobby and stood cold under the enormous chandelier, transfixed to the thousands of shimmering shards reflecting my face from all sides. It was 1994, era of the super models. Who didn't want to be a model?

I grew up in a rural village with dogs and horses, where my tree climbing earned me the nick name "Mowgli." I ran barefoot on hot asphalt and sat over a tractor's wheel driven by my underaged brother through deep mud and cattle fields. We had no magazines or MTV at home, and I did not grow up thinking I was pretty. "Pretty" for me was the one ballerina from our rural school, "pretty" belonged to my imagination.

At fourteen that had changed, but no amount of attention made me think I was pretty. Then the super models' glossy images managed to make me believe that they had something I wanted, and with the persisting encouragements of a friend the world seemed suddenly so promising: "You're so pretty, you should become a model."

The morning of my second meeting with the agency I get up early, tiptoe downstairs and out into the back yard. My dog Pups yawns and stretches to see me as I skim across the dewy and patchy grass. I wriggle into my still-moist jeans picked off the laundry line, tuck some money in my pocket, and after sending the nosy Pups back home I hitch-hike to the nearest bus stop. In the agency they hand me a tiny bikini to change into. I am ushered into an empty, fluorescent-lit room with no windows. With me come in two men and a woman. I stand in the middle of the room, the woman holding a note pad, the men circle around me and appraise my appearance as if inspecting new goods.

"A couple of scars, one tattoo," says one of them.

He leans towards my face so we nearly touch, smelling strongly of cologne. "Nice nose, blue eyes."

"Smile," says the other man, standing a step away. I am becoming acutely aware of every inch of my external self. I'm being stared at, but not the way the boys at school do or the older men in town. I am evaluated differently here, studied for a potential to generate something else, other needs. Perhaps it is my willingness to remain passively objectified that is tested too. Next, my weight: "fifty-five kilograms," the woman confirms. A measuring tape quickly fills the rest of check boxes.

I sit at the agency's lounge sipping water. Someone tosses a pile of magazines on the large glass table top. "The 'Guess' look," says a middle-aged woman in a buttoned polyester suit, and points to a few examples. Bubbly blondes in bras, she means. She is from Paris, she tells me with significance.

Next, I'm interviewed. Tell us about yourself, it's for a newspaper. I tell them about my dogs, my diet (no mentioning of throwing up), my favourite things. "Modelling has never been my dream," they quote me.

Back home, the village grocer leaves the published pages open by the cash register for everyone to see. A few days later, on the bus, a young man walks by my seat and stops to ask, "were you in the newspaper?"

"Yes," I say.

"Wow!" he smirks.

Yes, wow.

The bus was taking me back to the city where I was scheduled for a photo shoot the next day. The agency had persuaded me to participate in a beauty pageant called "Discovery of the Year," something I felt pressured to accept under the recommending rationale that it would be the best promotion I could ask for.

I spend that night at G's apartment. Early the next morning I go for a walk by myself, where I stop for the coffee and the croissant.

If only I had wanted this.

Preparations for a shoot: stylists are working on my outfit, hair, makeup. The mirror reflects someone I don't recognize. I am starting to cry. The make-up man is obviously annoyed. "She's smudging!"

G takes me aside; everyone takes a break. I follow him out of the studio into the street.

"When was the last time you had anything to eat?" he asks. "Let's stop at the grocer. Pick anything you want."

I pick one Granny Smith apple.

We sit on a bench near an overflowing garbage can not far from the market. G's steel blue eyes gaze at me while I nibble the apple. The camera is still hanging around his neck.

"Yael, it wasn't the best choice for your look, I agree," he says. "The gold and all that black lace ... but we can't let this opportunity slip by. I have a good feeling for you." I get up and start walking slowly and not in the direction of the studio. He snaps some pictures right then and there in the street.

I didn't become a "Guess Girl." I quit the competition shortly before the event. Did I lose by turning down a promising modelling career? I don't know. Over time, I learned to say that it wasn't so much that the opportunity slipped by as much as *I let it slip by me*.

I am holding a copy of that 1994 magazine. The girl who had lived my youth for me is looking back at me from black-and-white photographs, mute and frozen in "perfect images" forever: a bubbly blond in a bra. But I want to feel something else for her, for I know what went on behind this shiny-eyed teen whose makeup-free face was the result of tears, not some marketing trick.

Less Than Two Years

SAMANTHA SCIARRA

LIKE MANY Italian immigrants, a large boat sailing west across the Atlantic was the vessel leading to a new life, a new home, and new adventures. Felice stared over the railing of the large vessel. As a strong and independent thirty-year-old man, he knew he would be able to support his young wife and newborn son. As land came into view and he stared at Nova Scotia before him, he was ready to take the necessary steps for a better life for his family.

The delivery men gently closed the front door behind them. They made their way back to their truck. They were in and out of the house three times to deliver everything. My grandfather watched from his chair near the front window. He sat silently at the front of the house, staring out the window, expressionless. He did not get up once, or offer to help. As the hospital bed was carried through the hallway to the back bedroom, he didn't even flinch. His face gaunt from the sickness, his skin slightly grey, he slowly stood. "I knew I was sick, but I didn't think this." As he stood in the entrance of his bedroom, he wouldn't go inside. Not yet. He could still walk, he could still move on his own, and he knew that the hospital bed was waiting for him. He knew that once he got into that bed, he would not get out.

On average, approximately 500,000 people die of pancreatic cancer every year. The majority of the cases of pancreatic cancer are discovered in the body at stage four, and patients are not given long to live. Felice's three children spoke with numerous doctors on what could be done to help him. "We can make him comfortable at home. Someone will come see him every day, make sure he has all the necessities, and be there to help with anything around the house." Another doctor suggested chemotherapy, but only gave him six months to live. The final doctor

they spoke to that day was the most honest and blunt. "Your father is not going to live for longer than six weeks; he will get significantly worse each day. Whatever your father would like to do is his choice, but I do not recommend chemo, it won't help. Try to make him as comfortable at home as possible, and please start preparing funeral arrangements. Please start preparing yourself to say goodbye to your father very soon." Felice celebrated his eightieth birthday seventy-four days before he died. His eightieth year was supposed to be filled with joy. Instead, it was filled with sobs of crying relatives by his bedside and the slow morphine drip through to the vein in his arm. Surrounded by his three children and his wife, he took his final breath and fell asleep peacefully. In Italian tradition, relatives and close friends gather in the house after the person has died to say their final goodbyes. The first person to arrive at the house was my other grandfather, Antonio.

Antonio and Felice were very close. Antonio's daughter and Felice's son were married thirty years ago. The two men grew to know each other and like each other. They were both from Italy, spoke the same language, and had the same interests. "How could he get sick? I still don't believe." I follow him to the cold cellar; we needed to make room for the new bushels of tomatoes. He slowly bent to his knees, holding the shelving that lined the walls as support. He blindly hands over a jar of tomato sauce as he crawled deeper into the cold cellar. He was a large Italian man. The walls of the cellar seemed to shrink around him as he continued to crawl. Large callused hands moved objects around the back of the cellar until he found the box of jars. His exterior, his voice, and his physical presence screamed rough and tough, yet the tears in his eyes make him vulnerable and scared. "What can we do? This is life, it's no easy. We have to accept." His broken English comes out strained as he makes his way out of the cellar. "Nothing we can do."

A year and a half after Felice died, Antonio was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver and cancer of the liver. Antonio wasn't offered chemotherapy. His liver was not strong enough to handle it. Over the course of six months, the rough and tough figure of the strong Italian man became minimal. His six-foot-four-inch frame deflated like an old birthday balloon, his large callused hands became as frail as kindling. The normally joyous colour of yellow became the colour of sickness as jaundice crept over his body. One week before his death, he was transported by ambulance to the nearest hospital. He refused every medication offered and he was angry with everyone who spoke to him. He ignored his wife and his children when he asked how he was. He

would pretend he was asleep when someone came to visit him, and he refused to eat anything. As his sickness progressed he would mumble under his breath “God beat me. He won. I was supposed to live ‘til ninety-five, like my father.” He was upset and mad that he was sick. He was upset that someone as healthy as him contracted a sickness and was going to die earlier than he planned. Upset that he had to go the same way Felice did.

Antonio celebrated his eighty-second birthday eighteen days before he died. Every night after work I would go and visit the hospital. The night of his death, I drove into the parking lot and I instantly knew. The hospital parking lot packed as if it was Black Friday at the mall. My aunt, standing on the corner of the sidewalk, smoking a cigarette, waved slightly as I pulled through the gates and punched the machine for a ticket. I punched that machine harder than necessary. That machine gave me a twenty dollar ticket to see my grandfather for the last time. My leg shook as I anxiously waited for the machine to spit out my ticket. The arm of the gate took ages to lift, as if it was moving in slow motion. I parked in the closest spot possible and ran to the front of the hospital to meet my aunt. Her sunken eyes were filled with tears as she shook her head and engulfed me in a hug.

Two strong, rugged, independent Italian men were gone from my life. Two men who fought their way through wars, travelled to Canada on a boat, each with only one suitcase. Who learned to speak English and raised two families on very limited means. Gone were the powerful, tough, and yet kindly men that I was lucky enough to have as part of my life for twenty-six years. Gone. In less than two years.

All the World's A Stage But I Can't Afford the Price of Admission

HOLLY SELIGA

I'VE ALWAYS known that university was never an option for me. Even our local community college had a steeper tuition price than I could afford on my own.¹ Mom was already pulling night shifts to pay for rent, and Spencer and I had long grown accustomed to our daily dinner of Wonder Bread and Nutella sandwiches.² We'd been living in subsidized housing since my parents divorced a couple years back, and although it wasn't the most glamorous of lifestyles, it wasn't until public school that I began to recognize how different my life appeared compared to all my friends.... How different it might always be.

"What do you think of this one?"

Sitting across from me, Alice's peppy voice cut through the chatter of the café and caused me to glimpse up, albeit briefly, from my textbook. She was scrolling through a Pinterest feed, pinning decoration ideas for her residence room at Queen's University, grinning ear to ear and nearly bouncing in her chair from enthusiasm.

"I don't have a Polaroid camera, but don'tcha think it would be cute if I bought one soon and started hanging photos on my walls like this?"

A brief glance at the photo showed an angled picture of some perfectly white dorm room, with fringed throw pillows and a wall of indistinguishable photos spelling out the word "Love!" I shrugged.

"Yeah, that looks great."

I knew from the pause in conversation that I had responded incorrectly. What Alice was really looking for was someone who would reciprocate the same kind of excitement that she was feeling, but at that

exact moment, I just couldn't muster it. I glimpsed down at my phone again briefly and feigned a reaction from a fake text.

"Oh, sorry, Alice, my mom just texted me. It sounds like she's having trouble with Spencer again. Um, I should probably go check and make sure everything's okay," I lied through my teeth.

Alice frowned, lines of concern appearing on her forehead, and she reached out for my hand.

"Is he okay? Do you need anything?" Her voice was laced with genuine worry, but we both knew that even if Spencer was actually going through a withdrawal episode again, she would be far out of her element when it came to helping out.³

"No, no we're okay. I just want to make sure my mom's not freaking out." I squeezed her hand reassuringly before sliding it from her grasp and packing up my school supplies. As I got up to leave, I hesitated briefly and looked back at Alice.

"That dorm photo looks super cute; you should definitely get a Polaroid."

She flashed a smile and I watched the worry melt from her features as she looked back down at her Pinterest board.

On my walk home, I pulled the headphones out of my ears and shoved them in my pocket. Mental clarity was what I needed. I wasn't sure why today had set me off, but as September crept closer, I seemed to be having more bad days than good. I could feel a headache beginning to pulse behind my eyes.⁴

I remember the first time I was unable to attend a school field trip in elementary because mom didn't have the money for it. We had been studying the ocean ecosystem, so my teacher wanted to bring us to the local aquarium. I don't remember the exact admission cost, but I do remember the look on mom's face when I asked her for it.

"Oh, um, honey.... I'm sorry, baby, but I don't think you can go."

"What do you mean?" I was definitely teetering on a hissy fit, thinking she was punishing me for some fight Spencer and I might have had that day.

"We'll go soon, just the two of us! I'm sorry, Shelly, it's just not going to work right now."

Over the years I began to understand that the concept of "soon," used many times by my mom to describe the date when we would finally participate in all these activities, was unlikely to ever arrive. The word was comforting enough to give me real hope, and it was close enough to the circumstances it felt possible. But that realness meant I could, and

often did, still experience disappointment when “soon” never arrived.⁵ On the contrary, when I listened to Alice talk to me about how “soon” she was going to university, I knew that she had a real arrival date pencilled in on her calendar. One she had never questioned. What is it like, I wondered, never to have to face certain kinds of disappointment?⁶

“Stupid dorm room,” I muttered under my breath.

A car horn knocked me back to reality, and I took a right off the main street to get away from some of the noise. Trundling up Edworthy Street, I lifted my gaze from my feet and surveyed the houses around me.

There, on the corner of the street, were Mr and Mrs Eley. They had lived there since we had moved in, and Mr Eley worked at a drycleaner’s down the way. Spencer and I used to go over there for dinner when mom was working a night shift and couldn’t pay for a babysitter. It always smelt funny, like when you leave wet clothing in a bag for a long time and pull it out a week later. Musty, I guess.

I kicked a broken beer bottle out of my way as I turned right into our dishevelled yard and took the stairs up to the front door two at a time.

“Mom? Spencer?” I yelled down the hallway, the door still ajar behind me. Some muffled reply from upstairs signified my brother was home, but that was it. Sliding my backpack off my shoulder, it landed with a soft thump on the linoleum floor, next to the entry table stacked with recent mail.

“General Electric, Hydro One, Bell....” I flipped through the stack half-heartedly, scanning for anything other than an overdue bill. The familiar pit in my stomach began to churn again, and I pictured Alice’s shining face. One brightly coloured flyer caught my eye and I pulled it from the array. Pictured were two students sitting with linked arms on the front lawn of a campus, grinning cheerily back at me.

“University starts soon! Come to Staples to pick up everything you need for the big move.”

I grimaced. Crumpling the flyer, I tossed it back on the pile.

“Soon,” I grumbled. “Yeah, where have I heard that before?”

NOTES

¹Last year, the average price tag for an undergraduate degree per year for domestic students was \$6,500, not including the hundreds of dollars in mandatory fees to cover anything from health to sports services, nor does it include room and board, groceries, extracurricular costs, etc. Specialized degrees can start at a base foundation of thirteen thousand dollars and move upwards from there. For a high-school student working a minimum-wage job,

to pay off their *first-year* university costs would require them to work a minimum of five hours a day, four days a week, for an entire year (assuming a minimum wage of fifteen dollars an hour).

²One of the impacts of economic deprivation is the stress that results from a compromised diet, and the strain on psychological resources due to food insecurity. Studies have proven that lower diet quality (low-cost energy-rich starches, added sugars, and vegetable fats) separates lower-income households from more affluent Canadians (likely to purchase whole grains, seafood, lean meats, and fresh produce). Lack of proper nutrition, however, also leads to reduced working memory, cognitive skills, language development, and reading acquisition.

³Though some claim that addiction is an “equal-opportunity destroyer,” it is far less likely to impact those who have stable and structured lives with decent employment. Heroin addiction, as an example, is three times more common in socioeconomic groups that make less than twenty thousand dollars a year as compared to those who make fifty thousand. A combination of factors, including financial stress, lack of education about substance abuse, and insufficient resources for treatment can all catalyze an environment conducive to increased use of substances.

⁴“Allostatic load” refers to the price that the body must pay for being forced to adapt to adverse physiological situations, derived from the presence of too much stress or deprivation.

⁵Children growing up in low-income families learn from an early age to limit expectations of what their parents can afford, leading them to reduce hopes and aspirations for the future. Attributes that relate to motivation, coping strategies, self-esteem, and emotional well-being are all behaviours whose degree of manifestation has been linked to socioeconomic status.

⁶“The Great Gatsby Curve” is an economic measure that illustrates the correlation between generational mobility and income inequality, which hypothesizes that rich children are “predestined” to grow up wealthy whereas those who begin poor are likely to remain impoverished in adulthood. According to projections, the advantages of income passed from parents to children is predicted to rise by about a quarter for the next generation. With this wealth comes “access to opportunities ... quality education, health care, and a safe environment.”

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Eternal

DARA SHEERE

HE SOARED weightlessly through the sky one frigid winter afternoon, just as he had a hundred times before. The sky was his home. The hum and buzz of the plane propeller was a symphony to his ears, the boom of the engine like his own beating heart. Nestled within the familiar walls of the cockpit, face lit by the glare of the control system, he was never more at ease. His body was one with the plane, attuned to its every movement.

A knot formed abruptly in the pit of his stomach. His heart raced so violently it rang in his ears. Thump, thump, thump. He could feel the plane's sudden sense of malaise, as though its ailments were his own. He knew right away what was happening, but he wished he was wrong. Cold temperatures could wreak havoc on a plane, he was well aware of that. A blizzard was rolling in before take-off, and his co-pilot was adamant they get home before the storm got too thick. The idea hadn't seemed too unreasonable to him at the time.

"Let's go, Jack," his friend pleaded with him. "If we don't take off now, we'll be stuck here." He listened, silencing his initial apprehension. How bad could it be, right?

The engine sputtered and died, and the plane began its urgent descent back to earth. They plummeted from the sky, the lake below looming closer and closer. He was calm despite the chaos, his faith in the beloved machine unwavering still. As he reached for the controls, a flicker of gold caught his eye. He removed his watch and gripped it between his teeth to keep it dry. A cherished anniversary present from his wife, he would make sure it would survive the crash.

He yelled at his co-pilot to bail just moments before the tiny plane plunged into the choppy water. Eluding the clutch of the cockpit, he

surfaced. There was a brief moment of relief before the dark recognition. Treading water, he frantically scanned his surroundings. His friend was nowhere to be seen. Without wasting a minute, he dove back into the water's swirling embrace to retrieve his friend, who hung upside down from his seatbelt in the sinking aircraft. They had survived against all odds, although this wouldn't surprise those who knew him. Death was no match for my grandpa.

"Tell me the story again, Poppy!" I would beg. I had heard this story and others like it a hundred times. Each time I was held fast by every minute detail. Perched safely on his lap, I held on for dear life as he bounced me vigorously on one knee and described the plane's turbulent descent. His little co-pilot. The stories were his, but they felt like *ours*. He was larger than life to many, but to me he was more. My grandpa, the superhero. My ten-year-old mind imagined him swinging from buildings and fighting crime, ideas that didn't seem far-fetched at the time. He would joke that he had nine lives and I would believe him.

"How many lives do you have left?" I would ask eagerly. His response never more than a raised finger to his lips, as if he was keeping a secret.

The room is blindingly white and painfully quiet. The only noise comes from the beep of the heart-monitoring machine and my grandpa's strained, shallow breathing. I gaze in disbelief at the man who lay before me. I cannot reconcile the image of him with the one that exists in my mind. The strong, lively, energetic man now lay frail and motionless, nestled among countless layers of blankets. He looks funny to me with a skinny tube up his nose, and I wonder if it gives him his superpowers. Sitting by his side, I contemplate how he'll save the day this time. Surely, he has some trick up his sleeve. I squeeze his hand to signal that he can stop pretending. He doesn't move.

Just outside the door I can hear my parents chattering with doctors, nurses, and social workers. No one has good news, but none of them know my grandpa. They don't know what he can survive, that this will be no more than another story for him to collect. I daydream about how he'll tell this one, overjoyed that I won't have to imagine myself in it this time. The events unfold in my mind: he'll open his eyes, wink at me, and leap out of bed. Together we'll skip away, laughing at everyone who fell for his silly joke.

“Poppy might not ever wake up again, honey,” my parents explain, “the machines are breathing for—” I plug my ears to silence them, returning instead to my fantasies. My mind is its own planet, its existence lay miles beyond the clutch of their words. When I close my eyes, I hear my grandpa’s laugh, feel the bounce of his knee, see the flicker of his watch. I keep my eyes closed tight, abandoning the image of my grandpa in front of me for the one that exists in my mind. I could hardly wait for the day we proved everyone wrong, the ultimate *I told you so* moment.

I plummeted from the sky. I tried to remain calm despite the chaos, my faith in my grandpa unwavering still. The teary-eyed phone call, the final visit to that painfully white room, the sharp features of the wooden casket, the smooth edges of the granite tombstone. Captured by the turbulent waters of grief and loss, I frantically grasp for my fantasy world. When will he come to save his little co-pilot? I sink deeper and deeper as I wait for him. I struggle against the water’s current; its force threatens to swallow me whole. I kick and thrash unrelentingly. Is he coming back for me? Exhausted, I surrender at last to the water’s swirling embrace.

My grandpa wasn’t a superhero, I know this now. This knowledge fills the emptiness within me. No longer hollow, I float up and up, my body as light as air. Escaping the darkness, I break through the water’s surface. Rays of sunlight kiss my skin. I look to the clear sky and feel its bright glow course through me. I can see him way up there, at home once more. He soars weightlessly, just as he has a hundred times before. When I blink, he is gone, but his presence remains. I smile at the realization, I’m finally in on his secret. His ninth life is an eternity, his vibrant existence persevered in his stories—*our* stories.

Death was no match for my grandpa.

A Trip of a Lifetime

SOFIE SHETININA

TONIGHT MARKS the seventh night that I have spent travelling in Chennai, and I find myself strangely feeling a part of the culture here, despite being 8,307 miles from home. I have never before experienced such a sentiment of being integrated into a foreign society with such ease and effortlessness. Back home in Toronto I was *somebody*; I had a family, friends, and a structured routine. I was just *me*; the Russian girl with the oddly long blonde hair just trying to get through eleventh-grade finals. I could wake up in the morning and know what “tomorrow” would look like, a quality that I’m sure many people growing up, like myself, take for granted. Perhaps that is why I was so persistent in applying for this school trip. Coming from a fairly privileged family, I was fortunate enough to have travelled quite a bit. The two continents I had left to check off my list were Africa and Asia (apart from Antarctica and Santa’s Village, of course), so understandably I jumped at the opportunity to be able to explore an area that I had never been to. India, however, is something that I have never experienced before; a trip I can’t even compare to any of my other adventures—it’s *different*.

India has given me a thrill, a voyage, and most importantly, the unprecedented feeling of uneasiness—it grabbed my sentiments and completely threw “familiarity” out the window. This discomfort and anxiety that I am feeling of not knowing where “tomorrow” will lead has sparked something in me that can only be compared to an addiction. I now crave new experiences, and almost frown upon the “old me” who not only required but enjoyed a structured life. I sometimes don’t even recognize who I am, which is the most difficult part of this entire

experience. I am scared of the person I am becoming, but in an incredibly intriguing way.

I partially, if not entirely, owe this to my classmates and teachers. My mother always told me about the importance of picking the “right travel partner.” Some people crave adventure and relish discovering unfamiliar experiences, while others enjoy exploring the hotel’s minibar. Therefore, being with a group of people whom I have essentially grown up with (some of whom I consider to be a part of my family) makes this adventure that much more entertaining—it provides comfort in a space where comfort is not welcomed.

Our adventure began the second our plane touched down onto the tarmac. Walking out of the airport was an instant culture shock; everything was different. The smells, the air, the people. My culture shock was then perpetuated as we walked out of the airport and saw the locals waiting for their loved ones in the arrivals section. A young girl, maybe ten or eleven years old, ran up to me and started speaking in Tamil with the biggest grin on her face. Obviously, I don’t speak the language, so communicated with her the best way I knew how; I nodded, smiled, waved, and said “Hi.”

What she did next completely stunned me. She reached into the pocket of her long forest-green skirt, pulled out a tiny Nokia phone, and snapped a picture of me (with flash, I may add). I turned to my teacher in amazement, confused and astonished. Ms Previdelo, my History teacher, who takes this trip to India every year with the grade elevens, smiled and laughed as she saw this interaction transpire.

“Get used to it, Sof. Most of the people here have never seen somebody with blonde hair before.”

In that moment, I knew *I wasn’t in Kansas anymore*.

So far, we have visited spice markets, countless different restaurants, been on rikshaw rides around the city, and have even visited small villages where local families have taught us how to milk cows. Yesterday, however, was probably the most memorable and meaningful activity we experienced. We visited the Sundhareswarar Temple, Chennai Navagraha Sthalam for Budhan, located on top of a large picturesque mountain. As we walked inside, the men and women were separated and taken to opposite areas. I was a bit apprehensive, as I don’t speak the language and can’t understand any signage, but my classmates and I learned to just follow the crowd to figure out what to do. We walked into a large changing-room area, where a woman who was standing by the entrance handed each of us a robe. It then became clear that in order

to enter the temple we had to be wearing *nothing* apart from the robes. Once changed, we were led inside, where everybody was to remain silent and submerge themselves into this large body of water. The water was freezing cold, but it made me feel alive. There was a large ball-shaped item inside the water, which I later learned was mercury. As I observed my surroundings, I saw the other women swim to the mercury, touch it, and pray. I felt so invested, and even though I am not particularly a believer in God, I felt a sense of belonging. It made me respect and appreciate religion in a new light, and showed me how it can affect others' outlook on life. It was truly one of the most mesmerizing experiences of my life.

I sit here and write this all down because I don't want to forget everything that I am feeling. I know that I am an outsider, but I have never felt more of a sense of belonging. I am almost unable to even remember my life back in Toronto, and thinking about going back to my old routine makes me incredibly sad. On the bright side, we have seven more days to spend here in Chennai, and I am ready to embrace more *unfamiliarity* that India will surely throw at me.

In the Footsteps of Palatines

TRACY SHIER

THE CEMETERY had stones from the early 1700s. They were worn and moss-covered, which made it difficult to read the names and dates on them. I walked from stone to stone, my anticipation mounting as I deciphered familiar names like “Sparling” and “Switzer.” Finally, there it was. My name. “Shier.” I took out my sketchbook and laid a single sheet across the stone’s surface. Holding the lump of charcoal lightly between my fingers, I rubbed it back and forth across the stone until the letters appeared. *Nicholas Shier 1728-1790*. One of my direct ancestors. I placed the flat of my palm against the rough, icy stone; the act sealed the connection to my Palatine ancestors.

I looked around to find David, my partner, who had meandered to another part of the cemetery. With my charcoal drawing held high, I raised my voice above the buzzing of the gardener’s machinery.

“This was the first of my ancestors born in Ireland! My sixth great grandfather,” I said. The paper in my hand shook with my excitement.

He took the paper, tracing his finger reverently over the white spaces created from imprint before he handed it back.

“That’s so awesome that you found that so quickly,” said David.

In the early 1700s, the normally ideal conditions for agriculture in the Palatinates were interrupted by multiple years of unseasonably frigid temperatures, which decimated crops and caused famine. This, and repeated invasions by the French, led thirteen thousand inhabitants of the region to leave their homes and migrate to Britain. London was overwhelmed with these temporary residents, so Queen Anne used the political opportunity to settle thirteen hundred immigrants over several settlements around Ireland to dilute Catholicism. One hundred fifty of the immigrants were settled near the city of Limerick. Many of the

surrounding Catholics remained staunchly Catholic, and the tiny resettlement village near Limerick thrived for over a hundred years. These were my direct ancestors.

We always thought we were Irish, for as long as I could remember. My dad told me of how our family arrived in Canada from Ireland in 1830. They left before the Great Irish Potato Famine of 1847.

“You’re Irish as Irish can be,” he stated.

This conversation repeated whenever there was an inquiry into our background. Genealogy always piqued my interest, and when I began research into my paternal family tree, I learned to my surprise that we were not Irish descendents at all.

Late April 2016 found David and me travelling from Dublin to Limerick.

Monasterevin. Cloughjordan. Nenagh.

The names twisted my tongue as I tried to pronounce them. The train zipped along through the Irish countryside. Villages popped in and out of view, giving me glimpse after glimpse of life in rural Ireland, a contrast both foreign and familiar. Miles and miles of farmland stretched out, every field dotted with gorse, a brilliant yellow-flowered shrub that provided colour to the otherwise emerald fields.

First stop: Limerick. As we walked along I was daydreaming of what Limerick looked like then, superimposed on the now. It would have been smaller then, not modern, not filled with noisy cars and motorcycles. There would have been livestock, wooden walls, and hitched wagons. Far fewer people, with no traffic lights to guide wagons and pedestrians alike. Was this the place my ancestors would have brought the fruit of their labour? They must have worked hard to make enough to pay their landlord, Sir Thomas Southwell of Castle Matrix, and then to have enough left over to live comfortably. My distraction caused a near-miss with a crack in the sidewalk that threatened to send me and my fifty-pound pack flying into the street.

“Be careful!” David shouted.

“Yeah, yeah,” I muttered under my breath, as I tried to realign my pack.

A white Volkswagen Up was waiting for us at the car rental agency. Standard transmission. David took on the first attempt at driving on the wrong side of the road, his “wrong” hand doing the shifting. Despite the dangers caused by forgetting in which lanes oncoming traffic would travel and the frustrations of far too many roundabouts, we made our way out of the city and headed further west.

We arrived in Rathkeale, a community of about two thousand people, and the nearest town to the Palatines' settlement. Here we located the home base of the Irish Palatine Association, who have kept the Palatine culture alive and provided a connection for scattered Palatine descendants to their ancestral homeland of Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany. The association converted the abandoned train station into the Palatine Historic Centre. Our volunteer guide, Padraig, met us at the door just after midday. In a heavy Irish accent, he gave a history of every photo, artefact, and writing.

"Did you know that the Palatines taught the Irish about crop rotation?" he said. "They were very industrious with their farming, so they were always better off than their Irish neighbours."

"Were they accepted by their neighbours?" I asked.

He moved through the tight paths of the museum, not even a moment's hesitation, to a hardbound notebook, the writing style of a time long ago.

"Here," he said. "This is telling the way they stuck to their own people and did not integrate with the larger community. Some would say that neither the Irish nor the Palatines fully accepted the other."

The lineages had told the same story, the families intermarrying with other Palatines, often close cousins, as was then customary. We could sense Padraig's passion for the topic as he filled my head until it felt as if were stuffed with cotton.

Padraig provided us with a map of the original homesteads. We took off in search of the location. The directions took us down a serpentine laneway, barely wide enough for one car, though it was a two-way road. As the car wound around yet another blind curve, three Irish moss-covered outbuildings emerged. The sight made me suck in a quick breath, and goose pimples erupted on my arms. I quickly pulled over against the ancient dry-stone fence that lined the road. Exiting the car, I smelled the freshness of the luxurious deep green of the spring grasses.

My eyes transfixed on a piece of rusted old farm equipment, my imagination filling with visions of Hans Adam Scherer, my sixth great-grandfather, wearing well-worn overalls, tools in hand, fixing a plough. His wife hangs laundry from a line attached to the house. The older boys help their father, the girls help their mother, and the youngest run to and fro in a game of tag. The sight and touch of this place brought me full circle; this place, this country, is a part of who I am.

"What's on your mind?" David asked.

“It could have been on this spot that great-great-great-great-grandfather Jacob decided to emigrate to Canada,” I said. “It might have been this spot that changed everything.”

As we left, my heart was conflicted. Did one hundred years in a country give you roots there? My thoughts drifted back to when we trampled through the wet grass at the church cemetery and wandered through the forest of standing headstones. I knew then, certainty forming in me like the word “Shier” being brought forth on my piece of paper from the swipe of my charcoal, that here were my roots. Seeing how they lived, standing where they stood, and seeing their names on the gravestones in the churchyard gave me a sense of belonging to my Palatine ancestors and confirmed that I was of Irish descent.

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Not All Heroes Wear Capes

DUSTIN STEWART

SUPERMAN'S CREATOR, Joe Schuster, modelled the fictional city of Metropolis after Toronto, the city where he was born. He was so fond of his younger years in the Queen City that he even cast the Metropolis newspaper, the *Daily Star* (later the *Daily Planet*), in the image of the *Toronto Daily Star*. The Man of Steel came to life in *Action Comics* #1 in June of 1938. Some 1,817 kilometres away from the old *Toronto Star* building at St Martha's Regional Hospital in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Lester and Agnes were bringing their two-month-old son Casimir back to the physician to examine him. There was something different about Cas, but they could not put their finger on it. He was undersized, cantankerous, and always crying. The doctor examined him thoroughly before assuring his parents that he was a perfectly healthy boy. What Lester, Agnes, and the doctor all failed to recognize was that, much like the infant Kryptonian Kal-El found by the Kent family in a field, Cas was extraordinary. It would be years before anyone would know it.

In 1945 Schuster published another comic book called *Superboy*. Both Clark Kent and Cas were seven years old. Superboy was coming to grip with his powers and the responsibilities that go with them. Cas was developing a reputation as a problem child. He has a quick tongue and even faster fists. Adults were suspicious of him, other children feared him.

Growing up, I heard many stories about young Casimir and his adventures. To me, his exploits were nobler than others would give them credit. Where some would view him taking cucumbers from the neighbour's garden as theft, I saw it as Cas rescuing the gourd from a greedy rancher that would hoard his produce from the hungry villagers.

To me, he didn't steal lobsters from the fisherman's traps, he rescued them. Others may deem Cas fighting with older kids as reckless, but I saw it as brave. No one ever called David irresponsible for standing up to Goliath. To me, Cas is something of a folk hero, like something out of a Horatio Alger novel.

There is one story that has always stood out to me as a tale of bravery and heroism. It is the story of Cas and Ruth Bartley. Every hero has their nemesis. Superman had Lex Luthor, and Cas had Ruth. Ruth was the schoolmarm from hell. I always pictured her to stand about six feet tall, with broad shoulders. She and Cas did not get along with one another. Ruth ran a tight ship, and her word was final. Mrs Bartley had one rule that stood above all other schoolhouse commandments. It was etched in thick white chalk on the blackboard in perfect running hand: MAINTAIN THE FACILITIES. Everyone knew what that meant—keep the outhouse clean. It was understood that it was the responsibility of each student to report the condition of the outhouse following their previous classmate's use. Ruth demanded it, and the children obeyed.

The story begins with Cas using the outhouse. Whether driven by a sense of responsibility to protect his classmates or by a refusal to submit to Ruth's tyranny, Cas didn't report the sullied state he found the washroom in before using it. When the next student reported on the outhouse's condition to Ruth, it meant one thing: Cas did it. I picture a smirk on her face as she commanded to him in her shrill voice, "Casimir, clean it up!" She must have thought she had him. She must have been stunned when he responded, "No." No one had questioned Ruth up until that moment. I used to think it was the fear of losing her control over the students that motivated her to pick up her pointer and throw it at young Casimir. Cas remained still while the rod whizzed past his face, missing him entirely and breaking the window behind him. He was sent out to retrieve the stick. Instead of bringing it back to Ruth, Cas threw it back through another window. The glass shattered, and with it Ruth Bartley's dominion over the children. Ruth had been weighed, measured, and revealed to be fallible. In the schoolyard, his peers declared Cas a champion. At home, he was seen as a failure.

Life with Agnes and Lester was hard for Cas. Agnes was cold, and Lester was cruel. It was around this time that Cas's regular beating began at the hands of Lester. Agnes would catalogue Cas's indiscretions for Lester, and he would dole out the punishment accordingly. The "lickings" consisted of whips with a tree branch and continued until Cas cried. If the branch didn't work, Lester used his fists. The longer Cas

fought back the tears, the longer the beating went. At the age of twelve, Cas decided that his father would never make him cry again. His decision nearly landed him in the hospital. Lester never made him cry again. Nothing did. Cas swore that he surrendered his ability to cry on that day.

Ruth and Lester were not the last battles in Cas's life. As his youngest son, I witnessed many. By the time I was old enough to understand that Ruth was probably just a teacher, trying to do her best to deal with a misbehaving little boy, dad had already lost his heroic façade to me. I was a teenager by then. To me, he was just an average guy. He struggled with alcohol abuse, smoking, his weight, a failed marriage, and the fact that he couldn't cry seemed robotic to me.

It wasn't until I was a grown man myself, sitting by his bed in hospice in the days before he died, that the magnitude of his deeds came into focus for me. I began to realize that my dad was not a failure because he had problems. He was courageous for the way he attacked those problems the way he always did. He defeated Lester and became a caring father himself because of it. When drinking became a problem, he sought help, and eventually became an addiction counsellor. He quit a two-pack-a-day smoking habit, cold turkey. He became a man who ate right and worked out every day. He became the type of father who never missed an opportunity to tell his sons that he was proud of them. He wasn't the Clark Kent type that I always thought him to be. He was Superman all along. He hid his cape underneath a dirty pair of overalls. Cas was a relentless self-improver; a champion.

As I stood by his bed with my brothers, watching him slowly slip away, I witnessed the culmination of a life dedicated to self-improvement. As his final act of defiance, he drew his last laboured breath, and tears ran down his cheeks.

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It's What We do

RACHEL SUNDVALL

TREMBLING INTERNALLY, a cyclone of adrenaline coursing through my veins, I rushed into the trauma ward in search of the unit clerk's desk. My brain felt like a Walkman that had its pause and fast-forward buttons pressed simultaneously, both in a hurry to get through the fog of confusion, and stuck, unable to process the moment I was presently running through. I hurried past open trauma rooms, a flurry of activity happening within each one. All that activity a mere blur to my eyes as I sped towards the desk I was seeking.

Trying my best to appear calm while bursting with impatience, I waited for the clerk to end the call she had answered as I was approaching. She had barely hung the phone up before I hastily spit out my poor attempt at asking for her help.

"I need to find my mom, she's here somewhere. Her last name is Duhamel, Lynn Duhamel?"

She quickly typed the name into her computer, unfazed by my demeanour and lack of greeting.

"She's in Trauma Room 1, which is...."

Her words were interrupted by an alarm ringing out from one of the rooms. As her sentence trailed off, both our heads turned, in unison, toward the alarm. I saw a little purple light above a door, blinking on and off. The room was beside the entrance I had breezed on through, moments before. I knew without asking, it was Trauma Room 1. That light and alarm meant that mom was coding; her heart had stopped, for a second time. As a team of doctors and nurses rushed in to respond, I turned and walked, dazed and zombie-like, towards Trauma Room 1.

I can still remember grandma's funeral. I was twelve and hadn't seen her in about four or five years. She and mom had a very strained and

tenuous relationship, and mom had limited my exposure to grandma's cold, manipulative personality. I didn't feel any loss when she died, no sorrow over my grandmother's absence in the world. Sitting in that unforgiving church pew, my eyes scanning the faces around me, I became intensely aware that I was the only person there who *wasn't* crying. A wave of social embarrassment washed over me. I thought everyone would be aghast, once they noticed; I could already feel everyone's eyes on me, despite no one looking in my direction. I turned to mom beside me, and saw tears streaming down her face. The sight of mom crying over the loss of her own mother hurt me deeply. Using that brief swell of emotion, I forced a few tears out of my eyes, for propriety's sake. Because, it's what we do at funerals. Imagine my surprise, years later, when mom confided in me that she had also forced fake tears at her mother's funeral—after seeing her older sister crying.

I couldn't wrap my head around mom having a cardiac arrest. She'd had no history of heart problems. I was floored when an ICU nurse said the constant leg swelling mom had been suffering from was a common sign of congestive heart failure. I wasn't even aware that my mom had any heart problems. I've learned since that women are less likely than men to be diagnosed with heart disease. Their symptoms often go unnoticed, and thus are rarely reported to doctors. Women are also fifty percent less likely to survive a cardiac arrest (Zafar), a horrifying statistic that mom never deserved to be a part of. Between managing COPD and battling a spinal infection that deteriorated her legs, she had grown disheartened with the medical system and developed an aversion to doctors. Had she ignored her own symptoms, or had never even recognized them? I would never know the answer.

After spending several painfully long hours in the hospital by mom's side, I went home to my husband, and broke down in bed. Mom was in a coma; the outlook was bleak. Jeff held me while I cried, hard and uncontrollably, as I tried to come to terms with mom's impending death. My crying became hard sobs, which became sorrowful wails that filled our bedroom in the silence of the late night.

"I don't want to lose my mom!"

My body began to shake as the words came bursting from my mouth, as if saying it out loud solidified her fate. Jeff tried to mask the wavering in his own voice when he spoke.

"I know," he said. "I don't want to lose her either."

My son, just thirteen at the time, could hear my unbridled misery from his own room. It disturbed him to hear me so broken down; much

like my mother always was to me, I have always been his unflappable, warrior mom. I was stunned to hear his voice, almost whispering from my doorway:

“Mom, I could hear you crying in my room. Do you need a hug?”

“Yes,” more tears streamed down my burning cheeks. “I would love a hug from you right now!”

I was left with a lot of guilt after mom’s death. Guilt for not seeing her more often. For not being there when her heart stopped. Guilt for putting her on life support; I knew she wouldn’t have wanted that. Guilt for taking her *off* life support, when doctors said she’d never recover. Guilt for never having a funeral for her; so many people kept insisting I had to. They said that it would “help me grieve.” I didn’t agree. I think some people have funerals for the same reason some have weddings: because we’re told that “it’s what we do.” They believe it’s necessary, in order to grieve. But the truth is, grieving just happens—whether you’re prepared for it or not. Whether you set aside a time for it, or not. I grieved mom’s death for the entire six days she was in that coma, before she passed. And if I’m being honest, I’ve grieved her death every day since. For all the guilt I did have, I’m not guilty of crying fake tears. I cried an ocean of real tears in my grieving for her. Because, funeral or no funeral, grieving happens. Us humans, we can’t escape it. It’s what we do.

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The Cookie Cutters

MADISON TOMLINSON

I ALWAYS believed my life was normal. Growing up I thought that fighting, and drinking was common in every household and that every family had the same experiences that I had. It wasn't until I had my friend Denise over when I realized that we were unlike the other families. Back in 1976, I had my best friend Denise over. The day this happened, my house looked like a tornado had gone through it. In a drunken rage, my father had thrown over the couches and put holes in the walls and the strong smell of stale beer was lingering in the air. When Denise and I walked through the doors I thought, "Oh, dad's drunk again," but when I turned over to look at Denise, her face was in pure shock. It was evident that she was scared, fearful of my father, and that she did not want to be in my home anymore. This is when I knew that my family was not like other families. It is when I realized that the smell of stale beer was not something a child should be accustomed to and that watching your mother—the woman your father supposedly loves—get beaten by your father is anything but normal.

Growing up my family was quite wealthy. We had a big house with lots of property and a farm. My father was a strong police officer and my mother was a beautiful homemaker. Together, they had three children: myself, my brother, and my sister. My family was well known in our small town and my parents were quite popular with the townspeople due to my father's work status. We could've been seen as the perfect family on the outside, but behind closed doors were trapped screams, blood, and bruises. No one except for my family witnessed the abuse my mother took from my father—the screaming, pushing, punching, and scratching happened daily—but what happened behind closed doors was a huge

secret that my family wanted to keep hidden. Everyone believed we were the perfect cookie-cutter family, but we were far from it.

Due to the fact that my father was a police officer, it was clear that he was presented daily with violence, and this greatly translated into our homelife. In the 1970s police officers did not have as many resources as they do in present day. This is due to the fact that mental health is more of a serious topic than it was back then. The 1970s consisted of only the “insane” to be mentally ill, they did not take into consideration mild cases of anxiety, depression, or PTSD. Those who were mentally ill were considered by police officers to be “mentally disturbed persons” under the subcategory of “special people” (“Policing”). Because of this, there was a lack of support with the situations police officers were faced with and their only option was substance abuse or domestic violence, and in some cases both. Research states that police officers are the most likely profession to commit acts of domestic violence with a “minimum of forty percent of families of officers” (Stiles) experiencing some type of domestic violence. The same information also states that those experiencing domestic abuse, like my mother experienced, are more likely to feel trapped due to the fact that their abuser is an official who is legally able to carry weapons. And this is true. My father had a gun that he brought home from work every night that would stay on top of his dresser. I can even recall my father yelling at my older brother, telling him to get his gun when fighting my mother. But weapon carrying was not the only way his violent work life translated into our home life.

Too many times as a child I remember my father getting pulled over to the side of the road by other police officers. His drunk habits caused flashing red and blue lights to me something I have grown to be accustomed to, but still manages to send fear through my body every time I see them. Although as a child I did not realize that my father was willingly driving with his three children in the car while drunk. Memories continue to come out of the dark and surprise me, especially while in a car. Due to my father’s job, he never had repercussions for his actions and this is how his work life yet again managed to translate into our home life. When he would get pulled over, he would simply flash his badge and go on his way. He was never reprimanded for his wrongdoings because of the “blue wall of silence.” The blue wall of silence is an informal rule that all police officers share that consists of them refraining from reporting a colleague’s misconducts (Nolan). Because of this blue wall of silence, my father was let off despite the evident beer bottle wedged between his legs. There isn’t a time I remember being in the car

with my father where he didn't have a beer bottle between his legs. At points, he even made his drinking a game for us kids by seeing how many mailboxes he could hit with the empty bottles as we drove along the roads.

In the late 1970s, my mother took my siblings and me, and we ran away from my father. He looked for us for weeks but was unable to track us down until my mother filed for divorce. To this day, memories will pop up every once in a while, and remind me of my not-so-perfect childhood. And, now that my father has passed, I feel like I am able to openly discuss domestic violence from a child's point of view. I feared sharing my story when he was alive due to the fact that I viewed him as an authority figure; however, I now feel that he would be proud of me for sharing the story. I am now able to bring awareness to not only domestic abuse, but substance abuse, as well as the fault in our system to protect police officers.

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Fact: Hair Grows Back

You're Never Alone, Even on Downward Journeys

NATHALIE TRUDEL

“IT’S LIKE ... tobogganing down a snowy hill. You know it’s happening. You watch snow flying past. But you aren’t actively involved in sliding down. You just experience it. You cannot control yourself from propelling down the icy slope. *That’s* how it feels.”

Monday

Fact: I’m a foreigner.

An expat. We moved to Korea in November. I don’t speak Korean. I don’t have friends. We’re isolated inside our apartment because it takes forty-five minutes to get three people dressed to venture outdoors. The frosty white world of January. One of those people I’ll call Five, the other Not-Yet-Two. *Getting him ready is like wrestling fish into a wetsuit*, nags Jud. *The longer it takes, the hotter it gets, the hotter it gets the longer it takes*, drawls Gui. Inevitably, once everyone’s ready, every mitt, hat, and boot worn, *someone* has to pee—me included. I mean, I’m proud Not-Yet-Two is potty-trained, what parents wouldn’t be, but *really? Really? Now?* crows Ang. Getting ready is its own adventure. Any parent can attest. *That’s it! Adventure’s over*, declares Ira.

Five days left. His Asiana flight returns Friday at 6.45 p.m. He’ll be home at 8.45. My partner went to China for business.

I can’t do this alone. Jud laughs snootily, airily. Okay, I’m *not* alone. I’ve the lovely companionship of my over-emotional thoughts. Ira is completely irrational, Jud shames me, Ang is my anger, Gui is my guilt. Never alone with these “friends.” Psychology101 taught me “injected thoughts” and “auditory verbal hallucinations”—AVH for

professionals—are symptoms of mental distress. Common in schizophrenia but they appear in depressive disorders, also. This case is likely late-onset postpartum depression.

Tuesday

Fact: Asian bathrooms are an open room. No tub, no shower stall, no curtain.

I shower with my kids. Every day. Otherwise I can't shower. I *tried* showering alone. Once. I try again occasionally. I try today. I hear Five cry, Not-Yet-Two destroyed her Lego something-or-other-I-don't-care-anymore. Not-Yet-Two cries, Five took his toy. Sibling rivalry. Any parent with two or more children can relate. Not-Yet-Two pounds the bathroom door, "Mama." *Ignore it*, says Ang. "Mamaaa," the call turns to a cry.

Just tap it, encourages Ira. Despite the hot steam, the tiled wall feels cold as I tap my forehead against it. *Tap harder*. My lips betray me, verbalizing with Ira, "Yeah. Like that." Incrementing force relieves the numbness, evoking pulsing pain in my forehead.

Interrupted. "Mamaaaaaaa." *Just open it*, Gui worries. "Sit on the door-ledge. Don't get wet." Going through the motions, I squirt Herbal Essences into my hands, rub them together, apply, lather. Suds get in one eye. The other eye supervises. Not-Yet-Two grabs for a green plastic turtle out of reach. His arm gets wet. My big toe nudges Turtle closer to him. Turning to rinse I hear him squeal, "Ka!" Not-Yet-Two moves deeper into the bathroom for his yellow Hot Wheel. "Ka!" His back gets drenched. *Ha! Game over! You lose!* snickers Jud. I remove his sopping-wet shirt and the rest of his fresh pyjamas. "Just shower with me." *He's messing the toys you cleaned up*, tattles Ang. Giving up, I turn off the shower. *Conditioner?* sasses Jud. Turning the water back on, my shoulders feel heavy, eroding my posture with weariness. This task is tediousness. My hair is frustratingly thick. Conditioner. Squirt, rub, apply, lather, rinse. Done. Out.

Wednesday

Fact: My hair takes *forever* to dry.

Resentful from last night, I succumb to showering together again. More cumbersome than washing my hair is drying it. I can't dry it without interruptions. Five wants snacks. Not-Yet-Two wants milk. Both

run in circles. *Tell them to stop!* demands Jud. "Please, stop running," I say patiently. I'm not bothered, the hairdryer's drawl drowns out the sound of feet stomping the cheap wood-patterned linoleum. But the neighbours downstairs complain. They must stop. *Stop them running!* Gui frets. "Please! Stop running," I urge. Turning the dryer back on the heat soothes my body, melting tension and replacing cold air. *Stop. Them. Running.* Ang scorns. I hit the off switch. "Stop running!" Ira unhinges. *Her words exit my mouth. My body betrays me, again. Can't blame them, they're kids,* defends Gui. *I blame the hair. Why is your hair so thick?* Jud shames me. *This stupid hair,* irks Ang. *I'd chop it,* snarks Ira. I consider the idea.

Thursday

Fact: I didn't shower today.

The clippers are cold against my bruised forehead. I flick the switch on. Slowly, I create a perfect line front to back. Tendrils of hair land onto the newspaper-lined sink. I look up to mirror. *Why did you start there?* Jud criticizes. *What if you don't like it?* Ang steams. *You could've hidden by starting underneath,* says Gui. Ira quietly watches. A feeling floods me. Adrenaline? I do another line, and another. The exhilaration isn't so different than snorting cocaine. I cannot resist smiling as my bob-cut falls. I haven't smiled for months. I hum with Ira. Ariana Grande's "I've Got One Less Problem Without You." Finishing the job, peach fuzz from the nape of my neck falls. Problem solved. The drug-like exaltation doesn't last. Not-Yet-Two woke-up.

Friday

Fact: I cannot divorce from my over-emotional thoughts.

If I move, they'll wake up. I'm trapped. A child on either side of me. A Disney blanket suppresses my torso because Five and Not-Yet-Two lay on the top, pinning me underneath it. Child-sized arms encage me. *How* do I get out? I'm restrained. Physically. Literally. My head, void of ideas, but thoughts race. "Out," it echoes. The word takes on meaning. *How* do I get *out*? Metaphorical. Emotional. Jud, Ang, and Gui banter *Get out of here? This situation? This house?* Ira coldly suggests, *Get out of parenting?* Gui glares, as if I suggested it, *that's not an option.*

“It’s like tobogganing. The snowy hill sometimes plateaus. You gain control. Then slopes steepen again. Life’s slippery slopes cannot be averted. The sled bumps, jumps, vibrates. That feeling doesn’t subside. Life doesn’t stop. Doesn’t wait. *That’s* how it feels.”

Art Shall Set Me Free

SION X. VADAS

I WAS eighteen when I decided to go on a “tour” to find an answer to the question that has been haunting me for years. “Am I able to help change the world for the better, and is any of this worth it or not?” I thought through taking a “tour” of the world, and by helping people, I could justify my sense of self-worth, and find an answer to this question. My tour has led me to many places and allowed me to meet many people. Most memorable was chatting with victims of the Vietnam War and spending time with a woman whose life had been ruined by the Iraq War. It even brought me back to my home town in Canada, where the streets were lined with the forgotten. Also, forcing me to remember vivid images of my friends spread-eagled dead in front of our homes. No matter what horrors I saw, I always tried to justify that regardless if the world was filled with such suffering, I should help save it because destiny is never left to chance. And the world needs people to stand up and lead the charge towards a better future. Now my journey has led me to Mexico, where I would be travelling to the Maquiladora area to build homes for the locals and “help them get back on their feet.”

Sitting on a bus with twenty or so volunteers, we were headed straight for the town. Across from me sat my friend Paulina, who was staring out towards the darkening outskirts of Tijuana. “Tijuana is a beautiful city,” she said, which it was. It was a mixture of contemporary buildings contrasted with the Aztec-inspired art. The city’s beauty was only intensified under the deepening night sky that day. The iridescent sheen on both the art and buildings was magical. While this beauty was real, it also felt fake, fake like watching a lion in captivity, existing in front of you but unreachable, hidden behind a large pane of glass separating it from freedom, and you from death.

I pulled out a sketchbook and thought about sketching the scenery before me. I always found solace in art, perhaps because of its ease at deciphering and decoding such complicated things so effortlessly. First-class art can capture and portray thoughts, emotions, and morality; however, to me, its true beauty stems from its ability to objectify and manipulate the world around us, while also acting as an escape from the world I was beginning to hate. My brother is the one who half-jokingly told me to take a tour around the world “if I was that desperate to have my questions answered.” He told me to sketch what I saw and my experiences, and when I felt my question had been answered, go back through my drawings and see if it accurately captured the feelings in my heart.

Perhaps by sketching this beauty, it would act similar to a chalk outline at a crime scene, demarcating details that may be overlooked at first, maybe even providing me with an answer to the question stuck in my mind, that started me on my journey. Atop the sketchbook’s page was a single phrase scratched in: “Hypocrisy—the only evil that walks Invisible, except to God alone,” to ensure that “neither Man nor Angel can discern.” The famed linguist and theorist Noam Chomsky, who was an admirer of John Milton, inscribed these words into his book *Necessary Illusions*. I was given a copy of this same book by my brother, weeks before the trip, and it dealt with the notion of subjective reality and how the truth is shaped by what we see and hear, not what is.

I recently read a paper about this same idea, but through a human psychological lens. It stated that we tend to believe our perceptions are veridical representations of the world around us, which seems obvious. However, it highlighted another interesting idea. The psychological angle of how these “perceptions” are based primarily on our own designs. More simply put, we construct our perceptions on what we want the world to look like rather than what it actually is like (Leong, et al.). Perhaps this is why it is easy for so many of us to live out our day-to-day lives not being bothered by existential questions or acknowledging sufferings that we have a hand in causing.

Maquiladora, Mexico: “perhaps this trip can enlighten me more than my other travels did,” and prove that I should hold out hope that the world can change and is not as terrible as I was beginning to believe it was. The Maquiladora is touted to be the promised land of opportunity amongst Mexican workers. The vast number of foreign companies located there means vast amounts of jobs for the locals. But this “godsend” hides a more sinister reality. Working conditions akin to

modern-day slavery, as some say (Sargent and Matthews). As we arrived at our destination, the sight which I laid my eyes on was magnificent: large state-of-the-art mega-corporate buildings, stunning pieces of modern architecture looking down on a ruined and desolate “town.” George Orwell writes, “Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing.” These words burned into my mind spoke true of this great but terrible sight, a “true Orwellian illustration come true,” as Paulina put it.

While travelling the nearly three-thousand-mile journey from Canada to Maquiladora, Mexico, we were told that we were visiting a town “that has seen better days.” Yet this so-called “town” is nothing more than a labyrinth of open sewage rivers running along a row of cardboard-box shelters, webbed with flickers of light. The people here are not “town folk.” They are barely people at all, at least in the eyes of their employers and those who exploit them. They are more like rats forced to survive, or fester, in their own “squalor.”

Under the blistering heat, it would be reasonable to think all this was nothing more than a mirage. Still, it wasn’t, but it was, however, the perfect illustration of reality. This site got me thinking about what role I played in this atrocity. At first, it seemed impossible to say I was responsible, but that couldn’t be further from the truth.

All across the world, people live seemingly just and peaceful lives; we believe ourselves to be moral and virtuous creatures, but this is nothing but a farce. The darkness that breeds human suffering lies with every person. We carry delusions of some innate shared virtuousness, which allows us to continue making the same decisions regardless of the impacts it has on the world around us. We utilize hollow reasonings as justifications to exonerate ourselves from any blame that we deserve. Our lust for our material needs and wilful ignorance¹ has created a hopeless cycle and darkness, the seed from which human suffering stems from and continues to grow

The conversation I had with my brother just before departing on my first trip played in my head:

“Why not just let the world be and have the ‘darkness’ consume it?”

“If those who can make a change left the world alone, it would fall further to chaos. There needs to be order if we are to make the changes we desire.”

“Are you certain about that?”

“Perhaps you should just sit back and watch as things play out.”

“Have you ever thought that maybe you can’t change the world because this is what people want the world to be like?”

This idea became so much clearer when I stepped foot in this “town.” A “town” built of scrap wood, cardboard, and discarded metal. Punctured roofs, small outhouses lined the streets. Washing machines and old broken down stoves were everywhere, propped up on splintered wooden pallets. Crude electrical wires connected each tiny house. Flickering lights dangling throughout the entire neighbourhood

At that moment, standing amongst the twenty-odd volunteers looking down at this broken and sad excuse of a town, I finally began to understand why this question has been haunting me for so long. My friends could get hurt by what they saw or encountered, yet they would still have the will to continue their quest to help people. They would never become disillusioned because they genuinely believed in what they were doing and thought it was worth it. But what about me? I was just desperately trying to make someone else’s reason my own because I was too afraid to accept that, deep down, I knew that none of this mattered. Not the people killed in those unneeded wars, nor the people standing before me. They were nothing more than puppets whose strings were being pulled for the benefit of others. For my own benefit.... And if that was their destiny, then so be it.

We collectively chose to forge the world like this, whether it was intentional or not. Why should I try and challenge that? If society has actively chosen to delegate power to those who believe continuing atrocities such as war and extreme poverty is morally permissible, and treating these people as nothing more than disposable tools, it means we have collectively agreed that we can turn our backs on them. The reason I began to hate this world was that I wanted so hard to believe that we could change and that peace in our time was more than just a dream. But I finally realize that if I was so desperate to save someone, I could save myself from my own suffering. And the best way was to find an escape from it like so many other people did.

And I found it within the pages of my sketchbook. Here I could create a world devoid of this pain. My pen, the sword used to craft a kingdom where my authority is absolute. My solace from hardships was now found in immortalizing my experiences in ink.

I spent the next week working alongside my fellow volunteers, throughout which my pages were stained with the objectification of these people’s pain and experiences. I like those delegated power was the

puppet master controlling reality. Every line, every drawing, acting as an escape.

Finally, I was no longer burdened by my desire to imprint my vision on the world; all I needed now was the power of my art, never fading or rotting, through which I could finally achieve my desire to create my own perfect world, which is what my heart has been seeking all along.

Today when I see the sketches and the book I was given, they are an aide-mémoire to my trip and the views I long abandoned. No longer am I a naïve child who wore a mask hiding his heart from the reality of the world, but a person who has entirely accepted that the suffering of the planet and the dark nature of human society is a necessary part of the human experience.

NOTES

¹I say “wilful” ignorance rather than “unintentional” because we are making decisions that exacerbate these problems. For instance, electing officials that believe bombing people overseas or exploiting people solely for corporate profits is morally permissible. We know the facts about how the political system is overtly corrupt and biased. Yet, we are the ones responsible for allowing it to continue, because we are ones choosing whom we vote for and put in places of power. There are extenuating circumstances such as media complicity, moneyed interest corrupting the system, even lack of time. Still, the decision ultimately lies with the people. It’s merely a case of Hume’s paradox of power—“The power is always in the hands of the governed”—this is true for all societies, both democratic and totalitarian/authoritarian. Force is an element; the real element is opinion. By saturating their minds with a particular ideology (propaganda), we can control their opinion, and once you do that, you can maintain control. We can see this example play out in modern days with the notion of “American Exceptionalism,” saying by definition everything the US does is moral and virtuous even if they are committing the most heinous of crimes. This is why I said “wilfully” because regardless if we are fully cognizant of how these actions are being undertaken, a large swath of the population knows that many of these atrocities (mostly war) are being carried out by their government in their names, yet does very little to stop and in some cases supports it. The public-relations industry is also an example of controlling public opinion for business. There are multiple studies showcasing that people value convenience over ethics. A study conducted by Remi Trudel found that the notion that consumers were more likely to reward positive ethical corporate behaviours and hold negative views about those that didn’t. The relationship, however, was mostly determinant on pricing and convenience. If an unethical corporation sold products for less or were more convenient to purchase from, consumers would choose that over a more ethical alternative. There was no

evidence to support claims that consumers would incur the price increases of sacrifice convenience to reward positive ethical behaviour. Look at companies such as Amazon, which has horrific human-rights and workplace violations, or Apple and Microsoft, which utilize child labour to mine for cobalt used in their phones. Yet these are the biggest companies in the world. We are the ones propping them up, so it is wilful and complicit. By saying it isn't wilful, we are just cheaply exonerating ourselves from the blame we rightly deserve because of whatever random excuse a person will give. To me, being lazy and disconnecting yourself from reality is just a cheap excuse and nothing more. Now is it wrong to do that? No. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't share in the blame that we rightfully deserve. We are the only ones who can hold the government (who in many cases are the ones who structure inequalities into the system) accountable because, whether we like it or not, in mostly "free and open" societies the government is a representation of the wants of the population, because we voted them in (we can argue about how much a government represents the population in terms of policy, but that is beside the point. At the end of the day, it is our decisions that allow them to be seated in these positions of power).

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The (un)Work Culture at Queen's

KAITLYN VARIN

SHE SEEMED eager. But who was she? She had set up a screen and projector in our common room. I looked around the room; some of my floormates looked less than intrigued. Someone was supposed to talk to us about money and budgeting, but this woman looked too eccentric to be a Queen's financial officer. She was wearing linen pants and sandals. "Hi, I'm Emily," she waved at us with both hands, "I'm a chaplain here at Queen's." As a Catholic-high-school graduate, I wondered how a chaplain was in any way qualified to talk about finances. In a room of naïve first years, most coming from upper-class families, no one seemed to understand that this woman was offending anyone in the room who ever had to work for money. According to her short Power Point presentation, I would have money if I spent smartly. No Starbucks and no brand names. Someone scoffed. I looked around; it was me. Money comes from working, I remember thinking. Money doesn't come from not spending on lattes and luxury items. Other people in the room laughed too, but for different reasons.

Little did anyone know that, though I had a job, I still didn't have money. I remember a floormate asking if she should get a job. I remember giving her a strange look. "Why?" I asked. She leaned in close, whispering, "my parents can't know I pay people to get me alcohol ... or that I smoke weed." I knew what a joint account was, I just never realized people had joint accounts with their kids. I couldn't imagine using my parents' cards.

I felt that people didn't understand that working wasn't optional in my first year. When people joked that I worked for drug and alcohol money, it hurt. Most nights, I lay awake wondering if I'd hit a thousand calories that day. Dining-hall hours weren't flexible enough for students

who have to work. They were only open during meal times. Between classes and work, I'd be lucky to make one meal time a day. Most of the money I made in first year went to cab rides and food. The city buses started running after the Loblaws opened and stopped just as it closed. Any money left in my account went towards paying the interest on my student line of credit. I didn't even have a credit card. I was drowning.

I never imagined that a Scotiabank financial advisor, proudly displaying his essentially irrelevant Kinesiology degree on the wall, would save me. But there I was in his office: "I can change the limit." My financial advisor in Ottawa had said many times that this wasn't possible. But here he was telling me I could have more. "Residence is like the most expensive thing," he said. I nodded. It was mid-January; the deadline to pay tuition and residence fees was fast approaching. Without having access to more money, I wouldn't be able to pay the almost eight thousand dollars I still owed Queen's. I felt different when I left Scotiabank. Suddenly, all because one former student understood my struggle, the problem had transformed. There was no one I could share this feeling with. No one I knew at Queen's would understand.

At the end of her presentation, the interfaith chaplain decided to induce some more unneeded anxiety with a story about graduation. "The engineers," she said, "are always happy on graduation day. They take their degrees smiling because they have jobs and are about to make a lot of money. The Arts and Science students aren't the same. It looks like the worst day of their lives. They have no idea what they're going to do next."

In second year, it felt like the engineers I lived with were constantly reminding me about their ability to succeed. They'd be making *lots of money* one day. For now, however, whenever I requested the utility money, I had to patiently wait for their parents to send it to them. They complained about their parents often, how their parents didn't do anything for them. Even though their parents paid their tuition fees, their rent, and gave them money whenever they asked for it, their parents were the worst—or so they said. My housemates bragged about their futures, broke and unemployed now, but come graduation day, gainfully employed. It made no sense to me.

At the end of first year, I got a job at the Queen's Athletics and Recreation Centre. An on-campus job was a blessing. I could go home for holidays. I didn't have to work every weekend. In the summers, I worked for the federal government in Ottawa. Another blessing. The last week of my final co-op, in a meeting where I thought I'd have to ask my

manager for a full-time job, he offered me one. “If you want to work here, we’d be happy to have you. But think about it, really think about it,” he said. A job after graduation was all I had been thinking about for months.

I think about the chaplain’s message and my financial advisor’s unused Kin degree sometimes. I’m sad, but not because my future is unguided as was forewarned. I’m sad because I love school. I’m sad because this part of my life will be ending soon. But I don’t feel hopeless. Sometimes people in my home town tell me how lucky I was to get into Queen’s. I consider myself lucky for every employment opportunity I’ve received. However, I’ve come to the realization that I deserve some credit. Was I lucky? Sure, but I also worked really hard. I got into Queen’s because I worked hard in high school. I got a job after graduation because I worked hard to demonstrate that I could do the work. I could be something with an Arts and Science degree. Different from some graduates who have uncertain futures, I find myself imagining what it will be like to have a full-time job and steady income. What will it be like to start paying loans off instead of borrowing more?

The Wait

JACQUELINE VO

I WAS twenty-two. I sat there, listening to the sound of the respirator huff and hiss. The room was cold. My once-plump grandfather looked about a third of his size, his facial features sunken. I always waited for him to talk. Usually he would tell me the same story about his life in Vietnam or ask me if I knew French. Now he could only manage a grunt or blink slowly to signal “no”—usually when any of us tried to give him food. Like most tragedies, this was unexpected. We all figured my grandfather would recover within a month or two.

Seven months had passed.

In that time frame I had spoken about ten words to my grandfather. Hello, goodbye, do you need help. It became progressively harder to speak around him when his pneumonia progressed. He always waited for me to talk when I was younger. This time around he didn’t have much choice. My relatives who tended to my grandfather at the hospital commented to both of my parents about how I never spoke. I didn’t respond.

I was six.

The room was cold. It could have been my anxiety. I didn’t know at that time that anxiety could make you feel cold. I just wanted to leave. I didn’t know what a hospital visit to a psychologist would entail, but hearing my first-grade teacher say it out loud was an affirmation that yes, something was wrong.

“Hi Jacqueline, how are you today?” I stared at her. She had a kind voice with soft facial features. I felt safe.

“We’re going to play some games today. Can you look at the pictures and tell me what you think of when I say the word ‘citrus’?” She handed me a short booklet of what seemed like puzzles for children.

I wanted to tell her, “the orange! My house has a bottle that says citrus on it! It smells like oranges!” I didn’t say anything. I pointed to the orange. My hand quickly retreated to the safety of my lap.

The psychologist leaned in closer and smiled. “Great job,” she said, and pointed to the next question. We repeated this exercise and completed a few other diagnostics—physical puzzles I needed to solve, yes-or-no questions about my family and time at school. I wanted it to be over. I also wanted to stay in the room with her because I thought I would eventually be able to speak, as though wishing hard enough and waiting would make it happen. I stayed quiet for the rest of the session.

I spent the next year mostly in silence, trying to understand why I couldn’t talk. The hospital visits did me no good, as neither my relatives nor the doctors had told me anything. In high school, my family and peers would teach me that ailments, if not physical, simply do not exist. I was left to navigate the ins and outs of mental illness on my own because up until adulthood I felt I didn’t deserve to. Self-worth wasn’t something I or my peers had understood.

Selective mutism can prevent a child from speaking even if they have the physical ability to do so. This mutism becomes an issue beyond shyness or a social faux pas—it has been described as a constricting feeling that physically hinders individuals from speaking (Wong 23). It feels like you become a deer in headlights, terrified, aware, and frozen by instinct.

I waited for another year, thinking I would magically begin to talk one day. My second-grade teacher, however, did not wait. She proposed that we would try to talk together. When we started, she would greet me, and I would spell out “hello” to her. Despite overcoming the mutism, the vestiges of that constricting feeling came back in a different way in my teenage and adult years. I spent much time on my own, anxious and paranoid. I was deluded and suspicious of what seemed like dark figures around me. They were my family members and friends, but I told myself they were never to be trusted. Again, I waited, thinking it would resolve itself.

In Canada, people aged fifteen to twenty-four have a higher possibility of experiencing mental illness compared to other age groups. As well, only recently have Canadians felt more comfortable with sharing that they are affected by mental illness (“Mental”). I, too, could

not yet come to terms with revealing my vulnerability to anyone. Instead, I self-harmed for most of my time in high school, believing that this was just a way to stay grounded. I tried to express my emotions more, releasing the burden of my problems onto other people. My friends were only human; I knew I had strained my relationships when they began to stop contacting me. We were young. We are still young. Something one of my friends told me before ending contact summed up most of my relationships: “Sometimes you don’t say anything at all, and other times you tell me everything at once. It makes me feel helpless.” It was then that I realized I spent most of my life waiting in silence—before, during, and after mutism.

I was twenty-two.

My grandfather’s hands were warm for the first time in a while. I felt hopeful, even though I knew at this point he was on his way. He was unable to move without overexerting himself. His fingers twitched. It was his attempt at squeezing my hand.

I wanted to tell him I had started working at a school. I wanted to tell him that despite all that had occurred, a lot of the things he wanted for me had come to fruition. His eyes had been welling with tears. I didn’t say anything, even though I knew I could. It felt like I was six years old again.

I spent the next few weeks trying to focus and get everything done at once. Work, school, volunteering. I went to bed every night anxious about why my life seemed to revolve around other people—people I rarely spoke with. Why was I so reluctant to consider my own needs? I had to quit my volunteering position that week so I could have time to see my grandfather the following week. Two days before I planned to see him, my uncle texted our family that he passed away. I felt like I had nothing left. It felt like the consequences of constantly waiting had caught up to me.

I unintentionally gave myself time for me after quitting my volunteering position. I had the choice to do whatever I wanted on the Saturday I planned to see him. I realized that this waiting had only strained my ability to have a healthy relationship with myself and other people. My grandfather had always told me that I deserved to pursue my own goals.

I am twenty-three now. I think I deserve to.

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The Cruelty We Commission

IVY WATSON

I DIDN'T know why I felt so nervous as I got off the bus and headed down Glen Scarlett Road in west Toronto one Tuesday morning. I knew coming here wasn't going to be pleasant, but every preconceived notion of what I thought this experience was going to be like drifted away at my first glance of the sign for St Helen's Meat Packers. I took a deep breath and joined the small group of activists that had gathered around the entrance to the slaughterhouse. I was greeted with a friendly welcome, but I could see the tightness in the corner of their smiles. We were here to see the animals, to bear witness before their lives are taken from them. This wasn't a protest, but an acknowledgment of the realities of our world—something I'd never seen. The air was thin and dull, and before the first cattle truck even pulled into the loading bay I felt the chill of the November air sink into my skin and the hair rise on the back of my neck.

My heart was beating so hard I could feel it in my fingers as I walked up to the first truck and was immediately struck by how thick the smell of the animals was that hung in the air. There were dozens in this truck alone, crammed in without any room to move, and I was rooted in place. I was stuck in the freezing slush that was soaking my socks and unable to stop watching the small puffs of warm air hit the cold as they breathed.

I had no way of knowing where they'd travelled from, but I was stunned to see that they'd been in the two-storey hauler for long enough to be covered in the feces that had fallen through the slates of the top level. When I poked my fingers through the small holes in the sides of the truck, some of them, if they could, would raise their heads to smell and lick my gloves. They were curious and surprisingly gentle, and would stare directly into my eyes. A sense of confusion and pain seemed

to emanate from them. Tears rolled down my cheeks without my permission as I confronted the reality of what was in store for each innocent animal over the next hour. I found myself torn between feeling frustrated that I couldn't communicate and explain the situation to them, but also cowardly glad as the pit in my stomach grew once I realized that, even if our two species could speak the same language, what on earth could I say that justified the position we'd put them in?

Dr Will Tuttle is an environmental and ethics author who was interviewed for the famous documentary *Cowspiracy*, a film outlining the connection between animal agriculture and the changing climate. It shows how our current farming practices have consequences that have grown to influence the entire planet. He says in his interview, that ten thousand years ago, free-roaming animals made up ninety-nine percent of the planet's biomass, whereas humans only made up one percent. In comparison to today, those stats have nearly reversed when you take into account humans and the animals we consider as our property. This shows that consequences of farming to this scale spans past the guilt you may or may not feel for taking an animal's life, but to every corner of our planet where systemic issues like food shortage, fresh water contamination, ocean dead zones, rainforest deforestation, and species extinction can be felt. Nobody is innocent in the contribution to these global problems, but the film does go on to show how the consequences for different people around the world vary wildly.

I find myself thinking about these issues while en-route to St Helen's most Tuesday mornings. When left along with my thoughts, I often end up somewhere philosophical or existential. I think about the impoverished communities in rural North Carolina having to deal with generations of health problems due to the toxic nearby hog farms. It's evidence of a morbid irony that exposes the ugly underbelly of our societies and cultures. Not only are we willing to overlook the suffering of non-human animals in the agricultural industries, but we're also willing to sacrifice our own people to the consequences of these practices. Simply for the misfortune of living with lack of proximity to ourselves, we let vulnerable strangers all over the world pay the price for our indulgence.

When I consider honestly why I would show up anywhere before ten a.m. in the freezing cold, just to feel sad as I watch cows in the last moments of their lives, I think about how this moment is unknown to so many. There are things happening all around us, every day that we may not agree with but are accidentally or unwittingly supporting. The cows

that enter this building whole, leave in boxes. To this industry, they are products, not beings, which means that without a demand there is no purpose. Unlike so many global injustices that rely on the co-operation of entirely differing governments, religions, or political ideologies, this is something that is bought and paid for by a population of everyday people who would ironically most likely identify themselves as animal lovers. It's interwoven so deeply into our cultures, habits, tastes, and values that many of us don't even consider our dominion over these animals as unjust, while also acknowledging the cruelty we inflict as well as the lack of necessity for it.

When I stand face to face with a living, breathing creature, who can think and play and suffer, I genuinely wonder what makes me so different as to possess the right to take their life without any threat to my own. If any animal we breed for our own purposes had the ability to ask us why we treat them the way we do, I wonder if any of the justifications we use on ourselves would hold up.

We don't have power over many things in life, but within industries controlled by demand and money, every dollar in our pocket is a vote ready to be cast for what kind of world we want to live in. This is liberating and makes us powerful, but it also burdens us with responsibility, because when we vote carelessly there can be unseen consequences that spread to every corner of the world. If you ever decide you want to know for yourself what your dollar votes for, you can meet us at Glen Scarlett Road on any Tuesday morning.

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Can't Complain

NICHOLE WEBSTER

THE HIGH-PITCHED intermittent sounds of the base tones pierced the air. Resonating through my ears, I shivered against the sound bouncing off the walls and back at me. The speaker in the base shouted, “3121, code four for a VSA (vital signs absent).” I looked to my partner, who looked back. I slipped the heavy steel-toed boots on my cold feet and walked out to the garage towards the ambulance. I opened the passenger door and got in. The bay door opened, and we drove outside in silence. The air was frigid and silent. The grey-coloured early morning sky had both the moon and sun rising up. I leaned the passenger seat back, closed my eyes, and listened to our siren. Although my eyes were shut tightly, the darkness behind the lids illuminated a red, blue, and white, an unfortunate reminder that I’m at work. We are driving code four, highest priority, for a woman who is unable to wake her husband, possibly VSA.

I walked up the black asphalt driveway towards the front door of a brown-stoned house on the corner of a long residential street. The sky was still black but beginning to light up a soft orange and pink from the sun’s warming rays. A woman waited for us at the front door. She wore pyjamas that looked to be a few sizes too large. She lifted her arms and waved them towards the house in a quick manner. Without taking a single breath, she said, “Please come, you have to hurry! It’s my husband. He’s—please help.” Crunching the red and orange leaves that were resting on the front porch with our heavy boots, we walked into the house. Closing the front door behind me, I looked at the woman and said, “When was the last time you spoke to him?” I tried to position my voice into a concerned tone but found it difficult to do so. I felt no distress, unlike what most people would feel during times like this. No emotions

were best. The woman hastily walked towards the hallway behind the kitchen table, urging us to follow with a wave of her hand. Her brown hair was messy and matted. She walked deeper into the house, and I walked behind her with the large blue airway bag resting heavy on my back and the cardiac monitor in my hand. My partner held the red drug bag. I followed the woman down the hallway and into the first door on the right side. The room was bright with a light colour painted along the walls. The wooden dresser was against the wall on the left side. In front of the tall dresser was the foot of the bed. The thin blue duvet, with an interlocking floral pattern, hung loosely off the edge of the bed. The woman's eyes, swollen, red, and wide, looked into mine and said, "I can't wake him up."

I walked to the left side of the bed where the body lay in silence. My partner put her bags down, let out a breath, and awaited on my call, already knowing what was to come. With my purple-gloved fingers, I assessed the carotid artery on the man's neck, looking for a pulse that I already knew wasn't there. Touching his body was like touching a cold and stiff steel table. The back of his neck, arms, and legs had lividity where the deoxygenated blood was pooling due to his sedentary state. There was gross *rigor mortis*, stiffening of the body, present. The blue pallor of the body indicated to me that resuscitation is futile.

The woman noticed my partner put down her bags and watched as our hurried movements turned to the relaxed removal of our gloves. She broke the air, "Is he ... *dead*?" Her shaking voice told me she already knew he was. I briefly felt her mourning words pierce my chest, but before I could let the despair flood me, I cleared my throat, nodded my head *yes*, and said, "It's been too long for us to attempt resuscitation. I'm sorry for your loss." I spoke in monotone, not allowing myself to return to harsh reality as I mentally drifted myself away from the call. The woman looked at me, tears filling her eyes. After a moment, she cleared her throat and asked, "What do I do now?"

I left my partner in the house to speak to and console the woman. Just as I was returning the equipment back to the ambulance, police pulled into the driveway. One of the cops, tall and wearing a solid black authoritative uniform, got out of the cruiser and asked, "Hey, how's your day going?" I smiled in response and said, "Not too bad. First call." I nodded my head in the direction of the house. "He's *code five*," otherwise known as *obviously dead*. Together and empty-handed, we walked towards the house together. The cop turned to me and asked, "Have you called the coroner yet?" I opened the door for him and replied, "No, I

can do that, but I need to speak to his wife to get more information first.” The cop nodded his head and walked through the door.

“Can I ask you a few questions, please?” I asked the crying woman at the kitchen counter. She nodded. I got my notepad ready in hand then said, “What is his name and date of birth?” She proceeded to answer our questions and give both the police officer and me all the information we required for the deceased. I began my paperwork standing at the kitchen table while another police officer spoke to the wife. It was at that moment that I became aware of a soft crying that resonated in the air. I looked down by my feet, and there was a small black-and-grey Scottish terrier. He wore a worn burgundy collar around his neck. He was looking up at me and making a soft and unique crying whine. He then trotted hastily away and made his way back into the bedroom, where the body was lying. I stood up tall and peered down the hallway, watching the dog carefully. I have seen many people mourn, but never a pet. He continued crying at the feet of the police officers and the grieving widow. They never looked down or noticed him. Intrigued, I watched as the dog walked forwards into the bedroom, then walked backwards out. He did these movements repeatedly. *Walk in, walk out. Walk in, walk out.* He cried his soft whine, hoping it would wake his owner. He looked nervous and anxious. His body was shaking ever so slightly as he continued to walk into the bedroom, then walk out. His innocence and unknowing, for the first time in a long time, unveiled a hole in my chest. Watching the dog felt like a fist smashing through my body, breaking the walls and flooding me with suppressed sorrow. I felt my chest begin to ache. I went to the front door where I had previously noticed there were dog treats in a bag on the shelf. I picked them up, knelt down on one knee, and shook the bag in a desperate attempt to console him. The dog stopped crying and ran over to me. He took a few treats out of my hand and ate them with an excitement. As I was continuing to give him treats, his head turned back towards the bedroom. He remembered his sadness, then returned to the man he seemed determined to stay loyal to. I sat at the front door, trying my best to coax the dog out, trying to help him briefly forget his pain, but it was to no avail.

My partner and I got back into the ambulance and drove away. The rest of our shift wasn’t busy but felt never-ending. I constantly thought back to the helpless dog from the little house on the corner. I tried to repress the sadness, like I normally do—like all paramedics normally do—but I couldn’t help but feel the pit of my stomach begin to ache. I tried to ignore the pang in my chest, but the barrier that was built over

the years around my mind had its first crack, and the flood was coming. Palpitations overwhelmed my heart. Looking out the window of the ambulance, I concentrated on its beat with the *thump—thump—thump—thump*. “What a great shift, right?” My partner shattered the silence and turned to look at me from the driver’s side with a smile on her face. Snapping back to who I was supposed to be, I looked at her with a grin and said, “Can’t complain.”

Revisiting Grief

HEIDI WISLANG

THIS WAS the first time that my father and I discussed the details of that painful day.

“What do you remember from that day?” I asked.

“I remember coming home and she was being carried through the hall to be taken to a hospital. I left home early that morning. Whatever occurred after I left, you would know in greater depth,” he said.

I still remembered many details. There were many details I will never forget.

The sound of thumping woke me up. I was groggy, but the thumping was still there. As I laid in bed I looked over to the door. Nobody was there. As the thump continued, I looked down towards the floor and there was my nanna, Fior, banging on the door with one arm, as she lay on one side of her body.

I rushed to her side.

Her eyes were closed.

“Fior, what happened to you?” I asked, alarmed.

“Talk to me, please, Fior!”

She couldn’t speak.

I ran to the kitchen. The drawer by the old green stove was pulled out as far as it could go, angled downwards. I turned towards the laundry room. Soapy water was everywhere. The wash bucket Fior used was tipped on its side. The bar of laundry soap was on the floor. The smell of “Jabon de Cuaba,” a soap that is a staple in every Dominican household, spread through the room. And there was a pungent smell rising from the water of dirty laundry.

I worked out that something had happened as she hand-washed some clothes. That “something” paralyzed one side of her body. Afterwards, she must have tried to pull herself up with one arm, while using the kitchen drawer for support. She likely fell back to the floor.

Then, at some point, she made the decision that she would drag herself with one arm across the hallway from the kitchen and into the bedroom to let me know that she needed help.

You’re supposed to call 911 in cases of emergencies, but in Dominican Republic such services didn’t exist yet. Emergency services were implemented much later, in 2015 (IBP 204).

Fior had suffered a stroke, something that I, at 15, would not be able to recognize. In fact, even emergency-room doctors cannot always differentiate between a stroke and a differential diagnosis. There are “stroke mimics” that may present themselves as a stroke. This makes diagnosing a stroke challenging for doctors, leading to misdiagnoses (Nor 3).

I remembered that my friend’s father was a doctor, and so I called their home.

“My husband will be arriving home for lunch at any moment,” his wife said. “I will send him straight there.”

The minute he arrived, I felt relief.

Fior was safe.

All was going to be fine.

I watched him stand over her. He took out a syringe from his black bag and gave her some kind of medication.

“Let her rest. She will be okay; you can go and watch TV.”

“I can watch TV?” I asked, comforted by the idea.

“Of course,” he replied.

After he left, I made my way into my father’s room and I turned on the TV.

It didn’t feel quite right.

During that moment of stillness, I allowed myself to go to the bathroom. But then I quickly washed my hands. I came out, I turned off the TV, and I went back to Fior’s room. She appeared to be resting well.

The phone rang.

“Hi, is Fior there?”

It was Ramona, her best friend.

“Something happened to Fior, I’m here alone with her. I called a doctor and he examined her, and he said she was going to be okay, so don’t worry.”

Ramona’s tone changed. She sounded very concerned.

“But the doctor said she was going to be fine, that she just needed to rest!” I said, attempting to calm her down.

“I’ll be right there.”

And she was.

Perhaps the reason Ramona’s reactions were such, is because she understood the inequality that existed in Dominican society. Perhaps she knew too well the underlying discriminations that domestic workers could face, that are so deeply rooted that a lack of medical insurance could place a greater threat on her friend’s life (Diario 3.15). Data from a regional survey of Central America and Dominican Republic show that ninety percent of full-time domestic workers do not have social security or healthcare; while ninety-one percent of those surveyed, from the Dominican Republic did not know their labour rights (Blofield 73-74). These are stunning facts that provide insight into the societal norms of the country.

Ramona cried and screamed.

“Her clothes are soaking wet! Why didn’t you take them off?” she asked, in tears.

“She’s so cold!”

I never thought to take them off.

Had I noticed how wet she was?

The doctor said she was going to be fine. He never said to take them off.

Ramona sprang into action to get Fior to a hospital. With the help of some workers Ramona gathered from outside, I watched as Fior was carried out the door. As they left, I saw my father arrive.

“What has happened?” my father asked.

I filled him in as we followed Fior to the hospital.

Fior died.

And there I was.

Someone who wears her emotions on her sleeve. Someone who is filled with empathy. Someone who springs into action when anyone is in need. There I was.

I didn’t whisper to her that she was not alone.

I didn’t hold her hand while she was fading away.

I didn't kiss her face.
I didn't tell her that I loved her.
I didn't pray with her.
Because I didn't think she was going to die.

"I remember that the doctor believed that she presented with another case and not that of a stroke, which led the doctor to treat her with a relaxant," my father recalled.

"Dad, I didn't do enough," I said.

"You shouldn't feel that way. You did all the things you needed to do, given the circumstances. Without 911 emergency services and the absence of cell-phone usage during those times, you did all that you could."

This experience is still shaping my "larger sense of self," my understanding of the meaning of life, my place in the world, and what Fior's was (Cohen 6).

Experts say that when someone you love dies suddenly, the separation causes a trauma, where you feel a deep sense of longing to be close to that person again, and I can attest to that (Cohen 10).

The night we returned from the hospital, I went into Fior's bedroom and slept on her bed. That is as close as I would ever be to her again.

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My Florentine Adventure

NADIA XAVIER

THE YEAR was 2007 and I was in the middle of my semester abroad. My time in Florence was brief, but it was enough time for me to fall in love with this magnificent city. My roommate Jill and I travelled from Strasburg to Florence in hopes of adventure and a much-needed break. The hostel we stayed in was right in front of the Piazza della Repubblica—just walking distance to some of the best sights. The smell of freshly baked bread peaked its way through the open hostel window. In the distance, the sound of children laughing and playing filled the air. Florentine men danced around the Piazza while effortlessly playing the accordion.

That warm weekend in April was the first time we felt truly independent. I fearlessly dove into the culture and embraced every moment. Jill, on the other hand, was eager to get back to our routine. Our first morning in Florence I could hardly decide what to do first. “We have to see all the sights,” I said, with my head in a sight-seeing book. But Jill was more interested in sleeping until noon and going to a nightclub at midnight. But we managed to compromise. “Okay, let’s do all the touristy stuff—as long as you promise to go dancing tonight.” I immediately agreed! The excitement in my eyes must have been obvious because Jill started to laugh uncontrollably! That night, Jill and I decided to share a bottle of wine and a pizza at Fiorino D’Oro. The red-and-white checkerboard tablecloth was just as you would see on television. The wine was so rich and full of bold flavour—which is exactly how I would describe the Florentine culture. I remember thinking, “I don’t ever want to leave.”

As we walked down the cobblestone streets, we couldn't help but notice the women walking down the street. They belonged on a runway somewhere. They were fabulous and they knew it! I saw my future self living there, but Jill seemed a bit uneasy and reluctant to let herself go. Perhaps it was fear of being on our own in a new city, or the in-your-face Italian culture that can sometimes be overwhelming. Being of Italian descent, I was used to this. Every loud old lady reminded of my own cute little grandmother, and I loved it.

Being a former shopaholic, Florence was a dream come true! Every street corner had something different to offer. Gucci was my favourite, not to mention the many shoe salesmen who tried to lure me into their shops with free espresso at the door. Now that was the type of sightseeing that Jill and I could agree on. But let's remember we were students, so it was mostly window shopping, of course.

We spent Saturday night at Robin Hood Tavern. The entrance doors were rustic and made a crackling sound as they were pushed open. The music was loud, but we could still hear the chatter of those twenty-something students eating, drinking, and dancing. The barn house feeling made for a very relaxed and casual setting. The tavern didn't look like much, but it was a fun night spent with new friends. We met a couple of students from Croatia. They were in Florence for the weekend, just as we were. We ordered a few drinks, an antipasto platter, and danced the night away. Before we knew it, it was four o'clock a.m. and we were politely asked to leave. We walked back to our hostel with our new friends chatting about what sights we should visit next.

The Duomo is a spectacular Italian-Gothic cathedral dating back to the fifteenth century. We climbed up all 463 steps of narrow, old, windy staircases that at times could not fit more than one person at a time. The climb was long but memorable. The view at the top was something out of a movie. The wind was blowing in my hair as I gazed at the terracotta rooftops below. It was magical. When I speak to Jill about this adventure, she tells a different story. Her tired, sweaty feeling lingered throughout the day. The old crumbling walls began to close in, leaving her a bit claustrophobic. Once at the top of what seemed to be the tallest tower in the world, what she saw was beautiful, but she immediately began to dread the long trek down that would inevitably follow. The perfect ending to that day was a creamy ice-cold gelato from a nearby Gelateria.

On a lazy afternoon we decided to take a walk to the Galleria dell'Accademia, home of Michelangelo's statue of David. I spent years studying this piece in high school, so being able to see it in front of me

was a dream come true. I couldn't help but get emotional. David is more than just a statue in a museum—he is an overwhelming presence, making me feel amazed and just lucky to have seen it in real life. Jill snickered when she saw me tear up, which was the moment I realized our differences, and the importance of compromise when travelling with friends. She was not into it at all, and that's okay!

When researching sights to see in Florence, the most impressive one to me was the Ponte Vecchio, or Old Bridge. What a romantic sight. Couples were strolling along the bridge at night arm in arm, staring up at the starry sky. Just beautiful. I believe it was Sunday evening. The smell of freshly roasted chestnuts filled the air and eventually led us to a local street vendor. The streets were happy and full. The laughter of the town was the perfect company for a late-night stroll. The sun was kissing the surface of the Ponte Vecchio. We were lucky enough to see a wedding taking place. The bride's dress glistened onto the reflection of the water. The groom could not stop smiling. It was such a beautiful celebration of love in a perfect setting. That night was a wonderful representation of the phrase, "Live, Laugh, Love."

Embracing the local culture helped me be present and fully appreciate the wonderful things Florence had to offer. The pizza made in the wood-burning ovens, the delicious wine, the luxurious pasta dishes, and the light-as-air gelato, are just a few highlights. My time in Florence taught me to enjoy my independence while making the most of every experience life has to offer. Jill and I are very different travellers, but we both had a blast in our own way.

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